Summary

Introduction

Antony and Cleopatra is one of Shakespeare's best known later tragedies. Written about ten years after Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra portrays actual events and persons from Roman history, but unlike Julius Caesar it also embodies the love story of its title characters. For the historical background, plot and intimate details of the affair between the Roman general Antony and the Egyptian queen Cleopatra, Shakespeare drew upon the ancient Roman historian Plutarch's Lives; in fact, the description of Cleopatra upon her barge presented by the character Enobarbus in the play (II.ii.190-225) is nearly a word-for-word translation of a passage from Plutarch.

In Antony, Cleopatra, and Augustus Caesar, Shakespeare depicts characters that are larger than life, all three of the main figures commanding "planetary" status as rulers of the world and instruments of its destiny. Antony and Cleopatra is a very involved play, featuring rapid shifts between Cleopatra's palace in Alexandria, Egypt and Antony's homeland in Rome, along with two major battlefield sequences. There are in fact thirteen scenes in Act III and fifteen in Act IV. While some nineteenth and early twentieth century critics complained about the awkward structure of the play, recent interpretation has argued that this relentless movement in the middle of the play creates dramatic tension and reinforces the global scope of what is occurring on stage.

Antony and Cleopatra stands as one of Shakespeare's most poetic plays. It is noted for its evocative word paintings and vivid hyperbole. It is also regarded by many as a problem play, presenting as it does the ambiguity and ambivalence of life without providing clear or comfortable answers. The two lovers presented in the play may be world leaders, but they are also, after all, only human beings—flawed and aging ones at that. We as human beings share their mortality; many of us recognize their strong feelings of jealousy, love, shame, and insecurity. Despite their historical grandeur and thanks to Shakespeare's sensitive portrayal of them, Antony and Cleopatra are no more—and no less—extraordinary than we are.
Synopsis

Summary of the Play

After the battle at Philippi, Antony went to Egypt and began a romance with Cleopatra. Messengers from Rome arrive at Cleopatra’s court, demanding Antony’s immediate return to Rome to aid in the fight against Sextus Pompeius and upbraiding him for his dereliction of the official duties of a triumvir. Antony argues that he is not needed in Rome, but he does return and marries Octavius’ sister Octavia. A meeting between Pompey (Sextus Pompeius) and the triumvirs results in a standoff, in which Pompey gets the islands of Sicily and Sardinia in return for ceasing the attack on Rome and the piracy in the Straits of Messina. Antony and Octavia move to Athens. Later, Octavia, aware a serious controversy is arising between her husband and her brother, returns to Rome to try to heal the breach.

Octavius, seeking to become the sole emperor, puts Lepidus in prison and dares Antony to fight him on the sea. Antony, against the advice of all his advisers, accepts the dare, counting on Cleopatra’s ships to assist him. Cleopatra’s ships turn tail and run. Antony chases the ship carrying Cleopatra and deserts his own troops at the front, giving Octavius a major victory.

Octavius offers munificent terms of surrender to Cleopatra, with promises that he has no intention of keeping once he has taken over Egypt. Dolabella, one of Caesar’s henchmen, warns Cleopatra that Octavius will parade her and her attendants through the streets of Rome as booty of war.

An angry Antony, wrongly informed that Cleopatra is dead, tries to commit suicide but succeeds only in severely wounding himself. His personal guardsmen carry him to the queen, and he dies in her presence. Cleopatra and her two closest attendants, Charmian and Iras, commit suicide by allowing asps to bite them. Octavius (Caesar) finds the three women dead. He orders a huge state funeral for the pair to be attended by all Octavius’ army before he sails for Rome.

Estimated Reading Time
This is one of Shakespeare’s longer plays, so reading time should be at least one hour for each of the five acts. Many students will require seven hours for the entire play. This is a play that rewards careful, unhurried reading. Ideally, it should be read in one or two sittings, with occasional referral to the text notes and this study guide, but three or even four sittings is entirely feasible.
After the murder of Julius Caesar, the Roman Empire is ruled by the noble triumvirs Mark Antony, Lepidus, and Octavius (Caesar’s nephew). Antony, given the Eastern sphere to rule, goes to Alexandria and there he sees and falls passionately in love with Cleopatra, queen of Egypt. She is the flower of the Nile, but she is also the mistress of Julius Caesar and many others. Antony is so enamored of her that he ignores his own counsel and the warnings of his friends. As long as he can, he also ignores a request from Octavius Caesar that he return to Rome. Sextus Pompeius, son of Pompey the Great, and a powerful leader, is gathering troops to seize Rome from the rule of the triumvirs, and Octavious Caesar wishes to confer with Antony and Lepidus. At last the danger of a victory by Sextus Pompeius, coupled with the news that his wife Fulvia is dead, forces Antony to leave Egypt and return to Rome.

Because Antony is a better general than either Lepidus or Octavius, Pompeius is confident of victory as long as Antony stays in Egypt. When Pompeius hears that Antony is returning to Rome, he is reduced to hoping that Octavius and Antony will not mend their quarrels but continue to fight each other as they did in the past. Lepidus does not matter, since he sides with neither of the other two and cares little for conquest and glory. Pompeius is disappointed, however, for Antony and Octavius join forces in the face of common danger. To seal their renewed friendship, Antony marries Octavia, Octavius’s sister. Pompeius’s scheme to keep Antony and Octavius apart fails, but he still hopes that Antony’s lust for Cleopatra will entice him back to Egypt. To stall for time, he seals a treaty with the triumvirs. Antony, accompanied by his new wife, goes to Athens to deal with matters relating to the Roman Empire. There word reaches him that Lepidus and Octavius had waged war in spite of the treaty they signed and that Pompeius was killed. Octavius next seizes Lepidus on the pretext that he aided Pompeius. Now the Roman world has but two rulers, Octavius and Antony.

Antony cannot resist the lure of Cleopatra. Sending Octavia home from Athens, he hurries back to Egypt. By doing so, he ends all pretense of friendship between him and Octavius. Both prepare for a battle that will decide who is to be the sole ruler of the world. Cleopatra joins her forces with Antony’s. Antony’s forces are supreme on land, but Octavius rules the sea and lures Antony to fight him there. Antony’s friends and captains, particularly loyal Enobarbus, beg him not to risk his forces on the sea, but Antony is confident of victory, and he prepares to match his ships with those of Octavius at Actium. In the decisive hour of the great sea fight, however, Cleopatra orders her fleet to leave the battle and sail for home. Antony, too, leaves the battle, disregarding his duty toward his honor, and because he sets the example for desertion, many of his men go over to Octavius’s forces.

Antony sinks in gloom at the folly of his own actions, but he is drunk with desire for Cleopatra and sacrifices everything, even honor, to her. She protests that she did not know that he would follow her when she sailed away, but Antony has reason to know she lies. However, he cannot tear himself away.

Octavius sends word to Cleopatra that she may have anything she asks for if she will surrender Antony to him. Knowing that Octavius is likely to be the victor in the struggle, she sends him a message of loyalty and of admiration for his greatness. Antony, who sees her receive the addresses of Octavius’s messenger, rants and storms at her for her faithlessness, but she easily dispels his fears and jealousy and makes him hers again. After his attempt to make peace with Octavius fails, Antony decides to march against his enemy again. At this decision, even the faithful Enobarbus leaves him and goes over to Octavius, thinking Antony has lost his reason as well as his honor. Enobarbus is an honorable man, however, and shortly afterward he dies of shame for having deserted his general.

On the day of the battle, victory is in sight for Antony despite overwhelming odds. Once again, though, the Egyptian fleet deserts him. With the defeat of Antony, Octavius becomes master of the world. Antony is like a madman and thinks of nothing but avenging himself on the treacherous Cleopatra. When the queen hears of
his rage, she has word sent to him that she is dead, killed by her own hand out of love for him. Convinced once more that Cleopatra was true to him, Antony calls on Eros, his one remaining follower, to kill him so that he can join Cleopatra in death. However, Eros kills himself rather than his beloved general. Determined to die, Antony falls on his own sword. Even that desperate act is without dignity or honor, for he does not die immediately and can find no one who loves him enough to end his pain and misery. While he is lying there, a messenger brings word that Cleopatra still lives. He orders his servants to carry him to her. He dies in her arms, each proclaiming eternal love for the other.

When Octavius Caesar hears the news of Antony’s death, he grieves. Although he fought and conquered Antony, he laments the sorry fate of a great man turned weakling and ruined by his lust. He sends a messenger to assure Cleopatra that she will be treated royally, that she should be ruler of her own fate. The queen learns, however, as Antony warned her, that Octavius will take her to Rome to march behind him in his triumphant procession, where she, a queen and mistress to two former rulers of the world, will be pinched and spat upon by rabble and slaves. To cheat him of his triumph, she puts on her crown and all her royal garb, places a poisonous asp on her breast, and lies down to die. Charmian and Iras, her loyal attendants, die the same death. Octavius Caesar, entering her chamber, sees her dead, as beautiful and desirable as in life. There is only one thing he can do for his onetime friend and the dead queen: He orders their burial in a common grave, together in death as they wished to be in life.
Act and Scene Summary and Analysis

Act I, Scenes 1 and 2: Summary and Analysis

New Characters:
Philo: friend of Mark Antony
Cleopatra: Queen of Egypt
(Mark) Antony: triumvir of Rome
Messenger: one of several carrying messages between Rome and Egypt. Other messengers appear during the play; none are named
Demetrius: friend of Mark Antony
Charmian: attendant of Cleopatra and, apparently, the queen’s favorite attendant
Alexas: friend of Cleopatra and Mark Antony and sometimes the unofficial representative of Antony when he cannot be present at Cleopatra’s court
Soothsayer: accurately predicts the future and warns Antony to beware of Octavius
Iras: attendant of Cleopatra
(Domitius) Enobarbus: Roman soldier and friend of Mark Antony
Mardian: a eunuch attendant of Cleopatra
Other attendants, soldiers, etc., sometimes unnamed

Summary
In Scene 1 at Cleopatra’s court in Egypt, Demetrius and Philo are discussing the idle behavior of their beloved friend and general. Cleopatra and her attendants enter with Antony. A message arrives from Octavius and Lepidus demanding Antony return and help them in their fight against the son of Pompey the Great. Antony refuses to receive the messengers, but Cleopatra urges him to hear the message. He refuses. She knows that Fulvia (Antony’s wife) is a rival, with a greater claim on Antony than she has, even though she is the queen.

In Scene 2, which takes place the next day at Cleopatra’s court, the Soothsayer’s comments in lines 4 and 5 suggest that Antony will fall before the onslaught of Octavius. The messengers return and deliver their message from Octavius and Lepidus. They demand Antony’s return to Rome. Antony learns that Fulvia has died of wounds received in military action.

Analysis
Octavius was not the son of Julius Caesar but rather was the son of his niece. Julius Caesar “adopted” him when he was 18 years old and named him his heir. Shakespeare calls him “Caesar” throughout Antony and Cleopatra. In this study guide, he is usually referred to as “Octavius,” because he really had not achieved the position of caesar, regardless of his adopted name, until both of the other two triumvirs were dead and he had consolidated the Roman Empire under his rule as emperor.
Shakespeare understood and vividly portrayed the willful and impetuous nature of Mark Antony. Antony had been wildly successful in defeating Brutus and Cassius at Philippi to secure control of the Roman Empire for the triumvirate. Unfortunately, his success at Philippi led to both arrogance and the belittling of aid given to him there by Octavius and by the third triumvir, Lepidus.

Shakespeare considered Lepidus too weak a man to seriously consider as a leader, either military or civil. His actions in the play add to the audience’s opinion of him as weak and lacking in personal discipline. The playwright knew that a man lacking in personal discipline was unlikely to be a successful leader on the battlefield or in the halls of government for very long. Lepidus, both in the play and in real life, quickly faded from public view. Even today, most historians consider him to have been a weak leader at best.

Shakespeare’s principal characters in this play were real people well known in history. Under such circumstances, there is a limit to how far the playwright can stretch the truth. Antony’s impetuosity is obvious in the play; whether he was just as impetuous as a younger man leading the forces of the triumvirate against Brutus and Cassius is a matter of question. What is emphasized is the fact that General Mark Antony, once a man of strong personal discipline, had lost much of that quality through his dalliance with the beautiful Cleopatra. Only near the end of the play, does Antony begin to reassume the figure of the disciplined soldier that marked his younger and most successful years. His fall from his position of near worship by soldiers and friends, visible even in the first few lines of the play, is more than obvious. Near the end of the play he begins to regain their respect.

Although Shakespeare does not specifically say so, he does intimate that Antony’s first wife, Fulvia, was much more like Antony was as a young man than as Antony was as an older man resting on his laurels and consorting with Cleopatra. Fulvia supposedly died of wounds received in armed conflict, and that fact serves as a foil to highlight her husband’s failure to serve the state in its crisis with Sextus Pompeius. Fulvia had been exiled from Rome because she had participated in a rebellion against the Roman government, but that fact only slightly dulls the foil she provides here. Also important is Antony’s reaction to the news of Fulvia’s death, and Cleopatra’s rather frigid reaction to the same event, in direct violation of Charmian’s wise suggestion to her mistress.

The first act constitutes rising dramatic action, as the audience gradually begins to realize that the triumvirs are becoming competitors rather than colleagues, and armed conflict between Antony and Octavius (Caesar) most certainly will result. The alert observer will sense that Lepidus, is not now and never has been a serious factor in the action.

The prophecy of the Soothsayer, of course, is the original clue of how the matter will turn out. This foreshadowing is followed by a dozen less obvious instances. Here we see Octavius ascending and Antony descending, leading to the inevitable triumph of Octavius. In Scene 2, the Soothsayer’s comments suggest that Antony will fall before the onslaught of Octavius—an oblique prophecy here, to be sure, but a valid one. The foreshadowing continues throughout the play. The reference to Herod recalls the fact that he had slaughtered infants in Judea, including, he had hoped, the baby Jesus of Nazareth. Notice also another instance of sarcasm. The overflowing Nile presages not famine, but plenty, because the waters of the Nile are what make the production of food possible in most of Egypt. Without them the nation would be almost entirely a desert, incapable of producing any kind of crops.

Notice the bawdy repartee between Charmian, Alexas, and the Soothsayer at the opening of the scene. Almost every line has sexual overtones, but the references, perfectly plain to an Elizabethan, are much less so to modern readers. “Figs” can refer to the fruit, but also to a penis or an aphrodisiac. Charmian wishes Alexas a wife whom he cannot satisfy sexually, so that she will have 50 other men as lovers. All this is said, of course, in good humor.
The bawdy conversation ends abruptly when Cleopatra enters. Antony’s metaphor with “weeds” involves a pun (earing/hearing) in which “earing” means a plant’s bearing the “ears” for which it was planted (such as corn). Antony’s point is that, just as a blowing wind prevents the growth of some weeds in the fields, so hearing (and appropriate attention to) “news,” even if the news is unfavorable, can save us from mistakes later. This metaphor represents a switch in positions for Antony. In Scene 1 he refused to hear the news the messenger brought from Rome. Antony demands an end to the levity. What he must do is both serious and difficult; furthermore, his wife Fulvia is dead.

Later in the act, Shakespeare invokes another pun (“Adiew,” after referring to tears and weeping—i.e., dew). Also, here is an example of a metonymy, in which the whole (Egypt) is used for the part (Cleopatra). This usage is commonplace throughout much of the work.

Act I, Scene 3: Summary and Analysis

**Summary**

Scene 3 takes place later that day in Cleopatra’s court. Cleopatra is talking of taunting Antony; Charmian warns her against antagonizing him. Antony enters, talks with Cleopatra and tries to find a way to tell her he must go to Rome, at least for a short time. Suspecting the worst, she accuses him of “treason,” although possibly with tongue in cheek. She feigns sickness, hoping to keep him in Egypt and asks him why she should think he’d be true to her when he was false to his wife. Antony has trouble getting even a word in edgewise, as Cleopatra continues her tantrum. Finally he is able to explain that he must return to Rome because his wife is dead. Sextus Pompeius’ forces, which hold Sicily, and whose pirates Menas and Menecrates have been terrorizing shipping through the Straits of Messina, is threatening to march on Rome itself.

Grasping hold of herself, Cleopatra assures Antony of her heartfelt love for him, accepts his decision, wishes him Godspeed, and suggests that life will be difficult for her without him.

**Analysis**

Cleopatra’s moods shift (whether truly or feignedly) to the annoyance of Antony. The audience begins to wonder if Cleopatra has the innate ability to love anyone other than herself. Often she acts more like an adolescent girl than like an adult, possibly because she has been a queen for so long, and almost always has her own way. She cannot bear anyone denying her what she wants. When it becomes obvious to her that she cannot control Antony in the same manner as she has controlled her subordinates, she becomes psychologically unsure of herself and attempts to disguise this uncertainty by a bit of bravado. Shakespeare, aware of this tendency in all people (if to a much lesser extent), treats this subject specifically later in the play, when he suggests that people do not know what is truly good for them. The playwright thus foreshadows Cleopatra’s apparent mood changes later in the play that surely were an important, if not absolutely definitive, cause for Antony’s eventual defeat and destruction.

Act I, Scenes 4 and 5: Summary and Analysis

**New Characters:**

Octavius (Caesar): triumvir of Rome, later to become Augustus Caesar

Lepidus: triumvir of Rome

**Summary**

Scene 4 takes place at Octavius’ house in Rome, before Antony returns from Cleopatra’s court. Octavius (Caesar) and Lepidus discuss Sextus Pompeius’ challenge. Pompeius’ pirates control the Straits of Messina and nearby waters between Sicily and the Italian peninsula. Octavius condemns Antony for his wanton behavior and dereliction of his duties as a triumvir, but Lepidus attempts, weakly, to defend him.
In Scene 5, at Cleopatra’s court after Antony’s departure to Rome, Cleopatra and her attendants discuss the existing situation. Cleopatra is thinking of Antony so much that even Charmian chides her for doing so. The queen receives Alexas, an emissary from Antony, and promises to write to Antony every day.

**Analysis**

Scene 4 marks the beginning of a downward spiral for Lepidus that leaves him incapable of any meaningful action, and hence no longer in command of his third of the empire. Later, after Antony has left Rome for Athens, Octavius and Lepidus act in a manner so antagonistic to Antony’s interests (by abrogating the treaty with Pompey and launching a military attack on him, and by denigrating Antony in public speeches) that it becomes apparent that the only possible result can be open warfare against Antony.

This scene is the first indication that Octavius is beginning to consider Antony as a rival rather than as a colleague. “Tumble on the Bed of Ptolemy” means “engage in a sexual romp with Cleopatra.” Ptolemy was an earlier husband of Cleopatra but such a close blood relative to her that the marriage would have been of questionable validity, even in ancient Rome. “Rebel to Judgement” means “refuse to abide by one’s own common sense and fail to exercise self-discipline.” Octavius (Caesar) again comments on Antony’s misconduct. It becomes clear that Octavius (Caesar) will use this, and Antony’s treatment of Octavia, as a pretext for a military challenge.

In Scene 5, the eunuch Mardian puns on Cleopatra’s question “Indeed?” by stating that, because he is an eunuch, he can do nothing “in deed,” an example of Shakespeare’s frequent bitter humor. Note Cleopatra’s comment: “O happy Horse, to bear the weight of Antony!” which validates, to some extent, Charmian’s concern that Cleopatra’s constant thought of Antony is overly distracting the queen from other business. Nevertheless, such hyperbole verifies Cleopatra’s deep feelings for Antony, even though it causes a titter among the queen’s confidantes. Cleopatra loves Antony, whether wisely or otherwise, and challenging that love on the basis that it is not intelligent misses the point. Love, as Shakespeare reminds us time and again throughout his plays, is not to be measured on an intellectual yardstick.

It is obvious by the time Cleopatra promises to write to Antony every day that either she cares deeply for Antony or wants Alexas and her attendants to believe that she does so. Alexas’ report of Antony’s message to Cleopatra makes it clear that he is devoted to her.

**Act II, Scenes 1 and 2: Summary and Analysis**

**New Characters:**

- Pompey: Sextus Pompeius, son of Pompey the Great, and now the leader of a rebellion against the triumvirate that is sufficiently serious to cause great concern among the triumvirs

- Menecrates: friend of Pompey

- Menas: friend of Pompey

- Varrius: friend of Pompey

- Mecenas: friend of Octavius. Occasionally confused with Menas

- Agrippa: friend of Octavius (Caesar)

- Ventidius: friend of Antony and commander of one of Antony’s armies

- Octavia: sister to Octavius, wife of Antony
Summary

Scene 1 takes place at Pompey’s home in Messina, Sicily. The scene opens with Pompey’s men discussing the situation just as the first act opened with Antony’s men discussing the situation among themselves before Antony made his appearance.

At the absolute insistence of Octavius, Antony had returned to Rome. Pompey’s insurrection was the primary reason that Octavius and Lepidus wanted Antony back in Rome; Pompey was a real threat and was becoming more so each day. Pompey discusses with his friends the existing military situation concerning his revolt against the triumvirate. Varrius arrives with the news that Antony is expected momentarily in Rome. In a rather arrogant and pompous speech, Pompeius denigrates Antony by calling him an amorous surfeiter, but admits that Antony’s “soldiership is twice the other twain” (i.e., twice as competent as that of Octavius and Lepidus combined).

In Scene 2 at Lepidus’ home in Rome, Lepidus, in conversation with Enobarbus before the other principals enter, warns Enobarbus to be extremely careful not to stir up any quarrel between Antony and Octavius (Caesar). When Octavius and Antony enter, Lepidus urges them not to let personal differences obscure the purpose for which Antony returned to Rome. Ignoring the plea, Octavius brings up the fact that Fulvia and Antony’s brother made war on Octavius. Antony replies he had nothing whatsoever to do with the matter and that they had not asked his advice or permission.

Nevertheless, Antony pays Fulvia a kind of left-handed compliment in saying that she could not be controlled by himself or any other man. He suggests that it would be easier for Octavius to conquer the world than to control Fulvia. At this point, Enobarbus expresses a wish that all men might have wives such as Fulvia, so that the women might go to wars with the men. Here Enobarbus is making a partially sarcastic comment, suggesting that Antony and Octavius are wrangling over relatively trivial matters while a crucial problem faces them. An angry Antony silences his friend and subordinate, Enobarbus, but the soldier still gets in his cut. Octavius replies that he doesn’t mind what Enobarbus said but resents the way he said it.

Challenged by Antony to find other grounds for upbraiding him, Octavius accuses Antony of breaking his pledge to come to the aid of the other triumvirs. Here Antony’s defense is threefold: (1) his presence in Rome really was not needed earlier, (2) he had been “poisoned” by the beauty of Cleopatra and thus was not in his right mind, and (3) he had indeed returned to Rome as soon as he felt he was needed there. He apologizes for not returning sooner. He receives Lepidus’ approval for the apology. Mecenas reminds the principals that a far more important matter presses for their immediate attention.

Agrippa suggests to seal the friendship of the triumvirs, Antony marry Octavius’ sister Octavia; in short order, all agree that this should happen. Enobarbus, in the closing lines of the scene (after the other principals have left the stage), praises the grace and beauty of Cleopatra and says that Antony will never leave Cleopatra, especially for a woman such as Octavia, no matter what formalities (of marriage) might be involved.

Analysis

The second act of Antony and Cleopatra continues the rising action begun in the first act. We are introduced to Sextus Pompeius and his staff, against whose as yet sporadic attack the triumvirate is attempting to hold Rome. Sextus, a son of Pompey the Great, is now referred to by the playwright simply as “Pompey,” risking confusion with his deceased father. The act opens with Pompey’s men discussing the situation among themselves. Shakespeare knew that what the men say among themselves while alone often is notably different than what they say in the hearing of any one or more of the principals. At the absolute insistence of Octavius (Caesar), Antony had returned to Rome. Pompey was a real threat and becoming more so by the day.

Menas’ comment, “We are ignorant of our selves,” represents a theme that runs through many of Shakespeare’s writings, including several plays. Shakespeare seems to be telling us that we don’t know what
is really good for us and thus we seek goals which in the end, if achieved, would only harm or destroy us.

Sextus Pompeius (Pompey) is far too sure of himself and was certain that Antony would stay in Egypt and be no threat to him. Mark Antony returning to Rome from the court of Cleopatra is a fact that should have greatly alarmed Pompey, but apparently did not. Pompey had acknowledged Antony’s “soldiership is twice the other twain.” Pompey’s arrogance and pomposity come through flagrantly, and the audience has only slight respect for him at this point. The respect increases a bit, though, when he refuses the suggestion of Menas that, while he has a golden opportunity, he murder the triumvirs and seize control of the entire Roman Empire.

Lepidus’ primary motivation throughout most of the act is to keep the animosity between Octavius (Caesar) and Antony from destroying the triumvirate, and possibly Rome, too. Perhaps he senses his own inadequacy and realizes that an outright break between Octavius and Antony would destroy him as well. But his efforts are only partly successful, as Octavius and Antony have at it with words, although not yet with weapons. Antony’s apology for his late return to Rome reveals a certain humility in his character to balance the arrogance which he sometimes exhibits. It takes all that Lepidus, Mecenas, Agrippa, and Enobarbus can do to bring the conversation back to the principal point—what to do about Pompey. At his wit’s end and afraid open warfare might break out between the two triumvirs at any moment, Agrippa proposes marriage between Antony and Octavius’ sister, Octavia.

Octavia is offered no real choice in the matter. She is simply a pawn in a political contest. She speaks only a few lines in this act and the next, then permanently disappears from view. Her only real effect on the principals is to give Octavius a perfect excuse for fighting Antony after Antony returns to Cleopatra’s court, even though he is married to Octavia.

Perhaps the most important points of Antony and Cleopatra are the almost total destruction of Antony’s manhood that his dalliance with Cleopatra has produced, the arrogance and pomposity that Pompey has displayed, which inevitably leads to his downfall, and Octavius’ desire for personal revenge against Antony that leads to the destruction of many lives in the war in the Ionian Sea and in Egypt. Even the great Octavius wants to proclaim to everyone his “triumph” over his enemies by parading Cleopatra and Antony through the streets of Rome, but not until after he has had his own chance at love-making with Cleopatra. His intentions gradually become known as the play progresses.

Scene 2 portrays the rising conflict between Antony and Octavius (Caesar), which Lepidus tries to quiet. The underlings are acutely aware of this problem, but envision greatly different ways of resolving it. Enobarbus recalls the triumvirs to the problem of what to do about Pompey; Agrippa suggests that a marriage with Octavia might allay the tension. Both approaches are tried; neither works. When Octavia is informed that she is to be married to Antony, she reacts with all the grace of a woman acknowledging her duty and trying to please the triumvirs. Nevertheless, she comes across later as a human pawn in the hands of her brother Octavius.

Act II, Scenes 3, 4, and 5: Summary and Analysis

**Summary**

Scene 3 takes place in Rome, at the home of Octavius. The Soothsayer who made the oblique predictions in Egypt of Octavius’ rise and Antony’s fall makes that prediction explicit. He tells Antony that in every instance where he and Octavius are involved in any controversy, Octavius will always win, and he urges Antony to return to Egypt as soon as possible and keep away from Octavius. Antony sends his officer, Ventidius, to Parthia to enter into a campaign that will prove successful and convince the world of the futility of opposing the triumvirate.

Scene 4 takes place on a street of Rome just as the triumvirs are about to leave for the campaign against Pompey in Sicily. Lepidus tells Agrippa and Mecenas that he will be delayed a couple days before he can
leave Rome, but that he will meet them in Sicily.

The location of Scene 5 changes abruptly to Cleopatra’s palace in Egypt. Alexas is still there, as Antony’s unofficial representative during his absence in Rome. Cleopatra jokes with Charmian and Mardian about how she played a trick on Antony and, while he was drunk, dressed him in women’s clothes. This forms a bit of comic relief, but a messenger arrives from Rome, and all levity comes to an instant halt. Cleopatra fears that the message is that Antony is dead. Cleopatra queries the messenger and learns that Antony has married Octavia. Furious, she mauls the messenger and orders him whipped. Once she has quieted down, she tries to find out all she possibly can about Octavia and eventually sends Alexas to get a complete physical description of the woman.

Analysis
In Scene 3 it becomes obvious that Octavia is simply to be a “stick” in this play. Her character is not developed sufficiently for her to be considered a major character. The audience could hardly expect her to show much feeling about Antony. After all, the marriage occurred quickly, and she hardly knew her husband. One would suspect that Antony’s previous wife, Fulvia, although she does not appear in this play, was a far more interesting and compelling character than was Octavia.

Scene 4 serves merely as a transition scene and adds little or nothing to the plot. It does, however, suggest that Lepidus might have something “in the works” of which the two other triumvirs are unaware. History tells us that such almost certainly was the case, but Shakespeare does not develop that possibility here.

In Scene 5, Cleopatra’s mauling and whipping of the messenger represented a practice more or less common in those days. That is one reason why messengers cringed when asked to bear unfavorable news. It illustrates Cleopatra’s impetuous, adolescent nature. She acts so even after Charmian, her chief attendant and probably her best female friend, has strongly urged against it. This stubbornness emphasizes even more the fact that Cleopatra is governed by her emotions, almost totally unrestrained by reason.

By this time the audience knows that Cleopatra really loves Antony. Her feelings are what almost any woman would feel under the circumstances—insecurity and jealousy. Those doubts will be allayed later, but for now, she is thoroughly upset.

Act II, Scenes 6 and 7: Summary and Analysis
New Character:
Boy: a singer

Summary
Scene 6 takes place near Messina, Sicily, where Pompey’s ships are anchored. The triumvirate talks with Pompey, hoping to negotiate peace and thus save both sides from losing thousands of men in the fighting. Antony agrees to negotiate with Pompey “on the sea,” where Pompey is especially strong, so as not to threaten him during the negotiations.

Both sides have taken some hostages to prevent treachery by either side. The triumvirate has offered Pompey the islands of Sicily and Sardinia if Pompey agrees to call off his pirates and give up his designs on Rome itself. Pompey reminds Antony that Antony is living in Pompey’s father’s house, which he took without paying for it. Also he mentions the first tryst between Antony and Cleopatra, in which the queen was hidden in a rolled up mattress and brought into Antony’s quarters, without anyone else being aware of the matter. Enobarbus, aware that these veiled taunts might break up the meeting and result in all-out war, tries, successfully, to change the subject of the conversation.
Much to the distress of Pompey’s henchman, the pirate Menas, Pompey accepts and invites all to his galley for a “state dinner” to seal the agreement. After the principals leave the stage, Enobarbus and Menas discuss the situation, telling each other how they see the matter. They jocularly accuse each other of thievery—Menas on the sea, Enobarbus on the land.

In Scene 7, aboard Pompey’s galley in the harbor of Messina, the servants more or less agree that the triumvir Lepidus is pretending to be a much more powerful and wiser man than he actually is. They correctly predict his fall and destruction.

A great deal of drinking takes place, during which Lepidus passes out and must be carried to shore. Menas suggests quietly to Pompey that the cable that holds the boat near the Italian shore be surreptitiously cut, so that the boat will drift away from shore, and that he murder all three triumvirs; then Pompey might be able to take over the entire Roman Empire without significant loss of life. Pompey refuses, but tells Menas that he should have done it without asking permission—a permission that Pompey must refuse or sacrifice his honor: the triumvirs were Pompey’s guests. Menas, in an aside, says that opportunity once spurned never returns again, and thus foreshadows the fall of Pompey.

During the scene, Menas and Enobarbus reveal their feelings about the matter—feelings that hardly do honor to the principals. Menas is sullen, sure that Pompey has made a tragic mistake in handling the situation the way he has. Enobarbus, on the other hand, is quite jovial. The scene ends with the end of the dinner and a drunken dance in honor of Bacchus, the Greek god of wine.

Analysis
In Scene 6, “Sails” means “ships,” the same substitution appears again in Act III. Enobarbus says that Antony will return to Cleopatra and forsake Octavia, who is “of a holy, cold and still conversation.” He refers to Cleopatra as Antony’s “Egyptian dish,” a rather startling metaphor.

In Scene 7, the servants correctly predict Lepidus’ fall and destruction. This is only one of many places in Shakespeare’s plays in which the conversation of unnamed minor characters validly predicts the future. Notice the simile concerning the crocodile; Shakespeare normally uses metaphor more frequently than he does simile. A great deal of drinking takes place, during which Lepidus, passes out and must be carried to shore. This is another in the series of events that depict Lepidus’ character—lack of personal discipline and self-control—that lead inexorably to his destruction.

Menas suggests that opportunity, once spurned, never returns again. He thus predicts the eventual downfall of Pompey. Unexplained is how the murder of the triumvirs without Pompey’s foreknowledge would have spared him any dishonor. The host is generally considered responsible for the conduct of his servants and staff. No mention is made of what would happen to the hostages in such a case.

Notice the onomatopoeia, “Plumpy,” in line 108 where the word sounds like one meaning for which the word is often used. As the revelry ends, the audience knows that Octavius will triumph and become, in truth, Caesar, and that Pompey, Lepidus, and Antony, are on their downward spirals.

Act III, Scene 1: Summary and Analysis
New Character:
Silius: friend of Antony and soldier in Antony’s army commanded by Ventidius

Summary
Scene 1 takes place in Syria, probably on a plain near the battlefield. Ventidius, commanding Mark Antony’s army, has won a significant battle against Orodes, king of Parthia. His troops bear the body of Pacorus, Orodes’ son, as a symbol of victory. (The battle constituted revenge against the Parthians for the treacherous
murder of Marcus Crassus, a member of the first triumvirate of Rome.) Ventidius is urged to pursue his triumph to conquer adjacent regions, but he refuses, citing the danger of promoting himself and possibly eclipsing his general, Antony. Doing that has proved dangerous before with other generals, and Ventidius wants no part of that here. He has done his duty and is ready to return home, but he wants Antony to understand that his army was so successful because they were well paid and well cared for, something that could not be said for many armies of that day.

Analysis
This act illustrates the point where rising action ends and falling action begins. In most Shakespearean plays that point occurs somewhere in the third act, with two acts yet to follow. That is a contrast to the situation in modern drama, where rising action usually continues until later in the play—often to somewhere in the final act. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, surprises continue to occur until the very end of the play, but the final outcome is not in doubt after Act III.

Nevertheless, different commentators could reasonably place the “climax” of this play at any of several other points: (1) at the point where Antony again, at least temporarily, regains his status as a great military leader, (2) at the point where he commits suicide, (3) at the point where Cleopatra commits suicide (and the rather unusual manner in which she does so), or (4) at the point where Octavius (Caesar), deprived of his goal to parade Cleopatra through the streets of Rome as a captive, orders a large state funeral for them and grants Antony’s last wish—to be buried with Cleopatra in her tomb.

The third act emphasizes a major message of *Antony and Cleopatra*, that many a man has been ruined when he allowed his love (or infatuation) for a woman to overrule his better judgment and destroy both his stature and his life and cause. Women are the heroines of Shakespeare’s plays about as often as they are villains, but they are often portrayed as pawns for men to push around on a giant chessboard. An example of this in the play is Octavia, who has no reasonable choice but to accept her brother’s decision to marry her to Antony.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, as in so many of his other plays, Shakespeare portrays the tragic results of letting one’s emotions overpower the intellect. But, as the playwright well knew, the tendency to allow one’s heart to rule one’s head is endemic in the human race, as it always has been since the beginning of recorded history.

Act III, Scenes 2, 3, and 4: Summary and Analysis
Summary
In Scene 2 at Octavius’ house in Rome, Agrippa and Enobarbus are discussing Lepidus. They comment about how greatly Lepidus loves Octavius (Caesar), how greatly he loves Antony, and then on which he loves more. Octavia and her husband Antony are taking leave of Octavius, enroute to Athens. Octavius weeps at the parting; Octavia is his sister, and he is concerned for her welfare. Octavius’ lines tell Antony that he does not trust him. Antony asks Octavius not “to offend him with distrust,” but Octavius does not back down. Octavia cannot reconcile her emotions with her speech, as Antony himself points out. Antony and Octavia depart for Athens.

Scene 3 takes place at Cleopatra’s palace in Alexandria. Cleopatra, overcome with insecurity now that she has a real rival in Octavia, tries to find out as much as she can about Antony’s new life and especially about Octavia. The messenger from Rome has seen Octavia and tries to answer Cleopatra’s questions. The comments of those with the queen, however, tend to be directed to what they think will please her, rather than to what the actual situation is.

In Scene 4 at Antony and Octavia’s house in Athens, Antony is angry that Octavius (Caesar) has undertaken action against Pompey without consulting Antony and without his help, thus breaking the treaty the triumvirs made with Pompey. Also, he is furious that Antony has published his “will” for the Roman people to hear.
The will credits Antony with precious little kindness. He has given little or no credit to Antony in his speeches to the citizens of Rome. Octavia, seeing a potential conflict developing between her husband and her brother, seeks to go to Rome and reconcile the two men before full-scale war breaks out between them. Antony grants Octavia’s wish to return to Rome.

Analysis
In Scene 2, the net effect of the discussion between Agrippa and Enobarbus is to denigrate Lepidus, his dwindling status heightened by how extravagantly he pours praises on the other two triumvirs.

In Scene 3, no direct comparison is made between Cleopatra’s beauty and that of Octavia; the scene portrays Cleopatra’s jealousy, but also suggest that Cleopatra’s love for Antony is, after all, real.

In Scene 4, Antony’s anger that Octavius (Caesar) has undertaken action against Pompey without consulting Antony and without his help, and that Antony has published his “will,” for all practical purposes, cements the fact that war between the two men is imminent. Antony grants Octavia’s wish to return to Rome, probably because he knows armed conflict is to ensue, and he wants to spare Octavia. In this case, his desire to spare his wife, Octavius’ sister, is at least as much a motivation as his desire to be with Cleopatra. Antony is still fully capable of selfless thought of others, whether they deserve such magnanimity, as did Octavia, or whether they don’t.

Act III, Scenes 5, 6, and 7: Summary and Analysis

New Characters:
Eros: friend and servant of Mark Antony
Towrus: second in command of Octavius’ army
Camidius (Canidius): second in command of Antony’s army

Summary
In Scene 5 at Antony’s house in Athens, somewhat later in the day than the previous scene, Enobarbus and Eros discuss the existing political situation, primarily as it concerns Octavius and Antony. Octavius has seized and imprisoned Lepidus—that after the two triumvirs had fought a successful campaign against Pompey.

Scene 6 takes place in Rome, just after Octavia has arrived from Athens. Octavius (Caesar) receives Octavia and tells her that Antony has greatly wronged her and has enlisted the help of many nations in a forthcoming war against him—a considerable overstatement at best. Octavius is angry with Antony for not providing a sufficient escort for so great a woman as Octavia—a totally invalid charge, because Antony had offered her as much of an escort as she desired.

In Scene 7 at Antony’s camp in Actium, Greece, Enobarbus and Cleopatra discuss the situation. Enobarbus urges Cleopatra to return to Egypt. He explains that she will distract Antony’s attention from the crucial matter at hand—defeating Octavius (Caesar) if a battle ensues. In an analogy, he says that a stallion cannot properly devote himself to his master and rider if there are mares in the pasture with him. The stallion, even with the rider on his back, will mount the mare if she is in heat. But Cleopatra refuses to abide by his advice and insists on not only being with Antony but also in having her navy attack Octavius and precipitate a sea battle. Octavius soon will dare Antony to fight him on the sea.

The news arrives that Octavius has quickly crossed the Ionian Sea and taken the city of Toryne, to the amazement of Antony, who could hardly believe that he had crossed so quickly to Greece. After Antony refuses to reconsider his rash decision to fight Octavius on the sea, a soldier swears by Hercules that his efforts to dissuade Antony from a sea battle were valid and correct. Camidius, Antony’s second in command,
agrees with the soldier.

**Analysis**

In Scene 5, Octavius seized and imprisoned Lepidus—after the two triumvirs had fought a successful campaign against Pompey. Historians tell us that Lepidus did turn against Octavius in the war against Pompey, but Shakespeare neither mentions nor alludes to that fact anywhere in this play. Had he done so, the imprisonment of Lepidus could be considered to be at least somewhat justified. Shakespeare’s contempt for Octavius (Caesar) gradually becomes evident. Perhaps it was to engender such contempt among the audiences of his day that the playwright omits this important detail. If so, it is another example of the manner in which Shakespeare “adjusts” the known facts of history to suit his purposes, which usually, but not always, heightens the dramatic effect of the action on stage.

Scene 6 yields more such examples of Octavius’ attempts to belittle Antony in the eyes of everyone else, including his own sister, Octavia. Octavius’ telling Octavia that Antony has greatly wronged her and has enlisted the help of many nations in a forthcoming war against him is a considerable overstatement at best. At worst, it is an outright lie. The intended effect is to make Octavia feel sorry for herself (more than she already does) and convince her what a scoundrel Antony really is. Octavius’ misstatement of the situation is a forewarning of his less than pure motives for whatever he does. Octavius’ anger with Antony for not providing a sufficient escort for so great a woman as Octavia is groundless. Antony had offered her as much of an escort as she desired.

In Scene 7, Cleopatra’s insecurity probably precipitates her highly unwise decision not to return to Egypt and allow Antony to fight Octavius (Caesar) without having to think about her. She apparently felt she could not take a chance on being away from Antony any longer than absolutely necessary. Furthermore, she thought that her offer of her navy would serve to solidify their relationship.

Antony foolishly and with far too much pride accepts Octavius’ dare to fight a sea battle, and thus seals his own doom and that of Cleopatra. His disregard of all the efforts by seasoned commanders and soldiers to dissuade him from a sea battle leads to the understanding that Antony will be utterly destroyed. The synecdoche “sails” (the part) meaning “ships” (the whole) appears for the second time in this play. (A synecdoche, in which the part stands for the whole, is the opposite of a metonymy, in which the whole stands for the part.)

Antony claimed to be a descendant of Hercules, a mythical Greek hero who had become a demigod. Hercules had won a significant victory (against Antaeus) while standing on land. When Hercules, however, later put himself into the power of a woman, he was destroyed. This supposed tie between Hercules and Antony, well known to many of Antony’s day, explains several events that occur later.

**Act III, Scenes 8-11: Summary and Analysis**

**New Character:**
Scarrus: Roman soldier and friend of Mark Antony

**Summary**

Scene 8 takes place in Greece near Actium. Octavius warns his commander, Towrus, not to strike Antony by land until after the battle at sea. The future of the conflict depends on this battle plan. Nearby, in Scene 9, Antony gives some military orders to Enobarbus concerning the placement of troops so that the sea battle can be observed.

In Scene 10, which takes place at Actium, several hours later, Enobarbus and Scarrus discuss the total rout of the ships. All of Cleopatra’s navy has turned tail and run southward toward Peloponneseus and the battle appears lost. Even loyal Scarrus says that Antony’s actions in chasing after Cleopatra’s ship was an
unparalleled act of cowardice and dereliction of duty, unequaled in any war. Camidius enters and confirms the disaster.

In Scene 11, Antony leaves his forces and chases after Cleopatra, who is aboard her fleeing flagship. Eventually he catches her. It is not certain whether the reunion occurs in Egypt or on the Peloponnesus, but the latter seems more probable. In total dejection, and ashamed of himself for chasing Cleopatra and her navy instead of remaining with his men, he advises his soldiers to give up and go to Octavius (Caesar). Cleopatra’s attendants urge her to comfort Antony, which she does. Antony tells those soldiers faithful to him to take the ship laden with gold which Antony had reserved for himself, and go to make their peace with Octavius (Caesar). Then he accuses Cleopatra of treachery. She pleads for forgiveness, and says she never thought Antony would try to follow her. Antony replies that she should have known he’d follow her (to the ends of the earth, if need be). Nevertheless, Cleopatra’s protestations of innocence have their effect, and Antony ceases his verbal attack on her.

Analysis
The statement in Scene 8, in which Octavius tells his commander not to begin land action against Antony until after the sea battle, indicates how thoroughly Octavius is counting on the sea battle, a type of fighting in which Antony lacks experience to win the war. Scene 9 serves simply as a transition scene, in which Antony gives some orders about the placement of troops.

In Scene 10, however, Enobarbus and Scarrus discuss the total rout of the ships. At this point the audience learns of Antony’s disastrous defeat, which they were, or at least should have been, expecting. The appearance of Camidius confirms the scope of the disaster. Antony foolishly accepted a dare that put him and his troops at a severe disadvantage; he did not deserve to win.

In Scene 11, Cleopatra’s excuse for running away is invalid; it in no way mitigates her cowardice (and immaturity) in allowing her ships to turn tail and run from the battle. But Antony’s reply that she should have known he’d follow her is an equally invalid excuse on his part. The truth of the matter is that she should not have run away, and that, even if she did run away, he should never have chased her while the battle was still raging. It is a sad indication of how far Antony has fallen from his once lofty status as one of the world’s most competent soldiers.

Act III, Scenes 12 and 13: Summary and Analysis
New Characters:
Dolabella: friend of Octavius (Caesar)
Thidias: friend of Octavius

Summary
Scene 12 takes place at Octavius’ camp. Antony has sent his children’s schoolmaster to Octavius—perhaps a final insult to the victor, whom Antony always has called a mere boy. The emissary asks that Antony be allowed to live in Egypt, or, if not Egypt, as a private man in Greece. Cleopatra agrees to submit to Octavius’ rule. Octavius refuses to grant Antony’s request but gives the emissary a favorable answer to Cleopatra, providing only that she drive Antony from Egypt or kill him. Then he sends his own emissary, Thidias, to Antony and Cleopatra. Thidias is authorized to offer Cleopatra any terms he thinks appropriate.

Scene 13 takes place at Cleopatra’s palace in Alexandria, where she and Antony have returned following the disastrous sea battle. After Antony’s defeat, Cleopatra asks Enobarbus, “Is Antony or we at fault for this?” “Antony,” Enobarbus answers, for Antony would “make his Will Lord of his Reason.”
Antony, aware of Octavius’ terms that the price of Cleopatra’s safety is his own destruction, writes Octavius a letter, challenging him to a sword duel to settle the matter, rather than destroy thousands of soldiers in a final battle. Thidias arrives and tells Cleopatra that Octavius knows that she took up with Antony through fear of him, not love of him.

Antony returns and orders Thidias whipped—another sign that he lets his emotions control his intellect. Then he asserts his will to continue the war: “I am Antony yet,” after which he obliquely accuses Cleopatra of acting like a whore: “Would you mingle Eyes With one who ties his [Octavius Caesar’s] Points?” In a famous speech she defends herself and satisfies Antony, who now plans a final military and naval attack on Octavius. Antony proposes a feast, to which Cleopatra agrees, reminding him that it is her birthday.

Analysis
In Scene 12 Antony has insulted Octavius (Caesar) by sending his children’s schoolmaster to Octavius, whom Antony always has called a mere boy. (At this point, in 31 B.C., Octavius was 32 years old; Antony was 51.) It is evident that Octavius has no intention of abiding by his own or Thidias’ promises to Cleopatra. All he desires is physical possession of Cleopatra. Shakespeare, never an admirer of Octavius Caesar, paints a vivid picture of his lack of character.

In Scene 13, when Cleopatra asks Enobarbus which person was at fault in the defeat, the playwright makes a point which is made many times in his plays: that every man is responsible for his own actions. When Octavius tells Cleopatra that he knows she took up with Antony out of fear of him, not out of love for him, he offers Cleopatra an “out.” However, Octavius’ “gracious” comment is not valid; Cleopatra did not submit to Antony through fear. Nevertheless, Cleopatra accepts his statement as true, displaying her own weakness—a weakness which she bemoans later in the play.

When Antony returns to the scene and orders Thidias whipped, the audience sees another indication that Antony lets his emotions control his intellect. Nevertheless, his statement, “I am Antony yet,” and his willingness to continue the war, suggest that the old (and real) Antony is returning to the stage. At this point, Cleopatra’s stature, too, takes a turn for the better. (“But since my lord is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra.”)

Act IV, Scenes 1, 2, and 3: Summary and Analysis
Summary
Scene 1 takes place at the camp of Octavius and his forces, near Alexandria. Octavius (Caesar) receives the letter from Antony, resents that Antony has called him “Boy,” and refuses to fight a duel with him. Mecenas wisely suggests that Octavius take full advantage of Antony’s angry and irrational behavior and be careful not to become angry himself. Octavius mentions that enough men have defected from Antony’s forces to assure Octavius’ victory.

In Scene 2 at Cleopatra’s palace in Alexandria, Antony learns from Enobarbus that Octavius will not fight a duel with him. He discusses the coming land battle and invites his friends to a lavish dinner. He bids his leaders farewell and alludes to the “last supper” Jesus ate with his disciples, another anachronism. Enobarbus upbraids Antony for the defeatist speech to his comrades, but Antony insists he did not mean it in that manner. Notice Cleopatra’s “asides” to Enobarbus, asking what Antony meant by his words.

Scene 3 takes place where some soldiers are keeping watch near Cleopatra’s palace. The soldiers hear sounds of revelry, apparently coming from beneath the pavement where they are standing. One soldier says that it is the sound of Hercules, from whom Antony claimed descent, now leaving him. They agree it is an ominous omen for Antony.
Analysis
For a day and a half, Antony begins to resemble the great Mark Antony of his younger years. His contempt for Octavius still oozes from his language, but he can inspire his men and overcome blows, such as the defection of Enobarbus. Now that he has a chance to fight on land, rather than sea, he can out-general Octavius and win the day.

Eros and Enobarbus, two of Antony’s closest friends, are contrasted here. Throughout the play to this point, Enobarbus has occupied the superior position and was entrusted with more responsibility than was Eros. But it is Enobarbus who defects to the enemy, and Eros who stays with his friend and commander to the moment of their deaths. The audience may ponder what it was in the characters of the two men that caused the proverbial tables to be turned, nearly at the end of the play, and demonstrated that Eros was, in fact, the superior man, whereas, throughout almost the entire play, Enobarbus was given that position.

Never resolved is why Cleopatra’s navy deserted her and Antony. The audience is to assume that Cleopatra did indeed love Antony, probably as much as such a woman could love any man. Could she not control the commanders of her navy? Did she know she could not do so? If she did know, why had she not warned Antony? She had boasted of her naval strength only days before the treachery. In the first sea battle, her ships had fled, with Cleopatra aboard. Could she not have controlled her admirals? She did not protect Antony when presumably she could have done so, nor was she willing to risk herself to descend from her “monument” to kiss and talk with her dying Antony; she insisted that he be raised up to where she was. Perhaps the audience is to understand that a woman such as Cleopatra could not truly love anyone but herself.

At the moment of Antony’s death, the conflict of emotions within Cleopatra must have been heavy. She knew that the immediate cause of his death was her arranging to have a false report of her own suicide brought to him. That she should have done such a thing strongly indicates her own immaturity and lack of self-confidence—even a desperate psychological need to find out if Antony really cared about her. She had thought, too late, that her plot might have caused his suicide; a fully mature woman probably would have thought of that possibility before she initiated the plot. On the other hand, she had had sufficient control of her faculties to realize that once she was in the clutches of Octavius’ soldiers, it would be difficult for her to follow Antony in suicide. Therefore, she had made arrangements for the delivery of the figs, with the asps hidden in the bottom of the basket. This planning indicates considerable emotional maturity, suicide was considered an honorable act in Shakespeare’s times.

Antony’s strong feelings for Cleopatra is not disputed; did he really love her or was it simply “sex appeal”? Antony deserted his men in the first sea battle to chase Cleopatra, who swore later that she was not responsible for the flight of her ships, and Antony believed her. Perhaps she really thought that Antony would not follow her until the battle was over.

In the last analysis, the reader must believe that Antony was not responsible for his final defeat. Shakespeare offers no help in this respect, other than to tacitly suggest that his great fault was to team up with Cleopatra in the first place.

In Scene 1, Antony should have known that Octavius would refuse to fight the duel. If he really did know that, the challenge would have been symbolic, but here, once again, Antony’s emotions have overruled his intellect, as Mecenas well knew. It was that knowledge that allowed Mecenas to suggest that Octavius take full advantage of Antony’s angry and irrational behavior and be careful not to become angry himself.

In Scene 2, Cleopatra senses that Antony’s mind might be cracking under the strain of the previous defeat. Enobarbus’ replies offer her precious little encouragement. Enobarbus, perhaps Antony’s most trusted friend and soldier, had already planned to defect to Octavius. Therefore, his attitude would be extremely pessimistic about Antony, and he communicates that pessimism to Cleopatra at perhaps the worst time, psychologically,
for the queen to hear it.

In Scene 3, there are ghost footsteps. Octavius’ soldiers keeping watch there discuss the strange sounds, apparently coming from underneath the pavement. At first they decide it must be the sound of Bacchus departing from the festivities. Were that the case, the omen would have been neutral. But when the soldiers decided it was the sound of Hercules (from whom Antony claimed descent) departing, the omen became obvious: it was extremely unfavorable to Antony and his cause. This entire scene may be taken as foreshadowing Antony’s defeat.

Act IV, Scenes 4, 5, and 6: Summary and Analysis

Summary
In Scene 4 at Cleopatra’s palace in Egypt the next morning, Eros and Cleopatra are helping Antony don his armor as they discuss the prospects of the day. Cleopatra retires to her chamber, and Antony and his men go forth into battle.

Scene 5 takes place on the battlefield just before the battle begins. Antony learns that his close friend Enobarbus has deserted to Octavius. With a show of magnanimity, he sends Enobarbus’ trunk and “treasure” to him in Octavius’ camp.

At Octavius’ camp in Scene 6, Octavius orders his men to take Antony alive. Octavius also has ordered his commanders to put the men who have deserted to him from Antony’s forces into the front lines, so that they will be the first to die and Antony will have to kill those who were once his own men. Enobarbus, informed that Antony has sent him his possessions, cannot believe it and tells the messenger he may have them. The messenger assures him that it is true, and Enobarbus is stricken to the core by Antony’s love and magnanimity.

Analysis
In Scene 4, Antony’s lines are among his finest in the play and represent the old or “real” Antony as he sets out for battle. In Scene 5, Antony’s loving gesture in sending Enobarbus his possessions is typical of the old Antony and suggests that he has regained the stature he once had as the commanding general of the triumvirate’s forces. It suggests that a good and successful day is about to follow for Antony, as, indeed, it does. The suggestion that Antony took this action to “punish” Enobarbus and to make him “smart” for this treasonous defection has no support in the text of the play or in the meager historical records available to us. That it has an evil effect on Enobarbus and, in fact, does cause him to commit suicide (or, at least, to die) does not prove, or even suggest, that Antony intended it in this manner.

In Scene 6, Octavius’ order that his commanders put into the front lines the men who have deserted to him from Antony’s forces is, yet, another illustration of the depraved condition of Octavius’ mind. Such men will be the first to die, and Antony will have to kill those who were once his own men. Nevertheless, some commanders of high integrity today might have done the same thing, were the battle being fought today. The sight of one’s own men in the enemy’s front lines might have discouraged the commander from fighting the battle at all and thus might have led to a negotiated instead of a military solution, although this possibility appears strained, at best. Highly significant here is the comment by Octavius’ (Caesar) unnamed soldier, who informs Enobarbus of Antony’s loving gesture. The soldier says, “Your emperor continues still a Jove,” comparing him to Jupiter (Jove), king of the gods in Roman mythology. It is a startling comment from a soldier in the opposing army, and another instance in which Shakespeare uses an unnamed player to utter an important line.

Act IV, Scenes 7, 8, and 9: Summary and Analysis

Summary
Scene 7 takes place on the battlefield. Several hours have passed since the last scene, and Octavius’ forces are
in retreat before the victorious forces of Antony. Scarrus, although wounded, is game for more of the battle. His courage and enthusiasm greatly encourage Antony, who responds as the great military commander he once was and appears to be again now.

Scene 8 occurs a bit later, when the forces loyal to Antony realize that they have won the battle (although not yet the war). Antony sends messengers to Cleopatra to tell her of the victory and ask her to prepare to receive the heroes, particularly Scarrus, as her guests. Cleopatra appears and embraces Antony in a manner befitting a great and successful military commander. She offers Scarrus a suit of armor made of gold and prepares a victory banquet, even though the war is not yet won.

Scene 9 takes place at the edge of Octavius’ camp. Enobarbus, talking to himself, upbraids himself for his cowardly act in deserting Antony, then dies. The guards hear the monologue, listening for something that might be of use to their commander, Octavius. Then they carry off Enobarbus’ body.

Analysis
In Scene 7, Scarrus’ courage and desire to continue fighting, although wounded, greatly encourage Antony, who responds as the great military commander he once was and appears to be again now. This is another example of Shakespeare’s understanding of human psychology. Here the commanding general draws strength and courage from the courage and enthusiasm of one with a rank well beneath his own. Any experienced and high-ranking military or naval officer can tell stories of how exactly the same thing has happened to him/her—how he/she has been strengthened and encouraged by the enthusiasm and courage of just one underling.

In Scene 8, notice the pun on guests/gests (line 2), the latter word meaning, in Elizabethan times, deeds of valor. In Scene 9, a sentry is probably a lower-echelon officer, something like a centurion. The guard he commands is there to give warning if Antony should launch a surprise attack. Enobarbus’ dying speech suggests that he was dying from self-inflicted wounds, probably both internal and external. Nevertheless, it was a common supposition in Shakespeare’s day (and earlier) that one might actually die of a broken heart, given the proper circumstances, without any other cause of death.

Act IV, Scenes 10, 11, and 12: Summary and Analysis
Summary
Scene 10 takes place near Antony’s headquarters, the following morning. Antony is surveying the situation to determine how to handle the second day of the battle. He notes that Octavius is preparing for a sea battle. Antony is fighting his battle on earth and water and wishes he also could fight Octavius in air and in fire. Scene 11 has only four lines as Octavius (Caesar) views the situation from a point near his camp. Octavius tells his troops his best advantage, after yesterday’s defeat, is to attack by sea.

In Scene 12 at a vantage point overlooking the sea where the battle is to be joined, Antony and Scarrus see Cleopatra’s ships desert and go to Octavius’ side. Antony knows that their treachery ends his chance for a victory. He blames Cleopatra for ordering the treachery and calls her a whore. He orders Scarrus to tell his forces to give up the battle, then he launches into a bitter tirade against Cleopatra. When she appears, he tells her to leave immediately, or he’ll kill her. She leaves.

Analysis
In Scene 10, a foreshadowing of disaster for Antony is revealed in an expression of his overconfidence. In his day, people believed there were only four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. Antony, fighting his battle on earth and water, wishes he also could fight Octavius in air and in fire. This statement has been taken as Shakespeare’s prophecy that battles of the future would be fought in the air and with fire, but the possibility appears, at best, strained and, at worst, ludicrous. In Shakespearean drama, a display of undue pride often foretells a fall.
Scene 11 is another short transition scene that allows the audience to see the picture from Octavius’ standpoint.

In Scene 12, Shakespeare offers no real evidence that Cleopatra had anything to do with the desertion of her sailors and ships. Insofar as the audience can determine, the playwright assigns the cause to pure cowardice on the part of Cleopatra’s sailors (and, perhaps, the poor state of repair of their boats, which had been mentioned earlier in the play). Antony thinks she intended to become Octavius’ woman—another wrong guess on Antony’s part. The “shirt of Nessus” is a shirt Hercules’ wife, Deianira, had given him, smeared with the blood of the centaur Nessus whom Hercule—also sometimes called Alcides—had shot with a poisoned arrow. Deianira had thought the blood on the shirt would work as a love charm, but instead it caused Hercules such great and searing pain that he flung the servant who had brought the shirt to him so high in the air that he fell into the sea far from land and died. This is yet another reference to Hercules, from whom Antony claimed descent.

Act IV, Scenes 13 and 14: Summary and Analysis

**New Characters:**
- Diomedes: attendant of Cleopatra
- Decretas (Dercetus): friend of Mark Antony

**Summary**

Scene 13 takes place in Cleopatra’s palace. Cleopatra tells Charmian that Antony has gone insane. Indeed, this is a reasonable conclusion, considering the emotional manner in which Antony has been speaking. Then, at Charmian’s suggestion, she tells Mardian to tell Antony that she is dead and to report back to her, at her monument (which was built as her tomb), how Antony takes this news.

Scene 14 takes place on a promontory near Cleopatra’s palace, overlooking the battlefields and probably also the harbor where the sea battle took place. Antony discusses with Eros the tragedy of his defeat. Mardian arrives with (false) news that Cleopatra died with Antony’s name on her lips. Antony, in a bit of bitter comic relief, has been comparing himself to a shadow on the water. Antony now asks Eros to fulfill an old promise to kill him, assuring him that by killing Antony, it is Octavius (Caesar) that he will defeat. But Eros kills himself instead. Antony praises Eros as a worthier man than himself, then tries to commit suicide by falling on his own sword, but botches the job. Decretas sees Antony in his near-dead condition with his bloody sword nearby. He realizes that if he carries this sword to Octavius (Caesar) he will earn himself forever a seat in Octavius’ court, so he does so.

Antony begs the guards to come and kill him, but they refuse. Then Diomedes comes to him from Cleopatra. Antony asks Diomedes to kill him, but Diomedes says that Cleopatra is alive and was afraid that Antony might harm himself, thinking she was dead. Antony asks his guards to carry him to where Cleopatra is and assures them it will be the last service he asks of them.

**Analysis**

In Scene 13, having Mardian tell Antony that Cleopatra has committed suicide is her immature way to get back at Antony for his blistering condemnation of her when he thought she was responsible for the defection of the Egyptian ships. A more psychologically mature woman would have realized instantly the possible disastrous consequences of such a plot. Of course, Cleopatra did realize the consequences later, but too late to prevent Antony from trying to kill himself.

In Scene 14, notice the string of similes in the opening lines: “a cloud that’s dragonish.” etc. Eros, long before, had been Antony’s bondservant. When Antony had freed him, he had sworn to Antony that, should Antony ever ask him to do so, he would kill Antony. Notice the double entendre in line 105: “I have done my
work ill, friends.” can apply both to Antony’s botched attempt at suicide and his handling of the entire war with Octavius.

Act IV, Scene 15: Summary and Analysis

Summary
This scene takes place in Alexandria, at Cleopatra’s monument, which contains the tomb she has built for herself. Antony has been brought to the monument. He begs Cleopatra to come down and kiss him before he dies, but she refuses, saying it’s too dangerous. But she and her attendants manage to hoist Antony up to where Cleopatra is. Antony and Cleopatra exchange a few lines before he dies. In his typical spirit of magnanimity, Antony tells Cleopatra to seek both her honor and her safety with Octavius. She protests that, here, honor and safety are incompatible. Cleopatra vows to give Antony a real Roman funeral.

Analysis
In Scene 15, Cleopatra protests, after Antony has told her to seek honor and safety with Octavius (Caesar), that, here, honor and safety are incompatible—a line that shows her in a favorable light, especially to an audience of Shakespeare’s day. She has matured considerably, probably as a result of the crisis of the recent days, and determines to kill herself. In Elizabethan times, suicide was considered an honorable act; thus, Cleopatra, in making and carrying out this determination, exhibits a maturity that has been severely lacking in her character up to this point.

Act V, Scenes 1 and 2: Summary and Analysis

New Characters:
Proculeius: friend of Mark Antony
Seleucus: attendant to Cleopatra (and her treasurer)
Clown: brings the deadly asps to Cleopatra

Summary
Scene 1 takes place in Octavius’ camp outside Alexandria. Octavius (Caesar) learns from Decretas that Antony is dead, the message verified by Decretas’ presentation to Octavius of Antony’s sword, stained with the triumvir’s own blood. Octavius weeps for him, uttering another of the famous Shakespearan passages: “The breaking of so great a thing should make a greater Crack.” He says that the world should shake to its very foundations and everything in it be upset by the death of so great a man as Antony. Afterwards Agrippa says, in another well-known passage, “But you Gods will give us/Some faults to make us Men.” Octavius muses that it might have been Antony who became sole ruler of the world instead of himself.

A messenger from Cleopatra arrives to ask Octavius how she should prepare for whatever he should order her to do. He offers a peaceful answer, but then sends Proculeius (and Gallus, who does not speak in most extant manuscripts of this play) to Cleopatra with kind words, fearing that she, like Antony, might commit suicide. But Octavius is crafty and intends to physically seize the queen while her attention is distracted by talking with Octavius’ emissary, Proculeius (and, presumably, Gallus).

Scene 2 takes place in Cleopatra’s monument. Cleopatra, Charmian, Iras, and Mardian are there when Proculeius enters. He tells the queen that she will be treated well by the emperor, but while he is saying so, soldiers enter to seize her. They take from her a dagger with which she had intended to commit suicide. Nevertheless, she threatens suicide or, at the very least, disfigurement, and Proculeius tries desperately to dissuade her, knowing that her suicide will foil the emperor’s plans for her (and, incidentally, subject Proculeius to possible disciplinary action by Octavius). Dolabella enters and tells Proculeius that Octavius has sent for him and that he may leave, that he (Dolabella) will assume responsibility for the queen’s safety and that of her retinue.
Cleopatra tells Dolabella about a dream she has had about a magnificent Antony who seems far beyond other men in stature and magnificence. She asks Dolabella if such a man could exist. He replies in the negative, but feels great sympathy for Cleopatra and tells her, albeit reluctantly, that Octavius intends to parade her through the streets of Rome as a prize of war.

Octavius (Caesar) enters, speaks kind words to Cleopatra, and she replies, pretending abject submission to him. But Octavius warns her against committing suicide and tells her that, should she do so, things will go hard with her children. She offers him what she says is her entire treasure, but her treasurer Seleucus denies that fact and says it is only about half her treasure. Furious at this treason from one of her attendants, she blushes, but Octavius congratulates her on her foresight in holding something back. She says part of what was held back was intended as a present for Livia (Octavius’ wife) and Octavia. She asks Octavius to leave, which he does, along with his retinue.

In a bitter conversation with Iras and Charmian, the queen tells them how they will be treated if Octavius takes them to Rome. Iras replies that she’s sure that her nails are stronger than her eyes—that is, that she will tear out her eyes before she will submit to such humiliation.

Cleopatra, with considerable foresight, already has provided a relatively painless way for her, and possibly for her attendants, to kill themselves. A “rural man” (later identified as the Clown) arrives with what purportedly is a basket of figs, but actually contains several asps hidden beneath the figs. Cleopatra questions him about the asps and asks if he personally knows of anyone actually killed by them. He replies that he knows many. Here Shakespeare introduces a long period of comic relief, during which Cleopatra tries to get rid of the Clown, who obviously does not want to leave but rather to enjoy his hour in the sun with the queen and her court. Eventually the Clown does leave, but just before he would have been bodily thrown out of the monument.

Charmian and Iras bring the queen, at her command, the best robe, jewels, and crown. She dons them, stating that it is fitting that she, a royal queen, be dressed in her finest clothes to meet Antony, presumably in the hereafter, for all know that Antony is dead. She bids Iras and Charmian a long farewell, unaware that they too will be dead within seconds. Iras dies first, apparently bitten by one of the asps. Then the queen holds one to her breast, refers to it as her baby, sucking her to sleep, and dies. Charmian then grasps an asp, begging it to kill her, which it does.

Dolabella returns to the monument and finds the three women dead. Then Octavius arrives and is surprised at their deaths, for there was no blood. But Dolabella finds the “vent of Blood” on Cleopatra’s breast and arm. A soldier finds a trail of slime on the fig leaves, such as asps leave on the caves of the Nile River, thus answering for Octavius the question of how the three women died. Octavius pays them homage, orders that Cleopatra be buried with “her Antony,” and makes plans to give them a huge state funeral, which all his army shall attend.

Analysis
In Scene 1, Octavius’ speech, “O Antony,/I have followed thee to this,” suggests Octavius’ psychological maturity, as do the lines in which he praises his dead opponent as a great man.

In Scene 2, Dolabella apparently outranks Proculeius; otherwise Proculeius would have been reluctant to surrender control of Cleopatra. In Cleopatra’s description of her dream, notice the figures of speech: simile (he was as rattling thunder, dolphin-like, islands were as plates), synecdoche (crowns and crownets), metaphor (winter, autumn), etc.

Dolabella feels great sympathy for Cleopatra and tells her, albeit reluctantly, that Octavius intends to parade her through the streets of Rome as a prize of war. In doing so, Dolabella risks his own life, should Octavius
learn of the matter. It gives Dolabella, in the eyes of the audience, much greater stature than any other servant of Octavius and, indeed, stature above most other men in the play.

Later in this scene, Cleopatra’s remark to the emperor, “Wert thou a Man, Thou would’st have Mercy on me,” suggests that she is addressing Octavius, no doubt facetiously, as a god rather than as a man. The other possibility is that she addresses the remark to Seleucus, in which case it is an insulting and deprecating remark.

Octavius warns Cleopatra against committing suicide and tells her that, should she do so, things will go hard with her children. The viewer of Shakespeare’s day probably would have interpreted that warning as a statement that Octavius will kill all her offspring if she commits suicide. As mentioned earlier, he did kill one son—Caesarion—whom she had borne by Julius Caesar years before her relationship with Antony began. Octavius thus eliminated another possible claimant to the throne.

Cleopatra, with considerable foresight, already has provided a relatively painless way for her, and possibly for her attendants, to kill themselves. During the long period of comic relief while the Clown is on stage, there is an added point of comic relief produced by the pun on the word “lie” which could mean either to tell a falsehood or to have intercourse with.

As Cleopatra dons her best clothes, intending to meet Antony in the hereafter, it should be remembered that Antony in the previous act, metaphorically called himself a “bridegroom.”
Themes

Upon learning of the death of his cohort and foe, Augustus Caesar says of Antony's demise:

The breaking of so great a thing should make
A greater crack: the round world
Should have shook lions into civil streets,
And citizens to their dens. The death of Antony
Is not a single doom; in the name lay
A moiety of the world.

(V.i.14-18)

A politician by trade and heart, Caesar's words resound with Mark Antony's own funeral orations over the deaths of Julius Caesar and Brutus in the earlier Shakespearean tragedy *Julius Caesar*. But while Caesar is not to be taken at his word and is given to borrowed rhetorical exaggeration in service of his own advancement, here his words ring true. Above all, the dominant sense of the play is not so much a product of thematic content as it is of the sheer scope of the events taking place. Antony, Cleopatra, and Augustus Caesar are all giants, historical heroes whose lives ripple throughout the world for centuries. They are world rulers of unsurpassed historical importance, "planetary" characters with the power, will and talent to shake heaven and earth.

As Caesar's use of the word "moiety" connotes ("moiety" means "half"), the world of Antony and Cleopatra is divided into two, contrasting but complementary spheres. There is the Roman world from which Antony hales and in which Caesar ultimately triumphs. This is a world of rational politics, of reason, and of personal (especially military) honor, all of these being attributes of a western and "masculine" society. Cleopatra's world in Egypt is dominated by passion, by sensory pleasure, and by an "eastern/feminine" weakness associated with deception.

While each of these sides—Roman and Egyptian—has its virtues and its failings, Fortune is on the side of the former. In Act II, scene ii, the soothsayer predicts that Caesar will rise higher than Antony, and we know from history that this proved true. On a dramatic level (without the benefit of historical chronicles), we are told that Rome will defeat Antony and Cleopatra because Fortune demands it. On the cusp of his final battle with Antony and his Egyptian queen, Caesar proclaims that "the time of universal peace is near" (IV.vi.4). Shortly thereafter, Antony sees the writing on the wall and allows that "Fortune and Antony part here" (IV.xii.18). From Shakespeare's standpoint, Rome must triumph so that the historical destiny can be fulfilled, including the coming of Christianity to the West under the reign of Caesar. Cleopatra also acknowledges that Fortune is against her cause; in the final scene of Act IV, the vanquished Egyptian Queen vents her anguish with the statement, "let me rail so high / That the false huswive Fortune break her wheel" (IV.xv.42-43). In the end, even so mighty a couple as Antony and Cleopatra cannot oppose historical Fortune. Still, Cleopatra derives some solace from the fact that it is destiny, not Caesar, that conquers, saying in the last scene of the play: "'Tis paltry to be Caesar; / Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave, / A minister of her will" (V.ii.2-4).
Loyalty, personal honor and individual identity comprise another thematic cluster in the play. "If I lose mine honour, / I lose myself" (III.iv.22-23), Antony says to his Roman wife Octavia, and it is within Antony that this connection between integrity and selfhood is played out to the fullest. After abandoning Octavia and his first defeat at the hands of her brother, Antony summons his inner resources to assert "I am Antony yet" (III.xiii.92). But in Act IV, scene xiv, after all is lost, Antony recognizes: "Here I am Antony; / Yet cannot hold this visible shape" (II.13-14). Antony retains his noble stature for us, but in his own mind, his identity as Antony is annihilated by his defeat by Caesar and, more pointedly, by Cleopatra's treachery.

In addition to such obvious symbolic associations as that of Antony with Mars and Cleopatra with Venus, the text of *Antony and Cleopatra* is rich with recurrent images. One salient thread is that of "food," "eating" and "sensory consumption." Here the nexus of association lies with the Egyptian Queen. Cleopatra is described by Enobarbus as Antony's "Egyptian dish" (II.vi.123), and he earlier elaborated that "Other women cloy / The appetites they feed; but she makes hungry / Where she most satisfies" (II.ii.235-37). After their first defeat at Actium, an angry Antony says to Cleopatra, "I found you as a morsel cold upon / Dead Caesar's trencher" (III.xiii.116-17). These "cold dish" images converge with numerous references to serpents, snakes, and crocodiles—cold-blooded creatures of cunning that are also associated with Cleopatra.
**Advanced Themes**

**Language and Imagery**

*Antony and Cleopatra* is distinguished among Shakespeare's plays for its lush, evocative language. Some critics have even suggested that it should be classified with Shakespeare's long poems rather than ranked alongside his plays. Scholarly discussion has focused on Enobarbus's vividly detailed depiction of Cleopatra on her barge and on the lovers' continual use of hyperbole, or exaggerated language, to describe each other as well as their affection for one another.

Some critics have argued that the hyperbolic language in *Antony and Cleopatra* makes it a highly problematical play to stage. What actor, for example, is so physically fit that he can portray a character like Antony, whose "legs bestrid the ocean" and whose "rear'd arm / Crested the world"? What actress is charismatic enough to play Cleopatra, who is described as more seductive than Venus, the goddess of love? Odier critics have observed that Shakespeare was well aware of this conflict between language and reality and that he makes this clear in Act V when the defeated Cleopatra imagines that plays written in Rome about the former lovers will feature Antony as a drunk and herself as a "whore" played— as was the custom in Renaissance England— by a "squeaking . . . boy."

Scholars have in fact identified a variety of reasons for the existence of heightened language and vivid imagery in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Some have demonstrated its usefulness in highlighting the changing moods or fortunes of particular characters. Thus Antony's men effectively display their disappointment in their leader and his noticeable transformation when they complain that Antony has been reduced from acting like the god of war to behaving like the mere fawning servant of a lustful woman. Similarly, it has been pointed out that while Antony describes his love for Cleopatra in hyperbolic terms, he does not lose sight of his own importance in the world of politics. For instance, even as he asserts that his love for Cleopatra renders everything else in the world unimportant, he demands that the people of the world take note of his love or else face punishment from him. Thus we are introduced to the conflicting feelings—romantic love versus honorable renown— that plague Antony and that ultimately destroy him.

Several critics have suggested that *Antony and Cleopatra*'s hyperbolic poetry mirrors the paradoxes at work in the play: love versus death and immortality versus aging, for example. In connection with this, several scholars have noted the frequent use of images that link death, love, and immortality. The preponderance of death imagery intensifies the tragic nature of Antony and Cleopatra's love. Death imagery also emphasizes the fact that both lovers are aging. Aging and death are things that the extraordinary Antony and Cleopatra have in common with ordinary people, all of whom must come to terms with their mortality; therefore, some critics conclude that the imagery and hyperbole in Antony and Cleopatra are intended to reinforce the fact that all human beings are by their very nature extraordinary.

**Dualism**

Much of the commentary on *Antony and Cleopatra* has been devoted to the play's numerous thematic pairings: Antony and Cleopatra; love and war; Antony and Octavius; self-restraint and luxury; reason and emotion. Scholars customarily argue that all or at least a large portion of this dualism flows from one essential pairing— Rome (under the guardianship of the strictly disciplined Octavius Caesar) versus Egypt (under the sway of the flamboyantly unpredictable Cleopatra). Antony is traditionally regarded as the go-between or victim of the Rome/Egypt dualism. As such, commentators have remarked, Antony must deal with his own set of internal conflicts: his Roman honor giving way to dishonor in Egypt; his youthful warrior's physique diminishing with age and dissipation; and his love for Cleopatra undermining his loyalty to Rome.

On the other hand, many critics have countered that the elements at work in *Antony and Cleopatra* cannot be neatly grouped into rigid pairs because just as the political alliances in the play shift, so do the groupings in
the play's structure. For example, Antony's dilemma has been described as one involving a choice between love and war; between, that is, his life with Cleopatra in Egypt and his profession as a soldier in Rome. In contrast, critics have argued that Antony's dilemma is solved when love and death are paired through his and Cleopatra's suicides. Commentators have observed that when Octavius commands the burial of the lovers in the same grave, he acknowledges that death has immortalized the love of "a pair so famous" as Antony and Cleopatra.

In addition to thematic dualism, scholars have found linguistic forms of duality in the play. Irony, for example, occurs when the lovers use hyperbolic, or exaggerated, language to describe their devotion to one another even as the action of the play casts doubt on this devotion. Paradox occurs when death is used to solve the problems of the living. One critic has noted that, paradoxically, Octavius Caesar becomes emperor of the world at the close of the play, but his earthly power is eclipsed by the transcendent love achieved through Antony and Cleopatra's deaths.

Disagreements between critics concerning the play's meaning also underscore the dualism of Antony and Cleopatra. For example, commentators who assert that the play is about the transcendence of love are contradicted by critics who maintain that the play's real focus is on the moral transgressions of the two lovers and the deadly price they are obliged to pay for their sins. Critics who regard Cleopatra as selfish and whimsical are countered by those who argue that her actions in the play are misunderstood. Those who consider Antony a noble character are at odds with scholars who regard him as weak. Today, many critics conclude that the play's dualism or ambivalence is intentional, and that the insoluble conflicts which surface repeatedly in Antony and Cleopatra are meant to provoke audience members into thinking about the ambiguities present in their own lives.

Rome versus Egypt
Traditional scholarly assessments of Egypt and Rome as depicted in Antony and Cleopatra treat the nations as polar opposites. Thus Rome is a guardian of moral restraint, personal responsibility, social order, and military discipline. Further, Rome places a high value on honor and duty toward one's country. By contrast, Egypt is seen as a magnet for decadence, concupiscence, and indolence. Egypt, according to this view, places a high value on physical enjoyment and luxuriant fertility. Egypt is the place to have fun; Rome is the place to work. Egypt equals private life; Rome equals public life. By extension, traditional criticism asserts that Cleopatra symbolizes Egypt, Octavius Caesar represents Rome, and Antony is torn between the two worlds until he is finally destroyed.

More recent criticism, however, suggests that Rome and Egypt are alike to the degree that they are both in decline, and that the love of Antony and Cleopatra does not reflect the opposition between the two countries or the conflict endured by Antony, but the temporary triumph of imperialism. The love shared by Antony and Cleopatra, some critics argue, is as imperious and undemocratic as the new government in Rome. The lovers themselves describe their feelings in imperial terms; Antony, for instance, claims that his affection is capable of conquering whole worlds and of blotting out geographical formations.

Scholars have also remarked that the decline of Rome and Egypt is the result of changes in both nations: Republican Rome is now Imperial Rome; Egypt is ruled by an unpredictable and aging queen. Rome is prey to shifting alliances and political betrayal by Octavius, who bickers with one triumvir (Antony) and jails another (Lepidus); Egypt is subject to the flooding of the Nile and the unpredictable fortunes of Antony and Cleopatra's love. Both Egypt and Rome, one critic has observed, are pagan nations, which will soon give way to Christianity. Ultimately, commentators suggest that it is less constructive to view Rome and Egypt as "separate" entities than as shifting and intermingling locations of waxing and waning power that affect and are affected by the two lovers.
Characters

List of Characters

Mark Antony—Middle-aged protagonist of the play and one of the three members of the second triumvirate of Rome.

Octavius Caesar—Triumvir of Rome, the adopted son of Julius Caesar, who became the sole emperor, later known as Caesar Augustus. He was about 20 years younger than Mark Antony.

Marcus Aemilius Lepidus—Third member of the second triumvirate.

Sextus Pompeius (Pompey)—Son of Pompey the Great, who was one of the three members of the first triumvirate of Rome.

Cleopatra—Queen of Egypt, close friend of Mark Antony and previously to Julius Caesar, about 13 years younger than Mark Antony.

Octavia—Sister to Octavius and wife to Mark Antony.

Friends of Mark Antony

Domitius Enobarbus—The most important of Antony’s friends.

Ventidius (Ventigius in some manuscripts)—General under Mark Antony and conqueror of Orodes, King of Parthia.

Eros—Former bondservant to Antony, made a free man on the condition that he would kill Antony if Antony requested him to do so; among the most loyal of Antony’s friends.

Scarrus (Scarus in some manuscripts)—Courageous and trusted soldier under Mark Antony; hero of the war against Octavius Caesar.

Decretas (Dercetus in some manuscripts)—Opportunistic soldier and attendant to Antony.

Demetrius—Friend of Antony who is worried about Antony’s dalliance with Cleopatra and thinks he should attend to his responsibilities as triumvir of Rome.

Philo—Friend of Antony and Demetrius; his conversation with Demetrius alerts the audience to what is happening at Cleopatra’s court in Alexandria.

Alexas—Attendant to Antony and Cleopatra, often Antony’s representative at her court during Antony’s absence.
Camidius (Canidius in some manuscripts)—Lieutenant General to Antony.

**Friends to Octavius Caesar**
Mecenas—He warns Octavius Caesar against antagonizing Mark Antony.

Agrippa—Octavius Caesar’s attendant, who was chosen by Octavius as second in line to the throne of the Roman Empire.

Dolabella—Ranking attendant of Octavius Caesar.

Proculeius—Reluctant participant in Octavius’ successful plot to seize Cleopatra after Antony’s defeat.

Thidias—Attendant of Octavius Caesar and courier between Octavius and Cleopatra after Antony’s defeat.

Gallus—Octavius Caesar’s friend, who speaks little or not at all in the play.

Towrus (“Tarus” or “Taurus” in some manuscripts)—Lieutenant General to Octavius Caesar.

**Friends of Sextus Pompeius**
Menas—A pirate who harasses ships in and near the Straits of Messina, and an officer in Sextus Pompeius’ navy.

Menecrates—A pirate and an officer of Sextus Pompeius.

Varrius—Friend of Sextus Pompeius, he brings news of Antony’s expected return to Rome.

**Attendants of Cleopatra**
Charmian—Cleopatra’s closest confidante and attendant.

Iras—The next closest confidante of Cleopatra, and the very symbol of loyalty to the queen.

Seleucus—Cleopatra’s treasurer, whose act of treason near the end of the play infuriates Cleopatra and betrays the great trust she had in him.

Mardian—A eunuch and a musician.

Diomedes—A distinctly minor character in the play.

**Other Characters**
Silius—An officer in Ventidius’ army, with whom Ventidius converses after the victory over the Parthians.

Schoolmaster—Acts as ambassador for Antony to Octavius Caesar.

Soothsayer (Lamprius in some manuscripts)—Accurately predicts the future and warns Antony to beware of Octavius.

Clown—A misnomer; he brings the deadly asps to Cleopatra near the end of the play and unintentionally produces a period of comic relief before the final tragedy.

Boy—A singer who appears only once and sings a few lines.
Minor Characters
Messengers, soldiers, attendants, and other minor characters—Sometimes identified only with a description (e.g., “Roman,” “soldier,” “servant”) without being given a name. When several characters on the stage answer with one voice, Shakespeare uses the Latin term “Omnes” to mean “All.” Several other characters are named and appear on stage but do not speak. In some manuscripts, the Latin term “manet” (remains) and its plural “manent” (remain) are used to indicate that all on the stage except these characters exit the stage at that point.
Characters Discussed (Great Characters in Literature)

Mark Antony

Mark Antony, also called Marcus Antonius, the majestic ruin of a great general and political leader, a triumvir of Rome. Enthralled by Cleopatra, he sometimes seems about to desert her for her real and dangerous rival, Rome. He marries Caesar’s sister Octavia for political reasons but returns to Cleopatra. His greatness is shown as much by his effect on others as by his own actions. His cynical, realistic follower Enobarbus is deeply moved by him, his soldiers adore him even in defeat, his armor-bearer remains with him to the death, and even his enemy Octavius Caesar praises him in life and is shocked into heightened eulogy when he hears of his death. Antony is capable of jealous fury and reckless indiscretion, but he bears the aura of greatness. He dies by his own hand after hearing the false report of Cleopatra’s death, but he lives long enough to see her once more and bid her farewell.

Cleopatra

Cleopatra (klee-oh-PA-truh), the queen of Egypt. As a character, she has the complexity and inconsistency of real life. Like Antony, she is displayed much through the eyes of others. Even the hard-bitten realist Enobarbus is moved to lavish poetic splendor by her charm and beauty. Only Octavius Caesar, of all those who come in contact with her, is impervious to her charms, and the nobility of her death moves even him. She is mercurial and self-centered, and there is some ambiguity in her love of Antony. It is difficult to be certain that her tragic death would have taken place had cold Octavius Caesar been susceptible to her fascination. She is most queenly in her death, which she chooses to bring about in “the high Roman fashion,” calling the dead Antony “husband” just before she applies the asp to her bosom.

Octavius Caesar

Octavius Caesar (ok-TAY-vee-uhs SEE-zur), a triumvir of Rome, Antony’s great rival. His youthfulness is set off against Antony’s age, his coldness against Antony’s passion, and his prudence against Antony’s recklessness. The result, from a dramatic point of view, is heavily in Antony’s favor. Caesar’s affection for his sister Octavia is almost the only warm note in his character. His comments on the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra show unexpected generosity and magnanimity.

Domitius Enobarbus

Domitius Enobarbus (doh-MIHSH-yuhs ee-noh-BAHR-buhs), Antony’s friend and follower, a strong individual. Although given to the disillusioned cynicism of the veteran soldier, he has a splendid poetic vein that is stimulated by Cleopatra. He knows his master well and leaves him only when Antony seems to have left himself. Miserable as a deserter, Enobarbus is moved so deeply by Antony’s generosity that he dies of grief. He serves as a keen, critical chorus for about three-fourths of the play.

Marcus Aemilius Lepidus

Marcus Aemilius Lepidus (MAHR-kuhs ee-MIHL-ee-uhs LEHP-ih-duhs), the third triumvir, a “poor third,” as Enobarbus calls him. He tries to bring together Antony and Octavius and to quell the thunderstorms that their rivalry frequently engenders. He is the butt of some teasing by Antony while they are both drinking heavily on Pompey’s galley. After the defeat of Pompey, Octavius Caesar destroys Lepidus, leaving himself and Antony to fight for control of the world.

Sextus Pompeius
Sextus Pompeius (SEHK-suhs pom-PEE-yuhs), called Pompey (POM-pee), the son of Pompey the Great. Ambitious and power-hungry, he has a vein of chivalric honor that prevents his consenting to the murder of his guests, the triumvirs, aboard his galley. He makes a peace with the triumvirs, largely because of Antony, but is later attacked and defeated by Caesar and loses not only his power but also his life.

Octavia

Octavia, the sister of Octavius Caesar. A virtuous widow, fond of her brother and strangely fond of Antony after their marriage, she serves as a foil to Cleopatra. She is not necessarily as dull as Cleopatra thinks her. There is pathos in her situation, but she lacks tragic stature.

Charmian

Charmian, a pert, charming girl who attends Cleopatra. Gay, witty, and risque, she rises under the stress of the death of her queen to tragic dignity. She tends Cleopatra’s body, closes the eyes, delivers a touching eulogy, and then joins her mistress in death.

Iras

Iras, another of Cleopatra’s charming attendants. Much like Charmian, but not quite so fully drawn, she dies just before Cleopatra.

Mardian

Mardian, a eunuch servant of Cleopatra. He bears the false message of Cleopatra’s death to Antony, which leads Antony to kill himself.

Alexas

Alexas, an attendant to Cleopatra. He jests wittily with Charmian, Iras, and the Soothsayer. After deserting Cleopatra and joining Caesar, he is hanged by Caesar’s orders.

A soothsayer

A soothsayer, who serves two functions: He makes satirical prophecies to Charmian and Iras, which turn out to be literally true, and warns Antony against remaining near Caesar, whose fortune will always predominate. The second prophecy helps Antony to make firm his decision to leave Octavia and return to Egypt.

Seleucus

Seleucus (seh-LEW-kuhs), Cleopatra’s treasurer. He betrays to Caesar the information that Cleopatra is holding back the greater part of her treasure. She indulges in a public temper tantrum when he discloses this, but because the information apparently lulls Caesar into thinking that the queen is not planning suicide, perhaps Seleucus is really aiding, not betraying, her.

A clown

A clown, who brings a basket of figs to the captured queen. In the basket are concealed the poisonous asps. The clown’s language is a mixture of simple-minded philosophy and mistaken meanings.
Ventidius (vehn-TIHD-ee-uhs), one of Antony’s able subordinates. A practical soldier, he realizes that it is best to be reasonably effective but not spectacular enough to arouse the envy of his superiors. He therefore does not push his victory to the extreme.

**Eros**

Eros (EE-ros), Antony’s loyal bodyguard and armor-bearer. He remains with his leader to final defeat. Rather than carry out Antony’s command to deliver him a death stroke, he kills himself.

**Scarus**

Scarus (SKAH-ruhs), one of Antony’s tough veterans. Fighting heroically against Caesar’s forces in spite of severe wounds, he rouses Antony’s admiration. In partial payment, Antony requests the queen to offer him her hand to kiss.

**Canidius**

Canidius (ka-NIHD-ee-uhs), Antony’s lieutenant general. When Antony refuses his advice and indiscreetly chooses to fight Caesar’s forces on sea rather than on land, then consequently meets defeat, Canidius deserts to Caesar.

**Dercetas**

Dercetas (DEHR-keh-tuhs), a loyal follower of Antony. He takes the sword stained with Antony’s blood to Caesar, announces his leader’s death, and offers either to serve Caesar or to die.

**Demetrius**

Demetrius (deh-MEE-tree-uhs) and

**Philo**

Philo (FI-loh), followers of Antony. They open the play with comments on Antony’s “dotage” on the queen of Egypt.

**Euphronius**

Euphronius (ew-FROH-nee-uhs), Antony’s old schoolmaster. He is Antony’s emissary to Caesar asking for generous terms of surrender. Caesar refuses his requests.

**Silius**

Silius (SIHL-yuhs), an officer in Ventidius’ army.

**Menas**

Menas (MEE-nas), a pirate in the service of Pompey. He remains sober at the drinking bout on board Pompey’s galley and offers Pompey the world. He intends to cut the cable of the galley and then cut the throats of the triumvirs and their followers. Angered at Pompey’s rejection of his proposal, he joins Enobarbus in drunken revelry and withdraws his support from Pompey.
Menecrates

Menecrates (mehn-EHK-reh-teez) and

Varrius

Varrius (VA-ree-uhs), followers of Pompey.

Maecenas

Maecenas (mee-SEE-nuhs), Caesar’s friend and follower. He supports Agrippa and Lepidus in arranging the alliance between Caesar and Antony.

Agrippa

Agrippa (eh-GRIHP-uh), Caesar’s follower. He is responsible for the proposal that Antony and Octavia be married to cement the alliance. His curiosity about Cleopatra leads to Enobarbus’ magnificent description of her on her royal barge.

Dolabella

Dolabella (dohl-ah-BEHL-uh), one of Caesar’s emissaries to Cleopatra. Enchanted by her, he reveals Caesar’s plan to display her in a Roman triumph. This information strengthens her resolution to take her own life.

Proculeius

Proculeius (proh-kew-LEE-uhs), the only one of Caesar’s followers whom Antony advises Cleopatra to trust. She withholds the trust wisely, for Proculeius is sent by Caesar to lull her into a false sense of security.

Thyreus

Thyreus (THI-ree-uhs), an emissary of Caesar. Antony catches him kissing Cleopatra’s hand and has him whipped and sent back to Caesar with insulting messages.

Gallus

Gallus (GAL-uhs), another of Caesar’s followers. He captures Cleopatra and her maids in the monument and leaves them guarded.

Taurus

Taurus (TOH-ruhs), Caesar’s lieutenant general.
Character Analysis

Antony (Character Analysis)
Historically, Mark Antony lived from 82-30 B.C. After the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 B.C., Antony became part of a triumvirate—with Octavius Caesar and Aemilius Lepidus—that governed Rome for more than a dozen years. He met Cleopatra in 41 B.C., and they were lovers until their deaths in 30 B.C.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony is portrayed as the greatest military hero of his era. He is the last survivor of an age that reserved its highest honors for bravery and heroism on the battlefield. Antony is closely associated with Mars, the Roman god of war. He is also proud of his alleged descent from Hercules, the mythical Greek hero. He is driven to become, like them, a supreme symbol of heroic achievement. But times have changed. Rome's new heroes are those who excel in political maneuvering. Antony doesn't have the capacity to manipulate public opinion, and he doesn't know how to wage a propaganda war against Caesar. He tries to find a way to combine the values of Rome and Egypt—to be both a soldier and a lover—but he is frustrated in his search. He's humiliated by his losses at Actium and Alexandria. On the first occasion, he overcomes his shame, but the second one overwhems him. He rages helplessly at the disparity between the glorious hero he once was and the defeats handed to him by the "boy" Caesar. In his eyes, the shame and disgrace he suffers erase all that he has accomplished up until now.

Unlike Caesar, Antony doesn't seek power for its own sake or pursue the role of supreme ruler. It seems he would be content if he were in charge of a third of the world—sharing power with Caesar and Lepidus. His outbursts of rage and his difficulty in acting on his resolve to leave Egypt and attend to his duties in Rome are signs of an inability to govern himself. Nor does he appear to have the capacity to govern others. Yet he has an instinctive gift for leadership.

Men are drawn to Antony. He has a personal magnetism that attracts soldiers such as Enobarbus and Scarus and a heroic dimension that elevates him to superhuman stature. He's the kind of leader who inspires love and loyalty in his followers. Ironically, he is plagued by the desertions of his closest aides when his fortunes decline. Those who stand by him appear to do so even though it's clear he's on the losing side in his struggles with Caesar. On the night before the battle of Alexandria, he gathers his remaining followers together for a grand banquet, celebrating their past achievements and, he hopes, their future glory. His generosity of spirit is remarkable. It makes his followers weep and Enobarbus die of shame.

Balanced against these virtues are personal traits that contribute to Antony's downfall. He prolongs his stay in Egypt because he's self-indulgent. He's unwilling to give up the pleasures of Cleopatra's court. He is also inclined to self-pity and blames Cleopatra—with at least some justification—at times when he is clearly at fault too. When he follows her fleeing ships at Actium, the defeat that follows is chiefly his own responsibility. Moreover, he seems unable to resist a dare: when Caesar challenges him to a battle at sea—rather than on land where his forces are superior—Antony foolishly accepts the challenge. His bungled attempt to commit suicide is almost farcical. He "falls on his sword" (S.D.IV.xiv.103) in the manner of legendary heroes, but he fails to kill himself. Instead of a dignified ending, he has to plead with his followers to finish the job he has botched.

For many audiences, Antony's greatest failing is his passion for Cleopatra. It causes him to neglect his duty and his country. It affects his capacity to rule and to be an effective soldier. From time to time, he seems to understand that his obsession for her compromises his stature as one of Rome's most eminent men. But he continues to grant her too much power over him. He allows her whims to influence his decisions about military strategy. Enobarbus, Canidius, and Scarus repeatedly try to show him that his love for Egypt's queen has led to her domination over him. Occasionally he agrees with them, but he seems to lack the resolve to carry through on his intentions to leave her. Even though he returns to Rome in the first half of the play, he knows he can't stay away from her forever. Before his wedding to Octavia, he promises his bride-to-be that
from now on he will keep his life on a straight course. Only moments later, however, when he is alone, he declares: "I will to Egypt: / And though I make this marriage for my peace, / I' the East my pleasure lies" (I.iii.39-41).

There is another way of looking at Antony's love for Cleopatra; perhaps he is made even more noble by his passion for her. It gives him a broader perspective on life. His love it seems is so extraordinary—so beyond the experience of ordinary human beings—that it lifts him to new heights of experience. Antony's recognition that the kingdoms of the earth are made of clay (I.i.35) stems from his having known more of the richness of human life than Caesar ever will. When Antony embraces Cleopatra, he embraces the creative principal of life itself.

Antony's death is frequently seen as a mixture of triumph and defeat. Caesar's victory at Alexandria humiliates Antony. It is a devastating blow to his identity as a military hero. He seems to have lost his sense of himself, as he explains to Eros in the famous passage (IV.xiv.1-22) in which he compares himself to a cloud that cannot hold its shape. Antony dies in Cleopatra's arms, clinging to thoughts of his "former fortunes" and the time when he was "the greatest prince o' th' world" (IV.xv.53, 54). The world has lost its worthiest man, cries Cleopatra: without Antony "there is nothing left remarkable" on the face of the earth (IV.xv.67). In the opinion of some commentators, Antony is transfigured in death—raised to an exalted level—less by his own actions or character than by Cleopatra's eulogies of him. It's debatable whether Antony achieves a comprehensive understanding of himself before he dies. Readers may ask if his sacrifice was worth it or whether, given his nature, such an ending was inevitable. Antony attempted to alter reality, to shape the world so that it would allow him to combine the values and principles of opposing views of life. His daring to achieve the impossible may be sufficient in itself to qualify him as a great tragic hero.

Additional Character Commentary

While there is critical consensus that Mark Antony functions as a tragic hero in the play, there is disagreement concerning exactly when he becomes tragic and what it is that transforms him. Those commentators who describe Antony as torn between his Roman values of duty and valor and his Egyptian obsession with sex and dissipation assert that he achieves tragic status when he reclaims his honor through the Roman death of suicide. Similarly, critics have suggested that as long as Antony allows himself to be treated in Egypt as "a strumpet's fool," he remains a ridiculous figure; after he is defeated at Actium, however, Antony's shame is so intense that his fate becomes tragic. Some critics regard Antony's own "weakness" as the source of his tragedy. In essence, these critics argue that Antony's tragedy is that he sacrifices everything—physical strength, honor, political power, respect—simply to indulge his senses in Egypt. Finally, some scholars assert that Antony stumbles tragically when he in fact tries to have it all—power and respect in Rome alongside ease and love in Egypt.

An alternative take on Antony's tragic status is that he operates according to a moral code different from the one followed by Octavius. According to this view, the public-oriented Octavius adheres to a standard, Roman code of honor that takes into account such issues as political expediency. Antony, on the other hand, defines honor in more personal terms. Loving Cleopatra and enjoying himself in Egypt at the expense of his duties in Rome do not impinge on his sense of honor. However, retreating from the sea battle at Actium is, according to Antony, an unchivalrous act and is therefore highly dishonorable. In light of this assessment, Antony's role in the play is a tragic one because he is unable to reconcile his private concept of honor with the general one exemplified by the activities of the triumvirs in Rome.

Antony's tragic status has also been discussed in tandem with Cleopatra's role. Commentators who view the lovers as equals argue that at the beginning of the play both are self-absorbed despite their love for one another and thus they are in continual conflict with one another. These critics note that toward the close of the play, Antony and Cleopatra transcend their selfishness as a result of their suffering, and from there they learn to recognize each other's worth and together achieve status as tragic heroes.
Caesar (Character Analysis)

Historically, Octavius Caesar was the first emperor of Rome. He was born in 63 B.C. and died in 14 A.D. He was the nephew of Julius Caesar, who adopted him and treated him as his own son. In 27 B.C., Octavius received the honorary title Caesar Augustus; this is the name modern historians generally use when they refer to him.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Caesar is a man of destiny. He will be successful in achieving his goal: the destruction of the republic and the restoration of one-man rule. He accurately predicts the "time of universal peace" (IV.vi.4) when civil wars will come to an end and the Roman empire will flourish as never before. Caesar seems to be fortune's child. He views his consistent good luck as evidence that his cause is divinely ordained. He believes the gods have chosen him as the agent to carry out their plan. He claims that the course of action he is following will ultimately serve the best interests of Rome, and he's determined to achieve his goal.

"Single-minded" is the adjective most often used by commentators when they discuss Caesar. Political success is the only thing he's interested in. Though he's depicted in the play as a relatively young man—somewhere in his twenties—he's already a masterful politician. He shapes events and manipulates them for his own purposes. He takes advantage of other people's weaknesses, seizing on their mistakes and transforming them into opportunities to advance his cause. As a political strategist, Caesar is pragmatic and impersonal. He knows what he wants, and he carefully assesses the most effective means of getting it.

For many readers and commentators, the attributes which make him politically successful—self-discipline, single-mindedness, pragmatism—also make him personally offensive. He seems incapable of warmth or spontaneity. He shows no signs of affection toward any of his subordinates, nor does he receive any from them. His emotions are always carefully controlled. Control is also the hallmark of his relations with women. We never see his wife Livia, though Cleopatra refers to her at V.ii.169, so we know she exists. He seems to have no difficulty resisting the charms of Cleopatra. And his relationship with Octavia is disturbing.

Most commentators believe that Caesar genuinely loves his sister. They point out, however, that he's willing to sacrifice her for political gain. Despite his apparent affection for his sister, Caesar uses Octavia as he would anyone else. He refers to her in impersonal terms: she is a "piece of virtue" (III.ii.28) and the "cement" that will bind him and Antony together. He is moved by her tears when she leaves Rome with her new husband. Nevertheless, Octavia's happiness seems less important to him than fulfilling the destiny of Rome.

There is general agreement among commentators that Caesar has decided before Antony returns to Rome that a marriage between his sister and Antony will be to his own advantage. They argue that Caesar coaches Agrippa on what to say and tells him to present the suggestion as if it were his own idea. Caesar probably knows the marriage will not last, and he expects to make use of its failure. When Antony deserts Octavia and returns to Egypt, Caesar can treat this as an insult to his family—one more reason for declaring war on Antony. Romans will be scandalized by Antony's treatment of Octavia, and this will provide more material for Caesar's continuing effort to sway public opinion against his rival.

Caesar is a master at controlling public opinion. He sees to it that Antony's failings are widely known among the citizens of Rome, so that his own political image will be enhanced by comparison. After the battle of Alexandria, Caesar invites all of his officers to his tent to show them the written record he has made of his actions. He declares that these papers will show how reluctantly he was "drawn into this war" as well as the "calm and gentle" tone he used in all his letters to Antony (V.i.74, 75). Caesar has carefully prepared a record that will justify his own actions and cast Antony's in an unfavorable light. His intention to humiliate Cleopatra by exhibiting her in the streets of Rome is part of his public relations scheme: the sight of Egypt's queen in chains would delight the crowd and increase the significance of Caesar's triumph.
Cleopatra knows he's lying to her when he swears he means to treat her well, but most of his other victims fail to appreciate Caesar's lack of honor and his willingness to break his word. He signs a treaty with Pompey and then violates it as soon as Pompey is no longer a threat. Having made all the use of Lepidus he can, Caesar invents charges against him and imprisons him for life. Even the lowly servant Alexas doesn't escape Caesar's attention: he has him killed after Alexas betrays Antony and tries to help Caesar. Commentators who emphasize Caesar's viciousness often call attention to an incident before the battle of Alexandria. On that occasion, Caesar orders that the soldiers who deserted Antony should march into battle in front of all the others. This strategy will humiliate Antony and degrade his former followers. Caesar's ruthless treatment of his enemies contributes to his military victories and guarantees his political success.

Additional Character Commentary
While earlier critics regarded Octavius Caesar primarily as a representative of Imperial Rome, today most commentators look to the play for what it reveals about Octavius as a character. Significantly, it has been noted that this leader of the triumvirs delivers no soliloquies or personality-revealing asides. Octavius is so terse in his remarks that several commentators are in disagreement concerning such details as whether or not he becomes drunk along with the other triumvirs on Pompey's galley in Act II.

Most scholars agree that Caesar is cold and self-restrained. Some argue that he is thus meant to function as a foil to the extravagant lovers Antony and Cleopatra. Others consider his prudish criticism of Antony as hypocritical in light of the fact that he cruelly betrays the weakest triumvir Lepidus. There is a general consensus that Octavius carefully calculates each move he makes and that he is a manipulator. Thus he exploits Antony's sensitivity about his honor by challenging his competitor to a sea battle in Act III. Similarly, Octavius sends Thidias to Cleopatra in Act III, hoping to bribe and flatter her away from Antony.

An alternative perspective on Octavius Caesar is that he lacks imagination and empathy and is therefore vulnerable to faulty judgment. So, for example, he is unable to prevent either Antony or Cleopatra from committing suicide and as a result is robbed of the satisfaction of parading them—and their defeat—through Rome. According to this view, Octavius is less in control than he thinks he is or than he wishes to be.

Charmian (Critical Analysis)
She is Cleopatra's most trusted servant. Charmian has a forceful personality and an independent spirit. When she thinks the queen's treatment of Antony is unfair or misguided, she tells her so. Charmian is on familiar terms with her mistress and can tease her about her past life and former lovers. At I.v.66-67, Cleopatra asks Charmian whether, in her judgment, she ever loved Julius Caesar as much as she now loves Antony. Charmian responds with praise of "that brave Caesar!" (I.v.67). "Say, 'the brave Antony,"," the queen commands, but Charmian saucily replies, "the valiant Caesar!" (I.v.69). Cleopatra threatens to give her "bloody teeth" (I.v.70) if she says anything flattering about Caesar again. Charmian apologizes—though she notes that she's only repeating what Cleopatra herself used to say.

Charmian's devotion to her mistress seems deep and genuine. On one occasion, however, she unintentionally does her a grave disservice. When Cleopatra runs away from Antony's fury after the battle of Alexandria, it is Charmian who suggests that the queen lock herself in the monument and send word to Antony that she's dead. Cleopatra follows her suggestion, and Antony's suicide is the result—an outcome that apparently neither one of them anticipated.

Cleopatra entrusts Charmian with the task of arranging for delivery of the poisonous snakes, and then she prepares to die royally. Charmian stays by her, though her heart is breaking. The queen dies with a half-spoken sentence on her lips, and Charmian completes it for her. Charmian speaks a brief but now famous epitaph: "Death, in thy possession lies / A lass unparallel'd" (V.ii.315-16). She tenderly straightens her mistress's crown. As she places an asp on her own breast, she reminds her onstage audience—one Roman guard—and the wider one as well that Cleopatra's ending was "well done, and fitting for a princess /
Descended of so many royal kings” (V.ii.326-27).

Cleopatra (Character Analysis)
Historically, she became queen of Egypt in 51 B.C., at the age of eighteen. When she was twenty-one, Julius Caesar became her lover. Seven years later she met Antony, and their relationship continued until their deaths by suicide in 30 B.C. Cleopatra was a woman of remarkable poise and unusual intelligence. She was highly educated, spoke several languages, and dealt shrewdly with foreign ambassadors and heads of state. She also had a reputation as an extraordinarily sensuous woman.

In Antony and Cleopatra, Egypt's queen is portrayed as eternally fascinating. She is no longer a young woman, but her charm is ageless. Cleopatra's magnetism has little do with physical beauty. She has vitality, grace, intensity, and a radiance that excites awe. She is regal—the descendant of generations of monarchs. She is associated with divinities, particularly Isis, the Egyptian goddess of the sea. She is also the human counterpart of the river Nile, which overflows its banks each year, enriching Egyptian soil and breeding new life. She represents a kind of human richness that dazzles ordinary mortals. The source of her fascination cannot be pinned down. The range of her personality is beyond measurement—though the Romans try to do so. Cleopatra is a paragon of sexuality. Like others before him, Antony finds her irresistible. An experienced lover, she delights in erotic games. Her sexual appetite is legendary, and her love of pleasure inexhaustible.

But Cleopatra is more than the goddess of love. Generations of commentators have described her as the most complex of Shakespeare's female characters. She is a tangle of contradictions. She is depicted as being alternately splendid, foolish, mean-spirited, and extravagant. One of her principal faults is vanity. She demands attention and frequently acts like a spoiled or selfish child. At least through Act IV, she demonstrates only a small measure of concern for other people. Her treatment of her servant Mardian seems cruel. She is rash and impetuous, and she has a capacity for violence. Several commentators have argued that her abuse of the messenger who brings her the news of Antony's marriage to Octavia shows Cleopatra at her worst. She jokes with her handmaidens on several occasions, yet she can just as easily assume a tyrannical attitude toward them. She is Egypt's queen, and she does not expect them to ever forget that. From time to time she also appears untrustworthy. There are indications—in the scenes with Thidias and Proculeius, for example—that if she could have worked out an arrangement with Caesar that was to her advantage, she might have done so. The play provides no answers as to why she orders her fleet of ships to turn tail and run from the battle of Actium. Is she afraid? Does she think that Caesar is going to win in the end and thus there's no point in continuing the battle? Does she order her ships to desert Antony at the battle of Alexandria—as he believes—or do her captains betray Antony on their own? Concern for her own safety seems uppermost in her mind when the dying Antony is carried to the monument and she refuses to come down to him. So that she may avoid being captured by Caesar's soldiers, Antony must be hauled up to her, in a humiliating and painful maneuver.

Some commentators believe the play demonstrates that her love for Antony destroys him. They point out that in the initial scenes she teases and manipulates him so that he always appears to be in the wrong. They see her as a dangerous spellbinder who enchants Antony and keeps him from fulfilling his potential for greatness. Many think that her love for Antony doesn't match his love for her. Others believe that in the final scenes she achieves an understanding of the importance of love and becomes transformed by it. Some argue that her characterization is inconsistent: that she's a comic figure in Acts I through IV—vain, insensitive, and childish—and a tragic figure in the last, long scene of the play.

One facet of her personality that seems to remain constant is her identity as an actress. Whenever she appears, she commands center stage. She has a strong sense of spectacle or pageantry, whether she is stage-managing the glorious progress of her galley down the river Cydnus or arranging the scenic details of her own death. Readers and commentators alike wonder whether Cleopatra ever stops acting. It has been suggested that for her there is no line distinguishing illusion from reality.
This is one reason why her final hours are so impossible to evaluate. To some, Cleopatra's death is a triumph: it represents both a victory over Caesar and a self-transformation into a noble, tragic figure. For others, her death spells defeat: she has not been able to negotiate terms with Caesar that are favorable to her, so she chooses to die. The prospect of being paraded through the streets of Rome while commoners jeer at her is reason enough for this daughter of kings to kill herself. Some believe that she does so because she realizes she cannot live without Antony. They point to her dream of "an Emperor Antony" (V.ii.76-92) as evidence that she truly loves him, and they argue that her vision of Antony comes from her heart. To other commentators, it is a work of her imagination, an elaborate fantasy of an Antony that never was or could be. After her death, Charmian calls her a woman with whom no other can be compared. Caesar remarks on the bravery she showed in ending her life and notes that she did it royally, true to her nature. Yet she dies on a bed, not her throne, and her crown slips to one side. Nevertheless, as he orders that Cleopatra be buried next to Antony, Caesar remarks that "No grave upon the earth" will ever enclose "A pair so famous" (V.ii.360).

**Additional Character Commentary**

Critical reaction to Cleopatra has been strong and often negative. Early commentators in particular characterized the Egyptian Queen as self-indulgent, self-pitying, capricious, and treacherous. They considered the character Philo's description of her in Act I as a lustful "strumpet," or whore, to be appropriate. They found her taunting of Antony cruel and her apparent acceptance of Octavius Caesar's bribe in Act III untenable. They roundly blamed her for Antony's downfall. Today, scholarly evaluations of Cleopatra are more moderate. Increasingly, commentators have come to regard Antony and Cleopatra as "mutually" responsible for their fates. Several critics have described the earlier assessments of Cleopatra as extreme and sexist; they emphasize the importance of objectivity to any discussion of the Egyptian Queen; further, they observe that she deserves no more and no less sympathy than does, for example, a tragic hero like King Lear or Othello.

Those commentators who view Cleopatra in a negative light usually insist that she is too self-absorbed to qualify for tragic status. There are those, however, who regard her selfish ignorance as the very source of her tragedy. A more temperate version of this argument is that Cleopatra acts out of self-interest until she witnesses Antony's death. At that point, some critics assert, she recognizes too late Antony's worth and the extent of her love for him; as a result, she achieves tragic status. Cleopatra's tragedy has also been ranked as commensurate with Antony's. Scholars contend that both characters are initially self-interested and untrustworthy in love: Cleopatra is jealous of Antony's preoccupation with Rome; at the same time, Antony tries to satisfy political ambitions through marriage with Octavia. Neither, some commentators assert, achieves tragic status until both reach mutual understanding and love before their deaths at the close of the play.

Some commentators dispense with any discussion of Cleopatra's qualification as a tragic hero and concentrate instead on the lines accorded to her in the play. She is, they observe, the vehicle for some of Shakespeare's most eloquent poetry. Her remembrance in Act I, scene v, for example, of her youth as her "salad days, / When [she] was green in judgment, cold in blood," and her vision of Antony in Act V, scene ii, as someone so remarkable as to be "past the size of dreaming" are evocative and justifiably famous.

**Enobarbus (Character Analysis)**

Antony's chief aide, he deserts his leader before the battle of Alexandria and dies of shame. Enobarbus often functions as a commentator on events and on other characters. His judgments are generally detached and objective. Frequently, however, they are ironic or cynical as well. He scoffs at the great ones of the world and makes fun of the poses they assume. He recognizes Antony's weaknesses and tries to point them out. He attempts to show Antony how his love for Cleopatra has affected his reason, but Antony refuses to listen to him. Though Enobarbus is often cynical about the lovers' passion for each other, he's also sympathetic toward them. And the sensuous pleasures of Egypt have a strong pull on him as well as on his master.
This attraction is most apparent at II.ii.200-50, when he describes Cleopatra's first meeting with Antony. His onstage audience for this piece consists of two Roman officers who have heard rumors about Egypt's queen but have no first-hand knowledge themselves. One of them is enchanted; the other expresses his disapproval of what he's just heard. Interestingly, they represent the divided opinions toward Cleopatra held by generations of readers, audiences, and commentators.

Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra's river barge (II.ii.191-218) is one of the most famous passages in the play. Many critics regard it as among the foremost descriptive passages in all of Shakespeare's dramatic poetry. Enobarbus paints a breathtaking picture of purple sails "so perfumed that / The winds were love-sick with them" (II.ii.193-94); of silver oars that beat the water like lovers' strokes; of "pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids" (II.ii.202), whose fans cooled Cleopatra's cheeks even as they made them glow with greater warmth. Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra as a woman of "infinite variety" and fascination (II.ii.235), but also one whose sexual appetite is legendary, conveys her power to bewitch men—even Enobarbus from time to time.

For the most part, Enobarbus is depicted as a man of reason who sizes up a situation rationally and objectively. He undergoes a long struggle with himself before he finally leaves Antony. When Canidius deserts Antony after Actium, Enobarbus says that he'll continue to follow his leader, "though my reason / Sits in the wind against me" (III.x.35-36). As Antony's judgment grows more clouded, Enobarbus wonders if loyalty to fools makes faithfulness absurd. On the eve of the battle of Alexandria, Enobarbus decides that it's irrational to stay with Antony any longer, and he leaves. When he learns that Antony has generously sent all of his belongings after him, Enobarbus is stricken with guilt. "I am alone the villain of the earth," he says (IV.vi.29). Weighed down by shame and dishonor, he vows to "go seek / Some ditch wherein to die" (IV.vi.36-37). With his last words he condemns himself as a "master-leaver and a fugitive" (IV.ix.22). As commentators often point out, Enobarbus does not commit suicide. He simply lies down and dies.

Lepidus (Character Analysis)
One of the triumvirs, he is known as a valiant soldier. Despite his official standing, Lepidus is essentially a weak and ineffective man. Antony and Caesar have selected him to share the triumvirate because he commands a large army. He becomes a tool in the struggle that develops between them. Commentators generally view Lepidus as a man hopelessly out of his element, trying to fulfill a role that is beyond his abilities.

When Antony returns to Rome in II.ii, Lepidus tries to reconcile the differences between Caesar and Antony. He points out that with the triumvirate under attack by Pompey, this is the time for unity, not dissension. Both in this scene and in II.iv, when the rulers are negotiating with Pompey, Lepidus has a limited part to play. While those with stronger wills dominate the conversation, Lepidus is limited to an occasional interjection. However, he becomes the focus for a while during the banquet on Pompey's galley, where he becomes drunk and passes out—but not before he becomes the butt of everyone's jokes. Hardly a man of keen intellect to begin with, his mind is now befuddled by the wine. "What manner o'thing is your crocodile?" he asks Antony (II.vii.41). The mockery in Antony's description— that it is "shaped, sir, like itself," that "it is as broad as it hath breadth," and "is just so high as it is" (II.vii.42, 42-43, 43)—passes right over Lepidus's head. Eventually Lepidus has to be carried off the ship by one of Pompey's servants. Enobarbus jokes that the servant must be very strong, for he's bearing the weight of a "third part of the world" (II.vii.90). Lepidus faces an unkind fate. At III.v.7-8, Eros tells Enobarbus that "Caesar, having made use of him in the wars "gainst Pompey," has ousted Lepidus from the triumvirate now that his usefulness is ended. Furthermore, reports Eros, Caesar accused Lepidus of conspiring with Pompey and ordered him imprisoned for life.

Octavia (Character Analysis)
Caesar's sister, she marries Antony for the sake of Roman unity. Octavia is selfless and submissive, a pawn in the political battle between her brother and her husband. Her marriage to Antony brings about a temporary
settlement of their differences, and she and Antony establish their home in Athens. When the truce appears to be threatened, Octavia takes on the role of peacemaker and travels to Rome to speak with her brother. When she arrives there, however, she finds there is no possibility of reconciliation. She also learns that Antony is no longer in Athens but is back in Egypt with Cleopatra.

Octavia has only a few speeches in the play. What others say about her helps define what we think of her. However, these remarks frequently reveal as much about the characters who make them as they do about Octavia. Caesar's aide Agrippa describes her as full of virtues and graces (II.ii.129). Maecenas, another Roman on Caesar's staff, remarks that she is beautiful, wise, and modest (II.ii.240). Caesar himself refers to her as "the piece of virtue which is set / Betwixt us as the cement of our love" (III.ii.28-29). Enobarbus characterizes her as "holy, cold, and still" (II.vi.122-23). The messenger who brings Cleopatra word that Antony is married concocts an unflattering portrait of Octavia—in fear of his life if he does not. He describes the Roman matron as shorter than Cleopatra and "low-voiced"; the jealous queen converts this into "Dull of tongue and dwarfish!" (III.iii.16). When Cleopatra asks the messenger if there is majesty in the way Octavia walks, he says that "She creeps" (III.iii.18). Octavia is, he says, more like a statue than a living, breathing woman. Cleopatra rewards the messenger handsomely for his report.

Pompey (Character Analysis)
Sextus Pompeius, as he is formally known, is the son of Pompey the Great, who was, historically, a leading senator and one of Rome's most famous generals. Pompey the Great regarded Julius Caesar as a tyrant; he was killed by members of Caesar's political faction. In Antony and Cleopatra, Pompey carries on his father's opposition to the triumvirs. Like his father, he has been proscribed—that is, condemned as outside the law—and his financial estate has been confiscated by the government. His defiance of the triumvirs appears to be motivated by a combination of revenge for his father's death, republican idealism, and personal glory.

In the first part of the play, he represents a real threat to the triumvirs. For example, at I.ii.185, Antony says he's learned that Pompey and his ships dominate "the empire of the sea." Pompey also controls Sicily, an important source of Rome's supply of grain. At I.iv.36-40 and 48-55, messengers tell of his increasing popular support and the alliances he has made with pirates such as Menas and Menecrates.

In his initial appearance in the play, Pompey is self-assured and confident: "I shall do well; / The people love me, and the sea is mine" (II.i.8-9). When he's told that "Caesar and Lepidus / Are in the field" with a mighty army (II.i.16-17) and that Antony is returning to Rome, he becomes less boastful. He recognizes that Caesar and Antony may call an end to their quarrel in the face of his continued success. This is indeed what happens, and a direct confrontation between Pompey and the triumvirs seems likely. In II.ii and II.iv, they make plans to attack his stronghold at Mount Misena near Naples. However, in II.vi, Pompey meets with them to discuss the terms of a truce. He agrees to peace terms that are not very favorable to him and invites everyone to a feast on board his ship, lying at anchor in the nearby harbor.

While the triumvirs and their aides are feasting and drinking, Menas draws Pompey aside and makes a daring proposal: "Wilt thou be lord of all the world?" he asks him (II.vii.61). Menas offers to cut the anchor cables and then the throats of the triumvirs. Pompey's response underscores the element of political cynicism in the play. He says that if Menas had done this without consulting him, he would have approved of it as a good deed. However, having been informed in advance of Menas's intention, he "must condemn it now" (II.vii.80). Pompey rejoins the triumvirs and the banquet continues.

Commentators have offered varying perspectives on Pompey's reaction to Menas's proposal. Some believe that he lacks sufficient resolution to carry out his political convictions. Others suggest that he doesn't want to be the sole "lord of all the world." Perhaps he recognizes he doesn't have the capacity to fill that role, or perhaps he isn't personally ambitious. It seems that like many others in the play, he is very concerned with his reputation; he says he doesn't want it tarnished with the stain of villainy. For whatever reason or mixture of
reasons, Pompey lets what some would see as a golden opportunity slip away from him. After this scene he disappears from the play. At III.v.18-19, it's reported that one of Antony's officers has murdered Pompey.

Other Characters (Descriptions)

Aemilius Lepidus
See Lepidus

Agrippa
A Roman officer, he is Caesar's aide and closest confidante. He is the one who suggests that a marriage between Octavia and Antony would be the most effective way to reconcile the differences between Caesar and Antony. Commentators generally agree that the idea is Caesar's and that he has instructed Agrippa to launch the suggestion.

Agrippa and Maecenas, another aide to Caesar, make up the audience for Enobarbus's speech about Cleopatra and her barge. Maecenas disapproves of what he hears. Agrippa, however, is captivated by the picture conjured up by Enobarbus. "O rare for Antony!" and "Rare Egyptian," he blurts out (II.ii.205, 218) during Enobarbus's narrative. Agrippa is a steadfast supporter of Caesar, but he also appears to have at least some measure of sensitivity to the delights of Egypt.

Alexas
Cleopatra's principal male attendant, he frequently performs services for Antony as well. Alexas appears to enjoy his superior position in Cleopatra's household. He is sometimes pompous or overbearing, and Charmian and Iras delight in making fun of his pretentious ways. After the battle of Actium, Antony sends Alexas to Herod, the king of Judea, seeking his support. However, instead of representing Antony, Alexas tries to persuade Herod to join Caesar's faction. We learn of this from Enobarbus, who comments on Alexas's treacherous behavior—after he himself has betrayed Antony. According to Enobarbus, Alexas's efforts on behalf of Caesar earned him a brutal reward: "Caesar hath hang'd him" (IV.vi.15).

Ambassador
See Schoolmaster

Boy
At II.vii.113-18, during the banquet aboard Pompey's ship, the boy sings a drinking song. The drunken revelers loudly join in singing the refrain.

Canidius
A lieutenant-general, he is one of Antony's chief military officers. Before the battle of Actium, Canidius and an anonymous soldier discuss the folly of Antony's decision to accept Caesar's challenge and fight by sea. Canidius questions the soldier about Caesar's lieutenant-general (III.vii.77), perhaps because he's curious about his counterpart in the opposing army or perhaps because he's already thinking of leaving Antony and joining Caesar. After Antony's disastrous retreat at Actium, Canidius defects to Caesar, taking with him the foot soldiers and horsemen under his command. He justifies his desertion by remarking that Antony himself "has given example for our flight / Most grossly by his own!" (III.x.27-28).

Captain
The term "captain" appears throughout the play in association with a variety of characters. At IV.iv.24, an individual designated as the captain enters the room where Cleopatra and Eros have been arming Antony before the battle of Alexandria. Accompanied by soldiers and a flourish of trumpets, the captain greets Antony and tells him they have fair weather for the contest.
Clown
He is the "rural fellow" (V.ii.233) who brings Cleopatra the basket of figs and poisonous snakes. He seems to be simple-minded, yet he understands what use Cleopatra intends to make of "the pretty worm of Nilus" (V.ii.243). Some commentators view the clown as ghoulish. Others see him as presenting a non-threatening, even comic perspective on death. Several of his garbled, self-contradictory remarks have religious or spiritual overtones; he seems to suggest that death is not final. His several references to what people say and what may be believed underscore the motif of unreliable evidence that runs throughout the play. He tells Cleopatra that only yesterday he had a report of the effectiveness of the asp—from the lips of a woman who had died from its bite. The clown loves to talk. He rambles on and on as Cleopatra, with the means of her death now at hand, repeatedly tries to dismiss him. At last he leaves, wishing her "joy of the worm" (V.ii.279).

Decretas
One of Antony's soldiers, he responds with other aides when Antony bungles his suicide and calls for help. Neither he nor any of the others is willing to give Antony the death blow. Decretas sees Antony's fallen sword and picks it up. He thinks that if he carries the sword to Caesar and is the first to tell him of Antony's death, Caesar will look favorably on him. Decretas enters Caesar's presence boldly, the blood-stained sword unsheathed. He describes himself as a loyal follower of the noble Antony and offers his services to Caesar. Decretas's theft of Antony's sword is a dishonorable act, but it may also be seen as shrewd and practical. Devoted to Antony while he was alive, Decretas recognizes that with Antony dead, he will need a new patron.

Demetrius
He is a Roman soldier who, with his companion Philo, observes and comments on Antony and Cleopatra in the play's opening scene. He is surprised when Antony refuses to listen to a messenger from Caesar; from Demetrius's point of view, this is disrespectful. He remarks that what he has just seen confirms the rumors being spread by "the common liar" (I.i.60)—that is, general gossip, hence usually not to be trusted. Demetrius now agrees with those reports about Antony: he is indeed betraying his greatness and failing in his duty to Rome.

Diomedes
He is one of Cleopatra's attendants. From her refuge in the monument, she sends him to tell Antony that she is still alive. Diomedes arrives after Antony has tried to kill himself. He explains that Cleopatra sent the earlier, false report because Antony was in a towering rage and she feared that he might harm her. Diomedes also swears that Cleopatra had nothing to do with the Egyptian ships deserting Antony during the battle near Alexandria.

Dolabella
A Roman officer and aide to Caesar, he appears late in the play and becomes the last of Cleopatra's conquests. Caesar sends Dolabella to guard the queen in her monument. She describes for him her glorious vision of Antony—one of the most famous passages in the play (V.ii.76-91). When she asks him if he thinks "there was or might be such a man / As this I dream'd of?" Dolabella replies in the manner of a practical but gracious man: "Gentle madam, no" (V.ii.93-95). Though he is unable to imagine such an Antony, Dolabella is strongly moved. Recognizing this and taking advantage of his sympathy, she asks him what Caesar intends to do with her. Dolabella is caught between his duty to Caesar and his infatuation with Cleopatra. He hesitates for a moment. But when Cleopatra says "He'll lead me, then, in triumph" (V.ii.108), Dolabella confirms her worst fears: "Madam, he will; / I know it" (V.ii.109-10).

After Cleopatra's interview with Caesar, Dolabella returns. He appears completely enamored. In the language of courtly love, he declares that he is devoted to serving her. Then he tells her that Caesar has made plans to send her and children to Rome within three days. "Make your best use of this," he says (V.ii.203). Dolabella knows full well what Cleopatra will do—and that her suicide will frustrate Caesar's plans. He gently bids her farewell and leaves her so that he may fulfill his other obligation: "I must attend on Caesar" (V.ii.206).
Domitius Enobarbus
See Enobarbus

Egyptian
An anonymous messenger from Cleopatra, he goes to Caesar after Antony's death and tells him that Cleopatra has confined herself in the monument. The tone of his message is submissive—she wants to know, he says, what Caesar intends to do with her so she can make preparations to obey his wishes. Caesar assures the Egyptian that he means to treat Cleopatra honorably. The messenger prays that the gods will preserve Caesar, and then he departs.

Eros
A trusted servant of Antony, he has a tender heart and the spirit of a peacemaker. His name signifies love. After the battle of Actium, when Antony is feeling deep shame and frustration, Eros tries to persuade him to speak to Cleopatra. As devoted as he is to Antony, Eros pities Cleopatra. The queen will surely die of grief, he says, unless Antony comforts her.

Before the initial battle of Alexandria, Antony summons Eros to help him put on his armor. Cleopatra insists on helping, too, and the scene is charming, filled with tenderness and optimism. The next service Antony asks of Eros is to help him die. Eros is reluctant, but Antony insists. Eros gives in, but he asks Antony to turn his face away so that he doesn't have to see it as he stabs him. "Farewell, great chief," says Eros to his master (IV.xiv.93) then he plunges the blade into his own body. Inspired by his servant's courage, Antony "falls on his sword" (S.D.IV.xiv.103).

Gallus
One of Caesar's aides, he is present in V.i when Caesar learns of Antony's death. He is also in attendance when Caesar visits Cleopatra in V.ii to discuss the implications of his conquest of Egypt. Gallus says nothing on either occasion.

Guards
Antony and Caesar are each attended by a unit of soldiers described as guards or guardsmen. When Antony falls on his sword but fails to kill himself, he cries out for his guards to come and help him. "Let him that loves me, strike me dead," pleads Antony (IV.xiv.108). Though the guards are shocked and grief-stricken, none of them will do as he asks. When Antony learns that Cleopatra is still alive, he requests their help in transporting him to the monument. The guards mournfully comply, and, once they are there, they "heave Antony aloft to Cleopatra" (S.D.IV.xv.38).

After Antony's death, Caesar sends guards to Cleopatra's palace. They seize her while she is talking to his agent Proculius. Dolabella, another of Caesar's aides, arrives and announces that he is taking over responsibility for her. Guardsmen are left in the queen's vicinity, however. One of them escorts the clown with his basket of figs into her presence. Another returns later to bring Cleopatra a message from Caesar; he enters just as Charmian has finished straightening the dead queen's crown and is applying an asp to her own breast.

Iras
One of Cleopatra's principal attendants, she usually appears in the company of Charmian, the queen's chief handmaiden. By comparison with Charmian, Iras seems young and impressionable. However, her jests in I.ii are as bawdy as her companion's. Iras dies before Cleopatra and Charmian. There is no explanation for her death. The queen bids them both farewell and kisses them. Then Iras simply "falls and dies" (S.D.V.ii.293). Cleopatra marvels at the ease with which the young woman departed from life—then uses the event as the basis for one final jest. If Iras meets Antony in the next world before her mistress does, he'll "spend that kiss / Which is my heaven to have," says Cleopatra (V.ii.302-03). With this, the queen picks up an asp and places it on her breast.
**Lamprius**
A Roman soldier and one of Antony's followers, he appears in I.ii. While Cleopatra's attendants make bawdy remarks and playfully joke with a fortune-teller, Lamprius stands aside and says nothing.

**Lucilius**
A Roman soldier and one of Antony's followers, he appears in I.ii. He watches without speaking as Cleopatra's attendants amuse themselves with bawdy jokes and the predictions of a fortune-teller.

**Maecenas**
A Roman officer, he is part of Caesar's retinue of attendants on many occasions—though he rarely has anything to say. Maecenas appears to be a rather dull man. Whereas his colleague Agrippa is carried away by Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra and her exotic barge, Maecenas's response is stolid and prudish. His resistance to the sensuous pleasures of Egypt is evident in his expressed preference for the "beauty, wisdom, modesty" (II.ii.240) of the Roman matron Octavia.

**Mardian**
One of Cleopatra's attendants, he is a eunuch. The queen likes to jest with Mardian about his inability to please women sexually. When she does so—for example, at I.v.9-12 and II.v.5-6, 8-9—it's uncertain whether her teasing is affectionate or malicious. After Antony has been defeated at Alexandria, Cleopatra flees in alarm from her lover's fury. She instructs Mardian to report to Antony that she has killed herself. Mardian faithfully carries out her instructions. He tells her lover that "the last she spake / Was 'Antony! most noble Antony!'" (IV.xiv.29-30). Half-way through her last utterance, he reports, "a tearing groan" escaped from her body (IV.xiv.31), and she died with the "name of Antony … divided / Between her heart and lips" (IV.xiv.32-33). Mardian's performance is completely convincing, though his report is false from beginning to end. Antony is stunned, and he immediately resolves to end his own life.

**Mark Antony**
See Antony

**Menas**
A notorious pirate, he joins forces with Pompey against the triumvirs. Menas is a pragmatic man. Like others in the play, he believes that the gods determine men's fate. Yet he also believes that men must make the most of opportunities that are presented to them. Menas is present when Pompey negotiates a truce with the triumvirs—and gives away more than he gets in return. Afterwards Menas remarks to himself that Pompey's renowned father "would ne'er have made this treaty" (II.vi.82-83).

During the banquet for the triumvirs and their aides aboard Pompey's galley, Menas draws Pompey aside. He offers to make him "lord of the whole world" (II.vii.62) by cutting first the anchor cables and then, when the ship is underway, the throats of the "three world-sharers" (II.vii.70). Pompey turns down Menas's proposal. Menas thinks Pompey is a fool to have passed up this chance, and he ends their alliance.

**Menecrates**
A friend and supporter of Pompey, Menecrates is a notorious pirate. He appears in II.i. In some editions of the play, he is assigned two brief speeches in that scene; in others, he has no lines.

**Messengers**
Anonymous messengers—and ones whose names are known—are crucial to the play. They appear on more than thirty occasions. Their news is often out-of-date, biased, or inaccurate. The unreliability of their reports underscores the notion that it's often impossible to determine the "truth" about people.
One messenger is beaten for telling the truth. His message—that Antony has married Octavia—so enrages Cleopatra that she strikes him and draws a knife as if to kill him. "Should I lie, madam?" he asks her (II.v.93), and the answer is yes. When she summons him again, he describes Octavia as having a pudgy face, a creeping gait, and a stiff, almost lifeless form. "The fellow has good judgment," Cleopatra remarks (III.iii.25), and she rewards him handsomely for his lies.

In some scenes—for example, I.ii, I.iv, and III.vii—two or more messengers bring reports that either confirm or contradict earlier ones. These quick sequences of messages emphasize how many things are happening in the world of Antony and Cleopatra and how quickly the situation can change, as the fortunes of various characters rise and fall. They also illustrate the difficulty of making judgments when the available evidence is conflicting or ambiguous.

Octavius
See Caesar

Philo
A Roman soldier, he provides a harsh and highly critical perspective on Antony and Cleopatra. Philo and Demetrius, another Roman soldier, frame the first appearance of the lovers in I.i, commenting on them both before they enter with their attendants and after they exit. Philo charges that Antony, once the world's most famous warrior, has lost his zeal for fighting. Instead, says Philo, Antony's passions are now solely focused on Cleopatra, and he has become "a strumpet's fool" (I.i.13). Commentators have remarked on Philo's severity, his disdain for Egyptian ways, and his seeming lack of feelings or emotions. They also point out the sneering tone of his first speech and the racist attitude he displays toward Cleopatra—for example, when he calls her a gipsy and alludes to her skin color (I.i.10, 6).

Proculeius
A Roman officer and aide to Caesar, he is sent to talk with Cleopatra after Antony's death. Caesar instructs him to convince the queen that she will be treated well—though he reveals to Proculeius that he means to make her the centerpiece of his triumphant return to Rome by exhibiting her as a captive. Proculeius goes to the queen and introduces himself. In an elegant speech, he describes Caesar as a man of generous spirit, "so full of grace that it flows over / On all that need it (V.ii.24-25). He assures Cleopatra that Caesar pities her. As he says this, two guards come up behind the queen and seize her. "You see how easily she may be surprised," Gallus remarks (V.ii.35). The queen draws a dagger and appears about to kill herself, but Proculeius disarms her. His parting words to Cleopatra, after Dolabella has arrived to relieve him, are puzzling: "To Caesar I will speak what you shall please, / If you'll employ me to him" (V.ii.69-70). He knows what Caesar's true intentions are. Moreover, he diverted her attention so she could be easily captured by the guards. Now he appears to be offering to serve as an even-handed negotiator between her and Caesar.

Rannius
A Roman soldier and one of Antony's followers, he appears in I.ii. As Cleopatra's attendants joke and play, Rannius says nothing.

Scarus
He is one of Antony's officers. Scarus has a passionate temperament. After the disastrous battle of Actium, he is furious: "I never saw an action of such shame," he declares (III.x.21). He directs his rage at the absent Cleopatra, cursing her and referring to her as a cow, a worn-out horse, and a loose woman. Scarus declares that the queen has transformed Antony and made him betray his true nature. When Enobarbus deserts Antony, Scarus takes on some of his functions. He is at Antony's side throughout the battle of Alexandria. After Antony's victory on the first day of fighting, Scarus is exuberant, fierce, and eager to attack Caesar's forces again. He makes light of the wounds he's received and helps restore Antony's confidence. Antony commends him for his outstanding bravery and praises him to Cleopatra; he asks her to give Scarus her hand to kiss.
Scarus has fought like a god today, says Antony.

Schoolmaster
An attendant at the court of Alexandria, he is sent as an ambassador to Caesar after the battle of Actium. He reports that Antony asks to be allowed "to live in Egypt" (III.xii.12) or, if that's not possible, in Athens. The schoolmaster also carries Cleopatra's request that she be allowed to retain the crown of Egypt "for her heirs" (III.xii.18). Antony uses the schoolmaster as an agent once more, when he sends him to Caesar with a challenge to meet him in single-handed combat. As Dolabella points out (III.xii.2-6), Antony's reliance on a lowly schoolmaster to act as ambassador is an indication of how far his fortunes have fallen.

Seleucus
As Cleopatra's treasurer he is the focus of an episode that continues to baffle readers and commentators. In her final interview with Caesar, Cleopatra hands her conqueror a scroll that lists, she says, all her possessions. She then summons Seleucus and tells him to confirm that this is a truthful report of her assets. Seleucus says he'd prefer not to speak rather than tell a lie. "What have I kept back?" demands Cleopatra (V.ii.147). A very large amount indeed, replies her treasurer. Cleopatra flies into a rage and threatens to scratch his eyes out. Caesar is amused. He tells her he doesn't want to haggle with her over her personal possessions, and besides, he says, he never meant to include them among the treasure that is due to him as Egypt's conqueror.

It seems impossible to determine exactly what is going on here. Does Seleucus betray Cleopatra, hoping to gain favor with Caesar? Have the queen and her treasurer planned this in advance? Is her rage genuine or feigned? Perhaps Cleopatra drew up this scheme herself beforehand. Perhaps she cleverly figures out, on the spot, how to turn Seleucus's words to her own advantage. Whatever the explanation, the episode benefits Cleopatra. Caesar concludes that she has kept back some of her possessions because she means to go on living. He is put off guard, at least temporarily, and she has time to prepare for her death.

Sentry
He is in charge of a unit of watchmen. They patrol Caesar's camp during the night that passes between the two phases of the battle of Alexandria. The sentry and his watchmen draw aside when they see Enobarbus, and they listen as he laments his betrayal of Antony. Enobarbus dies just as they decide to "speak to him" (IV.ix.23). At first they think he's sleeping or has fainted, and they try to wake him. Then the sentry sees that "the hand of death" has touched him (IV.ix.29).

Servants
There are three sets of characters in the play who are designated as servants. Two or three Roman servants appear in the scene on Pompey's galley, commenting among themselves on Lepidus's drunkenness (II.vii.1-16). The servants mock the triumvir, describing him as a man who thinks he's one of the masters of the world but actually has no influence or power. Later in the scene, the servants carry Lepidus—who is too drunk to walk—off the boat and back to his quarters.

Several Egyptian servants appear in III.xiii. They are summoned by Antony, who orders them to take Caesar's messenger Thidias away and whip him for his insolence. One servant returns with Thidias and reports that Antony's orders have been carried out.

In IV.ii, Antony calls his household servants together and asks them to help him make the last feast for his soldiers a memorable one. He thanks them individually for their past services, shakes their hands, calls them his "honest friends" (IV.ii.29), and reduces them to tears.

Sextus Pompeius
See Pompey
Silius
An officer in Ventidius's army, he appears with him after the Roman victory over the Parthians (III.i). Silius urges Ventidius to press the advantage he has gained on the battlefield that day and pursue the fleeing enemy. More victories are sure to follow, says Silius. Ventidius declines this advice, pointing out that if he were to be too successful, it would diminish Antony's stature. Silius agrees and applauds Ventidius's discretion.

Soldiers
Roman soldiers appear throughout the play as followers of one leader or another. Sometimes they display loyalty, sometimes they do not. Caught up in the struggle between the triumvirs, they occasionally express their opinions about strategy and the likely outcome of battles.

One soldier speaks directly to Antony before the battle of Actium; "do not fight by sea," he says (III.vii.61). Echoing the advice of Enobarbus and Canidius, he reminds Antony that their forces are "us'd to conquer standing on the earth / And fighting foot to foot" (III.vii.65-66). In IV.v, the same soldier encounters Antony and Eros as they set out for the battle of Alexandria. Antony says he wishes he'd listened to him on the earlier occasion. The soldier informs Antony that Enobarbus has deserted and gone over to Caesar's side. Antony disbelieves him at first. Eros confirms the soldier's report, and Antony sends Enobarbus's belongings and "treasures" after him. Shortly after that, in Caesar's camp, a soldier approaches Enobarbus. He tells him of Antony's generosity, and Enobarbus thinks he's joking. "I tell you true," the soldier says, "Your emperor / Continues still a Jove" (IV.vi.25, 27-28).

Taurus
A friend and follower of Caesar, he is in charge of Caesar's land forces during the battle of Actium. In III.viii, Caesar instructs Taurus not to confront Antony's army until the naval battle is over.
Thidias
A follower and aide to Caesar, he is sent as a messenger to Cleopatra after the battle of Actium. Caesar instructs Thidias to try to persuade Cleopatra to desert Antony, promising him that if he's successful, he can name his own reward. When Thidias is admitted into Cleopatra’s presence, Antony is absent. Thidias says to the queen that Caesar believes she became Antony's mistress not because she loved him but because she was afraid of him. He goes on to declare that it would please Caesar greatly if she were to place herself under his protection rather than Antony's. Cleopatra's response is extremely gracious—at least on the surface. Thidias leans forward and kisses her hand. As he does so, Antony bursts into the room. He is outraged that a messenger of Caesar should take such a liberty with Egypt's queen. He is also furious with Cleopatra for allowing it. Antony orders that Thidias be whipped, and he is led away.

Thidias himself is of small interest in the play. However, Cleopatra's apparent willingness to have Thidias act as a mediator with Caesar raises questions. Is she deceiving Thidias or actually considering the possibility of deserting her lover? Antony violates a significant standard of diplomacy when he orders Caesar's messenger to be whipped. Some commentators regard this as the moment when Antony fatally compromises his honor.

Varrius
A friend and supporter of Pompey, he functions as a messenger in II.i. Just as Pompey is saying he's confident that Antony will remain in Egypt with Cleopatra, Varrius enters and tells him that Antony is on his way to Rome.

Ventidius
He is a Roman general and supporter of Antony. In the early part of the play, Roman provinces in the Middle East are under assault by the Parthians, led by a Roman general opposed to the triumvirate. Antony sends Ventidius to Parthia—what is now Iran and Iraq—to put down the uprising. Ventidius leads Antony's army to a sweeping victory and slays the son of the Parthian king. Silius, Ventidius's aide, urges him to pursue the remnants of the Parthian army into Media and Mesopotamia and thus gain even greater glory. Ventidius declines to do this, and he teaches his aide a valuable political lesson: subordinates should not outshine their masters. He says that while more victories by Antony's forces might enhance their leader's reputation, Antony would be offended if Ventidius won too many honors. Ventidius's perspective on the great ones of the world provides an interesting way of looking at characters and events in the play. Moreover, his defeat of the Parthians eliminates the last threat facing the triumvirs from a foreign enemy. And the location of his victory, far from Rome, enhances the sense of the vastness of the dramatic world of Antony and Cleopatra.

Watch
See Sentry; see also Soldiers and Guards
Sample Analytical Paper Topics

Topic #1

Antony and Cleopatra was received without enthusiasm by audiences of the early seventeenth century in England. The play has continued to attract attention throughout its nearly 400-year history. Many factors contributed to the audience’s reaction to the play. Discuss these issues in your paper.

Outline
I. Thesis Statement: Many social factors contributed to the audience’s negative reaction to Antony and Cleopatra when it was first produced.

II. The difference in time (1600 years) and in location (2000 miles) between where the action of the play takes place and where the play was first produced.
   A. Cultural Differences
      1. Roman and Egyptian History
      2. British Drama
   B. Shakespeare’s development of the character Cleopatra, compared to the other characters in the play.
      1. Influence of the playwright’s gender on the development of female and male characters.

III. Factors affecting how Antony and Cleopatra was received when it was first produced in England.
   A. By the critics
   B. By the literate public (who expressed their opinions in writing).
   C. By the illiterate public who saw the play performed and expressed their opinions.

IV. Politics that might have affected the way in which Antony and Cleopatra was received in England of the early seventeenth century.
   A. The recent union of Scotland and England to become Great Britain.
      1. The political repercussions of the imprisonment in England of Mary Queen of Scots.
   B. Publication of the “King James” English translation of the Bible.
   C. The religious unrest seething in England during the latter part of Shakespeare’s lifetime.
      1. The Protestant/Catholic controversies.
      2. The repression of religious freedom of speech and actions.

Topic #2

Shakespeare tends to favor Antony over Octavius (Caesar) as being the better of the two men, even though he honestly portrays the faults of both and the good points of both. Dissect the play to find specific lines or speeches that relate to this distinction, and indicate how they suggest the relative merits of the two leading men. Do you think the playwright preferred Antony? Was his preference based on historical fact or was it merely personal prejudice unrelated to the facts of history?
Outline
I. Thesis Statement: *Shakespeare favored the character of Antony over that of Octavius.*
II. Portrait of Antony
A. Antony in Egypt at the opening of the play.
B. Antony in Egypt after the battle of Actium.
C. Antony before, during, and after the successful land battle against Octavius.
D. Antony after the sea battle in which Cleopatra’s ships joined Octavius.
E. Antony with Eros just before his attempt at suicide.

III. A portrait of Octavius (Caesar).
A. Octavius upbraiding Antony upon Antony’s return to Rome from Egypt.
B. Octavius’ conference with Mecenas and Agrippa in Rome, detailing Antony’s faults.
C. Octavius receiving news of Antony’s death.
D. Octavius with Cleopatra near the end of the play.

IV. Comparison of the two characterizations.
A. Depth of characterization.
B. Accuracy and honesty of characterization.
C. Personal biases (if any) reflected in the characterizations.
D. Conclusions about Shakespeare’s treatment of these two men in this play.

**Topic #3**
Locate a modern stage production of *Antony and Cleopatra.* From the newspapers of the city where it was produced notice the reviews and any comments the papers’ drama critics might have made about it. Then consider how and why the text of the modern production might have been changed from the original text, what effect the changes had on the modern audiences, and whether the play was considered successful by the drama critics.

Outline
I. Thesis Statement: *It would be difficult to stage Antony and Cleopatra as it was originally produced.*

II. The original text.
A. Number of acts and scenes.
   1. Scenery used (remembering that no scenery was used in Shakespeare’s day)
   2. Should the play be shortened? (The original is one of the longest of all Shakespeare’s plays.)

III. Costuming.
A. Elaborate or simple.

IV. The critics’ reactions to the original version.
A. To the text of the play.
B. To the quality of the production.
C. To the financial success of the project.

V. Comments of the theatergoers and reviewers from various newspapers.
Suggested Essay Topics

Act I, Scenes 1 and 2
1. Charmian is Cleopatra’s servant, but the queen depends heavily on her in several ways. List some of these ways and discuss whether Charmian appeared worthy of such trust.

2. Antony obviously has fallen into considerable lassitude as a result of his relationship with Cleopatra. Are there any indications that Antony might return to the stature he enjoyed as the leader of the triumvirate’s forces against Brutus and Cassius at Philippi several years earlier? If so, what are they?

Act I, Scene 3
1. In this and the two previous scenes, the character of Antony and Cleopatra is revealed, but Cleopatra is subjected to more character development here than is Antony. Describe, by using specific references from the text, how Shakespeare proceeds to develop Cleopatra’s character.

2. Charmian, up to this point, has received about as much character development as has Cleopatra. Based on this and the two previous scenes, suggest how Cleopatra might have acted if Charmian or someone similar to her had not been available. Would Cleopatra’s approach to Antony and the solving of her emotional problems have been different without Charmian? Why, or why not?

Act I, Scenes 4 and 5
1. Scene 4 is, essentially, a conversation between Octavius (Caesar) and Lepidus. Both characters will receive much more development later in the play. Based on what transpires in Scene 4, compare the character and manners of these two triumvirs.

2. Alexas is represented in some editions of this play as a servant of Antony and in other editions as a servant of Cleopatra. He serves throughout the first half of the play as a kind of messenger from Antony to Cleopatra when Antony is out of the area. Do Cleopatra and her attendants consider him Antony’s servant and treat him accordingly, or do they consider him one of their own? Give examples to support your position.

Act II, Scenes 1 and 2
1. Contrast the attitude of Antony with that of his friend Enobarbus. Given that Antony is in the power position, discuss any examples that might indicate that Enobarbus was thinking more clearly and intelligently than Antony about the situation in Egypt and in Rome. Had you been Enobarbus, would you have acted and spoken as he did under the circumstances? Why, or why not?

2. Had you been Octavia, how would you have felt about what was transpiring during these two scenes? Would you have felt good about being the wife of a great warrior and triumvir of Rome and the sister of another triumvir? Or would you have preferred to live a much more private life apart from the realms of royalty? Why, or why not?

Act II, Scenes 3, 4, and 5
1. Why would Cleopatra want as much personal information about Octavia as she could possibly acquire? Suggest several possible reasons and estimate the validity of each reason. Did she intend to use this information against Octavia? Against Antony? If so, what were her chances of success?

2. In Scene 5, Cleopatra grossly mistreats the messenger who brings her the news that Antony has married Octavia. Discuss the character of Cleopatra as if the only picture you had of her was that offered in Scene 5. Then consider whether this picture of the queen harmonizes with the picture you formed of her from previous scenes (including those in the first act), or whether your picture of Cleopatra has changed substantially from
what it was before.

Act II, Scenes 6 and 7
1. Write a personal portrait of Pompey, comparing or contrasting (1) Pompey’s view of himself, (2) the triumvirs’ view of him, (3) his associates’ and friends’ view of him, and (4) history’s view of him.

2. History has considered Lepidus the weakest member of the second triumvirate. Summarize how Shakespeare portrays his weakness, then indicate some reasons why historians have considered him weak. Was his weakness the result of his personal failings or of circumstances over which he had no control? Why?

3. If Menas had simply murdered the three triumvirs and then told Pompey that he had done so, how would Pompey have handled the situation? How would he have preserved his “honor” in the view of the world?

Act III, Scene 1
Suggested Essay Topics
1. Ventidius was afraid that if he conquered more territory than Antony had told him to, Antony might have been displeased and might have punished Ventidius. Based on what you have learned thus far about Antony, was Ventidius’ fear justified? Why, or why not?

2. Orodes, king of Parthia, treacherously murdered Marcus Crassus, a member of the first triumvirate of Rome. In your opinion, did the circumstances surrounding the death of Crassus justify the invasion of Antony’s army under the command of Ventidius and the killing of the king’s son Pacorus? Why, or why not?

Act III, Scenes 2, 3, and 4
1. Agrippa and Enobarbus, in Scene 2, discuss whether Lepidus loves Octavius more than Antony or Antony more than Octavius. The discussion distinctly denigrates Lepidus, also a triumvir of Rome. Does his conduct in the play justify the ridicule offered by these two soldiers? Why, or why not?

2. In Scene 4, Antony is explaining to Octavia how her brother Octavius has wronged him. Do these accusations appear to you to justify Antony’s anger with Octavius? Why or why not?

Act III, Scenes 5, 6, and 7
1. Octavius has deposed Lepidus from his place on the triumvirate and imprisoned him in Rome. Some historians tell us Lepidus joined Pompey in making war on Octavius, but Shakespeare does not mention that matter. If Lepidus had been guilty of such treason, the actions taken against him would have been justified. Were they justified on the basis of what Shakespeare tells us in this play? Why, or why not?

2. Why do you think Cleopatra refused to return to Egypt from Greece when Enobarbus strongly suggested that she do so? What reasons, if any, did she offer for deciding to stay in Greece while Antony fought the battle? What was her real reason for staying?

Act III, Scenes 8-11
1. In the first sea battle of the war between Antony and Octavius (Caesar), Cleopatra’s ships turn tail and flee from the battle, granting Octavius the victory. Why do you think they fled? There is no record in this play that they were seriously defeated in the open sea battle, and history leaves the point in question. Could Cleopatra not control her sea captains? Or was it Cleopatra that gave the order to flee? Why do you think they gave up without mounting a serious fight? Can you find any clue in the play itself as to why such an unexpected thing might have happened, especially after Cleopatra had pledged her navy to Antony’s aid? Or is the matter simply one of abject cowardice on the part of the naval commanders and sailors?
2. Was Antony’s commander, Camidius, in any way justified in defecting, with his troops and cavalry, to Octavius (Caesar), or was it simply another example of cowardice on the part of Camidius? If you had been one of Camidius’ soldiers, how would you have felt about the surrender and defection to Octavius? Would you have gone along with Camidius and defected to Octavius, or would you have held out to serve Antony (assuming you were given that opportunity)? How would you have justified your choice, regardless of which choice you made?

Act III, Scenes 12 and 13
1. Enobarbus, a loyal supporter of his friend and commander Antony, becomes disillusioned with Antony’s leadership. What were the options open to Enobarbus? Which ones did he choose, what were the results, and were these results inevitable, given the choices he makes?

2. Whipping messengers who brought bad news was common in the period of which Shakespeare wrote. If you had been Thidias, how would you have handled the matter? If you had been Antony, would you have had Thidias whipped? Why, or why not? If you had been Octavius, how would you have reacted when his messenger Thidias returned, bearing the welts resulting from the whipping? Did the whipping of Thidias have any material effect on the final outcome of the battle between Antony’s forces and those of Octavius (Caesar)?

Act IV, Scenes 1, 2, and 3
1. Many of Antony’s men defected to Octavius, but many did not. Why did those who remained loyal to Antony do so, especially after Antony himself gave them permission to defect. Does this fact shed any light on Antony’s character? If so, what? What do you think happened to those who remained loyal to Antony after Antony committed suicide?

2. In Scene 2, the mood seems to swing from depressed to jubilant; in Scene 3 it swings back to depressed. How much do you think Mark Antony’s comments caused or affected this mood change? Should Antony have made the remarks that might have changed the mood either way? Could he have avoided making them and still have been honest with himself and the others around him? Should those around Antony have been so affected by his remarks? Would you have been, had you been one of Antony’s soldiers? Why, or why not?

Act IV, Scenes 4, 5, and 6
1. Did the fact that Cleopatra tried to help Antony don his armor for the coming battle indicate anything about her real feeling about Antony? Were her actions in this respect natural or forced? It became obvious that she knew almost nothing about armor, eliciting from Antony the well-known comment, “Thou art/The armourer of my heart.” What does this remark indicate, if anything, about Antony’s real feelings about Cleopatra? Would this interchange of remarks be likely to affect Antony’s activities during the approaching battle? Why, or why not?

2. In the three-line speech near the beginning of Scene 6, Octavius (Caesar) says, “The time of universal peace is near.” What did he mean? The comment could have been immensely significant for Octavius himself and perhaps for all the world. Was this an expression of hope, an augury of the future, or an attempt to build up his own spirit and that of Dolabella in advance of the approaching battle? Why?

Act IV, Scenes 7, 8, and 9
1. Why did Enobarbus defect to Octavius’ forces, and how did that defection lead to his death soon thereafter? Do you think he died of a broken heart, or did he actually commit suicide (by taking poison, for instance)? How much effect, if any, did his defection have on Antony?

2. Scarrus’ bravery and courage greatly strengthen Antony, as they talk after Antony’s big victory in the land action against Octavius (Caesar). Antony intends to see that Scarrus is properly rewarded by Cleopatra, as
indeed he is. But then, following this battle, Enobarbus deeply repents (Scene 9) of his defection from Antony and then dies. Does Antony gain as much, psychologically, from Scarrus’ bravery and courage as he lost from Enobarbus’ defection? Does Antony’s great victory in battle that day explain the sorrow and humiliation Enobarbus feels just before he dies? Did Enobarbus’ defection have anything to do with Scarrus’ magnificent performance that day? Why, or why not?

**Act IV, Scenes 10, 11, and 12**

1. Antony so exults in his victory over Octavius (Caesar) that he says he wishes he could fight Octavius in the fire and the air as well as on the land and the sea. Is he overconfident at this point? Does this comment indicate hatred of Octavius? Disgust with him? Or simply annoyance with him? Had it been within Antony’s power to simply disintegrate Octavius and all his army by waving a magic wand, would Antony have done that? Or would he have refused such an opportunity and chosen to attempt to defeat his enemy in a prosaic land and/or sea battle? Why?

2. In Scene 12, Antony blames Cleopatra and her ships for his defeat and calls her a “triple-turned whore.” Was either charge against Cleopatra justified, or was Antony simply overreacting to the situation, as he often did? No excuse whatever is offered anywhere in the play for the cowardly acts of the Egyptian ships, nor does the queen herself defend that action. Unlike in the action at Actium, she was not aboard any of the ships when they and their crews defected to Octavius. Do you think that Antony’s flight at Actium in search of Cleopatra had anything to do with the defection of the queen’s navy at the battle of Alexandria? Why, or why not?

**Act IV, Scenes 13 and 14**

1. To what extent can Cleopatra be blamed for Antony’s suicide? Was the fault hers or Antony’s, or was it simply a matter of fate, in which neither person can be blamed? How does Cleopatra’s character, as portrayed in the play to this point, explain why she acted as she did?

2. At the beginning of Scene 14, Antony says to Eros (probably the one major character still intensely loyal to him), “Sometimes we see a cloud that’s dragonish.” Is Antony, at this point, totally insane, gradually going insane, or merely trying to relax after a humiliating defeat (for which he blamed Cleopatra and her ships and sailors)? From Eros’ replies to Antony, how do you think Eros himself viewed the situation?

3. In your opinion, does Shakespeare drag out the matter of the death of Antony too long, when the same effect could have been produced with fewer lines, or is each line absolutely necessary to achieve the effect Shakespeare desired? Mention which lines might have been omitted with little or no loss of effect, if you find any that fit that description.

**Act IV, Scene 15**

1. Cleopatra refused to descend from her monument to tend to the dying Antony, for fear that she might be “taken.” What does this refusal say about her real feelings about him? A few lines earlier she had said to Charmian, her chief attendant and confidante, that she would “never go from hence.” If she thought she would never leave her monument under any conditions anyway, why was she afraid to go the side of her dying lover? Is she more interested in avoiding capture by the forces of Octavius (Caesar) than she is in comforting Antony? If so, is that not an indication of intense selfishness on her part? Would you have followed Cleopatra’s example and remained in the monument, or would you have cast caution to the wind and rushed to the dying lover’s side? Why, or why not?

2. What is Cleopatra’s mood after Antony dies and she is alone with Charmian and Iras? Her speech at the end of Scene 15 is one of the most tragic in all of Shakespeare’s works. Is she getting exactly what she deserves, or is she the victim of circumstances totally beyond her control? Why?
Act V, Scenes 1 and 2
1. Did Cleopatra have any reasonable alternatives to suicide? Did Iras and Charmian? To what extent, if any, did her love for Antony contribute to her reason to commit suicide? Had Cleopatra been more mature in her decisions throughout the play, would the play have had a different ending? If so, what are some possible endings?

2. Octavius (Caesar) said that, as supreme emperor, he dare not be other than merciful and gentle. Was he serious and did he really mean so, or were these simply words with no intent behind them? How would you have felt at that point if you had been Octavius? What outward indications in actual actions, if any, demonstrated his real intentions in this respect?

3. In your opinion, did the climax of the play occur when Antony committed suicide, when Cleopatra committed suicide, when you learned that Antony would fall before Octavius and that Octavius would become sole emperor of the world, or at some other point in the play? Why?
Criticism

Overview
Walter Cohen

[In this introduction, Cohen places Antony and Cleopatra within its literary context—with Shakespeare's own Julius Caesar as its prequel and the writing of Plutarch as its source. Cohen also remarks on the dualism and eroticism that pervade the play, and notes that Shakespeare is asking us to consider whether heroic acts can survive in the "post-heroic world" of Octavius Caesar's Rome or in the "private terrain" of Antony and Cleopatra's love. Finally, Cohen briefly examines Shakespeare's characterizations of Octavius, Antony, and Cleopatra.]

Antony and Cleopatra (1606-07) picks up where Julius Caesar leaves off. It presupposes familiarity not only with events dramatized in that play but also with earlier Roman conflicts. During the first century B.C., Rome, the overwhelming military power throughout the Mediterranean and beyond, entered into a protracted civil war that culminated in its transition from a republic (rule by a senatorial aristocracy) to an empire (monarchical power). As Julius Caesar opens, Caesar has already defeated his archrival Pompey the Great and governs Rome as dictator. The play recounts the republican assassination of him, led by Brutus and Cassius, and the assassins' subsequent defeat and death at the hands of Mark Antony (Caesar's lieutenant) and Octavius (Caesar's young grand-nephew and adoptive son, who took the name of "Caesar" upon Julius Caesar's death and turned it to political use). Antony and Cleopatra, which covers the period from 40 to 30 B.C., completes the narrative of Roman civil war and the final destruction of the republic. Rome and its vast holdings are now ruled by the triumvirate of Lepidus, Octavius Caesar, and Mark Antony, who govern, respectively, the Mediterranean portions of Africa, Europe, and Asia. Yet Shakespeare's tragedy shifts the focus from the struggle over Rome's internal political system to Rome's external imperial domination of the East (the present-day Middle East) and to affairs of the heart. Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar contend for political supremacy, but the love between Antony and Cleopatra occupies center stage.

Much of the play's fascination arises from this intertwining of empire and sexuality. The issue is already present in Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes—Shakespeare's favorite source, with the exception of Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and one that he follows closely here. Plutarch and other writers of Greek and Latin antiquity were preoccupied with the opposition between the conquering West, often thought by them to stand for political and moral virtue, and the older civilizations it subjugated in the East, frequently supposed to represent luxury and decadent, feminized sexuality. This particular understanding of empire re-emerged in the Renaissance during a new era of Western expansion, as Europe entered the path to genuine global domination armed with an increasingly racialized and still sexualized view of the peoples it sought to subdue. Antony and Cleopatra is one response to European expansion, and the play's subsequent fortunes testify to its connection with the imperial enterprise of the West.

Long supplanted onstage by John Dryden's All for Love (1677), a rewriting of Shakespeare's story as a tragedy of private life, Shakespeare's version came into its own only after 1800, when England became the world's leading power. During the last two centuries, both Cleopatra and the East with which she is identified have seemed female, dark, colonized, available, animalistic, exotic, and excitingly dangerous. Comments on the text or on its performance have stressed the play's "strange pervasive influence of Oriental luxury and vice," its "effect of Oriental repose," Cleopatra's "corrupt and half-barbarous Oriental court." "Just as Antony's ruin results from his connection with Cleopatra," one critic argued, "so does the fall of the Roman Republic result from the contact of the simple hardihood of the West, with the luxury of the East." Actresses playing Cleopatra recall "an Indian dancer" and "Asiatic undulations of form." They bring to mind a "panther," a "sensuous tigress," "a wicked monkey," and a creature full of "feline cunning."
Not all of these responses chauvinistically assume Western superiority, and *Antony and Cleopatra* itself seems designed to elicit complicated judgments. Rome is contrasted to Egypt, West to East, the conquerors to the conquered; rapid shifts of scene across enormous distances accentuate this division. A sober, masculine military ethos opposes a comically frivolous, pleasure-loving, feminized, emasculated, and sexualized court. Antony must decide between Octavius Caesar and Cleopatra, Octavius's sister Octavia and Cleopatra, the world and the flesh. Political opportunism drives Antony's marriage to Octavia, love and sexual desire his relationship with Cleopatra; he chooses between fidelity to a chaste, white wife and adultery with a promiscuous, "tawny," "black" seductress (1.1.6, 1.5.28). Where Caesar employs a rational self-interest (he is the "universal landlord," 3.13.72), Antony revels in an impetuous, extravagant generosity and challenges Caesar to one-on-one combat. Young Caesar is a bureaucrat of the future, old Antony a warrior of the past. Caesar's concerns are public and political, Antony's private and personal. Whereas Antony's brother and his previous wife, Fulvia, attack Caesar, Caesar promises that "the time of universal peace is near" (4.6.4). This assertion anticipates the *pax Romana* (Roman peace) instituted by Caesar throughout the empire. It also links the empire to Christianity by evoking the birth of Christ, which occurred in a Roman province during Caesar's long rule.

Through these conflicts, the play investigates the possibility of heroic action in a post-heroic world. It offers an epic view of the political arena, but deprives that arena of heroic significance. In this diminished environment, the protagonists' flaws are writ large. *Antony and Cleopatra* then asks whether heroic meaning can be transplanted to the private terrain of love. Throughout, Shakespeare maintains a studied ambivalence: critics disagree about whether the protagonists' concluding suicides are fruitless or redemptive. Following a series of tragedies—*Hamlet, Othello, King Lear,* and *Macbeth*—in which the protagonist's psychology is consistently probed, *Antony and Cleopatra* almost completely avoids soliloquy and thus inaugurates a final phase in Shakespeare's career, in which individual tragic intensity is sacrificed in favor of more broadly social representation. As a result, Antony's and Cleopatra's motives remain opaque to audiences and readers, to other characters in the play, to each other, and, arguably, even to themselves. Though we are invited to guess, we never definitively learn why Cleopatra flees at Actium, why she negotiates with Caesar in the last two acts, or why Antony thinks marriage to Octavia will solve his political problems. Instead of self-revelation, the play offers contradictory framing commentary by minor figures. These external perspectives help impart an epic feel, as do the geographical and scenic shifts, which also produce a loose, fragmentary, and capacious structure alien to classically inspired notions of proper dramatic form. Furthermore, like the other Roman plays based on Plutarch—*Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*—*Antony and Cleopatra* relies heavily on blank verse while almost entirely avoiding rhyme: Shakespeare may have been following the Earl of Surrey's sixteenth-century blank verse translation of part of the *Aeneid* (19 B.C.), Virgil's enormously influential epic of the founding of Rome. The Roman Empire would thus seem the obvious stage for heroic performance.

Yet this proves not to be the case, partly because the play's structuring dichotomies are unstable. It is as if *Antony and Cleopatra* created distinctions only to undermine them. For instance, the antitheses between Caesar and Antony and between Rome and Egypt lack political resonance. Julius Caesar's struggle between republic and empire arises only peripherally in *Antony and Cleopatra,* where it is voiced by Pompey:

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what
Made the all-honoured, honest Roman Brutus,
With the armed rest, courtiers of beauteous freedom,
To drench the Capitol but that they would
Have one man but a man?
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(2.6.15-19)

Pompey's rebellion is bought off by Caesar, Antony, and Lepidus. Pompey is then attacked by Lepidus and by Caesar (who later disposes of Lepidus) and is subsequently murdered by one of Antony's men, who may or may not have been acting on his master's orders. Although Antony supposedly "wept / When at Philippi he
found Brutus slain" (3.2.56-57), he asserts that "'twas I / That the mad Brutus ended" (3.11.37-38). The republic is thus already dead when *Antony and Cleopatra* opens. Caesar astutely conforms to the style of a republic, whereas Antony offends traditional Roman sensibilities by ostentatiously taking on the trappings of monarchy (3.6.1-19). Nonetheless, their political conflict concerns not rival systems of government but simply the desires of two ambitious men, each of whom wants absolute power. The independence of Egypt is at stake, although this occurs to no one except Cleopatra and then only belatedly and perhaps duplicitously. The end of civil war is also important, but it is hard either to celebrate the victory of the ruthless Caesar or to lament the defeat of the incompetent Antony.

Other apparent distinctions between the rivals also conceal basic similarities. Antony boasts of his valor at Philippi, while Caesar "alone / Dealt on lieutenantry" (battled exclusively through his officers; 3.11.38-39). Earlier, however, Antony's "officer" Ventidius, whom Plutarch calls "the only man that ever triumphed of the Parthians until this present day," remarks, "Caesar and Antony have ever won / More in their officer than person" (3.1.16-17). In addition, Caesar's promise of "universal peace" is anticipated in a version of Christ's Last Supper that Antony shares with his followers.

Tend me tonight.  
Maybe it is the period of your duty.  
Haply you shall not see me more; or if,  
A mangled shadow. Perchance tomorrow  
You'll serve another master.  
(4.2.24-28)

 Appropriately, Antony is criticized for moving his friends to tears by Enobarbus, a Judas-figure soon to betray Antony by defecting to Caesar and destined to die shortly thereafter, his heart broken by Antony's generosity.

Even the geographical contrast of the play partly dissolves into parallelisms and connections: Egyptian love is militarized, Roman war eroticized. Shakespeare does give Cleopatra a smaller political role than she has in Plutarch, to accentuate the basic conflict and perhaps also to reduce the threat of a powerful woman. But the external representation of the lovers' relationship, the absence of scenes of them alone, and their pride in exhibiting their affair intensify the feeling that love and war influence each other, that there is no distinction between public and private because nothing is private. Further, love is on both sides of the divide. Antony is preceded in suicide by his aptly named servant Eros (Love), a figure from Plutarch. But the play opens with a criticism of "this dotage of our General's" by Philo (also "love"; 1.1.1), a figure invented by Shakespeare. *Antony and Cleopatra* also renders problematic the object of desire. Presumably that object is Cleopatra. Loved by Antony, she elicits powerful responses from Enobarbus and Dolabella and had been the lover of "great Pompey" and "broad-fronted Caesar" (1.5.31, 29). Though this list may indicate the power of the Eastern femme fatale, the roll call of Romans in love has no Egyptian equivalent. It is unclear what they literally see in Cleopatra. Enobarbus's description of her initial meeting with Antony at Cydnus (2.2.192-232) elicits enthusiastic responses from Agrippa—"Rare Egyptian!" and "Royal wench!" (224, 232). But when Enobarbus says that "her own person ... beggared all description" (203-04), he draws the logical inference, almost renouncing "all description":

She did lie  
In her pavilion—cloth of gold, of tissue—  
O'er picturing that Venus where we see  
The fancy outwork nature.  
(2.2.204-07)

All we know of Cleopatra's appearance is that she was reclining.
This absence of the seductress points in the same direction as the list of Roman lovers—toward the feelings of Roman men and away from any inherent attractiveness of an Egyptian woman. Some of these feelings are directed toward Antony. The Pompey and Caesar of Antony and Cleopatra at times act almost as if they were the sons—rather than the younger brother (Pompey) and grand-nephew and adopted son (Caesar)—of Cleopatra's former lovers, whose paternal roles Antony has now assumed. In lines whose erotic charge goes beyond the intended objects (Antony and Cleopatra) to include the speaker himself, Pompey expresses pleasure that Antony takes him seriously (2.1.35-38). And Caesar is disgusted by Antony and Cleopatra's theatrical coronation:

At the feet sat
Caesarian, whom they call my father's son,
And all the unlawful issue that their lust
Since then hath made between them.
(3.6.5-8)

Here, there is a possible confusion between Antony and the older Caesar and a definite one between Caesarian and the younger Caesar, both of whom are "my father's son." This is not the only intense familial feeling Caesar has for Antony. When he weeps at Antony's death, Maecenas sees a noble narcissism: "When such a spacious mirror's set before him / He needs must see himself" (5.1.34-35). Caesar himself recalls Antony movingly:

thou, my brother, my competitor
In top of all design, my mate in empire,
Friend and companion in the front of war,
The arm of mine own body, and the heart
Where mine his thoughts did kindle.
(5.1.42-46)

This outpouring of emotion, however calculated, leads in contradictory directions. By calling Antony his "mate" and invoking a meeting of "heart" and mind, Caesar on the one hand suggests an intimacy between the two men that recalls Renaissance celebrations of close male friendship but that also borders on the erotic. On the other hand, he neutralizes any filial anxiety he may feel by describing Antony as "my brother" and then as a subordinate, "the arm of mine own body."

Though Caesar betrays various kinds of emotional intensity, that is not what he consciously espouses. His ideal Antony is not the lover who "o'erflows the measure" (1.1.2) but the soldier who exercised heroic self-deprivation (1.4.58-61). He certainly does not emulate the older Caesar, whose sexual and military conquests were completely intertwined (3.13.82-85). Thus Octavius Caesar represents not the preservation but the diminution of traditional Roman values, a constriction of a heroic culture of which Antony is the last survivor. The jaundiced view of political power that emerges could be construed as an implicit critique of the centralizing monarchs of Shakespeare's own time. In any case, the play insists that one can no longer have it both ways, that politics and sex (or any kind of grandeur) are irrevocably sundered.

Antony and Cleopatra must exercise their peculiar brand of paradoxical hyperbole in this new and smaller world. Antony's heart "is become the bellows and the fan / To cool a gipsy's lust": his heart is a fan that cools Cleopatra's lust by satisfying it, but in so doing he rekindles her passion, as if his heart were also a bellows (1.1.9-10). Similarly, when Cleopatra meets Antony, "pretty dimpled boys" (2.2.208) attend her

With divers-coloured fans whose wind did seem
To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
And what they undid did.
And when told that marriage to Octavia will force Antony to abandon Cleopatra, Enobarbus demurs in perhaps the play's most famous lines:

Never. He will not.
Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety. Other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies.

But the protagonists' inexhaustibility and their "infinite variety" do not fare well until the final scene. Though Shakespeare makes Antony and Cleopatra more sympathetic than they are in Plutarch, they remain maddeningly self-absorbed and self-destructive—ignoring urgent business, acting impulsively, bullying underlings, reveling in vulgarity, lying, apparently betraying each other.

Moreover, except for the first Battle of Alexandria, in which the couple briefly synthesize military and amorous arms, the fighting scenes testify to their belatedness, their irrelevance. Shakespeare's uncharacteristic decision to follow the practice of classical theater and keep all fighting offstage leaves only a feeling of being let down, as helpless observers report on the debacle. Thus, Enobarbus laments at Actium:

Naught, naught, all naught! I can behold no longer.
Th'Antoniad, the Egyptian admiral,
With all their sixty, fly and turn the rudder.

At the last battle of the play, it is Antony's turn:

All is lost.
This foul Egyptian hath betrayed me
My fleet hath yielded to the foe, and yonder
They cast their caps up, and carouse together
Like friends long lost.

Beginning with Act IV, however, the restlessness of the play diminishes as Antony and Cleopatra's sphere of activity is reduced to Alexandria. The manipulative report of her death that Cleopatra sends Antony, his botched suicide in response, and her refusal to leave her monument to attend him as he lies dying convert Antony's presumably climactic death into a mere false ending and shift the weight of significance to the final scene. Instead, Egypt and Cleopatra are what matter. Both have been associated throughout with the overflowing that Antony is faulted for at the outset. Antony declares his love for Cleopatra by rejecting the state he rules: "Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch / Of the ranged empire fall" (1.1.35-36). Upon hearing of Antony's marriage to Octavia, Cleopatra prays, "Melt Egypt into Nile, and kindly creatures / Turn all to serpents!" (2.5.78-79). This apocalyptic imagery, which dissolves all distinction, anticipates Antony's loss of self when he thinks Cleopatra has betrayed him. His body seems to him as "indistinct / As water is in water" (4.15.10-11).

The language of liquefaction is also connected to the confusion of gender identity. Antony
is not more manlike
Than Cleopatra, nor the queen of Ptolemy
More womanly than he.
(1.4.5-7)

And Cleopatra reports, "I ... put my tires and mantles on him whilst / I wore his sword Philippan" (2.5.21-23). Depending on one's perspective, this behavior either dangerously confuses gender roles, thereby leading to Antony's ignominious flight at Actium, or overcomes a destructive opposition. Furthermore, the language of inundation recalls not only the rise of the Nile, which fertilizes the surrounding plain, but Cleopatra herself, who is identified with Egypt throughout the play. The conclusion seeks this regenerative property in her. Shakespeare's probable recourse to Plutarch's Of Isis and Osiris apparently inspires the repeated invocation of the goddess Isis, the sister-wife of Osiris, whom she restores after he is pursued to his death by his brother-rival, Typhon. When Caesar complains of Antony's monarchical behavior, he finds Cleopatra's divine impersonation "of the goddess Isis" even more galling (3.6.17).

Cleopatra's suicide makes good on these imagistic patterns, retrospectively justifying Antony's decision to die for her. Unlike the protagonists' deaths in Shakespeare's earlier tragedies, this outcome is desired by readers and audiences. The ending also evokes the synthesis precluded by the play's dichotomies but implied by its more subtle patterns. Cleopatra dies a death that might be associated with a Roman man:

My resolution's placed, and I have nothing
Of woman in me. Now from head to foot
I am marble-constant. Now the fleeting moon
No planet is of mine.
(5.2.234-37)

But in rejecting the inconstancy of the moon, of which Isis was goddess, arguably she also dies the death of a faithful Roman wife.

methinks I hear
Antony call. I see him rouse himself
To praise my noble act ...  
... Husband, I come.
Now to that name my courage prove my title.
(5.2.274-79)

And in taking the poisonous asp to her breast, she may become a Roman matron as well:

Peace, peace.
Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep? ...
As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle.
O Antony!
[She puts another aspic to her arm]
Nay, I will take thee too.
(5.2.299-303)

Since the Folio lacks the stage direction included here, perhaps the final line can mean that she takes Antony to her breast, like a mother comforting her infant son.
But "O Antony" is also a cry of orgasm that looks back to Cleopatra's earlier sexual assertions, "I am again for Cydnus / To meet Mark Antony" and "Husband, I come," and forward to Charmian's orgasmic dying words, which Shakespeare added to his source: "Ah, soldier!" (5.2.224-25, 319). Furthermore, Cleopatra's manner of death is clearly Egyptian. The asp recalls Antony's description of her as "my serpent of old Nile" (1.5.25). Thus Rome and Egypt, Antony and Cleopatra, martial valor and sexual ecstasy, are united in death as they cannot be in life. "Dido and her Aeneas" (4.15.53), in Antony's vision soon to be eclipsed by himself and Cleopatra, wander together through the afterlife of the play. But the two legendary lovers remain bitterly unreconciled in the Aeneid. Shakespeare's source for the characters. With full awareness of the complexities and ironies at stake, Virgil narrates Aeneas's abandonment of Dido, who is associated with Eastern sensuality, in the name of a higher cause, Roman civic virtue. Antony and Cleopatra thus answers the Aeneid, ambivalently distancing itself from Roman and, by extension, Renaissance imperialism. It seems to be saying that you can have it both ways. East and West, conquered and conquerer are affirmed in a final synthesis.

Yet countercurrents trouble even the metaphorical validation of Cleopatra's "immortal longings" (5.2.272). She resolves on suicide not when she learns that Antony killed himself for her but when she becomes certain that Caesar plans to lead her in a humiliating triumph in Rome. This explains her pleasure in imagining that Antony will "mock / The luck of Caesar," that the asp will "call great Caesar ass / Unpolicied" (5.2.276-77, 298-99). The concluding triumphant rhetoric thus cleans up earlier dubious behavior and puts the best face on defeat. Heroic aristocratic individualism can act in the world only by leaving it. Moreover, the domestic Cleopatra of the conclusion can be seen as the reduction to a conventional gender role of a woman who challenged sexual hierarchy. At her death, Cleopatra "lies / A lass unparalleled" (5.2.305-06), or has the play instead presented "lies alas unparalleled"?

How Antony and Cleopatra should be interpreted depends on the relationship one sees between the ending and the partly incompatible material that has preceded it. Most, though not all, critics have found the conclusion affirmative on balance. But the work registers ambivalence to the last. This duality is captured in Cleopatra's account of the response she expects in Rome:

The quick comedians
Extemporally will stage us, and present
Our Alexandrian revels, Antony
Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I'th' posture of a whore.
(5.2.212-17)

Cleopatra shudders at the absurdity of a boy actor badly impersonating her, yet the part of Cleopatra in Antony and Cleopatra was originally performed by a boy. This reminder punctures the dramatic illusion just when it would seem most essential. Arguably, we are being asked to recognize that a boy in the role of an extremely seductive woman can establish the same emotional intensity with the men in the audience that sometimes seems to exist between the male characters in that play. These lines certainly look back to Cleopatra's deliberate blurring of gender division. And they emphasize the artifice of Cleopatra herself, a veteran actress in her final performance. Shakespeare is here flaunting the power of his medium. But if it is impossible to "boy" Cleopatra's "greatness," to represent her adequately, perhaps that is merely an invitation to look beyond what can be shown, to take seriously her "immortal longings."


Language and Imagery
David Daiches focuses on the rich poetic language of *Antony and Cleopatra*, arguing that imagery is present in the play not simply as a source of visual pleasure but also as a means of defining the various characters. So, Daiches explains, Antony's men vividly depict their disgust with their general's attraction to Cleopatra when they compare their former opinion of Antony as "plated Mars" to their current image of him as a mere "fan / To cool a gipsy's lust." Similarly, Daiches points out that the evolving language employed by Octavius Caesar to describe the lovers' feelings for each other alters our own view of Antony and Cleopatra. Daiches focuses in particular on the words Caesar uses to describe the dead lovers at the close of Act V: "'Famous,' 'high,' 'glory,' 'solemn ...'" Daiches remarks that "these are the terms which Caesar now applies to a love story which earlier he had dismissed as 'lascivious wassails.'"

Both Janet Adelman and Madeleine Doran note that Shakespeare intensifies the effect of the play's imagery by relying on hyperbole—that is, grandiose or exaggerated language. Thus Antony hyperbolically declares that Rome can dissolve into the Tiber River and that the world is nothing but mere "clay" compared to the great love that he and Cleopatra have for one another. Paul A. Cantor agrees that this particular speech of Antony's displays his deep love for Cleopatra, but argues that in the next few lines, the Roman general makes use of hyperbole for a far different purpose—in other words, to indicate that despite his love, he still considers himself an important part of public life; this, Cantor explains, is made clear when Antony asserts his leadership role by grandly ordering the world, or "binding" it on "pain of punishment," to treat the love that he and Cleopatra share as incomparable. In either case, Adelman remarks that the lives of Antony and Cleopatra seldom fulfill the extravagant claims that each makes for the other. Doran asserts that such hyperbolic language is not meant to convince us of the lovers' grandeur, but to impress upon us the extraordinary nature of all human beings.

Katherine Vance MacMullan examines a particular image that frequently appears in *Antony and Cleopatra*: the figure of Death. Noting that the play's use of the image of Death as a bridegroom was commonplace to Renaissance audiences, MacMullan asserts that Shakespeare developed the image beyond this familiar cliche. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, MacMullan contends, death imagery is meant to symbolize Antony's overpowering passion for Cleopatra, his diminishing political powers, and "the weakening of his judgment in the command of practical affairs." MacMullan also demonstrates how Shakespeare connects the image of death with those of sleep, darkness, and light to emphasize the inevitability of the lovers' tragic fate. For additional commentary on language and imagery in the play, see the excerpt by Janet Adelman in the DUALISM section.

**David Daiches**

[Daiches demonstrates how Shakespeare uses vivid imagery and point of view to depict the various roles of both Antony and Cleopatra. In the language of his soldiers, for example, Antony is a great general who has been made foolish by love. By contrast, the metaphors exchanged between Antony and Cleopatra depict them as magnificent lovers whose affection for each other surpasses boundaries and inspires our admiration. Daiches remarks further that the contrasting imagery in the play coalesces as each later commits suicide but that it also leaves us wandering whether the play is about "human frailty or human glory.”]

*Antony and Cleopatra* is at once the most magnificent and the most puzzling of Shakespeare's tragedies. Its magnificence resides in the splendour and amplitude of its poetry, in the apparently effortless brilliance with which language is employed in order to search and illuminate the implications of the action; it puzzles because the action itself seems to be of no moral interest yet it compels a kind of wondering attention which would normally be given only to a play with a profoundly challenging moral pattern. Bradley sensed this paradox when he asked, 'Why is it that, although we close the book in a triumph which is more than reconciliation, this is mingled, as we look back on the story, with a sadness so peculiar, almost the sadness of disenchantment?' And he added: 'With all our admiration and sympathy for the lovers we do not wish them to gain the world. It is better for the world's sake, and not less for their own, that they should fail and die.' This is surely to simplify the problem to the point of distortion, for it is not that Anthony and Cleopatra arouse our
admiration while doing wrong, so that we thrill to them yet cannot in conscience wish them success. It is rather that in this play Shakespeare seems to be building a moral universe out of non-moral materials. Yet I do not think that we can answer Bradley merely by making a spirited defence of the characters of the hero and heroine, as Dover Wilson does, convincingly enough, if not altogether relevantly.

Shakespeare's play is not, of course, as Dryden's was to be, about 'All for Love, or the World Well Lost', though this is one strand woven into the total fabric. It is—to summarize it crudely—about the different roles that man can play on the various stages which human activity provides for him, and about the relation of these roles to the player's true identity. Shortly before his suicide, when Antony sees events as having cheated him out of his role both of lover and of conqueror, he expresses his sense of the dissolution of identity:

Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish,
A vapour sometime, like a bear, or lion,
A tower'd citadel, a pendent rock,
A forked mountain, or blue promontory
With trees upon 't, that nod unto the world,
And mock our eyes with air.

He goes on to say that he

made these wars for Egypt, and the queen,
Whose heart I thought I had, for she had mine,

and having, as he believes, lost Cleopatra's heart, he no longer has a real identity either as lover or as man of action. The melancholy music of the lines rises up to involve us in this sad sense of loss of self. When however, he is informed by Mardian that Cleopatra has killed herself for love of him, his identity as lover is immediately re-established and he assumes this role again with a new confidence:

I will o'ertake thee, Cleopatra, and
Weep for my pardon. So it must be, for now
All length is torture: since the torch is out,
Lie down and stray no farther. Now all labour
Mars what it does: yea, very force entangles
Itself with strength: seal then, and all is done.
Eros!—I come, my queen:—Eros!—Stay for me,
Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,
And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze:
Dido, and her Aeneas, shall want troops,
And all the haunt be ours.

At first it seems that the re-establishment of his identity as lover means the abandonment of his identity as soldier—'No more a soldier', he exclaims; but soon it becomes clear that in his resolution to follow Cleopatra to death he is at last adequately uniting both roles. Cleopatra has now assumed the role of conqueror, and he will imitate her:

I, that with my sword
Quarter'd the world, and o'er green Neptune's back
With ships made cities, condemn myself, to lack
The courage of a woman, less noble mind
Than she which by her death our Caesar tells
'I am conqueror of myself.'
When he discovers that Cleopatra has not killed herself after all, he does not fall back into his earlier state of disillusion with her; he remains the lover and the loved, ready to act out the last of love's gestures:

I am dying, Egypt, dying; only
I here importune death awhile, until
Of many thousand kisses, the poor last
I lay upon thy lips.

Finally, at the moment of death, he re-assumes the character of conqueror also:

but please your thoughts
In feeding them with those my former fortunes
Wherein I liv'd: the greatest prince o' the world,
The noblest; and do now not basely die,
Not cowardly put off my helmet to
My countryman: a Roman, by a Roman,
Valiantly vanquish'd.

Cleopatra's great cry of grief at his death is the equivalent from her side of Antony's speech about the changing shapes of the clouds: no identities are now left in the world, no distinction between mighty and trivial; she is overwhelmed in a patternless and so meaningless world in which all roles are interchangeable:

O, wither'd is the garland of the war,
The soldier's pole is fall'n: young boys and girls
Are level now with men the odds is gone,
And there is nothing left remarkable
Beneath the visiting moon.

Her love for Antony, we now realise, had been what gave meaning to reality for her; it had been the top in a hierarchy of facts, and when Antony is gone there is no hierarchy, no order, and so no significance in reality. Her own position as queen equally becomes meaningless: she is

No more but e'en a woman, and commanded
By such poor passion as the maid that milks,
And does the meanest chares.

At the end of the play Cleopatra re-establishes order by the culminating role-taking of her death.

There are many ways in which Shakespeare uses poetic imagery to establish his main patterns of mining. The opening lines give us with startling immediacy the stern Roman view of Antony's love for Cleopatra, separating at once the Roman from the Egyptian world:

Nay, but this dotage of our general's
O'erflows the measure: those his goodly eyes,
That o'er the files and musters of the war
Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
The office and devotion of their view
Upon a tawny front: his captain's heart,
Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper,
And is become the bellows and the fan
To cool a gipsy's lust.

The word 'dotage' strikes hard in the very first lines—a damning and degrading word. But note that it is 'this dotage of our general's'. Antony is still, to the Roman onlooker, 'our general': there is a shared pride in that word 'our' and a deliberate placing in the hierarchy of command in the word 'general'. The general is a general, but his observed behaviour is to be described by this viewer as dotage. This viewer, because when Philo says 'this dotage' he is pointing at what he sees, drawing his companion's attention to the visible paradox, a general, yet in his dotage. Antony is seen by Philo as playing two contrary roles at the same time—and this is not in accordance with the proper proportions of things, it 'o'erflows the measure'. It would be proportionate for a general to love, but not for him to dote. For a general to dote 'reneges all temper', that is, it renounces all decent self-restraint, it is disproportionate, an improper placing of a particular kind of behaviour in the hierarchy of human activities and emotions.

A general has his proper 'office and devotion', his appropriate service and loyalty. For a general's eyes—'goodly eyes', it is emphasised, that have in the past appropriately and suitably 'glowed like plated Mars'—now to turn

The office and devotion of their view
Upon a tawny front

is again outrageous indecorum, wild disproportion. This disproportion is emphasized again and brought to a climax in the lines about 'a gipsy's lust'. "What has military glory to do with such domestic objects as a bellows and a fan? The juxtaposition is deliberately outrageous. Similarly, the captain's heart put at the service of a gipsy's lust reiterates the disproportion, the total scrambling of that hierarchy which gives people and objects their proper virtue and the proper meaning. As the spectacle of the two lovers moves across to the middle of the stage to Philo's cry of 'Look, where they come'—the lovers are now before our eyes as well as his—Philo's sense of the disproportion involved becomes agonizing:

Take but good note, and you shall see in him
The triple pillar of the world transform'd
Into a strumpet's fool.

And he invites his companion, in biblical-sounding language, to 'behold and see'. But it is we, the audience or the reader, who now both see and hear. And what is it that we hear?

*Cleopatra*: If it be love indeed, tell me how much.
*Antony*: There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd.
*Cleopatra*: I'll set a bourn how far to be belov'd.
*Antony*: Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth.

We move at once from the Roman soldier's view of Antony's behaviour to the view of the lovers themselves. Here, too, is disproportion, but disproportion of a very different kind from that seen by Philo. Antony declares that there is no limit to his love, that to measure it would involve going beyond the confines of both heaven and earth. To part of the audience—Philo and Demetrius, the shocked Roman soldiers—the role represents a monstrous confounding of categories; to the actors themselves, it is a glorious extravagance and subsumes everything else; to us who read or watch the play—well, what is it to us? Whose side are we on? We are jolted from Philo's offensively debasing comments to the sight and sound of the two lovers protesting their love. 'All the world loves a lover', the proverbs goes, and one naturally takes the lovers' side. But with Philo's words ringing in our ears we remain watchful, eager, interested: what is the true identity of this pair?

No pause for speculation is allowed. At once an attendant enters, saying:
News, my good lord, from Rome—

from that Rome whose representative has just so devastatingly described Antony's behaviour. The brisk
official announcement crashes into the world of amorous extravagance that the lovers' dialogue has been
building up. Antony's barked, annoyed response—‘Grates me, the sum’—shows him forced suddenly out of one
role into another which he is most reluctant to play. At this Cleopatra suddenly changes too, quite
unexpectedly yet wholly convincingly, into the playful, teasing mocker of her lover:

Nay, hear them, Antony:
Fulvia perchance is angry; or who knows
If the scarce-bearded Caesar have not sent
His powerful mandate to you, 'do this, or this;
Take in that kingdom, and enfranchise that;
Perform't, or else we damn thee.'

This shocks Antony out of his second role—the lover whose love-making is broken into by the claims of
business—into yet a third, the surprised and puzzled lover:

How, my love?

With what wonderful economy does Shakespeare capture this third movement of mind and feeling in Antony.
He is surprised out of his annoyance with the interrupter, wondering what Cleopatra is up to. She soon shows
him, as she goes on:

Perchance? nay, and most like:
You must not stay here longer, your dismission
Is come from Caesar, therefore hear it, Antony.
Where's Fulvia's process? Caesar's I would say. Both?
Call in the messengers. As I am Egypt's queen,
Thou blusses:, Antony, and that blood of thine
Is Caesar's homagen else so thy cheek pays shame
When shrill-tongued Fulvia scolds, The messengers.

She ends, note, by brusquely telling him to attend to the messengers: but she has made sure that, for the time
being at least, he won't. Her mocking references to Fulvia, Antony's deserted wife, sting Antony into rejection
of all that Rome means. In his next speech he confirms Philo's view of the monstrous disproportion of his
behaviour in a remarkable outburst which gains our sympathy not by any explicit or implicit justification but
by its taking in all of human existence by the way and then including and surpassing it:

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

All nobility of action is subsumed in the embrace of 'such a noble pair'. If the two poles between which
Antony moves are Rome and Egypt, for the moment the Roman pole is annihilate. But Antony has a long way
to go before he can find a role which combines his character of man of action and lover, which justifies him
(not perhaps in a moral sense but in the sense that it accommodates his full psyche): the chain of events which finally drives him to suicide is made, in virtue of the poetic imagery in the play, to be the only way in which his various roles can come together in the same act. At this stage, we see him changing parts, but every change is accompanied by some awareness of what is being given up by not participating in other kinds of human action. How compelling and inclusive is the phrase 'our dungy earth alike / Feeds beasts as man', taking as it does into its purview in one sweep of perception the very basis of human and animal life and their common dependence on the 'dungy earth'. And how that phrase 'dungy earth' stresses the coarse and common, yet rich and life-giving, elements that link the highest with the lowest in any hierarchy. In a sense Antony is not here abandoning everything in the world by his and Cleopatra's mutual love: he is taking it all with him. But only in a sense: as the play moves on Shakespeare develops more and more ways of taking all life with him in presenting the adventures of this couple. Between this speech and the recurrence of the image in a different context in Cleopatra's speech in Act V, scene II, whole worlds of meaning have been established:

My desolation does begin to make
A better life: 'tis paltry to be Caesar:
Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave,
A minister of her will: and it is great
To do that thing that ends all other deeds,
Which shackles accidents, and bolts up change;
Which sleeps, and never palates more the dung,
The beggar's nurse, and Caesar's.

Here the search for a timeless identity, 'which shackles accidents, and bolts up change', is movingly linked to a profound sense of the common necessities of all human existence. And when the dying Cleopatra, with the aspic at her breast, exclaims

Peace, peace!
Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep?

the imagery takes on yet another new dimension, so that not only does Cleopatra establish herself at the end as combining the roles of mistress and wife, of courtesan and queen, of Egyptian and Roman, of live-giver and life-taker, but this final unification of roles is linked—in ways that go far beyond the actual story—to a compassionate awareness of the sad yet satisfying realities of human needs and human experience.

But to return to the dialogue in Act I, scene i. Antony's moment of abandon to his vision of his and Cleopatra's mutual love cannot be sustained, for it cannot at this stage correspond to all the demands of his and Cleopatra's nature. He again repudiates his Roman business and then, by associating love with pleasure and pleasure with mere sport, modulates rapidly from the lover to the mere hedonist:

There's not a minute of our lives should stretch
Without some pleasure now. What sport tonight?

Cleopatra with continuing provocativeness acts the part of his Roman conscience—'Hear the ambassadors' is her only reply to the speech just quoted—but Antony, who has moved from passion to hedonism to joviality, insists on taking this as simply part of her attractive variety:

Fie, wrangling queen!
Whom everything becomes, to chide, to laugh,
To weep: how every passion fully strives
To make itself, in thee, fair and admired!
This topic of Cleopatra's infinite variety is to sound again and again, in many different ways, throughout the play before the hero and the heroine come to rest in the final and fatal gesture that can make variety into true identity. At this stage in the play Shakespeare deftly moves the royal lovers off the stage to let us hear again the two tough Roman soldiers whose comments had opened the action.

I am full sorry
That he approves the common liar, who
Thus speaks of him at Rome,
says Demetrius, giving another shake to the kaleidoscope so that we now see Antony neither as the debauched general nor as the passionate lover but simply as a nasty item in a gossip column.

We move straight from this splendid opening, with its shifting points of view and provocative contrasts between the former and the present Antony and between the Roman and the Egyptian view, to be given what Granville-Barker calls 'a taste of the chattering, shiftless, sensual, credulous Court, with its trulls and wizards and effeminates'. The queen enters, seeking Antony, aware that 'A Roman thought hath struck him', and worried. She prepares her tactics, bidding Enobarbus fetch Antony and then sweeping out as Antony enters. Antony, when he appears, is purely Roman: the blank verse he speaks is brisk and business-like, moving in short sentences. The news from Rome shames him. He is shaken into wishing to hear Cleopatra named 'as she is call'd in Rome' and to see himself through Fulvia's eyes. He has changed roles very thoroughly, and the atmosphere of the Egyptian Court, to which we have just been exposed, helps to make us sympathize. When Cleopatra reappears she has already been diminished, not only by the Court atmosphere and by Antony's Roman speech, but—and most of all—by Enobarbus' sardonic commentary on her behaviour and motives. Her tricks are all in vain, and after trying out a variety of moods and responses she is firmly shut up by Antony's Roman 'Quarrel no more, but be prepared to know / The purposes I bear'. She then tries the pathetic—

Sir, you and I must part, but that's not it:
Sir, you and I have lov'd, but there's not it;—

and in the end, unable to deflect him from his 'Roman thought', she acts the goddess of Victory and leaves him with the memory of an impressive parting:

Upon your sword
Sit laurel victory, and smooth success
Be strew'd before your feet!

But Antony has already come to see himself as Philo and Demetrius had seen him at the play's opening; we have heard him repeat Philo's very word, 'dotage'—

These strong Egyptian fetters I must break,
Or lose myself in dotage.

At this point it looks as though the play is to be a tug-of-war comedy, with Antony being pulled now by Egyptian sensuality, now by Roman duty. And indeed, there is an element of this in the play, and some critics have seen this element as its main theme. But any attempt to see the play as merely a balancing of opposites, geographical and psychological, impoverishes it intolerably and also results in the sharpening of the dilemma I described at the beginning. *Antony and Cleopatra* is a play about ways of confronting experience, about variety and identity.

In Act I scene iv we suddenly see Antony in yet another light, when Octavius Caesar refers to him as 'our great competitor', and this is followed by further images of disproportion applied to Antony—'tumble on the
bed of Ptolemy', 'give a kingdom for a mirth', and so on; yet with these words still in our ears we are brought back to Alexandria to hear Cleopatra, seeing Antony's meaning for her more clearly at a distance, describe him as

The demi-Atlas of this earth, the arm  
And burgonet of men

—a first foretaste of the grand mythological description she gives of him after his death to Dolabelk:

His legs bestrid the ocean, his rear'd arm  
Gested the world: his voice was propertied  
As all the tuned spere's, and that to friends:  
But when he meant to quail, and shake the orb,  
He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,  
There was no winter in 't: an autumn 'twas  
That grew the more by reaping: his delights  
Were dolphin-like, they show'd his back above  
The element they lived in: in his livery  
Walk'd crowns and crownets: realms and islands were  
As plates dropp'd from his pocket.

These tremendous images of power, benevolence and sensuality—or of greatness, love and joy—sum up the different aspects of Antony's identity, which are seen together, as co-existing, at last after his death. In life they interfered with each other, and can only be described separately. Nevertheless, the introduction of the figure of 'the demi-Atlas of this earth' so soon after Octavius Caesar's complaints about what Antony has declined to, is deliberate and effective. We should note, too, that even Caesar shows himself fully aware of the heroic Antony, though he sees him as the Antony who was and who may be again, not as the present Antony:

Antony,  
Leave thy lascivious wassails. When thou once  
Was beaten from Modena, where thou slew'st  
Hirtius and Pansa, consuls, at thy heel  
Did famine follow, whom thou fought'st against,  
Though daintily brought up, with patience more  
Than savages could suffer. Thou didst drink  
The stale of horses, and the gilded puddle  
Which beasts would cough at: thy palate then did deign  
The roughest berry, on the rudest hedge;  
Yea, like the stag, when snow the pasture sheets,  
The barks of trees thou browsed. On the Alps  
It is reported thou didst eat strange flesh,  
Which some did die to look on: and all this—  
It wounds thine honour that I speak it now—  
Was borne so like a soldier, that thy cheek  
So much as lank'd not.

This is not only imagery suggestive of almost superhuman heroism: it is also violently anti-sensual imagery. The contrast between, 'lascivious wassails' and 'thy palate then did deign' / 'The roughest berry' is absolute. Victory in Egypt is associated with riotous celebration; in Rome, with endurance. Cleopatra at the end of the play combines both these notions in her death, which is both a suffering and a ceremony.
When Caesar and Antony confront each other in Rome, Antony admits the most important charge—that in Egypt he had not sufficiently known himself:

And then when poisoned hours had bound me up
From mine own knowledge.

Caesar, cold and passionless, never has any doubt of his own identity; that is one of the advantages of having such a limited character. Lepidus' character consists in wanting to like and be liked by everybody, he has no real identity at all. Not that Shakespeare presents all this schematically. The presentation teems with life at every point, and some of the situations in which Lepidus is involved are richly comic.

Meanwhile, Antony acts out his re-acquired persona of the good Roman leader and dutiful family man. He marries Caesar's sister Octavia, and is all courtesy and affection. But Enobarbus has been with the back-room boys satisfying their eager curiosity about Egypt. In replying to their questions, this sardonic realist with no illusions tells the simple truth about Cleopatra's irresistible seductiveness. It is into his mouth that Shakespeare puts the magnificent and well-known description of Antony's first meeting with Cleopatra (from Plutarch, but how transmuted!), thus guaranteeing its truth; it is Enobarbus too who evokes her quintessential sex appeal with the brief but brilliant account of her captivating breathlessness after hopping 'forty paces through the public street', and above all it is Enobarbus who replies to Maecenas's 'Now Antony must leave her utterly' with

Never; he will not:
Age cannot wither her nor custom stale
Her infinite variety: other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry,
Where most she satisfies. For vilest things
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
Bless her, when she is riggish.

This is not role-taking: it is the considered opinion of a hard-boiled campaigner, and in the light of it we know that Antony has a long way to go before his different personae can unite.

If we are never allowed to forget Cleopatra, how can Antony? It takes only a casual encounter with an Egyptian soothsayer to turn him to Egypt again:

I will to Egypt;
And though I make this marriage for my peace,
I' the east my pleasure lies.

Mere sensuality is drawing him, it appears. Never up to this point has the love theme, as Antony reflects it, seemed so tawdry. It almost seems as though there is an obvious moral pattern emerging, with Rome on the good side and Egypt on the bad. This is further suggested by the following scene in Alexandria showing Cleopatra's reaction to the news of Antony's marriage to Octavia. Yet, after all her tantrums, with her

Pity me, Charmian,
But do not speak to me,

a new note of quiet genuineness emerges in Cleopatra's love for Antony. And if we have come to feel that the political world of Roman efficiency represents the moral good in this conflict between Rome and Egypt, we are soon brought to the scene in Pompey's galley in which power and politics are reduced to their lowest level. Antony fools the drunken Lepidus by talking meaningless nonsense in reply to Lepidus' questions about
Egypt; Menas tries to persuade Pompey to slaughter his guests and so secure the sole rule of the world, and Pompey replies that Menas should have done it first and told him about it afterwards; the reluctant Caesar is persuaded to join in the heavy drinking. Lepidus has already been carried off drunk, the man who bears him away carrying, as Enobarbus points out, 'the third part of the world'. And finally Enobarbus persuades Caesar to join in a dance with Antony and Pompey while a boy sings a drinking song. The utter emptiness of this revelry is desolating, and it casts a bleak light on the whole Roman world.

In the light of this dreary and almost enforced celebration we think of Enobarbus' description of Cleopatra's first welcome to Antony or the later presentation (Act IV, scene viii) of Antony's response to temporary victory and realise that there is another aspect to Egyptian revelry than the dissolute chatter of Act I, scene ii. Egyptian celebration has a humanity and a fullness wholly lacking on Pompey's galley.

Enter the city, clip your wives, your friends,
Tell them your feats, whilst they with joyful tears
Wash the congealment from your wounds, and kiss
The honour'd gashes whole,
exclaims Antony in genial triumph to his men and, to Cleopatra when she enters:

My nightingale,
We have beat them to their beds. What, girl, though grey
Do something mingle with our younger brown, yet ha' we
A brain that nourishes our nerves, and can
Get goal for goal of youth. Behold this man,
Commend unto his lips thy favouring hand:
Kiss it, my warrior: he hath fought today
As if a god in hate of mankind had
Destroy'd in such a shape.

And Antony goes on to proclaim a victory celebration:

Give me thy hand,
Through Alexandria make a jolly march,
Bear our hack'd targets like the men that owe them.
Had our great palace the capacity
To camp this host, we all would sup together,
And drink carouses to the next day's fate,
Which promises royal peril. Trumpeters,
With brazen din blast you the city's ear,
Make mingle with our rattling tabourines,
That heaven and earth may strike their sounds together,
Applauding our approach.

Kissing, touching and shaking of hands are frequent where Antony is the center of a celebratory scene; it is the human touch, the contact, the insistence on sharing feeling. So against I the east my pleasure lies' we must set on the one hand Roman pleasure as symbolized by the scene in Pompey's galley and on the other the warm human responsiveness to environment which Antony evinces in so many of his Egyptian moods. The latter part of the play is not simply a psychological study of the decline of the sensual man in intellectual and emotional stability as his fortunes decline (as Granville-Barker, brilliant though his study of the play is, seems to imply). If it were that, it would be merely pathetic, and it would be hard to account for the note of triumph that rises more than once as the play moves to its conclusion. The play is in fact both triumph and tragedy;
Antony, and more especially Cleopatra, achieve in death what they have been unable to achieve in life: the triumph lies in the achievement, the tragedy in that the price of the achievement is death. In the last analysis the play rises above morality to strike a blow in vindication of the human species. Queen or courtesan or lover or sensualist, or all of these, Cleopatra in her death does not let humankind down.

Antony's emotional vagaries in the long movement of his decline exhibit him as beyond the control of any establishing self; it is almost as though Shakespeare is making the point that in order to gain one's identity one must lose it. Antony is seen by his friend Scarus, whose military advice he rejects as he rejects everybody's except Cleopatra's, as 'the noble ruin of her (i.e., Cleopatra's) magic', and Shakespeare makes it clear that this is one aspect of the truth. Antony's military judgment is overborne by Cleopatra's reckless desires and intuitions. Even Enobarbus breaks out of his sardonic acquiescence in whatever goes on, to expostulate with Cleopatra herself in a tone of rising anxiety. Soldier and lover are here contradictory roles, which must be acted separately. To attempt to act them out simultaneously is to risk ruining both. Shakespeare spares us nothing—the bickering, the infatuate action, the changes of mood, the melodramatic gesturing. Yet the poetic imagery works in another direction, not so much in its actual verbal suggestions as in its rising energy and human comprehensiveness. And at least Antony acts all his own parts. His chief reason for scorning Octavius Caesar is that he plays simply the role of running policy spinner and refuses to prove himself in any other capacity.

The richness of Antony's humanity increases with the instability of his attitudes. His rage with the presumptuous Thidias, who dares to kiss Cleopatra's hand, is of course partly the result of Thidias' being Caesar's messenger and of Cleopatra's looking kindly on him—he himself shortly afterwards gives Cleopatra Scarus's hand to kiss. But more than that, it is a release of something humanly real within him, and his expression of it has a ring of appeal about it, appeal to our understanding of his emotional predicament, of the humanness of his situation:

Get thee back to Caesar,
Tell him thy entertainment: look thou say
He makes me angry with him. For he seems
Proud and disdainful, harping on what I am
Not what he knew I was. He makes me angry,
And at this time most easy 'tis to do 't:
when my good stars, that were my former guides,
Have empty left their orbs, and shot their fires
Into the abyss of hell.

The phrase 'harping on what I am / Not what he knew I was' has no equivalent in Plutarch. Antony's consciousness of his different selves represents an important part of Shakespeare's intention. At the same time Antony's almost genial acknowledgement of his own weakness has not only an engaging confessional aspect but also draws on its rhythm and movement to achieve a suggestion of human fallibility which increases rather than diminishes Antony's quality as a man:

He makes me angry,
And at this time most easy 'tis to do 't: ...

When Cleopatra approaches him, hoping that his angry mood has passed, he is still talking to himself:

Alack, our terrene moon
Is now eclips'd, and it portends alone
The fall of Antony!
It is Cleopatra who is the moon—the changeable planet. (We recall Juliet's reproof to Romeo):

O, swear not by the moon, th' inconstant moon,
That monthly changes in her circled orb ...

But while he is lamenting Cleopatra's changeableness, she is awaiting the change in him that will bring him back to a full recognition of her love for him: 'I must stay his time'. He accuses her of flattering Caesar, and she replies simply: 'Not know me yet?' To which in turn he replies with another simple question: 'Cold-hearted toward me?' Her answer to this, beginning with the quietly moving 'Ah, dear, if I be so, ...' brings him round at once. 'I am satisfied', is all he says to conclude the dispute, then proceeds at once to talk about his military plans. Having declared these, he suddenly realises just who Cleopatra is and where he stands in relation to her:

Where hast thou been, my heart? Dost thou hear, lady?
If from the field I shall return once more
To kiss these lips, I will appear in blood,
I, and my sword, will earn our chronicle:
There's hope in't yet.

He is both warrior and lover now, and well may Cleopatra exclaim 'That's my brave lord!' This in turn encourages Antony to move to his third role, that of reveller:

I will be treble-sinew'd, hearted, breath'd,
And fight maliciously: for when mine hours
Were nice and lucky, men did ransom lives
Of me for jests: but now, I'll set my teeth,
And send to darkness all that stop me. Come,
Let's have one other gaudy night: call to me
All my sad captains, fill our bowls once more;
Let's mock the midnight bell.

More role-taking now takes place on a very simple and moving plane. Cleopatra adjusts herself to Antony's recovered confidence:

It is my birthday,
I had thought t' have held it poor. But since my lord
Is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra.

Cleopatra's reference to her birthday is almost pathos, but it rises at once to grandeur with 'But since my lord / Is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra'. The question posed by the play is, What do these two characters finally add up to? When Antony is Antony again and Cleopatra Cleopatra who are they? One cannot give any answer less than the total meaning of the play.

Enobarbus, the 'realist', gives his comment on this dialogue. He knows his Antony; his shrewd and knowing mind give its ironic diagnosis:

Now he'll outstare the lightning; to be furious
Is to be frighted out of fear, and in that mood
The dove will peck the estridge; and I see still,
A diminution in our captain's brain
Restores his heart; when valour preys on reason,
It eats the sword it fights with: I will seek
Some way to leave him.

But it is the realist who does not see the reality, and Enobarbus' death in an agony of remorse for having deserted Antony in the name of *Realpolitik* is Shakespeare's final comment on this interpretation.

The death of Antony leaves a whole act for Cleopatra's duel with Caesar before she finally outwits him and dies in her own way and in her own time. It is an act in which she plays continuously shifting roles, and while these are obviously related to the exigencies of her conflict with Caesar and the fluctuations in her position, they also show her exhibiting varied facets of her character before deciding on the final pose she will adopt before the world and before history. She is not fooled by Caesar but plays a part designed to fool Caesar into thinking that she wants to live and make the best bargain possible for herself, exclaiming contemptuously to her ladies in waiting: 'He words me, girls, he words me'. Caesar is not an accomplished actor—he is not used to role-taking—and he gives himself away. 'Feed and sleep', he tells Cleopatra, thinking that the exhortation will disarm and soothe her. But the words suggest the treatment one gives to a caged beast and give away, what Dolabella is easily charmed by Cleopatra into confirming, that Caesar intends to lead Cleopatra and her children as captives in his triumphal procession. This role, for all her infinite variety, is one Cleopatra will never play. If she does not arrange her last act properly, the Romans will put her in their play:

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Nay, 'tis most certain, Iras: saucy lictors
Will catch at us like strumpets, and scald rhymers
Ballad us out o' tune. The quick comedians
Extemporally will stage us, and present
Our Alexandrian revels: Antony
Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I the posture of a whore.
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The pageant of her death which she arranges is a sufficient antidote to this. Preceded as it is by the characteristically enlarging dialogue with the clown who brings the figs—enlarging, that is, the human implications of the action—she goes through death to Antony whom at last she can call by the one name she was never able to call him in life—'Husband, I come'. The splendour and dignity of the final ritual brings together in a great vindication the varied meanings of her histrionic career and temperament:

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Give me my robe, put on my crown, I have
Immortal longings in me.
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It is both a subsuming and a sublimating ritual. Love and loyalty and courage and queenliness are here together at last. And so is sexyness and sensuality, for this is a vindication through *wholeness* not through a choice of the proper and the respectable elements only. Iras dies first and Cleopatra exclaims:

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This proves me base:
If she first meet the curled Antony,
He'll make demand of her, and spend that kiss
Which is my heaven to have.
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This almost flippant sensuality has its place in the summing up, which transcends morality. Charmian, who dies last, lingers to set her dead mistress's crown straight:

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Your crown's awry,
I'll mend it, and then play.
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'Play' means play her part in the supreme pageant of ceremonial death and at the same time refers back, with controlled pathos, to Cleopatra's earlier

And when thou hast done this chare, I'll give thee leave To play till doomsday: ... 

When Caesar arrives, the striking and moving spectacle of the dead queen in all her regal splendour flanked by her two dead handmaidens forces even this cold schemer to see her in the great inclusive role she has arranged for herself. Love, which in the Roman view of the matter has hitherto been opposed to history, the enemy of action and dignity and honour, is now at last, and by the very epitome of Roman authority and efficiency, pronounced to be part of history and of honour:

Take up her bed, And bear her women from the monument: She shall be buried by her Antony. No grave upon the earth shall clip in it A pair so famous: high events as these Strike those that make them: and their story is No less in pity than his glory which Brought them to be lamented. Our army shall In solemn show attend this funeral, And then to Rome. Come, Dolabella, see High order, in this great solemnity.

'Famous', 'high', 'glory', 'solemn', 'order', 'solemnity'—these are the terms which Caesar now applies to a love story which earlier he had dismissed as 'lascivious wassails'. Is the play about human frailty or human glory? We are left with the feeling that one depends on the other, an insight too subtly generous for any known morality.


Katherine Vance MacMullan

[MacMullan describes the artistic and literary image of Death that was familiar to Renaissance audiences—a grim but erotic bridegroom coming to claim his note. MacMullan then explains that in Antony and Cleopatra, Shakespeare "individualized" this conventional image so that it focused less on the figure of Death and more on the characters of Antony and Cleopatra as they experienced the act of "dying tragically" in their own world filled with both love and violence.]

Certain conventional methods of evoking the subject of death, either verbally or pictorially, were common to the Elizabethans, among them that of the danse macabre. That this convention was present virtually everywhere in sixteenth-century England is clear from its widespread employment as a decorative motif in art and as a theme in poetry, sermon, and the drama. The death imagery in Shakespeare's early plays seems largely to be drawn from the conventional antic figure of Death as he is personified and equipped in paintings, etchings, and emblemata. The images have a similar precise, decorative, grotesque quality and descriptive, moralistic emphasis and intent in both artistic mediums. Shakespeare employed an unusual variety of memento and devices in his earlier dramatic compositions, in particular within and surrounding battle scenes, funerals, and executions, to emphasize widespread destruction and violence. The iconographical tradition provided a rich source of grim pictorial representations of devastation which may, in part, have inspired his verbal expression of the idea of death. Preparation for death in the drama provided Shakespeare with a natural justification for creating the proper atmosphere through the medium of language to foretell the action which
his audience should anticipate. Death images skilfully introduced help to provide the context for deeds of violence and the sorrow and havoc which ensue. The Dance of Death, with its concentration on the deaths of kings, clergy, and noblemen, provides an apt analogy in the graphic arts to the course of destruction in an historical drama, for example, treating, as it often does, the rise and decline of royal fortunes.

Perhaps the most grotesque death images in the early histories are those of Constance in King John, picturing Death as the fatal bridegroom (III.iv.25 ff.). The idea of the marriage with Death is one of the most vivid and terrifying subjects of the iconographical tradition. Shakespeare has employed this figure, with all its attributes of sensual horror and grim fascination, as one of the predominating images of death in a number of his plays, notably in his tragedies of love, Romeo and Juliet and Antony and Cleopatra. The direct personification of Death in the earliest of the tragedies performs a unique function within the plot beyond that of the merely decorative or descriptive. Death appears as an active force within the context of events much as it does in the dame macabre, giving the play an intensity and quality of the grotesque. The notion that when a person dies he has a sort of physical union with Death is a macabre convention peculiarly suited to the nature of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, in which the suicide of the lovers appears in the guise of a wedding or a final consummation in and with death. Subtle variations on this theme, in both its pictorial and dramatic aspects, are to be found in a number of Shakespeare's other dramatic compositions. The bedchamber scene from Othello, for example, incorporates many of the commonplace symbols of the union with death familiar to the Elizabethan audience—the snuffing of the candles, preparation of the spirit by prayer, the suggestion of damnation—and these elements combine to provide the atmosphere for the kiss of death which Othello bestows on the sleeping Desdemona. In addition Shakespeare's technique of employing imagery of love and death, light and darkness, heaven and hell in this scene serves to communicate an inescapable sense of the tension and tragic irony present in the final moment before death.

Death, not as an end, but as a part of the physical or natural cycle of life, is thematically present throughout the Shakespearian canon. The images of the earlier plays, individually considered, do not appear comprehensive or cosmic in scope, however, nor do they reverberate echo-like with meanings. It is only with Shakespeare's later explorations into the grotesque, the subtly complex, and the paradoxical that the death images begin to function as a part of the plot, viewed as a whole and taking into account the manifold relationships of all its parts. In turning once more to a consideration of the omens or emblems of death in a play such as Antony and Cleopatra it is valuable to take cognizance of the development of style and subject-matter of Shakespeare's imagery so that we may perceive a growing awareness through the characters in this drama of death as a part of life and experience. Death has become more individualized—that is, less conventional—as Shakespeare's dramatic emphasis concentrates less on death itself than on the process of dying tragically present in the life of his characters.

Antony and Cleopatra is the last Shakespearian play in which the theme of love and death is employed as an integral part of the dramatic situation. The images depict both plot and character in this most expansive of plays, and they serve in addition to relate it to Romeo and Juliet and Othello, the two earlier tragedies in which the images of love and death predominate. The quality of love and the deaths of the lovers may refer to a more cosmic scope of existence, but this is in keeping with the vast scale of the plot and the towering stature of the characters. The death images which foretell and attend their deaths, however, are significantly related to Shakespeare's earlier portrayal of passion culminating in death. The tragic protagonists Romeo, Othello, and Antony all "die with a kiss" and in their suicides attest to a kind of immortal union in death with Juliet, Desdemona, and Cleopatra. Thus, while concentrating on the significance of the death imagery as it enriches the portrayal of the tempestuous love of Antony and Cleopatra, I shall occasionally draw analogies with Shakespeare's use of imagery in previous dramatic situations.

Imagery of death accompanies Antony's tragic passion and decline, demonstrating with forceful irony the strengthening of his attachment to Cleopatra and the weakening of his judgment in the command of practical affairs. His defeat and fall are foreordained by omens derived in part from Plutarch's account, but it is in his
relationship to the inexhaustible nature of Cleopatra that Shakespeare has most skillfully traced the stages of his decline in Fortune's favor. The sensuous imagery which originates in and surrounds Cleopatra herself, partaking as it does both of the passion and vitality of life and of the search for "easy ways to die", instills itself into the pattern of the lovers' destruction. The seductiveness which entices and which accompanies her own death is mentioned by the sullen Enobarbus at the beginning of the play:

Cleopatra, catching but the least noise of this, dies instantly; I have seen her die twenty times upon far poorer moment: I do think there is some mettle in death, which commits some loving act upon her, she hath such a celerity in dying.
(I.ii.145-149)

This quality in her entrances Caesar as he gazes on her silent form at the end of the play:

... she looks like sleep,
As she would catch another Antony
In her strong toil of grace.
(V.ii.349-351)

She is vital and enticing even in the sleep of death, and her nature is partially revealed to us by the sensual and extravagant images of sleep and death. Her "infinite variety" characterizes the death imagery as it is used by all those who come within the sphere of her influence, including the cynical Enobarbus and, finally, the all but "passionless" Octavius Caesar. It is natural that Antony should employ her imagery of love and death when he is within her ken. Following the report of Fulvia's death he says almost nothing:

Ant. Fulvia is dead.
Eno. Sir?
Ant. Fulvia is dead.
Eno. Fulvia!
Ant. Dead...
(I.ii.162-166)

and in the presence of Octavia he speaks coldly, in an avowal devoid of vital images, of honor:

... if I lose mine honour,
I lose myself: better I were not yours
Than yours so branchless.
(III.iv.22-24)

But in the presence of the Egyptian queen he can rail thunderously of death with all the hate instilled in the nature of his passion:

I have savage cause;
And to proclaim it civilly, were like
A halter'd neck which does the hangman thank
For being yare about him.
(III.xiii.128-131)

And in a moment, his hopes revived by her avowals of constancy, he can challenge Death himself with an even more brilliant image:
Come on, my queen;
There's sap in't yet. The next time I do fight,
I'll make death love me; for I will contend
Even with his pestilent scythe.
(III.xiii.191-194)

Cleopatra has met fire with fire. Her own elaborate declaration of her love for him embraces the enduring of a hideous "graveless" death. If she proves faithless to him may her life "dissolve", and may she, she proclaims,

Together with my brave Egyptians all,
By the discandying of this pelleted storm,
Lie graveless, till the files and gnats of Nile
Have buried them for prey!
(III.xiii.164-167)

Her impassioned avowal transforms his anger into the ironic figure of the pursuit of love even into the arms of Death. Death personified does not seem merely Antony's opponent, as he is Romeo's, but the symbol of his emotional subjugation to Cleopatra and the image of his own destruction in the toils of passion. Antony's death images, rooted as they are in the extravagant nature and language of Cleopatra, ironically mock his weakness, as does his failure to kill himself when he falsely believes that Cleopatra has preceded him in death. Shakespeare employs death imagery skillfully to depict aspects of weakness, bravado, and destructiveness through character and action but culminating in a display of nobility in the presence of death infused with a sense of the immortal nature of passion.

Shakespeare uses the imagery of love and death to portray the character of Cleopatra and to foretell the decline of Antony early in the play (see I.ii.145 ff., III.x.8 ff.), but the individual images occur more frequently and contain greater variety and significance following Antony's first defeat at Actium. Act III, scene xiii marks an important turning-point in the plot and introduces the sequence of death images which culminates only in the deaths of the lovers. This scene opens with the suggestion of dying, as the disgraced Cleopatra asks Enobarbus:

Cleo. What shall we do, Enobarbus?
Eno. Think, and die.
(III.xiii.1-2)

Later in the scene Enobarbus compares Antony to a sinking ship (1.63 ff.), a traditional omen of death, an image which echoes Antony's significant figure in the preceding encounter with Cleopatra:

Egypt, thou knew'st too well
My heart was to thy rudder tied by the strings,
And thou shouldst tow me after: o'er my spirit
Thy full supremacy thou knew'st, and that
Thy back might from the bidding of the gods
Command me.
(III.xii.56-61)

The forerunners of this image occurred earlier in the play; Caesar termed the enamored Antony an "ebb'd man" (I.iv.43), and Cleopatra as the siren figure described her fatal attraction as the lover's port of death:

... great Pompey
Would stand and make his eyes grow in my brow;
There would he anchor his aspect and die
With looking on his life.
(I. V. 31-34)

Then in a series of varied images Shakespeare weaves Cleopatra's charms into the omens of Antony's fall and death. As Act III, scene xii progresses, Enobarbus compares Antony to an old lion dying (1.95), Antony deplores the fall of his guiding stars "into the abysm of hell" (1.147), Cleopatra will be true to him or "He graveless" (1.166, and see above), and Antony determines once more to "fight maliciously ... / And send to darkness all that stop me" (11.179, 182). The scene ends with Antony's rash challenge to Death, as quoted above. This latter image, combining the notions of love and death, dominates the following scenes, and its noble irony sets the tone for Antony's fall. A suggestion of this image occurs again in Antony's farewell to his followers on the night before the battle of Alexandria:

Mine honest friends,
I turn you not away; but, like a master
Married to your good service, stay till death.
(IV.ii.29-31)

The love-death omen reappears more forcefully, with all its mock-heroic and sensuous connotations, as Antony attempts to kill himself in the belief that his mistress is already dead:

    My queen and Eros
    Have by their brave instruction got upon me
    A nobleness in record: but I will be
    A bridegroom in my death, and run into 't
    As to a lover's bed.
(IV.xiv.97-101)

This figure, derived from the notion of a marriage with death, mocks Antony's failure to die an heroic Roman death. Interestingly enough, Shakespeare has twice given Antony this figure before his strategical failures, as if to emphasize the cause and degree of his weakness. This striking image serves also to link the deaths of the lovers, separated as they are by the space of nearly an act; as such, it is one of a series of brilliant figures which unite the dying pair during the last five scenes of the play. As Antony had witnessed the death of Eros before uttering the lines on marriage with death, so Cleopatra as the faithful Iras falls at her feet comments on the impassioned pain of dying:

    Dost fall?
    If thou and nature can so gently part,
    The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch,
    Which hurts, and is desired.
(V.ii.296-299)

These variations on the ancient notion of Death as the lover, as Shakespeare employed the figure in Romeo and Juliet, are peculiar to the sensual, bitter-sweet language of Cleopatra and Antony, who would seem to seek the pleasures of love even in the arms of death. The image, as we have seen, rose out of the nature of Cleopatra (Enobarbus, satirically, saw her death as the embrace of a lover, I.ii.147 ff., above); its mock-heroic cast has tinged the martial speeches of Antony (III.xiii. 192 and IV.ii.29 above); and, finally, it serves to characterize Cleopatra's own sense of a kind of honorable seduction in the act of dying.

Another primary death image, which occurs with increasing frequency in the scenes following Act III, scene xiii, is that of sleep and death, an image which Shakespeare employed effectively in dramatizing the fall of
Macbeth. Unlike the "murder of sleep" image in the latter play which serves to reveal Macbeth's engrossment in sin, the sleep of death now attaches itself to Cleopatra as a characteristic expression of her personality. Shakespeare employs all the languid, luxurious connotations of sleep to portray the dying queen in all her regal seductiveness. The sleep image reveals, in addition, Shakespeare's skillful technique in uniting the deaths of the lovers. In fact, it is Antony who first uses the expression. Antony's tirade against Cleopatra for her betrayal is suddenly transformed by Mardian's report that Cleopatra has killed herself. His life and his defeat by Caesar now seem meaningless, and he replies quietly:

Unarm, Eros; the long day's task is done,
And we must sleep.
(IV.xiv.35-36)

He determines to "lie down, and stray no further" but rather to seek the realm "where souls do couch on flowers" (11.47,51). He will face death as if running "to a lover's bed" (1.101). In the scene in the monument following Antony's actual death, Cleopatra echoes Antony's words in an image of sleep which seems a part of her decision to follow him in death:

I dream'd there was an Emperor Antony;
O, such another sleep, that I might see
But such another man!
(V.ii.74-76)

The dream, which she suggests as a symbol of her own desire for death, is evoked in her attempt to win over Dolabella, Caesar's emissary; but even here she does not deny her attachment to the notion of reuniting with Antony in death.

Her own death is leisurely and displays the cunning and "infinite variety" for which she is noted, ranging from her clever deception of Caesar to her humorous sallies with the Clown who brings her "the pretty worm of Nilus" (V.ii.243). "She is herself to the very end", as Granville-Barker has noted (p.447). Her consummate sensations are restful as sleep itself:

Peace, peace!
Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep?

As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle,—
O Antony!
(V.ii.312-314, 315-316)

It remains only for Charmian to close the "downy windows" (1.319) of the queen, her youthful charm restored once more in death:

Now boast thee, death, in thy possession lies
A lass unparallel'd.
(V.ii.318-319)

The impression Shakespeare has created for us through imagery of a Cleopatra most like sleep in her death is confirmed by Caesar, usually so business-like and confident in speech and manner;

... she looks like sleep,
As she would catch another Antony
In her strong toil of grace.
(V.2.349-351)

The conqueror too is transformed for a moment by the spectacle of the fallen Cleopatra, enchanting and seductive even in death. And, briefly, her influence colors his language with an image most befitting her vital nature. The qualities so often transmitted to Antony's Egyptian tongue thus reappear as the final tribute to Cleopatra. Her death serves, in addition, to illustrate Shakespeare's technique of deriving imagery from the nature of character and action, using that imagery to link the fates of his central figures. Just as Othello's language displays Iago's influence when the tragic culmination is approaching, so Cleopatra's speech and character seem to communicate through those who surround her a quality of the exotic and passionate. The comprehensive range of the plot of Antony and Cleopatra challenged Shakespeare's resources of imagery in preserving the relationships between characters and their actions, and gave rise to the devices of technique which portray the fall of Antony and the deaths of the lovers.

Another series of images which attends the decline of Antony and Cleopatra and which illustrates how the lovers appear to each other is that of the opposition of light with darkness, Shakespeare used this paired association in Romeo and Juliet and Othello to depict love and tragic loss. As Caroline Spurgeon has noted, Romeo and Juliet see each other as beacons of light gleaming against a dark background (pp. 310-316). Even in the blackness of the tomb Juliet's presence illuminates her surroundings as she appears through the eyes of Romeo:

... here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes
This vault a feasting presence full of light.
(V.iii.85-86)

She too is like sleep, beautiful in her supposed death.

Othello, transforming image into symbolic action, quenches the light over the sleeping form of Desdemona before stifling her, she who once had seemed a "radiant angel" to him. At the conclusion of his deed, Othello conveys his sense of loss as an image of darkness, an eclipse of sun and moon. These are only the last in a series of images of light and dark which display the alteration of Othello's love as he falls prey to Iago's devil-like influence, Othello's "put out the light" and Macbeth's "out, out, brief candle" are but two of Shakespeare's variations on the traditional literary and iconographical image depicting the approach or the actual moment of death. The image of the waning of the lamp or candle of life occurs frequently in the early histories to describe or poetize the act of dying. An example of Shakespeare's previous use of this figure, uncomplicated by symbolic meanings or thematic associations, is found in Henry VI. The dying Mortimer says:

These eyes, like lamps whose wasting oil is spent,
Wax dim, as drawing to their exigent.
(II.V.8-9)

and his image is echoed by Richard Plantagenet: "Here dies the dusky torch of Mortimer" (LI. v. 122).

Death is described dispassionately in emblem-book figures, which often depict Death personified snuffing out the candle of life. Shakespeare consistently places darkness in opposition to light as

Dualism
Dualism in its various forms—contrast, paradox, irony—plays a significant role in Antony and Cleopatra. Peter Berek describes the play as one "in which mighty opposites meet, struggle, and embrace. Rome encounters Egypt, Reason feels emotion, Spirit wars with Flesh, Duty yields to Leisure." Richard G. Harrier contrasts
Cleopatra—whom he sees as representative of Egypt, undisciplined fertility, and inconstancy—with Octavius Caesar—with whom he links Rome, order, and power. Cynthia Kolb Whitney focuses on the contrasts which exist between Rome and Egypt, asserting that the two have completely different value systems and that "behavior which is almost divine to one is repugnant and silly to the other." Janet Adelman observes that many of the paradoxes in the play are the result of the frequent use of hyperbole, or lavishly extravagant language. Adelman argues that while many of the characters use hyperbole for dramatic effect (as when Philo complains that Antony's heart has "become the bellows and the fan / To cool a gipsy's lust") Antony and Cleopatra, by contrast, seem to be absolutely serious in their use of exaggerated language. Adelman asserts that the lovers' references to the gods and to powerful forces of nature to describe their love for one another have the paradoxical effect of sounding comical to an audience. Adelman concludes that the resulting conflict between what the audience feels and what the lovers believe is resolved in this intentionally complex play when Cleopatra acknowledges the existence of a very human foolishness behind everyone's dreams.

Commentators have suggested a variety of ways in which dualism directs the action and outcome of Antony and Cleopatra. Paul A. Cantor, for example, argues that the play does not in fact neatly establish an opposition between private and public life but that the love affair of Antony and Cleopatra is intended to mirror the antagonisms which occur in the public life of Rome. Thus according to Cantor, the distrust and jealousy that Antony and Cleopatra feel regarding their love for one another is reflected in the suspicions that Antony and Octavius harbor toward each other with regard to their political alliance. Cynthia Kolb Whitney argues that of the principal characters, Antony is the one who is most profoundly affected by the play's dual worlds. Whitney asserts that the "external combat between Egypt and Rome" becomes a source for internal conflict for Antony—who must choose between his love for Cleopatra and his loyalty to his country. Sheila M. Smith also refers to Antony's inner struggle, but she sees it as a reflection of a more specific conflict between Cleopatra and Octavius Caesar. Further, Smith argues that such dualism can only be resolved in the play through death. Peter Berek views death in Antony and Cleopatra as the expression of duality as well as its resolution—for, paradoxically, it is through death that the two lovers make their love immortal.

Finally, Stephen A. Shapiro presents two conflicting views of Antony and Cleopatra once held by scholars: the "moral" view asserts that the play is critical of the two lovers; the "transcendental view" contends that the play "exalts romantic love." Shapiro rejects both views, arguing instead that in Antony and Cleopatra Shakespeare withholding all judgment and that the play's opposites—love versus war, Rome versus Egypt, and fertility versus death—are meant to underscore the ambivalent nature of life.

Janet Adelman

(Adelman evaluates the dualistic vision that pervades the play, remarking on such paradoxes as the fact that characters' actions often fall far short of their elaborately poetic descriptions of one another, and that Antony and Cleopatra at last resort to death to keep their love alive. Adelman observes that this dualism is established not only through paradox but also through the poetic device known as "hyperbole"—descriptive language that is exaggerated to extremes in order to create a particular effect. Adelman concludes that this hyperbolic and paradoxical dualism causes us to wonder whether to take the action in the play seriously, but she suggests that the lovers themselves are very serious in their descriptions.)

Skepticism and Belief

From the first words of the play ("Nay, but"), our reactions have been at issue. We are given judgments that we must simultaneously accept and reject; we are shown the partiality of truth. But finally we are not permitted to stand aside and comment with impunity any more than Enobarbus is: we must choose either to accept or to reject the lovers' versions of themselves and of their death; and our choice will determine the meaning of the play for us. But the choice becomes increasingly impossible to make on the evidence of our reason or our senses. How can we believe in Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra as Venus when we see the boy actor before us? The Antony whom Cleopatra describes in her dream is not the Antony whom we have seen sitting on stage in dejection after Actium or bungling his suicide. Although the lovers die asserting their
postmortem reunion, all we see is the dead queen and her women, surrounded by Caesar and his soldiers. The stage action necessarily presents us with one version of the facts, the poetry with another. This is the dilemma inherent in much dramatic poetry; and the more hyperbolical the poetry, the more acute the dilemma. Critics are occasionally tempted to read *Antony and Cleopatra* as a very long poem; but it is essential that we be aware of it as drama at all times. For how can one stage hyperbole? Reading the play, we might imagine Antony a colossus; but what shall we do with the very human-sized Antony who has been before us for several hours? In a sonnet, for instance, an assertion contrary to fact will be true within the poem; standards must be imported from outside the work by which to find the assertions improbable. As Shakespeare points out, not every girl be-sonneted has breasts whiter than snow, despite the assertions of her sonneteer. But a play carries its own refutation within itself: even with the most advanced stage technology, the action and the human actors will undercut these assertions even as they are made. Precisely this tension is at the heart of *Antony and Cleopatra*: we can neither believe nor wholly disbelieve in the claims made by the poetry.

The poetry of the last two acts is generally acknowledged as the sleight-of-hand by which Shakespeare transforms our sympathies toward the lovers, in despite of the evidence of our reason and our senses. Although even Caesar speaks in blank verse, the language of most richness and power is in the service of the lovers: it is the language in which Enobarbus creates Cleopatra as Venus and the lovers assert the value of their love and their death. In this play, the nay-sayers may have reason and justice on their side; but as Plato suspected when he banished poetry from his republic, reason and justice are no match for poetry. The appeal to mere reason will not always affect fallen man; according to Renaissance theorists, it was precisely the power of poetry to move, occasionally against the dictates of all reason, that made it at once most dangerous and most fruitful. And modern critics are as wary of the power of poetry as their predecessors: the poetry in *Antony and Cleopatra* is almost always praised, but the praise frequently coincides with the suspicion that it has somehow taken unfair advantage of us by befuddling our clear moral judgment. It is that doubtless delightful but nonetheless dubious means by which the lovers are rescued from our condemnation at the last moment, rather as Lancelot rescues Guinevere from her trial by fire. We are pleased but suspect that strictest justice has not been done. If it is true that Shakespeare uses the poetry to dazzle our moral sense and undo the structure of criticism in the play, then we may find *Antony and Cleopatra* satisfying as a rhetorical showcase, but we cannot admire the play as a whole. It is refreshing to find this charge made explicit by G. B. Shaw [in *Three Plays for Puritans*], who clearly enjoys expressing his contempt for a poet who finds it necessary to rescue his lovers from our moral judgment by means of a rhetorical trick.

Shakespear's Antony and Cleopatra must needs be as intolerable to the true Puritan as it is vaguely distressing to the ordinary healthy citizen, because after giving a faithful picture of the soldier broken down by debauchery, & the typical wanton in whose arms such men perish, Shakespear finally strains all his huge command of rhetoric & stage pathos to give a theatrical sublimity to the wretched end of the business, & to persuade foolish spectators that the world was well lost by the twain. Such falsehood is not to be borne except by the real Cleopatras & Antonys (they are to be found in every public house) who would no doubt be glad enough to be transfigured by some poet as immortal lovers. Woe to the poet who stoops to such folly! ... When your Shakespears & Thackerays huddle up the matter at the end by killing somebody & covering your eyes with the undertaker's handkerchief, duly onioned with some pathetic phrase ... I have no respect for them at all: such maudlin tricks may impose on teahouse drunkards, not on me.

The final poetry, detached from character and situation, does indeed give us the glorified vision of love that Shaw mistrusted, a vision not wholly consistent with the merely human Antony and Cleopatra, though Antony is far more than a debauchee and Cleopatra anything but typical, no matter how wanton. But the poetry is not a rhetorical Lancelot. Its assertions and the problems they present to our skepticism have been inherent throughout: and if the poetry strains our credulity toward the end, the strain itself is a necessary part of our experience. Are the visions asserted by the poetry mere fancies, or are they "nature's piece 'gainst fancy"?
Precisely this tension between belief and disbelief has been essential from the start. When the lovers first come on stage, very much in the context of an unfriendly Roman judgment, they announce the validity of their love in a hyperbolical poetry which contrasts sharply with Philo's equally hyperbolical condemnation. Here, at the very beginning, two attitudes are set in juxtaposition by the use of two equally impossible images which appeal to two very different modes of belief. Philo uses hyperbole as metaphor, "his captain's heart / ... is become the bellows and the fan / To cool a gipsy's lust" (1.1.6-10). This is the deliberate exaggeration which moral indignation excites; it does not in any sense call for our literal belief. The hyperbolical metaphor is morally apt, and that is all. The Roman metaphor is carefully delineated as metaphor: it never pretends to a validity beyond the metaphoric. But what of the lovers? "Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth" (1.1.17); "Let Rome in Tiber melt" (1.1.33). Strictly speaking, these hyperboles are not metaphor at all. Antony's words assert his access to a hyperbolical world where such things actually happen, a world beyond the reach of metaphor. They claim, like Cleopatra's dream, to be in the realm of nature, not of fancy. His words do not give us the protection of regarding them merely as apt metaphors: they make their claim as literal action. We may choose to disbelieve their claim; but in doing so, we are rejecting a version of reality, not the validity of a metaphor. And precisely this kind of assertion will become more insistent—and more improbable—as the play progresses.

The poetry of the final acts should not take us unawares: if at the last moment it surfaces, like the dolphin who shows his back above the element he lives in, the whole of the play and a good deal of Shakespeare's career should have prepared us for its appearance. The validity of the imaginative vision as it is asserted in the poetry is a part of Shakespeare's subject in Antony and Cleopatra. But the play is not therefore "about" the vision of the poet: we are presented with lovers creating the image of their love, not with poets poetizing. For the association of love with imagination or fancy is one of Shakespeare's most persistent themes. Love in Shakespeare almost always creates its own imaginative versions of reality, and it is almost always forced to test its version against the realities acknowledged by the rest of the world. Theseus in Midsummer Night's Dream tells us that the lover, like the lunatic and the poet, is of imagination all compact (5.1.7-8); in that play, "fancy" is generally used as synonymous with "love." We remember Juliet, valiantly making day into night in spite of the lark that sings so out of tune. Imagination is essential to love; but if it is totally unmoored to reality, it becomes love's greatest threat. Othello's love will turn to hate as Iago poisons his imagination. Spenser circumscribes his book of chaste love (The Faerie Queene, book 3) with just this kind of warning about the uses and misuses of imagination in love. Britomart falls in love with Artegaill when she sees him in Merlin's magic mirror; she immediately assumes that the vision has no basis in reality and that she is doomed to "feed on shadowes" (FQ 3.2.44). But her vision is directed by Merlin's art: her Artegaill exists, though she does not recognize him when she first meets him in the real world. The vision here is no shadow but an idealized version of reality; and in time Britomart will recognize the real Artegaill whose ideal form she has seen. Her love depends initially on the idealizing vision, but it passes the test of reality. But at the end of book 3, we see the consequences of an abandonment to self-willed imagination. Amoret is subject to Busirane's tormented perversion of love: and the masque of Cupid which holds her captive is led by Fancy (FQ 3.12,7).

Love is an act of imagination, but it cannot be an act of mere imagination. In the plays that deal with lovers, Shakespeare continually emphasizes the need to circumscribe the tyranny of imagination in love. The arbitrary loves of Midsummer Night's Dream must be subjected to the chaos of unbridled fancy (stage-managed by Puck) before they can be sorted out. At the end of As You Like It, Orlando proclaims that he can live no longer by thinking (5.2.55). But in the Forest of Arden, thinking makes it so: Orlando's imagined Rosalind can reveal herself as the real Rosalind because her game has permitted her to test the realities of love. The matter is more complex in Twelfth Night, where mere imagination prevails in the self-willed loves of Olivia and Orsino. Here the emblem for the dangerous prevalence of the imagination in love is Malvolio, reading the supposed letter from Olivia and finding himself in every word. Malvolio here is exactly like any lover, searching reality for clues to confirm his own delusions; that the letter is constructed precisely so that he will find such confirmation simply emphasizes the process. Given all this imagination run rampant, it is no wonder that Viola insists on testing her imagination, even to the point of stubbornness:
"Prove true, imagination, O, prove true" (Twelfth Night 3.4.409), she says, and then quizzes Sebastian extensively about his parentage and his early history before she will allow herself to believe that he is her brother.

If the theme of imagination in love is a concern in these plays, it is an obsession in Troilus and Cressida, where the consequences of mere imagination are delineated with chilling accuracy. Before Troilus meets with Cressida, "expectation" whirls him round; "th' imaginary relish is so sweet" (3.2.19-20) that it enchants his sense. But even Troilus knows that the imaginary relish will exceed the act; and his description of the physiology of sex is true of all enterprise in this world of frustration:

This is the monstruosity in love, lady, that the will is infinite and the execution confin'd, that the desire is boundless and the act a slave to limit.
[Troilus and Cressida 3.2.87-90]

Troilus watching Cressida give herself to Diomed will learn exactly how much desire or imaginary relish is bound by the limits of reality. He has throughout the play assumed that thinking makes it so: during the council scene he asks, "What is aught, but as 'tis valu'd?" (2.2.52). At the end, he will learn the hard facts of value, the facts implicit in Hector's answer to his question:

But value dwells not in particular will;
It holds his estimate and dignity
As well wherein 'tis precious of itself
As in the prizer.
[Troilus and Cressida 2.2.53-56]

Troilus and Cressida is Shakespeare's most horrifying vision of untested imagination in love. In that sense, it is a necessary counterpoise both to the earlier comedies and to Antony and Cleopatra. For Antony and Cleopatra is Troilus and Cressida revisited: if Troilus and Cressida portrays desire as a slave to limit, Antony and Cleopatra asserts the power of desire to transcend limits; if Troilus's subjection to mere imagination nearly destroys him, Cleopatra's imagination or her Antony virtually redeems them both. Later, in the romances, the desires of the lovers will usually become their realities: the art itself is nature, and imagination purely redemptive. Troilus and the romances are in this sense at opposite ends of the scale: in Troilus and Cressida, our credulity is at the mercy of our skepticism, as Troilus himself will discover; in the romances, our skepticism is banished by an act of total poetic faith. But Antony and Cleopatra is poised in a paradoxical middle region in which skepticism and credulity must be balanced. In this sense, the perspectives of both Troilus and Cressida and the romances are included within Antony and Cleopatra; and it is precisely because of this inclusiveness that imagination can emerge triumphant.

The process of testing the imagination is essential to the assertion of its validity: for only through an exacting balance of skepticism and assent can it prove true. And more than any other play, Antony and Cleopatra insists on both our skepticism and our assent. For it is simultaneously the most tough-minded and the most triumphant of the tragedies, and it is necessarily both at once. Throughout, Shakespeare disarms criticism by allowing the skeptics their full say: the whole play is in effect a test of the lovers' visions of themselves. Cleopatra herself presents the most grotesquely skeptical view of her own play:

... The quick comedians
Extemporally will stage us, and present
Our Alexandrian revels: Antony
Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I’ the posture of a whore.
Once she has spoken, this Roman version of her greatness becomes untenable; we know that Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* is not an item in Caesar's triumph. It is only in the context of "Nay, but" that we can answer "yes": if the imaginative affirmations were not so persistently questioned, they could not emerge triumphant. The extreme of skepticism itself argues for affirmation: and here the affirmations are no less extreme than the skepticism. Throughout the play, we are not permitted to see Cleopatra merely as a fallen woman: we are asked to see her in the posture of a whore. And when the time has come for affirmation, we are asked to believe not in the probable but in the palpably impossible: not that the lovers are worthy though misguided, but that they are semidivine creatures whose love has somehow managed to escape the bonds of time and space, and even of death. "Whore or goddess, strumpet's fool or colossus: the play allows us no midpoint. After all the doubt which has been central to our experience, we are asked to participate in a secular act of faith. This is the final contrariety that the play demands of us: that the extreme of skepticism itself must be balanced by an extreme of assent.

If we come to believe in the assertions of the poetry, it is, I think, precisely because they are so unbelievable. One of the tricks of the human imagination is that an appeal to the rationally possible is not always the most effective means of insuring belief: occasionally an appeal to the impossible, an appeal to doubt, works wonders. *Antony and Cleopatra* embodies in its structure the paradox of faith: the exercise of faith is necessary only when our reason dictates doubt; we believe only in the things that we know are not true. The central strategy of *Antony and Cleopatra* depends upon this process: we achieve faith by deliberately invoking doubt. And in fact this process dictates not only the broad structure of the play but also its poetic texture. The imaginative vision of the play is based firmly on the two rhetorical figures that are themselves dependent on this strategy: paradox and hyperbole.

The incidence of paradox and hyperbole in *Antony and Cleopatra* is not merely an accident or Shakespeare's sleight-of-hand: these figures inform the shape and the substance of the play. For they posit in their very structure the tension between imaginative assertion and literal fact that is part of the state of love. Even [Francis] Bacon [in "On Love"] is willing to concede that love is appropriately expressed in hyperbole, precisely because its assertions are palpably untrue.

It is a strange thing to note the excess of this passion, and how it braves the nature and value of things, by this: that the speaking in a perpetual hyperbole is comely in nothing but love. Neither is it merely in the phrase; for whereas it hath been well said that the arch-flatterer, with whom all the petty flatterers have intelligence, is a man's self; certainly the lover is more. For there was never proud man thought so absurdly well of himself as the lover doth of the person loved.

As Bacon points out, love infects the thought as well as the language of lovers with hyperbole. Biron and the other lovers fall hopelessly into paradox as they fall in love in *Love's Labour's Lost*; even Hamlet is subject to paradox and hyperbole in love, as his poem to Ophelia demonstrates. Only the contradictions of paradox are capable of expressing the contradictions of love: for paradox is a stylistic *discordia concors*, a knot intrinsicate like love itself. In his discussion of the Neoplatonic doctrine of Blind Love [in *Pagan mysteries in the Renaissance*], [Edgar] Wind says,

> In reducing the confusions of the senses to reason, the intellect clarifies but it also contracts: for it clarifies by setting limits; and to transcend these limits we require a new and more lasting confusion, which is supplied by the blindness of love. Intellect excludes contradictions; love embraces them.
In embracing contradictions, love transcends the limits of the intellect and of reality as the intellect normally perceives it: and no figure more vehemently asserts this transcendence than hyperbole, Puttenham's over-reacher. Shakespeare expresses his sense that love transcends the limits of reason and fact in the overreaching paradoxes of "The Phoenix and the Turtle": here the lovers can transcend number ("Two distincts, division none," line 27), space ("Distance, and no space was seen / Twixt this turtle and his queen," lines 30-31), and identity ("Property was thus appalled, / That the self was not the same," lines 37-38). Reason itself is confounded by these paradoxes and cries: "Love hath Reason, Reason none, / If what parts can so remain." (lines 47-48).

Antony and Cleopatra is the exploration of this if it is the working out of these paradoxes in human terms, with all their human contradictions. The paradoxes so easily stated in "The Phoenix and the Turtle" are the hard-won conclusions of the lovers: that one must lose oneself to gain oneself; that the only life is in death, the only union in separation. To regard either paradox or hyperbole as merely rhetorical ornament is to overlook their enormous potency in the play: in a very literal way, they shape not only the language but also the presentation of character, the structure, and the themes. And if the tension between skepticism and belief is resolved for a moment at the end, it is resolved only insofar as we for a moment accept paradox and hyperbole as literally true, despite their logical impossibilities. These are large claims; in order to substantiate them, I shall have to discuss the figures and some related concepts at length.

The structure of Antony and Cleopatra is the structure of paradox and hyperbole themselves: according to Renaissance figurists, both gain our credence by appealing to our doubt.

Paradaxon, is a forme of speech by which the Orator affirmeth some thing to be true, by saying he would not have beleeved it, or that it is so straunge, so great, or so wonderfull, that it may appeare to be incredible.

Thus Henry Peacham defines paradox [in The garden of Eloquence]. The figure paradaxon, or as [George] Puttenham calls it [in The Arte of English Poesie], "the wonder," affirms faith by appealing to doubt. Paradox was for the Renaissance a figure pliable to any use: if John Donne as a young man could use it as an occasion for the display of witty and cynical extravagance, he could also use it in his sermons to express the central tenets of Christianity. A seventeenth-century theologian cast these tenets into the form of paradox precisely because they impose such a strain on our logical categories and nonetheless are not to be questioned—that is to say, because they demand the operation of our faith, not our reason. All paradox demands an act of faith; but hyperbole is that species of paradox which poses the crisis in its most acute form. Hyperbole must, by definition, assert that which is literally untrue. George Puttenham in The Arte of English Poesie discusses hyperbole along with other figures which work by altering the meaning of words or phrases:

As figures be the instruments of ornament in every language, so be they also in a sorte abuses or rather trespasses in speech, because they passe the ordinary limits of common utterance, and be occupied of purpose to deceive the eare and also the minde, drawing it from plainnesse and simplicitie to a certaine doublenesse, whereby our talke is the more guilefull & abusing, for what els is your Metaphor but an inversion of sense by transport; your allegorie by a duplicite of meaning or dissimulation under covert and darke intendments: one while speaking obscurely and in riddle called Aenigma another while by common proverbe or Adage called Paremia: then by merry skoffe called Ironia: ... then by incredible comparison giving credit, as by your Hyperbole.

"By incredible comparison giving credit": this is the paradox of hyperbole. And if all these figures are in some sense deceivers, then the worst in this kind are the hyperboles. Puttenham later says,
Ye have yet two or three other figures that smatch a spice of the same false semblant but in another sort and maner of phrase, whereof one is when we speake in the superlative and beyond the limites of credit, that is by the figure which the Greeks called Hiperbole, the Latines Dementiens or the lying figure. I for his immoderate excesse cal him the over readier right with his originall or [lowd lyar] & me thinks not amisse: now when I speake that which neither I my selfe thinke to be true, nor would have any other body beleive, it must needs be a great dissimulation, because I mean nothing lesse than that I speake.

Precisely this great dissimulation gives credit, as Puttenham has told us earlier; and although the speaker does not believe himself and expects no one else to believe him, he means no less than what he says. This very illogical state of affairs reduces Puttenham to a similar illogic; but with this illogic he suggests the central force of hyperbole and its fascination for poets at the end of the sixteenth century. If we are to take it seriously, hyperbole must elicit some sort of belief or assent: that is to say that it demands of us the simultaneous perception of its literal falsehood and its imaginative relevance. It presents the spectacle of man making his own imaginative universe in spite of all reality, in despite of all human limitation: the struggle of Tamburlaine, or Richard II, or the lover in Donne's love poetry.

But can we take paradox and hyperbole seriously? If the two figures challenge our reason by their very structure, the play takes up that challenge: for paradox and hyperbole are to some extent embodied in the lovers; and the degree to which we can believe in these figures will determine our response to the play. Cleopatra herself seems to embrace contradictions; she is usually described in terms which confound all our logical categories. One need only look at Shakespeare's additions to Plutarch's description of Cleopatra at Cydnus for confirmation: by the use of paradox, Shakespeare transforms Plutarch's beautiful but entirely probable description into something rich and strange. The wind from the fans of her Cupids "did seem / To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool" (2.2.203-4). Her barge burns on the water. She animates nature with love for her: the waters follow her barge, "As amorous of their strokes" (2.2.197), as Antony will follow her at Actium. "She did make defect perfection, / And, breathless, power breathe forth" (2.2.231-32). She embodies all the paradoxes of sexual appetite, which grows the more by reaping: she "makes hungry, / Where most she satisfies" (2.2.237-38). Like the woman in the sonnets, she is black with Phoebus's amorous pinches (1.5.28) and yet the day of the world (4.8.13): black and wholly fair. She is wrinkled deep in time (1.5.29), and yet age cannot wither her. And if Cleopatra is paradoxical in her nature, Antony is hyperbolical in all that he does: in his rage, his valor, his love, and his folly. From Philo's description of him as Mars to Cleopatra's description of him as her colossus, he is seen in hyperbolic terms; and his own passionate use of hyperbole confirms its association with him.

The paradoxes surrounding Cleopatra are in a sense verified early in the play by Enobarbus's portrait of her at Cydnus. Enobarbus's speech is placed between Antony's resolution to marry Octavia and his decision to leave her; placed here, it serves to tell us why Antony will return to Cleopatra. In this sense, it functions as a substitute for a soliloquy in which Antony could announce his intentions to us. But a soliloquy would tell us about Cleopatra only as Antony perceives her: this description comes from Enobarbus, the most consistently skeptical voice in the play. That Enobarbus is the spokesman for Cleopatra's paradoxes establishes the portrait of her as one of the facts of the play. We are presented with her paradoxical nature as a fait accompli, as one of the premises from which the action of the play springs. In this sense, paradox itself is embodied in the person of Cleopatra, and we are forced to acknowledge its presence on stage. Her nature is fixed from that moment: and although she changes constantly, paradox can accommodate all the change; it is, after all, central to the paradox that everything becomes her and that she becomes everything. Cleopatra's definition by paradox comes early in the play and remains relatively static; Antony's definition by hyperbole is a continuing process, a continuing attempt to redefine him. And our education is at stake in his definition: for we are continually reeducated in the possibilities of hyperbole and in the kind of belief we can accord it. If Antony's hyperboles are verified, it is only at the end of the play, after a continual process of testing. The entire play leads us to Cleopatra's hyperbolical portrait of him; but it leads us there by subjecting hyperbole to skepticism.
as well as to assent.

Like the play itself, Antony's hyperboles can be verified only by surviving the test of the comic structure. Hyperbole can indicate either the similarity or the discrepancy between assertion and reality; or it can indicate both together. Whether the effect of the hyperbole is comic or tragic depends largely on the extent to which we are permitted to believe in the untruth it asserts. In purely comic hyperbole, the effect lies precisely in the discrepancy between the fact and the assertion. The hyperbolical claims about Antony are frequently subject to just such mockery. For Ventidius, who has just won a battle by his own harsh labor, Antony's name is "that magical word of war" (3.1.31). Agrippa and Enobarbus mock Lepidus's sycophantic love for his two masters by citing his hyperbolical praise of them:

Eno. Spake you of Caesar? How, the nonpareil?
Agr. O Antony, O thou Arabian bird!
[3.2.9-12]

But not all the hyperboles in the play are comic: and as hyperbole becomes imaginatively relevant, it begins to invoke our belief, in despite of all reason. For Antony and Cleopatra is virtually an experiment in establishing the imaginative relevance of hyperbole and consequently the kind of belief we can accord it: and our final sense of Antony depends on this process.

Throughout the play, we are given a medley of hyperboles ranging from the purely comic to the purely tragic. Antony, as one of the three triumvirs, is "the triple pillar of the world," according to Philo (1.1.12); and even Antony seems to imagine that when he takes his support from the world, a significant portion of it will collapse ("Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch / Of the rang'd empire fall!" 1.1.33-34). Cleopatra later imagines Antony bearing up the heavens rather than the earth: her Antony is "the demi-Atlas of this earth" (1.5.23). But these very hyperboles are mocked when the drunken Lepidus is carried offstage:

Em. There's a strong fellow,
Menas. Men Why?
Em. 'A bears the thud pan of the world, man; see'st not?
Menas. The third part, then, is drunk.
[2.7.88-91]

When Octavius hears of Antony's death, he comments, "The breaking of so great a thing should make / A greater crack" (5.1.14-15). In his words, the concept of universal order crumbles; but so does our hyperbolical vision of Antony upholding earth and heaven. At his death, there is no crack. But the effect of this sequence of hyperboles is balanced by another sequence. When the serving men on Pompey's barge compare the drunken Lepidus to a star, the poetical clothing is clearly too large for him, and the effect is comic:

To be called into a huge sphere, and not to be seen to move in't, are the holes where eyes should be, which pitifully disaster the cheeks.
[2.7.14-16]

The servant's shift from the cosmic and outsized to the human and minute in mid-metaphor is wholly appropriate: for poor Lepidus is in a sense a mere mortal caught in a world filled with hyperbolical figures. But when we find Antony dressed in the same poetical clothing, he wears it with grace. Lepidus compares his faults to the spots of heaven (1.4.12-13); and the comparison is not ludicrous. By the time the second guardsman responds to Antony's suicide by reiterating the hyperbolical association ("The star is fall'n" 4.14.106), we are, I think, quite prepared to believe him. And he in turn prepares us for Cleopatra's assertion
that the crown of the earth doth melt and the soldier's pole is fallen.

If the hyperboles that describe Antony are subject to a continual process of testing, so are the hyperboles that Antony himself uses. In his education in the hyperbolical, Antony appeals to his ancestor Hercules as teacher:

The shire of Nessus is upon me, teach me,
Alcides, thou mine ancestor, thy rage.
Let me lodge Lichas on the horns o' the moon,
And with those hands that grasp'd the heaviest club,
Subdue my worthiest self.
[4.12.43-47]

But Antony does not even manage to subdue his worthiest self. "What is possible for the god inevitably remains impossible for the mortal—impossible and consequently slightly foolish. Cleopatra suggests by her mockery at the beginning of the play that this emulation is folly in a mere mortal: she notes to Charmian "how this Herculean Roman does become / The carriage of his chafe" (1.3.84-85). In imitating his ancestor's gigantic rage in Act I, Antony is merely playacting and is as foolish as Pistol or any other Herculean stage braggart whose language is clearly too big for his worth—he is a slightly larger version of Moth. The frequent reference to Herod, the conventional stage blusterer, would remind the audience of the dangers inherent in the use of hyperbole: it was the language of tyrants. For much of the play, Antony's hyperbolical passion is subject to this kind of comic testing. The long scene in which Antony rages in Hercules' vein and Enobarbus consistently undercuts him (Act III, scene xiii) is fundamentally comic in structure; as I have noted elsewhere, it follows the classical pattern of miles glorious and servant. His rage here does not fully engage our sympathy, when he says, "O that I were / Upon the hill of Basan, to outroar / The horned herd, for I have savage cause" (3.13.126-28), we are disinclined to believe in the extent of his grievances or in his hyperbolical expression of an action appropriate to them. The hyperbole here dissuades us from belief and becomes mere rant. But the situation is more complex after the Egyptian fleet has joined with Caesar's. Antony in calling on his ancestor for instruction seems to recognize that his own hyperbolical language is not altogether equal to the occasion. His language here is proportionate to the cause of his rage: it is not merely rant, and it is surely no longer comic. Moreover, Cleopatra immediately verifies the heroic extent of his rage: "O, he's more mad / Than Telamon for his shield, the boar of Thessaly / Was never so emboss'd" (4.13.1-3). Though we still cannot believe in Antony's hyperbolical actions as literal, at least we believe in his rage. The hyperbole becomes an appropriate expression for the gigantic rage and, in that sense, imaginatively relevant. And after Antony hears of Cleopatra's death, he echoes her reference to Ajax in an image which sounds hyperbolical but is in fact absolutely literal: "The sevenfold shield of Ajax cannot keep / The battery from my heart" (4.14.38-39).

If Cleopatra is the first to mock Antony's hyperboles, she is also the final advocate of their truth. Cleopatra asserts to Dolabella that her dream of Antony belongs to the realm of nature, not of fancy: "to imagine / An Antony were nature's piece, 'gainst fancy, / Condemning shadows quite" (5.2.98-100). But this assertion comes only after five acts of continual testing. Even while Antony is dying, Cleopatra can acknowledge the folly of hyperbole. As she struggles to lift her into her monument, she says,

... Had I great Juno's power,
The strong-wing'd Mercury should fetch thee up,
And set thee by Jove's side. Yet come a little,
Wishers were ever fools.
[4.15.34-37]

Yet side by side with this quiet resignation to the literal is her hyperbolical appeal to the sun ("Burn the great sphere thou mov'st in" 4.15.10): precisely the crack the absence of which Caesar notes. "Wishers were ever
fools": "O, see, my women: / The crown o' the earth doth melt" (4.15.62-63). If we are finally able to believe Cleopatra's hyperbolical portrait of her Antony, it is only because she herself tells us that wishers are fools.


Peter Berek
[Berek locates the source of the play's dualism in the verbs "to do" and "to undo." He notes the play's frequent fixus on the paradox that "doing" or completing an action also ends it, or "undoes" action. Berek remarks farther that in Antony and Cleopatra, the verb "to do" refers both to making love as well as to waging war. Finally, he observes duality at work in the paradox that Antony and Cleopatra find the ultimate expression of their life and love together through suicide.]

Antony and Cleopatra is a Play in which mighty opposites meet, struggle, and embrace. Rome encounters Egypt, Reason feels Emotion, Spirit wars with Flesh, Duty yields to Leisure. These fatal conflicts corrupt Mark Antony (in the older view of the play) or (as more recent critics argue) translate the lovers into a realm of "pure nobility." In the latest book on the play [The Common Liar: An Essay on Antony and Cleopatra], Janet Adelman refuses to take sides in this lovers' quarrel. She argues that Shakespeare made it impossible to arrive at tidy, formulaic judgments of his characters and their deeds. Following Maynard Mack (who is quoting George Meredith), Professor Adelman directs those who are "hot for certainties in this our life" to some other play than this. In asserting the problematic nature of judgment and the encompassing vision of the play, she is nearer the mark than those who yield to the magnetism of one pole or another. Critical compasses which point resolutely in a single direction tell us as much about the polarities of their own needles as about the location of true North.

I don't propose to deny the existence of polarities in Antony and Cleopatra. But in this essay I focus on a perception shared by Antony, Cleopatra, and Octavius Caesar. These major characters, and minor characters as well, have a common understanding of the possibilities for action the world of the play makes available to them. Though there are great and obvious differences among their actual behaviors, characters in the play are in substantial agreement about what "doing" is worth. While they often disagree on how or when or even whether to act, they agree that there are grim limits to the joy one can take in earthly achievements.

I.
My concern for visions of "doing" in Antony and Cleopatra arises from a wish to make sense of a recurring, and somewhat peculiar, use of forms of the verb "do" in the play. Early in the action, as Enobarbus describes Cleopatra's first appearance to Mark Antony on the river Cydnus. He tells how Cleopatra's attendants cope with the intemperate Egyptian climate:

On each side of her
Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
With divers-color'd fans, whose wind did seem
To [glow] the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
And what they undid did.

Shakespeare is following North's Plutarch closely here, but the paradoxical last two lines are entirely his own.

Later, when Antony hears the false news of Cleopatra's death, he says, "Now all labor / Mars what it does; yea, very force entangles / Its elf with strength" (IV. xiv. 47-49). As Cleopatra herself prepares to die, she announces to her attendants,
... it is great
To do that thing that ends all other deeds,
Which shackles accidents and bolts up change,
Which sleeps, and never palates more the dung,
The beggar's nurse and Caesar's.
(V. ii. 4-8)

Enobarbus describes a state of affairs in which the fans of Cleopatra's attendants cool her cheeks even as the wind from those fans seems to make the same cheeks glow ardently. "Undoing"—In this case, mitigating the effects of heat with the breeze of a fan—and "doing"—making cheeks glow more brightly—are the same action, despite their ostensible opposition. The lines are puzzling because they reverse the way we would expect to find the terms used: Johnson emended them to "what they did, undid." Not only does Enobarbus conflate an action and its opposite, but he celebrates the fact that this is so and makes it one measure of Cleopatra's infinite variety. However, when Antony thinks Cleopatra is dead, "doing" creates an "undoing": "labor / Mars what it does." The act of laboring to do something brings one's labors further from fruition. Finally, with Antony dead, for Cleopatra the greatest of "doings" is "that thing that ends all other deeds." Only one labor is worth performing, and that will be the last.

All three uses of forms of "do" emphasize the paradoxical qualities of action, Enobarbus' phrase most of all. Paradox, of course, is central to the play's presentation of Cleopatra (as Adelman points out, adding that hyperbole is the characteristic trope used in presenting Antony). Paradox characterizes not just Cleopatra herself but the whole relationship between Antony and Cleopatra. Just as it is hard for us, as members of the audience, to know how to judge this mutual pair, so it is also hard for them and for other characters in the play to assess the effects of any particular cause. It's hard to know what any "doing" will in fact do. Philo's opening speech in Act I, scene i, for example, roundly condemns Antony for dereliction of duty. "This dotage of our general's / O'erflows the measure" (I. i. 1-2). Antony's eyes, in a gesture which anticipates Cleopatra's maidens who "made their bends adornings" (II. H. 208), "now bend, now turn / The office and devotion of their view / Upon a tawny front" (I. i. 4-6). Philo describes dereliction of duty in the vocabulary of secular and religious commitment, "office and devotion"; and a "tawny front" can be a forehead he adores or a battlefield where he opposes an enemy. Antony, like the cupids of the Cydnus speech, "is become the bellows and the fan / To cool a gipsy's lust" (I. i. 9-10).

But the phrase Philo uses is itself paradoxical in a way Philo surely doesn't intend. The winds of a fan cool, but the winds of a bellows are intended to make a fire burn hotter. Just as Cleopatra "makes hungry / Where most she satisfies" (II. ii. 236-37), so Antony in "dotage" heats the very lust he overtly tries to cool.

The vocabulary of doing and undoing, then, in part works to emphasize the paradoxes which are central to the relationship between the great lovers and which find their fullest expression in Enobarbus' Cydnus speech. But this vocabulary also renders more abstract than they would otherwise be the two basic actions of Antony and Cleopatra: making love and making war. Forms of the verb "do" serve as euphemisms or elliptical phrases for both sets of actions and thus stress the continuities as well as the conflicts between them. For example, Cleopatra jokes with the eunuch Mardian and asks if he has affections:

Mar. Yes, gracious madam.
Cleo. Indeed?
Mar. Not in deed, madam, for I can do nothing
But what indeed is honest to be done;
Yet have I fierce affections, and think
What Venus did with Mars.
(I. v. 13-18)
"Doing" is used as a sexual euphemism by a character who is limited in the here-and-now to perpetual dreams of possibility—as, one can argue metaphorically, Antony and Cleopatra are limited themselves. Cleopatra takes up Mardian's locution in lines charged with sexual energy as she thinks of Antony on his horse. "O happy horse, to bear the weight of Antony! / Do bravely, horse, for wot'st thou whom thou mov'st?" (I. v. 21-22). The word "do" helps bring together the world of warfare, where Roman Antony reigns supreme, and a sexual Egyptian kingdom where Cleopatra herself "does bravely" with her lover.

The verb that the queen and her eunuch use in the female world of Egypt recurs again in an aggressively masculine Roman setting. After the triumvirs make peace with Pompey, Menas and Enobarbus, two grizzled warriors, acknowledge the comradeship of fellow-craftsmen and a shared scorn for their opposed masters' politicking:

Men.— You and I have known, sir.
Ena. At sea, I think.
Men. We have, sir.
Ena. You have done well by water.
Men. And you by land.
Ena. I will praise any man that will praise me, though it cannot be denied what I have done by land.
Men. Nor what I have done by water.
(II. vi. 84-90)

Both speakers, free for a moment of diplomatic constraints, feel one another out and strut a bit in martial pride. Their euphemistic use of "do" for "fight" is partly good manners, because being forthright in acknowledging past quarrels might strain a potential drinking companionship. But their peculiar diction also implies that warfare, like sex, is the deed that dares not speak its name. Both realms are potentially so charged with emotion that one tiptoes about with periphrasis. At the same time, both realms are so important that one can count on being understood despite the obscurity of euphemisms. However, although euphemisms are a tribute to the emotional importance of the thing euphemized, they also to some degree trivialize the activity they refuse properly to name. They can be overly cute, as Mardian and Cleopatra are in their exchange. And employing the same euphemism for lovemaking and for battlefield heroism makes heroism seem as fleeting as love. Enobarbus acknowledges the fragility of heroic renown when he says, "I will praise any man that will praise me," and both Enobarbus and Menas, before their conversation ends, shift from the euphemism of "done well" to the reductive:

Ena. You have been a great thief by sea.
Men. And you by land.
(II.vi.92-93)

Indeed, military victory in Antony and Cleopatra is an ambiguous prize. The relationship is vexed between the prize of victory and the means chosen to attain that prize. Menas, man of action that he is, offers his master Pompey dominion over the world if he will let him cut the cable and fall to the throats of the carousing triumvirs (II. vii). Giving the grim deed its proper name takes the gloss off it for Pompey. "Ah, this thou shouldst have done, / And not have spoke on't!" (11. vii. 73-74), he replies. We find it hard to judge between the shrewd treason of Menas' oath-breaking and the pompous and self-defeating honor with which Pompey refuses his own best advantage. Neither action seized nor action rejected can avoid a sour aftertaste.

Doing great deeds can sometimes lead to being undone. When Ventidius enters "as it were in triumph," he shrewdly rejects urgings to extend his victory over the fleeing Parthians (III. i). Once again Shakespeare follows North closely. North writes, "Howbeit Ventidius durst not undertake to follow [the Parthians] any further, fearing least he should have gotten Antonius displeasure by it" (Arden ed., p. 267). Taking up
Plutarch's hint that Antony and Caesar "were alway more fortunate when they made warre by their Lieutenants, than by them selves" (Arden ed., p. 267), Shakespeare has Ventidius explain the motives for his actions more fully than in North:

I have done enough; a lower place, note well,  
May make too great an act. For learn this, Silius:  
Better to leave undone, than by our deed  
Acquire too high a fame when him we serve's away.  
Who does i' th' wars more than his captain can  
Becomes his captain's captain; and ambition  
(The soldier's virtue) rather makes choice of loss  
Than gain which darkens him.  
(III.i.12-15, 21-24)

A military victory can turn into a political defeat.  
There is nothing unambiguous about Ventidius' triumph.

Octavius Caesar is the paragon of worldly success in Antony and Cleopatra. He is accurate in his judgments of others, effective in his generalship, and accomplished in politics. Except for his frustrated plan to display Cleopatra in his Roman triumph, Caesar accomplishes what he sets out to accomplish. But Caesar's own expressed opinions on the worth of the successes he and others achieve are carefully measured and more than a bit rueful. In I. iv, the first scene in which we see Caesar, he tells Lepidus and his followers not to be surprised at the news that men are rallying to the rebellious Pompey:

I should have known no less:  
It hath been taught us from the primal state  
That he which is was wish'd, until he were;  
And the ebb'd man, ne'er lov'd till ne'er worth love,  
Comes [dear'd] by being lack'd.  
(I.iv.40-44)

From the beginning of government, he who has power was wished to be in power until that power was attained. The "ebbed" man (in this case, Pompey), unloved until he loses the power which truly makes one worthy of love, becomes dear to the populace by his very lack of power. Caesar asserts that being successful costs one the very love of others which helped one win success; conversely, failure, even when due to one's own misdeeds, wins popular affection. Caesar's grim realism places strict limitations upon the satisfaction one can take in the success of one's deeds or the fulfillment of one's wishes. Accomplishing one's desires, at least in the public realm, costs the very acclaim which seemed the just reward of accomplishment. That the process is cyclical and natural to politics is implied by Caesar's simile in the succeeding lines:

This common body,  
Like to a vagabond flag upon the stream,  
Goes to and back, [lackeying] the varying tide,  
To rot itself with motion.

The bloom of political success rides the tide of popular favor. That tide sometimes ebbs, sometimes flows, but never moves beyond its own bounds; the "vagabond flag" may give the illusion of motion, but its only sure change is decay.

That wishes accomplished, deeds achieved, bear within themselves the cause of the wisher's own disappointment is a perception Caesar shares with his great opposite, Mark Antony. In I. ii, Antony mediates
upon the news of Fulvia's death, saying,

Thus did I desire it.
What our contempts doth often hurl from us,
We wish it ours again. The present pleasure,
By revolution low'ring, does become
The opposite of itself. She's good, being gone;
The hand could pluck her back that shov'd her on.
(I. ii. 122-27)

Antony agrees with Caesar that our doings often make us wish ourselves undone.

II.
It is not surprising that Caesar and Antony should speak so similarly. Even after harshly criticizing Antony as "a man who is th' [abstract] of all faults / That all men follow" (I. iv. 9-10), Caesar praises his consummate soldiership. But the terms of praise raise questions about the costs of the heroism Antony once epitomized. Though Shakespeare follows North closely in Caesar's speech, he greatly intensifies the loathsomeness of the adversity Antony has endured and adds a reference to "the stale of horses" which echoes other excremental images in the play:

Thou didst drink
The stale of horses and the gilded puddle
Which beasts would cough at; thy palate then did deign
The roughest berry on the rudest hedge;
Yea, like the stag, when snow the pasture sheets,
The barks of trees thou brows'd. On the Alps
It is reported thou didst eat strange flesh,
Which some did die to look on; and all this
(It wounds thine honor that I speak it now)
Was done so like a soldier, that thy cheek
So much as lank'd not.
(I. iv. 61-71)

Before the great general entered his Egyptian dotage he was so like a soldier that he was tougher than a beast. Ordinary men, like animals, grow pale, cough, and die when called upon to ingest urine or "strange flesh," but he who would be master of heroic "doing" is capable of swallowing anything at all. But the taste, Antony and Caesar seem to agree, is unsavory indeed.

In defeat, Antony's rejecting success as dungy is psychologically plausible. But even his return to valor after the first defeat at Actium attends more to his own moods and taste for posturing than to strategic plausibility. "The next time I do fight, / I'll make death love me" (III. xiii. 191-92), says Antony, prompting that grizzled realist Enobarbus to seek some way to leave him, saying, "A diminution in our captain's brain / Restores his heart" (III. xiii. 197-98). Enobarbus soon discovers that there is no clear connection between his own brain and heart: Antony's magnanimity after his subordinate's betrayal makes Enobarbus conclude that death is better than Roman triumph purchased by brainy practicality. In victory after the second battle, Antony and Cleopatra continue to be absorbed in private rather than public feelings. Antony's heart, which Philo at the start of the play described as having burst the buckles on his breast in the "scuffles of great fights" (I. i. 7), is now the panting recipient of Cleopatra's ardor:

O thou day o' th' world,
Chain mine arm'd neck, leap thou, attire and all,
Through proof of harness to my heart, and there
Ride on the pants trimphing!
(IV. viii. 13-16)

The crucial triumph of the happy pair is within, not in the political and military world. With respect to that world, Cleopatra perceives Antony not so much as victor but as successful fugitive:

Lord of lords!
O infinite virtue, com'st thou smiling from
The world's great snare uncaught?
(IV. viii. 16-18)

The heroic Rome that Antony intermittently rejects and ultimately loses for love is, like Alpine valor, a world of excrement. Caesar wants to call Antony back to the same kingdom he rejected when he dismissed the first of the play's many messengers from Rome: "Let Rome in Tiber melt ... Kingdoms are clay; our dungy earth alike / Feeds beast as man" (I. i. 33, 35-36). The dungy earth isn't fructifying [as D. A. Traversi argues in Shakespeare: The Roman plays]; rather it is an ignoble arena in which those without vision to imagine a better are doomed to do their deeds. (Fertility in Antony and Cleopatra is associated not with dung, but with the simultaneously destroying and fertilizing "overflowing the measure" of the Nile.) Caesar, Antony, and Cleopatra agree on the appropriate language to describe the glories which Caesar achieves and the lovers eventually scorn; ruling the world requires the tasting of excretment, and there is some matter that Antony and Cleopatra will not eat. Better, says Cleopatra, to seek doing in undoing and enter the sleep of death which "never palates more the dung, / The beggar's nurse and Caesar's" (V. ii. 7-8). There is no substantial difference between Cleopatra's claim that Caesar, like beast or beggar, palates the dung to do high deeds on earth, and Caesar's own praise of Antony's greatness. Caesar persists in his efforts, swallows whatever needs to be swallowed (incuding the scorn of his critics), and masters the real world. Antony and Cleopatra agree with Caesar about the nature and cost of earthly "doing," but decide its cost is too high. For them, the undoing of self is preferable to the doing of earthly glories.

III.
Traversi speaks of a world of Alexandria in which the sensual imagination "loses itself in the gratifying imagination of boundless fulfillment" (p. 85). I have tried to show that in the political and military—perhaps one should say the "geographic"—world of the play, there are rigorous bounds to fulfillment by action. "Doing" is possible, but it carries within itself inevitable "undoing," as the "wish'd" man loses esteem by accomplishment and all achievements lackey the varying tides of historical change. But Antony asserts at the start of the play that "There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd" (I. i. 15). The lovers' kind of doing seeks after private or emotional efficaciousness rather than the reckonable achievements of Caesar's world. In their eyes, the highest form of doing occurs in supremely dramatic gestures, gestures that give specificity to the speakers' euphemistic language. The first such moment comes at the start of the play when Antony says,

the nobleness of life
Is to do thus [embracing] when such a mutual pair
And such a twain can do't.
(I. i. 36-38)

"Doing" takes on meaning, not with idea, but with gesture—it is "doing thus" that matters, and such deeds can be done only in Cleopatra's presence. The gesture's grandeur lies in its imaginative sweep, not in its truth to any actual world beyond the lovers' consciousness: Cleopatra jeers in reply, "Excellent falsehood" (I. i. 40), but mere contradictroriness doesn't wither the gesture's wonder. As the play proceeds, Antony comes more and more to substitute the dramatic gesture for practicable deeds. After having Thidias whipped, Antony knows "our terrene moon / Is now eclips'd, and it portends alone / The fall of Antony!" (III. xiii. 153-55). But
self-dramatizing reconciliation with Cleopatra restores his heart, and he assures her that he and his sword will earn their "chronicle" (III. xiii. 175) without troubling about the distinction between legend and victory. "One other gaudy night" (III. xiii. 182) is the grand "doing thus" of this scene, and by the theatrical gesture toward his sad captains Antony, reunited with Cleopatra, takes his stance firmly in the cloud-castle world of imagination.

Antony's imaginative apprehension of Cleopatra, and Cleopatra's apprehension of him, alone validates these dramatic gestures. When Antony thinks he is scorned by Cleopatra, death is simply the way to "end ourselves" (IV. xiv. 22). But when Mardian reports that Cleopatra has died with the name of Antony on her lips, Antony's tone takes on a new serenity: "Unarm, Eros, the long day's task is done, / And we must sleep" (IV. xiv. 35-36). So long as death reunites him with Cleopatra, death's undoing is the noblest of doings. He has no regret about leaving the vile world; without Cleopatra, 

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All length is torture; since the torch is out,
Lie down and stray no farther. Now all labor
Mars what it does; yea, very force entangles
Itself with strength.
(IV. xiv 46-49)
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By echoing Cleopatra's death, Antony's suicide affirms their union and asserts that the true realm of action is neither Rome nor Egypt, but that private dramatic space in which Antony and Cleopatra perform their grandest gestures. The nobleness of life was to do "thus" as Antony and Cleopatra embraced in I. i. Now, after her death and Eros',

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My queen and Eros
Have by their brave instruction got upon me
A nobleness in record; but I will be
A bridegroom in my death, and run into 't
As to a lover's bed. Come then and, Eros,
Thy master dies thy scholar: to do thus [Falling on his sword]
I learnt of thee.
(IV. xiv. 97-103)
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The only worthwhile "doing" is "to do thus"—an ultimate gesture in which sexual climax and the end of life are joined.

The gestures which accompany the phrase "do thus" give its vagueness specificity. But at the same time, the euphemistic formula obscures distinctions that we ordinarily think of as fundamental. Surely one reason death seems so available a deed to both Antony and Cleopatra is that they think of it in terms which minimize the distinctions among warring, loving, and dying. It is easier to die if you regard life as a chore and death as restful sleep. The similarity between dying and other human deeds implied by the lovers' euphemisms makes death seem a logical furthering of the nobleness of life. For the audience, euphemistic language and glamorous gesture join to create an imponderable moral dilemma. We know before we enter the theatre that falling on one's sword or holding an asp to one's breast isn't the same as defeating Caesar and ruling the world. (Critics who roundly condemn the lovers know nothing else.) But the rhetoric and gestures of the actors exhort our assent to a condition superior to fact. How can we decide whether they are heroic or semi-deluded?

"Doing thus" locates the lovers unequivocally in a world of imagination, and the imaginary nature of that world is underscored by two grim realities: Cleopatra isn't dead, and Antony botches his own suicide. But that real-world actions should fail to live up to the lovers' "gratifying imagination of boundless fulfillment" is by now hardly a surprise. Astonishingly, neither Antony nor Cleopatra even acknowledges the ironies
surrounding Antony's death. Together for the last time in the ultimate space of their kingdom, Cleopatra's monument, they play their last scene as though wished affection transcended all t

Rome Versus Egypt
Rome and Egypt function effectively as characters in Antony and Cleopatra, and the two are traditionally depicted as opposites. Rome, according to Sheila M. Smith, represents "military glory, honor, and moral duty"; Egypt represents "instinctive passion, ... extravagant love, fertility, and magnanimity." Rome, Cynthia Kolb Whitney suggests, values power and warfare; Egypt admires ease and sexuality. As William D. Wolf observes, Egypt has come to be regarded as "the place of love" and of private life, while Rome is the center of politics and public life. Smith, Whitney, and Wolf all share the view that Cleopatra personifies Egypt and Octavius Caesar embodies Rome; Antony, meanwhile, is caught between both worlds.

By the same token Wolf, along with Michael Platt and Larry S. Champion, argues that Rome and Egypt have several aspects in common. Platt, for instance, asserts that the two powers are on the wane and that Rome is losing its military integrity just as Egypt is losing its lushness. As pagan worlds, Platt concludes, both will soon be eclipsed by a new, Christian world. Wolf likewise describes Rome and Egypt as subject to change: Egypt is affected by Cleopatra's emotional fluctuations and by nature's cycles; Rome is prey to political intrigue, betrayal, and war. Wolf asserts that the change or "mutability" reflected by both worlds is what Antony and Cleopatra hope to escape from through death. Larry S. Champion condemns both Egypt and Rome as "tainted" and morally bankrupt thanks to their leaders. Champion observes that Cleopatra is self-absorbed and addicted to luxury, while Octavius Caesar is "cynical" in his arrangement of a political marriage between his sister and Antony, and Machiavellian in his dealings with Lepidus.

Michael Platt
Platt begins by comparing the Republican Rome of Shakespeare's Coriolanus and Julius Caesar with the Roman Empire of Antony and Cleopatra. Republican Rome, he explains, was characterized by "equality and friendship"; in contrast, the Roman Empire is distinguished by "love" (or the adoration of one ruler) and "inequality." Republican Rome, Platt asserts, was based on public life, the Roman Empire, on private life. Platt argues that in the play, Rome borrows the attributes of love and private life from the part of its empire that includes Egypt. He concludes that in Antony and Cleopatra, both Rome and Egypt are in a state of decline—Rome has lost its valor and Egypt has lost its fertility—and that the world is on the verge of a new era that includes the birth of Christianity.

"She's good, being gone" (1.2.122) says Antony of his dead wife. He could just as well say the same of the Roman Republic as it fades in the hearts and deeds of his countrymen. The fall of so great a thing reverberates throughout Antony and Cleopatra; the men in this play either were molded by the Republic or judge their nobility by its resplendent memory. Pompey's son recalls the Republican sentiments and declares his allegiance to them. To the Triumvirs he is about to fight he says:

What was't
That moved pale Gassius to conspire? And what
Made all-honored, honest, Roman Brutus,
With the armed rest, courtiers of beauteous freedom,
To drench the Capitol, but that they would
Have one man but a man? And that is it
Hath made me rig my navy, at whose burden
The angered ocean foams; with which I meant
To scourge th' ingratitude that despiteful Rome
Cast on my noble father.
(2.6.14-23)
These sentiments are given the lie by his subsequent deal with the Triumvirs. Menas observes that his father would not have agreed to such a deal (2.6.82-83). The sincerity of his Republican sentiments is further compromised by the subsequent banquet scene. Approached by Menas with the plot to cut the cable and the throats of his guests, he admits without shame to the desire to be "lord of all the world" (2.7.60). However, his desire is checked by his honor. While his virtue impedes his vice, let us note, it does not guide him. We even suspect that it is the weakness of his desire rather than the consideration of honor which prevents him from acting. The sensual momentum of the banquet and excess of wine sap his ambition. He laughs his fortune away, as his alert and abstaining lieutenant, Menas, observes.

In Pompey and throughout the play we see the fading of Roman virtue. It survives, but fitfully, in the intermittent courage of Antony; in his magnanimity it glows but ember-like; and in his sensuality it bows before a new god, both un-Roman and uncivil, Eros. The manners and morals of the Empire appear on the horizon of the East where Antony's pleasure lies; in Egypt will reside the private life of the Romans. At the play's end one man, Octavius, will command the streets and public places of Rome; he will sum up in himself all the public things, sharing honor and power (the old aims of the ambitious sons of the Republic) with no equal; he alone will be the Republic, the res publica, the public things. Under his rule and beneath the canopy of his peace, the private and erotic life of his subjects (no longer citizens) will come into its own.

What will succeed the Republic was already indicated by Antony in his funeral oration for Caesar. He stressed love and gratitude, the love that Caesar showed Brutus and the assembled multitude and the gratitude owed to Caesar by Brutus and by the multitude. In other words, for relations of equality and friendship he substitutes inequality and love. With the disappearance of equality under post-Republican rule, friendship will languish but love will prosper.

The Roman friendships so important in Julius Caesar will be replaced by erotic relations; all the passions (to chide, to laugh, to weep according to Antony's view of Cleopatra [1.1.49-50]), will vie to make themselves fair and admired. Erotic relations will not be those characterized by equality, but by inequality, each lover will hang by chains of passion (golden chains and therefore all the more chains); each will be each other's slave, each, each other's master. The thymetic warrior will be replaced by the soft voluptuary. The lush flora and fauna of eros, under the beneficent rays of the world empire, will choke out the hardy stalks of thymos. Nowhere is this transvaluation of values more present than in Antony; in Julius Caesar he was unscrupulous, hard, cold but also grasping and ambitious. Only the comment of Caesar about his love of pleasure and music prepares our expectation to meet this new Antony. It is hard to believe this was the man who proscribed the hundred Senators (including Cicero), altered Caesar's will, and smirked behind Lepidus' back. These changes occur within a changing world, and are an index of that change itself; Rome changes around Antony and the change is most visible in Antony.

To appreciate these changes we turn to the impressions which hit our senses as the play opens. All of Shakespeare's plays set in Rome which we have treated so far have begun with a street scene in the capital city itself, for the condition of Rome is evident in her streets. The tumultuous pleb-filled streets of Coriolanus were natural to the early Republic and the decay of that Republic was evident in the street scenes which open Julius Caesar. The plebs who then filled the streets with tumult were corrupted by a certain servile adulation of one man, and a later Cassius measures this departure from republican ways by appealing to the accord between Rome's ancient streets and her ancient regime:

When could they say (till now) that talked of Rome
That her wide walks encompassed but one man?
(1.2.154-155)

The first casualty of Antony's regime, Cinna, poet and friend to Caesar, is slain in the same wide walks.
Antony and Cleopatra opens indoors in the palace of an Eastern Queen. We are within the Roman Empire, but not in Rome. Gone are the civil streets of the Republic, replaced by a courtly interior. Still, elements of continuity are evident—a continuity which the republican eyes of Cassius would smart to look upon. "A triple-pillar of the world" (1.1.12) is Philo's image for Antony, an image which Cassius would not use unless he were persuading a friend to join him in tyrannicide. "Since when could they say (till now) that Rome's wide streets held but three men?" Cassius would murmur. But Philo (his Alexandrian name is significant) feels no slight in his master's greatness; he is a courtier whose fortunes hang on his master, not for him the honors of a consulship, or a statue with his ancestors. He chides his master for failing to pursue fortune, for failing to share his own motives. Towards the close of this scene we glimpse the streets outside this indoor court. Antony dismisses the Ambassadors and turns to Cleopatra:

Fie, wrangling queen! Whom every thing becomes—to chide, to laugh,  
To weep; whose every passion fully strives  
To make itself, in thee, fair and admired.  
No messenger but thine, and all alone  
To-night we'll wander through the streets and note  
The qualities of people. Come, my queen;  
Last night you did desire it.  
(1.1.48-55, my italics)

The tumultuous and public streets of Rome, the scene of both struggle and of triumphs, the place of politics and the arena in which honor was pursued, here give way to the uses of pleasure, diversion, privacy. All alone, their attendants dismissed and (doubtless) in disguise, these lovers will wander to the neglect of public things. "What a world of manners and morals Shakespeare manages to compress into this invitation of Antony's. True, these streets will be filled with people, but what will count to these exemplary public figures will be the light fair surface of things, the diverting look on a passing slave's face, the amusement of bargaining in the market; all the pleasant and passing impressions which occupy modern tourists will distract these lovers from the cares, the solitude, and the boredom of Imperial public life. It is impossible to imagine Coriolanus, Menenius, Volumnia, Brutus, Cassius, even Julius Caesar occupying themselves in this manner. Elsewhere Cleopatra, eager for diversion, calls for music, suggests billiards, and then fishing (2.5.1ff.). Later Antony pleads with Caesar to allow him to lead a private life in Athens, Octavius Caesar disdains it but he is about to create a world in which these will be the chief pleasures available. Magna civitas, magna voluptas.

So far we have examined the manners and morals of both Rome and Egypt from the perspective of an older, but not entirely extinguished Rome, the Rome of the Republic present on the lips of Pompey and evident by its alteration in the sensuous streets of Alexandria. We have been alerted to the fact, therefore, that when we speak of Rome in this play we must be careful to distinguish the Republic and the Empire, the Rome fought for by Brutus and Cassius, and the new Rome which arrives at the play's end when Augustus' victory over Antony leaves him absolute ruler of a peaceful Empire.

This distinction is of great importance. Often remarked by commentators of this play is the sense that two worlds of value divide the play, one Roman, one Egyptian; in the center between the world of Rome and the world of Egypt is Antony. The struggle between the two worlds focuses upon his fitful and compromising allegiance to the two worlds. This account of the play is founded in our first impressions of the action. At first glance we would say that the virtues to the Romans are the vices of the Egyptians and the vices of the Romans are Egyptian virtues. However it must be amended and modified in important respects; for each of these two worlds as they face each other are not characterized by unity; in each there is a disharmony between first impressions (often the product of the declared self-presentation of the characters) and subsequent realities. Rome is not what it appears to be; Octavius is not what he represents himself as. Nor, on the other hand do Egypt and Cleopatra live up to their first gorgeous and fertile image.
For example, there is the seductive duality which seems to face Antony. The frequent references to Antony as Hercules tempt one to see him as a Hercules who, when faced with the choice of Hercules (between Virtue pictured as a chaste woman and Vice pictured as a seductively unparalleled wench, see Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, 2.1.21ff.), chooses Vice. To see Antony in this mythological light is to succumb to the Roman view. The opposition between virtue and vice is not so clear as the Romans seek to represent it. Moreover, the play's chief Roman (in the sense of most exclusively Roman) is Octavius and he replaces the choice of virtue and vice with the struggle of *virtu* with Fortuna, a lady who, unlike Virtue, forgives the vices of the powerful and effective. And Egyptian "vice" possesses not only a certain charm for all the Romans in the play but it contains what neither Egyptian nor Roman are sensible of, the seed of new order whose new tablet of virtues and vices will transvalue ancient virtues and vices.

We will continue our treatment of Rome. Then we will treat Egypt.

In ascertaining the nature of Rome in this play the most often quoted passages are taken from the frequent condemnations of Antony. Certainly these give an impression of Roman values; but we must measure the reality of Rome by Roman deeds as well as by guilty, nostalgic speeches. A mark of the condition of Roman virtue is the conduct of Enobarbus. Brutus would never be a traitor to his cause; Coriolanus was choleric just to hear the word "traitor." Enobarbus calls his treason "reason."

When valor preys on reason,
It eats the sword it fights with: I will seek
Some way to leave him.
(3.13.199-201)

To Enobarbus' credit he comes to grieve his loss of integrity; however, the nature of his loyalty is personal and has no mixture of impersonality and principle in it. His integrity is hostage to Antony not to Rome. Like other Romans in the play, Enobarbus seems disposed to acknowledge something higher than himself, a disposition which would correct the immoderate Roman longing for immortality (in a Coriolanus) if it were not focused on a man much like himself.

Speaking of Antony's life in the East, Caesar censures his "lascivious wassails" (1.4.56), his drunkenness (1.4.20), and his familiarity with slaves. His own conduct belies his code. While Caesar is too cold to permit familiarity (having already begun to follow his namesake's habit of third-person self-reference) he is not above drunkenness at the banquet with Pompey (2.7); though he holds a prim silence through most of the wassails, he has to ask for Antony's hand in order to leave the ship. Nor are his censures of Antony moral in character; he only raises them in protest of the burdens placed upon him by Antony's absence (1.4.16ff.).

His praise of Antony's former self is in what Cleopatra calls the high Roman fashion:

When thou once
Was beaten from Modena, where thou slew's!
Hirtius and Pansa, consuls, at thy heel
Did famine follow, whom thou fought'st against
(Though daintily brought up) with patience more
Than savages could suffer. Thou didst drink
The stale of horses and the gilded puddle
Which beasts would cough at. Thy palate then did deign
The roughest berry on the rudest hedge.
Yea, like the stag when snow the pasture sheets,
The barks of trees thou browsed. On the Alps
It is reported thou didst eat strange flesh,
This praise of the Roman martial virtues of courage and fortitude stands in marked contrast to the conduct of the Romans in the play. Antony alone offers to test these qualities and it is the very utterer of these praises who refuses his challenge. Caesar's battles are all fought at sea and unlikely to test fortitude over a long engagement.

These discrepancies between the values by which Caesar measures Antony and Roman conduct in the play raise a pertinent question: is there any use for Roman courage, Roman valor? When the death of Antony gives the Empire to Augustus and peace to the Empire, of what value will be fortitude? What far-flung military engagements will require the kind of courage evinced by Antony? What scope will be provided for the exercise of ambition? What avenues will be open for the pursuit of honor? "None," is the answer provided by a scene apparently designed to answer these questions. On the edge of the Empire lies one force which might insure that Roman virtue will not languish, that Roman swords will not rust; this force lies in Parthia. At the end of Julius Caesar Cassius set free a Parthian and made him his executioner (5.3.37ff.). In Antony and Cleopatra the distant Parthians are often mentioned. Their significance, however, is concentrated into a single scene designed to reveal the moral and military condition of Rome. This scene (3.1) marks a simple contrast to its immediate predecessor (2.8). There the three pillars of the wide world (four if you count Pompey) shook, banqueted, sang, and danced to "Egyptian Bacchanals" (2.8.103) in a mutual pleasure which could not disguise their mutual distrust. The hollow drums and flourish which convey these limp pillars of the world to shore (in 2.8) ring in the mind's ear as a real warrior, Ventidius, enters in the scene immediately following (3.1).

The scene is Syria. Ventidius has just evened the death of Marcus Crassus with the death of Orodes' son Pacorus; he has just kept the Parthians from Judea, where Antony has installed Herod as King of Jewry (1.2.28). The trust and friendship his companion in arms, Silius, shows when he urges Ventidius to pursue the Parthians, contrasts with the unsteady contract which passes for friendship among the Triumvirs. Silius shows neither mistrust of his companion nor envy of his achievements; he attributes to Ventidius his own pursuit of honor and derives a frank pleasure from the honor due Ventidius. Were this the early Republic we would think these men consuls; moreover, we would expect immediate pursuit of the Parthians. Ventidius explains why he will not offer pursuit, and by explaining anatomises the present state of Rome:

O Silius, Silius,
I have done enough. A lower place, note well,
May make too great an act. For learn this, Silius,
Better to leave undone, than by our deed
Acquire too high a fame when him we serve's away.
Caesar and Antony have ever won
More in their officer than person. Sossius,
One of my place in Syria, his lieutenant,
For quick accumulation of renown,
Which he achieved by th' minute, lost his favor.
Who does i' th' wars more than his captain can
Becomes his captain's captain; and ambition
(The soldier's virtue) rather makes choice of loss
Than gain which darkens him.
I could do more to do Antonius good,
But 'twould offend him. And in his offense
Should my performance perish.
(3.1.11-27)

Ambition is now checked and men must be wary of showing distinction; how long will it be before valor falls into desuetude?

Now that the borders of the Empire have been set, what's the use of valiantness? But the toll incurred by the approaching peace of Augustus is not alone in valiancy; it is in truth. "That truth should be silent I had almost forgot," observes Enobarbus (2.2.108). Indeed, a fitting comment upon the repeated episodes of men being struck and cursed for delivering true reports or speaking truth (e.g., 2.5.23ff.). In the new era a fussy taste for truth will earn the displeasure of one's master and an invitation to take poison as a chaser. Truth, the measure of human affairs, even as Antony, the odds, is the measure of men, truth too suffers that injury called the Empire.

Underlying the hurry of action in this play is the approaching stillness of the Augustan Peace. The security of the Empire will be accompanied by inactivity. You can feel the course of Rome coming to a halt as the civil war winds up. Up until this time Rome had motion; it was a mover and a sweater (though not a breather and a panter like the Queen of the Nile). This motion might have been tumult but that tumult kept the fortunes and territories of Rome on the increase. But when Ventidius, an able commander, halts his advance against the Parthians we are given to see something revealing about the course of the Empire; now her motion and her station are as one. These words describe Rome no less than Octavia, the sister of Octavius Caesar. The peace which the death of Antony brings to the world which is known as the Pax Augusta may make the Mediterranean world as stale and as motionless as a "gilded puddle."

Hence, whenever a Roman tries to measure Antony's conduct by pristine Roman virtues we receive an impression of a decay in Rome of which the speaker is not fully aware. Their eulogies are elegies to a disappearing world; when they praise they bury. When Cleopatra tries to describe the consequences of the disappearance of Antony from the world,

    The odds is gone,
    And there is nothing left remarkable
    Beneath the visiting moon ...
(4.15.66-68)

she portrays not only the disappearance of a man but of a whole order which reared him. The elegy she composes for Antony combines with the words of Caesar:

    The breaking of so great a thing should make
    A greater crack The round world
    Should have shook lions into civil streets,
    And citizens to their dens. The death of Antony
    Is not a single doom, in the name lay
    A moiety of the world ...
(5.1.14-19)

to make us realize the remarkable stature of what is disappearing; to Cleopatra, Antony is the last man; she chooses death over Octavius. To Caesar Augustus, Antony is the last wordiy antagonist. From the vantage point occupied by Shakespeare, though by neither Caesar nor Cleopatra, we can see that Antony is also the last Roman. When Rome is unable to produce even the flawed nobility of an Antony its order is senescent.
Something like the sense of the world about to fall apart, or held together in an order which stupefies, is presented in the Rome of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Shakespeare focuses upon Rome at times of grave constitutional crisis or innovation. In *The Rape of Luasos* we have the transition from tyranny to an aristocratic Republic; in *Candanus* we have the innovation of Tribunate representation of the plebs whose bodies are now required for Rome's armies; in *Julius Caesar* we have the struggle of Republicans against the post-Republican rule of Caesar; in *Antony and Cleopatra* we see the funeral of the dead Republic and the elements which will thrive under Imperial peace. When the Roman world finally reaches a period of peace—the Augustan Peace which comes with the defeat of Antony—it is a peace of exhaustion; in *Antony and Cleopatra* the Roman order still rules, but posthumously, it is felt to be dead and incapable of producing more great men. It is dead at what seems its greatest victory.

If Rome has lost its motion and if its order is no longer youthful where can one find motion and a new order? Put in different words, where does all that's quick and lively go when it leaves politics and the city? Apparently it goes to the East and to Cleopatra; it follows Antony to the beds of the East. There in the person of Antony a warrior's integrity is replaced by the integrity of a lover. In the arms and charms of Cleopatra, Antony finds the motion which Rome now lacks; her motion and her station are not as one; in the play of passions in her breast Antony will discover whole early Republics of tumult. To the inconstancy of the passions, Antony dedicates his integrity. He seems to find a constancy in a life immersed in *eros* for there he finds the motion and quickness which characterized Rome.

The experience of *eros* in the play is focused upon Cleopatra. Unlike his source, Plutarch, Shakespeare has spent prodigally of his great poetic powers to make us feel her attraction. In her, *eros* is infinite in its variety; it fascinates the gazer, be he Enobarbus, Antony, or the many critics who have testified to her enchantment. There is no need to add to the appreciations of her charms which have been offered. What is needed is a unenchanted understanding, for Shakespeare has not made her attractions blinding. The very degree of *eros* which appears in her suggests her deficiency. She practices a sensual calculation designed to heighten pleasure, but not to provide satisfaction; she sauces every meal with something elusive; appetite swells with what it feeds on. Full satisfaction she will not or cannot provide, and so with her *eros* thrives on its own dissatisfaction. The passionate life of *eros* seems to point beyond itself to a place of where dissatisfaction is banished. The longing for Cleopatra fills the lover with longings which she cannot satisfy because they are immortal longings. The life of the lover shares with the life of the thymetic warrior (e.g., Coriolanus) a desire for immortality, an immortality which Antony and then Cleopatra reach for in their suicides. Both she and Antony seem to testify to the inadequacy of motion when they seek to shackle up change through suicide. Something lacks in their *eros*.

In a famous banquet marked by a sobriety which contrasts with the banquet of Pompey and the Triumvirs, Socrates and his friends give eulogies to *eros*. The most moving and hence erotic of the speeches is one a woman gave to the young Socrates. According to Diotima, love is a lack of something and ultimately this thing is immortality, in the variety of things which it pleases men to pursue there is always the desire to secure immortality. To adopt Cleopatra's phrase, all men have "immortal longings." Hence, the philosopher who seeks to dwell among the noble, fair and wise ideas lives the most satisfying life. He is most perfectly the lover and he most perfectly fulfills human nature.

For reasons which will emerge subsequently, I do not believe that Shakespeare means us to measure these lovers by the measure of wisdom praised by Diotima. Hence something which Diotima mentions on her ascent up the ladder of love is more pertinent. There are two modes of life, below the philosophic life, which secure a lesser portion of immortality; they are the mode of the warrior who loves honor and the mode of the parent who achieves immortality through the child. Of this mode Diotima says,

All men, Socrates, have a procreative impulse, both spiritual and physical, and when they come to maturity they feel a natural desire to beget children.... There is something divine
It is this mode, the lowest rung on the classical ladder, which claims our attention in regard to *Antony and Cleopatra*. The fascination of Cleopatra begets nothing. Despite her association with fertile flooding of the Nile, Cleopatra lacks the substance of fertility. True, there is mention of her children, but we never see them. The fruits of her union(s) are nowhere vividly and forcefully presented. When Caesar threatens the destruction of her children (5.2.128-133), Cleopatra is unmoved (5.2.134ff.). Her "fertility" is of the eye not the womb. It dazzles the eye of the beholder, but it does not make him a father. The very manner of her suicide calls attention to her infertility; at her breast a viper sucks, not an infant. Eros in Egypt appears to be a eunuch, it begets nothing. (Indeed, the character Eros, Antony's companion, slays himself.) This effectual infertility is not limited to Egypt and Cleopatra. The men in the play are nowhere presented as fathers. Both Rome and Egypt are without children. Though most of the principal figures in the play are old, there seems to be no young generation on the horizon, no children inherit the earth. Octavius was the adopted son of Julius Caesar and adoption will be a common relation between one Caesar and the next.

This absence of children is all the more remarkable in the midst of so much talk of fertility and of the fascination of eros. This remarkable observation seems all the more deliberate in the light of an event alluded to in the play. The frequent references to Herod of Jewry speak in a tongue which no Roman or Egyptian can interpret. No Roman or Egyptian could interpret God's infinite book of secrecy sufficiently to understand allusions to a King of the Jews who was disturbed at the news of the birth of a King of kings and who slew the innocent babes in Bethlehem.

It is the end of an era, though neither Romans nor Egyptians know it. The "valiant" Romans do not know that they are deedless; the "fertile" Egyptians do not know that they are seedless. The union of Antony and Cleopatra of Rome and Egypt is an old union unable to give birth to a new political and moral order. Yet unbeknownst to itself, this Empire cradles a new order in its womb. It will come from the East, but further East than Alexandria. In *Antony and Cleopatra* the new order provided by Christianity, whose focus upon the child is pronounced, seems just over the horizon, visible to Shakespeare and some of his audience, if not to his Romans. The birth of the Christ child which inaugurates the Christian era lies in pointed obscurity behind the foreground sterility of both Rome and Egypt. One sees a similiar pointed obscurity in the paintings of Breughel, in his "Crucifixion" and his "Fall of Icarus".

Rome supplies a roughness, Egypt supplies a panting, to a beast which unconsciously slouches toward Bethlehem. "With astonishing concentration Shakespeare has portrayed the demise of old Rome, the transfer of its thymetic motion to the erotic East; finally he has upstaged even the attractions of Cleopatra and pointed to a new order founded on eros and inaugurated with the birth of a Divine child. Yet he has done this with such a light hand that we cannot know whether the emphasis falls upon the divinity or the child, whether Christianity is the new order because it gives to each soul an afterlife which can shackle up mortal accidents (and hence really fulfills both Roman and Egyptian longings for immortality) or whether it is the new order because its canon against self-slaughter heralds a new loyalty to the living, changing, impermanent, and perishable things. From these frequent and sonorous reminders of the birth of Christ, we cannot tell whether Christianity is the new order because it fulfills Ancient (both Roman and Egyptian) longings for immortality or whether it is a new order because it brings to mere living a new affection capable of sustaining weary inhabitants of the Empire without the heroic exit of suicide. The image of a child who is also divine would seem to contain both these apparently contrary valuations. On the one hand, whoever hears of a child who so prefers life to death that she kills herself. On the other hand, the divinity of this child would suggest that the divine or eternal things are far superior to the mortal and momentary things. But to understand Shakespeare's account of Christianity is another task.
Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* makes us long for a better world, for world where the beauty we apprehend fitfully and uncertainly in these lovers will be strong, constant, and viable, where what is in passionate tension in them is knit whole. There we could submit wholly to wonder, unqualified as here by skepticism and uncertainty. Reading or beholding this play means struggling to judge these lovers aright, a task they struggle with too; it also means never denying either what skepticism sees or wonder divines in them. "Divines" is the precise word; we are not to think these lovers do deserve, except fitfully, our faith. Instead, we are by their imperfections meant to long for something better: by struggling to judge them we come to long for something better, by struggling to judge Rome and Egypt, we come to long for something beyond ancient politics and ancient pleasures.


**Larry S. Champion**

*[In this brief excerpt, Champion contends that the worlds of Rome and Egypt are "equally tainted." Cleopatra, he remarks, cares more about herself and her pleasure man about her subjects' needs; similarly, the supposedly disciplined Roman leaders are shown engaging in a drunken orgy on a barge.]*

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, whether actually his last tragedy or not, Shakespeare achieves his most powerful delineation of these secular values between which man struggles to make the choices for a successful life. Gone is a clear distinction between virtue and vice, between material and spiritual choice. The drama operates within the world of man, within the conflict created out of the struggle for power and influence between a Roman emperor and an Egyptian queen. And the values of these two worlds are equally tainted.

Cleopatra's world, for instance, is decadent and enervating. Nowhere do the spectators have even the slightest sense of the queen's concern for her kingdom and for the welfare of her subjects; nowhere are they convinced that her affairs with heads of the Roman state, past or present, are motivated by any sort of determination to protect her nation at any price. To the contrary, she utilizes her unlimited power and her limited beauty for the gratification of her own vanity. The first visual impression is almost cloying—Cleopatra in lavish array, the elaborate train of attendants, the eunuchs fanning her, her ladies catering to her smallest whim. Virtually every action through the first half of the play underscores this egocentric posturing. She tauntingly persuades Antony to refuse a message from Rome as a token of his doting affection. Rebuking him moments later, in total disregard for the news of his wife's death and of adverse political developments at home, she is apprehensive not because of his grief but because of the looming possibility that he might escape from her clutches. This same egocentric vanity is evidenced again later when she receives word of Antony's marriage to Octavia. At first striking the messenger and threatening to dispatch him forthwith, she finally resorts to the rather childish ploy of questioning him about Antony's wife feature by feature and then convincing herself that she is superior in every respect. Enobarbus, in mocking hyperbole, brands her passions as "pure love" (I, ii, 144), her sighs and tears as "greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report" (145-46). And she herself admits to the role she plays in maintaining a close rein on Antony by irritating and crossing him at every turn (I, iii).

The Egyptian world is also morally vitiated. For one thing, it reeks of sensuality. The bawdy wit of Iras and Charmian in the opening scene (over where best to have an additional inch of fortune in a husband and over how delightful it would be to see Alexas cuckolded) is prologue to Cleopatra's own banter with Mardian after Antony has departed for Rome. She takes "no pleasure / In aught an eunuch has" (I, v, 9-10); his affections cannot be shown "in deed" (15); one would do as well to play with a woman as "with an eunuch" (II, v, 5); his "good will" perforce will "come too short" (8). What Octavius terms her "lascivious wassails" (I, iv, 56), Enobarbus describes as occasions for sleeping "day out of countenance" and making "the night light with drinking" (II, ii, 178-79). She recalls with obvious pleasure how often she laughed Antony "into patience" at night.
and next morn,
Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed;
Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst
I wore his sword Philippan.
(II, v, 20-23)

Such a moment, as Maurice Charney observes [in *Shakespeare's Roman Plays*], visually depicts Cleopatra in "control of her lover's sword, the symbol of his manliness and soldiership." She, in her own words, is one who "trade[s] in love" (II, v, 2), trained by Julius Caesar in her "salad days" (I, v, 73). For another thing, this queen is totally devoid of the fortitude essential to leadership. She finds it easy to articulate her role as commander of her forces, insisting both that Antony fight by sea and that she accompany him as the "president" of her kingdom and fight by his side; with almost equal ease she later assumes she can erase with a word the onus of her retreat which proves so disastrous to Antony: "I little thought / You would have followed" (III, xi, 55-56).

If there is no moral fiber in Cleopatra and her court attendants, so also no such quality is to be found in Octavius and his associates. Robert Ornstein aptly remarks [in "The Ethic of the Imagination: Love and Art in *Antony and Cleopatra*""] that "the decay of Roman idealism is so advanced that it is difficult to say whether a Roman thought is of duty or disloyalty." In any event, Shakespeare methodically undermines the spectators' confidence in the Roman leaders through reflection of Lepidus' dissipation and Octavius' duplicity. Ironically, for example, despite all the references to the orgies of the East, the only such scene in the play involves the Western leaders on Pompey's barge. So drunk are Lepidus and Antony that "the least wind i' th' world will blow them down" (II, vii, 2-3); their sense "steeped" in "conquering wine" (106), they dance hand in hand, drowning their cares in a song to Bacchus. Although the "high-colored" (4) Lepidus is especially mocked by his servants, both he and Antony have turned themselves into hollow shells of the power they espouse; with an easy slit of the throat, as Menas observes, Pompey could be an "earthly Jove" (66) greater than those "world-sharers" and "competitors" (69).

Disconcerting also is the Roman marriage by which Octavius intends to insure "perpetual amity" (II, ii, 125) with Antony. Arranged lock—born not in love but in material convenience—is, of course, conventional practice both in Shakespeare's day and Caesar's. Even so, the context of heated words followed by historionic displays of affection results in a union which looks cynical indeed to the friends of the triumvirs, who have no illusions about the game they watch. Octavius bequeaths a sister to join their kingdoms and their hearts. Blest by the third triumvir, this business will be the cement with which to build and hold their love, "the ram to batter / The fortress of it" (III, ii, 30-31); Octavia will be a "blessed lottery" (El, ii, 244) to her husband. Again there is little to choose between; in trading in love Rome can better Egypt at her own game! Most degrading of all, Octavius forces truth to serve his convenience. While Antony is in Alexandria with Octavia, Caesar is quick to violate their agreement, engaging in a new war against Pompey and speaking "scantly" (III, iv, 6) of his brother-in-law to the public ear. Moreover, on his individual initiative he removes Lepidus from a position of command, denying him "rivalry" and seizing him "upon his own appeal" after "having made use of him" in the wars against Pompey (v, 6-10). His claims that he is merely responding to Antony, who has returned to Egypt to dole out kingdoms to Cleopatra's brood, are clearly post facto; Antony's actions subsequent to this power play merely provide Octavius a convenient excuse and a ready response to Octavia's queries. This use of wit to distort the facts he finds useful again in his later pronouncement that only with great hesitation was he "drawn into this war" against Antony, that he ever proceeded with calmness and gentleness in all his writings. Such boasting of leniency and mercy is mocked by the spectators' memory of Antony's earlier plea that he be allowed to "breathe between the heavens and the earth" as a "private man in Athens" (III, xii, 14-15), to which Caesar coldly responded that he would not hear the request. In the same breath he offered audience to Cleopatra only if she drove Antony from Egypt or assassinated him. So, too, Proculeius' claim in Caesar's name that Cleopatra should "fear nothing" from his "princely hand" (V, ii, 22) is belied by the soldiers' stealthy attack upon her immediately thereafter and by Dolabella's later admission that Caesar plans to lead her in triumph.
Antony

J. Leeds Barroll describes Mark Antony as "one of Shakespeare's most complexly imagined tragic heroes," and indeed, scholarly response to Antony has been various. Barrott characterizes him as lacking in conventional ideas of "social responsibility"—Antony does not, for example, feel the duty toward Rome that characters such as Octavius Caesar and Enobarbus feel he should. Nor does he feel ashamed when he neglects Roman politics or when he indulges himself in Egypt. Barroll notes that Antony does, however, feel ashamed when he flees the fighting at Actium; thus Barroll concludes that Antony is not motivated by orthodox theories of politics as Caesar is, but by his own personal notion of chivalry and public honor.

Much of the critical discussion regarding Antony has focused on his conflicting ties to Rome and Egypt. Like Barroll, Paul A. Cantor observes that despite his extravagant claims to the contrary, Antony has not completely rejected the world for the sake of his love for Cleopatra but instead remains concerned about his role as a world leader. Unlike Barroll, Cynthia Kolb Whitney argues that Antony's "Roman honor is at war with his Egyptian sexuality." William D. Wolf describes Antony as someone who is "caught between [the] irreconcilable poles" of Egypt and Rome, love and military duties, Cleopatra and Octavius Caesar—and whose ultimate response to these two, fluctuating worlds is death.

Ruth Nevo and Sheila M. Smith assess Antony's role in the context of his relationship to Cleopatra. Smith views Antony and Cleopatra as equals whose power over one another continually shifts. "Each," she observes, "is a shifty lover, guilty of treachery towards the other." Nevo describes the lovers as different personalities within a "mutual pair"—two people who approach their love for one another in conflicting ways until the closing, tragic acts of the play. Within this pairing, Nevo sees Antony as too much at home in both Rome and Egypt; further, she observes that Antony's tragedy lies in the fact that he is unwilling to choose between preeminence in Rome or devotion to Cleopatra.

Austin Wright also focuses on Antony as a tragic figure. After depicting him as "a natural athlete" with a great deal of "personal charm," Wright observes that Antony loses everything through "his own weakness": in other words, Wright contends, Antony foolishly sacrifices his former reputation for honor and military prowess to satisfy his needs as a lover.

E. A. J. Honigmann and John W. Draper approach Mark Antony from somewhat unconventional perspectives. Honigmann tackles Antony's generic role in the play. At first, Honigmann remarks, Antony appears to be almost comical as he repeatedly serves as the butt of Cleopatra's jokes and submits himself to her teasing. However Honigmann contends that after his defeat at Actium, Antony refuses to put up with Cleopatra's capriciousness; at this point, he becomes a tragic figure. Draper asserts that Antony's tragedy stems from a neurosis that is brought on by middle age and that is put under unbearable strain from the conflicting pressures of Cleopatra's love, Octavius Caesar's authority, and Enobarbus's insubordination. For additional commentary on the character of Antony, see the excerpt by Walter Cohen in the OVERVIEW section, the excerpts by David Daiches and Katherine Vance MacMullan in the LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY section, the excerpts by Janet Adelman and Peter Berek in the DUALISM section, the excerpt by Maurice Chamey in the section on CLEOPATRA, and the excerpt by Gordon Ross Smith in the section on OCTAVIUS.

John W. Draper

[Draper provides a psychological portrait of Antony, arguing that the Roman general becomes the victim of his own emotional struggle between his duty to Octavius Caesar and his fascination with the "idles" of Cleopatra. Draper observes that, as Antony ages, he suffers from a type of psychological exhaustion that prevents him from pursuing his proper role as a Roman but that instead drives him to madness and thus to...
suicide when he pursues Cleopatra and the sybaritic life in Egypt.]

According to Aristotle, a tragic plot consists of a chain of episodes causally related in which, given the characters and the initial situation, the final catastrophe is as inevitable as the outcome of a chemical experiment. Hegel, however, from a hint in Aristotle devised a variant theory that the basic principle was not so much causality as conflict, in which one or both of the adverse forces at last meets inescapable disaster. These might be objective forces portrayed by opposing characters or groups, as for example, Lear against his daughters; or the forces might be subjective, a psychological struggle within a single person—a matter more easily expressed in the fuller exposition of the novel than in the brief compass of drama. The first type, objective conflict, is common in tragedy; the second is rarer; but in Shakespeare's middle plays, it occasionally appears: In Act I of Julius Caesar, the affection of Brutus for his friend briefly contends against the patriotic arguments of the conspirators; but soon his republican idealism makes him join them in the plot against Caesar, and so this inner conflict is a mere introduction to the tragedy. Lady Macbeth likewise must suppress her womanly compunction before she embarks upon the murder of her king and guest. These subjective conflicts are only incidental: The main action appears objectively in the conflict between individuals and/or groups, such as the republican conspirators versus Caesar and Antony.

Indeed, Shakespeare's only tragedy in which the dominant conflict is subjective seems to be Antony and Cleopatra, one of his latest plays. Here the hero's political rivalries in Rome and his wars in the Orient are little more than background; and the main contest, apparent in the very first lines, concerns his political and military ambition against his infatuation for Cleopatra; and, throughout the episodes that follow, he vacillates between these two contending motives. By birth and rearing, Antony is a Roman with a Roman's ambition in the forum and the field; and his intelligence tells him that these are his rightful careers; but, more and more, his overmastering passion and his growing taste for exotic luxury draw him to the fleshpots of Egypt. Indeed, the soldier Enobarbus, whom Shakespeare developed from his source as a kind of chorus and as a contrast to the wavering Antony, repeatedly reminds us that his general, even in the welter of Roman politics, is bound to return to Cleopatra; for she had "pursed up his heart upon the river of Cydnus" so that "He will to his Egyptian dish again." Rome and Alexandria were poles apart: the former, the military and political mistress of the world with a tradition of plain, soldierly virtue; the latter, the commercial link with India and the emporium of Oriental luxury and splendor superimposed upon Hellenistic sophistication; and one can understand why the emperors so long forbade the public celebration in Rome of the orgiastic rites of Isis. Antony was torn between the conflicting ideals of soldier and sybarite.

The course of the tragedy shows this vacillation between Roman rigor and the relaxing indulgences of Egypt; and Cleopatra had at her command an "infinite variety" of allures. Even in the first scene, Philo says that "his captain's heart ... is become the bellows and the fan / To cool a gipsy's lust"; and Antony himself declares that love and pleasure are "the nobleness of life," and so "let Rome and Tiber melt, and the wide arch / Of the ranged empire fall," and he concludes, "What sport tonight?" But news of his wife's death and public affairs in Rome tear him away from the temptress: Despite her wiles, he still is more a Roman than a love-sick sensualist; and his intellect still governs his emotions. In Act II, he gives himself to politics in Italy, and even makes a marriage of convenience with Octavia; but Enobarbus tells us that he has not forgotten his Egyptian paramour and must return to her. In Act III, war breaks out between him and Caesar, who wins at Actium because, against the advice of Enobarbus and an unnamed "Soldier," Antony fights on the sea and not on land: His military judgment has deserted him. Indeed, as Caesar says,

... Cleopatra Hath nodded him to her.
He hath given his empire
Up to a whore ...

In the midst of the carnage, the queen and her fleet suddenly sail away; and he, "doting" as ever, takes after them, and so ruins his career. This is the crisis of the play and hereafter both his fortunes and his mental
powers rapidly decline. In Act IV, again in Egypt, he forgives her against his better judgment, desires one more "gaudy night" on the town, and fondly hopes against hope, now boasting, now despairing. His followers, even his divine protector, Hercules, and the faithful Enobarbus at last desert him; his martial spirit is burned out; he is no longer a soldier. "When he hears that his beloved is making sly overtures to the enemy, he kills himself, true Roman at the last—or perhaps mere disillusioned sensualist.

Plutarch's *Life of Antoni*, on which the play is based, concentrates on political and military matters, and hardly even implies its hero's psychology. It tells us merely that the sumptuous meeting with Cleopatra on the river Cydnus "ravished" Antony; it quotes Caesar's opinion that Cleopatra used charms to subdue him; and it states that just before the Battle of Actium Antony had become "subject" to her; but Plutarch shows no inward conflict between love and duty, and his Antony seems to take things quite nonchalantly just as they come—politics in Italy, fighting in the East, and luxurious sport in Egypt. Antony's instability on his return from Actium to Alexandria, his mad vacillations, his despairings and his hopes, are Shakespeare's additions, an essential motivation for the events barely set forth in Plutarch. A biography can concentrate objectively on mere fact; but a tragedy that would not sink to melodrama must show clearly in its dialogue motive and emotional detail. Therefore, one might inquire where Shakespeare got this motivation and detail that he supplied and whether it is psychologically right.

The humoral theory that was derived from Galen and accepted by Elizabethans usually gave Shakespeare motives for his characters, but Plutarch's facts forbid its use in Antony. In actual history, though Shakespeare, for dramatic compression, does not emphasize the point, some 12 years pass during the course of the tragedy: In Act I, Antony is already over 40; and, by the middle of the play, he is well beyond 50, which the Elizabethans, with their short life-expectancy, would consider old age. In Shakespeare also he is far from young: He refers to his "white" hairs among the brown and to his "grizzled head"; and soon after Caesar calls him "the old ruffian." In contrast to the freedom with which Shakespeare used Plutarch in *Julius Caesar*, this play follows the source closely, but Plutarch's narrative hardly allowed the dramatist to pattern his hero's psychology on Elizabethan medical theory; Generals and rulers, according to this theory, should be hot and dry in physique and in character choleric; and the heat in time burned out, with diminishing vital fluids, to the cold, decrepit melancholy of old age. It did not give place to Antony's infatuated ardor of the "amorous surfeiter," cold but wet and phlegmatic, under the astral influence of sensual Venus or the lunatic moon. According to the then current medical ideas, his enamored slavery fits neither his military status, which should be choleric, nor his "grizzled" hair, which should herald melancholic senility. He does not age like that old lecher Falstaff, who drinks strong wine to maintain the choler essential to his military caste, and who displays no inward struggles, no matter what he does, and no blunting of his wit; nor is Antony like Adam in *As You Like It* whose physical exhaustion does not impair his steadfast mind, nor like ancient Lear, whose royal choler, much prolonged, suddenly leaves him to senility and melancholy madness: All these in their several ways accord with the current theory; but Antony's advancing years, despite the exhaustion of "gaudy" nights in Alexandria, show a renewing of youthful ardor. Not melancholy debility but phlegmatic lust makes him desert the battle and steer his ship after the fleeing Cleopatra, and then forgive her for the unforgivable. He has changed from the choleric Roman of Act I, who left her at political behest, into a phlegmatic voluptuary, who has no thought of consequences, in fact, no thought at all; and Enobarbus notes with soldierly disgust a "diminution" in his general's intellect. In short, Plutarch has obligated the playwright to set aside accepted medical theory, and depict advancing years as turning the soldier into the sybarite; and such a change implies a protracted tension in which native ideals and obvious good sense give way by degrees to overwhelming passion.

The younger Antony of *Julius Caesar*, sharp politician and successful general, properly looked forward to becoming a power in the state; but the older Antony, having achieved great power and a time of life that ought to have brought wisdom, looks forward more and more only to Cleopatra; and, as the tragedy unfolds, the inner conflict of this strange transition becomes close to psychosis, a conflict between past and present, between intellect and emotion, that reduces the sufferer to bad judgment at Actium and later in Egypt to
instability and utter folly. In Act IV, Antony's oscillation between bravado and despair and his escapist fantasies might make some Elizabethans suppose that at the last he lapsed into a melancholy madness; but the lines of the play lack the terminology of the Galenic humors, except for Enobarbus' reference to the "damp of night" as "melancholy" when he is about to kill himself; and Antony's psychological evolution seems to follow no contemporary theory: He is not a younger Lear.

Modem psychiatry, however, attests to the substantial accuracy of Shakespeare's portraiture. Antony's type of severe disorder often "develops slowly and insidiously over a long period of years," and, as in Antony, may hardly be evident until "later life": furthermore, "toxic-exhaustion factors," which should be especially potent as bodily strength declines, would speed the progress of the disease; and Antony's dissolute life would grow increasingly exhausting. The consequence is a "disharmony between mood and thought"—a sort of shattered personality. By degrees, he shows "great instability," which often is a symptom of psychosis, and at the end extremes of ambivalence, which Scams notes:

... Antony
Is valiant, and dejected, and by starts
His fretted fortunes give him hope and fear,
Of what he has and has not.

Indeed, Cleopatra calls him "mad." The "genius type" was believed to be subject to such fits, and Antony was no ordinary man. By following his paramour in her flight after Actium, he shows "domination of thinking entirely by emotion." The sufferer "may shrink from facing the situation directly, and may temporize in the hope that something will turn up;" and so, on his return to Egypt Antony still hopes against hope. He takes refuge in "phantasy" and the illusion that he still can win; but outwardly, he has "coherent speech" that seems like sanity. Shakespeare, indeed, has filled out Plutarch's narrative with a true realism of psychological detail.

Today, with better hygiene and longer life-expectancy, men are not lacking who prolong their sexual urge beyond the threshold of old age; and, doubtless, some such existed in Elizabethan times, and in that boisterous day experienced conditions that tore their personalities apart. Shakespeare may well have noted their changing symptoms: Even obvious lunatics, if not actually violent, could be seen walking the streets of London without restraint; and Antony's disease, at least in its earlier stages, might pass for mere eccentricity. Personal observation was undoubtedly the basis for Shakespeare's vivid local color in the Falstaff plays; and, even when his characters were conceived of in terms of current humoral and astrological theory, he doubtless supplemented this with his own eyes and ears, and, like all of us, subconsciously interpreted what he saw and heard in terms of the patterns that he and his audience accepted as true science. Late in his career, however, he used as his source a famous biographical classic that Galenic theory could not explain; and, perhaps because the strictures that Ben Jonson is thought to have made on *Julius Caesar* now caused him to follow Plutarch more carefully, or because the authority of traditional science was declining—as evidenced in Bacon—Shakespeare, rather than change Plutarch, apparently trusted his own observation in depicting the course of a mental disease. Antony's malady may originally have been precipitated by the shock of this new and startling Egyptian life, stage-managed so astutely by the queen; but, as this initial shock took place before the play began, Shakespeare leaves it as mere inference; but he correctly charts the case history of Antony's illness until at the last, Roman custom combines with loss of mental balance to bring on suicide.

Cleopatra is the perfect foil to Antony: She has the same two humors, choler of dominion and phlegm proper to womanhood; but she keeps her phlegm subordinate to the requirements of her choler; and so there is no conflict; and, when she is not playing a part, she shows an integrated, almost masculine, choler. Whereas Antony's intellect and strength of character are lapsing into irresolution; Cleopatra's shrewd intelligence is always in command; it calculates the wiles by which she holds her lover; it tells her when his star is setting so that she looks forward hopefully to Caesar and turns Actium into Caesar's victory; it finally shows her that his fair promises are false and her hope to rule him an illusion; and so, to avoid the degradation of grasping his
Roman triumph, she kills herself, secretly, quickly, and as painlessly as she can, for she had provided even for this outcome. Antony had been a fine figure of a man and ruler of the East, even if "ruffian" and half-barbarous Roman; and she had ruled him; for, since her personal and her political interests ran concurrently, she had no inner struggle: Her problems were not of aim and purpose but only of the details for accomplishing these aims, a matter not of strategy but mere tactics.

For a whole generation, she had kept Egypt independent and herself its queen by enchanting her would-be conquerors; but the future Emperor Augustus was as cool and calculating and well integrated as herself, and so was not to be enchanted. Antony was her last conquest. Cleopatra's two contrasting humors apparently follow Galenic theory: In seeming, she is as supine, luxurious and amorous as the phlegmatic Antony; and, as this accorded with her sex, the appearance was all the more convincing. But in her this humor was subject to strong choler under the astral influence of the sun, astute but hidden like that of Iago and more extreme than that of Shakespeare's independent heroines. Like them, she gets what she wants by shrewd maneuvering under the guise of poor, weak womanhood: As a mere girl, she got Julius Caesar and so saved herself and Egypt; in middle life, she got Antony; and, when she saw that she could not get the future Augustus, she put an asp to her breast. Antony, still something of a Roman, falls on his sword; and she with crown and jewels dies in the panoply of the last Egyptian queen.

Most of Shakespeare's plays are based on old stories, often-times crude, that were well known and popular; but, as his art developed, he generally revised these stories to give them motive and characterization in terms of the accepted psychology of the day; but he did not so revise the Antony of Plutarch, for it could not be so explained: Plutarch's Antony is no youthful sanguine lover like Orlando or Ferdinand, nor a weakly mercurial Macbeth, who could hardly have committed regicide without his wife's support. In the Roman scheme of life, he had desired and achieved both military glory and high office, as Shakespeare shows in *Julius Caesar* and as the audience well knew. Not his weakness, therefore, but his very strength must be made to cause his downfall; and strength makes conflict all the more severe. Even as he aged, he was still very much a man, with a man's virile urges; and Cleopatra was very much a woman, with all the arts of the Orient at her command; and Antony succumbed. His ruin could come only by the ruin of his inner self; and so the tragedy had to show the conflict of shattered personality; and, since Elizabethan popular science had no pattern for such a conflict, Shakespeare had to depict and interpret life as he saw it, and hope that the audience would understand. Half a century later, Dryden's heroic plays likewise present the clash between love and honor, but not with Shakespeare's depth of understanding. *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare's final tragedy, again presents the ruin of a strong man; but the major conflict is objective, between the hero and the plebs; and not until Act V, Scene iii does an inner struggle appear: The malign effects of choleric pride were a commonplace of Elizabethan thought, and so the plot could proceed clearly to its catastrophe. *Antony and Cleopatra* presented a far more vexing problem; for Plutarch's depiction of Antony obliged the dramatist to depend for character-analysis on his own observation, and hope that the audience could follow, and the truth of his portrayal as attested by modern science shows that the master-playwright could see even beyond the problems of the normal human mind and express the progress of a psychiatric state uncharted in popular theory. Each of the major figures that surrounds Antony represents a force straining upon his personality. Enobarbus, whom Shakespeare developed from Plutarch to express the Roman military ideal; Caesar, the civic success expected of every Roman; and Cleopatra, whose entangling web enmeshed and overcame the other two forces in Antony's character, so that at last Antony, having negated his inborn Roman self, was also overcome.


**J. Leeds Barroll**

*In this excerpt from his chapter-length analysis of Mark Antony, Barroll argues that Antony refuses to be ruled by other characters' ideas of honor. Antony does not, Barroll suggests, think in terms of politics or strategy as Caesar does, nor does he feel ashamed that he has spent so much time luxuriating in Egypt.*
Instead, Barroll asserts, Mark Antony has a chivalric sense of honor that celebrates bravery and courage rather than military theory; linked to and perhaps more important than this chivalry is a strong reliance on Cleopatra's belief in their "mutual" love. Thus when Antony loses a battle he becomes depressed, but when he hears that Cleopatra has apparently killed herself, he becomes suicidal.

I

Mark Antony is one of Shakespeare's most complexly imagined tragic heroes. For this we thank, of course, Shakespeare's human empathy and genius. But the compelling quality of Antony's humanity owes as much to strategy as to genius. And if, in the end, these are perhaps the same thing, then the strategy by which genius brings Antony to life, makes him a tragic "character," is Shakespeare's emphasis on desire. For this in us is a complicated and deeply implicated phenomenon whose entangled state is much more specifically human than is grief, anger, or fear. These responses animals share with us. But our humanity is delineated by the kaleidoscopic focusings and terrible steadiness of our wishing.

That the strangeness of desire is Shakespeare's basic framework for "talking about" the character of Mark Antony is apparent at the outset. We are immediately confronted with a life being torn between "Egypt" and "Rome." But Rome and Egypt, in torn, are mere geographical, or political expressions that, in the end, oversimplify everything. Indeed, if we allow the idea of Egypt and the concept of Rome to act as allegorical stations we lose the point. West tugging with East over Antony's fallible but attractive Renaissance soul; psychomachia pitting Duty vs. Lust, Love vs. Greed, or Imagination vs. Reason—these are all attractive dualities. But Shakespeare's drama is a tragedy about an imagined human being, not an Essay on the Good Life in which Antony is to be significantly manipulated from pillar of Roman virtue to post of Egyptian inebriation. Ancient Rome and ancient Egypt in Shakespeare's drama are suggestions about confusion, not the panels of a medieval painting. Desire is not a simple duality: that is why it is complex.

Enobarbus, that careful (but often careless) observer of Antony, says about him, "Antony will use his affection where it is." And, in the long run, Enobarbus cannot help but mislead us too. For in Shakespeare's time, as today, "affection" was a multiplex word for a difficult envisioning, more complicated than what Enobarbus seems to intend by his words. After Antony follows Cleopatra's prematurely panicking battleship, thus fatally confusing his fleet and losing the empire of the world, the lamentations and shock are succeeded by a quiet scene in which Cleopatra reflects about what has happened.

Whose fault is all this? she asks Enobarbus and again he talks about "affection." The battle, he says, was lost by

Antony only, that would make his will
Lord of his reason. What though you fled
From that great face of war, whose several ranges
Frighted each other? Why should he follow?
The itch of his affection should not then
Have nick'd his captainship, at such a point,
When half to half the world oppos'd, he being
The meered question.
(3.13.2-10)

"Affection," we are to understand, then, is that thing in Antony which draws him from his true Roman interests to Cleopatra and the Egyptian life.

Symmetrical enough—at least for Enobarbus—but for Antony himself the choices do not seem quite so cut and dried. "I'th'East my pleasure lies" was indeed the frank statement of one kind of allegiance, but other statements, other allegiances render and blend "affection" into something complexly hued beyond dualities.
What happened at Actium denied any neatly distributed, defined, and scaled hierarchies of value in Antony. For there, fighting not simply against something, but for something—for his relationship with Cleopatra—and with everything to gain from victory, he nevertheless allowed himself to lose.

And having lost, why could he not have been content with Cleopatra, the world well lost for love? Indeed, his passion, his anger, his regrets force us to seek Antony somewhere within the complex of these contradictions, beyond the pale of Enobarbus's adages. Our quest begins at Actium in these Antonian writhings.

Hark, the land bids me tread no more upon't,  
It is ash'md't to bear me.  
(3.11.1-2)

And, to Cleopatra here.

O, whither has thou led me, Egypt? See  
How I convey my shame out of thine eyes  
By looking back what I have left behind  
'Stroy'd in dishonor.  
(3.11.51-54)

There is much in this play of Antony and shame. Very early on, Caesar talks about it. Antony's "shames" should from luxurious Egypt "quickly drive him to Rome." But in this case Antony is not so affected. Free from a sense of guilt despite the spate of moralisms which have surrounded him (and us) since the play began, Antony in Rome responds to the Caesarean lecture as if he came from another planet. Antony, we gather, cannot be held responsible for the activities of relatives or of wives fomenting civil wars. Nor, for that matter, can he be expected to inconvenience himself for messengers who come too early in the morning from Caesar, especially when one might have a hangover. Caesar urges that Antony broke his oath—but Antony will not stand for this either.

as nearly as I may,  
I'll play the penitent to you; but mine honesty  
Shall not make poor my greatness, nor my power  
Work without it.  
(2.2.91-94)

And it is presumably with the same aplomb that Antony will later alternate infidelities. Barely speaking four lines, he will agree to marry Caesar's sister to establish stronger political ties with him. Barely speaking two lines, he will desert Octavia for Egypt, and for war with Caesar, whom he sought to reassure by marrying Octavia in the first place.

No, Antony is not ashamed to have been truant—in fact, so little is he affected on this Roman score that one wonders why he left Egypt at all. For indeed the play began with this awakening. But the drama began too by making it clear that Antony departs from the East for reasons which do not wholly embrace ideas of Roman imperium. Otherwise, why, on his way to Rome, did he send back a pearl to Cleopatra with the message that he would "piece her opulent throne with kingdoms?"

When it comes to shame, Antony will know his own personal cue.

Since Cleopatra died  
I have liv'd in such dishonor that the gods  
Detest my baseness. I, that with my sword
Quarter'd the world, and o'er green Neptune's back
With ships made cities, condemn myself to lack
The courage of a woman—less noble mind
Than she which by her death our Caesar tells,
"I am conqueror of myself."
(4.14.55-62)

Honor and nobility—to Antony these mean one thing: bravery, physical courage. As when Eros, having put a sword through himself before his master did, elicits this:

Thrice-nobler than myself!
Thou teachest me, O valiant Eros, what
I should, and thou couldst not. My queen and Eros
Have by their brave instruction got upon me
A nobleness in record.
(4.14.95-99)

In the wreckage of Actium, that central point in tragedy, this, for Antony is the only, the real, issue. For the very notion of seeming to flee, of seeming to act the coward by following Cleopatra's retiring ship arouses in Antony a sense of self-destroying more profound than he ever experienced leaving Rome for revels in Egypt. At Actium, one has "instructed cowards" and thus one has left oneself. He has lost his way forever and he is most profoundly ashamed. "I follo'd that I blush to look upon." "For indeed," as he dismisses his friends, "I have lost command." Yet, in our sense, how could he have been a coward? He followed Cleopatra's ship when she herself fled. True. That following broke up the order of the fleet and of course brought disaster is true too. So Antony worried about the queen and became a tactical imbecile. Yet he thinks "coward," not "imbecile."

Contrast this with a future mood, the elan of the second, strategically futile battle before Alexandria. "You that will fight," he calls to his soldiers, "follow me close. I'll bring you to't." And from this fight—the only one we ever see him win—we watch him come and note his high celebration. But not as a general—he has won nothing. As a successful gladiator.

Through Alexandria make a jolly march,
Bear our hack'd targets like the men that owe them.
(4.8.30-31)

Euphoria overwhelms as he paints his magnificent hyperbole.

Had our great palace the capacity
To camp this host, we all would sup together,
And drink carouses to the next day's fate,
Which promises royal peril. Trumpeters,
With brazen din blast you the city's ear,
Make mingle with our rattling tamborines
That heaven and earth may strike their sounds together,
Applauding our approach. Exeunt
(4.8.32-39)

This is a tragedy about love, as critics all must tell us, but love is not a single, simple thing. In the dawn before his battle, when Antony meets a soldier armed and ready, he says:
Thou look'st like him that knows a warlike charge.
To business that we love, we rise betime,
And go to't with delight.
(4.4.19-21)

Antony, as his queen noted, is up early himself. Strange then that Actium should be such a terrible failure.

But what is not so strange by these lights is how the play itself begins; this soldier sense in Antony makes his "awakening" clear. Our earliest cue for him in this play has always seemed to be Cleopatra's when she tells us that Antony was inclined to mirth, but now "a Roman diought hath struck him." Yet the only "Roman" thoughts available up to now have been the opening remarks of those two shadowy figures, Demetrius and Philo. (But if these two had actually hailed each other by name, they would have struck their seventeenth-century auditors not as Roman, but as Greek.) It is they who tell us, anyhow, that Antony, the once-great leader, has now become "the bellows and the fan to cool a gypsy's lust." Sometimes, too, we gather, "when he is not Antony, he comes too short of that great property--which still should go--with Antony."

Thus emerges the first Antonian "self" molded from the sensitivities of Roman (?) soldiers (?). But when Antony himself comes to prove Cleopatra's accuracy about Roman thoughts—to show some second "self" he has not become a Roman. Hearing that Labienus and his Parthian forces are on the move against him, Antony urges his faltering messenger:

Speak to me home, mince not the general tongue;
Name Cleopatra as she is call'd in Rome.
Rail thou In Fulvia's phrase, and taunt my faults
With such full license as both truth and malice
Have power to utter. O then we bring forth weeds
When our quick winds lie still, and our ills told us
Is as our earing.
(1.2.105-11)

"These strong Egyptian fetters I must break," he mutters, "or lose myself in dotage." Perhaps there is here some Roman "shame," but it is an oddly aphoristic and mannered guilt, contrasting with the passions to come at Actium. Here all this weed-growing seems small stimulus.

The news of his wife's death prompts proper regret and muted encomium—"there's a great spirit gone"—and even some properly moral words about Cleopatra:

I must from this enchanting queen break off;
Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know,
My idleness doth hatch.
(1.2.128-30)

But, as the messengers succeed one another to inundate him with news to which he now responds—if not attends—it becomes quite clear that government affairs are not the issue. The challenge is Pompey.

Antony speaks to Enobarbus about him at length, and then to Cleopatra too. Caesar also speaks of Pompey, far away in Rome, but when Caesar talks about him and the danger he poses, the Roman leader tends to comment in Tudor words appropriate to Shakespeare's Henry IV: giddy rebelling Roman multitudes surging behind some Roman Jack Cade. Antony dutifully moves in the fringes of these ideas too, but the thrust of his meaning is elsewhere.
Sextus Pompeius
[Hath] given the dare to Caesar, and commands
The empire of the sea. Our slippery people,
Whose love is never link’d to the deserver
Till his deserts are past, begin to throw
Pompey the Great and all his dignities
Upon his son, who, high in name and power,
Higher than both in blood and life, stands up
For the main soldier.
(1.2.183-91)

This is the concept that engages Antony. Some one else is acting the "main soldier." And Antony describes Sextus to Cleopatra—he speaks to her about him too—as "the condemn'd Pompey, rich in his father's honor." The "main soldier" is merely riding on the military reputation of Pompeius Magnus whom the tribunes lamented at the beginning of *Julius Caesar*.

In Rome, Antony turns to the subject with Caesar. His words here are not the quintessence of *realpolitik*. They are almost chivalric, redolent of tournament.

I did not think to draw my sword 'gainst Pompey,
For he hath laid strange courtesies and great
Of late upon me. I must thank him only,
Lest my remembrance suffer ill report;
At heel of that, defy him.
(2.2.153-57)

The news, however, is bad.

Ant. What is his strength by land?
Caes. Great and increasing; but by sea
He is an absolute master.
Ant. So is the fame.
Would we had spoke together!
(2.2.161-64)

"Speaking together" means "joining battle."

The triumvirate meet with Pompey, who begins the proceedings with a passionate speech of defiance. Caesar responds in his usual matter-of-fact, take-it-or-leave-it tone. What we hear from Antony is something else.

Thou cans't not fear us, Pompey, with thy sails;
We'll speak with thee at sea. At land, thou know'st
How much we do o'er-count thee.
(2.6.24-26)

Caesar has already mentioned the hopelessness of trying to match the pirate-leader on the water, but Antony must, it seems, respond. And if there is more emotion than reason in Antony here, it produces that cautious compliment of a later exchange. Pompey (significantly) shakes hands with Antony before he does with the others, saying
Let me have your hand.
I did not think, sir, to have met you here.
_Ant._ The beds i'th'East are soft, and thanks to you,
That call'd me timelier than my purpose hither;
For I have gain'd by't.
(2.6.48-52)

We must attend this Antony, for although it is not all of him it is part of his sense of himself, and that is all of him. "O love," he says to Cleopatra before that victorious, futile battle toward the end of the tragedy.

That thou could'st see my wars to-day, and knew'st
The royal occupation, thou should'st see
A workman in't.
(4.4.15-18)

"I'll leave thee now like a man of steel." And even after the final disaster his language figures forth his vision of the warrior supreme. "Bruis'd pieces go, you have been nobly borne." Later, in rage, this supremacy is of almost Herculean transcendence.

_Teach me,
   Alcides, thou mine ancestor, thy rage._
_Let me lodge Lichas on the horns o'th'moon,_
   And with those hands, that grasp'd the heaviest club,
_Subdue my worthiest self._
(4.12.43-47)

Antony's private feeling of self lives away from all those judging notions of his duties which others of the play are always so ready to envisage for him. From these judges we hear many versions of what Antony "is" and what he should be—from Pompey, Lepidus, Enobarbus, Caesar, and Cleopatra—but it is interesting that, in the end, not one of these judging or supposedly knowing characters can avoid being surprised, startled, or disappointed. For in Antony's world, honor, baseness, duty, nobility achieve their definition not in conventional terms, but, perhaps, in a context illuminated by Antony's own metaphor when he breaks in upon the tearful farewell between his bride, Octavia, and her brother to whom she clings for a moment. Antony takes Caesar's hand in farewell.

_Come, sir, come,_
_I'll wrasle with you in my strength of love._
_Look, here I have you, thus I let you go,_
   And give you to the gods._
(3.2.61-64)

The wrestling is figurative, but Antony is the victor.

The moment, light and fleeting enough to die under the hand of analysis, tells in the silent language of drama of one of Antony's worlds, more real than Egypt or Rome.

_II_
If Antony were wedded to physical courage—to some naive concept of "manliness"—he would have anticipated the Hemingway ideal by three hundred or so years. But Shakespeare endowed his tragic hero more complexly, beyond the dimensions of Ajax, whose solution to most problems, in _Troilus and Cressida_, was "poshing" some one. Antony seems related to a general pattern of behavior in what Shakespeare's contemporaries would
have termed "pleasure," that conglomeration of yearnings for sensual stimuli of all kinds, as well as an attraction to physically induced and totally enjoyed euphoria to which the dramatist Thomas Lodge and his contemporaries interestingly gave the name of "sloth." Such moral terms need not overconcern us—they concern Caesar and his fellow Romans too much already, ever anxious as they all are to wrap up the hero squirming into the amber of a morality drama in which he can forever play sinner to Caesar's redeemed man. But we must all the same—and without Caesar's eager help—take note of Antony's propensities.

There is, for example, love—not a simple thing in Mark Antony's universe.

Now for the love of Love, and her soft hours,
Let's not confound the time with conference harsh;
There's not a minute of our lives should stretch
Without some pleasure now. What sport tonight?
(1.1.44-47)

Here is Antony, the much-discussed voluptuary, fond of physical beauty. At Cleopatra's first banquet he "for his ordinary pays his heart for what his eyes eat only," as Enobarbus put it. And even to Octavia, Antony is not totally indifferent. These are his words about his new wife as she talks weepingly to her brother, Caesar, the hero making his remarks beyond their hearing:

Her tongue will not obey her heart, nor can
Her heart inform her tongue—the swan's down feather,
That stands upon the swell at the full of tide,
And neither way inclines.
(3.2.47-50)

Enobarbus speaks of "our courteous Antony whom ne'er the word of 'No' woman heard speak" and it is obvious that women indeed do something for Antony. It is as if they help his imagination. When he prepares for the Battle of Actium he takes Cleopatra with him, much to Enobarbus's consternation as he argues this out with the queen. But "we'll to our ship," Antony announces in grand exit with the Egyptian queen:

Away, my Thetis!

This was the sea-nymph of the silver feet who danced on the dark waves with her sisters in the moonlight before the secret and astounded eyes of Peleus who bravely entwined with her Protean and savage forms to win her and engender in her Achilles.

But let us not rush to implicate Cleopatra as the only begetter of Antony's sensualities and thus to make his woes a tale of her fashioning. It is important that we allow the queen to stand apart. Voluptuousness is Antony's own leaning, as is emphasized by the Roman banquet which presents the only revels we observe in the drama. This celebration is a triumvirate affair and Caesar predictably complains of unseemly levity and of washing the brain with wine, which makes it dirtier. But it is our Antony who urges things on. "Be a child o'th'time," he tells Caesar, and Antony and Pompey, their host, respond with alacrity as Enobarbus celebrates:

Ha, my brave emperor!
Shall we dance now the Egyptian bacchanals
And celebrate our drink?
_Pom._ Let's ha't, good soldier.
_Ant._ Come, let's all take hands,
Till that the conquering wine hath steep'd our sense
In soft and delicate Lethe.
So they dance, and shout the refrain: "Cup us till the world go round!" If we search for Cleopatra in this
entertainment, we will find that she is far away, in Egypt. For we are now in Italy.

Where Shakespeare makes Antony especially interesting is in the fact that the hero is proud of this voluptuary
mode in himself. In truth, the pleasures of the flesh and of combat and of the idea of women are his personal
way to a sense of exaltation which he sees as the gates to a kind of transcendence. The ambition of his soul
achieves its natural mode of expression in these domains. To be preeminent in existence is the core of
ambition, and if "existence" resides especially in life's physical feelings and beauties, then preeminence must
be there too—somehow.

Thus self-admiration is everywhere in his physical life. The queen quotes him.

When you sued staying,
Then was the time for words; no going then;
Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
Bliss in our brows' bent; none our parts so poor
But was a race of heaven,
(1.3.33-37)

It is a state that can even extend beyond death.

Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,
And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze.
Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops,
And all the haunt be ours.
(4.14.51-54)

So Antony's opening statement is wholly appropriate to him.

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space,
Kingdoms are clay; our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man; the nobleness of life
Is to do thus ... when such a mutual pair
And such a twain can do't, in which I bind,
[On] pain of punishment, the world to weet
We stand up peerless.
(1.1.33-40)

So, what of it? To love these things and to think this way—-to live with feasting, battle, women—is not
necessarily to court disaster. Indeed, Philo speaks of a "great property" in Antony. Pompey says of the hero's
soldiership that it is indeed "twice the other twain." Antony is not deluding himself about his military
reputation. For these opinions about him, are reinforced further with the words of Eros. In Plutarch's Life of
Antonius, Shakespeare's primary source for events in this play, Antonius lost badly to the Parthians, but in
Shakespeare, when Eros refuses to help Antony kill himself, he mitigates this Parthian disaster:

Shall I do that which all the Parthian darts,
Though enemy, lost aim and could not?
(4.14.70-71)
Antony's soldiership also receives the praise of the scarred soldier, Scarus, after the land-battle at Alexandria, when he corroborates Agrippa's surprise at the military reversal of Caesarian momentum.

Oh my brave Emperor, this is fought indeed!
Had we done so at first, we had droven them home
With clouts about their heads.
(4.7.4-6)

Yet there is an irony in Scarus's words, just as it lurks in Caesar's magnificent description of that Antony to whom even he must yield respect.

When thou once
Was beaten from Modena, where thou slew'st
Hirtius and Pansa, consuls, at thy heel
Did famine follow, whom thou fought'st against
(Though daintily brought up) with patience more
Than savages could suffer. Thou didst drink
The stale of horses and the gilded puddle
Which beasts would cough at; thy palate then did deign
The roughest berry on the rudest hedge;
Yea, like the stag, when snow the pasture sheets,
The barks of trees thou brows'd. On the Alps
It is reported thou didst eat strange flesh,
Which some did die to look on; and all this
Was borne so like a soldier, that thy cheek
So much as lank'd not.
(1.4.56-71)

For despite all this, there are the facts. Antony lost at Modena, he lost in Parthia, he loses at Actium, and he will lose the last battle. When he triumphs in the fighting celebrated by Scants, Antony gains little but the desertions which collapse the last battle around him. And when there is a victory in Parthia, it is won by Antony's general, Ventidius, who tells his lieutenant that

Caesar and Antony have ever won
More in their officer than person.
(3.1.16-17)

For Caesar this is not important—he has no personal military aspirations. For Antony, it is crucial. Is it true?

"Now Antonius was made so subject to a woman's will that though he was a great deal stronger by land, yet for Cleopatra's sake, he would needs have this battle tried by sea," writes Plutarch. Cleopatra again emerges as the destructive femme fatale. But in one of the most significant deviations from this source in the whole play, the line Shakespeare adopts is not this at all. The hero speaks to his general Canidius.

Ant. Canidius, we
Will fight with him by sea.
Cleo. By sea, what else?
Can. Why will my lord do so?
Ant. For that he dares us to't.
Enrib. So hath my lord dar'd him to single fight.
Ay, and to wage this battle at Pharsalia,
Where Caesar fought with Pompey. But these offers,
Which serve not for his vantage, he shakes off,
And so should you.
(3.7.27-34)

It is of the utmost importance to note that Shakespeare's version of why Antony chose a naval battle has little
to do with what Cleopatra does or does not want, no matter how much her subsequent flight may obscure this.
The point is even reemphasized by the scene before the final battle wherein Caesar, having lost the land-battle
at Alexandria, apparently has less concern for his own "honor."

Ant. Their preparation is to-day by sea,
We please them not by land.
Scar. For both, my lord.
Ant. I would they'd fight i'th'fire or i'th'air;
We'd fight there too. But this it is: our foot
Upon the hills adjoining to the city
Shall stay with us—order for sea is given,
They have put forth the haven.
(4.10.1-7)

Again this is not Plutarch; this is Shakespeare's Antony and his response to what he sees as a "dare."

It is not possible to restrain Antony in these things, any more than it is possible for the soothsayer to reveal the
unpleasant fact of Caesar's dominance. "Speak this no more." Antony always rejects the idea that his
subjectivity may not be all-sufficient, and this adamantine streak in his geniality is always there. Ventidius
was afraid to follow up his victory against the Paithians.

I could do more to do Antonius good,
But, 'twould offend him; and in his offense
Should my performance perish.
(3.1.25-27)

This is what must be done to avoid irritating Antony:

I'll humbly signify what in his name,
That magical word of war, we have effected;
How with his banners, and his well-paid ranks,
The ne'er-yet-beaten horse of Parthia
We have jaded out o'th' field.
(3.1.30-34)

Before Actium, in his effort to persuade Antony to avoid that sea-battle, Enobarbus alters his own
characteristically blunt way of speaking to adopt the same "magical-word-of-war" line. "By sea, by sea,"
Antony persists, and Enobarbus:

Most worthy sir, you therein throw away
The absolute soldiery you have by land,
Distract your army, which doth most consist
Of war-mark'd footmen, leave unexecuted
Your own renowned knowledge.
(3.7.41-45)
The fact, however, is that Shakespeare's Mark Antony tends to view military problems with the moods of a swordsman rather than with the detachment of a general. And though his performance in the battle line itself is always formidable, in concepts of strategy his predispositions render him indifferent or inept. Before Actium, speaking of Caesar's deployment, he sounds naive.

Is it not strange, Canidius,
That from Tarentum and Brundusium
He could so quickly cut the Ionian Sea,
And take in Toryne?
(3.7.20-23)

More news of Caesar. He has indeed taken Toryne.

Can he be there in person? Tis impossible
Strange that his power should be.
(3.7.56-57)

In all justice, Canidius, and the other soldiers too, share this wonder.

Can. This speed of Caesar's
Carries beyond belief.
Sold. While he was yet in Rome,
His power went out in such distractions as
Beguil'd all spies.
(3.7.74-77)

This justifies Antony's own amazement, but it does impose certain important limitations on Pompey's dictum about Antony's soldiership as "twice the other twain." Apparently, one of the "other twain" is an astounding master of the art of troop movement. Whether this counts for "soldiership" depends on the viewpoint, but it is clear that for Antony such matters do not induce the boredom of familiarity.

There are debates on the strategic issues before the battle of Actium. Shakespeare allows Enobarbus to expand on details which have little actual relevance to the battle we experience—we will only need to be told that the hero followed Cleopatra's flight. But Enobarbus's "details" are important for us simply because Shakespeare shows Antony ignoring them. Why should Antony not fight at sea? Well, Enobarbus says,

Your ships are not well mann'd,
Your mariners are [muleters], reapers, people
Ingross'd by swift impress. In Caesar's fleet
Are those that often have 'gainst Pompey fought;
Their ships are yare, yours heavy. No disgrace
Shall fall you for refusing him at sea,
Being prepar'd for land.
(3.7.34-40)

It would, in one way, be a relief if Cleopatra were at the bottom of all this, for then we could simply say that Antony acts as a man infatuated. But she is only agreeing with Antony and he, reacting to Caesar's dare, ignores all else, even though the soldier Scarus, showing his wounds, hints at the mood of an infantry nervous at the prospect of fighting on unstable ships against a fleet of experienced pirates. But Antony only remarks "Well, well Away," and exits.
Antony's attitudes and needs are continually at odds with the reality he must comprehend to survive a war, and the time after Actium emphasizes this. Muttering to himself in his shame, reminiscing about Philippi, he says of Caesar that

he alone  
Dealt on lieutenancy, and no practice had  
In the brave squares of war; yet now—No matter.  
(3.11.38-40)

Sharing with Iago that contempt for the theoreticians, for those who delegate authority, who ignore prowess as the crucial stuff of war, Antony's remark is no casual one, penned by Shakespeare unthinkingly. The motif has been developed through the play until its eloquent articulation in Antony's response, after Actium, to the messenger from Caesar. Caesar sends a refusal to grant Antony's highly interesting request to be allowed to live "a private man in Athens." "To him again!" says Antony.

Tell him he wears the rose  
Of youth upon him; from which the world should note  
Something particular. His coin, ships, legions,  
May be a coward's, whose ministers would prevail  
Under the service of a child as soon  
As i'th'command of Caesar. I dare him therefore  
To lay his gay comparisons apart,  
And answer me declin'd, sword against sword,  
Ourselves alone. I'll write it. Follow me.  
(3.13.20-28).

"Coward," "child," "dare." The whole complicated mechanism of war which under Caesar's guidance has swept over Antony at such a speed as even to astound the generals is, here, relegated to the realm of the superficial. Toy baubles fit for a child, these forces are unreal, cloudlike wisps which trivially obscure that ultimate and profound moment, the determination of manhood: "sword against sword, ourselves alone."

It is not strange that Antony should look at war like this, for he cannot even look at Me in any other way. This would be to deny himself. And often when he cannot deny himself, he harms himself the most. It is true that military daring can be decisive too, no matter the dictates of theory, and it is true that Antony was holding his own quite well at Actium before Cleopatra's flight—vantage like "a pair of twins" appeared. But Antony cannot put daring into a larger perspective. For in defeat, he responds with rage and rationalization. It is as if victory were not determined by victory, but by bravery. Perhaps Caesar "cheated" but he won and the answer he sends Antony's duel-challenge points the difference between them. For this answer precipitates a moment of stunning naivete as Antony tries to comprehend a challenge that, unlike Sossius's generalship in Africa, the hero has no power to waive from existence.

Ant. Irk will not fight with me, Domitius?  
Eno. No.  
Ant. Why should he not?  
(4.2.1-2)

"Antonius being thus inclined," runs Shakespeare's source, "the last and extremest mischief of all other (to wit, the love of Cleopatra) lighted on him." Although Plutarch's slant is misleading for the play, his attribution of the love affair to other than strictly sexual penchants in Antony is suggestive. For in Shakespeare's play, Antony's relationship with Cleopatra simply reinforces and illustrates elements that we see in his personality when romance is not his immediate concern.
As for my wife,
I would you had her spirit in such another,
The third o’ th’world is yours, which with a snaffle
You may pace easy, but not such a wife.
(2.2.61-64)

"There’s a great spirit gone," he said at the beginning of the play when he heard of her death, and it is clear—especially by contrast with his attitude toward the meek Octavia—that Antony admires Fulvia for the kind of qualities he finds in himself. Cleopatra has caught this to use it for her own purpose. She not only flatters Antony’s self-portrait but replicates it when accusing him of infidelity early in the play. She recalls to him his words in this manner:

none our pares so poor
But was a race of heaven.
They are so soil, Or thou, the greatest soldier of the world,
Art turn’d the greatest liar.
Ant. How now, lady?
Cleo. I would I had thy inches, thou shouldst know
There were a heart in Egypt.
(1.3.36-41)

She plays the "great spirit," acts masculine. She gives the astonished Antony the lie and wishes she were big enough to back up her insult (or big enough to compete with him in other suggestive ways).

And Antony does admire Cleopatra as a mirror of himself. When she taunts his surprise before Actium at Caesar’s speed of maneuver, he is happy to be impressed.

A good rebuke,
which might have well becom’d the best of men,
To taunt at slackness.
(3.7.25-27)

But she is something more than mirror. This is clear enough early in the play as he leaves Egypt. He says to her:

Quarrel no more, but be prepar’d to know
The purposes I bear, which are, or cease,
As you shall give th’advice. By the fire
That quickens Nilus' slime, I go from hence
Thy soldier, servant, making peace or war
As thou affects.
(1.3.66-71)

This when leaving for Rome.

But perhaps what we see is merely his indifference to politics. War is what he treasures to himself. What then are we to make of an episode the queen relates to Charmian?

next morn,
Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed;
Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst
I wore his sword Philippan.
(2.5.20-23)

What principles in Antony's life are most important? He leaves her, and Egypt, marries Octavia, yet he follows her in flight at Actium. And though Antony forgives Cleopatra after Actium when he considers himself unmanned, he will be ready to kill her when he thinks she has betrayed him. How does she fit in?

There is Antony's answer to her after Actium when she says she hadn't thought he would follow after her fleeing ship.

You did know
How much you were my conqueror, and that
My sword, made weak by my affection, would
Obey it on all cause.
(3.11.65-68)

It is Enobarbus's use of "affection." But if Antony here wishes to blame Cleopatra by constructing an allegory that reminds us of the revels described earlier by Cleopatra, what he said a moment before was naked of moral attitudinizing.

O'er my spirit
[Thy] full supremacy thou knew'st, and that
Thy beck might from the bidding of the gods
Command me.
(3.11.58-61)

This is not totally true. There are other tugs at him, else Antony would not be so disconsolate now. But he seems to be saying that she is almost as important to him as his soldier "self." As he leaves Egypt, the psychology of interchange, despite its manifest Platonism, is complex.

Let us go. Come;
Our separation so abides and flies,
That thou residing here, goes yet with me;
And I hence fleeting, here remain with thee.
Away!
(1.3.101-5)

It is as if in some important way, Cleopatra actually expressed the soldier principle for Antony. For if he were merely "her soldier" as protector, he would not necessarily react as he does when he hears of her death. At that time we see an impressive piece of behavior, accompanied by appropriate imagery and activity emphatically visible to the audience. Brooding about the betrayal of his fleet, he speaks dispiritedly and despairingly. But when he hears the queen is dead, he immediately begins to take off his armor.

All length is torture; since the torch is out,
Lie down and stray no farther. Now all labour
Mars what it does; yea, very force entangles
Itself with strength.
(4.14.46-49)

Strength has lost its meaning, as if the queen had, in Antony's life, been the ideal in terms of which his existence was to be organized. A force usually exerted by a philosophy, a creed, or a god—this was the "grave
Whose eye beck’d forth my wars and call’d them home,
Whose bosom was my crownet, my chief end.
(4.12.26-27)

This is something more than drunken companionship with the fleshpots of Egypt. At the same time, ideals are not essentially products of altruism. They tend to be defined in accordance with those traits loved in the self, and if Antony holds Cleopatra more important than politics, it is not only understandable but inevitable. "The nobleness of life is to do thus, when such a mutual pair and such a twain, can do't," and "nobleness" is defined as that which Antony thinks good. He sees himself preeminently suited to enact this end, and Cleopatra is part of the enactment.

What would happen then, if the queen flouted this great Idea (whatever it is)? We see when she lets Caesar's messenger, Thidias, kiss her hand. Antony, on fire, rages:

what's her name,
Since she was Cleopatra?

Cleopatra is not "herself" anymore if she does not share Antony's opinion of the grandeur isolating him, with her, from the rest of the world. So instead of being grief-stricken and faithfully continuing to love Cleopatra as if he were her slave, Antony thrusts her from the crucial circle of his self-esteem into the "Roman" context, the Caesarean mode.

You were half blasted ere I knew you;
Ha?
Have I my pillow left unpress'd in Rome,
Forborne the getting of a lawful race,
And by a gem of women, to be abus'd
By one that looks on feeders?
Cleo. Good my Lord—
Ant. You have been a boggier ever,
But when we in our viciousness grow hard
(O misery on't!), the wise gods seel our eyes,
In our own filth drop our clear judgments, make us
Adore our errors, laugh at's while we strut
To our confusion.
Cleo. O, is't come to this?
Ant. I found you as a morsel, cold upon
Dead Caesar's trencher, nay, you were a fragment
Of Cnerus Pompey's besides what hotter hours,
Unregistered in vulgar fame, you have
Luxuriously pick'd out; for I am sure,
Though you can guess what temperance should be,
You know not what it is.
(3.13.105-22)

We need not see this speech as any kind of orthodox repentance of the error of his ways: Antony, by "temperance," simply means that Cleopatra should only be intemperate with him. His true attitude emerges from another figure.
Alack, our terrene moon
Is now eclips'd, and it portends alone
The fall of Antony!
(3.13.153-55)

Cleopatra seems to be the "objective correlative" of his own being when she acts appropriately. But when she does not enhance his self-esteem she is no longer "himself." And when this living symbol of his own identity, as he sees it, is gone, what is to become of him? She is his conception of himself made flesh.


Cleopatra
There is much critical debate about the true nature of Shakespeare's Cleopatra. Maurice Charney calls her "the most puzzling figure in Antony and Cleopatra" and examines the ways in which other characters view her. Charney notes that Enobarbus refers to Cleopatra as no longer young even as he asserts that she is fascinating to men. Charney quotes Cleopatra's own instructions to her maid Charmian concerning Antony as an example of her "infinite variety": If you find him sad, / Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report / That I am sudden sick." Ultimately, Charney suggests that Cleopatra is a proud figure desiring both admiration and sympathy.

Richard G. Harrier describes her as the embodiment of Egypt, possessing "vitality and change, the fecund earth, the Nile's slime and ooze, and the inconstant moon-sea spirit." Harrier holds the more traditional view of Cleopatra as a negative force—arguing that her "selfish and capricious domination of Antony" ruins him. L. J. Mills and Austin Wright also regard Cleopatra from a negative perspective. Mills considers her manipulative, self-absorbed, and possibly treacherous. Austin Wright's views reflect the 1950s during which he wrote. He criticizes Cleopatra for her failure to be supportive of Antony during his time of trouble; he also condemns her lack of virtue and modesty and calls her opportunistic, lubricious, and common. At the same time, Wright concludes that Cleopatra is irresistible to men.

L. T. Fitz and Ruth Nevo provide more sympathetic portraits of Cleopatra. After asserting that the Egyptian queen is complex enough to elicit a variety of interpretations, Nevo suggests that Cleopatra behaves unpredictably toward Antony because she is afraid of losing him to Rome; to his first wife, Fulvia; and later to Octavia. Fitz argues that the misogynistic views of critics, and not Shakespeare's characterization, are the source of negative attitudes toward Cleopatra. Both Fitz and J. Leeds Barroll remark that there are two traditional and opposing interpretations of Cleopatra: first, that she is a treacherous harlot; or second, that her love for Antony "transcends" all boundaries. Fitz also asserts that male critics are particularly virulent in their dislike of Cleopatra and that they find her behavior in the play incomprehensible. Fitz contends that Cleopatra's actions are no more confusing than those of an equally complex Shakespearean character such as Hamlet, and that in order to judge her fairly, scholars must dispense with their "sexist bias."

Another question that concerns critics is whether or not Cleopatra functions as a tragic figure. Robert E. Fitch calls Cleopatra a character who "does not touch our affections" because her love for Antony is "devious" and without "courage or honor or faith." Thus he concludes that she does not qualify for tragic status. By contrast, L. J. Mills, J. Leeds Barroll, and Richard G. Harrier suggest that Cleopatra does achieve a tragic dimension to a greater or lesser degree. Mills asserts that Cleopatra is tragic simply because in the end she lacks the time or sensitivity to attain the self-awareness usually attributed to tragedy. Harrier argues that Cleopatra achieves tragic status when she chooses to follow Antony's example and end her life in suicide as a Roman would do. Barroll assert that Cleopatra's death is as tragic as King Lear's—both, he contends, die with the knowledge that they have been "destructive" to themselves and to someone they love. For additional commentary on the character of Cleopatra, see the excerpt by Walter Cohen in the OVERVIEW section, the excerpts by David Daiches and Katherine Vance MacMullen in the LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY section, the excerpts by Janet Adelman and Peter Berek in the DUALISM section, the excerpt by Larry S. Champion in the ROME
VERSUS EGYPT section, the excerpts by J. Leeds Barroll and John W. Draper in the section on ANTONY, and the excerpt by Gordon Ross Smith in the section on OCTAVIUS.

L. J. Mills

[Mills argues against critics who regard Antony as the play's tragic figure to the exclusion of Cleopatra. Mills points out that after Antony's death, there is still one more entire act left in the play— with Cleopatra alive and the action unresolved. Mills then defines what makes Cleopatra tragic: she is a self-centered, and "self-pitying" character who is unable to admit her love for Antony or to recognize his worth or his love for her until it is too late.]

Interpretations of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra have emphasized, with varying degrees of stress, one or another of the three principal themes in the play, which are, as summarized by John Munro [in The London Shakespeare]:

... first, the East represented by Egypt and lands beyond versus the West represented by Rome; secondly, the strife in the Triumvirate who divided and governed the world, and the reduction of the three, Octavius, Lepidus and Antony, to one, Octavius; and thirdly, the love and tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra. Of all these the last is dramatically dominant.

But among the commentators who regard the third theme as dominant there is much difference of opinion. Some write as if the play were entitled "The Tragedy of Antony"; for example, J. Middleton Murry [in Shakespeare]:

... up to the death of Antony it is from him that the life of the play has been derived. She [Cleopatra] is what she is to the imagination, rather in virtue of the effects we see in Antony, than by virtue of herself. He is magnificent; therefore she must be. But when he dies, her poetic function is to maintain and prolong, to reflect and reverberate, that achieved royalty of Antony's.

Others give Cleopatra more significance but yet make Antony central, as does Peter Alexander, who allots to Cleopatra a somewhat more distinct, more nearly self-contained personality than does Murry [in Shakespeare's Life and Art]:

Antony dies while the play has still an act to run, but without this act his story would be incomplete. For Cleopatra has to vindicate her right to his devotion.

Any interpreter, however, who concentrates on the tragedy of Antony is confronted with the difficulty pointed out by Robert Speaight [in Nature in Shakespearean Tragedy]:

... if you are thinking in terms of Antony's tragedy alone, and if you are trying to make his tragedy conform to a classical definition, then you may find it awkward to face a fifth act, in which only his heroic and fallen shadow is left to keep Cleopatra company.

Moreover, such an interpreter overlooks the title of the play as it appears in the Folio: "The Tragedie of Anthonie, and Cleopatra", with the significant comma after "Anthonie." The nature of the play Antony and Cleopatra, really in itself more than from the comma signal but given added emphasis by it, should be self-evident: the play presents the tragedy of Antony and then the tragedy of Cleopatra. Such recognition, however, does not obscure the fact that each tragedy gives significance to the other and increases its effect.
Judicially objective critics have granted Cleopatra more stature as a tragic figure in her own right than those who think of the play as Antony's tragedy. [In *Approach to Shakespeare*] J. W. Mackail, for instance, though he does not point out that Cleopatra's tragedy differs from Antony's, says:

> It is the tragedy not of the Roman world, but of Antony and Cleopatra: and of both of them equally ... Here, neither single name gives the central tone to the drama; Antony does not exist for the sake of Cleopatra (as one might put it), nor does Cleopatra exist for the sake of Antony: they are two immense and in a sense equivalent forces which never coalesce, and the interaction between them is the drama.

And Virgil K. Whitaker, though insisting [in *Shakespeare's Use of Learning An Inquiry into the growth of His Mind and Art*] that "the tragic action of the play is centered upon Antony, who has so yielded himself to the passion of love that it has possessed his will and dethroned his judgment", gives Cleopatra stature as a tragic figure: "Cleopatra, although she is developed almost as fully as he is, remains the seductress, and only at the end does she become a participant in a tragedy of her own." "A tragedy of her own"—just what is it? "A question to be asked", and answered.

It is trite to remark that an audience's first impression of a character is very important; it is not commonplace to call particular attention to Cleopatra's first word in the play: "If". It is obvious—or should be—that in saying "If it be love indeed, tell me how much", she is following up a previous declaration, on Antony's part, of great love for her by teasing and bantering him. She is playful, but within her brief demand may be discerned one of her chief devices, contradiction. Immediately, by the entrance of the messenger from Rome, her tone changes; the contradictions become blunt, the taunts amazingly bold and affrontive. Antony's submitting to them proves that Philo's term "dotage" is not an exaggeration. That Cleopatra's contradictory behavior (as in Lii.89-91; II.i. 1-5) is calculated is obvious from her rejoinder to Charmian's warning: "Thou teacheest like a fool. The way to lose him!" (I.iii.10). Simultaneously Cleopatra's constant fear is revealed: that Antony will leave her.

When Antony, having determined to break off with Cleopatra and return to Rome, goes to her to announce his departure, she perceives that he is in a serious mood and, surmising his intention, gives him no chance to talk. Six times she interrupts him when he starts to speak. In her tirades she taunts him (1) by references to his wife Fulvia, charging him with falsity to her, (2) by the accusation that he has treacherously betrayed her (Cleopatra); and (3) by recounting his compliments to her when he was wooing, practically calling him a liar. And when eventually Antony commands her to listen to him and hear his reasons for leaving, ending with a reference to Fulvia's death, she then accuses him of lying, of expecting her, like a child, to believe fairy tales. When he offers proof, the letter he has received, she then charges him with insensibility for not weeping over his wife's death and predicts that he would be equally unmoved by her death. And as he protests his love for her she begins one of her fainting spells but changes her mind; she is, she says, "quickly ill, and well", as changeable as Antony is in his love. She mockingly urges him to produce some tears for Fulvia and pretend they are for her, ridicules him for not making a better show at weeping, and calls on Charmian to join her in laughing at Antony's rising anger.

Antony turns to walk away. Then Cleopatra brings him back by the one appeal that just then could do it, a quavering "Courteous lord". It is the first time in the play that she has spoken to him in anything like a complimentary fashion. Then she pretends to have something serious to say, or that she was going to say and has now forgot. Antony recognizes that she is playing for time, and she perceives his recognition. She has drawn on her coquette's kit for a variety of tools, and they have failed her, even her appeal to pity (her most effective, much used tool); Antony is going despite all she can do. But perhaps, if she says something kind, for once, it may eventually bring him back:
Your honour calls you hence;
Therefore be deaf to my unpitied folly,
And all the gods go with you! Upon your sword
Sit laurel victory, and smooth success
Be strew’d before your feet!
(I.iii.97-101)

Or something that may seem kind! Her reference to his honor is much belated; she makes another appeal to pity, and the sequence of s sounds and the concatenation of b's and f's and e's t's in the last line may suggest, by the conceivable hissing and sneering, an unconscious extrusion of her essentially serpentine nature.

During Antony's absence Cleopatra's behavior is self-characterizing. She evinces no interest in the business he is engaged in; she is concerned as to what he may be thinking of her, is enveloped in thoughts physical and sensual, and reviews the list of her great lovers, "Broad-fronted Caesar", "great Pompey", "brave Mark Antony". She revels in memories of her behavior to Antony—trickery in fishing, laughing him out of and into patience, dressing him in tires and mantles while she "wore his sword Philippan", contrarieties all. She is aghast when the news comes that Antony has married Octavia and beats the messenger, but regains hope from the description he gives of her.

We do not see Antony and Cleopatra together again until just before the battle of Actium. Were it not for Enobarbus' description of her on the river Cydnus and his analysis of her charms (II.ii.195-245), there would be little about her in the first half of the play that to an objective reader is alluring. But even Enobarbus' account hints at Cleopatra's oppositeness, for he pictures Antony, "Enthron'd i' th' market place", waiting for Cleopatra to appear before him, which she does not do, and accepting her refusal to dine with him and her counter-invitation "to come and suppe with her". The description follows closely the reconciliation scene between Antony and Octavius in which Antony, then at his best, is shown as firm master of himself and thus provides the background to contrast with his sorry self when manipulated by Cleopatra. But there is no such admirable background for Cleopatra; it is apparent that her tragedy will have to be of a distinctly different sort from Antony's. It cannot be a "tragic fall", for there is nothing for her to fall from.

After Actium, where Antony at her urging has fought at sea, she offers as her reason for leaving the scene of the battle that she was afraid. But that reason does not satisfy everyone. [In Shakespeare Studies] E. E. Stoll, for instance, lists among various unanswered questions in Shakespeare's plays the query "Why does Cleopatra flee from the battle and Antony?" Later [in Poets and Playwrites] he wonders whether in examining such a question as that, and about her later dealings with Thyreus and her responsibility in the second sea-fight, we may not be "then considering too curiously". Certainly the question about her behavior at Actium exists and must be considered; but just as certainly it cannot be answered. Cleopatra's "I little thought / You would have followed" (III.xi.55-56), besides putting the blame on him, may reveal a more nearly true reason than her "fearful sails": Is her leaving the battle at the critical point a test of Antony, to see whether the political leader or the lover is stronger in him? Does she fear that military success and political mastery would be a dangerous rival to her charms? And when Antony reproaches her with

You did know
How much you were my conqueror, and that
My sword, made weak by my affection, would
Obey it on all cause
(III.xi.65-68)

and she cries "Pardon, pardon!" is she really sorry? Her behavior to Thyreus soon after makes us wonder.

When Thyreus tells Cleopatra that
He [Caesar] knows that you embrace not
Antony As you did love, but as you fear'd him
(III.xiii.56-57)

she exclaims "O!" What does she mean by that? There are those who seem to know; e. g., G. L. Kittredge (note on 1. 57):

Cleopatra's exclamation is meant to convey to Thyreus not only eager acceptance of Caesar's theory of her union with Antony, but also gratified surprise that Caesar should have shown so sympathetic an understanding of the case. All this she expresses in plain terms in her next speech: 'He is a god,' etc.

That interpretation implies that Cleopatra, suddenly perceiving a way out of the impasse, is deserting Antony and preparing to entangle Caesar in her "toils of grace", through the pity for her that she hopes to inspire. But conceivably the "O!" may merely imply painful shock at the idea that anyone could even think she feared Antony and did not love him. If so, the idea of appealing to Caesar's pity may not occur at the moment but be suggested by Thyreus'

The scars upon your honour, therefore, he
Does pity, as constrained blemishes,
Not as deserv'd.
(11.58-60)

It is doubtful whether one is justified in saying that "All this she expresses in plain terms in her next speech", inasmuch as Thyreus' statement comes between her "O!" and "her next speech". Or, perhaps, the previous lines should be taken into consideration; Thyreus says,

Caesar entreats
Not to consider in what case thou stand'st
Further than he is Caesar,
(11.53-55)

which seems to promise noble treatment, with possible emphasis on the good will of Caesar the man. If the idea of attempting to entangle Caesar has already occurred to her, her enthusiastic "Go on. Right royal!" is flattery intended to be relayed to Caesar. But then Thyreus'

He knows that you embrace not Antony
As you did love, but as you fear'd him

is definitely cooling, and her "O!" may involuntarily escape her, indicating sudden awareness of Caesar's realization that she "embraced" Antony because of his power more than for love of the man himself and thus is on guard against any designs she might have on him now that he has conquered Antony. If that is the situation, then Thyreus' speech suggesting Caesar's pity for the scars upon her honor "as constrained blemishes, / Not as deserv'd" arouses hope and prompts her flattering and pity-inviting

He is a god, and knows
What is most right. Mine honour was not yielded
But conquer'd merely,
(11.60-62)

a bare-faced lie, as Enobarbus recognizes.
Whatever the significance of the "O!" it is soon obvious that Cleopatra proceeds to cajole Thyreus, hoping thereby to make him a friend in court. But whether she is actually deserting Antony and staking all on a hope of ensnaring Caesar or is planning a deep deception of Caesar it is impossible to tell. Nor is her behavior to Antony clear when he enters unexpectedly and in fury orders punishment to Thyreus and condemns her. She attempts to defend herself with four questions: "O, is't come to this?" "Wherefore is this?" "Have you done yet?" and, after a parenthetical "I must stay his time", "Not know me yet?" What does she mean by the fourth question? She probably intends for Antony to understand that she was just temporizing, meeting Caesar's suspected treachery with pretended submission. When Antony, still pained by what he is sure is betrayal of him, asks, "Cold-hearted toward me?" she breaks out in impassioned speech:

Ah, dear, if I be so,
From my cold heart let heaven engender hail,
And poison it in the source, and the first stone
Drop in my neck; as it determines, so
Dissolve my life! The next Caesarion smite!
Till by degrees the memory of my womb
Together with my brave Egyptians all,
By the discandying of this pelleted storm,
Lie graveless, till the flies and gnats of Nile
Have buried them for prey!
(III.xiii.158-167)

Actually her plea that, if her heart is cold, from it hail, poisoned in its source (her heart), should be "engendered" only to fall in her neck, melt, and in melting dissolve her life, is basically nonsense. For if there were enough poison in the source, her heart, to kill her when, incorporated into hail, it was carried to her neck and then caused her life to dissolve, she would have been dead long ago. To say nothing of the amount of poison it would take to dispose of Caesarion and "my brave Egyptians all"! She has created a barrage of words that by the excess of emotion and the deficiency of sense seem to denote complete devotion to Antony but which by the very excesses reveal the opposite. "The lady doth protest too much, methinks." Her speech is not the bald lie that she tells Antony when later she sends him word that she has killed herself, but there is deception, masked by the barrage of words and the vehemence of her utterance.

What a narrow escape that was for her! She has convinced Antony ("I am satisfied") but not Enobarbus; for him it is the last straw. He knows that Antony is now lost, for "When valour preys on reason, / It eats the sword it fights with" (11. 199-200). Though Enobarbus speaks only of Antony, he reveals his interpretation of Cleopatra's behavior in the crisis.

Antony declares that he will fight Caesar again, gains Cleopatra's "That's my brave lord", and joins with her in anticipation of her birthday festivities. The next morning she playfully helps Antony don his armor and kisses him. as he departs for battle. She comments to Charmian, "He goes forth gallantly", and expresses a wish

That he and Caesar might
Determine this great war in single fight!
Then Antony—but now—
(IV.iv.36-38)

Since she apparently thinks Antony will be defeated, she is surprised at his victorious return:

Lord of lords!
O infinite virtue, com'st thou smiling from
The world's great snare uncaught?
Though she thus compliments Antony in exaggerated terms and rewards Scarus extravagantly ("An armour all of gold", 1. 27), she hardly discloses her real thoughts. Nor is it certain that she did not betray Antony in the second sea-fight. Antony is sure: "This foul Egyptian hath betrayed me!" (IV.xii.10) and he is exceedingly bitter about the "triple-turn'd whore" that

Like a right gypsy hath at fast and loose
  Beguil'd me to the very heart of loss!

He calls for Eros, but Cleopatra appears, having mistakenly thought, perhaps, that Antony was summoning her by calling on the deity of love (Eros), and is met by "Ah, thou spell! Awaunt!" In innocence or seeming innocence she asks, "Why is my lord enrag'd against his love?" Then at Antony's threats she leaves. Exclaiming that he is "more mad / Than Telamon for his shield" (xiii. 1-2), she sends Mardian to Antony:

Mardian, go tell him I have slain myself.
  Say that the last I spoke was Antony's
  And word It, prithee, piteously. Hence, Maidian,
  And bring me how he takes my death.
(IV.xiii.7-10)

The lie, with the appeals for pity—"I have slain myself" (for love of Antony), "piteously"—is her final deception of Antony. Knowledge about how he takes her death may be intended to provide her with a clue as to possible appeasement of his wrath, but the lie is the climax of all her tricks, and ironically causes his death. Though it be argued that she did not betray Antony, his thinking she did is understandable, in the light of her behavior throughout the play up to the time of the second sea-fight.

What would be—to return to Cleopatra's entrance and exit for a moment—the impression on an audience of Cleopatra's behavior? Antony's brief but vivid description of the fleet's surrender and his repeated charge that Cleopatra has betrayed him, plus remembrance of what happened at Actium, may well make an audience suspicious of her when she appears. And her exit, following immediately upon Antony's detailed picture of her as the captive of Caesar and the victim of Octavia's wrath, may well give the definite impression that her self-interest has been and is the force that motivates her action. She does not even think of fainting or of attempting to kill herself in disproof of Antony's accusation. And her question "Why is my lord enrag'd against his love?" is colored by her accustomed plea for pity. Altogether, whether or not she betrayed Antony to Caesar is left an unanswered question, like the motives for her behavior at Actium.

There are some obvious facts. Cleopatra, to satisfy her ego, must have as her lovers the world's greatest. The outcome of the war between Antony and Octavius, since it is for world mastery, will determine which will emerge as the greater. Suppose Antony should win: he will certainly be immersed in state affairs and neglect her. Suppose Octavius should win: then there is the question as to whether she can ensnare him. Her equivocal behavior to Antony and her flirting with Caesar through Thyreus may reflect her uncertainty.

Yet there can be no doubt that Cleopatra has love, of a sort, for Antony, and when he, dying, is brought to her in the monument it is the realization of his personality as a man, her lover, and her belated recognition of the stalwart Roman qualities he represents (emphasized by the pride in them shown in his dying speech) that for the moment overshadow everything else. Even though self-pity is not completely absent—"Noblest of men, woo't die? / Hast thou no care of me?" (IV.xv.59-60)—she is genuine in lamenting that "The crown o' th' earth doth melt", and she is quite humbled:
No more but e'en a woman, and commanded
By such poor passion as the maid that milks
And does the meanest chares.

(11. 73-75)

Some appreciation of Antony's worth, now that he is no more, comes to her:

It were for me
To throw my sceptre at the injurious gods,
To tell them that this world did equal theirs
Till they had stol'n our jewel.

(11. 75-78)

But there is no admitting, apparently no perception, of the fact that she is responsible for his defeat and death. Her self-pity, her concentration on self, makes it impossible for her to see the situation objectively. If she could see it objectively, she would not be Cleopatra. It is her very Cleopatraness that is the basis for her ultimate tragedy. If she were a Juliet she would kill herself immediately for love of Antony, not merely talk about suicide. The fact that she does not act but talks precludes any interpretation of her tragedy as a love tragedy, even though there is pathos in her

what's brave, what's noble,
Let's do it after the high Roman fashion
And make death proud to take us.

(11. 86-88)

She has learned something; she has gained unconsciously some insight into what virtue, Roman virtue as embodied in Antony, is. There is no sneering now at "a Roman thought" (I.ii.87). But though she knows no "friend / But resolution and the briefest end", she is yet a long way from declaring "Husband, I come"; her tragedy is by no means yet manifest.

When we next see her (V.ii) some time has elapsed; she still talks of suicide, but not of "the briefest end": "My desolation does begin to make / A better life." Better than what? Since she immediately speaks of Caesar and his subjection to Fortune, she will show a "life" superior to his by doing that which ends all the influence of Fortune. Is it unconscious irony that she uses the word "life" in speaking of the ending of her life? Her whole speech (11. 1-8) is of herself in relation to Caesar, and she does not attempt suicide until the Roman guardsmen make a move to capture her. Meanwhile she has parleyed with Proculeius and through him made a bid for pity from Caesar—"a queen his beggar"—and professes "A doctrine of obedience". But she adds, significantly, "and would gladly / Look him i' th' face" (II. 31-32).

When she is prevented from killing herself (not for love of Antony but to forestall capture) she moans,

Where art thou, death?
Come hither, come! Come, come, and take a queen
Worth many babes and beggars.

(11. 46-48)

The real reason for her attempted suicide is made plain by her outburst after Proculeius's "O, temperance, lady!":

Sir, I will eat no meat; I'll not drink, sir;
If idle talk will once be necessary,
I'll not sleep neither. This mortal house I'll ruin,
Do Caesar what he can. Know, sir, that I
Will not wait pinion'd at your master's court
Nor once be chastis'd with the sober eye
Of dull Octavia. Shall they hoist me up
And show me to the shouting varlotry
Of censuring Rome? Rather a ditch in Egypt
Be gentle grave unto me! Rather on Nilus' mud
Lay me stark-nak'd and let the waterflies
Blow me into abhorring! Rather make
My country's high pyramids my gibbet
And hang me up in chains!
(V.ii.49-62)

Proculeius had been commended to her by Antony (IV.xv.47-48), but he has proved untrustworthy. When Dolabella follows and attempts to gain her confidence by "Most noble Empress, you have heard of me?" (V.ii.71), she tests him: "You laugh when boys or women tell their dreams; / Is't not your trick?" He does not understand what she means, and is puzzled as she pours out an elaborate eulogy of Antony (II. 79 ff.). She glorifies Antony's power and bounty and wins Dolabella's sympathy to the degree that he answers truthfully her question as to what Caesar intends to do with her: lead her in triumph in Rome. She has told Dolabella that she "dreamt there was an Emperor Antony" and asked whether "there was or might be such a man / As this I dreamt of". It appears that she was giving him an opportunity to assure her that Caesar, now Emperor, is such a man; since he did not respond affirmatively, she puts her direct question. Immediately after his answer, Caesar enters.

It is through the glorified Antony of her dream that the audience is made aware of the fact that Cleopatra now has gained some conception of the worth of Antony. But that is in retrospect; she indicated no such recognition while Antony was alive. The idealization of Antony in the dream contrasts with the unideal realism of her treatment of him while he lived. (Dramatically, the idealized Antony comes between the deceitful Proculeius and the cold, unmalleable Caesar. Cleopatra's acquired recognition of Antony's excellence cannot be left to the very end of the play but must be made evident, for it is vital to the formation of her tragedy.) But she is in many ways still the former Cleopatra; she schemes, and uses a new device to arouse pity for herself. There is no admission of responsibility for what has happened, no hint of a sense of guilt. And she obviously has not given up hope of a future if one can be contrived that is not shameful to her. That future depends on what she can gain from Caesar.

Since she is still alive and has not become penitent nor admitted—even realized—any responsibility for the dire situation she is now in, it is inevitable that she should carry on. Indeed the force of momentum, not checked by a change in character, leads the audience to anticipate an attempt to captivate Caesar: Julius Caesar, Pompey, Antony, and now Octavius is Caesar, the world's greatest. And it is to be expected that she will use the old tools, or rather the most effective one, the appeal to pity. When Caesar enters, she kneels to him:

Sir, the gods
Will have it thus. My master and my lord
I must obey;
(V.ii.115-117)

then

Sole sir o' th' world,
I cannot project mine own cause so well
To make it clear; but do confess I have
Been laden with like frailties which before
Have often sham'd our sex

Caesar's response gives her little encouragement, ending as it does with a threat:

If you apply yourself to our intents,
Which towards you are most gentle, you shall find
A benefit in this change; but, if you seek
To lay on me a cruelty by taking
Antony's course, you shall bereave yourself
Of my good purposes, and put your children
To that destruction which I'll guard them from
If thereon you rely.

There follows the Seleucus incident. Whether she is providing for herself if she should have a future or, as some think, tries to convince Caesar by the planned exposure of her concealing half her wealth that she has no intention of following "Antony's course", or has contrived the whole thing as a means of eliciting pity, she unquestionably utilizes it for the latter purpose:

O Caesar, what a wounding shame is this,
That thou vouchsafing here to visit me,
Doing the honour of thy lordliness
To one so meek, that mine own servant should
Parcel the sum of my disgraces by
Addition of his envy! Say, good Caesar,
That I some lady trifles have reserv'd,
Immoment toys, things of such dignity
As we greet modern friends withal; and say
Some nobler token I have kept apart
For Livia and Octavia—must I be unfolded
With one that I have bred? The gods! It smites me
Beneath the fall I have ...

Be it known that we, the greatest, are misthought
For things that others do; and, when we fall,
We answer others' merits in our name,
Are therefore to be pitied.
(V.U.159-171;176-179)

But her flattery, her profession of complete subjection to him and her tearful appeals for pity have no effect on the astute Caesar, who answers her by the royal "we" and to her final, more quaveringly piteous "My master and my lord", says bluntly, "Not so. Adieu." She has done her best, but her practised methods, particularly the previously much-used pleas for pity, do not touch Caesar. And when he leaves she is vehement in her outburst—"He words me, girls, he words me", and adds "that I should not / Be noble to myself!" There is nothing left for her but to fall back on her resolution. The confirmation by Dolabella of what he had already told her about Caesar's intentions and his specification of a time limit,

Caesar through Syria
Intends his journey, and within three days
You with your children will he send before,
incites her to immediate action. She describes vividly to Iras the exhibition Caesar would make in Rome of
Iras and herself (she would no doubt include Charmian if she were then present) and applauds Iras' determination to pluck out her eyes rather than see it,

Why, that's the way
To fool their preparation, and to conquer
Their most absurd intents.

Caesar having proved to be untouched, she reverts to the scene of her conquest of Antony:

Show me, my women, like a queen. Go fetch
My best attires. I am again for Cydnus,
To meet Mark Antony.
(11.227-229)

With an implied confession of dillydallying, she declares:

My resolution's plac'd, and I have nothing
Of woman in me. Now from head to foot
I am marble-constant. Now the fleeting moon
No planet is of mine.
(11.238-241)

In her final moments, as she carries out her resolution, Cleopatra has "immortal longings", hears Antony call,
gloats over outwitting Caesar, addresses Antony as "husband", shows jealousy in her fear that Iras may gain the first otherworld kiss from Antony, sneers at Caesar again, speaks lovingly to the asp at her breast, and dies with "Antony" on her lips and with a final fling of contempt for the world. But, it should be noted, she does not "do it after the high Roman fashion", nor with the singleness of motive that actuated Antony, whose tragedy gains ironical poignancy because he thought Cleopatra—really the lying Cleopatra—had anticipated him in nobility (IV.xiv.55-62).

Does she kill herself to be with Antony or to escape Caesar? It is the final question, to be placed along with others. Would she have killed herself if she could have added Caesar to her string of "greats"? Why did she leave the battle of Actium? Why did she urge Antony to fight at sea? Did she betray Antony in the second sea-fight? What was the meaning of her "O"? Why did she behave in such a way as to lose her country instead of preserve it? Did she ever really love Antony or did she love herself for having captivated him? Why did she tease, taunt, and cross Antony, very rarely saying anything kind to him? These questions, and others that could be asked, show that it was not accidental that the first word she speaks in the play is "If". The appropriate symbol for her is a big interrogation point. There is testimony, of course, by Antony and especially by Enobarbus, the clear-headed, cynical logician, as to her infinite variety. Somehow she has enchanted the world's greatest men, and she is beloved by her attendants, even to the death. But in her behavior throughout the play, from the effrontery of her appearing on the Cydnus to her wily proceedings with Octavius Caesar, there are repeated evidences that she is unaccountable. It is certain that Antony never penetrates her real character; he may call her gypsy and witch, but that is begging the question. How, in the face of and through his presentation of Cleopatra's behavior to Antony, does Shakespeare make of her a force powerful enough to bring about the downfall of the great Antony? Does he not supply the answer, paradoxically, by depicting her as the world's great question mark, alluring and magnetic because or all the unanswerable questions about her? Does he not imply that the secret of her charm lies in the fact that neither Antony nor we (including Shakespeare himself) can identify the secret of her charm? Such an interpretation
was suggested by Gamaliel Bradford many years ago [in "The Serpent of Old Nile"] but apparently disregarded by most commentators on the play:

I have said that Cleopatra was mysterious. Perhaps it is an element of the art of Shakespeare to puzzle us a little, to make us feel that we cannot interpret him always conclusively. It detracts nothing from the truth of his characters that we cannot always determine what their motives are as we can with that poor little creature of Dryden. ... I, at least, do not feel clear as to her good faith to Antony. That she loves him there is no doubt at all, loves him as she is capable of loving. But it is more than doubtful whether she kills herself for love of him or in sheer desperation to avoid the scorn and vengeance of Caesar. I greatly fear that if she had been confident of Caesar's favor, confident of reigning in Rome as she had reigned in Alexandria, Antony's poor dust might have tossed forgotten in the burning winds of Egypt. And yet, I do not know—who can know? That is precisely what gives the character its charm.

But whatever interpretation of Cleopatra's character may be given—and to survey all that has been said would demand a volume devoted to her—the final question remains: What is her tragedy? One can agree with Willard Farnham's statement (p. 174) that "It is part of her tragedy that with her subtlety she wins control of his [Antony's] force and by winning this control ruins him and herself", but that is hardly the whole story. Nor is it satisfactory to become rhapsodic, to glorify Cleopatra beyond warrant, as J. Middleton Murry does:

Now [after Antony's death] in very deed, Cleopatra loves Antony: now she discerns his royalty, and loyalty surges up in her to meet it. Now we feel that her wrangling with Caesar and her Treasurer which follows is all external to her—as it were a part which she is still condemned to play 'in this vile world': a mere interruption, an alien interlude, while the travail of fusion between the order of imagination and love, and the order of existence and act is being accomplished: till the flame of perfect purpose breaks forth [V.ii.226-229 quoted]. No, not again for Cydnus: but now for the first time, indeed. For that old Cydnus, where the wonder pageant was, was but a symbol and preparation of this. That was an event in time; this is an event in eternity. And those royal robes were then only lovely garments of the body, now they are the integument of a soul. They must show her like a queen, now, because she is a queen, as she never was before.

Much nearer to the test of the play and to all the evidence is E. E. Stoll [in Poets and Playwrights]:

... in [an] ... audacious, sensuous key, for all her exaltation, she expresses herself on her deathbed. She is tenderer with her women, and stronger and more constant, than she has ever been; but her thoughts of Antony, though now an inviolable shade, are not celestial or Platonic. They are steeped in amorousness, and she is waiting, coiled on her couch. She loves him more than at the beginning; but neither now nor at his death is she, as Professor Schuckuig declares, "all tenderness, all passionate devotion and unselfish love"; nor does she quit life because it is not worth the living. On life she really never loosens her greedy grip. Her beauty she clutches to her dying bosom as the miser does his gold. Her robe and jewels are, even in death, assumed to heighten the impression of it upon Caesar—though only to show him what he has missed. She hears Antony mock him now, from over the bitter wave; and at the beginning of the scene she cried,

go fetch
My best attires; I am again for Cydnus—
as one who, to please both him and herself, and vex their rival, would fain die at her best, reviving all the glories of that triumph. To an ugly death she could scarcely have brought herself; ... the death which ... she is choosing and devising [is] ... an event, a scene, well-nigh an amour ... she thinks the stroke of death is as a lover's pinch, which hurts and is desired ... she is wrapped and folded up in sensuous imaginations to the end.

Indeed, to have Cleopatra glorified and transfigured is to forgive her treatment of Antony, to imply that it was well worth the destruction of the great Roman to bring about her regeneration. If the tragedy of Antony and the tragedy of Cleopatra are to interact to intensify each other, it is necessary not to have a transfiguration of Cleopatra; the poignancy of Antony's tragedy is intensified by Cleopatra's unregeneracy, and it increases the pathos and tragedy of Cleopatra that she is never penitent, not even conscious of the debacle she has wrought. That she does change somewhat, that she does attain some realization of what Antony was, is to be recognized. That she did not realize it earlier, and to a much greater degree, is her tragedy; the too little and the too late. Thus the tragedy of Cleopatra is different in kind from that of Antony; the play contains the tragedy of Antony and then the tragedy of Cleopatra.

The "too little" involves a considerable pathetic element. Cleopatra, though appearing on the Cydnus as Venus, is really Isis in environment, interests, and obsessions. Of that the fertility connotations made obvious in the conversation of her companions Iras and Charmian with the Soothsayer (I.ii), the Nile imagery frequent in the play, and the trend of Cleopatra's own thoughts as revealed in her speeches give plentiful proof. Her basic interests show themselves in her imagination as she visualizes Antony in Rome (I.v.19 ff.). They permeate the glowing dream of Antony she describes to Dolabella, as she concentrates on Antony's power and his bounty (not on aspects of character and personal qualities). They suffuse her final speeches; "but even then what emerges is a state of trance, a vision of the divine lover Antony, filling Heaven and Earth, the kiss of the bridegroom, Love lifted to a higher plane among the Homeric gods, all an aspiration and a wild desire, the eagle and the dove." This last characterization of her vision is over-etherealized; a more moderate statement is Wllard Farnham's:

If we are to understand that the love of Cleopatra for Antony, like her character, continues to be deeply flawed to the end of her life, we are nevertheless to understand that, like her character, it has its measure of nobility. If Cleopatra never comes to have a love for Antony to match his love for her, she at least comes to have magnificent visions of what it would be like to achieve such a love, and her climactic vision leads her to call him husband as she dies. (P.202)

To that extent we may credit Cleopatra with some ennobling; but it is just enough to intensify and illuminate her tragedy. "She's good, being gone; / The hand could pluck her back that shov'd her on", said Antony (I. ii. 130-131), on hearing of Fulvia's death. Cleopatra only after Antony's death comes to some realization of what he was; he's good, being gone. Only after he is wounded or dead does she call him "noble"; only in a sort of funeral hymn does she recognize his power and bounty. But she never feels any sense of guilt such as Antony confesses; there is no pecavi; there is no repentance, no consciousness even, or the need for remorse. She is no Othello; her tragedy can be only partial, not complete. The picture she imagines of rejoining Antony in another world could never Become actual; she still would have considerable explaining to do.

Cleopatra's tragedy is inherent in her equivocality, in her utter self-interest, and in her complete ignorance of the existence of an unselfish love apart from the physical. She has had no comprehension of Roman virtues, no recognition of Antony's fundamental character, no appreciation of his courtesy and devotion to her. She gloated in his greatness as a soldier and as the most powerful of the triumvirs, not for his sake but for her own—and undermined both his military prowess and his power. She evinces, throughout the play, little concern about the country of which she is queen; she is woman, not queen, in her interests and behavior. She is as innocent of morality as Falstaff of honor. But she does learn something, through frustration and
suffering, of what virtue—Roman virtue—means. It is pathetic and tragic that a beginning of anything other than sensual self-interest comes when there is neither the opportunity nor the time for growth to ensue. In that irony—in the too little and the too late—lies her tragedy. That is all the tragedy there is for her, but it is none the less profound, and gains poignancy through contrast to Antony's as his gains pathos through contrast to hers.


Maurice Charney
[Charney discusses Cleopatra from the point of view of other characters in the play. He asserts that Enobarbus, for example, sees her in "objective" but flamboyant terms, while Antony—who knows her personally—does not use exaggerated language to describe her. Charney also notes that Cleopatra is characterized via food metaphors and sensual images; her depiction can be contrasted with that of Antony's new Roman wife, Octavia, who is presented coldly via "building imagery."]

The most puzzling figure in Antony and Cleopatra is Cleopatra herself, Shakespeare's most complex representation of a woman. As Enobarbus explains her charms (and the reason that Antony, though newly married to Octavia, will return to Egypt), "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale / Her infinite variety" (2.2.241-42). Cleopatra is no young ingenue like Juliet, but an experienced and artful lover, "with Phoebus' amorous pinches black / And wrinkled deep in time" (1.5.28-29). How old is that? Certainly closer to Gertrude's age in Hamlet than to Ophelia's. Her "infinite variety" in the play is expressed in terms of artifice and erotic games, as she explains to Charmian: "If you find him sad, / Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report / That I am sudden sick" (1.3.3-5). She plays in contraries in a way that frightens Charmian, who follows conventional women's doctrine: "In each thing give him way, cross him in nothing," which Cleopatra is certain is wrong: "Thou teachest like a fool: the way to lose him!" (9-10).

As Enobarbus attests elsewhere, Cleopatra is "a wonderful piece of work" (1.2.155-56), and he celebrates her infinite variety in a specifically sexual sense:

other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies; for vilest things
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
Bless her when she is riggish.
(2.2.242-46)

Rig is a common word for strumpet, and riggsh means wanton and licentious. In Enobarbus's account the imagery of appetites and feeding is sexual and there is a dark innuendo in "vilest things." Why should the holy priests bless Cleopatra's lasciviousness if it doesn't represent some apotheosis of sexuality? Enobarbus's paradoxes puzzle us, and his sense of wonder and admiration for Cleopatra is entirely different from Antony's, who is personally involved with her.

It is not surprising that Enobarbus should speak the heightened description of Cleopatra in her barge on the river Cydnus. He describes her mythologically as she first appeared when she went to meet Mark Antony. Unlike his commanding general, he is an objective observer of the marvels of Egypt, which he never hesitates to celebrate. In Shakespeare's play Antony could never possibly utter this hyperbolic oration because he is too aware of Cleopatra's dangers. He never speaks of her in hyperbole, or overwrought, exaggerated, even excessive rhetorical figuration. Actually, Enobarbus says almost nothing about Cleopatra herself except that, in the Marlovian fashion of invidious comparison, she is "O'erpicture that Venus where we see / The fancy outwork nature" (2.2.206-7).
Enobarbus expends his effort in describing "The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne" (2.2.197), whose "poop was beaten gold" (198), and whose sails were purple (presumably the royal purple, or deep red). In a notable sadomasochistic image very relevant to the context, the silver oars of the barge "made / The water which they beat to follow faster, / As amorous of their strokes" (201-3). This is like the stroke of death, which, like a lover's pinch, "hurts, and is desired" (5.2.296). Cleopatra's costume and stage setting is opulent in the style of a Busby Berkeley musical. It is really overwrought, and the sense of stasis creates a feeling of puzzlement and wasted effort, as in the description of the pretty dimpled boys with divers-colored fans, "whose wind did seem / To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool, / And what they undid did" (209-11). This sense of defeated motion may be part of a larger pattern of "discandyng" in the play.

We see a very different Cleopatra in Act II, Scene v, while she is waiting for the absent Antony to return. A high degree of sexual innuendo, an impatient shifting of mood, an impetuous violence—all steeped in an impenetrable boredom—permeate this scene. Cleopatra begins by calling for music: "music, moody food / Of us that trade in love" (1-2), which recalls Duke Orsino's languorous lament at the beginning of Twelfth Night: "If music be the food of love, play on" (1.1.1). Cleopatra is histrionic, even faintly ridiculous, in speaking of music as "moody food" and of herself as a trader in love, like Pandarus in Troilus and Cressida.

But as soon as Mardian the Eunuch enters, she abandons music and wants to play billiards, a wildly anachronistic game for ancient Egypt. Charmian, her waiting woman, begs off: "My arm is sore (2.5.4), and sets up an obvious sexual pun: "best play with Mardian" (4). Cleopatra cannot resist the unsubtle wordplay: "As well a woman with an eunuch played / As with a woman" (5-6), but she drives home the sexual point with a knowing smirk: "And when good will is showed, though't come too short, / The actor may plead pardon" (8-9). We already know from a previous encounter in Act I, Scene v, that Mardian the Eunuch has "fierce affections" and thinks "What Venus did with Mars" (17-18). So Cleopatra has already played the scene before with its set dialogue and prepared jokes.

But Cleopatra suddenly switches her interest to fishing, and her image of hooking "tawny-finned fishes" (2.5.12) is violently sexual:

My bended hook shall pierce
Their slimy jaws; and as I draw them up,
I'll think them every one an Antony,
And say, "Ah, ha! / are caught!"
(12-15)

Slimy jaw is not exactly attractive, but the image of Antony floats in a wide medium of instantaneous sexual attraction. Earlier, it was "O happy horse, to bear the weight of Antony" (1.5.21), and later Cleopatra commands the messenger with phallic impudence: "Ram thou thy fruitful tidings in mine ears, / That long time have been barren" (2.5.24-25).

Reporting the news of Antony's marriage to Octavia, the messenger is struck down, haled up and down, and threatened with a knife. This is the Cleopatra of the "vilest things" (2.2.244) that the holy priests bless when she is riggish. At the end of the scene, when the grieving Cleopatra has been fully informed about Antony's new wife, Octavia, she utters to Charmian a mysterious line that is one of her most characteristic flourishes: "Pity me, Charmian, / But do not speak to me" (2.5.118-19). She is infinitely above Charmian in social station and in complexity of feeling: she wants her pity but not her conversation. This teeters on the edge of magnificence and absurdity, like Mae West's "Beulah, peel me a grape."

Octavia, Caesar's sister, is set out as the opposite of Cleopatra, as hard and material Roman values are set against the luxuriance of Egypt. Enobarbus, who is an insightful observer, says that Octavia is "of a holy, cold, and still conversation" (2.6.122-23)—conversation is used in the larger sense of personal behavior and
manner. Menas asks naively: "Who would not have his wife so?" (124), meaning that this describes an ideal Roman wife, but Enobarbus answers definitively: "Not he that himself is not so; which is Mark Antony. He will to his Egyptian dish again" (125-26).

Cleopatra is irresistibly presented in terms of food and sensual attraction, while Octavia unfortunately shares in the coldness and impersonality of Rome, expressed in building imagery: she is the "piece of virtue" who is set between Caesar and Antony "as the cement of our love / To keep it builded" (3.2.29-30). Cement is not a very romantic image, nor is the alternative military siege instrument: "the ram to batter / The fortress of it" (30-31). Cleopatra could never be presented in such alternative images: either the positive "cement" or the negative "ram." Later on Octavia herself speaks of wars between Caesar and Antony in the metal-working image of solder: "As if the world should cleave, and that slain men / Should solder up the rift" (3.4.31-32). All these images separate the Roman world of Octavia from the Egyptian world of Cleopatra and focus the alternatives on which the play turns.

Antony is caught in this bifurcated system of values. The play opens with a choral scene between the Roman soldiers, Demetrius and Philo, who comment directly on Antony's degeneration in Egypt. All the heroic, military, manly values of Rome have been destroyed by Cleopatra, and the first words of the play are about Antony's "dotage," which "O'erflows the measure" (1.1.1-2). Dotage is an Elizabethan word specifically connected with foolishness in love, especially on the part of an old lover for his young mistress. The war-like Antony, whose eyes "glowed like plated Mars" (4)—Mars in his resplendent armor—"now bend, now turn / The office and devotion of their view / Upon a tawny front" (4-6). There is a pun on front, both battlefront and Cleopatra's dark and sensual forehead or face (or her own when the doter forgets his manliness and duty and is overwhelmed by the love object). Antony's "captain's heart" (6) now "reneges all temper" (8)—and the image is one of the hardness and resiliency of metal, especially the blade of a sword—"And is become the bellows and the fan / To cool a gypsy's lust" (9-10). Then, in a very Shakespearean move to connect words with gestures, Antony and Cleopatra enter with their train and "with Eunuchs fanning her" (10 s.d.). This specifically identifies Antony with the Eunuchs because he has been made effeminate in Egypt.

The representation of Antony in this play oscillates between Roman and Egyptian images, and there is a sense of dichotomy that cannot be bridged. Caesar praises Antony for his fortitude and endurance (as Cassius praises himself in *Julius Caesar* for his physical superiority to Caesar). After the battle of Modena, a famine followed and Antony "didst drink / The stale of horses and the gilded puddle / Which beasts would cough at" (1.4.61-63). There are admirable qualities for a soldier but not for a lover, especially the ability to drink horse piss. One can see why Caesar admires this. He continues, with a hyperbolic enthusiasm rare for him in this play, to enumerate Antony's accomplishments: "The barks of trees thou browsed" (66), and, most climactic of all, on the Alps "It is reported thou didst eat strange flesh, / Which some did die to look on" (67-68). Caesar's admiration borders on the ridiculous. Antony is the ideal Roman soldier whom Caesar wants his sister Octavia to marry, and it is clear that Caesar understands nothing about love either for himself or for Antony.

But Antony thinks of his own tragic conflict in the dichotomized terms of Caesar and Philo and Demetrius. He always sees Cleopatra as perilous, even when he is most attracted to her—especially when he is most attracted to her. When he has lost the Battle of Actium through Cleopatra's machinations, he speaks of "My sword, made weak by my affection" (3.11.67), and there is a strongly erotic association of sword throughout the play. Cleopatra's simple apology immediately elicits the rapturous vaunting of love rhetoric: "Give me a kiss; / Even this repays me" (70-71). There is no way to reconcile Antony's contradictory impulses. He is rendered both effeminate and noble by Cleopatra, and the unresolvable paradox deepens the meaning of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Shakespeare doesn't work out the love/honor dichotomy, unlike Dryden in *All for LOVE*, or *The World Well Lost* (1678), his version of Shakespeare's play.

In the extraordinary death scenes that occupy our attention in Act IV, scenes xiv and xv, and in Act V, scene ii, the play moves away from tragedy as we know it from earlier Shakespearean plays to a celebration of the
lovers united finally in death. The moral formulas of Egypt versus Rome are forgotten, and we glory in the
grand passions and poetic speeches of the protagonists. After his final defeat, everything becomes
deliquescent for Antony, and Shakespeare has invented a dis- prefix set of words to carry this meaning:
disarming dissolving discandying and dislimning. At the beginning of Act IV, scene xiv, Antony sees the
masque-like cloud shapes (like those in The Tempest) that keep changing and that symbolize his present
reality: "here I am Antony, / Yet cannot hold this visible shape" (13-14). Like Othello, Antony's "occupation's
gone" (Othello 3.3.354); he is "No more a soldier" (4.14.42), and with his occupation his identity is gone, too.
Therefore, like the cloud shapes he sees,

That which is now a horse, even with a thought
The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct
As water is in water.
(9-11)

This dislimning is in the languorous Egyptian style of the barge on Cydnus passage.

It is not surprising in this sanguineous setting that Antony cannot successfully run on his sword and accomplish
his Roman suicide. He has to beg Diomedes to "give me / Sufficing strokes for death" (4.14.116-17). He is
heaved aloft, mortally wounded, to Cleopatra in her monument, and she puns on the erotic overtones of the
dying Antony: "Here's sport indeed!" (4.15.32)—spat is a specifically sexual word—"How heavy weighs my
lord! / Our strength is all gone into heaviness" (32-33). This echoes the earlier exclamation: "O happy horse,
to bear the weight of Antony!" (1.5.21). There is no feeling of contradiction between these two different
contexts. By the time we reach Cleopatra's dream of Antony, Antony has been mythologized: "It's past the
size of dreaming; nature wants stuff / To vie strange forms with fancy" (5.2.94-95). The Roman issue of
effeminacy and unmanliness has ceased to exist and there is only room to exercise the imagination, yet even
to imagine an Antony as once having really existed is "nature's piece 'gainst fancy, / Condemning shadows
quite" (99-100). Shakespeare was fond of debating the properties of nature and art, as in the talk of the
gillyvors (or pinks) in The Winter's Tale (4.4.73ff.).

Roman history enters powerfully into Antony and Cleopatra, especially as Shakespeare encountered it, in
biographical form, in Plutarch's Lives. Some things in the play are difficult to understand without reference to
Plutarch. The role of Pompey, who also figured in Julius Caesar, is notably compressed in Antony and
Cleopatra and depends upon some historical knowledge outside the play (or at least a diligent reading of the
notes). The politics in this play are strongly presented, as they are in Julius Caesar, and there is a significantly
chilling sense of amorality and brute force. Antony's oration, the death of Cinna the Poet, and the proscription
scene right afterward in Julius Caesar all show us the frightening implications of revolution. In Antony and
Cleopatra, two scenes that follow each other reveal how politics really works: the scene on board Pompey's
galley (2,7) and the scene of Ventidius's victory over the Parthians (3,1).

The scene on board Pompey's galley is a wonderfully composed social unit, where the three world-sharers and
their associates celebrate the peace that Pompey has made. Everyone is tipsy or well on the way, including
Octavius Caesar, whose "own tongue / Splits what it speaks" (2.7.125-26), and there is also vigorous singing
and dancing. Lepidus is the farthest gone of all, and Antony makes merciless fun of him, for example, in his
truistic description of the crocodile: "It is shaped, sir, like itself, and it is as broad as it hath breadth" (43-44).

Beneath the joviality and good fellowship, Menas takes Pompey aside and offers him the whole world:

These three world-sharers, these competitors,
Are in thy vessel. Let me cut the cable,
And when we are put off, fall to their throats.
All there is thine.
It is wonderfully simple, but Pompey reluctantly refuses: "Ah, this thou shouldst have done, / And not have spoke on't" (75-76). Pompey's refusal of the world is disturbingly political, since it is based not on moral realities but on appearances: "Being done unknown, / I should have found it afterwards well done, / But must condemn it now" (80-82). This is Machiavellian in the sense of the manipulation of political events that we find in the history plays, such as Richard III. Menas thinks Pompey merely a fool and will never follow his "palled fortunes more" (84). His desertion is like that of Enobarbus.

Act III, scene i immediately following repeats the same political reality in a different form, it is a companion scene to Act II, scene vii. Antony's general, Ventidius, is having a great triumph over the Parthians in Syria, but he rejects Silius's sound advice to continue the war and pursue the "fugitive Parthians" (7), which Silius thinks will please Antony, who will "Put garlands on thy head" (11). Ventidius feels, however, that he should stop and that there is a political dimension to military triumph (this is quite unlike Coriolanus's personal victory over the Volscians). There is a certain wistful melancholy in Ventidius's speech to Silius:

O Silius, Silius,  
I have done enough: a lower place, note well,  
May make too great an act.  
(11-13)

This kind of compromise seals the fate of Antony, which we understand that Ventidius is forecasting: "Who does i' th' wars more than his captain can / Becomes his captain's captain" (21-22), and in paraphrase: "I could do more to do Antonius good, / But 'twould offend him" (25-26). This is unusually explicit, and it explains why Antony may be full of bravado but he is not a heroic figure. Ventidius perceives him in all his vanity and political weakness.

There is a great deal that is theatrical in Antony and Cleopatra, or, more properly, metatheatrical, since it is the theater conscious of itself in Brecht's sense. Cleopatra doesn't want to be staged in Caesar's triumphal procession, and she goes into detail about the kinds of scenes she wants to avoid, like the mob scenes in Julius Caesar for Brutus and Antony's orations: "mechanic slaves / With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers shall / Uplift us to the view" (209-11). Not only will Cleopatra and her girls be "shown" (208) in Rome in a public spectacle, but they will also be the subject of extempore plays like those put on by commedia dell'arte troupes: "The quick comedians / Extemporally will stage us, and present / Our Alexandrian revels" (16-18).

Cleopatra cannot bear the thought of the histrionic impersonation of scenes that were already quite histrionic when they took place in reality:

Antony  
Shall be brought drunken forth, a  

Octavius

J. Leeds Barroll observes that the character Octavius Caesar has been described as "mysterious" and "remote," and notes that Octavius does not deliver a soliloquy in the play, nor does he speak in self-revealing asides or even utter more than a few lines at a time. He suggests that this taciturnity of Caesar's makes him seem a distant, unapproachable character. Gordon Ross Smith sees Octavius's brief comments as an intentional contrast to and puritanical criticism of the hyperbolic, flamboyant speeches of Antony and Cleopatra; further, Smith interprets such brevity in Octavius Caesar as a sign that he is "self-controlled"—witness his apparent sobriety during the orgy on Pompey's ship. Finally, Smith regards Octavius as cruel and Machiavellian in his arrest of the third and weakest member of the triumvirate, Lepidus. Richard C. Harrier describes Octavius as a "cool manipulator" who looks closely at the outcomes of events before he makes decisions.
By contrast, Barroll focuses more on the fact that, due to a lack of imagination, Octavius is prone to misjudgment. Caesar miscalculates events or people at least three times during the play: once when he is convinced Antony will lose a battle; later when he is unprepared for Antony's suicide; and lastly when he is foiled in his attempt to prevent Cleopatra's suicide. Thus, Barroll suggests, Octavius Caesar—who desires power—has less power over actions and people than he thinks he does. For additional commentary on the character of Octavius, see the excerpt by Walter Cohen in the OVERVIEW section and the excerpt by Larry S. Champion in the ROME VERSUS EGYPT section.

Gordon Ross Smith

[Smith evaluates five politicians in the play—Octavius, Antony, Lepidus, Cleopatra, and Pompey—and concludes that none of them can be regarded as ideal leaders according to the standards of Shakespeare's time. Smith characterizes Octavius as "restrained" and "somewhat puritanical" in his judgment of others—especially of Antony and Cleopatra. Smith further remarks that while Octavius is a "competent" ruler, he is also self-serious and untrustworthy—as his treatment of Lepidus makes clear.]

Since my principal concern in this instance is with the political behavior in this play, I shall examine how it appears in Octavius, Antony, and other Romans, and the ways in which they are manipulated by Shakespeare to set each other off. The flickering enticements of Cleopatra, however alluring, must be neglected so long as we are struck with Roman thoughts. I do not overlook the fact that much of the dramatic effect of the play derives from the juxtapositions and conspicuous contrasts of those opposite poles of Egypt and Rome, pock-marked as they both are. It is not a matter of separating sheep from goats, but rather of separating different kinds of goats from one another.

Our first view of Octavius (I.iv) shows him self-controlled, competent and somewhat puritanical. His opening comments upon Antony seem rather restrained condemnation if one recollects what we have seen and heard of Antony (and Cleopatra), in the three preceding scenes. Octavius alludes to Cleopatra as "the queen of Ptolemy," and inasmuch as Pompey later calls her "Egypt's widow" (II.i.37), we must infer a Shakespearean awareness of and allusion to Cleopatra's marriage with her younger brother, whom she later reportedly murdered with poison. It follows, then, that Octavius is more restrained in his language than in his implied condemnation. He speaks of Antony as "the abstract of all faults" (I.iv.9), which is also restraint compared to the descriptive possibilities in Antony's past behavior, not to mention the potentialities which will—so to speak—fruit out. In brief, the language of Octavius' opening speech foreshadows his implacable opposition to Antony. Simple Lepidus resists these judgments and would even make the faults "the spots of heaven," to which Octavius replies in his hard, laconic, absolute style, "You are too indulgent." Perhaps the actor playing Lepidus raises his eyebrows in doubt or resistance; at any rate, Octavius proceeds to stronger and more specific condemnation (I.iv.16-25), and on the grounds that Antony's neglect of burdens of State causes them to fall on Octavius (and by implication upon the other Triumvir, Lepidus). As if in confirmation of Octavius' judgment, in comes news of Pompey's growing power and of the depredations of Menecrates and Menas (I.iv.25-51). The incompetence of Lepidus is clear and it implies his approaching superannuation. Lepidus' last speech here asks Octavius to keep him informed (I.iv.81-83), although he ought to have as good sources of information as Octavius, and therefore that speech also shows his incompetence and foreshadows his forced retirement. Octavius' answer, "Doubt not, sir, / I knew it for my bond," acknowledges his agreement with Lepidus as a fellow Triumvir, but it seems rather to imply Octavius' ensuing duplicity. The use of past tense instead of present is a further and characteristically Shakespearean hint that Octavius will abrogate that agreement and cashier Lepidus.

We next see Octavius encountering Antony in Rome. We have a brief difference as to who shall sit first in a passage which is quite free of judgment words:

_Caes_. Welcome to Rome.
_Anth_. Thank you.
Caes. Sit.
Ant. Sit, Sir.
Caes. Nay, then.
(II.ii.28)

All the emotional content there must be conveyed by the facial expressions, gestures, bow (if any), and the intonations with which the words are exchanged, all of which are inevitably missing from the text. That much-fragmented line has caused some varying interpretations among critics, but we must acknowledge that the words alone are so neutral that the tone of the passage will be as the actors play it. That allowed, we must ask what manner of playing will best fit its position in the whole play. Dr. Johnson asserted resentment on Antony's part at Caesar's presumed presumption in offering him permission to sit. Malone asserted it was a mere exchange of courtesies, and M. R. Ridley has agreed. A third interpretation (and way of playing it) seems more plausible to me: whichever man sat first, while the other still stood, presumably had the higher rank, a matter of commonplace protocol both then and now. When Antony tells Caesar to sit first, he slips himself into a subordinate position, and Caesar promptly takes the superior. The incident is too trivial and too lacking in any evidence in itself to warrant such an inference, but in the next scene the soothsayer tells Antony at some length that Caesar cramps his style, that his angel "Becomes afeared," and that his "lustre thickens" when Caesar's angel is by (II.iii.16-29). Dramatically this extended warning is pointless unless true. It is, moreover, straight out of Plutarch. Between the "Sit, sir" incident and the soothsayer's warning occurs the long discussion between Antony and Caesar. Antony begins apparently aggressively: "I learn, you take things ill which are not so: / Or being, concern you not" (II.ii.29-30). But we learned earlier that Antony feels guilty over his neglect of public affairs:

I must from this enchanting queen break off,
Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know,
My idleness doth hatch.
(I.ii.125-127)

These strong Egyptian fetters I must break,
Or lose myself in dotage.
(I.ii.113-114)

Would I had never seen her!
(I.ii.150)

His reasons had been given at length (I.ii.175-192). When the new agreements with Caesar have been made, we see and hear again his sense of guilt over past behavior:

Read not my blemishes in the world's report:
I have not kept my square, but that to come
Shall all be done by the rule.
(II.ui.5-7)

We cannot believe such a promise, not only because we all know the story and that he didn't, but also because we have just heard Enobarbus in two or three of the most famous passages in the play describe Cleopatra's elaborate Greco-Egyptian enticements and predict absolutely that Antony could not leave her (II.ii.191-240). It follows from all this that Shakespeare has portrayed Antony's guilt as a constant current in his being, and we can then see his first accusation against Caesar to be really one of self-defense. It ought to be delivered resentfully, not aggressively. Moreover, as the argument continues, Octavius seizes the initiative and puts a succession of accusations upon Antony (II.ii.38-44, 54-56, 71-74, 81-83, 88-89), to which he answers more with denials than refutation, and at length he guiltily admits his faults and asks pardon (II.ii.94-98). Upon that
admission, the futile marriage with Octavia, Caesar's best trap, is proposed by Agrippa and agreed to by Antony. The relationship of underlings like Agrippa to superiors like Caesar being what they are and have always been, as we can see with Menas and Pompey (II.vii.66-73), it is impossible to imagine Agrippa's making such a proposal without having first secured Caesar's approval; moreover, Caesar himself gives the signal that opens the way for Agrippa to propose it by saying, "Yet I knew / What hoop should hold us staunch from edge to edge / O' the world, I would pursue it" (n.ii.114-116). It is inconceivable that such a conniver should not himself have thought of marrying Octavia to Antony, and Agrippa's proposal, therefore, must in fact be Caesar's. Antony steps into the trap, and can hardly do otherwise unless he is to commit an unforgiveable affront by refusing so generous an offer and implying a preference for the trollop of Egypt over the icicle of Rome. The Soothsayer's advice to Antony is thus delivered too late for Antony and serves only to confirm the surmises of the audience. That the marriage cannot work and will cause dissention between Antony and Octavius becomes clear in the expression of Antony's own foolish expectations upon the soothsayer's exit: "He hath spoken true. / ... I will to Egypt: / And though I make this marriage for my peace, / I' the east my pleasure lies" (II.iii.32-39). Philo was right: "this dotage of our general's / O'erflows the measure" (I.i.1-2).

Our next view of Antony and Octavius together is in parley with Pompey, and therefore it behooves us to go back to Pompey's first appearance, which occurred shortly after Caesar's (I.iv. and I.i., respectively). Pompey enters accompanied by Menas and Menecrates, with whom he is allied, as the Messenger reported to Caesar (I.iv.48-55). Pompey begins by saying that if the great gods be just, they shall assist just men—like himself, presumably (I.ii. 1-2). The subjunctive is ominous in that context, and we know from many previous Shakespearean portraits of self-announced righteousness that Pompey's self-righteousness may also be a bad sign. Pompey soon shows himself confident (as Brutus had been), that Antony is a poor thing, that he sits at dinner in Egypt, that Caesar is losing public support, and that Lepidus is estranged from both. Of these four assertions the first three are quite wrong and the fourth is not yet true. Mena's report that Caesar and Lepidus are in the field Pompey denies as dreaming. A man who makes such errors and in such bouquets is sure to be a loser. The audience has already seen enough to know how wrong Pompey is; that his opinion of Antony is erroneous is promptly made explicit (II.i.27-31). Pompey's only correct evaluation is that without his own opposition, the triumvirs must quarrel (II.i.44-45) but for Pompey that belief will prove a posthumous truth.

Pompey's next appearance is in his conference with Antony and Caesar—oh, and Lepidus (II. vi). Pompey speaks of "the good Brutus ghosted," and of "the all honour'd, honest Roman, Brutus," (II.vi.13, 16), and his admiration is not inappropriate, for he partakes too much of Brutus' character. There is no little self-interest in Pompey's position. His father had been worsted by Caesar, as Caesar had been worsted by Brutus, and Brutus, by Antony. In the see-saw of Roman power, Pompey remained with his father's side, and on the dubious principle that an enemy of our enemy is our friend, Pompey considers the dead Brutus his friend. His speech is too long and hashes over the past, and laconic Octavius answers characteristically, "Take your time" (II.vi.8-23). Antony brags of their superior power (characteristically), Lepidus changes the subject to the present offers in an attempt to mediate by deflecting recriminations (also characteristically), and Octavius says, "There's the point," grimly, briefly. All four are characterized, individualized, and contrasted with each other.

Pompey's acceptance of Sicily and Sardinia as his share obliges us to doubt that with so narrow a base he could hope to maintain himself in the middle of the Mediterranean world wholly ruled by the triumvirs. We must conclude a groundless trust in Pompey, in spite of his slurs at Antony (II.vi.62-68). Notwithstanding the resentments he has displayed, Pompey invites the triumvirs aboard his galley. "With the exit of the principals, the smaller fry, Menas and Enobarbus, show themselves as shadows of the great by complimenting each other upon being thieves, the pirate by sea and the soldier by land; their shaking hands is the kissing of pickers and stealers, wherefore Enobarbus says, "if our eyes had authority, here they might take two thieves kissing" (II.vi.96). But obviously there is no moral authority in this Mediterranean world to control the thieves at the top, and Menas is quite right when he presently says, "Pompey doth this day laugh away his fortune"
We are next shown the foremost men of all that world stupidly drunk: Lepidus is so drunk he must be carried off half way through the carouse (II.vii.89-91); Octavius says hardly anything, and might have been sober, except that he says he can scarcely talk straight (II.vii.122-123); Antony talks drunken nonsense (II.vii.41-45), agrees that the occasion approaches an Alexandrian feast (II.vii.95-96), desires to be dead drunk (II.vii.105-107), and needs to be steadied upon leaving (II.vii.126-128), and so surely should be presented on stage as staggering. Practical Menas sees the chance in this carouse for Pompey to win all. His proposal to cut the cable and then the throats of the drunken triumvirs is offered cautiously (II.vii.61-73), but rejected by Pompey instantly with the explanation, "Ah, this thou shouldst have done, / And not have spoke on 't! In me 'tis villainy, / In thee, 't had been good service" (II.vii.73-75). Such an excuse is the Renaissance cowardice of conscience. Pompey is portrayed as willing to profit by the crime, but unwilling to authorize or to take the blame. The fact that Menas asks is an illustration of the principle that the loyal subordinate first asks his superior before he commits a crime that may as likely injure as benefit him. If Menas had proceeded to do it without having first asked, he could have expected only that such a one as Pompey would be willing to profit by the crime but would salve his conscience and public indignation with the execution of the perpetrator. Menas answers in an aside, "For this / I'll never follow thy pall'd fortunes more" (II.vii.81-82), and he is right is considering Pompey doomed: Caesar and Lepidus soon make war on Pompey (III.iv.3-4; III.p.4), who being defeated, escapes to Samos, where he has his throat cut by order of Antony, who then threatens to cut the throat of the officer who did so (III.v.18-19). Menas—one would like to say "wisely"—disappears from the play.

A contrast to Menas is promptly shown with Ventidius in Syria. We had heard briefly twice previously that he was intended for Parthia (II.ii.15; iii.40-41). Now he has won victories there, and could win more, but he holds back for a reason given at some length and as true today in dozens of vocations as ever it was in the Renaissance or Roman Military:

Caesar and Antony have ever won
More in their office than person: Sossius,
One of my place in Syria, his lieutenant,
For quick accumulation of renown,
Which he achieve'd by the minute, lost his favour.
Who does i' the wars more than his captain can,
Becomes his captain's captain: and ambition,
The soldier's virtue, rather makes choice of loss,
Than gain which darkens him.
I could do more to do Antonius good,
But 'twould offend him. And in his offence
Should my performance perish.
(III.i.16-27)

These generalizations have a source in Plutarch which is much more specific:

[Ventidius] made the Parthians flie ... Howbeit Ventidius durst not undertake to follow them any further, fearing least he should have gotten Antonius displeasure by it. Notwithstanding he led his armies against them that had rebelled ... Antiochus, King of Gommachena, ... offered him a thowsand talentes to be pardoned his rebellion ... But Ventidius made him aunswere, that he should send unto Antonius, who was not farre of, and [who] would not suffer Ventidius to make any peace with Antiochus, to the end that yet this lirde explyoe should passe in his [Antony's] name, and [so] that they should not thinke he did any thing but by his Lieutenaunt Ventidius.
A comparison of the two passages shows that Shakespeare has generalized from Ventidius in Plutarch to certain characteristics of command and power. The inclusion of the Ventidius scene does nothing to advance the plot in any way; its inclusion—when so much else had to be omitted—suggests Shakespeare was much interested in the incident, and his generalization from it suggests Shakespeare thought it true. It is not for patriotism, or empire, or national defense that such feats are done at the behest of an Antony or a Caesar, but only for the power and aggrandisement of Antony or Caesar, and a person who cannot see that truth of power—then or now—is very likely a dupe of the calculated dissemination of fatuous ideals.

The testimony of Ventidius is followed immediately by a scene in which Agrippa and Enobarbus mimic and ridicule not only the foolishness of Lepidus, but the pretenses of Antony and Caesar. Antony is "the god of Jupiter," says Agrippa, who is part of Caesar's faction, and Enobarbus, part of Antony's, exclaims, "But as for Caesar, / Kneel down, kneel down, and wonder" (III.i.1-20). The scene is tomfoolery, and the principal target is Lepidus, but Caesar and Antony emerge as things less than demigods in the opinions of their subordinates. In the remainder of the scene the departure of Antony and Octavia from Rome is seeded with warning to Antony: "You take from me a great part of myself; / Use me well in't" (III.i.24-25). But Agrippa and Enobarbus continue in asides their quizzical and skeptical comments upon the doings of the great folk (III.i.51-59). The comments are appropriate guidance to the audience, since this marriage is broken up the next scene but one. Shakespeare has here sometimes followed Plutarch either explicitly or implicitly, and in other details he has condensed or reversed Plutarch. The most important detail is that Shakespeare only implies what Plutarch says so openly, namely, that Caesar allowed Octavia to be married to Antony so that "he might have an honest culler to make wane with Antonius if he did misuse her, and not esteeme of her as she ought to be." And again: "For Octavia, sayd they, that was maryed unto him as it were of necessitie, because her brother Caesars affayres so required it." The chief condensation is that considerable time elapsed between the marriage and its final open disruption, during which time Octavia leaves Athens for Italy, returns to Athens, returns to Rome, lives in Antony's house and cares for his children by herself and Fulvia. Shakespeare omits these details and the report that Caesar ordered Octavia to leave Antony's house in Rome, and that she refused until Antony himself ordered her out. Meanwhile Antony takes offense at Caesar's provocations, threatens him, is reconciled again, is offended again, rejoins Cleopatra, and in Alexandria publicly awards whole kingdoms to his and Cleopatra's children. Some of this is reported in the play, but much is not. In Plutarch Antony has given the earlier provocations, Octavius has been patient and restrained; in Shakespeare, more likely by design than as a result of the condensations, Caesar gives the provocations which cause Antony to send Octavia back to Rome (III.iv.), and that single separation is final. His dismissal of her is generous:

Provide your going,
Choose your own company, and command what cost
Your heart has mind to.
(III.iv.36-38)

Thus when she walks into her brother's presence, he bursts out with no evidence, but with an instinct for political propaganda, "That ever I should call thee castaway!" (III.vi.40). We should probably think him nothing disappointed, and the actor might throw a surprised and pleased look toward Agrippa and Maecenas. Octavia answers, "You have not cll'd me so, nor have you cause," which is false in both halves, but Caesar then picks another fault at length, her unceremonious approach, which we have seen was Octavia's choice, as she acknowledges (III.vi.55-60). Octavia is trying to save her own face, which in his determination to have grievances her brother will not allow (III.vi.60-61), although he has a formidable battery of alleged grievances already assembled (III.vi.1-23), and has dismissed with specious excuses, or transparent ones—as that Lepidus was cruel (III.vi.32-34)—the better grievances that Antony has against him. Having exhibited his duplicity to the audience at some length, and also his efficiency in espionage (III.vi.65-76), Octavius recruits the high gods:
But let determin'd things to destiny
Hold unbewail'd their way ...
... You are abus'd
Beyond the mark of thought: and the high gods,
To do you justice, makes his ministers
Of us, and those that love you.
(III.vi.84-89)

The *his* in the penultimate line certainly would be its in present-day usage, the antecedent of the pronoun *his* is incidentally *justice*, but that Octavius is a minister of justice we may as certainly doubt as that Richard III is the Lord's Anointed. Octavius has traded his sister to Antony in the hope and expectation that she would be neglected or rejected and that he would thereby acquire another grievance against Antony to justify his aggressions. But Octavius had no intentions of being dependent upon the chances of such a rupture, and so he proceeded to give provocations to bring it about and to take offence in anticipation. It is a significant change from Plutarch that Caesar's provocations, which are reviewed by Antony (III.iv.1-10), took place in Plutarch after Octavia had returned to Rome and Antony to Cleopatra; whereas in Shakespear's play, they are the cause of Antony's returning to Rome. Shakespeare thus has made Octavius less injured, less patient than he is in Plutarch, more corrupt, calculating, ruthless and predatory. He has made Antony simpler, "a plaine man, without suttletie," as Plutarch said, and something of the "plain blunt man," who could "only speak right on" (Caesar, III.ii.220-225), which the Antony of Julius Caesar said he was but wasn't. But Shakespeare has further improved Antony by omitting descriptions of the extremely offensive behavior which Plutarch attributed to Antony. For example, Shakespeare has Antony's seizure of Pompey's father's house mentioned twice (II.vi.26-29; vii.126-127), but nowhere is the behavior that accompanied that seizure reported in any such terms as Plutarch used:

But setting aside the ill name he had for his insolencie, he was yet much more hated in respect of the house he dwelt in, the which was the house of Pompey the great: a man as famous for his temperance, modestie, and civill life, as for his three triumphes. For it grieved them to see the gates commonly shut against the Gaptaines, Magistrates of the citie, and also Ambassadors of straunce nations, which were sometimes thrust from the gates with violence: and that the house within was full of tomblers, anticke dauncers, juglers, players, jeasters, and dronkards, quaffing and goseling, and that on them he spent and bestowed the most parte of his money fie got by all kind of possible extorcions, briberie and policie. For they did not only sell by the crier, the goods of those whom they had outlawed, and appointed to murther, sлаunderously deceived the poore widowes and young orphanes ... the holy vestall Nunnes had certaine goods and money put in their custodie ... they went thither, and took them away by force.

Constantly elsewhere Plutarch declares of Antony or his friends, "he easely fell againe to his old licentious life ... every one gave them selves to riot and excess"; and again, "so was he ... to the most parte of men, cruell, and extreme. For he robbed noble men and gentle men of their goods, to geve it unto vile flatterers; who oftentimes begged mens goods living, as though they had bene dead, and would enter their houses by force"; and again, "But Antonius desire was altogether wicked and tyrannical: who sought to keepe the people of Rome in bondage and subjection, but lately before rid of Caesars raigne." In brief, Shakespeare has debased the character and morality of Octavius and elevated the character and morality of Antony.

With the approach of Actium the behavior of Cleopatra as queen and commander of Egyptian forces becomes quasi-political. Plutarch had spoken of her enticements of Antony as "flickering," but in Shakespeare they are flamboyant and crackling from the beginning. Her principal tactic is to be adoring, complaisant and accursedly contrary by unpredictable turns: when Charmian tells her to "cross him in nothing," she answers, "Thou teacheest like a fool: the way to lose him" (I.iii.9-10). Her technique works: he finds her "enchanting"
and "cunning past man's thought" (I.ii.125, 143), and so with excellent reason Cleopatra has said in the first scene, "I'll seem the fool I am not; Antony / Will be himself" (I.i.42-43), i.e., they'll act a pair of fools together. The plain, blunt, triple pillar of the world is about as clever with Cleopatra as Rawdon Crawley is with Becky Sharp. Like Becky, Cleopatra reports the truth with considerable flexibility; so much so that she's rather a first cousin to a pathological liar. Nothing she says can be taken without consideration of her reasons for saying it, and the calculated lies she exhibits so casually early in the play (I.iii.1-5) continue all the way to the accounting with Seleucus (V.ii.140-157). We must, accordingly, peer around or through her speech as much as with any other character that Shakespeare has made for us.

The debate before Actium is upon whether to fight by land or sea and whether Cleopatra should be present. She enters with Enobarbus, who has opposed her participation in battle and who is already half frantic about her determination and her hostility to him for opposing her decision. "But why, why, why?" he asks, and "Well, is it, is it?" (III.vii.2,4), two popular forms of distraught indignation that are still current. Cleopatra concludes despotically: "Speak not against it/I will not stay behind" (III.vii.18-19).

When Antony comes and tells her of Caesar's celerity, she answers with a rebuke of his negligence (III.vii.20-25). Apparently in an effort to mollify her he tells Canidius, "we / Will fight with him by sea," and she about-faces to rebuke him again with, "By sea, what else?" Canidius and Enobarbus both argue with Antony, Enobarbus with such arguments as paralleled the English experience with the Spanish Armada: "Their ships are yare, yours heavy" (III.vii.38), and that argument is also straight out of Plutarch, who had said, "Caesars shippes were not built for pompe, highe, and great, onely for a sight and bravery, [as Cleopatra's and Antony's were] but they were light of yarage, armed and furnished with water men" [instead of landsmen]. Antony is reduced to stubborn and stupid assertions, "By sea, by sea," and "I'll fight at sea," and Cleopatra comes to his rescue with: "I have sixty sails, Caesar none better" (III.vii.49).

With that remark we should surmise what lies behind the decision: Cleopatra wants to be present at the battle, it is she who wants the fight by sea, and her reason is the sybaritic one that her boat will be more comfortable than anything that land accommodations can provide—litters, tents, camps, horses, dust, noise and confusion. How do we know this? From her character—her voluptuousness, self-indulgence, willfulness and duplicity. What if the spectator doesn't know all that? He's free to miss it; or if it puzzles him, he can again resort to Plutarch, who says in one place, "yet for Cleopatraes sake, he [Antony] would needs have this battell tryed by sea," and in another, "But now, notwithstanding all these good perswasions, Cleopatra forced him to put all to the hazard of battel by sea: considering with her selfe how she might ... provide for her safetie, not to helpe him to winne the victory, but to flie more easily." Even the unnamed common soldier can see how wrong the decision is (III. vii.61-66), but Antony evidently thinks him not even worth answering, and the soldier is left standing, to say in the aggrieved style of a commoner neglected because he's a commoner, "By Hercules I think I am i' the right."

He is right indeed; apparently Hercules also thought so (IV.iii.15), and the earlier aside of Enobarbus now proves prophetic:

If we should serve with horse and mare together,
The horse were merely lost; the mares would bear
A soldier and his horse.
(III.vii.7-9)

The politics of the remainder of the play are the reciprocal patterns of triumph and defeat—with little honesty emerging from either. Canidius joins six unnamed kings in defecting with all his troops to Caesar (III.x.33-35). Antony's sanguine reservations, "But if we fail, / We then can do 't by land" (III.vii.52-53), was naively oblivious of other people's ideas of their own self-interest. Antony deceives himself in thinking Caesar might allow him to remain in Egypt or to live a private man in Athens (III.xv.11-15), and he deceives himself
again in thinking his army and navy hold firm (III.xiii.169-171). His supreme foolishness is in thinking Caesar might risk all against him in single combat (III.xiii.25-28). Caesar's implacable hostility to Antony and his evident intention to hunt Antony to death wherever he might go (III.xii.1 1-15, 19:20; V.i.37-40) leave Antony the choices of futile resistance, ignominious flight, or ignominious surrender—and death will be the certain termination of any one of those. Cleopatra, however, Caesar would save for a Roman triumph, and so the political negotiations between Caesar and Antony are replaced by those between Caesar and Cleopatra.

Caesar's first move is to attempt to separate her from Antony (III.xii.26-27), and when, after her flagrant abandonment at Actium, Shakespeare has her ask Enobarbus, "Is Antony, or we, in fault for this?" (III.xiii.2), we may surmise that Caesar's intuition is serving him well. Thidias soon arrives, having been given carte blanca to deceive (III.xii.26-33), and comes to Cleopatra with a face-saving opener:

_Thid._ He knows that you embrac'd not Antony
As you did love, but as you fear'd him.
_Cleo._ O!
_Thid._ The scars upon your honour, therefore he
Does pity, as constrained blemishes,
Not as deserv'd.
_Cleo._ He is a god, and knows
What is most right. Mine honour was not yielded,
But conquer'd merely.
(III.xiii.56-62)

This dialogue is a considerable change from Plutarch, who has said, "Cleopatra began to cleare and excuse her selfe for that she had done, laying all to the feare she had of Antonius. Caesar, in contrarie maner, reproved her in every poyn." Moreover, in Plutarch Cleopatra's disowning of Antony takes place only after his death, at the same time as the episode with Seleucus. In advancing this detail from after Antony's death to before, and attributing its origin to Caesar's machinations, Shakespeare has complicated and subtilized it, and cynically degraded the characters of both Caesar and Cleopatra as they appear in this incident in Plutarch. How far Shakespeare's Cleopatra accepts Thidias' face-saving device is not clear. Her "O!" seems like sudden surprise, and her next answer sounds ironic, and could even be mockery if delivered that way, but Enobarbus takes it as a straightforward lie and leaves to fetch Antony. Meantime Cleopatra continues with vague terms of accommodation and gives Thidias, as Caesar's emissary, her delicate royal hand to kiss.

In the storm of Antony's recriminations which follow, Cleopatra is always slippery, always implying he ought to properly understand her, who loves him so unreservedly, and yet she is always so non-committal that she may indeed be planning to save herself by accommodating Caesar. "O, is 't come to this?" says she, and "Wherefore is this?" and "Have you done yet?" and "I must stay his time," as he finally gets blown out, "Not know me yet?" She is not the world's most plausible candidate to play injured innocence, but she played it anyway. Antony's ravings, through which she exhibits such angelic patience, ring changes upon what he was and how the world forgets, and what she was, "a morsel, cold upon / Dead Caesar's trencher," although we may doubt from his own and Enobarbus' earlier testimony (II.ii.228-240) that this particular morsel was ever cold. Indeed, all through this scene Antony wrests the truth of what we know were past events (III.xiii.105-109, 116-120), blames the stars, harps on what he was and superficially seems oblivious to the fact that the authority he finds melting from him has nothing to do at all with what he, for being simply man, may be, but on the contrary derives only from power, which can exist without him, and has now passed elsewhere. Antony is quick to declare of Caesar that he lacks personal merit and derives his reputation from the achievements of lieutenants (III.xi.38-40; IV.xii.14, 48), but comparable things were said of Antony by Ventidius, of whom Plutarch had written, "Ventidius was the only man that ever triumphed of the Parthians until this present day, a meane man borne, and of no noble house nor family ... he confirmed that ... Antonius and Caesar ... were always more fortunate when they made warre by their Lieutenants, then by themselves."
Thus in this play the power that authority derives from appears to be based more upon prestige than upon the transcendant merit that would be necessary morally to justify the inequities of power. The prestige that appears to govern power and thence authority is shown as something of an imposition; prestige as it operates in this play is closer to its etymological meaning—delusion, illusion, juggler's trick, prestidigitation—than to its modern meaning, which is certainly naive and may be intrinsically gullible. How Antony's power has melted is explicit in the next scene when Caesar declares, "Within our files there are, / Of those that serv'd Mark Antony but late, / Enough to fetch him in" (IV.i.12-14). At the battle of Alexandria Caesar orders Antony's defected soldiers to be placed in the vanguard, "That Antony may seem to spend his fury / Upon himself" (IV.vi.10-11). We infer that troops which have revolted once may revolt again, and so they're unreliable, and so they were best used up some way, and so if one's own advantage is also served in their consumption, the benefit is double. We are then told that Caesar is suspicious of all defectors and has had one hanged outright (IV.vi.12-18).

The ultimate defection from Antony would be that of Cleopatra, and whether or not it was begun we cannot be sure. Antony's report of the movement of her fleet (IV.x.6-7), is phrased in passive voice, and so we cannot tell whether he or Cleopatra had sent the order, but we must infer it was either he or she, and it is more plausible to infer the order was hers. Whichever it was, her fleet defects, and it might have done so without any order or urging from her. On the other hand, Antony asserts six times that she has betrayed him: "This foul Egyptian hath betrayed me: / My fleet hath yielded to the foe" (IV.xii.10-11); "Triple-turn'd whore, 'tis thou / Hast sold me to this novice" (IV. xii. 13-14); "Betray'd I am. / O this false soul of Egypt!" (IV.xii.24-29); "The witch shall die, To the young Roman boy she hath sold me, and I fall / Under this plot" (IV.xii.47-49); "she, Eros, has / Pack'd cards with Caesar, and false-play'd my glory / Unto an enemy's triumph" (IV.xiv. 18-20); "She hath betray'd me, and shall die the death" (IV.xiv.26). Nothing dissuades him from this opinion until he receives news of her death, which, had it been true, might have been persuasive for the audience, too. As it is, we cannot tell from Plutarch whether Antony's accusation was true, and in the play Shakespeare has retained that ambiguity but heavily increased the vehemence and frequency of the accusation. When Antony storms at her fleet's defection, her answer sounds most extraordinarily hypocritical: "Why is my lord enrag'd against his love?" (IV.xii.31). Although Cleopatra speaks of Antony as "my lord" to other persons, her use of the term in direct address is uncharacteristic and implies an uncharacteristic subordination of herself; the last four words imply fault in him and innocence in herself; the third person references to him and to herself, also uncharacteristic, suggest a detachment which in turn suggests lying. Even if she was innocent of arranging for the defection of her fleet, it was visible from where they were (IV.x.4-9), and knowledge of it ought to have reached her as soon as it reached Antony. If she already knew of it but was innocent of arranging it, she ought to have come in with woeful exclamations. If she really did not know, then the normal Elizabethan answer called for by Antony's exclamation was, "What's the matter now?" not what she says. But Shakespeare gives us no unequivocal evidence either way, easy as it would have been to do so, and we are left to weigh the possibilities against her other behavior.

During their reconciliation after the quarrel over Thidias, Cleopatra falls so strangely silent and preoccupied that Antony must recall her to what he has been saying with, "Dost thou hear, lady?" (III.xiii.172). He repeats his brags, and she answers with a mixture of encouragement and patronage: "That's my brave lord!" We cannot tell what she is thinking of, but we can see that she is not heart and soul with Antony. The defection of her fleet and her own flight to the monument follow, and Diomedes brings word to Antony:

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when she saw—
Which never shall be found—you did suspect
She had dispos'd with Caesar, and that your rage
Would not be purg'd, she sent you word she was dead.
(IV.xiv.121-124)
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This message hardly constitutes evidence of her innocence; if one falsehood can be sent by messenger, so can other. Convincing evidence would have to be disinterested, a soliloquy or a confidence from her or from Caesar, but none is given us. Her grief over Antony's death is great poetry, and out of the silent shock of woe she answers her maid's urgent address, "Royal Egypt: / Empress," with "No more but e'en a woman, and commanded / By such poor passion as the maid that milks, / And does the meanest chares" (IV.xv.70-75).

Cleopatra's first response to Antony's death is shock, and the second is to ask, "Then is it sin, / To rush into the secret house of death / Ere death dare come to us?" (IV.xv.80-82). Caesar's first response is a tempered regret (V.i.14-48), and next, to negotiate with Cleopatra. In the same speech he tells Proculeius, "Go and say / we purpose her no shame," and also, "For her life in Rome / Would be eternal in our triumph" (V.i.61-66). This flagrant lying is not all of it at his hour of absolute triumph. He invites everyone on stage into his tent, "where you shall see / How hardly I was drawn into this war"—not how he gambled on Antony's weakness and provoked the war deliberately, as Shakespeare has shown. The inevitable myth of the virtuous victor is in process of formation.

When Proculeius appears before Cleopatra and she asks for Egypt, "mine own," Proculeius gives her soothing words without commitment (V.ii.9-34), captures her, and supplies more soothing but deceitful words. Antony's advice to her to trust only Proculeius (IV.xv.47-48; V.ii.12-15), a detail out of Plutarch, makes Antony wrong to his dying words, however good his intentions may have been. Cleopatra's sure insight as to Caesar's intentions, that he would carry her in a triumph, is expressed with great spirit (V.ii.52-62), and confirmed not from Proculeius, who knows it, but from Dolabella (V.ii.106-110), a minor character of unaccustomed sweetness to be a minion of Caesar.

The incident with Seleucus which follows has been subjected to opposite interpretations. The bare bones of the incident are in Plutarch, where Caesar laughs at it and where the gloss declares "Cleopatra finely deceiveth Octavius Caesar as though she desires to live." This passage gave rise in the nineteenth century to the suggestion of Adolph Stahr (1864) that Cleopatra was in cahoots with Seleucus, and that her purpose was to deceive Caesar into thinking she wanted to live so that she'd have time to arrange to die in a suitable fashion. That interpretation was accepted by J. Dover Wilson and M. R. Ridley in the introductions to their respective editions. The chief difficulties with it are that Cleopatra's collusion with Seleucus is entirely inferential in both Plutarch and Shakespeare, and difficult or impossible to show in the playing, although neither objection is sufficient reason to deny the hypothesis. Whether conniving with Seleucus or not, Cleopatra is still showing herself characteristically deceitful. The only difference the denial of collusion makes is that instead of being calculatedly deceitful, she is casually so, and that latter quality is by no means out of character. It is rather a fuller revelation of her unplumbed potentials, of which one more remains.

Antony had called her a "triple-turn'd whore" (IV.xii.13), and the explanation that has been offered for that epithet is that her first turn was from Julius Caesar to Pompey, the second was from Pompey to Antony, and the third was (or Antony believed it to be), from Antony to Octavius Caesar. Plutarch gives no indication that Cleopatra played for Octavius, but in the Roman Histories of Floras, Bolton's translation is quite specific: "Antonius was the first of the two who slew himselfe. The Queene kneeling at the feete of Caesar, laid bake for his eyes; but in vaine; her beauties were beneath that princes chastitie." In Daniel's Cleopatra (1599), she says to Octavius, "For looke what I have beeene to Antony, / Thinke thou the same I might have beeene to thee," of which Caesar says to Dolabella, "In deed I saw she labour'd to impart / Her sweetest graces in her saddest cheere: .... But all in vaine, she takes her ayme amisse."

If we look for evidence of similar tendencies in Shakespeare, it must be granted that all the evidence is so oblique that it might either be made evident or be quite obscured by the acting that accompanies the text. First, there is her apparent dealing with Caesar through Thidias, of which Granville-Barker has written, "She lends an ear to Thidias, and the message to Caesar sounds flat treason." Next, there is the defection of her fleet and Antony's consequent accusations. Third, there is her question of Dolabella after Antony's death, "Think you
there was, or might be such a man / As this I dreamt of?" (V.ii.93-94). As L. J. Mills has written of this question. "It appears that she was giving him an opportunity to assure her that Caesar, now Emperor, is such a man." If so, Dolabella fails to understand or ignores what he sees, or denies it, for he says, "Gentle madam, no." Fourth, and perhaps what should be the most evident in the acting, is her farewell to Caesar. He has just said, "For we intend so to dispose you, as / Yourself shall give us counsel" (V.ii.185-186). Her farewell is, "My master, and my lord," which last is a term she had once bestowed upon Antony. If she there engages in some blandishments, smiles wistfully and kisses his hand overlong, he or any man would understand, and his answer, "Not so," is a double refusal—of her terminology and of her offer of love—and his "adieu" is meant both as the temporary departure of a conqueror and as a refusal to become a lover, but is also the long farewell of those parted by death, all of which meanings Cleopatra immediately understands. The last piece of evidence, and one which supports this interpretation of their final meeting, is after her death, lines which are Caesar's only poetry in the whole play:

she looks like sleep,
As she would catch another Antony
In her strong toil of grace.
(V.ii.344-346)

Certainly we should think of Octavius as thinking of himself.

As in King Lear, the great poetry at the tragic conclusion of the play often obscures momentarily the behavior that had produced that tragedy. The more effectively the tragic catharsis works, the less one considers all the deceitful machinations just reviewed; and conversely, the more one contemplates the machinations, the farther off the tragic catharsis and hence the dramatic essence may be felt to be. We conclude that one cannot give this attention simultaneously to both. But the play is both parts together, and only that. It is as great a love tragedy of irresponsible maturity as Romeo and Juliet is of irresponsible youth. As Shakespeare advanced in middle age, it is to be expected that his protagonists would also age somewhat. But a tragedy of middle-aged love need not involve a tale of politics—Othello doesn't—nor heroics, either. Had Shakespeare wanted to write a tragedy of middle-aged, classical and heroical figures in love, there was always the tale of Dido and Aeneas, which has all kinds of possibilities in King Cambyses' or any later vein. The choice of Antony and Cleopatra as a subject, with its very heavy emphasis upon political chicanery and deceit, is a deliberate Shakespearean choice. It continues his studies of politics at the highest levels of government, and once more what we have been shown is not at all flattering to heads of state.

Octavius is completely self-controlled, but that merit has so many inherent defects that even whether it is a merit may be questioned. He has a puritanical contempt of Cleopatra which conveniently and not incidentally serves his own interests. A man who would sell his own sister as a bait and trap to do in a friend and ally, with full expectation that the alliance will turn out as it does, stands on no eminence from which to disseminate moralistic airs. Cleopatra may be three kinds of a liar, but she has the internal spontaneity which Octavius can never even understand. His treatment of Pompey, Lepidus, Alexas and Antony, and his intentions toward Cleopatra all express one impulse: his heartless and ruthless pursuit of his own power. Although Shakespeare could hardly have known the Ricordi of Guicciardini, the behavior of Octavius in this play illustrates the principles of the following paragraph:

Neither Alexander the Great, nor Caesar, nor the others who have been praised in this respect, ever showed mercy which they knew might spoil or endanger the fruits of their victory, because that would have been madness, but only in those cases where mercy did not threaten their security and made them the more to be admired.

That Octavius is competent to rule in his fashion cannot be denied, but that is not to say that Shakespeare's Octavius has our, Shakespeare's, or anyone's approval. His modern press has been terrible.
Antony, on the contrary, has been improved from Plutarch; his cruel and uncontrollable predation there has been muted and converted to private riot, "lascivious wassail" the envy of Octavius and posterity, gaudy nights heaped upon gaudy days, and the inexhaustible erotic safari—"Come on, my queen, / There's sap in 't yet" (III.xiii.191-192), as he no doubt grins and shakes it. Shakespeare had a Renaissance example of such a chief of state in Henry IV of France, who also came to a bad end not long after this play was written. That so serf-indulgent a triumvir could be any match for so coldly calculating an Octavius is not to be thought of. In the safe and non-consequential realms of vicarious identification we can admire Antony for the poetic reasons Cleopatra gives us (V.ii.76-92), but in no lucid moment could we wish to be a citizen of the towns he gives away as the ruck of his moiety of the world.

Neither could we have much wish to be subject, like Mardian, to the whims of Cleopatra. Shakespeare's idea of the quality of her rule must be inferred from his portrait of her character. Capricious, despotic, amoral, licentious—"O happy horse to bear the weight of Antony!"—utterly possessed by her erotic appetites, seemingly, she still has self-possession enough always to seek her own immediate self-interest, to lie, cheat, swagger and swear, to be humble and sly, and to betray anyone, even Antony or her children, for her own enormously egocentric satisfactions. Shakespeare has lowered the levels of morality in both Octavius and Cleopatra from what they are in Plutarch, and he has made Antony less vicious but more foolish. If one be disposed to think well of the great and famous, Shakespeare's alterations are cynical. On the other hand, trust in the great may be fatuity, and Shakespeare's cynicism may be true realism.

To these three principals we may add the third triumvir, foolish Lepidus, and a would-be ruler, idealistic and imprudent Pompey. Not one of the five has the remotest resemblance to that Renaissance image of the perfect prince, he who was just under the angels on the Great Chain, anointed, crowned, and planted as God's vicar, most Christian, wise and just, clement, magnanimous, majestic and serene, as all the various royal rascalitie of that age commonly represented itself to its public.

Critical Evaluation

In his tragedies, William Shakespeare rose to dramatic heights seldom equaled. *Antony and Cleopatra* surely belongs to the greatest of his tragedies for its staggering scope, which covers the entire Roman Empire and the men who ruled it. Only a genius could apply such beauty of poetry and philosophy to match the powerful events: A man born to rule the world is brought to ruin by his weaknesses and desires; deserted by friends and subjects, he is denied a noble death and must attempt suicide, but bungles even that. The tragedy is grimly played out, and honor and nobility die as well as the man.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare did not bind himself with the Aristotelian unities. He moves swiftly across the whole of the civilized world with a panorama of scenes and characters, creating a majestic expanse suitable to the broad significance of the tragedy. The play is Shakespeare’s longest. It is broken up into small units, which intensify the impression of rapid movement. Written immediately after Shakespeare’s four great tragedies—*Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (pr. c. 1600-1601, pb. 1603), *Othello, the Moor of Venice* (pr. 1604, pb. 1622), *King Lear* (pr. c. 1605-1606, pb. 1608), and *Macbeth* (pr. 1606, pb. 1623)—it rivals them in tragic effect though it has no plot that Aristotle would recognize. Shakespeare took the story of *Antony and Cleopatra* from a translation of Plutarch but refashioned it into a complex rendering of a corruption that ennobles as it destroys. The play may lack the single, poignant representative character of the great tragedies, but it extends its significance by taking the whole world for its canvas.

As a tragic figure, Antony leaves much to be desired. His actions are little more than a series of vacillations between commitment to a set of responsibilities that are his by virtue of his person and office and submission to the overpowering passion that repeatedly draws him back to Cleopatra’s fatal influence. His nobility is of an odd sort. He commands respect and admiration as one of the two omnipotent rulers of the world, but the audience is only told of his greatness; they do not see it represented in any of his actions. In fact, he does not really do anything until his suicide—and that he does not do efficiently. His nobility is attested by his past deeds and by his association with the glories of Rome, and Shakespeare frequently reminds the audience of it, but Antony does not demonstrate this quality in the play.

There is another impediment to Antony’s tragic stature: He is too intelligent and aware of what he is doing. As Mark Van Doren has noted, he lives “in the full light of accepted illusion.” He is not duped; Cleopatra is not Antony’s Iago. There is no self-deception; Antony does not pretend that his love for Cleopatra is more than it is.

That love, however, is sufficiently great to endow Antony with the nobility he salvages. It is not simply that he is a hero brought to disgrace by lust, although that much is true. Viewed from another angle, he is a hero set free from the limits of heroism by a love that frees him from a commitment to honor, allowing him instead to give his commitment to life. Of course, his liberation is also his humiliation and destruction. Both noble and depraved, both consequential and trivial, Antony finds new greatness in the intense passion that simultaneously lays him low.

Cleopatra is an equally complex character, but her complexity is less the result of paradox than of infinite variation. Throughout the first four acts she lies, poses, cajoles, and entices, ringing manifold changes on her powers to attract. However, she is not a coarse temptress, not a personification of evil loosed upon a helpless victim. As her behavior in the last act reminds the audience, she is also an empress. Cleopatra, too, is swept along by overwhelming passion. She is not only a proud queen and conniving seducer but a sincere and passionate lover. Despite her tarnished past, her plottings in *Antony and Cleopatra* are dignified through the underlying love. Like Antony, she is not the sort of character who challenges the universe and transcends personal destruction. Rather, her dignity lies somewhere beyond, or outside, traditional heroism.
The complexity of Cleopatra is most apparent in the motivation for her suicide. Certainly one motive is the desire to avoid the humiliation of being paraded through Rome by the victorious Octavius Caesar. If that had been all, however, she would be nothing more than an egoistic conniver. More important, she is also motivated by her sincere unwillingness to survive Antony. The two motives become intertwined, since the humiliation of slavery will also extend to Antony, whose failures leave her vulnerable and taint his reputation. This mixture of motives is a model of the way in which the two lovers are at once each other’s undoing and salvation. Their mutual destruction springs from the same love that provides both with their antitheroic greatness. Love is lower than honor in the Roman world, but it can generate an intensity that makes heroism irrelevant. Antony is too intelligent, Cleopatra too witty, and their love too intricate for ordinary tragedy.

The structure of the plot departs from the tragic norm. There is almost none of the complication and unraveling that are expected in tragedy. Rather, the action moves in fits and starts through the forty-two scenes of the play. Although the action of the play must extend over a long period of time, the quick succession of scenes suggests an unsteady hurtling toward the fatal conclusion. The helter-skelter quality is reinforced by the language of the play. Few speeches are long and there are many abrupt exchanges and quick, wide-ranging allusions. Shakespeare often uses feminine endings and spills the sense over the ends of lines in a metrical reflection of the nervous vitality of the play. Thus, plot and language spread the drama over the entire world and hasten its progress toward the inevitable conclusion.
Essays

Conflict of Rome versus Egypt; West versus East

As its title plainly suggests, Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* revolves around the extraordinary relationship between two unique individuals, one a Roman general and the other an Egyptian queen. Along with Augustus Caesar, these figures dominate the tragedy's narrative progression. But while *Antony and Cleopatra* focuses upon an incendiary love affair, Shakespeare makes it apparent that there is a much larger tension involved here, a clash between two worlds. Encompassing much of the known world at the time, what is at stake in *Antony and Cleopatra* is not confined to the fortunes of two (or three) characters. From the very start, we are encouraged to look upon Antony, Cleopatra, and (Augustus) Caesar as global, indeed planetary forces. Thus, in Philo's complaints about his commander in Act I, scene i. of the play, Antony is consistently identified with the god and the planet of war, Mars, while Cleopatra is associated with the god and planet of love, Venus (see, for example, Madrian's speech at I, v. l.17ff.). Antony, Cleopatra, and Augustus Caesar are not merely powerful rulers within the ancient world; they are world-sharers whose actions determine how power will be distributed long after their lives have passed. As Caesar's extensive roster of kings and principalities who align themselves with *Antony and Cleopatra* underscores (III, vi., ll.68-75), what transpires here is not merely a struggle between powerful individuals, but rather a collision between two civilizations: Rome in the West and Egypt in the East. The question naturally arises: Whose "side" is Shakespeare on?

The simple answer to this question is evident from the very start: Shakespeare sides with Rome. Opening outside of Cleopatra's palace in Alexandria, two of Antony's officers leave no doubt that, from their Roman perspective, their general's dalliance with Cleopatra has caused him to neglect his rightful duties. This normative viewpoint is immediately reinforced by the behavior of Cleopatra, who actively taunts Antony's residual concern for his marital obligations toward Fulvia and, more important, his political obligations toward the Roman Senate. There is a gender inversion at work here: Cleopatra, the female or female principle governs Mark Antony, the erstwhile embodiment of male virtue. Shakespeare highlights the irony in Act I, scene ii, when Enobarbus hears the sounds of the powerful figure approaching with an entourage and assumes that it is Antony but is corrected on this count by Charmian's words "Not he, the Queen" (I, ii., l.78). Cleopatra (and Egypt) have usurped what properly belongs to Antony (and Rome). After Cleopatra's chides her lover for his "Roman thoughts," Antony withdraws from contact with his homeland, and it is clear that the Eastern seductress has used her physical beauty and her mental wiles to separate him from his natural loyalties to his homeland. Worse, in Act II, scene iii, having reiterated his solemn bond with Rome and cemented it through his marriage to Octavia, Antony immediately proves false to both as he prepares to return to the East where Cleopatra and his "pleasure" lie. Augustus Caesar is justifiably outraged when he learns that Mark Antony has not only broken his pledge by taking up his affair with the Egyptian Queen, but gone so far as to crown her and himself joint rulers of the Roman Empire in the East. This certainly demonstrates that under Cleopatra's oriental sway, Antony is no longer an honorable man.

Cleopatra and her Egyptian mores of sensuous pleasure, emotional manipulation, and political deception are posed against the Roman qualities of self-sacrificing stoicism, calculated rationality, and brute force. Nevertheless, Shakespeare's sympathies are not entirely with the Romans and their cause. In the play's final act, we are led to believe that the Romans are themselves duplicitous, that while Caesar and his emissaries reassure Cleopatra that she will be treated with dignity they plan to parade her through the streets of their capital as a trophy of war.

It is not because Caesar and Rome are morally superior to Cleopatra and Egypt that Shakespeare favors the former over the latter. The structure of the play is meant to present an appearance of incertitude as to which side will ultimately triumph. The play follows rapidly shifting political alliances and a whirl of battles. Before Act I is concluded, Caesar puts down one rebellion—that of Antony's wife Fulvia and his brother—and confront another, that of Pompey with league with the pirates Menas and Menecrates. This second rebellion
does not come to a head, for in Act II, scene vi. Pompey and the other rebel leaders meet with Caesar, Antony, and Lepidus and agree not to fight. If war is uncertain, so is peace. Although Pompey admirably resists the suggestion of his pirate allies to dispatch with his rivals through a double-dealing act of subterfuge, in Act III, scene v we learn from, that Caesar and Lepidus have made war on Pompey and beaten him. From here we move to the conflict between Caesar, on the one hand, and Antony and Cleopatra on the other. The tides of battle shift back and forth: indeed, as late as Act IV, scene viii, the outcome of the conflict appears to lie in the balance, as Antony and his Roman followers and Egyptian allies beat Caesar's Roman force back to their camp.

Yet despite the surface impression that the world lies at stake, *Antony and Cleopatra* is an historical drama and Shakespeare's audiences (as well as ourselves) are never in doubt about who will prevail. Rome is bound to win, while Egypt is bound to subordination within a Roman world order. In Act II, scene iii, when Antony asks the Soothsayer whose fortunes will rise higher, his own or those of Caesar, the seer's answer is unqualified and immediate--Caesar will rise above Antony. At the end of Act III and while the outcome of the conflict is yet to be resolved, Antony nonetheless sees that he and his side's fate has already been determined: "Alack, our terrene moon/Is now eclipsed, and it portends alone/The fall of Antony" (III, xiii, ll.153-154), and after watching Cleopatra's "betrayal" he again proclaims that "Fortune and Antony part here" (IV, xii, l.19). In fact, as Lepidus comments to Caesar in Act I, Antony's faults seem to be hereditary "rather than purchas'd" (I, iv, l.14). Nothing that Antony can do will prevent his demise and, with it, the victory of the Roman West over the Egyptian East.

Just as Antony, Cleopatra and Egypt are the pre-determined losers, Augustus Caesar and Rome are destined to be the winner of the global power struggle at hand. At the midpoint of the play, with the military and the political advantage still gyrating between the two sides, Caesar tells his sister Octavia that she should not be troubled by the times but "let determined things to destiny/Hold unbewail'd their way" (III, vi., ll.84-85). Caesar knows in advance that, like Aeneas in Virgil's epic poem, he is destined to play a leading part in the formation of a great Empire that will endure long after his own death. In Act IV, scene ii, at a feast held in Cleopatra's palace, Antony is told by Enobarbus that Caesar has refused his challenge to fight in single combat. Antony's faithful officer tells his commander that Caesar "thinks, being twenty times of better fortune,/He is twenty men to one" (IV, ii., ll.3-4). As it turns out, Caesar need not consign his future empire to the uncertainty of a personal combat with Antony; the planets have already foretold that he will emerge victorious.

In the end, Shakespeare sides with Rome not because Caesar and his cohorts are morally better than Antony, Cleopatra and Egyptian civilization, but because the former's victory will usher in what the Bard and his contemporaries longed for most, an end to civil strife and the establishment of universal order. In Act IV, scene vi, Augustus Caesar proclaims: "The time of universal peace is near/Prove this a prosp'rous day, the three-nook'd world/Shall bear the olive freely" (ll.5-7). The triumph of Rome and the West eliminates all uncertainty, all tension, and all cause for conflict within both the West and in the world at large. By doing so, it sets the stage for an even greater world order that will grow forth from the period of the Pax Romanum into Shakespeare's own day, the rise of Christendom. Shakespeare sides with Rome while acknowledging that its leaders are not morally superior to Egypt because Rome must win if the potential of Western Christian civilization and culture is to be realized.

The Character of Cleopatra
After Antony's death at the end of Act IV, Cleopatra says to her handmaiden Charmian that "Our lamp is spent" and concludes "Come we have no friend/But resolution and the briefest end" (IV, xv, ll.90-91). This strongly implies that the Egyptian queen is determined to take her own life and that its is the death of her paramour, Antony, that compels her toward suicide. Plainly the bond between Cleopatra and Antony is powerful, and her tragic love for the fallen Antony seems strong enough to drive her to self-destruction. But Cleopatra's love for Antony does not fully explain her ultimate demise. After all, just two scenes earlier the
Egyptian monarch is told that Antony is enraged by her betrayal and plans to take her life, and she responds to the threat by sending word to her lover that she has already killed herself. Cleopatra is not a love-stricken maiden akin to Shakespeare's Juliet. She is, in fact, a mature, practical-minded woman whose "salad days" when she was "green in judgement" have long since passed (I, v., l.72). Most significant of all, although she seems to be intent upon taking her own life immediately after Antony's death, there is another full act in the play. In the midst of Act V, Cleopatra consoles herself by asserting that it is "paltry to be Caesar," since he is not Fortune and is therefore under Fortune's sway, prefacing this observation by saying, "My desolation does begin to make/A better life" (V, ii. l1.1-2). Thus, having indicated that she will kill herself for the sake of her lost love, Cleopatra nevertheless demurs and begins to bargain with Caesar and her own circumstances.

As an alternative explanation for her suicide, in the final scene of the play (Act V, scene ii.), the trustworthy Roman Procleus tells Cleopatra that the victorious Caesar intends to treat her kindly. Contrary to this report, however, the Queen is seized by Roman soldiers and she is told by the sympathetic Roman Dolabella that Augustus actually plans to parade her in the streets of Rome as a trophy of war. Caesar himself appears on the scene and states that he will allow Cleopatra to retain her dignity and a portion of her wealth to boot. But Cleopatra is herself a master of deception and sees through Caesar's benign façade. After he leaves, Cleopatra addresses her servant Iras: "Thou, an Egyptian puppet, shall be shown/In Rome as well as I. Mechanic slaves/With greasy aprons, rules and hammers shall/Uplift us to the view. In their thick breaths/Rank of gross diet, shall we be enclouded/And forc'd to drink their vapor" (V, ii., ll.208-213). To this, the lowly Iras exclaims "the gods forbid," and if Iras will not suffer such indignities, plainly the noble Cleopatra cannot allow them to inflict her person. Seen in this light, Cleopatra's suicide is less a matter of lost love than an unwillingness to serve as a puppet on a Roman string.

But in trying to weigh whether it is her past love for Antony or her aversion to future abasement at the hands of Caesar, we can never be too certain, for Cleopatra's stock and trade is play-acting to manipulate others. In Act I, scene iii., Cleopatra sends Charmian to find Antony and instructs her serving woman, "If you find him sad,/Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report/That I am sudden sick" (I, iii, ll.3-5). Cleopatra's actions are always conducted with a target audience in mind and with their impact upon the beholder calculated in advance. Indeed, she carefully monitors the emotions of others, educes what they mean for her and how they can be exploited to serve her interests. Thus, in Act I, scene iii., when Antony enters with the news that his wife Fulvia is dead, Cleopatra remarks that Antony is not disturbed by his "beloved" wife's end, and says, "Now I see, I see/In Fulvia's death how mine receiv'd shall be" (I, iii, ll.64-65). This comment, of course, is both a playful tease and a calculated means for inducing Antony to profess his love for Cleopatra and to act accordingly. In both blunt and sublime language, Cleopatra is distinguished by her capacity for dramatic gestures. In III, vii, when Enobarbus tells Cleopatra that it is not proper for her to take part in the battles against Caesar, she replies with a defiantly profane "Sink Rome." On the cusp of her suicide, Cleopatra pauses to make the rhetorically grand statement, "Give me my robe, put on my crown. I have/Immortal longings in me" (V,ii, ll.280-281). Indeed, to the very end, we cannot be sure that Cleopatra will follow through with suicide. The means used to that end, a clown appearing with a basket of poisonous asps, arrive without any pre-announcement and we are given no clue as to when and how the Queen arranged for this lethal bounty to be brought to her, especially given that she is already under Roman guard.

There is another explanation for Cleopatra's suicide. *Antony and Cleopatra* is an historical drama and, therefore, its outcome in not in doubt. Antony, Cleopatra, and Egypt are pre-destined to lose in their conflict against Caesar and Rome, and all of Cleopatra's stagecraft and witchcraft cannot alter the end result. It is only by taking her own life by means that she conjures into existence that Cleopatra can gain some modicum of control over her own life and ultimate demise. In essence, she willfully commits suicide before Fortune can fully determine her death.

Shakespeare's Use of Solar and Lunar Imagery in Antony and Cleopatra
In the final scene of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, the Egyptian queen relates the contents of dream to Dolabella in which her deceased paramour appeared to her as the Emperor of the world. She describes her fallen consort's visage: "His face was as the heav'n's, and therein stuck/A sun and moon, which kept their course and lighted/The little O, th' earth" (V, ii, 11.79-81). Cleopatra's depiction of Antony embodying the sun and the moon is but one of the many instances in which Shakespeare uses solar and lunar imagery to underscore the play's principal thematic concerns. Throughout the text, Cleopatra is figuratively identified with the "fickle" moon, most frequently through associations with the goddess of the moon, Isis. In complementary fashion, Antony is often identified with the "constant" sun. These tandem image clusters reinforce our sense of the cosmic stature attributed to both *Antony and Cleopatra* by Shakespeare. They also correlate with the play's theme of time, particularly the tension between the inevitable passage of the sun and moon in their daily marches and the tragic desire of both Antony and Cleopatra to somehow control or disregard time. Moreover, the conjunction of solar and lunar images is emblematic of human nature as Shakespeare shows it to us in *Antony and Cleopatra*: both of the lovers display a combination of the fickle and the constant. In the end, it is fitting that the deaths of both Antony and Cleopatra are framed by references to twilight, for both exhibit a combination of solar and lunar traits.

Throughout the text Cleopatra is symbolically identified with the fickle moon through the medium of Isis. This association is first broached by Cleopatra's maid, Charmian in Act I, scene ii (11.64-70), but the strongest expression comes in Act III, scene vi. At that juncture, Caesar rages against Antony's division of territory to his heirs and notes that on the day when Antony proclaimed these kings, Cleopatra was garbed in the habiliments of the goddess Isis (1.17). Cleopatra herself acknowledges the connection. She ultimately refers to it when she decides to shed her fickle ways and embrace death rather than be "beclouded" by Rome's vulgar rabble: "My resolution's placed, and I have nothing/Of woman in me: now head to foot/I am marble constant: now the fleeting moon/No planet is of mine" (V, ii.238-241).

In parallel manner, Antony is closely identified with the sun. The first association of the Roman general with the solar orb occurs as he prepares to leave Cleopatra in Act I, scene iii and swears, "by the fire/That quickens the Nilus slime, I go from hence" (11.69-70). When Antony learns that he has been betrayed by that "triple-turned whore" Cleopatra, he too tries to discard his connection to his ruling planet, exclaiming, "O, sun, thy uprise I shall see no more/Fortune and Antony part here" (IV, xii, 18-19).

Moreover, there is strong textual evidence that Antony and Cleopatra see each other respectively as the sun and the moon. In Act I, when Cleopatra ingests a narcotic and longs to be with Antony, she tells Charmian, "Now I feed myself/With most delicious poison. That am with Phoebus" (I, v, 11.26-28), Phoebus, of course, being the sun. When Cleopatra espies the mortally wounded Antony, her thoughts again turn to solar images, as she commands, "O sun/Burn the great sphere thou mov' st in: darkling stand" (IV, xv, 11.9-10). For his part, when Antony is angered at Caesar's reply to his terms, he behaves in the same passionate manner as Cleopatra did upon learning of Antony's marriage to Octavia, swearing "by the moon and stars" that Caesar's servant be whipped for bearing an unwanted message (III, xiii, 1.95). Finally, when Antony dies, a chastened Cleopatra laments, "the odds is gone/And there is nothing left remarkable/Beneath the visiting moon" (IV, xv, 11.66-67).

On one level, these associations plainly reinforce our appreciation of Antony and Cleopatra as figures of cosmic proportions. With reference to Cleopatra, Enobarbus tells Antony: "We cannot call her winds and waters sighs and tears/They are greater sighs and tempests than almanacs can report" (I, ii, 11.149-151). Realizing that Antony is about to commit suicide, one of his guards remarks that "a star is fallen," while another replies "and time is at his period" (IV, xiv, 11.107-108). Even his nemesis Caesar duly acknowledges Antony's stature as "a sovereign creature" whose legs bestrode the ocean, saying of his adversary's death, "the breaking of so great a thing should make/A greater crack. The round world/Should have shook lions into civil streets" (V,i,11.14-15).
On a second level, we recall that throughout *Antony and Cleopatra* there are innumerable references to the passage of time, and with it, to the movement of the sun and moon across the skies. In the second scene of the play, the Soothsayer tells Charmian that, "you shall outlive the lady whom you serve" (I, ii, 1.31), a prediction which the royal attendant ironically interprets as meaning a long life for herself, rather than a short one for her mistress. When Antony leaves Cleopatra in the next scene, he does so because, "the strong necessity of time commands/Our service awhile" (I, iii, 11.43-44). Antony later marvels at the pace at which Caesar's forces have advanced. The notion of the world spinning on its axis is also evoked when Menas and Enobarbus become increasingly intoxicated aboard Pompey's galley, and Enobarbus encourages Menas to increase the spinning of the world (II, vii, 1.95). Shortly thereafter, Pompey's guests sing a song that concludes with a chorus of "Cup us till the world go round" (II, vii, 1.120).

Both Antony and Cleopatra express their desire to either control time or to disregard its passage. In the play's opening scene, Antony speaks to Cleopatra:

Now for the love and Love and her soft hours,
Let's not confound the time with conference harsh.
There's not a minute of our lives should stretch
Without some pleasure now (I, i, 44-47).

Near the conclusion of Act I, Cleopatra orders Charmian to bring her the narcotic mandragora root, so that "I may sleep out this great gap of time my Antony is away" (I, v, 11.5-6). As their fortunes dissipate, Antony laments to Cleopatra, "Alack, our terrene moon/Is now eclipsed, and it portends alone/The fall of Antony" (III, xiii, 1.153-154). But he then defies changed circumstances and is soon determined to "mock the midnight bell" by engaging in a night of revelry before the final battle with Caesar's forces (III, xiii, 1.184).

We recall Cleopatra's vision of the deceased Antony with both the sun and the moon emblazoned on his face. Indeed, both characters display aspects of the fickle moon and the constant sun. Under the influence of Cleopatra's nocturnal glow, the battle-resolute Antony makes the arbitrary and rash decision to challenge Caesar's power by sea. Yet when all is lost, Antony becomes his constant self again, carrying out his suicide alone as his faithful followers blanche at the thought of the deed. In the words of the relatively minor character, Maecmenas, we find that within Antony, "his taints and honors waged equal with him" (V, i, 1.30), just as sun and moon divide rule over the earth.

Cleopatra, to be sure, is less noble and constant than is Antony. Her suicide is prompted less by Antony's death than by her aversion to being led in disgrace through the streets of Rome by a victorious Caesar. Still, in the final estimation, Cleopatra exhibits admirable constancy. Thus, in Caesar's epitaph for her we hear, "Bravest at the last/She leveled at our purpose, and being royal/Took her own way" (V, ii, 11.334-335). Neither Antony nor Cleopatra is all sun or moon. They are both complex figures who combine both spheres in their persons. We get the sense that their tragedy stems from their tragic desire to operate outside of their natural ambit, that Antony should simply have stayed "constant" as a soldier beneath the sun, while Cleopatra should have remained "fickle" as a creature of the moon.

Immediately before his suicide, Antony says to one of his friend, "Unarm, Eros. The long day's task is done/And we are for the dark" (IV, xiv, 11.35-36). This image of the setting sun is subsequently recapitulated on the cusp of Cleopatra's suicide as Iras whispers to the queen, "Finish, good lady, the bright day is done/And we are for the dark" (V, ii, 11.193-194). In the end, both of these luminary figures are extinguished into a world in which neither sun nor moon exists any longer.

**Antony and Cleopatra: Analysis of the Final Act and Scene**

The language of the final act and scene of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* richly reflects the metaphors and images of the preceding acts. As a final statement by Cleopatra of her devotion to Antony, the scene is
rich in references to the dead lover’s majesty; comparisons with Caesar serve to heighten the glory of Antony’s greatness in life and death.

The setting is the Monument, and the scene opens on Cleopatra, whose grief over Antony’s death is beginning to turn into resolution of the course she must now take. In her first words she speaks of her “desolation”, the first of many times in the scene when each word spoken holds at least two meanings. Cleopatra’s desolation is at the death of her lover, and her part in it. But her word carries in it her plan for her own desolations--first of Caesar and then of herself. In this first speech we see for the first time that Cleopatra has learned the “paltry” value of worldly power, and that the decision to commit suicide has been made in a spirit which glorifies an honorable death at one’s own hand.

Cleopatra’s title of Queen of Egypt is stressed throughout the following lines, in contrast with the position of “beggar” which Caesar would have her reduced to. Her conversation with Proculeius illustrates her total rejection of the possibility that she might be able to deal with Caesar for her freedom. She bids the messenger to tell Caesar that she is “his fortune’s vassal”; we recall that moments before she has called the emperor “Fortune’s knave.” In this response to Proculeius we also find that Shakespeare furthers the irony of each of Cleopatra’s speeches by having part of what she says directly answer her listener, only to be followed by lines which undercut what she has just said. When the Queen speaks of obedience, we can be sure that she means obedience to Antony and not Caesar. Irony in speech is not limited to Cleopatra, although hers may be the most conscious. When Proculeius stays Cleopatra in her attempt to stab herself he pleads, “Do not abuse my master’s bounty by/Th’undoing of yourself” the words abuse and bounty can clearly be taken in two ways. It is interesting that when Cleopatra finally reveals that she knows Caesar’s plan to lead her in chains through the streets of Rome, she expresses equal revulsion for being “chastis’d with the sober eye/Of dull Octavia.” This speaks well for her noble intentions since it shows she is thinking of Antony’s honor as well as her own.

Cleopatra begins to identify herself with the mud and earth of Egypt when she says she would prefer a “ditch in Egypt” or “Nilus’ mud” to Rome, and this serves as a contrast with the lines beginning “I dream’d there was an Emperor Antony.” We are reminded of Act IV, scene 14, in which Antony speaks of the cloud formations which portend dark occurrences; he thinks of Cleopatra, and blaming her for his defeat, also blames her for the fact that he feels himself drifting, like the clouds: “Here I am Antony;/Yet cannot hold this visible shape.” Cleopatra too thinks of the heavens, but how differently than Antony! Antony is not just the sun nor moon in the Queen’s sky. He is the universe, and the earth itself is nothing more than his footstool. In this speech the Queen combines the powerful Antony, world conqueror, and the passionate lover, conqueror of the Queen of Egypt. The image of Antony, “his legs bestrid the ocean,” is at once one of power and sexuality. It is more accurate an estimate of Antony’s worth than he gave himself, and shows the development of a sense of something like humility in Cleopatra.

After speaking of the grandeur of Antony, Cleopatra must now face the ruler of the world, Octavius Caesar. He addresses her as “Egypt”, and we recall that she has just spoken of realms as “plates dropp’d from his (Antony’s) pocket.” We know, then, what her realm is worth in relation to Antony. Cleopatra kneels, not to Caesar but to her only “master and lord,” Antony. Cleopatra and Octavius discuss the transfer of the Queen’s possessions, with Caesar pretending a kindness he does not feel; he tells her not to worry but to “feed and sleep,” as if she were some animal he was fattening for sacrifice. When he has left, Cleopatra says openly what she has implied in her irony all along. “He words me, girls, he words me./that I should not/Be noble to myself.”

Cleopatra tells Iras what Caesar has in store for her, and though some have interpreted this as revealing her fear for her own reputation, it seems clear that what she cannot bear is the mockery of her and Antony’s love. When she speaks of the Alexandrian revels of herself and her love we know that she cannot bear to be reduced to that aspect of their life; she will not see the passion and power of her love in caricature.
For the last time, Cleopatra dresses in her royal robes to be worthy of Antony, and places her crown on her head. With the entrance of the Clown, who brings the “pretty worm of Nilus,” the scene takes on a sense of other-worldliness. We know that Cleopatra has been immortalized in literature, and Shakespeare has the clown say of the worm, “his biting is immortal; those that do die of it do seldom or never recover.” At this point we see that the longing for immortality is so strong in Cleopatra that she cannot wait to be rid of the Clown and die. Four times she interrupts his tale with a sharp “farewell.” We should note that the Clown says that a woman is a “dish for the gods,” echoing both the plan that Caesar has for Cleopatra, and the sense in which she sees herself as a “dish” to be offered to Antony.

There follows the speech in which a kind of spiritualization takes place in Cleopatra. It is interesting because she is fully conscious, in this moment of her life at least, of the action she is about to take and its consequences. How different in her real death she is from the self which feigned death for Antony. She disavows the sensual and selfish part of her—“I am fire and air; my other elements/I give to baser life”—and embraces that part of herself which is poetry, loyalty, and courage. Having been Antony’s lover, but not his wife, in death she aspires to a spiritual marriage. In fact she has always, in the sense of the love between them, been Antony’s wife. One would not have thought that the Queen of Egypt wanted a title so simple as “wife.”

Cleopatra does not want an after-life filled with the conquests and pleasures of life. She says that it is only Antony’s kiss which is her “heaven to have.” There is a gentleness in the Queen’s last lines, and a softness even as she applied the zap. In her last breath she calls out Antony’s name, and dies with it on her lips. As she dies, Charmian notices that her crown has fallen to one side. We know that Cleopatra no longer needs a crown to be called “O eastern star”; having proven herself as a woman, she no longer needs to be a queen.

Caesar arrives too late to take his prize possession. Yet we can see in his reaction to Cleopatra’s death the powerful effect it has upon him. For the first time in the play a bit of poetry enters his manner, and gazing down at Cleopatra he sees that she resembles Antony. He gives her credit for being both brave and noble in her death, and even orders that she be buried with Antony.

If one were to select the key words of the last scene in this play, they would have to include star, sun, moon, and immortality among them. The overwhelming impact is of transmutation of the earth and earthly concerns into the indestructible spiritual essence won by a noble death. Above all, Cleopatra, in her glory, has turned the tables on Caesar, and in a sense allowed herself and Antony to triumph over him together. As Charmian says, “It is well done, and fitting for a princess/Descended of so many royal kings.”
**Antony And Cleopatra (Vol. 27)**

**Introduction**

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

See also Antony And Cleopatra Criticism (Volume 58) and Antony And Cleopatra Criticism (Volume 81).

Although considered by many critics to be one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies, *Antony and Cleopatra* holds an ambiguous position in Shakespeare's oeuvre and has been characterized as a "problem play." In her 1977 essay "Egyptian Queens and Male Reviewers," L.T. Fitz commented, "Most critics are united in proclaiming that *Antony and Cleopatra* is a magnificent achievement; unfortunately, they are not united on the question of exactly what the play achieves. It is difficult to think of another Shakespearean play which has divided critics into such furiously warring camps." Reviewers have traditionally attempted to discern the moral significance of the drama, interpreting the work as either the tragedy of Antony's fall, or an affirmation of the transcendent power of love. Increasingly, however, commentary has acknowledged the uncertain morality of the work, and has focused instead on its complex language and structure. Feminist reinterpretations of Cleopatra's role have also been among the most notable developments in criticism of the work since 1960.

The structure of *Antony and Cleopatra* has occasionally been faulted for a lack of unity and cohesion, with some critics complaining that characters and settings are presented and dismissed too quickly. In *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904), for example, A. C. Bradley commented that the play exemplifies a "defective method" of linking a "number of scenes, some very short, in which the *dramatis personae* are frequently changed; as though a novelist were to tell his story in a succession of short chapters, in which he flitted from one group of his characters to another." Later critics, however, have tended to view the fast-paced, nonlinear structure of the play as a unique solution to the problem of handling unwieldy historical information that involves a multitude of characters and incidents. Ernest Schanzer defended the structure of *Antony and Cleopatra* in *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare* (1963), explaining that the work is organized by a series of parallels and contrasts between events, settings, characters, and values. This pattern of duality is also maintained through the drama's language, as the protagonists' speeches are echoed and inverted throughout the play. Schanzer also suggested that Shakespeare purposefully employed quickly changing scenes in order to manipulate the audience's shifting attitudes toward events onstage: "Of all Shakespeare's plays this is probably the one in which the structural pattern is most perfectly adjusted to the theme and has, in fact, become one of the chief vehicles for its expression."

While *Antony and Cleopatra* continues to be regarded as the source of some of the most glorious speeches in Shakespeare's oeuvre, recent commentary has focused in particular on Shakespeare's use of hyperbolic language to evoke a sense of the ideal, to convey the unusual vitality of the protagonists, and to express the rarity and historical significance of the experience described. Overreaching language abounds throughout the work in vast images of the natural world, descriptions of political greatness and power, and extreme declarations of passion. In his introduction to the Oxford edition of *Antony and Cleopatra* (1994), Michael Neill emphasized the hyperbolic nature of "the gulf between the high rhetoric in which the lovers clothe themselves and the harsh reality of their decline," observing that Shakespeare's constant "hazarding of bathos" accounts for much of the tragedy's "unstable brilliance," and also for its mixed reception. One of the most frequently cited examples of hyperbole in the work is Cleopatra's elevated speech following Antony's death [V.ii.81-92]: "His legs bestrid the ocean: his rear'd arm / Crested the world...." Madeleine Doran (1964) commented: "There is left only the idea of Antony the absolute soldier, whose arm 'crested the world,' and whose death leaves the world a meaner, poorer place. All the widening meaning of such a death, of the fall of such a prince, is borne in the imagery. It is a great event in history." The effect of vastness and transcendence is also enhanced by mythological allusions to Mars, Venus, and Hercules, by which the playwright endows...
the protagonists with attributes of the gods. Janet Adelman (1973) observed that *Antony and Cleopatra* is distinguished from Shakespeare's other tragedies by this sense of connection between the mythological and human realms: "This insistence on the analogy between the human and the mythological, so foreign to the tragedies, is in fact an anticipation of the romances; for, in the last plays, precisely this sense of the participation of the mythic in human life becomes essential."

Cleopatra's vain, contradictory, and unpredictable qualities have typically been viewed by critics as either dramatic flaws in Shakespeare's characterization or morally reprehensible traits that contribute to Antony's demise. Viewing the play as essentially the story of Antony's fall from power, Maynard Mack (1973) suggested that a supernatural and fatalistic quality pervades Cleopatra's role: "Though Antony chooses her and we are shown the familiar feminine skills with which she draws him, the play keeps alive a complementary assurance that a power works through her which is also, in some sense, a fate. She is for everyone an 'enchantress,' a 'fairy,' a 'witch,' a 'charm,' a 'spell,' and she moves, even for the Romans, in an ambience of suggestion that seems to give these terms a reach beyond their conventional horizons of gallantry and erotic praise." Cleopatra has also been perceived as an embodiment of the private world of human emotions that Shakespeare contrasts with the dispassionate public realm of Roman values. Recent critics have emphasized the speculative aspect of these opposite domains, often concluding that both sets of values are equally flawed. Traditional assumptions concerning Cleopatra's character have also been reevaluated as a result of the growth of feminist criticism of the play. For example, L.T. Fitz faulted the continuing tendency of commentators to view *Antony and Cleopatra* as essentially a play about Antony, without recognizing Cleopatra as a tragic hero in her own right. Fitz pointed to the overwhelming tendency to emphasize Cleopatra's "feminine wiles" and "childlike" qualities, while completely ignoring her motivations as the ruler of a nation. She commented: "[In] assessing the respective actions of Antony and Cleopatra, critics apply a clear double standard: what is praiseworthy in Antony is damnable in Cleopatra. The sexist assumption here is that for a woman, love should be everything; her showing an interest in anything but her man is reprehensible. For a man, on the other hand, love should be secondary to public duty or even self-interest." Supporting the view of Cleopatra as a dual protagonist, Michael Neill observed that in contrast with the gradual dissolution of Anthony's identity, Cleopatra acquires a sense of wholeness by the end of the play. "[What Cleopatra] claims is the androgynous wholeness at which Anthony's end gestures only falteringly. It is not for nothing that, in handing over to Cleopatra almost the whole last act, Shakespeare accords her the structural privilege conventionally granted to the male protagonist."

Structure

**Ernest Schanzer (essay date 1963)**


*[In the following excerpt, Schanzer responds to critics who have considered Antony and Cleopatra to be "faultily constructed," arguing that the structural pattern of the work consists "(a) of a series of contrasts between Rome and Egypt; and (b) of a series of parallels between Antony and Cleopatra."]*

'The events of which the principal are described according to history, are produced without any art of connection or care of disposition', wrote Dr. Johnson of *Antony and Cleopatra*, in *Johnson on Shakespeare*. Nearly a century and a half later A. C. Bradley expressed a very similar view when he called it 'the most faultily constructed of all the tragedies', and pointed to it as exemplifying Shakespeare's 'defective method' of stringing together a 'number of scenes, some very short, in which the *dramatis personae* are frequently changed; as though a novelist were to tell his story in a succession of short chapters, in which he flitted from one group of his characters to another' [*Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904)]. What can explain such extraordinary blindness in these two great critics, and in the others who have echoed them? It seems partly to stem from a false expectation, the expectation of a 'linear' structure, like that preached by Aristotle and found in much
Greek and classical French tragedy. But, as H. T. Price insists in his excellent essay on *Construction in Shakespeare* (1951), the structure of Shakespeare's plays, comedies and tragedies alike, is not linear but multilinear, not based on a unity of action but on a unity of design.

When Elizabethan playwrights began to take their subject-matter from narrative romance or chronicle history, with their multitude of characters and incidents, they were inevitably confronted with the vexed problem of imposing shape and coherence upon so heterogeneous a material. Shakespeare solved this problem more brilliantly than any of his fellow-playwrights. He does it mainly by establishing a series of parallels and contrasts. Character is compared and contrasted with character, incident with incident. Dramatic irony is called into play, so that action comments implicitly upon action, situation upon situation, speech upon speech. Sometimes, as in *Lear* and *Timon*, a whole subplot is invented to comment, both by its likenesses and its contrasts, upon the main plot. At other times, as in the Laertes and Fortinbras scenes in *Hamlet*, such parallels and contrasts are more closely integrated into the main action, but serve the same function of implicit commentary. The structural pattern thus helps not only to give the play shape and coherence but also, more importantly, it becomes a silent commentator, a means of expressing the playwright's attitudes and concerns.

Nowhere is this principle of construction better illustrated than in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Of all Shakespeare's plays this is probably the one in which the structural pattern is most perfectly adjusted to the theme and has, in fact, become one of the chief vehicles for its expression. This pattern consists (a) of a series of contrasts between Rome and Egypt; and (b) of a series of parallels between Antony and Cleopatra. Let us deal with the second class first.

This may be divided into three groups: (i) echoes of each other by the lovers, both in words and actions; (ii) similarities in descriptions of them; (iii) parallels in relations with them. But the function of all three is much the same: to bring out the extraordinary likeness, the near-identity of Antony and Cleopatra, in feeling, in imagination, in tastes, in their responses to people and events, and in their modes of expressing these responses. The total effect of all this is to make us see their relationship as something more than a sensual infatuation, more even than an exalted passion. Professor Peter Alexander has defined its precise quality better than any other critic known to me when he writes [in *Shakespeare's Life and Art*] of Antony: 'Having enjoyed all the world can give to unlimited power and the richest physical endowment, he finds in Cleopatra's company a joy beyond anything he has known. And the world, whatever it may say of those who sacrifice reputation and wealth for such a satisfaction, does not readily forget their story, guessing dimly no doubt at the truth with which Aristophanes entertained Socrates and his friends, when he told the fable of the creatures cut in half by Zeus and condemned to go as mere tallies till they find and unite with their counterpart ... "for surely", he concludes, "it is not satisfaction of sensual appetite mat all this great endeavour is after: nay, plainly, it is something other that the soul of each wisheth—something which she cannot tell, but, darkly divining, maketh her end".'

The lovers' echoes of each other's words and sentiments, though found scattered throughout the play, increase greatly in the last two acts, at the very time that the other main element in the structural pattern, the contrast between Rome and Egypt, diminishes. For towards its end the play becomes much less concerned with the presentation of the choice between two opposed modes of life and increasingly with the glorification of the choice which Antony has made. The following is a brief list of some of the most notable of these echoes:

*Antony:* Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
   Of the rang'd empire fall!
   (1.1.33-4)

*Cleopatra:* Melt Egypt into Nile! and kindly creatures
Turn all to serpents!

Antony: Kingdoms are clay; our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man. The nobleness of life
Is to do thus when such a mutual pair
And such a twain can do't …

Cleopatra: 'Tis paltry to
be Caesar:
Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave,
A minister of her will; and it is great
To do that thing that ends all other deeds,
Which shackles accidents and bolts up change,
Which sleeps, and never palates more the dung,
The beggar's nurse and Caesar's.

(The echo here is accompanied by a contrast. Suicide has taken the place of love-making as 'the nobleness of life'. The quite unjustified change of 'dung' to 'dug', initiated, on Warburton's suggestion, by Theobald and followed by the majority of subsequent editors, eliminates the echo and with it the contrast.)

Cleopatra's

Broad-fronted Caesar,
When thou wast here above the ground, I was
A morsel for a monarch; and great Pompey
Would stand and make his eyes grow in my brow …

is echoed in Antony's

I found you as a morsel cold upon
Dead Caesar's trencher. Nay, you were a fragment
Of Cneius Pompey's …

Both lovers, characteristically, look on death as an erotic experience.

Antony: But I will be
A bridegroom in my death, and run into't
As to a lover's bed.

Cleopatra: If thou and nature can so gently part,
The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch,
Which hurts and is desir'd.
Each sees the death of the other as the extinction of the source of all light:

_Antony:_ Since the torch is out,  
Lie down, and stray no farther.  
(4.14.45-6)

_Cleopatra:_ Ah, women, women, look,  
Our lamp is spent, it's out!  
(4.15.84-5)

Antony's  

Unarm, Eros; the long day's task is done,  
And we must sleep  
(4.14.35-6)

finds a close echo—though this time by the maid, not the mistress—in Iras's  

Finish, good lady; the bright day is done,  
And we are for the dark.  
(5.2.192-3)

Of echoes in the actions of the two lovers the most notable instance is Cleopatra's treatment of the messenger who brings her the news of Antony's marriage to Octavia (2.5) and Antony's treatment of Caesar's messenger, Thyreus (3.13). Both actions are prompted by jealousy and a sense of betrayal and desertion by the other, and both are marked by uncontrolled fury, coupled with a relished cruelty towards the innocent messenger, as shown in Cleopatra's  

Thou shalt be whipp'd with wire and stew'd in  
brine,  
Smarting in ling'ring pickle  
(2.5.65-6)

and in Antony's  

Whip him, fellows,  
Till like a boy you see him cringe his face,  
And whine aloud for mercy.  
(3.13.99-101)

Now for the chief parallels in the descriptions of the two lovers: Cleopatra's words about Antony,  

Be'st thou sad or merry,  
The violence of either thee becomes,  
So does it no man else  
(1.5.59-61)

echo (and hence also belong to the previous group) Antony's words about her:
Fie, wrangling queen!
Whom everything becomes—to chide, to laugh,
To weep; whose every passion fully strives
To make itself in thee fair and admir'd.

(1.2.48-51)

The great set-piece describing Cleopatra's transcendent perfections, Enobarbus's barge-speech, finds its counter-part in Cleopatra's equally hyperbolical description of Antony to Dolabella. In both speeches the same conceit is used: the person described is declared superior to anything the artist's imagination could create, Nature in this instance surpassing fancy. Cleopatra was

O'er picturing that Venus where we see
The fancy out-work nature.

(2.2.204-5)

Of Antony we are told,

Nature wants stuff
To vie strange forms with fancy; yet t'imagine
An Antony were nature's piece 'gainst fancy,
Condemning shadows quite.

(5.2.97-100)

Both lovers at their death are identified with the star most appropriate to them. At the death of Antony the guards exclaim:

2 Guard: The star is fall'n.
1 Guard: And time is at his period.

(4.14.106-7)

The reference here is presumably to the day-star, the sun, which measures time, and to which Antony has been repeatedly compared in the course of the play. When Cleopatra dies, Charmian exclaims:

O Eastern star! (5.2.306)

The appositeness of this identification of the Egyptian queen, mistress of the East, with Venus, the 'Eastern star', needs no emphasis.

Among the third group, the parallels in the relations of others with Antony and Cleopatra, the most notable instances are found in the deaths of their companions and servants. Eros and Charmian do not even consider the possibility of surviving them. This is the supreme tribute paid to the pair in the play. And, to complete the pattern, Iras, like Enobarbus, appears to die merely from grief, of a broken heart. Suicide, though contemplated, is not found necessary.

This blows my heart.
If swift thought break it not, a swifter mean
Shall outstrike thought: but thought will do't, I feel.

(4.6.34-6)
And thought does it, we are led to believe. Enobarbus dies with Antony's name on his lips (4.9.23). The lack of a stage-direction in the Folio leaves the cause of Iras's death more obscure. But the absence of any aside like that given to Charmian ('O, come apace, dispatch. I partly feel thee') suggests that we are not meant to regard it as suicide. And the structural pattern, which plays such an important rôle in the play, corroborates this view.

Let us now turn to the other main element in the play's structural pattern, the series of contrasts between Rome and Egypt. These contrasts between Roman and Egyptian attitudes and values, Roman and Egyptian ways of feeling and thinking, find their simplest expression in the constant alternation of scenes located in Rome and Alexandria. But the Roman world sometimes invades Egypt, as at the play's opening, where the hostile comments of the Roman soldier, Philo, are delivered in the very stronghold of the enemy, the court at Alexandria; and occasionally Egypt invades Rome, as in the person of the soothsayer (2.3), or in Enobarbus's barge-speech, where the most glowing tribute to Cleopatra is delivered in Rome and by a Roman soldier, though one partly under the spell of the East. And the pattern of simple opposition between Rome and Egypt is further complicated by the fact that in her last hours of life Cleopatra, without surrendering any of her Eastern guile and sensuousness, acquires some Roman qualities, becoming 'marble-constant' (5.2.239) and doing 'what's brave, what's noble' 'after the high Roman fashion' (4.15.87), though with some concession to an Eastern concern for 'easy ways to die', preferring the indigenous and kindred serpent ('Where's my serpent of Old Nile?' / For so he calls me', 1.5.25-6) to the Roman sword. And standing between the two opposed worlds, and combining them in his person, there is Antony. What in him they have in common is their extravagant, hyperbolic nature. 'The greatest soldier of the world' (1.3.38) is also its greatest lover. The same Antony who amazes his fellow-soldiers when, during a famine in his wars, he drinks 'the gilded puddle / Which beasts would cough at'; and eats 'strange flesh, / Which some did die to look on' (1.4.62-9) amazes them equally by his feats of drinking and eating in his Alexandrian revels (2.2.183-6). Hyperbole is the mark of his own words and deeds, as well as of what is said by others about him, finding its climax in Cleopatra's great speech to Dolabella.

What above all unites the two worlds in Antony is the intense vitality which he brings to his rôle of voluptuary as well as to that of statesman and soldier. Professor L. C. Knights puts it admirably when he writes of it [in Some Shakespeare Themes]: 'What Shakespeare infused into the love story as he found it in Plutarch was an immense energy, a sense of life so heightened that it can claim to represent an absolute value…. This energy communicates itself to all that comes within the field of force that radiates from the lovers, and within which their relationship is defined.' The opposition is never one between sensual sloth and the life of action. That is why the stock-image presented by Spenser of the knight in the arms of Acrasia (F.Q., II, 12, lxxvi-lxxx) fits Antony's case so little, in spite of its surface similarities. Pompey thinks of the relationship in this conventional way when he calls upon Cleopatra to

Tie up the libertine in a field of feasts,
Keep his brain fuming. Epicurean cooks
Sharpen with cloyless sauce his appetite,
That sleep and feeding may prorogue his honour
Even till a Lethe'd dullness.
(2.1.23-7)

Caesar in his account, for all his patrician contempt for the 'democratic' Antony, and in spite of much that he leaves out, conveys the energy and vitality of this life much more truly:

Let's grant it is not
Amiss to tumble on the bed of Ptolemy,
To give a kingdom for a mirth, to sit
And keep the turn of tippling with a slave,
To reel the streets at noon, and stand the buffet
With knaves that smell of sweat.
(1.4.16-21)

A further complication of the simple pattern of contrasts results when Shakespeare, after showing Antony's Love and Honour (meaning chiefly military glory) in continuous conflict, with Honour disastrously routed by Love at the battle of Actium, proceeds to give us a series of scenes in which Love and Honour have for a time joined forces. In 4.4. Cleopatra, the armourer of his heart, has also become the armourer of his body, and his love for her the spur to his valour. The scene was, I believe, influenced by Plutarch's implied contrast of Antony's behaviour with that of Demetrius, in his 'Comparison of Demetrius with Antonius' [in his Lives]: 'They were both in their prosperitie very riotously and licentiously given: but yet no man can euer say, that Demetrius did at any time let sleep any opportunitie or occasion to follow great matters, but only gaue himselfe indeed to pleasure, when he had nothing else to do … but indeed when he was to make any preparation for war, he had not then Iuie at his darts end, nor had his helmet perfumed, nor came out of the Ladies closets pricked and princt to go to battell: but he let all dancing and sporting alone, and became as the Poet Euripides saith: The souldier of Mars, cruel and bloudie. 'Plutarch's unfavourable contrast is here turned by Shakespeare in Antony's favour. For he is shown capable of sporting and feasting all night and fighting a victorious battle the next day, of being in quick succession a devotee of Venus and Bacchus and a soldier of Mars.

The temporary fusion of Love and Honour in these scenes is epitomized by the astonishing image in Antony's speech of welcome to Cleopatra after his victorious return from battle:

Leap thou, attire and all,
Through proof of harness to my heart, and there
Ride on the pants triumphing.
(4.8.14-16)

The image also forms an ironic contrast to Antony's imprecations uttered the following morning (only about a hundred lines separate the two passages):

Vanish, or I shall give thee thy deserving
And blemish Caesar's triumph. Let him take thee
And hoist thee up to the shouting plebeians …
(4.12.32-4)

Another element that complicates the pattern of contrasts between the two worlds is the fact that certain qualities, such as cruelty and deceit, are shown to belong to both. For instance, Caesar's cruel treatment of Alexas (4.6.12-16) has its counterpart in Antony's treatment of Thyreus and his offer concerning Hipparchus (3.13.147-51). The whole last act is given over to the contest between Caesar's guile and Cleopatra's, each determined to outwit the other. 'Policy' and duplicity is used just as much by Cleopatra in the service of Love as by Caesar in the service of the State. The truth is that Cleopatra is less Caesar's complete opposite than is Antony. It is Caesar's sister, Octavia, who is her opposite in every way.

This juxtaposition of opposed characters, Antony and Caesar, Cleopatra and Octavia, forms another essential part of the play's dualistic structure, another means by which Shakespeare brings out the all-pervasive contrast between East and West. He achieves the contrast between Antony and Caesar by burying the Antony of Julius Caesar and creating an entirely new and different dramatic character. In spite of the attempts of many critics to find links and similarities between them, I do not see how a belief in the unity of conception of the two Antonies can be maintained…. [The] Antony of Julius Caesar has scarcely a trait in common with the Antony depicted by Plutarch, except a fondness for revelry, and this is also his only link with the Antony of our play,
who is largely based on Plutarch's depiction of him. He is basically what Plutarch calls him, and what the Antony of Julius Caesar only pretends to be (3.2.218), 'a plaine man without subtily'. The Machiavellism of the Antony of Julius Caesar has in the later play been transferred to Caesar, who had shown no traces of it in the earlier drama. The ruthless treatment of Lepidus there advocated by Antony (J.C., 4.1.19-27) is in fact carried out by Caesar in Antony and Cleopatra (3.5.6-12). We need only to think of this cynical advice on the treatment of Lepidus in the mouth of the Antony of the later play, or to imagine that 'mine of bounty' planning to defraud Caesar's heirs of part of their legacies (J.C., 4.1.8-9), to realize how impossible it is to entertain the notion that the Antony of our play is a development and continuation of the Antony of Julius Caesar. Nor is it very difficult to see why Shakespeare should have made the change. Had Antony instead of Caesar been made the calculating politician, the deceitful Machiavel, it would have destroyed the presiding conception of the play. This demanded that the value of all that Antony loses through his love for Cleopatra, such as political power, wordly glory, should be called into question by a display of the ruthlessness, the deceit, the calculating inhumanity that goes with the acquisition and maintenance of such power and glory. Caesar, therefore, had to be the Machiavel, and Antony, by contrast, the simple, generous, impulsive, chivalrous soldier; one who is willing to stake his worldly fortunes upon a sea-fight where he is at a grave disadvantage, merely because Caesar 'dares us to't' (3.7.29) and his chivalric code obliges him to accept this challenge; one who seems genuinely surprised when 'the full Caesar' refuses to 'answer his emptiness' and meet him in personal combat (4.2.1-4).

Yet, as one would expect with Shakespeare, who, even at his most schematic, refuses to paint in black and white, Caesar is depicted not merely as the cold-blooded, calculating politician. He is also shown to be a tender and loving brother (for, unlike some commentators, I do not think Shakespeare means us to question the sincerity of this love) and at least the post mortem admirer of Antony and Cleopatra, capable of true and deep feeling.

Professor Danby has shown how what he calls 'the Shakespearean dialectic' is the informing structural principle of the entire play. 'It comes out in single images, it can permeate whole speeches, it governs the build-up inside each scene, it explains the way one scene is related to another.' It also extends to the emotional pattern exhibited by the two lovers (this is another way in which they resemble and echo each other). In no other play by Shakespeare do we meet characters given to such persistent oscillation of feelings, such violent veering between emotional extremes. In the case of Cleopatra it is at times deliberately practised, part of her technique of exhibiting her infinite variety in order to keep monotony at bay, her method of tantalizing Antony by providing moods that are emotional foils to his own.

If you find him sad
Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report
That I am sudden sick.

(1.3.3-5)

But it also expresses her essential nature, dominated by her planet, the fleeting moon. With Antony the oscillation of feelings is even more pronounced and is linked to, and partly expressive of, his veering between East and West, which exert their rival pull upon him. The remarkable absence of any inner conflict in Antony when faced, at several points in the play, with the necessity to choose between Rome and Egypt is an expression of this emotional polarity, this pendulum swing of the feelings. As A. C. Bradley remarks [in his Oxford Lectures on Poetry], Shakespeare 'might have made the story of Antony's attempt to break his bondage, and the story of his relapse, extremely exciting, by portraying with all his force the severity of the struggle and the magnitude of the fatal step'. But he chose not to do so. Instead he shows us Antony's complete devotion to Cleopatra in the opening scene, followed by his sudden resolution to break free from her: 'These strong Egyptian fetters I must break, / Or lose myself in dotage' (1.2.113-14). In the leave-taking that follows his fetters are shown to be as stoutly knit as ever:
By the fire
That quickens Nilus' slime, I go from hence
Thy soldier, servant, making peace or war
As thou affect'st.

(1.3.68-71)

In the message he sends her by Alexas he promises to 'piece her opulent throne with kingdoms' (1.5.46). Then comes Agrippa's marriage-plan, Antony's immediate acceptance of it, and his protestation to Caesar:

Further this act of grace; and from this hour
The heart of brothers govern in our loves
And sway our great designs!

(2.2.151-3)

When we meet him next he confesses to Octavia,

I have not kept my square; but that to come
Shall all be done by th' rule.

(2.3.6-7)

Directly upon this follows the encounter with the sooth-sayer, and Antony's instant resolution:

I will to Egypt;
And though I make this marriage for my peace,
I' th' Easy my pleasure lies.

(2.3.39-41)

When we find him next in the company of Octavia, at their leave-taking from Caesar, the following exchange takes place between the two men:

Caesar: Most noble Antony,
Let not the piece of virtue which is set
Betwixt us as the cement of our love
To keep it builded be the ram to batter
The fortress of it; for better might we
Have lov'd without this mean, if on both parts
This be not cherish'd. Antony: Make me not offended
In your distrust.
Caesar: I have said.
Antony: You shall not find,
Though you be therein curious, the least cause
For what you seem to fear.

(3.2.27-36)

A few scenes later Octavia hears from her brother that Antony is back in Egypt, that 'Cleopatra / Hath nodded him to her' (3.6.65-6). I feel sure it would be a gross falsification of Shakespeare's conception to see Antony in these changes as a conscious deceiver, hiding his true feelings and intentions from Caesar, Octavia, or Cleopatra. Rather should we see him as sincere in all his protestations, believing each to be true at the moment it is uttered, until he is suddenly drawn into a contrary allegiance. Instead of being 'with himself at war', like Brutus, or Macbeth, or Othello, he is like a chronic deserter, forever changing sides in the struggle, and this emotional pattern mirrors and underlines the structural pattern of the entire play.
The dualistic structure of *Antony and Cleopatra* also helps to make it Shakespeare's problem play *par excellence*. Let us remind ourselves of L. C. Knights's dictum quoted in the *Introduction*: 'In *Macbeth* we are never in any doubt of our moral bearings. *Antony and Cleopatra*, on the other hand, embodies different and apparently irreconcilable evaluations of the central experience.' Throughout the play, and to an extent far exceeding anything found in *Julius Caesar* and *Measure for Measure*, we are confronted with these opposed evaluations, and in such a way as to exclude—at least in those open to the play's full imaginative impact—a simple or consistent response. Indeed, Antony's great speech to Eros ('Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish') not only expresses his sense of an utter loss of identity as a result of Cleopatra's supposed betrayal of him, but, as Professor Danby suggests, also describes our experience in watching the play. As applied to the ever-changing outlines of Cleopatra's character it is only another way of describing her infinite variety. But it extends to the play's whole moral landscape, our shifting attitudes towards its events, our ever-changing feelings towards its main characters, Antony, Cleopatra, and Caesar. Here the technique of 'dramatic coquetry', consisting in an alternate enlisting and repelling of the audience's affections for a character, which we have studied in the two preceding chapters and which, when strongly in evidence, is one of the hall-marks of the Shakespearian Problem Play, reaches its climax. As regards the two lovers, it is employed from the very beginning until the fourth act. As for Caesar, it extends through the entire play up to its closing lines.

To Professor Knights's contrast between *Macbeth* and our play may be added a secondary contrast between them: In *Macbeth* Shakespeare depicts in his hero's mind a complex response to a simple, unproblematic, moral issue. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, as in *Measure for Measure*, the reverse is found: A complex, problematic moral issue confronting Antony and Isabella evokes a simple response, one apparently arrived at without any inner conflict. But the simplicity of the response, the absence of inner conflict in the hero and heroine of these plays, in no way prevents a complex and divided response in the minds of the audience or the taking of opposite sides among its members. As with *Julius Caesar* and *Measure for Measure*, the opposition of attitudes in the play, the conflicting presentation of its moral issues, is reflected in the polarity of views among its commentators. A substantial body of critics, especially of the last century (with even Arthur Symons, oddly, among them) adhere, with varying degrees of emphasis, to the Roman view of Caesar, Pompey, and Philo, seeing Antony's love for Cleopatra very much as Plutarch saw it. This attitude may be prompted by a personal response to the play, or, in more recent times, by an attempt to see it 'historically', to respond to it as it is supposed an Elizabethan audience (always by such critics thought of as a monolith, incapable of divided feelings or varying reactions) would have responded. On the opposite side there is the at present more influential body of critics who see the love-affair as the glorious culmination of Antony's life. This group, whose doyen is Swinburne, includes such names as Wilson Knight, Dover Wilson, S. L. Bethell, and, across the Atlantic, Donald Stauffer and Harold S. Wilson.

But, once again, there is also a *tertium quid*, a group of critics who feel that the play conveys no clear-cut, unequivocal attitude to the love-story. A. C. Bradley may be allowed to speak for all these when he declares that 'Neither the phrase "a strumpet's fool", nor the assertion "the nobleness of life is to do thus", answers to the total effect of the play. But the truths they exaggerate are equally essential; and the commoner mistake in criticism is to understate the second.' Since these words were written (1905), the critical pendulum has swung the other way and today the commoner mistake is to understate the first. But Bradley's essay, despite a few lapses, remains one of the sanest and justest comments on the play.

Another set of oppositions in the play's effect upon its audience is brought out by Professor Knights when he writes [in his essay "On the Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra," *Scrutiny*, Vol. 16, 1949]: 'This, then, is what the play asks of us: to be true to both these impressions of the presented relationship. On the one hand, a closed circle of passion, of which the boasted "variety" is, in the end, entirely dependent on the application of fresh stimulants; on the other hand, natural force and fertility and spontaneous human feeling, all apparently inextricably tied ("this knot intrinsicate") with passions directed to death.... If we do not feel both the vitality and the sham vitality, both the variety and the monotony, both the impulse towards life and the impulse towards death, we are missing the full experience of the play.'
Professor Danby provides a *tertium quid* of a different sort. After pointing to 'the ambiguity which invests everything in Egypt equally with all things in Rome' and declaring that 'If it is wrong to see the "mutual pair" as a strumpet and her fool, it is also wrong to see them as a Phoenix and a Turtle', he goes on to argue that both the Roman and Egyptian attitudes are shown to be inadequate and mistaken. 'Egypt is the Egypt of the biblical glosses: exile from the spirit, thraldom to the flesh-pots, diminution of human kindness.... The fourth and fifth acts of *Antony and Cleopatra* are not epitaphies. They are the ends moved to by that process whereby things rot themselves with motion—unhappy and bedizened and sordid, streaked with the mean, the ignoble, the contemptible. Shakespeare may have his plays in which "redemption" is a theme (and I think he has), but *Antony and Cleopatra* is not one of them.' I do not find it possible to follow him in this view. If the desolation that begins to make a better life for Cleopatra (5.2.1-2) does not take her away from the flesh-pots, if she does not undergo an ennoblement (if we prefer to confine the word 'redemption' to religious contexts) which carries with it an increase in human kindness and a diminution of selfishness and pride, and so is kindred to the change in Lear (a comparison which Professor Danby dismisses as blasphemous), it is difficult to see what Shakespeare was doing in the last act.

Bernard Shaw achieves a unique combination of the opposed critical views when he claims [in the preface to *Three Plays for Puritans* (1925), p. xxviii] that 'after giving a faithful picture of the soldier broken down by debauchery, and the typical wanton in whose arms such men perish, Shakespeare finally strains all his huge command of rhetoric and stage pathos to give a theatrical sublimity to the wretched end of the business, and to persuade foolish spectators that the world was well lost by the twain'. Shaw's account is based on a fundamental distortion of Shakespeare's procedure in this play. For from the opening scene until Antony's death the two views are presented side by side. The theatrical sublimity is as manifest in the lovers' first words (1.1.14-17) or in Enobarbus's 'barge-speech' as in what Shaw calls 'the wretched end of the business'. (His account applies far better to the Countess of Pembroke's *Antonius*, where for the play's first three quarters chiefly the hostile, Roman view of Antony's infatuation is presented, while in the last quarter we are given the 'romantic', sympathetic view.)

I do not share Professor Knights's feelings [in *Some Shakespearean Themes*] that in the last resort Shakespeare 'places' and condemns the love-affair. 'It is, of course', he comments, 'one of the signs of a great writer that he can afford to evoke sympathy for what, in his final judgment, is discarded or condemned. In *Antony and Cleopatra* the sense of potentiality in life's untutored energies is pushed to its limit, and Shakespeare gives the maximum weight to an experience that is finally "placed".' So definite, so unequivocal a response does not seem to me to emerge. Shakespeare does not prevent those who wish to do so from applying to his play the subtitle of Dryden's adaptation, 'The World Well Lost'.

The nature of Shakespeare's treatment can be perceived more clearly when it is contrasted with the handling of a very similar moral issue by two other great poets. In *Paradise Lost* the protagonist has also to choose between a woman whom he loves and who threatens his very existence and a contrasted set of values allegiance to which assures his self-preservation and prosperity. And there, too, he chooses immediately, unhesitatingly, to follow the woman. *Paradise Lost* could well have been called *All for Love*. But it could never have been called *The World Well Lost*. For though Milton enlists our utmost sympathy for Adam's decision to sacrifice all for his love of Eve, this decision is presented in a context of values which leaves no room for a problematic response by the reader. The whole ethical framework of the poem is too explicit in its condemnation of the action. And it is just because it is so explicit and we are never in doubt of our moral bearings that Milton can afford to evoke such a degree of sympathy for Adam's choice. And much the same may be said of Virgil's treatment of Dido and Aeneas. His deeply compassionate presentation of the plight of the abandoned Queen is not, so it seems to me, an indication that the poet was 'swept away irresistibly' beyond his intentions, that the moralist's overt purposes have been foiled by the artist's hidden sympathies, as some critics have asked us to believe; but on the contrary, and much as with Milton, it is an expression of Virgil's confidence in the clarity and force of the poem's ethical postulates and in the reader's ability to share them imaginatively, at least to suspend his disbelief in them. In the case of some readers this has proved an
over-confidence. Just as a number of Romantic critics have applauded Adam's decision to die with Eve, there are some who have deplored Aeneas's decision to abandon Dido. But their response is not the result of any ambiguity or uncertainty in the moral frame-work of the two poems, but rather of the critics' lack of sympathy with it, which makes them anxious to enlist the poet as an ally in their revulsion against it, makes them eager to discover in him conflicts between the conscious moralist and the intuitive artist, between the planner and the maker.

Adam's and Aeneas's decisions are 'placed' by the moral framework of the poem in a way that Antony's never is. Antony and Cleopatra remains securely within the area of the problem play. It is interesting to compare it in this respect with two of its English predecessors, with both of which Shakespeare was acquainted, the Countess of Pembroke's Antonius (1590), and its companion-piece, Daniel's Cleopatra (1594).

In its general presentation of the love-story the Countess of Pembroke's Antonius, a translation of Garnier's Marc Antoine (1578), is, surprisingly, not at such a far remove from Shakespeare's as one would expect. It is certainly closer to it than it is to that of Plutarch, its principal source. It differs chiefly from Shakespeare's presentation in its omission of anything that derogates from its eulogistic portrayal of Cleopatra. Though, of course, more simple and less vital, she is basically Shakespeare's Cleopatra of Act V, with no hint of Shakespeare's Cleopatra of Acts I-IV. Her love for Antonius has been deep and true from the first, his suspicions of her betrayal are unfounded, and her motives for suicide simple and unalloyed: To have her body closed 'in one selfe tombe, and one selfe chest' (1. 1968) with that of Antonius, while her spirit is reunited with his in 'the hellish plaine' (1. 1951). In essence this Cleopatra, who invokes Antonius by 'our holy mariage' (1. 1948), is indistinguishable from Chaucer's, the martyr and one of the saints of Love. To this picture of her as a devoted and faithful wife Garnier has added that of the loving mother in a pathetic scene of leave-taking from her children (11. 1834 ff.).

Apart from the deluded Antonius when he thinks himself betrayed by her, nobody in the play except she herself utters a word of blame or criticism of Cleopatra; not even the chief victims of her actions, the chorus of Egyptians, who, in laments full of Sophoclean pessimism, repeatedly bewail their fate; not even Caesar and Agrippa, who have a great many harsh things to say about Antonius. And her self-blame is not for her past relations with Antonius but for her flight at Actium, which led to his overthrow. The equivalent to Enobarbus's tribute to Cleopatra in his 'barge-speech' is found in Diomede's extended praise of her perfections:

Nought liues so faire. Nature by such a worke
Her selfe, should seme, in workmanship hath past.
She is all heau'nlie: neuer any man
But seeing hir was rauished with her sight, etc.

(11. 709-12)

While the picture of this paragon among women thus remains untarnished, Antonius's part in the love-affair is severely condemned by various speakers: by his friend, Lucilius; by Caesar and Agrippa; but chiefly and most vehemently by himself while in revulsion against his love for the woman whom he believes to have betrayed him. Nothing that Caesar or Philo say in Shakespeare's play is stronger in its condemnation than Antonius's

Nay, as the fatted swine in filthy mire
With glutted heart I wallow'd in delights,
All thoughts of honor troden under foote.
So I me lost.

(11. 1155-8)
The tributes to Antonius come chiefly from Cleopatra, but are also to be found in Dirceus's account of the 'plaints and outcries horrible to heare' with which 'Men, women, children, hoary-headed age' received the news of his death (11. 1661-2).

In _Antonius_, then, as in Shakespeare's play, we find side by side both condemnation and glorification of the love of Antony and Cleopatra. What we do not find in Garnier's play, and what is all-important in Shakespeare's, is a weighing of what Antony loses against what he gains, an alternate calling into question of the values of worldly glory and of the glory of their love. There is scarcely anything in _Antonius_ of the 'World Well Lost' attitude, which is epitomized by Antony's words to Cleopatra after Actium,

> Fall not a tear, I say; one of them rates
> All that is won and lost
> (3.11.69-70)

and which is caught well enough by Dryden in his Antony's exclamation,

> Give, you Gods,
> Give to your Boy, your _Caesar_,
> This Rattle of a Globe to play withal,
> This Gu-gau World, and put him cheaply off:
> I'll not be pleas'd with less than _Cleopatra_.
> (All for Love, II, 443 ff.)

Much the same contrast is also found between Shakespeare's play and Daniel's _Cleopatra_ which equally lacks a problematic attitude towards the love-story. Its chief difference from _Antonius_ lies in its treatment of Cleopatra. She is seen as a much more complex creature, driven on to suicide by a mixture of motives, as she herself confesses.

> So shall I shun disgrace, leave to be sorry,
> Fly to my loue, scape my foe, free my soule,
> So shall I act the last of life with glory,
> Die like a Queen, & rest without controule.
> (11. 1382-5)

Dying like a Queen seems to mean more to her than flying to her love. Unlike the Cleopatra of _Antonius_ (and of Shakespeare's play), she has only come to love Antony after his death. She repents of her former way of life, speaks of its infamy (1. 461), and sees herself as an _exemplum_ of princes 'As please themselves, and care not what become' (1. 465). Nor do others spare her in their comments. The Chorus of Egyptians, in marked contrast to that in _Antonius_, fiercely condemns her for her vices, which have led to the destruction of them all.

> _And Cleopatra now,
> Well sees the dangerous way
> She tooke, and car'd not how,
> Which led her to decay:
> And likewise makes us pay
> For her disordered last,
> The int'rest of our blood:
> Or liue a seruile pray,
> Vnder a hand vnjust,
> And others shall thinke good.
> This hath her riot wonne,
And thus she hath her state, herselge, and vs vndone.

(11. 336-47)

For now is nothing hid, they declare,

The scene is broken down,
And all vncovered lies,
The purple Actors knowne
Scarce men, whom men despise.

(11. 360-3)

Nothing said by their detractors in Shakespeare's play is as savage in its denunciation of the lovers as these lines by the Chorus of Egyptians.

The chief tribute to her perfections comes from Cleopatra's last conquest, Dolabella. She is, he declares,

The wonder of her kind, of powerfull spirit,
A glorious Lady, and a mighty queene.

(11. 1620-1)

The divided response towards his Cleopatra which Daniel thus evokes in his reader is one of repugnance for what she has been and of admiration for what she has become, something quite different therefore from our divided response to Shakespeare's Cleopatra.

One's moral bearings are never in doubt. Her liaison with Antony is seen as infamous, though perhaps only the means used by the divine powers to punish the Egyptians for their sins by causing their country's enslavement (11. 450-57). For the repentant, regenerate Cleopatra our utmost sympathy and admiration is evoked. At the same time Daniel turns us against Caesar by giving us the soliloquy of his innocent victim, Caesario, who predicts that the heavens will revenge the crime of his execution.

And then Augustus what is it thou gainest
By poore Antillus blood, and this of mine?
Nothing but this, thy victory thou stainest,
And pulst the wrath of heauen on thee and thine.

(11. 1444-7)

But the effect of this is merely to draw us closer to Cleopatra, not to make us question the comparative value of Love and Empire. It does not bring Daniel's Cleopatra any nearer to being a problem play.

In describing Antony and Cleopatra as such it must be insisted that the problem it raises is not general but unique. I cannot agree with S. L. Bethell's statement that in Antony and Cleopatra Shakespeare returns to the old problem: What are the positive bases of the good life? The problem, as presented by Shakespeare, seems to me a much more specific one, confined to the choice by a uniquely endowed individual, placed in a unique historical situation. The play is not a Morality, presenting the choice of Everyman, or Rex, between Love and Empire. By means examined at the beginning of the chapter, it conveys, on the contrary, a sense of an unexampled, near-miraculous fitness of the lovers for one another, and hence of the singularity of their case. 'The nobleness of life', exclaims Antony,

Is to do thus when such a mutual pair
And such a twain can do't …
The force of the restrictive clause, obscured if not entirely obliterated by the habit of editors, misled by the punctuation of the Folio-text, of placing a heavy stop after 'thus', is all-important and too often ignored by commentators on the play.

Maynard Mack (essay date 1973)


[In the following excerpt, Mack argues that Antony and Cleopatra "owes much, at least in its general outline, to the medieval tragic formula of the fall-of-princes and mirror-for-magistrates tradition."]

Considered as pure story, the play that Shakespeare makes of Antony and Cleopatra would have delighted Chaucer's Monk. For it obviously owes much, at least in its general outline, to the medieval tragic formula of the fall-of-princes and mirror-for-magistrates tradition, which the Monk enunciates to the Canterbury pilgrims, and which was still, in 1607, owing to a good deal of Elizabethan dramatic practice including Shakespeare's own, far better known than Plutarch to playhouse audiences. Tragedy, according to this formula, is what happens when eminent historical personages lose their foothold on the pinnacle of wealth or power and plummet down to ruin with a gratifying homiletic crash. Implied in Plutarch's narrative inevitably, though only desultorily stressed there and sometimes lost in masses of detail better suited to biography than to homily, the theme of lost (or gained) imperium became for Shakespeare the central issue.

For this reason, his Antony is brought before us at the zenith of his eminence, when his soldiership ("twice the other twain," says Pompey, comparing him with Lepidus and Caesar) is critically in demand. He already holds the whole of the gorgeous East in fee and now is about to be freed from threats, on one side by his reconciliation with Caesar and marriage to Caesar's sister; on the other, by the victories of his lieutenant Ventidius in Parthia. He is also, we quickly learn, about to throw all this away for the fascinating creature shown us in four of the first five scenes and in Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra on the Cydnus. For conquest has several forms, it seems. There is more than one kind of stronghold to attract a soldier:

> those his goodly eyes
> That o'er the files and musters of the war
> Have glowed like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
> The office and devotion of their view
> Upon a tawny front;

(I, i, 2-6)

and there is more than one kind of attitude that may be taken toward the imperium of Rome:

> Let Rome in Tiber melt and the wide arch
> Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space,
> Kingdoms are clay.

(I, i, 33-35)

In short, from the moment we are introduced to Antony, we are made aware of the undertow that will sweep him away, and this is kept so vividly before us in every scene thereafter—by Cleopatra, Enobarbus, Caesar, Pompey, the soothsayer, and Antony himself—that it is only a small exaggeration to say that Shakespeare's story of Antony's fall and of its consequences moves from the first scene of act I to the last scene of act V
uninterruptedly, despite the presence of certain early scenes in which, ostensibly, his political fortunes are on
the rise.

The play has other features, too, that if not derived from the medieval formula are at any rate in tune with it.
Treatment of the protagonists from the outside and from a certain aesthetic distance, so as to enhance the
element of spectacle and with it our impression that we behold a sort of paradigm or exemplum in the de
casibus tradition, is one such feature that I have already underscored. So is the corollary reliance on choric
commentary rather than interior meditation to point up the stages leading to the disaster, and particularly the
emphasis laid by this means (and in every other imaginable way) on the grandeur of the world the protagonists
inhabit and on their own special magnificence and magnanimity, in order to increase the pathos of their fall,
however much that fall may be shown to be self-caused.

The play is further attuned to the formula in insisting simultaneously on what is not self-caused, on fortune,
accident, destiny, doom—all that in the original medieval context might have been called the will of God and
here is hinted at least to be the will of one god: "'Tis the god Hercules, whom Antony loved, Now leaves him"
(IV, iii, 15-16). Shakespeare may have been moved to this equivocal management by a bemusing sentence in
his source. For Plutarch says of Cleopatra's plea to be allowed to join the wars against Caesar (in Plutarch's
narrative, delivered to Antony through a bribed Canidius): "These fan-persuasions won him; for it was
predetermined that the government of all the world should fall into Octavius Caesar's hands." Hence it was
Antony's decision, except that it was also destiny's. Just so, in the play, though our attention is repeatedly
called to Antony's misjudgments, a sense of impersonal fate runs deep. Caesar, as Bradley says [in his Oxford
Lectures on Poetry] is "the Man of Destiny, the agent of forces against which the intentions of an individual
could avail nothing," one from whom "the feeling of fate comes through to us." The language repeatedly
proclaims this. Whereas "noble" is the play's characterizing term for Antony (despite his sometimes ignoble
deeds like the whipping of Thidias), Caesar's characterizing term is "fortune." This word, with its cognates
and synonyms, appears some forty times in Antony and Cleopatra, more than twice as often as in any other of
the major tragedies, and repeatedly in connection with Caesar, whose invisible "genius" it appears to be.
Antony's own genius, the soothsayer assures him immediately after his marriage to Octavia, "is Noble,
courageous, high, unmatchable," but placed near Caesar's it is over-powered; "and of that natural luck, He
beats thee 'gainst the odds" (II, iii, 19 ff.). From that point on, Caesar regularly beats Antony against the odds,
and is spoken of increasingly as "fortunate Caesar" (IV, xiv, 76), "full-fortuned Caesar" (IV, xv, 24), the man
whom Antony has to address after Actium as "Lord of his fortunes" (III, xii, 11), and the man whose "luck,
we are told by Cleopatra, he learns eventually to mock: "I see him rouse himself," she says of Antony as she is
dying, "To praise my noble act. I hear him mock The luck of Caesar" (V, ii, 283-85).

Something similar seems to hold true for Cleopatra. Though Antony chooses her and we are shown the
familiar feminine skills with which she draws him, the play keeps alive a complementary assurance that a
power works through her which is also, in some sense, a fate. She is for everyone an "enchantress," a "fairy," a
"witch," a "charm," a "spell," and she moves, even for the Romans, in an ambience of suggestion that seems
to give these terms a reach beyond their conventional horizons of gallantry and erotic praise. The sun makes
love to her; the air, "except for vacancy," would have gone to see her triumphant landing from the Cydnus;
she sighs and tears are greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report; she is cunning past man's
thought; her variety is infinite; and the fetters in which she binds, like those of Merlin's Vivien, are "strong,
as is also—to recall a phrase of Caesar's when he sees her in death—her "toil of grace":

she looks like sleep,
As she would catch another Antony
In her strong toil of grace.
(V, ii, 344-46)
The phrase captures her mystery superbly because its range of meaning is altogether indeterminable. Is the emphasis in "toil" on the cruel snare of the hunter or on the delighting web of the accomplished woman's charms? Do the boundaries of "grace" include simply the feline movements of the experienced beast of prey, or do they extend to the worldly accomplishments cited by Claudius in giving young Laertes permission to return to Paris: "Time be thine, And thy best graces spend it at thy will," or do they glance also toward the enigmatic territories touched on by Prospero when, in praising Ariel for his simulation of the harpy, he sums up in five words the meaning of the disasters in *The Tempest* and (some critics would have it) of those in *Antony and Cleopatra* as well?

Bravely the figure of this harpy hast thou  
Performed, my Ariel; *a grace it had, devouring.*  
(III, iii, 83-84; italics mine)

My point, of course, is not that there is a right answer to these questions, but rather that the play teases us into asking them. Shakespeare's medieval inheritance remains strong enough to enable him to show us a catastrophe that Antony has quite literally made love to as if it were simultaneously a "doom."

The "fall" story chiseled out of Plutarch receives in the finished play many kinds of imaginative extension, as every spectator will remember. One of these is the intricately elaborated context of mobility and mutability within which the fall is shown to occur, so that here as elsewhere in Shakespeare a play's characteristic "world" and its major action tend to become expressions of each other.

Our sense of a world in flux in *Antony and Cleopatra* is created primarily through the imagery, as many have pointed out, but in the theater it reaches us yet more directly through continual shifts of place (to mention only those of the first three acts: from Egypt to Rome to Egypt to Messina to Rome to Egypt to Misenum to Syria to Rome to Egypt to Athens to Rome to Actium to Egypt), and in the number and brevity of the episodes and scenes. In its episodic character, in fact, the play again seems mindful of the medieval past, each scene acted, as it were, from an appropriate historical "maison" or pageant-wagon, as in the cyclical plays. Today, the text of *Antony and Cleopatra* is usually divided into forty-two scenes, and while these need not be taken seriously as divisions of the action, since the folio text has neither scenes nor acts, their number indicates to us how often we are asked to register that one time, place, mood, or person gives way before another.

To this we must add the equally striking circumstance that *Antony and Cleopatra* in performance contains just under two hundred distinct entrances and exits (rather more than one per minute of playing time) and that a great many of these acquire a special impact on our senses, either from being ceremonial and accompanied by much fanfare or from their effect in bringing about emotionally significant leave-takings and reunions. People flow to and away from each other in *Antony and Cleopatra* with relentless frequency and ease—Antony from Cleopatra and to her, to Caesar and from him; Octavia from Caesar and to him; Antony from Cleopatra and to her, to Caesar and from him; Octavia from Caesar and to him, to Antony and from him; Enobarbus from Antony, then (in heart) to him; and Cleopatra—who can say? This pattern is climaxed by the great reunions and leave-takings of the close. Antony, after being reunited with Cleopatra in her monument, takes his last farewell of her ("I am dying, Egypt, dying"); Cleopatra takes hers of Caesar and the world ("Give me my robe, put on my crown"); and both farewells are preludes, so the lovers insist, to a further reunion in the Elysian fields, or on the Cydnus, where the great passion will begin anew. Nothing seems to be granted finality in *Antony and Cleopatra*, perhaps not even death.

Mobility and mutability are not confined to spatial and geographical forms, but penetrate the play at every point. They are reiterated in the allusions to the ebbing and flowing of the tides; the rising and setting (or eclipse and extinction) of stars, moons, and suns; the immense reversals of feeling in the lovers and in Enobarbus; the career of Pompey, whose powers, "crescent" in II, i, are by III, v scattered and the man himself dead; and the steady erosion of persons whom for a moment we have known or heard of as presences: Fulvia, Lepidus, Pompey, Pacoras, Enobarbus, Alexas, and Eros all are dead before Antony dies; Menas and
Menecrates, Philo and Demetrius, Ventidius and Scærus have disappeared without a trace, along with Mardian; Candidus and Decretas (besides Alexas and Enobarbus) have turned their coats, and Cleopatra may or may not have been several times on the verge of turning hers.

In addition, the style itself generates impressions of this kind. Johnson's account of the play rightly emphasizes the "hurry," the "quick succession" of events that calls the attention forward; and part of the effect he has in mind comes clearly from the style, which pours rather than broods (as in *Macbeth*), which is sensuous rather than intellectual (as in *Hamlet*), and which, as Pope said of Homcr's, animates everything it touches: from Philo's view of Antony in I, i, where eyes glow, bend, turn, and the heart remembers buckles it has burst in the scuffles of great fights, to Cleopatra's view of him in V, ii, where he bestrides, rears, crests; quails and shakes the orb with rattling thunder; gives in a perpetual autumn; sports like a dolphin above the ocean of his pleasure; and scatters crowns and coronets from his pockets as if they were small change.

Most striking of all, perhaps, is Shakespeare's use of the grammatical mood that, of all moods, best expresses mobility and mutability: the optative. Most of the great speeches in the play are "options"—in the radical sense. At all levels, high and low, playful and serious, hearts continually press forward with their longings, so much so that by placing even a few of them in sequence one may easily recapitulate the action.

Let Rome in Tiber melt. (I, i, 33)

> Let me be married to three kings in a forenoon and widow them all.... Find me to marry me with Octavius Caesar, and companion me with my mistress. (I, ii, 25-29)

> Upon your sword
> Sit laurel victory, and smooth success
> Be strewed before your feet! (I, iii, 99-101)

Let his shames quickly
Drive him to Rome. (I, iv, 72-73)

> But all the charms of love,
Salt Cleopatra, soften thy waned lip!
Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both!
(II, i, 20-22)

Let her live
To join our kingdoms and our hearts and never Fly off our loves again. (II, ii, 151-53)

Would I had never come from thence, nor you thither. (II, iii, 12)

Melt Egypt into Nile! and kindly creatures Turn all to serpents! (II, v, 78-79)

In thy fats our cares be drowned, With thy grapes our hairs be crowned. (II, vii, 114-15)
Sink Rome, and their tongues rot
That speak against us! (III, vii, 15-16)

O that I were
Upon the hill of Basan, to outroar
The hornèd herd! (III, xiii, 126-28)

This is a selection simply, and from the first three acts. Thereafter, for obvious reasons, the optative mood quickens, to culminate at last in three of the best known utterances in the play:

We'll bury him; and then, what's brave, what's noble,
Let's do't after the high Roman fashion,
And make death proud to take us.

(IV, xv, 89-91)

I dreamt there was an Emperor Antony.
O, such another sleep, that I might see
But such another man! (V, ii, 76-78)

Husband, I come:
Now to that name my courage prove my title!

(V, ii, 286-87)

To all these impressions of a world in motion, much is added in performance by the playwright's insistent stress on messages and messengers—though here, doubtless, other effects and purposes must also receive their due. To ignore a man's messenger who has a legitimate claim on you, as Antony does in I, i, or to have such a messenger whipped, as he does in III, xiii, or, like Cleopatra in II, v, to assault a messenger for the bad news he carries: these are Shakespeare's equivalents in this play of Hamlet's melancholy, Lear's quick wrath-marks of the tragic personage's incapacity or unwillingness to adjust to the world he lives in. Messengers also, of course, enhance our sense of power and of the rearrangements that take place in power as the play wears on. Cleopatra's inexhaustible supply of emissaries and her determination to "unpeople Egypt" (I, v, 78) rather than let Antony in Rome go a day without a letter bear testimony to her political stature at the outset of the play as well as to her passion. Later on, the fact that Antony, who has had "superfluous kings for messengers" (III, xii, 5), is reduced to using his children's schoolmaster to carry a message to Caesar serves as an index to the audience as well as to Caesar that his wing has indeed been "plucked." Such effects are of course highly visual in performance, and capable in some contexts of communicating exquisite ironies. In the last scene, for instance, Caesar's messengers come and go again and again in a fine show of strategy and efficiency, but then comes the messenger no one anticipated, a bumpkin and malapropist bearing figs, who is escorted in by Caesar's own guard; and he proves to be messenger that counts.

Beyond this, the play's emphasis on messengers reminds us that, in so volatile and mutable a world, opinion and report are matters of huge concern. All these people have an immense curiosity about each other, especially the Romans about Cleopatra, which they can only satisfy with fresh news. "From Alexandria," says Caesar to Lepidus the first time we see him, "This is the news" (I, iv, 3-4), and he goes on to detail Antony's ill courses there. After the triumvirs have made peace in Rome, Enobarbus is no sooner left alone with Maecenas and Agrippa than they throw out bait about life in Egypt that they hope he will rise to: "Eight wild-boars roasted whole at a breakfast, and but twelve persons there. Is this true?" says Maecenas (II, ii, 180-81). Pompey plays a like game with Antony, hinting at the time when Cleopatra kept an assignation with Julius Caesar by having herself rolled up inside a mattress and carried to him (II, vi, 68); while Lepidus, in the brawl on Pompey's galley, speculates drunkenly—but inquiringly—about pyramids and crocodiles (II, vii, 24
This is merely the surface of "report" in the play. It soon turns out that almost everyone we meet is passionately conscious of report in other senses: not simply the public report of Rome, which Caesar is concerned as far as possible to manipulate and even Antony and Cleopatra from time to time feel the need to placate or consciously defy, but the report of history. This too is an aspect of the play that insists on its aesthetic distance from us, on its character as spectacle and exemplum. Caesar is walking into history, and is keenly conscious of it; in fact, he hopes to guarantee a good "report" for himself by composing it: "Go with me to my tent," he says to Agrippa and Maecenas, after Antony's death has been announced to him:

where you shall see
How hardly I was drawn into this war,
How calm and gentle I proceeded still
In all my writings. Go with me, and see
What I can show in this.

(V, i, 73-77)

Enobarbus, throughout his hesitations about leaving Antony, looks forward to what "story" will say of him if he stays—

The loyalty well held to fools does make
Our faith mere folly: yet he that can endure
To follow with allegiance a fall'n lord,
Does conquer him that did his master conquer
And earns a place i' th' story.

(III, xiii, 42-46)

though it must be admitted he reckoned without Plutarch, who gives his going over to Caesar and his repentance short shrift, and says nothing whatever about his hesitations. Again, in his death scene, all alone, he appeals to the "blessèd moon" to bear him witness, "When men revolted shall upon record Bear hateful memory," that he repents his betrayal of his master, and then, as if resigning himself to an eternity of bad notices in the theatrum mundi, concludes:

O, Antony,
Nobler than my revolt is infamous,
Forgive me in thine own particular,
But let the world rank me in register
A master leaver and a fugitive.

(IV, ix, 7 ff.)

The lovers' own consciousness of being ever on parade before the reviewing stand of world opinion is particularly acute. Antony's anguished "I have offended reputation" after Actium means more than simply that he has stained his individual honor, or even his immediate public image; he has also deviated from the world's conception of what a Roman soldier is and does, guarded and passed on from generation to generation in world opinion. When he takes Cleopatra in his arms at the play's beginning, he is conscious of the world as audience; in fact, he invokes it:

The nobleness of life
Is to do thus; when such a mutual pair
And such a twain can do't, in which I bind,
On pain of punishment, the world to weet
We stand up peerless.

(I, i, 36-40)

When he anticipates their reunion in the Elysian fields, he thinks of the audience they will have there:

Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,
And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze.

(IV, xiv, 51-52)

When Eros takes his own life rather than kill him, the thought that captivates his imagination is that Eros and Cleopatra will have won a nobler place in history than his: "My queen and Eros Have by their brave instruction got upon me A nobleness in record."

This, too, as everyone will remember, is the concern that occupies Cleopatra as she steels herself after Antony's death to do "what's brave, what's noble … after the high Roman fashion," and so win fame, not obloquy, in the chronicles of times to come (IV, xv, 85 ff.). Her wish that her women "show" her "like a queen" in her "best attires" (V, ii, 227-28)—though no doubt partly vanity and partly calculated staginess for Caesar's last view of her—is partly too, one feels, her sense of what is suitable, in the record that will be forthcoming, "for a princess Descended of so many royal kings." Caesar's parting words about her have the quality of an epitaph, and seal the immortality in "report" that now awaits all three:

She shall be buried by her Antony.
No grave upon the earth shall clip in it
A pair so famous. High events as these
Strike those that make them; and their story is
No less in pity than his glory which
Brought them to be lamented.

(V, ii, 356-61)

The imaginative extension that Shakespeare gives to the story of Antony's fall by surrounding it with a world in which, as Mutability says in The Faerie Queene, "Nothing doth firme and permanent appeare, But all things tost and turnèd by transverse," has its counterpart in the extension he gives the love affair. Everyone who reads or sees the play is struck at once by the hyperbolic character of the value the lovers set on each other, or at any rate the hyperbolic character of their own conception of that value: "There's beggary," as Antony puts it, "in the love that can be reckoned" (I, i, 15).

The play as a whole, supporting but also qualifying this attitude, sets moving around it an enormous traffic of evocation, primarily of two sorts. One sort moves the love affair in the general direction of allegory and myth. In some sense, the play hints, there looms behind Antony's choice of "Pleasure" the great model of Hercules at the Crossroads—a popular motif of Renaissance painting and engraving about which much has been written by the iconographers—choosing between Virtue and Pleasure, who are represented in two females as opposite in their qualities as Octavia and Cleopatra, or Rome and Egypt. It has been pointed out, too, that behind the play's references to a great warrior feminized—Cleopatra putting her robes on Antony, for instance, and wearing his sword Philippan, or Canidius's remark after the decision to fight at Actium by sea: "so our leader's led, And we are women's men" (III, vii, 69-70)—may be discerned another favorite Renaissance exemplum: Hercules's servitude in woman's dress to Omphale, which Plutarch explicitly compares to Antony's in his Comparison of Demetrius with Antonius:
But to conclude, [Demetrius] neuer had ouerthrow or misfortune through negligence, nor by delaying time to follow his owne pleasure; as we see in painted tables, where Omphale secretly stealeth away Hercules clubbe, and took his Lyon skinne from him: euen so Cleopatra oftentimes vnarmed Antonius, and enticed him to her, making him lose matters of great importance, and very needfull iournies, to come and be dandled with her.

To these the play adds two further analogies, Aeneas and Dido, and Mars and Venus, whose implications are far less clear. Though at first Antony might be said to imitate Aeneas in abandoning his Dido for a Roman destiny and a Latin marriage, his later career substantively revises the Virgilian story in that he abandons Rome and empire for his African queen and, in the only overt allusion the play makes to Virgil's lovers, anticipates that he and Cleopatra in the afterworld will be admired more than they for their eminence in love: "Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops, And all the haunt be ours" (IV, xiv, 53-54). Does Shakespeare nod here, forgetting Virgil's own depiction in book VI of the estrangement of Dido from Aeneas on his visit to the underworld? Or is this simply Antony's exuberant imagination undertaking to bring reality closer to the heart's desire, as he does so often elsewhere? Or does Shakespeare, for whatever reasons, choose to see Aeneas in the Chaucerian and generally medieval perspectives that had already made of Dido, as of Cleopatra, an exemplar of faithful love?

Similar questions must be asked about the playwright's association of his lovers with Mars and Venus. Are we chiefly to remember Homer, in whose Odyssey the two Olympians, trapped in an adulterous affair and exposed in the absurdity of love's postures in a net they cannot break, move our superior laughter—as do, in one of their dimensions, Antony and Cleopatra? Are we to remember, too, the Renaissance taste for paintings and engravings that show a Mars vanquished by Venus, victim or trophy of love's power, her amorini sporting with his armor, and he himself languid or asleep, or, in some instances, chained and fettered to her throne? And is it pertinent to recall further that the intention of these images often turns out to be more complex than at first glance we might suppose? For the two deities are, in some instances, to be understood as emblems of contrary qualities, male force and female grace, now in a work of art ideally reconciled; and even, in others, as the contrary powers of Strife and Love, which tie the universe together and from whose union, according to Plutarch, the goddess Harmony is born.

Antony, like Mars in the paintings, grows conscious of love's "fetters"; loses or is threatened with the loss of manhood, as the fanning eunuchs in I, i warn us; and at long last acknowledges himself (as he was also obliged to do the day she came down the Cydnus) Cleopatra's captive in a "Triumph of Love." But the crucial question that remains—in the play as in the painted figures of Mars and Venus—is what the triumph means. I believe that Shakespeare throws some light on the perplexities of this question in the scene that reunites the lovers after the middle day of Actium, when for the time being Antony and his men have had the victory (IV, viii). As he enters, still clad in full armor, he thanks his soldiers with characteristic élan and generosity. Then he sees Cleopatra, stops (as I read the scene) in his tracks bedazzled (leaving us in the audience to imagine his emotions as he finds himself once more in his old role of redoubtable captain returning to a radiant queen), and then, with an intensity of adoration that ignores all onlookers, bursts forth in one of the most winning speeches of the play:

O thou day o' th' world,
Chain mine armed neck, leap thou, attire and all,
Through proof of harness to my heart, and there
Ride on the pants triumphant.

(IV, viii, 13-16)

The image of Cleopatra riding the great beats of Antony's heart (a heart that, as we know from earlier comment, "in the scuffles of great fights hath burst The buckles on his breast") as if it were a high-mettled steed on which she is carried in a triumph that he—her prisoner, "chained"—adorns, is breathtaking and
becomes more so when we reflect on what we see: for though in the language she is conqueror and he her captive, in the scene he is conqueror too and has indeed freely bestowed this conquest on her, as his victorious presence, in full armor, attests. The episode forces upon our consciousness a recognition of the very different kind of triumph that they have within their power as lovers from the kind for which Caesar seeks him, and the two competing value systems, theirs and Caesar's, hang for a brief instant in the eye as well as in the ear, as she runs to be embraced. Then, leaning back and devouring him with her gaze, she kindles sublimely to the occasion, catching his image in an answering image of her own:

Lord of lords!
O infinite virtue, com'st thou smiling from
The world's great snare uncaught?
(IV, viii, 16-18)

Does she, by her "world's great snare," mean the wars? Does she, on the contrary, mean Caesar, who is soon to become "universal landlord" and "sole sir o' the world"? Or does she simply mean, as a recent editor phrases it, "all the snares the world can set," understanding by "world" everything, inner as well as outer, that the play accumulates to threaten love? No matter. As with Roman triumphs versus Antony's "triumphing," we are obviously to let this "snare" reverberate against another order of captivity altogether, an order implicit at this moment in Antony's "chain my armed neck," explicit earlier in his "These strong Egyptian fetters I must break," and evoked again, tellingly, at the play's end, when, as we saw, Caesar speaks of "her strong toil of grace." There, once again, the two attitudes will hang against each other in the mind and invite us to consider that there are more kinds of captivity and of triumph than any Caesar dreams of.

Language
Madeleine Doran (essay date 1964)


[In the following essay, originally delivered as a lecture at Queen's University in 1964, Doran discusses Shakespeare's use of hyperbolic language to characterize Antony, Cleopatra, and Roman politics in Antony and Cleopatra.]

When Shakespeare opens the play of Antony and Cleopatra with an adverse judgment spoken by one of his officers, he sets the former Antony, the famous soldier, beside the present Antony, the lover of Cleopatra; and he puts the infatuation in the most demeaning terms:

Nay, but this dotage of our general's
O'erflows the measure….
His captain's heart,
Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper
And is become the bellows and the fan
To cool a gypsy's lust.

"The triple pillar of the world," he says, is "transform'd / Into a strumpet's fool." If that were all the play was about—an aged dotard's ruinous infatuation for a scheming strumpet, we should scarcely be moved by it, or return to it again and again as a special play, something with a poetic radiance that tells us Shakespeare wrote it con amore—with zest, with love, and a free spirit. It is not unlike him to show a character or a situation in the worst light at first, in order to make the truth which follows all the more impressive. (This he had done, for instance, with Othello.) Shakespeare is nothing, if not bold, and so sure is he of his power to win our
sympathies for Antony and Cleopatra that he takes the risk of showing the worst of them straight off.

On the heels of Philo's comment, Antony himself enters with Cleopatra, and Antony seems to confirm the adverse judgment by his waving away the messengers with then-urgent business from Rome, and then by turning to embrace Cleopatra:

Let Rome in Tiber melt and the wide arch
Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space.
Kingdoms are clay; our dungy earth
Feeds beast as man. The nobleness of life
Is to do thus (embracing), when such a mutual pair
And such a twain can do't, in which I bind,
On pain of punishment, the world to weet
We stand up peerless.

We are taken in a great leap, in Antony's large and generous imagination, to the issue of the play: the world for love. The terms on both sides are magnificent: "the wide arch of the rang'd empire" for the love of "such a twain," who "stand up peerless."

Although our judgment of Antony's heedlessness is in no way qualified, we are at once charmed by the vitality of the characters and by the experience that has begun to unfold before us; we would not have it otherwise.

Antony's "rang'd empire" speech immediately sets the tone of the play—the greatness of the issue, the sweep of the scene, the splendor of the imagery. The action moves freely back and forth between the two poles of Antony's conflicting lures—Rome, the world of Octavius Caesar, and Alexandria, the world of Cleopatra; the world of power and the world of love. The imagery enlarges "Rome" to mean the whole world. The kings of the earth assemble for war:

Bocchus, the king 'of Libya; Archelaus,
Of Cappadocia; Philadelphos, king
Of Paphlagonia; the Thracian king Adallas;
King Malchus of Arabia; King of Pont;
Herod of Jewry; Mithridates, king
Of Comagene; Polemon and Amyntas,
The kings of Mede and Lycaonia, with a
More larger list of sceptres.

(III. vi. 68-76)

The triumvirs are "the triple pillars" of the world, Antony, when Lepidus has fallen out, is "the demi-Atlas of the earth," Caesar at the end is "the universal landlord." He and Antony cannot "stall together / In the whole world." On the other side, Cleopatra is "Egypt." She "o'erpictures Venus," and her person beggars all description. Antony is "the sun," "the star" which falls; Cleopatra the "terrene moon." In setting and image alike, hyperbole may be said to be the dominant trope of the play.

In a sense, Shakespeare is simply using with special richness and intensity the trope for which the taste was so strong in the literature of his time. I believe we must look to more than school training in rhetoric to explain or understand the taste. The school training is a symptom as well as a cause. At the basis of the taste is probably something deeply grounded, something that I shall not try to explain but merely note the signs of. The pressure in much Elizabethan literature is towards the ideal, the excellent, the distinguished, the quintessential.
Theories of society, of poetry, and of history alike put value on what might be called the ideal of excellence—not on the little known, the mean, the ordinary in event or character, but on the famous, the great, the distinguished.

I shall digress a little on this topic before returning to _Antony and Cleopatra_, for a right understanding of the characteristic attitude may help us to avoid critical pitfalls in the interpretation of the play. I need not develop the point as it applies to society, so familiar is the Renaissance doctrine of degree. Sidney, in _The Defense of Poesy_ (1595), best states the ideal of excellence as it applies to poetry:

> Only the poet … lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect into another nature, in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth or quite anew…. Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done—neither with so pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden…. know whether [Nature] have brought forth so true a lover as Theagenes, so constant a friend as Pylades, so valiant a man as Orlando, so right a prince as Xenophon's Cyrus, so excellent a man every way as Virgil's Aeneas.

There are, of course, at least two sorts of excellence implied here: one, the transcendence of the perfect idea over the imperfect fact, the other, moral excellence, always strongly emphasized by Sidney. But there may be absolutes as well in villainy as in goodness—witness More's and Shakespeare's Richard III, that "excellent grand tyrant of the earth." And the excellence need not be put in moral terms, but thought of simply as the perfection of a quality. The quality may be beauty. Is it, asks Sidney, "better to have it set down as it should be, or as it was?" Cicero's story of the painter Zeuxis (in _De inveri-one_ II. i), who was said to have chosen the best features of the five most beautiful women in the city of Croton and combined them to form his portrait of Helen, becomes, with Renaissance literary critics, an axiomatic assumption about the way painters and poets alike go about their imitation. Or the quality might be ugliness. One thinks of Leonardo's sketches of the grotesque faces of old men, in which the features of age are intensified and concentrated. Leonardo himself justifies such intensifying in his account (in the _Notebooks_) of how an artist should depict an angry man:

> How a figure is not worthy of praise unless such action appears in it as serves to express the passion of the soul: …

> An angry figure should be represented seizing someone by the hair and twisting his head down to the ground, with one knee on his ribs, and with the right arm and fist raised high up; let him have his hair dishevelled, his eyebrows low and knit together, his teeth clenched, the two corners of his mouth arched, and the neck which is all swollen and extended as he bends over the foe, should be full of furrows.

This way of conceiving of character, event, place—whatever one's topic—and of marking it by superlatives—the "most," the "best," the "highest," the "greatest," the "noblest"; or their opposites, the "the least," the "worst," and so on—is everywhere met with in Elizabethan literature. The trees beside the purest crystal spring where amorous Corydon sits versing to Phyllida are the finest of each of the kinds—of elm, beech, and oak; of pine, palm and laurel. The ladies of the sonneteers reach in their beauty the type ancient poets only thought they saw in Helen:

> Then, in the blazon of sweet beauty's best
Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,
I see their antique pen would have express'd
Even such a beauty as you master now.
So all their praises are but prophecies
Of this our time, all you prefiguring.

In Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*, the Poet remarks on the Painter's portrait of Timon that

*It tutors nature; artificial strife*

*Lives in these touches, livelier than life.*

We shall remember the phrase, "livelier than life."

Clearly this attitude does not preclude the most vivid realism of the observation of detail. And there is besides a strong current of objective realism in Elizabethan literature that appears to be outside the thing I am talking about. Even here, I think, the important thing is that mere ordinariiness, mediocrity, or commonplaceness, is not glorified as such—or if so, only tentatively and sentimentally, and with an apology. The drab, the flat, the colourless, the futile are not thought interesting. Deloney's and Dekker's Simon Eyre was worthy of putting into a novel and a play not because he was ordinary, but because he was not: he became Lord Mayor of London.

The idea of excellence expressed in poetic theory was matched in the commonly held view of history that it was interesting and instructive for the examples it furnished of great men and great events. History was seen as highly personal and dramatic, composed not of "trends" and "movements," but of distinguishable events and distinguished people. Thomas North, Englishing (in 1579) Jacques Amyot's preface to his French translation of Plutarch, notes that "the proper ground" of history

is to treate of the greatest and highest things that are done in the world:... It is a picture, which (as it were in a table) setteth before our eyes the things worthy of remembrance that haue bene done in old time by mighty nations, noble Kings and Princes, wise gouernours, valiant Captaines, and persons renowned for some notable quality.... & their demeaning [i.e., behaviour] of them selues when they were come to the highest, or throwne down to the lowest degree of state.

It was among the great men of history that tragedy sought its subjects, its Falls of Princes. The post-classical grammarians had taught that tragedy was concerned with the falling of the great into adversity; its subjects were heroes, nobles, kings; its actions were conflicts, exiles, and violent deaths. "Let us sit upon the ground / And tell sad stories of the death of Kings," Shakespeare makes his Richard II say. Sidney observed that tragedy should be "high and excellent." The rhetorical mode of *de casibus* tragedy, moving as it does from the extreme of power to the extreme of deprivation, from the throne to the grave, is naturally hyperbolic. Richard would give his "large kingdom for a little grave / A little, little grave ..."

In the fifteenth century Lydgate contemplates, from the slippery top, the depth of the descent. In the late sixteenth, Marlowe looks up to the glorious height, when he makes Tamburlaine speak of the "thirst of reign and sweetness of a crown":

*Nature ...*

*Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds:  *

*Our souls, ...*

*Still climbing after knowledge infinite,  *

*And always moving as the restless spheres,  *

*Wills us to wear ourselves, and never rest,  *

*Until we reach the ripest fruit of all,  *

*That perfect bliss and sole felicity,  *

*The sweet fruition of an earthly crown.*
No brief period in history furnished more examples of famous falls, or was better chronicled, than the period of the Roman Revolution, from Marius and Sulla to the establishment of the empire by Octavius Caesar, and the achievement of the Peace of Augustus. In this sequence of tragedies—of Marius, Sulla, Pompey, Cato, Julius Caesar, Brutus, Cassius, and Mark Antony—none save Caesar's tragedy was more fascinating than Antony's. For Antony, a generously gifted man, famous for his "absolute soldiership," threw all he had won away in a moment, when in the midst of the Battle of Actium, his chances as good as his enemy's, he sailed after Cleopatra's retreating galleys. Antony's "kissing away kingdoms and provinces" would have been known to Shakespeare not only through Plutarch, but in the Fall of Princes tradition, as a great and unique event in history.

Moreover, the two lovers had another kind of long association, with a different and more sympathetic tragic emphasis. In those gatherings-up of famous names, those Houses of Fame medieval writers were fond of making, Antony and Cleopatra were usually to be found beside Helen and Paris, Dido and Aeneas, Pyramus and Thisbe, Hero and Leander, Tristram and Iseult—those notable victims of the cruel and resistless God of Love. In *The Assembly of Ladies*, an anonymous poem that found its way into the sixteenth century editions of Chaucer, a lady is led in a dream into a great hall, on the walls of which were

```
grauen of storyes many one
First how Phyllis of womanly pyte
Dyed pyteously for loue of Demophone
Next after was the story of Tysbe
Howe she slew her selfe under a tree
yet saw I more / how in a right pytous caas
For Antony was slayne Cleopatras.
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Shakespeare knew this tradition well enough, for he makes Antony say, thinking Cleopatra dead:

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Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand
And with our springhtly port make the ghosts gaze.
Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops,
And all the haunt be ours.
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(IV. xiv. 51-54)

This is not quite the Virgilian note. Medieval love poetry has contaminated it.

For such a high event as the tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra high statement was appropriate. There is nothing surprising about Shakespeare's choosing to be hyperbolic in a treatment that should be worthy of the event and of the tradition. But of course he is not simply hyperbolic. His sensitive and sympathetic knowledge of men and women as they are, his sure sense of moral values, his profound sense of irony, make completely sustained or unqualified hyperbole impossible for him. He found in Plutarch's life of Marcus Antonius a full, thoughtful, quite unidealized, largely detached, but mainly sympathetic account of Antony—this man formed of very mingled stuff, of large virtues and large vices. Of Cleopatra in Plutarch Shakespeare found both explicit disapproval and implicit wonder, for Plutarch, blame her as he might for Antony's ruin, was yet fascinated by this great and extraordinary woman. Having caught from Plutarch a sense of vital, interesting people, living at a place and time in history, Shakespeare went far beyond his source in giving their personalities wholeness within his dramatic action. What we have in the play, therefore, is something of extraordinary subtlety. We have a story of a complex, unsentimental relationship between two richly endowed but very imperfect people, a story acted out in the thorough worldliness of Egyptian luxury and Roman power politics. At the same time characters and action are set in a poetic frame which creates an aura of uniqueness.
and greatness—of "infinite variety," "of nature's piece 'gainst fancy, beyond the size of dreaming," of high
events that make the beholders feel that "time is at his period." The vision, however, is not therefore double; it
is fused into one with wit, irony, sympathy, and delight.

Something needs to be said briefly about hyperbole as a trope before turning to Shakespeare's use of it in
Antony and Cleopatra. This figure is defined by Puttenham (in The Arte of English Poesie, 1589) as "the
overreacher": "When we speake in the superlatiue and beyond the limites of credit, that is by the figure which
the Greeks called Hiperbole … I for his immoderate excesse cal him the ouer reacher … & me thinks not
amisse: …" But the overreaching trope may be used in quite different ways—as Puttenham says, "when either
we would greatly aduaunce or greatly abase the reputation of any thing or person." It may be used, as the
modern temper prefers to read it, as overreaching actuality so as to diminish it and make it appear smaller or
less worthy than we usually think it is. It may also be used—and this was the more frequent use in the
Renaissance—to heighten or amplify actuality to some ideal perfection, to what it might be in idea, to
something beyond the common reach. The distinction, may be readily seen in two notable plays on the theme
of ambition, Tamburlaine and Sejanus. Marlowe used hyperbole absolutely in Tamburlaine, without ironic
implication. Tamburlaine's "high aspiring mind" sweeps us (like Zenocrate) resistlessly with him across
Persia, Turkey, and Syria, and, in his mind's eye, around the world—until his ships

Sailing along the oriental sea,
Have fetched about the Indian continent,
Even from Persepolis to Mexico,
And thence unto the Straits of Jubalter.

In Tamburlaine action and trope are one. Jonson, on the other hand, used hyperbole with precise satiric value
as the "overreacher" in Sejanus. His hero is a prodigy, who feels his "advanced head/Knock out a star in
heav'n"; his swelling joys prove hollow bubbles.

Shakespeare, however, is no Marlowe, in whose heroes there can be no accommodation between all or
nothing, all the world or hell. And he is no Jonson, whose remorseless logic must cut human dreams down to
size. The effect of Shakespeare's hyperbole is neither to overwhelm our judgment as in Tamburlaine, nor to
sharpen our critical faculty to a satiric edge as in Sejanus, but to give us a sense of pleasurable participation in
a credible, but rare experience, an experience that we know did indeed happen in some fashion to actual
people at a time and place in history, yet one so special that it became a famous tragedy to all the world; and
one now carried in Shakespeare's art to the utmost stretch of the possibilities of such an experience and such a
choice.

It is easier to describe the effect of this complex vision than to say how it is achieved. But perhaps we can find
some clues in the particular ways in which Shakespeare qualifies his hyperbole—qualifies to enrich and
complicate but not to destroy.

A principal method, operative throughout the play, is in the strong yet supple web of the language itself. The
golden threads running throughout it are crossed by the plain, tough fibres of direct and simple speech: "Well,
is it, is it?" "My being in Egypt, Caesar, / What was't to you?" "Let the old ruffian know / I have many other
ways to die." "He words me, girls, he words me." The heightened style and the plain are often set side by side.
The combined richness and strength of such juxtaposing is well illustrated in the scene of Antony's death in
Cleopatra's monument (IV. xv). Her defence against grief is made in several ways. One way is in employing a
fanciful conceit to exclaim against fortune:

No, let me speak; and let me rail so high
That the false huswife Fortune break her wheel,
Provok'd by my offence.
Another is in her habitual coquetry, now in a new key:

Noblest of men, woo't die?
Hast thou no care of me? Shall I abide
In this dull world, which in thy absence is
No better than a sty?

Still, another, most movingly, is in lyric cadences:

O sun,
Burn the great sphere thou mov'st in! Darkling
stand
The varying shore o' th' world! O Antony,
Antony, Antony!

These variations are Shakespeare's new way with the old rhetorical "fullness in exclaims" recommended for the augmentation of passion. But the undertone in the scene is Antony's simple repetition, "I am dying, Egypt, dying." Farther along in the scene, when Antony is dead, Cleopatra in her grief sees herself as

No more but e'en a woman, and commanded
By such poor passion as the maid that milks
And does the meanest chares.

Far from reducing the greatness of her sorrow, the comparison gives it rather the strength of common human experience.

Another such contrast of the hyperbolic and the literal statement, at a farther remove, but at paired dramatic points, comes in two of the crucial speeches marking Antony's choice. The first is the "rang'd empire" speech with its expansive splendour—"Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch / Of the rang'd empire fall. Here is my space." The choice here is imaginary, one that he hardly thinks of as a real choice. At the moment both the world and Cleopatra are his, and he can afford to scorn "the dungi earth." The action of the play shows him trying to hold both the world and Cleopatra, until his defeat at Actium seals his eventual fate. Then, with the world lost indeed, and more than the world, the world's esteem—

Hark! the land bids me no more tread
upon't!....
I am so lated in the world that I
Have lost my way forever—

he embraces Cleopatra with words that sadly echo that first confident embrace:

Fall not a tear, I say. One of them rates
All that is won and lost. Give me a kiss.
Even this repays me.

(III. xi. 69-71)

The speech is all the more poignantly ironic for its sad simplicity.

I have been speaking of a general method in the management of the language. We shall note now, more particularly, how the alternatives of Antony's choice, the world of power and the world of love, are described and how hyperbole is used and qualified. In the discussion, I shall also consider the conceptions of the two
central characters themselves.

First for Rome and power, and Antony's part in these. The reach and greatness of Rome and the urgency of its business are of course implicit in the action and suggested in the constant references to events and geography. One has the sense of something going on at every moment everywhere within the empire: "Italy shines o'er with civil swords," in the borders maritime "flush youth revolt" to Pompey, Fulvia's garboils are uncurbable, Labienus shakes his conquering banner from Lydia to Syria to Ionia, Ventidius jades "the ne'er-yet-beaten horse of Parthia" out of the field, in Alexandria Antony proclaims his sons the kings of kings. The magnificence of power wielded by the Roman rulers is suggested, as I have already noted, by the running images of them as owners or upholders of the whole world: world-sharers, triple pillars, demi-Atlases. Octavius finally becomes, in Cleopatra's ironic compliment, "Sole sir o' th'world." In proposing a stronger union between himself and Antony, after their first quarrel, Octavius says,

Yet if I knew
What hoop should hold us staunch, from edge to edge
O' th' world I would pursue it.

(II. ii. 116-18)

When they fall out a second time, they are the world's jaws, a pair of chaps,

And throw between them all the food thou hast,
They'll grind the one the other.

(III. v. 14-16)

Wars between them would be

As if the world should cleave, and that slain men
Should solder up the rift.

(III. iv. 30-32)

But these images of greatness may be variously qualified, comically, sardonically, or playfully. The world-sharers' image is reduced to comic bathos when Lepidus, the weakest of the three, is carried drunk off Pompey's galley at the end of the peace-celebrating feast (II. vii). The servant who is carrying him is "a strong fellow," because, as Enobarbus says, "A bears the third part of the world, man; see'st not?" "The third part, then," replies Menas, "is drunk." The same world-sharers' image is varied rather sarcastically by Pompey, at the meeting to sign the terms of peace (II. vi), when he addresses the triumvirs as

The senators alone of this great world,
Chief factors for the gods.

The implication of overreaching becomes clear when he goes on to ask:

What was't
That mov'd pale Cassius to conspire? and what
Made the all-honour'd honest Roman, Brutus,
With the arm'd courtiers of beauteous freedom,
To drench the Capitol, but that they would
Have one man but a man?
There is a whole set of images that magnifies the power by reducing the objects of its control, the subject kings and kingdoms. There was a time, before Actium, we hear, when Antony had "superfluous kings" for messengers; when, if he called for a servant, "kings would start forth / And cry, 'Your will?'" There is a fine carelessness about these phrases. Caesar says, in disapproval, that Antony "gives a kingdom for a mirth" (that is, a show). And Cleopatra tells us, not in disapproval, that

In his livery
Walk'd crowns and crownets. Realms and islands
were
As plates dropp'd from his pocket.

This double effect of hyperbole (heightening) and meiosis (diminishing) is most delightfully seen in a speech of Antony's to Alexas, who is to carry back to Cleopatra the gift of an orient pearl:

'Say the firm Roman to great Egypt sends
This treasure of an oyster; at whose foot,
To mend the petty present, I will piece
Her opulent throne with kingdoms…'

(I. v. 43-46)

If these images magnify Antony's Gargantuan prodigality, together with the means Rome furnishes him to be prodigal, they also, in their light-hearted extravagance, prevent us from being altogether solemn about the power and the glory.

For the Roman world we see in operation is, after all, only the world, the very realistic world Shakespeare found in Plutarch. It is no better than the men in it, and no one of them is touched with any idealism about the business of war and politics they are engaged in. No one, that is, but Pompey, in the rather nostalgic speech about Cassius and Brutus as "courtiers of beauteous freedom." All the same, we are asked to judge the decline of Antony against a standard from which he has fallen. It is the standard of what one might call the Roman republican virtues of spare living, courage, fortitude in the face of hardship, devotion to duty, and responsibility and prudence in the performing of it. These are first of all a soldier's virtues, but also, in part, a ruler's. They are everywhere implied or expressed as something opposed to the effeminacy and voluptuousness of Egypt, to which Antony the soldier has surrendered. Our judgment assents to the truth of most that is said in reproof of Antony, such as that

His captain heart,
Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper…

(I. i. 6-8)

We assent even to Caesar's diagnosis, which, in spite of his temperamental prejudice, is just:

'tis to be chid
As we rate boys who, being mature in
knowledge,
Pawn their experience to their present pleasure
And so rebel to judgment.

(I. iv. 30-33)

We assent, above all, to what is said by Enobarbus, whose clearly choric comments mark the stages of Antony's decline. In a scene (III. xiii) soon after Actium, he makes three speeches of acute analysis. First he
tells Cleopatra that Antony was responsible for the defeat because he "would make his will / Lord of his reason." When Antony challenges Octavius to single combat, Enobarbus comments in soliloquy that Caesar has subdued his judgment, for "men's judgment and / A parcel of their fortunes, and things outward / Do draw the inward quality after them / To suffer all alike." And finally, when overconfident Antony boasts of the deeds he will perform in the battle before Alexandria, Enobarbus tells us that "A diminution in our captain's brain / Restores his heart," for "When valour preys on reason, / It eats the sword it fights with": Antony will "outstare the lightning." We assent. At the same time Antony's generosity, his liberality, his large imagination, even his impulsiveness and his enthusiasm for gaudy nights, win our liking and our sympathy in a way that Caesar's cold prudence never does. Caesar will win the world right enough, and deserves to; but there is more charm in Antony's splendid carelessness. As so often happens in Shakespeare, we find him taking our judgment one way, our sympathy another. After Antony is dead, his former friends resolve the dilemma:

Maecenas.  His taints and honours
Wag'd equal with him.
Agrippa.   A rarer spirit never
Did steer humanity; but you gods will give us
Some faults to make us men.
(V. i. 30-33)

But we have also seen Antony through Cleopatra's eyes as her "man of men," her "lord of lords," "the arm and burgonet of men," and when he is dead, her words are all choric lament and praise. To these I shall return. After his death, we hear no more of Antony's weaknesses; he is "good, being gone." Not long before her own end, Cleopatra tells Dolabella her dream of Antony. In this bravura piece, we have what must surely be the boldest heapung up of superlatives in the play:

I dreamt there was an Emperor Antony—

His face was as the heav'n's, and therein stuck
A sun and moon, which kept their course and
lighted
The little O, the earth.

His legs bestrid the ocean: his rear'd arm
Crested the world. His voice was propertied
As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends;
But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,
He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,
There was no winter in't; an autumn 'twas
That grew the more by reaping. His delights
Were dolphin-like; they show'd his back above
The element they liv'd in. In his livery
Walk'd crowns and crownets. Realms and islands
were
As plates dropp'd from his pocket.
(V. ii. 75-92)

What we have is the "idea" of Antony, Cleopatra's vision of what was essential in him—the nobility, the bounty, the largeness of spirit, above all, the full participation in life raised to the highest power. Yet it is all done wittily, for the fun of saying it, as well as seriously. The sheer virtuosity of this astonishing "portrait" takes us. In this way it is true to the tremendous vitality of the character Shakespeare has created. Its "artificial strife / Tutors nature, livelier than life." Significantly, this splendid piece comes late in the play. "Strumpet's
"fool" was the epithet with which Antony was introduced to us; but it is not the word of dismissal.

In the same way, the worst that can be said of Cleopatra is said at the beginning, when she is called a "strumpet" and a "gypsy," connoting, as well as Egyptian, a trickster, a cheat, a worker of spells to no one's good. The terms are repeated during the play with variations—"witch," "spell," "charm," "trull," "whore"—as when Antony himself, thinking she has betrayed him, abuses her in the ugliest language (III. xiii and IV. xii). But the sordidness of the epithets simply cannot prevail against the vitality and invention in Shakespeare's conception of her. His method of handling the varying points of view towards her is, however, somewhat different from the way he managed those towards Antony. For as Antony declines in greatness, Cleopatra rises. Since she achieves her greatness, there is no need, as with Anthony, to use hyperbole to restore the "idea" of her. The great hyperbolic set-piece about her—Enobarbus' description of her in her barge at Cydnus—comes early; the mystery and the power therein suggested are something to be realized as the play progresses, and is fully reached only at the end.

We come, then, to the world of Egypt, of which Cleopatra, Antony's "serpent of old Nile," is the most essential part. If Rome is the epitome of power, Egypt is the epitome of pleasure. But it is to be observed that we hear far more of this riotous living than we see of it. As the splendour of Rome was largely in the poetry, so is the luxury of Egypt. This is important. Hollywood supposes that it is to be laid out grossly, in full colour, for reel after reel in a way which quite misses its point and its function. To translate poetic superlatives of opulence and of sensuality into fact can result only in vulgarity or ridiculousness. Display without reservation ends for us all the fascination that exotic Egypt—with its "pyramises," its over-flowing Nile, its foison and famine, not to mention its Cleopatra—have for us. Too much representation ends the fun, too. "Y'ave strange serpents there," says Lepidus; "Your serpent of Egypt is bred now out of your mud by the operation of your sun. So is your crocodile." The beast is even stranger by the time Antony has finished telling him that it is shaped like itself, is as broad as it hath breadth, is just so high as it is, moves with its own organs, lives by that which nourisheth it, and is "of it own colour too." True it is that in the language of Octavius Caesar, Antony's life in Egypt is described sarcastically and with disgust:

Let us grant that it is not
Amiss to tumble on the bed of Ptolemy,
To give a kingdom for a mirth, to sit
And keep the turn of tippling with a slave,
To reel the streets at noon, and stand the buffet
With knaves that smell of sweat.
(I. iv. 16-21)

But the speech is supposed to tell us something about Caesar as well as about Antony. We also hear of Alexandrian high living in the gossip of Enobarbus and his Roman friends, whose half-joking, half-envious curiosity Enobarbus loves to satisfy in full measure:

Maecenas.... You stay'd well by't in Egypt. Enobarbus. Ay, sir; we did sleep day out of countenance and made the night light with drinking.
Maecenas. Eight wild boars roasted whole at a breakfast, and but twelve persons there. Is this true?
Enobarbus. This was but as a fly by an eagle. We had much more monstrous matter of feast, which worthyly deserved noting.
Maecenas. She's a most triumphant lady, if
We catch in Maecenas the note of fascination with something exotic and perhaps wonderful. This dialogue is indeed the beginning of the conversation in which Enobarbus gives his Roman friends the account of how Cleopatra first pursed up the heart of Antony "upon the river of Cydnus." In that show-piece of description, he far transcends mere gossip. The discussion of it must wait still a moment longer.

When we move from comment to representation, what do we see? When Antony and Cleopatra are shown together in Egypt, where we know that the beds are soft, we hear more talk of gaudy nights, of wine peeping through the scars of Antony's officers, of Cleopatra drinking Antony to bed ere the ninth hour in the morning. But we see no lascivious wassails acted out. During the play we see even very few of the many thousand kisses Antony tells us of as he is dying.

What we do see, when Antony and Cleopatra are together, is not love-making of the ordinary sort, but Cleopatra teasing, quarreling, coquetting, having fits of the sullens, entangling him in her wit, being endlessly exasperating and changeable. Her deep and unaffected love of Antony appears most when her "man of men" is not present, or at nearly wordless moments of reconciliation. The point of all this is that the superlatives about Egyptian ease as about Roman splendour are chiefly in the mind.

Cleopatra is in the mind, too, as well as in the action. Nothing better illustrates than the Cydnus scene (II. ii) Shakespeare's management of the hyperbolic and the actual so that the value of neither is destroyed. I have spoken of the gossip between Enobarbus and his Roman friends with which the conversation opens. The subtle change of tone in Maecenas' comment, "She's a most triumphant lady, if report be square to her." prompts Enobarbus to begin:

I will tell you.
The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne,
Burn'd on the water. The poop was beaten gold;
Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
The winds were love-sick with them; the oars were silver,
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
The water which they beat to follow faster,
As amorous of their strokes.

Every detail taken from Plutarch is heightened in the direction of amorousness and artifice. Plutarch has only the physical objects and their materials, not the personifications and the gestures. Cleopatra is the very type of the earthly Venus (except that she even outdoes the type), the Venus who knows every art of seduction, and who does not, therefore, appear in the nakedness of simple truth, but most artfully clothed.

For her own person,
It beggar'd all description. She did lie
In her pavilion, cloth-of-gold of tissue,
O'erpicturing that Venus where we see
The fancy outwork nature. On each side her
Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids
With divers-colour'd fans, whose wind did seem
To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
And what they undid did.
"O, rare for Antony!" interposes the enthusiastic Agrippa. Enobarbus continues:

Her gentlewomen, like the Nereides,
So many mermaids, tended her i' th' eyes,
And made their bends adornings. At the helm
A seeming mermaid steers. The silken tackle
Swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands
That yarely frame the office.

That this barge was never meant for locomotion in actual wind and waves is wittily pointed up in the delightful anomaly of the flower-soft hands and the nautical adverb "yarely" to characterize their work in the rigging. Here in this scene the whole description creates a moment of perfection caught in the mind's eye through the mediation of Enobarbus.

Notice that Antony does not come aboard and break the illusion. Instead we are eased back to actuality by a different route, the same route of comedy by which we moved out of it. We are told that in excited curiosity everybody in town rushed to the river to see the great sight:

The city cast
Her people out upon her; and Antony
Enthron'd i' th' market place, did sit alone,
Whistling to th' air, …

Invited to supper by Cleopatra,

Our courteous Antony,
Whom ne'er the word of 'no' woman heard speak,
Being barber'd ten times o'er, goes to the feast,
And for his ordinary pays his heart
For what his eyes eat only.

The tone has changed, and Agrippa, reminded of another of her conquests, puts it coarsely:

Royal wench!
She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed.
He plough'd her, and she cropp'd.

Enobarbus continues the earthy vein, but only to catch up in his anecdote the paradox of her quality:

I saw her once
Hop forty paces through the public street;
And having lost her breath, she spoke, and panted,
That she did make defect perfection
And, breathless, pow'r breathe forth.

To Maecenas' comment, "Now Antony will leave her utterly," Enobarbus replies:
Never! He will not.
Age cannot wither her nor custom stale
Her infinite variety. Other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies; for vilest things
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
Bless her when she is riggish.

He has composed the contraries of the scene and the character, of "the most triumphant lady" and the "royal wench." He has, besides, suggested someone both convincingly "real" and yet beyond description. The final contrast is full of anticipatory irony. Maecenas remarks on the coming wedding of Antony to Octavia:

If beauty, wisdom, modesty, can settle
The heart of Antony, Octavia is
A blessed lottery to him.

Enobarbus has already said all that is necessary and lets this speculation pass without comment.

As with Antony, but even more so than with him, what we feel about Cleopatra is the energy of the dramatist's conception. Both characters sound and act like living people, yet both have an "excellence"—in the artistic sense in which I have been using the word—beyond actuality.

The reach for this excellence, this quintessence, the very idea of their story, is made especially as the play draws towards its close. As we have seen, Antony declines with his fortunes. The "grand captain" falls farther and farther from the image of that heroic ancestor of his, the Hercules he would like to be. He has, in a way, disintegrated, lost what he feels to be his essential self. After Actium he was "unqualified with very shame." Now, just before his attempted suicide (in IV. xiv), he uses the analogy of the towering thunderheads one sees towards evening, the clouds that at one moment have a form—like "a tower'd citadel" or "a pendent rock"—and at the next lose it:

That which is now a horse, even with a thought
The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct
As water is in water.

He tells Eros that he is

Even such a body. Here I am Antony;
Yet cannot hold this visible shape …

Perhaps he means no more than that he must die, but the meaning, in the light of all that we have seen happen, is far wider for us. He does hold to the best of himself in the act of suicide. As Dercetas puts it later to Octavius:

He is dead, Caesar,
Not by a public minister of justice
Nor by a hired knife; but that self hand
Which writ his honour in the acts it did
Hath, with the courage which the heart did lend it,
Splitted the heart.

(V. i. 19-24)
When Antony hears that Cleopatra is not after all dead, his tortured jealousy and rage at her simply fall away: "The long day's task is done, / And we must sleep"; "I will o'er-take thee, Cleopatra, and / Weep for my pardon." His last words, in Cleopatra's arms, are all the more poignant for the overtone of Stoic acceptance of his fate in so un-Stoic a man, and for the holding to the one dignity left to him—the fact that he made his own choice of death.

The miserable change now at my end  
Lament nor sorrow at; but please your thoughts  
In feeding them with those my former fortunes,  
Wherein I liv'd the greatest prince o' th' world,  
The noblest; and do now not basely die,  
Not cowardly put off my helmet to  
My countryman—a Roman by a Roman  
Valiantly vanquish'd.

(IV. xv. 51-58)

But the meaning of the death has already become greater in our minds than Antony himself. The guards who found him, mortally wounded but not dead, after he had fallen on his sword, spoke lyrically and chorically:

2. Guard. The star is fall'n.  
1. Guard. And time is at his period.  
All. Alas, and woe!  
(IV. xiv. 106-7)

The scene of the death itself (IV. xv) is enclosed in the choric laments of Cleopatra. Her words are, at the beginning:

O sun,  
Burn the great sphere thou mov'st in! Darkling  
stand  
The varying shore o' th' world! O Antony,  
Antony, Antony!

And when he is dead:

The crown o' th' earth doth melt. My lord!  
O, wither'd is the garland of the war,  
The soldier's pole is fall'n! Young boys and girls  
Are level now with men. The odds is gone,  
And there is nothing left remarkable  
Beneath the visiting moon.

All here is tragic elevation. The dross has fallen away. There is left only the idea of Antony the absolute soldier, whose arm "crested the world," and whose death leaves the world a meaner, poorer place. All the widening meaning of such a death, of the fall of such a prince, is borne in the imagery. It is a great event in history, after which nothing will be the same as if it had not happened. His death "is not a single doom." This is the very essence of historical tragedy, of the meaning the old medieval Fall of Princes theme might hold when brought to noble fruition in a great play.
It is to the "idea" of Antony that Cleopatra rises—an idea she helps create, both here in the death scene and in the dream speech to Dolabella ("I dreamt there was an Emperor Antony, / His face was as the heav'n's...."). To her women she says:

Our lamp is spent, it's out! Good sirs, take heart.
We'll bury him; and then, what's brave, what's noble,
Let's do it after the high Roman fashion
And make death proud to take us.

In her resolution and in the manner of her death, the conflict between the idea of Egypt and the idea of Rome is finally resolved. For she is ready to put off her femininity for masculine courage, and for the Stoic ideal of the free and constant mind, superior to accident and un-terrified by death.

My resolution's plac'd, and I have nothing
Of woman in me. Now from head to foot
I am marble-constant. Now the fleeting moon
No planet is of mine.

(V. ii. 238-41)

She is ready to take herself beyond the world of time and circumstance:

To do that thing that ends all other deeds,
Which shackles accidents and bolts up change.

(V. ii. 5-6)

But in the doing of it she triumphs over Caesar, and in a woman's way.

The end takes us back to the beginning. For the ranged empire Antony had used the metaphor of the Roman triumphal arch. In the image of the "triumph" or victory procession, the great formal "pomp" of the Roman conqueror, Shakespeare gathers up all the conflicts, the victories and defeats, the multiple ironies of the play. Caesar, "the sole sir o' th' world," the winner of the world that Antony had kissed away, is most concerned to keep Cleopatra alive and in health, "for her life in Rome / Would be eternal in our triumph." But Cleopatra designs her own triumph:

Show me, my women, like a queen. Go fetch
My best attires. I am again for Cydnus,
To meet Mark Antony.

There once before, we remember, she had been "a most triumphant lady." Little is left, in this triumph of Cleopatra's, of hyperbole. There is now no need for it, for the thing and the idea are one. She has assumed her greatness:

Give me my robe, put on my crown. I have
Immortal longings in me. Now no more
The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip.
Yare, yare, good Iras; quick. Methinks I hear Anthony call. I see him rouse himself
To praise my noble act. I hear him mock
The luck of Ceasar, which the gods give men
To excuse their after wrath. Husband, I come!
Now to that name my courage prove my title!

There is room for coquetry. "If she first meet the curled Antony," she says of Iras, who has fallen first,

If she first meet the curled Antony,
He'll make demand of her, and spend that kiss
Which is my heaven to have.

And there is room for a triumphant joke. She addresses the asp she has applied to her breast:

O couldst thou speak,
That I might hear thee call great Caesar ass
Unpolicied!

The brief dialogue at the end between Charmian and Cleopatra is lyric and in low key:

Charmian  O Eastern star!
Cleopatra.  Peace, peace!
Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep? Charmian  O break! O, break!
Cleopatra. As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as
gentle—
O Antony!

Only Shakespeare, bold in his assurance of what he had done, would dare Charmian's final epithet for Cleopatra:

Now boast thee, death, in thy possession lies
A lass unparallel’d.

Is the world well lost for love, as Dryden phrased it? The question is not asked. It is impertinent. The loss, the love, simply are. To Antony, Cleopatra's bosom was his crownet, his chief end. For Cleopatra, her courage proved her title to call him husband. They reach the end they make. Finis coronat opus.

Caesar, after all, has the last word—rather, the last two words. The first is a tribute to the triumphant lady, spoken without rancour or personal grievance. He is captured, like all the rest, by the wonder of Cleopatra:

She looks like sleep
As she would catch another Antony
In her strong toil of grace.

The second is the dismissal and final judgment, spoken as always in Shakespearian tragedy, directly, plainly, and formally:

Take up her bed,
And bear her women from the monument.
She shall be buried by her Antony.
No grave upon the earth shall clip in it
A pair so famous. High events as these
Strike those that make them; and their story is
No less in pity than his glory which
Brought them to be lamented. One army shall
In solemn show attend this funeral,
And then to Rome. Come, Dolabella, see
High order in this great solemnity.

But I have an epilogue of my own. If this play strikes you as fancy's piece 'gainst nature, I recommend to you Cleopatra's words to the incredulous Dolabella, after her extravagant characterization of the Antony of her dream—the Antony whose legs bestrid the ocean, whose reared arm crested the world. She asked him, "Think you there was or might be such a man / As this I dreamt of?" And he replied, "Gentle madam, no." Then she said:

You lie, up to the hearing of the gods!
But, if there be or ever were one such,
It's past the size of dreaming. Nature wants stuff
To vie strange forms with fancy; yet t'imagine
An Antony were nature's piece 'gainst fancy,
Condemning shadows quite.

This is Pelion on Ossa, hyperbole upon hyperbole—or so it seems. Is it not, rather, hyperbole confronted, outfaced in an assertion that the truth is beyond anything hyperbole can reach? It would not be uncharacteristic of Shakespeare to suggest that the true wonder, something always beyond statement, lay, after all, in human beings themselves—in these two and in their story.

G. R. Hibbard (essay date 1980)


[In the following excerpt, Hibbard discusses Shakespeare's use of language in Antony and Cleopatra, describing the play's style as "an astonishing union of the hyperbolical with the simple, the downright, and the direct." ]

[Enter Demetrius and Philo.]

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

The office and devotion of their view
Upon a tawny front. His captain's heart,
Which in the scuffles of great fights haht
burst
The buckles on his breast, reneges all
temper,
And is become the bellows and the fan
To cool a gipsy's lust.

[Flourish Enter Antony. Cleopatra, her Ladies,
the Train, with Eunuchs fanning her.]

    Look where they come!
    Take but good note, and you shall see in
    him
    The triple pillar of the world transformed
    Into a strumpet's fool. Behold and see.

Cleopatra. If it be love indeed, tell me how much.

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

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

Antony. Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth.

[Enter a Messenger]


Antony. Grates me! the sum.

Cleopatra. Nay, hear them, Antony.

Fulvia perchance is angry; or who knows
If the scarce-bearded Caesar have not sent
His powerful mandate to you: 'Do this or this;
Take in that kingdom and enfranchise that;
Perform't, or else we damn thee.'

Antony. How, my love?

No other of Shakespeare's plays begins on such a full-throated note as this. That 'happy valiancy of style', which Coleridge singled out [in Coleridge's Essays and Lectures on Shakespeare] as the tragedy's most striking and characteristic quality, makes itself felt from the very start. Philo's outburst sweeps forward in a flood-tide of verbal splendour. Only once within the entire speech does the end of a sentence coincide with the end of a line; and no fewer than seven lines out of the thirteen are run on. Moreover, as befits an impetuous outburst, the speech is both repetitive and expansive, returning time after time, but in different terms, to the same central issue. The essence of what the soldier has to say is already there in the first sentence: he finds Antony's behaviour incomprehensible, exasperating, and intolerable. But this initial statement, inadequate in its brevity to convey a depth and complexity of feeling which, like Antony's 'dotage', itself 'O'erflows the measure', is then exemplified and further defined through two magnificent images, each rising on a wave of hyperbolical inflation that eventually breaks in the same kind of devastatingly reductive scorn: 'a tawny front' and 'a gipsy's lust'. And then, after the colourful and spectacular entry of the hero and the heroine, in which the effeminacy that Philo has castigated is endorsed and given visual form in the eunuchs and the fanning, comes the summing-up in yet another image, which follows exactly the same pattern of development as the two previous images to reach its conclusion in the contemptuous finality of 'a strumpet's fool', the metrical as well as the sense counterpart to 'a tawny front' and 'a gipsy's lust'.

The most distinctive feature of Antony and Cleopatra as a whole is already apparent: Philo cannot understand why Antony should behave as he is doing, nor can he suppress or control the mixed emotions, including a profound sense of loss and regret as well as scorn, with which that behaviour fills him, but he can, through the words that Shakespeare finds for him, express both the incomprehension and the violent conflict of opposing impulses that he feels within himself. It is all completely and pellucidly there, subtly shaped in such a way as to make his speech a brief but powerful self-contained poem, deriving much of its unity from recurrent rhythms that act like echoes. The similarities of the three long sentences, each working out an image, of the three dismissive phrases, and of the three exhortations to Demetrius, 'Look where they come', 'Take but good
note', and 'Behold and see', give the lines a formal quality not unlike that of a lyric or a sonnet, with the long sentences taking the place of stanzas, and the parallel phrases and commands, so reminiscent of each other, corresponding to rhymes.

The speech is intended to be memorable and to be remembered, because it puts a point of view which will be of the utmost importance for the tragedy it introduces, which will be reiterated time after time during its course, and which will not receive its final answer, and, I think, its ultimate refutation, until the close. That answer is, of course, Cleopatra's last speech and Chairman's coda to it (v.ii,278-326), a passage which, with a miraculous appropriateness, is, in its structure as distinct from its content, extraordinarily like Philo's prologue; for it, too, is a complete poem in itself that tends to fall into a series of irregular stanzas, punctuated and held together by commands, questions, and exclamations, nearly all of which are of the same two-foot length as his three expressions of scorn and his three exhortations: 'Give me my robe', 'put on my crown', 'Husband, I come', 'So, have you done?', 'Dost thou lie still?', 'This proves me base', 'O couldst thou speak', 'O Eastern star!', 'O break! O break!', 'What should I stay—', 'In this vile world?', 'So, fare thee well', 'Your crown's awry', recalling, with a difference, Cleopatra's 'put on my crown', and 'It is well done.'

Commenting on this speech of Cleopatra's, Middleton Murry says: 'A dying woman does not use such figures of speech; and at the pinnacle of her complex emotion, a Cleopatra would have no language to express it.' He then goes on to say: 'in the death scene of Cleopatra [Shakespeare] achieves the miracle: he makes the language completely adequate to the emotion and yet keeps it simple'. About the simplicity I have doubts; but the rest of that statement puts the matter extremely well and can be applied, mutatis mutandis, to Philo's opening lines. Soldiers, particularly when exasperated, do not speak as he does, but the language he is given is 'completely adequate to the emotion'. In this respect, above all others—and there are others—his lines are the perfect prologue to the play, for Antony and Cleopatra is, of all Shakespeare's mature tragedies, the most expressive and luminous. In part this luminosity comes from the manner in which images are handled. The play is charged with them, and, as Maurice Charney has shown in great detail [in Shakespeare's Roman Plays], they are most intricately linked together and carry much of the total significance; but, while they often tread hard on one another's heels, as they do, for example, in Cleopatra's ecstatic picture of the Antony she knew (v.ii,79-92), they are always kept separate from one another, as they are in Philo's speech. They do not grow into and become entangled with each other, as they do, for instance, in Lady Macbeth's taunt to her husband:

Was the hope drunk
Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since,
And wakes it now to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time
Such I account thy love.

(Macbeth, I.vii,35-9)

The compressed involution of that, so wholly in keeping with an action that occurs for the most part in darkness and mist and in which 'the torture of the mind' (III,ii,21) is a central concern, would be entirely out of place in Antony and Cleopatra, where the action takes place in the clear light of the Mediterranean day and the darker recesses of the human heart are left unprobed.

It is not merely the clarity and distinctness of its images that makes Antony and Cleopatra so expressive, though they obviously contribute to its expressiveness; Shakespeare's whole attitude towards language seems to have changed from what it was when he wrote King Lear. Anne Barton, in her essay, 'Shakespeare and the Limits of Language' [Shakespeare Survey, vol. 24, 1971], remarks, with considerable justification, that 'It is in the tragedies … that words are exposed to a scrutiny not only intense but, in the case of King Lear, distinctly unfriendly', and then goes on to point out how often in that play characters in their moments of extreme
suffering can do no more than repeat some single word, such as 'Howl' or 'Never', time and again; how often they lapse into sheer incoherence; and how often also they actually say that what they are experiencing is quite beyond the capacity of language to formulate. She does not refer to Antony and Cleopatra in her subsequent discussion of the scepticism about the adequacy of words to convey man's profoundest feelings which Shakespeare, she argues, shows in much of his tragic writing, but a brief mention of it in another context makes it evident that she regards it as the great exception to the general idea she advances.

It is, indeed; for if the other tragedies do evince a certain distrust of language—and, in so far as King Lear is concerned, this seems to me undeniable—on the part of their creator, this one does precisely the opposite: in it there is an unbounded confidence in the potentialities of language, which seems capable of encompassing anything and everything, except the monstrous and the unspeakable, which it is not called on to do. In Antony and Cleopatra even incoherence itself, on the one occasion when it occurs, is expressed in such a convincing fashion that it becomes a kind of eloquence. In Act I, scene iii, Cleopatra, having learnt from Antony of his intention to return to Rome, reproaches him for his lack of love and then taunts him by suggesting that his reluctance to leave her is merely a piece of play-acting. Eventually she goes too far, and brings down on herself the curt rejoinder, 'I'll leave you, lady.' Thereupon, she tries to hold him back, if only for a moment, by pretending that she has something of great importance to say to him but cannot remember what it is:

Courteous lord, one word.
Sir, you and I must part—but that's not it.
Sir, you and I have loved—but there's not it.
That you know well. Something it is I would—
O, my oblivion is a very Antony,
And I am all forgotten.

(I,iii,86-91)

In that speech the je ne sais quoi has been defined with completeness and employed with assurance to 'snatch a grace beyond the reach of art'. In a similar way but on a much larger scale the verse conjures up the spaciousness of the Roman empire on the bare stage of the Globe theatre, and leads the audience into accepting the reality of a heroine of whom it is said, 'Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale / Her infinite variety' (II,ii,239-40). Moreover, it also works as a potent unifying factor to hold together an action that ranges over many countries and many years, takes in events as diverse as the coming of the Pax Romana and a drunken party, and is almost as much comic as it is tragic.

The verse has this unifying effect because the style of the play is remarkably homogeneous; the style not the styles, for Antony and Cleopatra, unlike the other tragedies, is written in one style not several. The tragedies which come closest to it in this respect are the other two (excluding the very early Titus Andronicus) which admit only a minimal amount of prose, less than ten per cent of the total number of lines: Julius Caesar and Macbeth. In the former, however, a clear distinction is made between the language of the crowd and that of the other figures, as well as between the Attic style of Brutus and the Asiatic style of Antony in the forum scene (III,ii). In the latter, the most obvious distinction is between the blank verse of most of the play and the rhyme of the witches, and the prose of the drunken Porter and, later, the prose of Lady Macbeth in the sleep-walking scene, each providing a kind of ironic counterpoint to the dominant manner. But in Antony and Cleopatra even the one character who is wholly confined to prose, the Clown who brings the asp to Cleopatra in the final scene, is still, like the other characters in the play, very much an overstater, in his own malapropian fashion, describing the worm's biting as 'immortal' and his own account of its prowess as 'most falliable' (v,ii,246-56). At the same time, however, the Clown plainly has his feet on the ground, so to speak, carefully defining the meaning he gives to 'immortal' by adding 'those that do die of it do seldom or never recover', and applying 'most falliable' to his unimposing but indisputable statement, 'the worm's an odd worm'.
In fact, the Clown's speeches, in their mixture of the would-be impressive and the bathetic, are a brilliant parody of the manner of Philo's opening lines, which is also the manner of the play those lines introduce, an astonishing union of the hyperbolical with the simple, the down-right, and the direct. Fully conscious of the new style he has created for his play and utterly confident in its strength, Shakespeare repeatedly draws attention to the hyperbolical element in it by submitting it to parody. Charmian, consulting the Soothsayer, says:

Let me be married to three kings in a forenoon, and widow them all. Let me have a child at fifty, to whom Herod of Jewry may do homage. Find me to marry me with Octavius Caesar, and companion me with my mistress. (I,ii,26-9)

And he, not to be outdone, replies to her question, 'Prithee, how many boys and wenches must I have?', by retorting:

If every of your wishes had a womb,
And fertile every wish, a million.
(11. 34-6)

This criticism of the tendency, so evident in the writing, towards a fine excess reaches its height in the opening lines of Act III, scene ii, where Agrippa and Enobarbus compete with each other in mockery of the sycophantic efforts, as they see them, of Lepidus to stand well with both Caesar and Antony, a competition which Enobarbus wins hands down when, in answer to Agrippa's judicious comment, 'Indeed, he plied them both with excellent praises', he remarks:

But he loves Caesar best. Yet he loves Antony.
Hoo! hearts, tongues, figures, scribes, bards,
poets, cannot
Think, speak, cast, write, sing, number—hoo!—
His love to Antony. But as for Caesar,
Kneel down, kneel down, and wonder.
(III,ii,14-19)

The odd thing about this speech and, indeed, about the mockery of which it is part, is that we have heard nothing from Lepidus to justify it. His manner of expressing himself is no more extreme and excessive than that of anyone else; for in Antony and Cleopatra Shakespeare, abandoning, for the time being, his talent for conferring life and individuality on a character by endowing him with a distinctive and often idiosyncratic idiom, a way of speaking which is peculiarly his own, relies for his characterisation on what the dramatis personae say, on what is said about them by others, and, of course, on what they do. It is, it must be added, quite enough. Octavia, for example, short though her part is, makes a very definite impression that sets her off from all the other characters; yet it is only the sense and the sentiment of the following lines addressed to Antony that mark them out as hers; in their movement, their appeal to Jove, their resort to the repeated superlative, and in the magnitude and vigour of their imagery they could equally well belong to almost anyone else in the play:

The Jove of power make me, most weak, most weak.
Your reconciler! Wars' twixt you twain would be
As if the world should cleave, and that slain men
Should solder up the rift.
A mere eighteen lines later, Enobarbus, also anticipating the likelihood of a war between Antony and Caesar, virtually makes my point for me when he says:

Then, world, thou hast a pair of chaps—no more;  
And throw between them all the food thou hast,  
They'll grind the one the other.  

(III,v,13-15)

In both speeches the images are epic in their scope, but far more compressed and forceful than the images of heroic poetry usually are. A much earlier use by Shakespeare of an image that is very close in essentials to that of Enobarbus will serve to illustrate the difference. In *King John*, when John and Philip of France, after the first indecisive engagement between their armies, seem on the point of renewing the battle, the Bastard cries:

O, now doth Death line his dead chaps with steel;  
The swords of soldiers are his teeth, his fangs;  
And now he feasts, mousing the flesh of men,  
In undetermined differences of kings.  

(II,i,352-5)

The image there is, because of its greater detail, more picturesque, more explicit, and much closer to the epic manner than Enobarbus's, but it does not have, if the pun may be allowed, the same crunch. In Octavia's lines, as in Enobarbus's, it is the reciprocal interplay of the grand and the familiar that creates the striking effect. A 'rift' is the chasm caused by an earthquake, not a common sight, but the verb 'solder', belonging to the language of tinkers and plumbers, bridges the gap, as it were, and brings the whole notion much nearer to everyday experience.

It is the 'heavenly mingle' of the elevated and grand with the simple and familiar which is the basic feature of the style of *Antony and Cleopatra* and the source of that 'angelic strength' which so impressed Coleridge. Nor is this mingle simply a matter of images. A pair of words are often brought into a vital and unexpected relationship with each other in such a way that they interanimate, to use a word of Donne's, each other. 'A lass unparallel'd' (v,ii,314) is a rare creature indeed, especially when the lass in question is 'with Phoebus' amorous pinches black, / And wrinkled deep in time' (I,v,28-9), simultaneously ordinary and quite extraordinary, common and yet unique, the offspring of a marriage between a native English word that first appears around the year 1300 and a neologism, deriving ultimately from the Greek, for which the OED gives no example prior to 1594. Furthermore, 'lasses' are usually found in the popular love poetry of Shakespeare's day, and they live in the country, witness his own song, 'It was a lover and his lass' (*As You Like It*, v,iii,14-31); whereas 'unparallel'd' comes from the world of science and of learning in general, smacks of the Inns of Court, and has more than a touch of metaphysical wit about it. 'A lass unparallel'd' is a poem in little, and its style a microcosm of the style that informs the play.

The consistency of that style in its sustained mixing of the sublime and the simple, the heroic and the amorous, suggests that Shakespeare, when writing this play, saw it as his own dramatic contribution to the Renaissance epic in which the main themes were love and war. Philo's initial speech lends strong support to this idea, for it looks like a highly original variation on the well-established epic *topos* so memorably employed by Virgil in Aeneas's description of the ghost of Hector as it appeared to him on the night of Troy's destruction. Torn, blood-stained, and covered in dust, just as Hector's body was after being dragged round the
walls of Troy by Achilles, the ghost is a shocking contrast to the hero Aeneas knew:

\[ \text{quantum mutatus ab illo} \]

Hectore, qui redit exuvias indutus Achilli
vel Danaum Phrygios iaculatus puppis ignis!

Shakespeare characteristically puts his own stamp, in the form of verbal energy and linguistic inventiveness, on the contrast he draws between Antony as he was and Antony as he is. Over against the mythological references to Mars and to Atlas, with, perhaps, a hint of Hercules as well in the latter, are set images from common life, 'the bellows and the fan'. His mastery of concentrated and significant word-play is evident in 'dotage', meaning primarily 'sexual infatuation' but also carrying overtones of 'the lack of judgement that comes with old age', and again in 'fool', denoting both 'amorous plaything' and 'dupe'. The word 'scuffles' appears nowhere else in the canon, and its occurrence here is the earliest recorded in the OED, though there is evidence that 'sculling' was being used in East Anglia rather more than twenty years before; and 'triple', signifying 'third' or 'one of three', is a usage peculiar, it would seem, to Shakespeare. The most important instance of linguistic adventurousness in the entire speech is, however, the pregnant and teasing phrase 'reneges all temper', which most editors, forgetting or overlooking the fact that temperance is not a quality that Philo, or anyone else for that matter, associates with Antony, gloss as 'abandons or renounces all moderation'. On the only other occasion when Shakespeare employs 'renege' (King Lear, II,ii,73) it means 'deny'; but a better guide to its full significance here is Maria's laughing account of Malvolio's ridiculous behaviour, in which she says of him:

Yond gull Malvolio is turned heathen, a very renegado; for there is no Christian that means to be saved by believing rightly can ever believe such impossible passages of grossness.

(Twelfth Night, III,ii,64-8)

To 'renege' is 'deliberately to deny and renounce one's faith'; and the 'temper' Philo has in mind is the temper of good steel, standing metaphorically for the steely courage and springy resolution of Antony's heart in which his men have hitherto been able to put their trust, exactly as they have done in the temper of their swords. At the root of the soldier's bitter and regretful condemnation of his general lies his conviction that Antony is now a renegade, one who has betrayed and renounced that faith in the military virtues which he once embodied and which Philo holds still.

The stylistic daring of the speech is matched by the dramatic daring of its placing. No other of Shakespeare's tragic heroes is introduced after this fashion. It is true that we hear many harsh things about Othello before he actually appears, but, since they come from the lips of one who admits from the outset that he hates the Moor, we do not take them at their face value. We have no such reason for distrusting Philo; on the contrary, his obvious love and admiration for the Antony he once knew inspire confidence in the accuracy of what he says. His lines are a lament for fallen greatness as well as an attack on apostasy. Consequently, they also leave us asking what kind of tragedy this is to be. The other tragedies of Shakespeare's maturity all deal with a fall from greatness that happens during the course of the action, after the greatness of the hero has been made plain to us and impressed on us by what we see him do and hear him say; but after listening to Philo we can only conclude that Antony's greatness is already a thing of the past, and that greatness of any kind is the last thing Cleopatra can lay claim to. If the play is to be a tragedy, as both the head-title and the running-title in the First Folio assure us it is, it is bound to be radically different, as indeed it is, from the other tragedies.

Myth

Janet Adelman (essay date 1973)

In the following excerpt, Adelman examines parallels to the myth of Venus and Mars in Antony and Cleopatra, commenting that "[the] significance of the mythological allusions in [the play] is not in their number but in their use: the gods are generally adduced as analogues for the protagonists."

Yet have I fierce affections and think
What Venus did with Mars.

(1.5.17-18)

It is at first hardly startling to find a great many allusions to mythological personages and events in Antony and Cleopatra: the play deals, after all, with classical matter in a high style to which Thetis, Bacchus, Hercules, Venus, Mars, Juno, Jove, and the rest are most appropriate. But if we look at Julius Caesar, a play dealing with essentially the same historical matter, we find almost no mythological allusion. Moreover, there are very few allusions in the major tragedies. R. K. Root comments [in Classical Mythology in Shakespeare],

In the series of great tragedies, classical mythology plays a quite insignificant part, but in Ant. and Cor. it suddenly reasserts itself with surprising vigor; from the 7 allusions of Lr. and the 11 of Tim., we jump in Ant. to 39 allusions.

The romances, of course, continue to exhibit this vigor of allusion. But the number of mythological allusions is no index whatever to the sense of myth in a play. Despite the paucity of allusions in Julius Caesar, there is a very strong sense of Caesar as simultaneously man and myth and of the universal order which his death disturbs. Lear's seven mythological allusions cannot account for the storm scene on the heath or Gloucester's leap, among the most mythically powerful scenes in all Shakespeare. The number of mythological allusions in Troilus and Cressida is higher than in any other play, but the sense of myth is altogether absent: the mythological figures are subject almost uniformly to the scurrilous and denigrating vision which informs that play. The significance of the mythological allusions in Antony and Cleopatra is not in their number but in their use: the gods are generally adduced as analogues for the protagonists. Our lovers will not only replace Dido and Aeneas in Elysium, they will begin to encroach on the realm of the gods themselves.

In Julius Caesar and the major tragedies, mythic natural forces may be responsive to disturbances of human order, but the mythic personages are infinitely remote. The gods are usually evoked as a distant court of appeal, as participants in another realm, quite separate from that in which the protagonists act: in the tragedies, this sense of separation is part of the point. But in Antony and Cleopatra, the sense of the distance between realms is surprisingly absent. We hear the music of the god Hercules departing from Antony: and this invisible masque of withdrawal asserts the presence of the mythological realm in the human as powerfully as the masques and visions in the romances. The distinction between man and god is blurred. And if Hercules participates in the human realm, the lovers begin to participate in the divine: Cleopatra is like Venus or Isis and Antony like Mars. This insistence on the analogy between the human and the mythological, so foreign to the tragedies, is in fact an anticipation of the romances; for, in the last plays, precisely this sense of the participation of the mythic in human life becomes essential. Here, as in the romances, the characters themselves are on the way to becoming larger than life.

Not all the mythological allusions can be examined in detail, though nearly all are suggestive. Bacchus, for instance, presides over the scene on Pompey's galley as the very ambiguous god of wine: does wine reveal a suprarational truth, or does the subjugation of man's reason leave him in the dark night of passion? Cartari [Vincenzo Catari in his Le imagini colla spozione degli dei degli antichi (1556)] speaks of Bacchus both as a valiant conqueror and as the disreputable god of drunkenness. Is not this description suggestive of Antony's own rake's progress? These and other questions might be raised about the god whose song is sung on Pompey's galley, the god whom Plutarch had associated with Antony; but since Shakespeare minimizes this association, we had best follow suit. But what of Thetis, the sea nymph who arms her son Achilles? Antony calls Cleopatra Thetis before Actium (3.7.60); might not her presence be invoked when Cleopatra arms
Antony? The presence of Isis in the play is not merely Shakespeare's way of adding local color; our sense of Cleopatra is partly shaped by Isis, goddess of the Nile, the earth, and the moon, nurse of all life and patroness of generation, who almost always appears accompanied by serpents.

Antony tells us that Hercules is his ancestor; the god is associated with Antony throughout the play. According to the mythographers, Hercules was confronted in his youth by the two lovely ladies, Pleasure and Virtue. Unlike Paris, he chose Virtue. In this respect, he is clearly Antony's antitype: he did not pass his taste in women on to his far-removed son. It is possible that this moral analogue functions in the play to comment on Antony's choice of Cleopatra ("I' the east my pleasure lies" [2.3.39]) over Octavia ("the piece of virtue" [3.2.28]). But the necessity of a choice between pleasure and virtue is scarcely a theme which needs bolstering from so eminent a figure as Hercules; though this analogue does function in a shadowy way, it by no means accounts for the significance of Hercules' presence in the play. The legends associated with Hercules by the Renaissance made him as gigantic in folly as he was in strength and virtue: his transformation into Omphale's servant, dressed in woman's clothes and performing domestic chores, was generally cited as evidence that even the strongest men are liable to be made effeminate by a failure to bridle their passions. As such, he serves Sidney as a type of the comic in The Defense of Poesy and Spenser as a model for Artegall's bondage to Radigund in The Faerie Queene, book 5. This association of Hercules with effeminacy is clearly analogous to that sinister change of clothing which Cleopatra reports; the association of Antony's captivity with Hercules' was commonplace. But the primary function of Hercules in the play is not as a moral analogue; in fact, he seems rather to suggest a heroic or divine perspective to which considerations of ordinary human morality are somewhat irrelevant.

Throughout the play, Antony and Cleopatra are presented as human extremes of martial and venereal virtue; it is inevitable that they be seen as analogous to Mars and Venus. Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra at Cydnus insists on the analogy:

… she did lie
In her pavilion—cloth of gold, of tissue—
O'er-picturing that Venus where we see
The fancy outwork nature. On each side her,
Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids.
(2.2.198-202)

The analogy is made by the most skeptical voice in the play; we need no other image of Cleopatra as Venus. This passage serves as the still point which defines all Cleopatra's movement; immediately before her death, she shall herself remind us of Cydnus. Antony's association with Mars is more complex: it points toward what he should be as well as what he is. According to Cleopatra, Antony is "painted one way like a Gorgon, / The other way's a Mars" (2.5.116-17); Enobarbus wants him to "speak as loud as Mars" (2.2.6) in the conference with Caesar. The opening lines of the play associate Antony with Mars even as they insist that he is Mars no longer:

… those his goody eyes,
That o'er the files and musters of the war
Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
The office and devotion of their view
Upon a tawny front: his captain's heart,
Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper,
And is become the bellows and the fan
To cool a gipsy's lust.
Antony has been Mars in battle; now he, like Mars, has turned from his proper business and become captive to love. But in this captivity, the god of war is metamorphosed into the blacksmith husband of Venus: the bellows and the fan are associated with Vulcan and suggest a humbler and more domestic fire than the glow of war. The alliance of Mars and Venus serves as a euphemism in Mardian's reply to Cleopatra's teasing: "Yet have I fierce affections, and think / What Venus did with Mars" (1.5.17-18). But even Mardian's reference suggests the analogy between the human and the celestial adulterers: when Mardian thinks "what Venus did with Mars," Cleopatra completes his half line with "O Charmian, / Where think'st thou he is now?" (1.5.18-19). In her words, Antony and Mars are syntactically united; and she is of course remembering what she has done with him.

The union of these divine adulterers was one of the ruling mythological commonplaces of the English Renaissance. Virtually any woman who managed to disarm any man could be seen as reenacting the victory of her divine prototype. Book 2 of *The Faerie Queene* gives us several versions of the myth, culminating in the image of Verdant and Acrasia trapped in the Palmer's net as Mars and Venus were in Vulcan's. Shakespeare's own Venus uses the analogy in her attempt to seduce Adonis (*Venus and Adonis*, lines 97-114). It is no wonder that allusions to the myth turn up nearly everywhere: the image of the god of war subjugated by the goddess of love is so inclusive that it could be used to express almost anything. This all-purpose image can serve to indicate the right (or the wrong) relation between male and female, or war and love, or public action and private passion, or destruction and creation, or strife and concord, or even heat and moisture; it can be a text on the power of love in the universe or on the certain doom of adulterers. It is a fable about adultery, but adultery committed with the principle of generation herself: consequently, it is particularly subject to a dizzying variety of interpretations, from the simplest moralizing to the most abstruse Neoplatonic explication of Harmonia as that *discordia concors* which proceeds from the union of a very Empedoclean Mars and Venus.

The divergence in interpretation has a venerable ancestry. Shakespeare and his audience almost certainly knew at least two classical versions which were contradictory in tone and import: the Ovidian and the Lucretian. Ovid's versions in both *Metamorphoses*, book 4, and *Ars amatoria*, book 2, are generally tolerant of the peccadilloes of the pair; the emphasis is not on the sexual union but on Vulcan's subtle net and the envious laughter of the gods. But Lucretius in *De rerum natura* treats the fable with philosophic high seriousness: he emphasizes the union itself, and the two gods are made to represent the primary forces of strife and concord. The Venus of his invocation is not merely an indiscreet wife; she is the great life principle of nature. Although the Ovidian version is good-humoredly tolerant of the gods and the Lucretian version treats them with high seriousness, it is the Ovidian version that later acquires the main burden of moral allegory: Ovid presents the gods as quasi-human and consequently as open to moral interpretation; but Lucretius presents them as cosmic principles to which human moralizing is ludicrously irrelevant.

The quasi-human and the cosmic interpretations are distinct in Ovid and Lucretius, but they are combined with disconcerting ease in Renaissance mythographers. There are those like Golding [in "The Epistler" introducing his translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*] and Fraunce [in *The Third Part of the countesse of Pembroke's Yechurch*] who read the fable simply as a warning that adultery will be discovered and who consequently disapprove entirely of the divine frolic, but these simple moralists are in the minority. More typical is Sandys who, [in *Ovid's Metamorphoses Englished, Mythologiz'd, and Represented in Figures*], compresses all the commonplaces into a paragraph with a blissful disregard for consistency: the fable carries this Astrologicall sense: that those who are borne in the conjunction of *Mars* and *Venus* are prone to inordinate affections. *Mars* sometimes descendeth beneath the Sun, and *Venus* for a part of the yeare ascendeth above him, as it were to meete with each other: whose conjunction may then be said to be discovered by the Sun, when he ceaseth to obscure them.
by the proximitie of his greater splendor. Vulcan bindes them in a net: that is, with too much fervor subdues their operations. For the starre of Mars is hot; and that of Venus moderate moist; and whereof generation consists: and therefore mutuall lovers: by Neptune unbound; in that water extinguisheth fire, which is Vulcan. This fable therefore was invented to expresse the sympathy that is necessary in nature. Proceed we a little with the influence of these Planets: Mars is malignant; but approaching Venus subdues his malignitie.… Mars likewise signifies strife, and Venus friendship; which, as the ancients held, were the parents of all things. But morally adulteries are taxed by this fable: which how potent soever the offenders, though with never so much art contrived, and secrecy concealed, are at length discovered by the eye of the Sun, and exposed to shame and dishonour.

Thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird, indeed. The conjunction of Mars and Venus must be seen as good insofar as it represents the sympathy of hot and moist necessary for generation in nature, or the subduing of Mars's malignant influence, or the union of strife and friendship as the parents of all things; but it must be seen as evil insofar as it is interpreted morally as adultery. In natural, cosmic, or philosophic terms, it is good and indeed necessary; in moral terms, it is evil. Both values are posited; the perspective of interpretation determines which is relevant.

This alignment of perspective with value is common among the mythographers. Conti [Natale Conti in his Natalis Comitis Mythologiae (1581)] also sees the conjunction of Mars and Venus as a moral evil and a cosmic good. Indeed, he finds the fable a particularly satisfying example of his favorite principle: the diversity of interpretations. He says,

Sed quoniam pro variis eventis varie fabulas interpretati sunt antiqui, ita ut aliae ad res naturae, aliae ad astronomam, aliae ad mores spectarent, aliae ad haec simul omnia; quid Martis cum Venere adulterium significat, explorandum est. Quid est tam contrarium quam occidere & procreare, expolire & devastare, erigere & prosternere? At Mars tamen qui haec omnia facit… cum Venere, quae omnia animalia, plantasque in lucem producit, congreditur. Quid ex hac tam discordi coniunctione orietur? nihil omnino superveniente Vulcano praecipue. Nam litigium & amicitia sunt Mars & Venus intelligendi, quorum utrumque opprimit Vulcanus, sive calor immodicus, principiaque vincit, neque ita illa suis funguntur viribus. Ad exprimendum igitur quod symmetria necessaria est rebus naturalibus, ista fabulose coninxerunt.… Quod Mars omnium deorum fortissimus & velocissimus arte Vulcani fuerit retibus implicatus, & debilis & claudicantis & tardi Dei, quid aliud significat, quam sceleratos homines nullis viribus, nulla pedum celeritate fretos posse Dei vindicens omnium flagittiorum iram devitare?

[But since the ancients interpreted fables variously for various ends, insofar as some were considering nature, others astronomy, others morals, and others all these at once, we must explore what the adultery of Mars with Venus means. What is so contrary as killing and begetting, perfecting and laying waste, lifting up and casting down? But nonetheless Mars, who does all these things… comes together with Venus, who brings forth all animals and plants into the light. What springs from this union so discordant? Nothing at all, especially with Vulcan rising above them. For Mars and Venus are understood to be strife and friendship, both of which Vulcan, or immoderate heat, extinguishes and overcomes their elements, nor can they perform with their full strength. Therefore they invented this fable to show that symmetry is necessary in nature…. That Mars, the strongest and swiftest of all the gods, was caught in a net by the art of Vulcan, the feeble and limping and slow god, signifies what else but that no guilty man who trusts in strength or in swiftness of foot can avoid the anger of God, the avenger of all crimes?]
Sandys has excellent precedent for his curious juxtapositions: the similarities between the two are immediately apparent. The contrary interpretations and values are even clearer in Conti's tenth book, devoted to systematic explication of the fables according to his principle of diverse interpretation. He does not remain systematic for long in this book, but he does progress far enough to include Vulcan and Mars. Vulcan is interpreted physically and meteorologically (these are Conti's own terms) and then ethically:

at nunc Ethice, Vulcanus ligavit Martem ac Venerem in rete, nempe claudus celerem, & invalidus fortissimum bellorum Deum: quia nullae vires iniquum hominem possunt a lusta vindicta Dei protegere. Quare per haec etiam homines hortabantur ad integritatem & ad innocentiam, & ab omni turpitudine revocabant.

[And now ethically: Vulcan caught Mars and Venus in a net, that is, the lame and unsound one caught the swift and exceedingly strong god of war: so that no strength can protect wicked man from the just vengeance of God. Wherefore men are exhorted to integrity and innocence by this too, and called away from all baseness.]

It is the same old story. But immediately afterward, he passes on to Mars and accords the fable an entirely different value:

De Marte Physice, Martem nonnulli Solem esse voluerunt, qui cum Venere coniunctus, superveniente Vulcano praecipue nihil procreat. Per haec & vitam & ortum animalium in qualitatum elementorumque symmetria consistere demonstrarunt: quippe cum per Martem litigium, per Venerem amicitiam significarent. Per Vulcanum exuperantem aliquam qualitatem. Nihil enim ex una tantum qualitate elementorum nascitur, neque ex similibus, sed ex his temperatis & modice inter se permistis.

[About Mars physically, some want Mars to be the sun, who procreated nothing when joined with Venus, especially with Vulcan rising above them. By this they have demonstrated that both the life and the origin of animals consists in symmetry of qualities and elements: certainly, since they mean strife by Mars and friendship by Venus. Therefore, by Vulcan they mean some surpassing quality. For nothing arises from only one quality of elements, nor from similar qualities, but from these [different] qualities moderately mixed among themselves.]

How, then, are we to see Mars and Venus? As quasi-human lovers warning us that Adultery Will Out or as the foundations of the universe? The mythographers ask us to see the divine interlude simultaneously as a moral evil and a cosmic good, but even this division is slightly shaky: the subduing of Mars's malignity may be seen as good in moral as well as astrological terms. The value of the union depends significantly on the value of Mars's customary activity: is he a cruel butcher or an honorable soldier? Spenser plays on precisely this chaos of significations in *The Faerie Queene*. In the proem to book 1, he invokes Cupid, Venus, and Mars together as images of beneficence and peace:

Come both, and with you bring triumphant
Mart,
In loues and gentle iollities arrayd,
After his murdrous spoiles and bloudy rage
allayd.

(*The Faerie Queene*, 1.proem.3)

But when Phaedria allays the bloody rage of Cymochles and Guyon, her function is highly equivocal:
But if for me ye fight, or me will serue,
Not this rude kind of battell, nor these armes
Are meet, the which doe men in bale to sterue,
And dolefull sorrow heape with deadly harmes:
Such cruell game my scarmoges disarmes:
Another warre, and other weapons I
Doe loue, where loue does giue his sweet
alarmes,
Without bloodshed, and where the enemy
Does yeeld vnto his foe a pleasant victory.

Debatefull strife, and cruell enmitie
The famous name of knighthood fowly shend;
But louely peace, and gentle amitie,
And in Amours the passing houres to spend,
The mightie martiall hands doe most commend;
Of loue they euer greater glory bore,
Then of their armes: Mars is Cupidoes frend,
And is for Venus loues renowned more,
Then all his wars and spoiles, the which he did
of yore.

(The Faerie Queene, 2.6.34-35)

We may be disconcerted to see the Knight of Temperance fighting Cymochles over Acrasia's handmaiden, but we are even more disconcerted when he obeys Phaedria's venereal appeal and stops fighting. Her plea to make love, not war, is disturbing precisely because she comes close to defining the Renaissance ideal of concord, even while she perverts the ideal to serve her own lust. We know that her appeal is fallacious, that there will be no true peace until our enemies—she among them—are defeated; but the appeal is irresistible nonetheless. The passage depends for its effect on all the ambiguity inherent in Venus's triumph over Mars: and just at the moment when we are most suspicious of Phaedria, Spenser congratulates his knights on succumbing to her charms.

Therewith she sweetly smyld. They though full
bent
To proue extremities of bloudie fight,
Yet at her speach their rages gan relent,
And calme the sea of their tempestuous spight,
Such powre haue pleasing words: such is the
might
Of courteous clemencie in gentle hart.

(The Faerie Queen, 2.6.36)

At this very complex moment, it is apparently good to stop fighting, even for the wrong reasons. But in Busirane's tapestry, the interruption of Mars's bloody fight is regarded simply as effeminate weakness:

How oft for Venus, and how often eek
For many other Nymphes he sore did shreek,
With womanish teares, and with vnwarlike
smarts,
Priuily moystening his horrid cheeke.

(The Faerie Queen, 3.11.44)
Mars and Venus can mean all things to all men; and when Spenser himself alludes to Antony, he associates him with the full complexity of their divine union.

The analogy of Mars and Venus in all its complexity helps to clarify one essential element in Antony and Cleopatra the lovers' exchange of clothing and to some degree of sexual characteristics. In the first words of the play, we see Antony associated with effeminacy. Cleopatra's description of an Alexandrian morning at home confirms this association:

Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed;  
Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst  
I wore his sword Philippan.  

(2.5.21-23)

It is inevitable that we see this exchange of clothing primarily as a psychological revelation; in it a state of affairs implicit throughout the play is made explicit. Octavius characteristically puts the matter in its least favorable light: Antony

… is not more manlike  
Than Cleopatra; nor the queen of Ptolemy  
More womanly than he.  

(1.4.5-7)

The Egyptian Antony is seen as effeminate by the Romans; and indeed Egypt seems to be a kingdom composed exclusively of women and eunuchs. We do not need the allegorical tradition to explain that lasciviousness robs a man of his virtus, his manly virtue: the transition from the Antony who drinks the gilded puddle to the Antony of the Alexandrian feasts makes the point abundantly clear. And the ruin at Actium is partly due to Cleopatra's determination to "appear there for a man" (3.7.18). Her description of the festive morning costume party becomes most sinister when Antony says to Mardian after Actium, "O, thy vile lady! / She has robb'd me of my sword" (4.14.22-23): the presence of the eunuch on stage makes it impossible to overlook Antony's phrase as a description of emasculation. The exchange of clothing, then, inevitably suggests a disastrous exchange of sexual authority and consequently a violation of the proper hierarchical relation between man and woman. This disturbance in sexual hierarchy can be seen morally as a violation of the proper hierarchical relation between reason and will. After Actium, Cleopatra asks if she or Antony is at fault, and Enobarbus replies, "Antony only, that would make his will / Lord of his reason" (3.13.3-4). The archetype for Antony's transformation is Hercules in woman's clothes, serving Omphale. Seen in these terms, the exchange of sexual roles is very sinister.

But these are not the only terms in which it can be seen, nor is Hercules the only available model. The image of Cleopatra wearing Antony's sword Philippan evokes one of the most complex of Renaissance iconographic topoi: the Venus armata. This elusive woman is all things to all mythographers. Armed with bow and arrows, as Venus Virgo, she is Venus borrowing the equipment and consequently the techniques and values of Diana; she has her prototype in the appearance of Venus so disguised in Aeneid 1. In this guise she suggests something about the relation of chastity to love: either that the appearance of chastity is often a stimulant to lust or that true love is always chaste—or virtually any attitude between the two. One of her most striking appearances is, of course, as Spenser's Belphoebe. In armor, Venus can readily be identified with Minerva and hence with militant wisdom, so readily in fact that the iconographers are undecided about the identity of some armed women. This version of Venus is one of the prototypes for Spenser's Britomart. But the most common type of the Venus armata is the Venus Victrix, the Venus who wears her arms as the emblem of her conquest over Mars and of all the consequences, moral and cosmic, of that conquest. She is a Renaissance commonplace; her presence would probably be recognized in the briefest of allusions. And if she is suggested by Cleopatra's description of herself with Antony's sword Philippan, she may later materialize on stage.
Immediately before Actium, Antony announces his determination to fight by sea and says to Cleopatra, "We'll to our ship, / Away, my Thetis!" (3.7.59-60): the sea nymph Thetis is often portrayed carrying armor for her son Achilles. Cleopatra herself has already told Enobarbus that she "will appear there for a man"; she "will not stay behind" (3.7.19). Given the familiar iconographic associations, it seems to me likely that Cleopatra on her way to do battle would have been dressed literally as a man, in armor. At this moment, Cleopatra may enact the role of her divine prototype on stage.

Given the complex range of meanings associated with the Venus armata, what is her significance as analogue for Cleopatra? Since Fulvia presumably arms for war as well as Cleopatra, we cannot demand too much specificity of meaning for the figure of the armed woman. But the tradition insists that the allusions to the armed Cleopatra be seen as meaningful, even if the audience does not know precisely what they mean. In fact, the most fundamental implication is probably that the Venus armata does not work out very well in ordinary life, fighting everyday battles. As Enobarbus says, "If we should serve with horse and mares together, / The horse were merely lost" (3.7.7-8). But the life of the play is not, after all, very ordinary; and though Cleopatra armed may be responsible for the loss of this battle, the figure of the Venus armata suggests another sphere of action in which she and Antony are triumphant.

The figure of Venus armed as an emblem of her victory over Mars suggests that the exchange of arms and clothing need not be seen exclusively in moral terms; and in natural or cosmic terms, the exchange has an altogether different emphasis. If we recall the monstrous hermaphroditic Venus in Volpone, we must also recall Spenser's hermaphroditic Venus in the Temple of Venus. Despite the Renaissance dread of effeminate men and mannish women, bisexuality could be seen in several ways. Cartari tells us that Bacchus, the god whom Plutarch had associated with Antony, is sometimes dressed as a woman. "On dit qu'il estoit de femme, pource que le trop boire debilite les forces, & rend l'homme effeminé"; or, as his English translator Lincke would have it [in his loose translation of Cartari's The Fountaire of Ancient Fiction],

   The clothes and garments of women so said to be on Bacchus signife, that the inordinate taking of wine weakeneth and debilitateth the naturall forces and powers of a man, making him feeble, unconstant, and strengthlesse like a woman.

Fair enough. But fifteen pages later, Cartari turns to the naturalistic mode of interpretation: Bacchus was thought by the ancients to be that hidden power which enables plants to bear fruit. He is dressed like a woman

   pour monstroir qu'aux plantes, sont les deux vertus de masle & de femelle…. Generalement toute plante produit de soymesme, fueilles & fruits: ce qui n'est pas ainsi des animaux, qui ne peuvent engendrer, si le masle ne se ioinct avec la femelle.

[to show that with plants there are two powers, male and female…. Generally each plant produces leaves and flowers from itself: which is not so among animals, who cannot reproduce if the male is not joined with the female.]

Cartari's hermaphrodite Venus has a similarly naturalistic explanation: the statue of Venus has the face of a man but the clothes of a woman because she is the generative principle. After his discussion of Venus as hermaphrodite, Cartari adds, doubtless to the despair of those who look for precision in iconography, that all gods are by their nature bisexual:

   Les anciens ne disoient pas seulement cela de Venus, mais aussi de tous les autres Dieux, donnans à chacun le nom d'homme & de femme, comme ne se trouvant entre eux la difference du sexe, qui est entre les hommes.
Antony and Cleopatra are not gods; and their transexuality must be seen in human terms. But the process of analogy with the gods suggests that they participate in the cosmic and natural harmonies signified by divine transexuality; and they must also be seen in that context. Even the Roman Agrippa associates Cleopatra's sexuality with the fecundity of nature itself: "She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed; / He plough'd her, and she cropp'd" (2.2.227-28). The wordplay makes the point very tidily: the sword is unmistakably both a sexual and a military weapon; and the military must be put aside (or laid to bed) before the sexual can be literally laid to bed, or put to use. In the second line of the image, the sword has been beaten into a plowshare: there are suggestions of that great generative sympathy in nature which occurs only when Mars succumbs to Venus and lays his sword to bed. And the lovers' exchange of sexual characteristics is the emblem for this generative sympathy: the elements in the play that may be seen from the Roman point of view as evidence of Antony's loss of manhood may also be seen as the emblem of his procreative union with Cleopatra. For if the union of Mars and Venus signifies generative harmony in the universe, that union is frequently represented pictorially by a partial exchange of clothing. Edgar Wind describes the appearance of this theme in Renaissance art [in Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance];

The many and famous Renaissance idylls in which the victorious Venus, having subdued the fearful Mars by love, is seen playing with his armour, or allowing her cupids and infant satyrs to play with it, all celebrate this peaceable hope: that Love is more powerful than Strife; that the god of war is inferior in strength to the goddess of grace and amiability…. In the idylls of the same subject painted by Botticelli and Piero di Cosimo no chain or ribbon is required to demonstrate the bondage of Mars. Venus has put his fierceness to sleep.

In several of the paintings, Mars is nude or slightly draped. The disarmed and sleeping god of war, the goddess of love toying with his armor: surely this image lurks behind Cleopatra's description of the exchange of clothing. For the scene which she describes is a vivid tableau of the union of the two gods. Antony and Cleopatra virtually reenact this union: their transexuality may be the ultimate emblem of their unity, that discordia concors necessary in human, natural, and cosmic love.

The dalliance of Venus and Mars serves as an exemplum antithetical to that of Dido and Aeneas: if Aeneas reminds us of the nearly superhuman effort by which love can be subjugated to empire, Mars reminds us that even the god of war is susceptible to the power of love. The relevance of Dido and Aeneas to Antony and Cleopatra is immediately apparent, for despite his divine guidance, Aeneas is a human being with human problems and choices; but what is the relevance of the gods Mars and Venus to our very human protagonists? How do these divine analogies function within the play? If we consider merely the moral interpretation of their fable, their relevance is clear enough; but what of the natural and cosmic interpretations? This question seems to me to be related to one of the most central issues in the play: its power to assert that the protagonists are at once entirely human and larger than life, that they are both lascivious adulterers and virtually mythic natural forces.

For many of us in the twentieth century, the sense of meaningful analogy between human and cosmic or divine events has been lost. But the central concept of the orthodox Elizabethan world picture was that of meaningful analogy between microcosm and macrocosm. Even when details of that world pictures were challenged or rejected, the sense of analogy remained. This sense of the relevance of the cosmic and divine to the human and everyday gives much of the greatest Renaissance literature its power: a hundred naked ladies dancing on a hill, an old man on a heath, the rediscovery of a lost child. But analogies between natural or cosmic order and man are less to the point here than that habit of mind which sees specific mythological or allegorical figures as the type for human figures, as Spenser's Belphoebe is a type for Queen Elizabeth. This
habit of analogy was occasionally dramatized: part of the peculiar pleasure of a masque lay precisely in recognizing the noble actors simultaneously as themselves and as mythological or allegorical figures. Moreover, it was fashionable to paint portraits of nobility as mythological figures, much as Enobarbus verbally paints Cleopatra at Cyndus as Venus. Elizabeth was painted as Diana; and there are several wedding portraits of young couples as Venus and Mars. Presumably the delight was in the perception of the analogy and the implied compliment. Within *Antony and Cleopatra* itself, we hear of Cleopatra dressed in the "habiliments of the goddess Isis" (3.6.17). We who have lost the ability to see the everyday as analogous to the extraordinary must not deny the force of analogy in the play. There is a habit of mind more generous than ours, which sees things as larger than they "really" are, and to that habit of mind, the analogy of Antony and Cleopatra with Mars and Venus, even in their cosmic aspects, would not necessarily seem ludicrous.

The process of analogy which assimilates a human event to a cosmic is very much at issue in Cleopatra's description of Antony:

> His face was as the heavens, and therein stuck  
> A sun and moon, which kept their course, and lighted  
> The little O, the earth….  
> His legs bestrid the ocean, his rear'd arm  
> Crested the world: his voice was propertied  
> As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends:  
> But when he meant to quail, and shake the orb,  
> He was as rattling thunder.  
> (5.2.79-86)

This passage has obvious affinities with Marlowe's hyperbolical description of Tamburlaine: Menaphon describes his eyes "Whose fiery circles bear encompasséd / A heaven of heavenly bodies in their spheres" (*Tamburlaine the Great* 2.1.15-16). Both insist on the cosmic aspects of the human figure. This technique of description is part of a venerable tradition: Homer's Hate, Virgil's Fame, Boethius's Philosophy, Chaucer's Fame, are all monumental figures whose heads touch the heavens though they have human shapes. The representation of a figure as simultaneously human and cosmic was common in the alchemical and astrological texts, and it was central to the descriptive technique of the Renaissance mythographers. A work such as Cartari's *Imagines deorum* was explicitly intended to provide the correct recognizable image for every god, an image which suggested both his human and his cosmic attributes. This process is at work in Cartari's description of Jupiter, in the 1599 translation by Lincke:

*Orpheus* … ascribed thus much unto Jove, that he was the first before any thing in the world received forme, and shall continue the last after the consumation and dissolution thereof, and that he sitteth on the highest part of it, whose feet reach down to the lowest and basest corner thereof, within whom is contained earth, water, aire, fire, day, and night: whose Image he thus setteth forth, his head (sayth hee) with those his goldenhued lockes, is the beauteous firmament gloriously adorned with such infinite armies of tralucent stars, and from ech side of his temples peepe forth two yong golden homes, signifying by the one the East, & by the other the West, his eies are the Sunne and the Moone, his shoulders and breast the spacious compasse of the aire, and the wings thereon infixed, intend the furious swiftnesse of the winds, his bellie down to the knee, is the wide earth circumscent with the waters of the sea, & his feet descend down through the bowels of the lower center.

I do not mean to imply that either Marlowe or Shakespeare was directly influenced by Cartari or the alchemical works but rather that the same process of description is at work in this passage as in Cleopatra's description of Antony as a monumental figure: the creation of a fully human figure with cosmic attributes.
And this kind of figure, embodying at once the human and the divine, would be much more familiar to the sixteenth century than to us; it would not so immediately be dismissed as irrelevant to the merely human. Dolabella does not confirm Cleopatra's description, but his is not the last word.

The mingling of the human and the cosmic is characteristic of the Renaissance mythographers; and through them it becomes the commonplace mode of interpreting fables about the gods. After all, the gods themselves may have once been men: one curious effect of euhemeristic interpretation is to break down the distinction between man and god, between history and allegorical fable. If the gods themselves were merely great men deified, then might not any historical event be subject to the same process of deification? Actium was precisely such an event; and both Virgil and Ovid had in effect deified Octavius. A human and historical event might thus be seen in cosmic or divine terms: and the very process of interpreting fable, and therefore history, encouraged precisely such juxtapositions. A given fable can be seen simultaneously as a historical, moral, astrological, philosophical, or cosmological event; and our value judgment of the story will depend entirely on which interpretation happens to be primary at the time. The conflicting interpretations, and consequently the conflicting value judgments, are never seen as mutually exclusive; and the mythographer is free to move among them without attempting to reconcile them. In fact, this mingling of modes produced a fruitful complexity of interpretations, to which any niggling demand for consistency is irrelevant. These methods of interpretation imply a fluidity of category and of perspective which we have since lost, a fluidity essential to the effect of much Renaissance literature, even though it sometimes thwarts our desire for moral tidiness. Spenser can interpret the fable of Venus and Adonis as evil in Malecasta's castle and as good in the Garden of Adonis precisely because in the first it is interpreted as a moral event in a human context conducive to sin and in the second as a natural event in a cosmic context which man cannot attain. Part of the wit of Shakespeare's own Venus and Adonis depends on our knowledge that both Venus and Adonis were often allegorized as natural forces. No such allegory works consistently in the poem, but nonetheless the cosmic analogy is felt to be occasionally relevant. The point is that Venus is simultaneously a person, the abstraction Love, and the generative force of all nature. And however morally correct Adonis's speech on lust is in a human context, it is at the same time rather like the sun accusing the earth of lasciviousness. This principle of interpretation is essential to Antony and Cleopatra no less than to Venus and Adonis: both insist on their status as interpreted myth.

We should not expect the fable of Mars and Venus to define the meaning of Antony and Cleopatra. Indeed, iconography and mythography can never serve as a definition of meaning, for only the play can define itself. But iconography and mythography can provide a context for the play; they can serve to identify those images which the original audience might have felt to be particularly significant and to suggest the range of signification. The analogy with Mars and Venus operates precisely to define the range of meaning in Antony and Cleopatra. For in the play it is suggested that the lovers are larger than human, that their union is somehow cosmic like that of their great prototypes, the union of male and female, war and love, strife and friendship. And at the same time, of course, they are the merely human adulterous lovers whom strict morality must condemn. The play takes on the quality of a myth that offers its contrary perspectives of interpretation and value within itself: and, like the mythographers, the play insists that we see all the perspectives at once. If it is the fault of the lovers that they do not see from the moral perspective, it is the fault of the Romans that they, rather like some critics, see only from that perspective.

**John Coates (essay date 1978)**


[In the following essay, Coates considers parallels between the Renaissance story of "The Choice of Hercules" and Antony and Cleopatra.]
The importance of the 'Choice of Hercules' in the art of the Renaissance has been made clear by the work of Erwin Panofsky [Hercules am Scheidewege] and its role in the culture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has been illustrated by Edgar Wind [in Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance]. From a simple story in Xenophon's Memorabilia, which coalesced with Scipio's dream in the Punic of Silius Italicus, neo-Platonist philosophy fashioned a richly-textured, highly sophisticated allegory. This allegory touched on the most vital moral question of the time: the attainment of human wholeness, perhaps the central concern of the Renaissance. My object is to explore the connection of the 'Choice of Hercules' with Antony and Cleopatra and to define the effect which this well-known allegory may have on the meaning of the play.

Familiar as the 'Choice of Hercules' is, it is worth briefly recalling it for the sake of my argument. In Xenophon's Memorabilia, the sophist Prodicus is reported to have told a story of Hercules's meeting in youth with two women; the one sober, modest-eyed and dressed in white, the other with face made-up, 'dressed so as to disclose all her charms' and glancing about to see whether any noticed her. They are, of course, Virtue and Vice, and the scene which follows achieved a great familiarity in Renaissance iconography. The well-known Rubens painting is only one of scores of instances of Hercules hesitating between Vice and Virtue. Vice is made to offer every kind of sensual pleasure. Rather than wars and worries, Hercules shall consider his choice of food, drink, sound, touch or perfume; 'what tender love can give you most joy and how to come by all these pleasures with the least trouble'. Virtue reminds Hercules that if he desires success and glory he must work for them. The gods give nothing good or great without effort. She attacks Vice for continually seeking artificially to stimulate human appetites, 'eating before thou art hungry, drinking before thou art thirsty, getting thee cooks to give zest to eating', even searching for snow in summer to give zest to drinking.

The image of the 'Choice of Hercules' was reinforced by an imitation in Silius Italicus's boring but much read epic on the Second Punic War. The appearance of Virtue and Vice to Scipio the Elder in a dream provided a Latin source for the picture of the hero hesitating between Vice and Virtue, which undoubtedly secured its even wider dissemination. In Silius's account the enemy of Roman military virtue takes on a distinctly oriental colour: 'Pleasure's head breathed Persian odours, and her ambrosial tresses flowed free: in her shining robe Tyrian purple was embroidered with ruddy gold'. As in Xenophon she is a wanton and her beauty is studied and artificial.

In Xenophon's account earthly glory and fame are the reward of virtue. Silius's 'dream of Scipio' adds two other important elements; the raising of man to the divine and the rendering of him superior to Fortune. If the hero exerts himself and ignores what Fortune can give or take away he will gain the height and look down upon mankind. Persistence in such a course earns immortality. Heaven is open to those who have preserved the divine element born with them.

In the Renaissance the 'Choice of Hercules' was far from esoteric or eccentric; in fact it was a visual, moral and philosophical truism as Panofsky's many examples abundantly prove. This is certainly true of its simpler form, in which the hero, confronted by Vice and Virtue, chooses Virtue with its pains and rewards. (Thomas Bradshaw's The Shepherds Star, 1591, contains a popular version of this simpler form of the 'Choice of Hercules'.)

The image of Hercules is so emphatically linked with Antony in Antony and Cleopatra, that it is natural to suggest a connection between the choice of the play and the 'Choice of Hercules'. Frank Kermode has, in fact, touched on the connection in a footnote in Renaissance Essays but has not, I feel, pursued the subject:

Shakespeare stresses the Herculean side of Antony (1, iii, 84; 1, v, 23 where 'demi-Atlas' means 'the substitute of Atlas'; IV, xii, 43-7) to the degree that he converts the god who deserts Hercules (IV, iii, 12-17) from Plutarch's Bacchus into Hercules, and makes no mention of Bacchus, though to Plutarch's Antony he was at least as important as Hercules. Octavius makes it clear that Antony was familiar with the hard Prodician road to glory (1, iv,
Kermode here summarises much of the evidence linking the 'Choice of Hercules' with *Antony and Cleopatra*; some of the many explicit references to Hercules in the play, the clash between Vice and Virtue in eastern and western guise, above all the alteration from Bacchus, in a source which Shakespeare otherwise follows closely, to Hercules. However, the connection with the 'Choice of Hercules' only becomes really interesting when the simpler connotations of the myth are left behind. If Shakespeare did refer to it at all, he would be referring to a far richer complex of meanings than 'the temptation of the "new Hercules" of Renaissance epic … a conflict taken over from Plutarch between heroic virtue and sensuality'. Edgar Wind has described the humanists' interest in the esoteric meanings of the 'Choice of Hercules', above all in the ideal of the reconciliation of pleasure to virtue, in the highest type of man: 'Although the humanists used it profusely in their exoteric instruction, they left no doubt that for a Platonic initiate it was but the crust and not the marrow.'

The theme appealed to many others besides Platonic initiates. Both Wind and Harry Levin draw attention to Ben Jonson's *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* (1619). Jonson's masque illustrates the popularity of the subject which is indeed central to the whole culture of the Renaissance. As Levin remarks [in *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance*]: "The ethos of the Renaissance did not rest content with conjoining the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa*. Ficino also complimented Lorenzo de' Medici on his achievements within a third realm of being, the *vita voluptuosa*. It is the esoteric 'Choice of Hercules' which is most interesting in *Antony and Cleopatra*. *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* is worth noting as a useful introduction to some of the refinements involved in this moral choice and is, I believe, illuminating when one comes to examine the Renaissance Hercules in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

In a setting which is, significantly, 'in the mountains of Atlas' near the garden of the Hesperides, Hercules is made to reject the crude animal pleasure of the god Comus. It drowns the human personality. However, what follows is not a simple moral choice between Pleasure and Virtue. The complete man can and should live in both elements. The clash between the two is over now. Virtue controls Pleasure, which adds a grace and charm to the moral character. She encourages her children to pass through the element of pleasure and trusts them, giving them entrance to the Hesperides. It is fitting that they should pass through a refined pleasure and return to the hill of virtue carrying traces of its moral effect, 'for what is noble should be sweet'. Having returned they are above fate and may look down 'Upon triumphed chance'. *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* supplies the sense of the complete man living both in Pleasure and in Virtue, the linking of this higher moral state with the garden of the Hesperides, the promise that such a state is above chance.

The work of such writers as Cartari and Conti supplies other elements of the Renaissance Hercules, interesting in connection with the Herculean Antony. They emphasise his role as, in some sense, the complete man. According to Cartari's *Imagines Deorum* (1581) Hercules's courage was moral rather than physical. Natale Conti in his *Mythologiae* remarks that Hercules's education by Chiron in both arms and law was a model for any prince. Cartari emphasises the somewhat unfamiliar role of Hercules as a god of eloquence: 'Itaque in Arcadia templum commune cum Mercurio eloquentiae Deo habuisse furtur. Athenienses etiam in Academia aras non solum musis, Minervae et Mercurio, verum etiam Herculi posuerunt.' One of the most interesting illustrations in the *Imagines Deorum* shows Hercules in his lion-skin, with lines, presumably representing his eloquence, drawn from his mouth to the ears of young and old people of both sexes. Antony's eloquence in *Antony and Cleopatra* may well have identified him especially, for Shakespeare's first audiences, with the Hercules of contemporary mythography.

The role of complete man assigned to Hercules is made to rest by the mythographers on a moral victory. Piero Valeriano's *Hieroglyphics* (1556) connects the three apples of the Hesperides, won by Hercules, with the three most important heroic virtues, the control of anger, the curbing of avarice and a noble indifference to pleasure. Panofsky suggests the strong connection of the 'Choice of Hercules' with the apples of the Hesperides and it seems clear from *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* that the Hesperides signify the highest ideal, the linking of the
vita activa with the vita voluptuosa.

More important for Antony and Cleopatra is the moral interpretation of the descent of Hercules into Hades. Cartari links this descent and the carrying-off of the triple-headed dog Cerberus with man's descent into his own nature to bridle its impulses. It is perhaps needless to recall that Hercules's descent into Hades gained additional currency through the parallel drawn with Christ's Harrowing of Hell. Ralegh in his History of the World declares that 'the prophecies that Christ should break the serpent's head, and conquer the power of hell, occasioned the fable of Hercules killing the serpent of the Hesperides, and descending into Hell, and captivating Cerberus'. As well as probably making the myth better known such an analogy would reinforce its meaning, that of a moral victory.

It is entirely proper to ask what acquaintance Shakespeare could be presumed to have with the Hercules of the Renaissance mythographers. Douglas Bush has borne testimony to the general popularity of contemporary mythological compilations [in Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry]: 'The mythographers, as we have seen, were not merely convenient for reference. Their allegorical interpretations were highly attractive.' In Seznec's view [in The Survival of the Pagan Gods] 'there are certain indications pointing to Shakespeare having known the Imagini of Cartari'. While it is impossible to be dogmatic, Berowne's well-known lines in Love's Labour's Lost in praise of love strongly suggest Shakespeare's knowledge of the mythographer's allegorical Hercules. Love
gives to every power a double power,
Above their functions and their offices
(IV, iii, 327-8)

For valour, is not Love a Hercules
Still climbing trees in the Hesperides?
(iii, 336-7)

The context suggests 'the Hesperides' possess a moral significance symbolising a type of excellence, and their mention evokes ideas of mental agility and eloquence.

If Antony is seen as tinged with a reminiscence of the Renaissance Hercules, certain difficulties in the play are partially solved. Critics have frequently disputed the moral meaning of Antony and Cleopatra and there is no consensus. The view of Bradley that the triumphant death of Antony means an endorsement of the ideal of 'the world well lost for love' seems simplistic and sentimental. The moralist's view of L. C. Knights [in The Pelican Guide to English Literature] that the play shows a self-indulgent man conducted to 'the very heart of loss' is simplistic in the opposite direction. Both views leave out too much. More sophisticated accounts see Antony and Cleopatra as a kind of golden chaos, or picture of the dissolving pagan world, 'moments, opinions, moods, speeches, characters, fragments of situation, forked mountains and blue promontories, imposed upon us with all the force of a "giant power"' [as stated by John Danby in Elizabethan and Jacobean Poets]. Quite possibly this last may seem an adequate view to many readers.

If, however, we wish to attach a more precise significance to the dramatic events leading up to Antony's death, then the figure of the Renaissance Hercules is essential. One might note the figure of Antony between Octavia and Cleopatra as closely parallel to the classical accounts of Hercules between Virtue and Pleasure. It is most interesting, however, to observe what Shakespeare has done with the fall of Antony. In Plutarch's account the god departs in the night before Antony's final defeat at Alexandria and the desertion of his remaining forces. In Shakespeare there is a vital interlude, which seems to me to be best explained by reference to a sophisticated variant of the 'Choice of Hercules'.

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The god Hercules leaves Antony in IV, iii, by passing under the stage to the sound of hautboys. ('Musicke of the Hoboyes is under the Stage.')

Second Soldier. Hark!
First Soldier. Music i th'air
Third Soldier. Under the earth.
(IV, iii, 13)

The text, at this point, seems to be emphasising just where the music is coming from and where Hercules is going. It may seem far-fetched to suggest that Hercules is going into Hades at this point, but such a suggestion receives support from the well-known stage convention associating the 'cellarage' with Hell. The figure of Hercules bearing the earth, which was the sign of the Globe Theatre, might imply a special familiarity with the myth on the part of Shakespeare and his audience, a familiarity which might allow him to use a stage shorthand at this point.

Antony's continued display of Herculean characteristics after the god departs fits within the mythographer's philosophical scheme. As Wind remarks, Neoplatonist ideas permitted the simultaneous presence of a spiritual force in Hades and in Heaven. In fact Plotinus illustrated this 'difficult doctrine which was essential to his concept of emanation' [according to Wind], by the descent of Hercules into Hades. Far more significant, however, is the dramatic value of the descent at this particular moment in the play. On Cartari's showing it implies a descent into one's own nature to control it, perhaps through increase of self-knowledge, perhaps through grasping and purifying one's instincts. It is an ordeal and a form of purificatory suffering, as the parallel with Christ's Harrowing of Hell implies. Its significance at this point in Antony and Cleopatra is that Antony is shown as beginning just such a self-purification, a progress in self-control. The progress involves a series of 'tests' of the virtues of the Renaissance Hercules. Antony must demonstrate courage, rejection of avarice, mastery of pleasure. Finally he must undergo a cleansing agony parallel to that endured by Hercules. The god leaves Antony after he has rallied from utter despair and humiliation but before he has again proved himself. Hercules departs as the prelude to a kind of spiritual ascent, a liberation of his nature from its baser elements.

The second soldier's certainty that the god is leaving Antony is perhaps not such a problem in this reading as it at first sight appears. There is a suggestion elsewhere in the play that the observers see events but miss their true significance. Enobarbus dismisses the return of Antony's courage as a loss of his reason. The practical Dolabella cannot share Cleopatra's sense of Antony's glory. Cleopatra's death scene is introduced by her dialogue with the clown, who jokes with her but cannot understand what she is about. The splendour of her dying utterance is followed by the somewhat matter-of-fact questions and comments of Caesar. Perhaps the guard's question to the dying Charmian and her reply presents in condensed form this sense of two levels of awareness. The second soldier's comment is not alien to this double level of apprehension, or indeed to the method of allegory. In one sense the god's departure has the simple meaning which he sees, the loss of Antony's protective spirit. The greater nobility, rather than straightforward defeat, which follows, suggests a meaning to which he is blind. Dramatically the soldier's comment raises a question. It should sharpen our attention, our sense of mystery, perhaps allegory, when what follows the god's departure is not what we perhaps expect.

The hypothesis that this is the 'descent of Hercules' seems to be confirmed by what follows. Cleopatra (IV, iv) arms Antony, recalling the many Renaissance paintings of Venus arming Mars, love aiding courage. He leaves her asserting the unity in himself of lover and soldier.

Fare thee well, dame, whate'er becomes of me;
This is a soldier's kiss.
(IV, iv, 29-30)
On hearing of the desertion of Enobarbus, he sends his treasure after him, displaying one of Piero's heroic
virtues, the curbing of avarice. The god's leaving Antony is not, as in Plutarch, the prelude to his disgrace but
to the appearance of a nobler and more integrated figure:

Your emperor
Continues still a Jove.

(IV, vi, 28-9)

The nobility Antony shows is so striking that it overwhelms the hard-bitten Enobarbus and drives him to die
die of a broken heart. Antony's feasting no longer seems a continuous self-indulgence but the reward of valour
(IV, viii, 32-5), and for the first time he shows a gratitude to those who serve him (IV, iii, 22-6) unlike his
earlier jealousy (III, i, 17-27).

The interlude between the god's desertion and the final loss of his fleet and army, assert emphatically his
possession of courage, generosity and of a noble capacity to enjoy pleasure without being possessed by it.
There remains the ultimate agony of supposed betrayal by Cleopatra. At the moment of desertion by the
Egyptian fleet an explicit parallel is drawn with the final agony of Hercules:

The shirt of Nessus is upon me; teach me,
Alcides, thou mine ancestor, thy rage;
Let me lodge Lichas in the horns o’ the moon.

(IV, xii, 43-5)

The agony of Hercules, falsely believing himself betrayed by Deianeira, runs exactly parallel to Antony's
suffering believing himself betrayed by Cleopatra. ('Hercules's one thought had been to punish her before he
died, but when Hyllus assured him she was innocent as her suicide proved, he signed forgivingly') [according
to Robert Graves in The Greek Myths].

Antony. O thy vile lady
She has robbed me of my sword.
Mardian. No, Antony;
   My mistress lov’d thee, and her fortunes
   mingled
   With thine entirely.
(IV, xiv, 21-4)

The final suffering of Hercules had for the Greeks a purificatory significance: 'It is a reasonable as well as a
common conclusion that the mortal parts of Hercules were consumed by fire that the immortal part might be
free to ascend to heaven,' [according to G. S. Kirk in The Nature of the Greek Myths]. Antony's terrible rage is
followed by acceptance and a final touch of kindliness to Eros (IV, xiv, 21-2). The images of dissolving, of
being unable to hold his visible shape, are reinforced by Antony's declaration that 'the torch is out' (IV, xiv,
46), a well-known Renaissance emblem of the soul being freed from the body, later repeated by Cleopatra
(IV, xv, 85).

The immortality which Antony promises himself and Cleopatra is one in which

Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops
And all the haunt be ours.

(IV, xiv, 53-4)
In its context there-uniting of Dido and Aeneas in Hades, against Virgil's authority, surely means more than the evocation of another pair of famous lovers. Dido and Aeneas are evoked and united because like Cleopatra and Antony they suggest east and west, an identification obvious enough to all familiar with Virgil's account. Jackson Knight commenting on the ingredients in the love story of Dido and Aeneas remarks, 'there was the lure and danger of eastern luxury which Vergil had contemplated in the *Georgics* and contrasted with the simple Italian life. The conflicts between love and duty, the moment and the future, are familiar; they have become familiar through Vergil'. Antony as Hercules is able to reconcile these contradictions. It is highly significant that as Antony is raised to her arms Cleopatra declares,

\[
\text{Had I great Juno's power} \\
\text{The strong-winged Mercury should fetch thee up} \\
\text{And set thee by Jove's side.} \\
\text{(IV, xv, 34-6)}
\]

When Hercules was received into Olympus it was by the agency of his old enemy Hera (Juno) who had forgiven him after his purificatory death. Antony-Hercules has undergone his final ordeal and the reconciliation of opposed elements is complete. When he dies in Cleopatra's arms it is as a lover laying the last of many thousand kisses on her lips and as

\[
\text{a Roman, by a Roman} \\
\text{Valiantly vanquished} \\
\text{(IV, xv, 57-8)}
\]

What seems to strengthen the connection of Antony with the Renaissance Hercules and his choice, is Cleopatra's description of him after his death. There are too many points of similarity to the Hercules who blends pleasure with virtue to be dismissed as coincidence. Antony is seen as possessing the eloquence of Cartari's Hercules. He was the perfection of generosity and ripeness. Above all, he was dolphin-like, greater than the element of pleasure through which he moved. This last perhaps evokes the well-known Renaissance image of wholeness, the Aldine dolphin; '[This] and innumerable other emblematic combinations were adopted to signify the rule of life that ripeness is achieved by a growth of strength in which quickness and steadiness are equally developed' [according to Wind].

Cleopatra's lines are packed with allegorical reference.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{His legs bestrid the ocean; his reared arm} \\
\text{Crested the world; his voice was propertied} \\
\text{As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends;} \\
\text{But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,} \\
\text{He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty} \\
\text{There was no winter in't, an autumn 'twas} \\
\text{That grew the more by reaping; his delights} \\
\text{Were dolphin-like, they showed his back above} \\
\text{The element they liv'd in.} \\
\text{(V, ii, 82-90)}
\end{align*}
\]

This conception, Cleopatra states, is the ultimate reality, far beyond the scope of imagination or dream. Pleasure reconciled to Virtue makes Antony superior to fate:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{I hear him mock} \\
\text{The luck of Caesar, which the gods give men} \\
\text{To excuse their after wrath.}
\end{align*}
\]
It would be profitless to attempt to impose on *Antony and Cleopatra* a reading based on a little out of the way information, external to the text; a reading at variance with the sense of the play as derived from its entire effect. However, the Renaissance Hercules is not extraneous but very much present in the play. There is, too, much less agreement about what *Antony and Cleopatra* actually does mean, about its moral texture, than about most of Shakespeare's plays. There is, therefore, much less risk of affronting the commonly held 'sensible' view of the play; such a view does not exist. In the continuing controversy concerning the play (outlined by J. L. Simmons in *Shakespeare's Pagan World*) the 'Choice of Hercules' is a suggestive piece of evidence. It tends to make against the view that Shakespeare's intentions are mainly ironical, that he is debunking the lovers. The linking of the 'Choice of Hercules' with *Antony and Cleopatra* gives a fuller value to Enobarbus's death, strengthens the case for accepting Antony's courage at the end as genuine, and above all, allows us to accept the poetry of acts IV and V as what it surely is, the real expression of something real: nothing so callow as 'the world well lost' but a statement of Pleasure reconciled to Virtue.

Rome Vs. Egypt

**Julian Markels (essay date 1968)**


[In the following excerpt, Markels examines the opposition between private and public values symbolized by the conflict between Rome and Egypt in Antony and Cleopatra.]

Up through the end of Act III, scene v [in *Antony and Cleopatra*], (Eros' choric scene), Shakespeare has located in Rome and its various adjuncts a total of eleven scenes comprising 863 lines, and in Egypt a total of six scenes comprising 606 lines. After Antony's departure from Egypt in I.iii, Shakespeare locates his remaining Egyptian scenes (I.v, II.vi, and III.iii) in places along the sequence that dramatize the contrast in tone, texture, and values between a Roman world whose ideal of rational, disinterested politics is uniquely capable of degenerating into the cynical bargaining of ward bosses, and an Egypt whose highest values of emotional fulfilment are equally capable of collapsing into mere willfulness and sybaritic vanity. This first half of the play, while presenting Antony's character and conflict, provides us also with a comparative anthropology of these two worlds, a running critique of the criteria of civilization as they are hammered out in the confrontation of the two cultures. Although this geographic polarization of values is rare in Shakespeare, there is nothing unfamiliar in the particular values represented by Rome and Egypt, nor in the fact of their opposition. They are, broadly speaking, the values of public and private life, of the state and the person, of honor and love; and the opposition of these values, along with the possibility of reconciling them, was one of Shakespeare's deepest concerns throughout his career, from the parallel battle scenes in *Henry VI* of a father killing his son and a son killing his father, to that moment in *The Tempest* when division is at last resolved and Gonzago announces that, despite all obstacles, Claribel has found a husband, Ferdinand a wife, Prospero a dukedom, "... and all of us ourselves / When no man was his own."

The public values of Rome arise from the same source as always in Shakespeare: the ideal of order, harmony, and mutuality in the state. At the beginning of the play Antony's lapsed honor is inseparable from the failure of the Roman peace, like two sides of a coin. To Antony's question on his return to Rome, "My being in Egypt, / Caesar, what was't to you?", in effect Caesar had already given an answer:

If he fill'd
His vacancy with his voluptuousness,
Full surfeits and the dryness of his bones
Call on him for't! But to confound such time
That drums him from his sport and speaks as loud
As his own state and ours—’tis to be chid
As we rate boys who, being mature in knowledge,
Pawn their experience to their present pleasure
And so rebel to judgement.

(I.iv.25-33)

These remarks could have been made about Richard II or about Prince Hal by his father. They remind us that this Roman tragedy, like Julius Caesar before it, is wrought from the same thematic materials as the cycle of

chronicle plays from Richard II to Henry V. For they imply that same intimate connection between disorders of character and of the state, between personal honor and the public peace, that is the grand subject of the

history plays.

But the public world of Rome and the values that serve it are placed in a different perspective from that of the history plays; and this difference is an important measure of Shakespeare's development during the period of his greatest works.... It is enough to say here that England hereself, the health and destiny of the nation, is the subject of those plays; and that the personalities and activities of individuals—Richard, Bolingbroke, Hotspur, and Prince Hal—are judged according to their actual or potential relation to the condition of England. The careers of men are conceived as subordinate to the general welfare. From the dying Gaunt's great paean to "This blessed land, this earth, this realm, this England," in Richard II, to King Henry V's battle cry before Harfleur, "God for Harry! England and St. George!", the integrity and glory of the nation is everywhere the criterion of individual conduct.

But Octavius in his speech doesn't mention Rome, doesn't refer even to a single community of which he and Antony both are members. The threat of Pompey is not, like that of Bolingbroke, Hotspur, and Macbeth, to an organic political society whose wholeness must be sustained by love, justice, and truth. It is a threat merely to "his own state and ours," to an accidental sum of wealth and power that has passed from the hands of Julius Caesar through those of his assassins, and now has accrued, "Like to a vagabond flag upon the stream," to the present triumvirs. In the design of the play the condition of Rome is subordinated to, and frequently obscured by, the interests and intrigues of persons. Before we pursue the sordid political implications of this fact, we must recognize also that in the design of the play Rome's security is guaranteed, regardless of the conduct and character of her citizens. In Antony and Cleopatra as in Julius Caesar, no matter how much our attention is focused abstractly upon politics, we are not permitted to fear concretely for the survival of the state. The urgencies we feel are on behalf of particular characters, irrespective of what happens to Rome. For Shakespeare and his audience the story of Rome was comfortably finished history, not a piece of uncertain ongoing business; and its symbolic meaning as history had already begun to reside in the stability of Roman political institutions.

In a variety of ways the two plays present Rome herself as the donnée rather than the protagonist of the drama—for example, the comic reassurance of Casca's jokes about Caesar refusing the crown three times in

Julius Caesar, as contrasted with Owen Glendower's ostensibly comic but ominously unsettling insistence upon his astrological potency in / Henry IV. But the chief evidence of Rome's security is in the language itself: in Julius Caesar the name "Rome" becomes a personification, a term of familiar address woven into her citizens' discourse, so that we cannot imagine any limit to her life. Instead of asking God's blessing for Rome, these characters keep referring to Rome as a familiar household god:

Rome, thou has lost the breed of noble bloods!

(I.ii.151)
What trash is Rome,
What rubbish and what offal, when it serves
For the base matter to illuminate
So vile a thing as Caesar!

(I.ii.108-11)

By all the gods that Romans bow before,
I here discard my sickness! Soul of Rome!
Brave son, derived from honourable loins!

(II.i.320-22)

Are yet two Romans living such as these?
The last of all the Romans, fare thee well!
It is impossible that ever Rome
Should breed thy fellow.

(V.iii.98-101)

There is a certain easiness and relaxation of attitude toward a state that breeds and mourns, that alternately can be described as trash and given a soul. The multiplicity of forms and activities of which Rome is metaphorically capable makes it seem as continuous and indestructible as life itself. This personified conception of Rome is carried over into Antony and Cleopatra:

He was dispos'd to mirth; but on the sudden
A Roman thought hath struck him.

(I.ii.86-87)

... with which I meant
To scourge th' ingratitude that despiteful Rome
Cast on my noble father.

(II.vi.21-23)

Contemning Rome, he has done all this and more
In Alexandria.

(III.vi.1-2)

Let Rome be thus
Inform'd.

(III. vi. 19-20)

Sink Rome, and their tongues rot
That speak against us!

(III.vii. 16-17)

We'll bury him; and then, what's brave, what's noble.
Let's do it after the high Roman fashion
And make death proud to take us.

(IV.xv.86-88)
In the verbal texture of these plays Rome is truly an Eternal City. Its internal divisions and civil wars themselves are evidence of its durability. They even swell its fortunes. Though Shakespeare did not write the two plays consecutively, there are many internal signs that he meant the political history of Antony and Cleopatra to pick up where Julius Caesar left off; and a striking fact about this continuity is that conspiracy and civil war seem not to have weakened the state but to have strengthened and enlarged it, until the triumvirs of Rome have become the triple pillars of the world. The identification of Rome with the entire civilized world is pervasive in Antony and Cleopatra and it frequently becomes explicit, as in Pompey's address to the triumvirs during the negotiations:

To you all three,
The senators alone of this great world,
Chief factors for the gods …

(II.vi.8-10)

Rome has achieved a cosmic identity. Her political foundations have become so secure that her imagined destiny transcends the timeserving deeds of men. For Shakespeare's dramatic purpose Rome now becomes an idea, an abstract value with an almost allegorical significance. Having certified imaginatively the permanence of Rome as a political institution, Shakespeare is free to scrutinize the idea of Rome and to treat it as only one item in a pluralistic world of values.

Once he can do that, he attributes to Rome—pre-eminently in the person of Octavius Caesar—a political opportunism and a human mediocrity that amply confirm Cleopatra's final judgment, "Tis paltry to be Caesar." Octavius, a man essentially unmarked by malice or by love, is full of the cloistered virtue of the letter of the law. He is all but a cipher of the public world, a Roman Henry V, who, as the late Harold Goddard pointed out [in The Meaning of Shakespeare], is as quick to give up his sister for an empire as man ever was to give an empire for a whore. He violates the pact with Pompey, deposes and executes Lepidus, and seeks every means to ruin Antony and insure Cleopatra's public humiliation. After rejecting Antony's challenge to personal combat and defeating him at Actium, he sends Thyreus to prey upon Cleopatra,

From Antony win Cleopatra. Promise,
And in our name, what she requires; add more,
From thine invention, offers. Women are not
In their best fortunes strong, but want will
perjure
The ne'er-touch'd Vestal. Try thy cunning,
Thyreus.

(III.xii.27-31)

and he repeatedly assures Cleopatra that he intends her no shame, only in order to preserve her from suicide so that he might lead her through Rome in triumph. "… feed, and sleep," he says to her at last, as if she were being fattened for lions. To be sure, Octavius is not so heartless as to remain untouched by the love and death of Antony and Cleopatra. When he hears of Antony's suicide, he says that "it is a tidings to wash the eyes of kings"; and when at last Cleopatra has frustrated his designs by her suicide, nevertheless he orders her to be buried with Antony in full solemnity. "… their story is / No less in pity than his glory which / Brought them to be lamented," he says at the end. But these generous sentiments are never permitted to qualify his political opportunism, as when, his eyes freshly washed by the tidings of Antony's death, he renews his effort to deceive Cleopatra so that she may be led through Rome in triumph. He said of the dead Antony, "I must perforce / Have shown thee such a declining day, / Or look on thine," voicing a political theory that is conspicuous in Plutarch, but which the play has shown is not in the least shared by Antony. The ideological rigidity of his commitment to this theory is the principal source of Caesar's mischievous politics.
Octavius is only the play's most conspicuous example of Roman opportunism and duplicity. In Menas, Pompey, and in Antony himself, we have further evidence of degradation in the political values of Rome. To Menas' grotesque plan for cutting loose the ship on which the triumvirs are feasting and then cutting their throats, Pompey makes a hypocritical reply that is equally characteristic of Shakespeare's English and his Roman plays:

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Ah, this thou shoulds't have done,
And not have spoken on't! In me 'tis villany;
In thee 't had been good service. Thou must
know,
'Tis not my profit that does lead mine honour;
Mine honour, it. Repent that e'er thy tongue
Hath so betray'd thine act. Being done unknown,
I should have found if afterwards well done,
But must condemn it now. Desist, and drink.
(I.II.vii.79-86)
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Antony's lieutenant Ventidius shows another facet of debased Roman honor when, after his victory in Parthia, he explains that although he can conquer still more territory for Antony, Antony would become jealous if he did. He makes in advance the necessary adjustment of Antony's profit to Antony's honor: "Better to leave undone, than by our deed / Acquire too high a fame, when him we serve's away." (III.i.14-15)

This public world is naturally impatient of private feelings. Its calculating politics drain off the passions; and Octavius exemplifies its norm of temperament as well as its public practice. In his political efficiency he rejects everything personal, whether it is Antony's challenge to individual combat, or the reeling camaraderie of Pompey's banquet. Coupled with his devastating exposure of Roman pretensions in the banquet scene on Pompey's galley—both in the drunkenness of the celebrants and in Menas' plan for killing them—Shakespeare gives us a portrait of Octavius as nevertheless the most repellent Roman of them all. His superior restraint only enhances his unloveliness. This impersonality permeates his conduct throughout the play, from his reference to his sister as a "piece of virtue" that will "cement" him to Antony, to his desire to show his love for her publicly, "Which, left unknown, / Is often left unlov'd," and finally to his effort to humiliate Cleopatra. Attempting to woo Cleopatra from Antony, Thyreus says of his master:

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But it would warm his spirits
To hear from me you had left Antony
And put yourself under his shrowd,
The universal landlord.
(III.xiii.69-72)
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The juxtaposition of "warm … spirits," "shroud," and "universal landlord" implies a fundamental inhumanity that is Caesar's private counterpart to his political practice.

In this respect Octavia is unhappily her brother's sister. To all Romans but Enobarbus—to Octavius, Agrippa, Maecenas, Menas, and Antony himself—she is an ideal woman; and all share Maecenas' hope that her "beauty, wisdom, modesty, can settle / The heart of Antony." We come to perceive and admire these virtues, and so does Antony. But they cannot settle his heart, because Octavia appeals only to that forensic fragment of himself that found its halting voice in the overblown rhetoric of his farewell to Cleopatra. Enobarbus explains with customary accuracy her incompatibility with Antony: "Octavia is of a holy, cold, and still conversation"; and her attempt to reconcile Antony and Octavius, although it is nobly aimed at preserving peace in the family and the world, is inadequately grounded in loyalty to Antony and justifies the description.
Shakespeare's image of Rome, then, is variegated and complex, yet coherent. I have spoken of the degradation of Roman values; but behind that lies a high ideal of selfless devotion to the public good, a belief that honor, honesty, and order come before profit and pleasure, and that men must be loyal above all to those public duties that guarantee the human community. This ideal brings Antony back to Rome and prompts his marriage to Octavia. But behind the idealized public values is the suppression of private feeling and the cold impersonality of the political leader. This human inadequacy of the Roman ideal leaves Antony's marriage spiritually unconsummated and frees him for Egypt. At its worst the Roman ideal is perverted into Octavius' systematic spoliation of the world. At its best it produces the holy coldness of Octavia, in whom the breath of life has been diminished almost to nothing.

Cleopatra is set in deliberate contrast to Octavia, and Cleopatra is nothing less than Egypt and human feeling. She is all heat and motion and immoderate overflowing; she can barely be contained in loving, teasing, and then missing Antony, and is overwhelmed into a kind of madness by her jealousy of Octavia. She is truly the incarnation of private life, and she begins by regarding all public loyalties as forms of timeserving. She resists totally Antony's efforts to subject his personal life to public standards: she assumes that his Roman obligations are distracting and irrelevant to his life with her, and she is merely impatient to discover that "A Roman thought hath struck him." Later she will be schooled to the importance of public values, so that after Antony's death she chooses to kill herself "after the high Roman fashion." But at the beginning she balances Octavius and his sister by showing us both the perversion and the human inadequacy of merely private values.

In one sense Cleopatra is committed to the public world from the start, simply as Queen of the Nile. Like Richard II, Prince Hal, and Julius Caesar, she is a public figure whether she likes it or not; and like them, she takes a histrionic satisfaction in her role. But she refuses to honor by word or deed the expectations of the public world. She uses her public status simply as an instrument of her pleasure and an extension of her privacy. She is selfish and spoiled, and she overcomes all obstacles to her desire simply by making the world her oyster. For one thing, she needs the world as a large enough stage to support her Alexandrian revels. Nothing less than the public eye can do justice to the scope and vitality of her private life, and all her pleasures (or almost all) are had in the open. In the play's first scene Antony proposes their evening's sport, not by inviting her to bed, but by reminding her of her wish to "wander through the streets and note / The qualities of people." Later Enobarbus reports,

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\begin{align*}
&\text{I saw her once} \\
&\text{Hop forty paces through the public street;} \\
&\text{And having lost her breath, she spoke, and} \\
&\text{panted,} \\
&\text{That she did make defect perfection} \\
&\text{And, breathless, pow'r breathe forth.} \\
&\text{(II.ii.233-37)}
\end{align*}
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and we never think to ask what was the occasion for this performance, for in Enobarbus' description the action justifies itself. Cleopatra and "the public street" are ornaments to each other, and they measure each other's value. In the same way the grandeur of her appearance at Cydnus, in Enobarbus' famous description, constitutes an autonomous value, since her perfumes and her fans and her mermaids command the homage of the city and of nature.

But however much Cleopatra lives her intimate life in the open air, private and public values do not meet and merge in her. Her beauty and passion vanquish all other considerations, and the public world exists simply to show her off. Cleopatra recognizes as a condition of her grandeur that she must outwit the world and bend it to her purpose. She devotes her intelligence and energy to cultivating those wily arts by which she can impose her interests upon the world and twist its great men around her fingers. The world must either be her plaything, as when she is ready to "unpeople" Egypt and fill the sea with messengers to express her passion.
for Antony, or it must be her enemy until it can be made her plaything.

From the beginning Egypt is her plaything, Rome her enemy. Whether the values of Rome are represented by Antony or Octavius, Enobarbus or Thyreus or Octavia, she deploys her cunning to subdue them to her will. When Antony has been struck by his "Roman thought" at the beginning of the play, she sets out to trick him in order to recapture his attention. At Actium she flees apparently out of fear; but her flight is also consistent with the strategy of beguilement by which she has ever tried to keep Antony from taking his honor too seriously. After the defeat at Actium she flirts with Thyreus, reminding him that she has had other lovers before Antony, and subtly implying that Caesar might be next. And she continues bargaining with Caesar, first through his underlings and then directly, even as she is tricking Antony into killing himself because of the false report of her death.

This wiliness of Cleopatra's is surely aimed at saving her own skin; but it has also a broader and more profound purpose. She is no less deceitful toward her lover than toward their common enemies, because she supposes that all public commitments, Antony's no less than Caesar's, threaten the integrity of her existence. She recognizes no distinction between the letter and the spirit of the Roman world, and until Antony's death she is blind to his growing difference from Octavius. At the beginning of the play she mocks Antony's Roman business, urging him to hear the messengers:

Nay, hear them, Antony.
Fulvia perchance is angry; or who knows
If the scarce-bearded Caesar have not sent
His pow'ril mandate to you: 'Do this, or this;
Take in that kingdom, and enfranchise that.
Perform't, or else we damn thee.'
(I.i.19-24)

And near the end of the play, on the day of Antony's short-lived victory by land, she voices precisely the same attitude:

Lord of lords!
O infinite virtue, com'st thou smiling from
The world's great snare uncaught?
(IV.viii.16-18)

There is something oddly inappropriate in this response to Antony's victory. Almost all critics of the play, whatever their disagreements about other matters, regard the land battle as a moral triumph for Antony. Win or lose, do or die, Antony has momentarily overcome his weakness and stood up to the mark. But what we regard as a triumph Cleopatra considers a lucky escape; what we think is Antony's true and proper business she calls "the world's great snare." His "infinite virtue," for her, is something more than his having come off with his life: he has been "uncaught" spiritually as well as physically. He is smilingly aloof from his own victory.

There is evidence that Cleopatra has always expected Antony to take for granted her unremitting contempt for public values that threaten her comfort. She not only keeps betraying him but seems to assume that he should have expected her to do so, and not have taken offense. At Actium she insists upon participating in the battle, against the advice of Enobarbus and others, "as the president of my kingdom." But it is clear from everything we have learned about her, and from her conduct at Actium, that the entire function of the president of her kingdom is to become the object of universal gaze and wonder. Actium, like Cydnus, is for her a parade ground; and after the debacle she is surprised to discover that Antony supposed differently: "O my lord, my lord, / Forgive my fearful sails! I little thought / You would have followed." Her business at Actium was to
cavort upon that stage where Antony made war. After the defeat she flirts with Thyreus not with the desire to betray Antony but only because she is Cleopatra; and again she is genuinely surprised that Antony should suspect her loyalty. To his charge that she has "mingled eyes" with Thyreus, she answers, "Not know me yet?"; and her magnificent speech that follows (III.xiii. 158-67) indicates that this remark is in no way disingenuous.

Cleopatra dazzles us by her wild effort to personalize all of life and to vivify the world by her beauty and her passions. To our own time, which repeatedly compares itself regretfully to Rome, her celebration of the self, with all its recklessness, seems vastly preferable to all calculated claims to selfless public virtue. But her recklessness is finally self-destructive. It is not simply that in her antipathy to Rome she resorts to deceptions and violence that subvert legitimate public values like honesty, loyalty, marriage, and public order, no less than Octavius ignores private values. Just as the ideal of Roman public life, carried far enough, becomes in Octavius the impersonal Machiavellian cynicism that is its opposite, so Cleopatra's persistence merely in private pleasure brings her to an inchoate restlessness where the self has no contour and therefore no substance. At the beginning of the play her quick shifts from mirth to sadness are designed to beguile only Antony. But in the three marvelous scenes where she is busy missing Antony, when she shifts from dreams of mandragora to dreams of former lovers, and from music to billiards to fishing, she is trying to beguile herself; and without the discipline of any commitment to those public values that have separated Antony from her, she is as unsuccessful with herself as she was with him. Her spirit can find no rest, and finally loses all coherence in venting itself upon the messenger who brings the news of Antony's marriage to Octavia. We find that outburst bewitching, perhaps, but only in the same uncomfortable way that we admire Octavius' sobriety at Pompey's banquet. For Cleopatra is doing violence not only to the messenger but to herself. In Cleopatra as in Octavius there is a surrender of human dignity, in him by an excessive self-control that stifles emotion, and in her by a failure of control that dissipates all emotion and causes Charmian to cry out, "Good madam, keep yourself within yourself, / The man is innocent." Rome and Egypt truly require the discipline of each other.

Charles Wells (essay date 1992)


[In the following essay, Wells discusses the austerity that characterizes the Roman view of love and passion in Antony and Cleopatra. He comments: "Shakespeare suggests that the political world is irredeemably flawed and that it must yield before the higher claims of a personal commitment and devotion. "]

However widely Shakespeare ranged among his classical source material for Antony and Cleopatra he would have found little if any sympathy shown towards the famous lovers. Plutarch, upon whom he leaned most heavily, regarded them as degenerate in the extreme. North's translation describes Antony as a 'dissolute man' whose 'ill name to intice men's wives' made the nobility 'hate him for his naughty life'. Horace and Virgil endorse this view, regarding it as axiomatic that his love for Cleopatra undermined both his physical and his moral strength, though one should remember that they were avowed apologists for the Augustan regime. Most scathing of Antony's critics was Cicero whose Second Philippic confronts him with a virulent denunciation that springs from the bitterest personal antipathy:

   You are a drink-sodden, sex-obsessed wreck…. In the Assembly, in full public view, we watched a man in high office of state spewing into his own lap and flooding the platform with vomit that stank of wine…. Day after day your revolting orgies carried on … until the house reverberated with the din of drunkards and the walls and pavements ran with drink.

Cleopatra fares little better. Plutarch considers her love for Antony to be no different from her previous amours with Caesar and Pompey, all of them merely tactical manoeuvrings inspired by her political ambition. It was, he writes, 'the last and extremest mischief of all other which lighted on Antony'. Horace goes further,
describing her as *a fatale monstrum* or Fury.

Medieval writers, by and large, maintained this disapproving stance. Dante assigned Cleopatra to the second circle of Hell with Dido, Helen and Semiramis, all women whose lechery had overcome their reason, while Boccaccio described Antony as a man 'dragged into infamy by his unbridled lust.' Chaucer, in *The Legend of Good Women*, though more sympathetic towards the lovers' plight, regards Antony as a man so ensnared by his raging desire 'That al the world he sette at no value' (1.599). Cleopatra he calls a 'martyr' in recognition of her courageous end.

> Anon the nadderes gonne hire for to styngre,  
> And she hire deth receyveth with good cheere.  
> (1.698)

Only with the evolution of the Courtly Love ethic, together with those literary conventions that we now label 'Petrarchan', do we find any radical reassessment of the values involved in the relationship and, for the first time, a recognition that the celebrated affair might contain elements that were ennobling and even magnificent. Spenser, in the *Faerie Queene*, is torn between the two traditions. Like Chaucer he marvels at

> … beauty's lovely bait, that doth procure  
> Great warriors oft their rigour to repress  
> And mighty hands forget their manliness,  
> (V.viii.i)

but the tone of the next stanza conveys a thrilling awareness that perhaps the world may indeed be governed by the lover's heart.

> And so did warlike Antony neglect  
> The world's whole rule for Cleopatra's sight.  
> Such wondrous power hath women's faire aspect  
> To captive men and make them all the world  
> reject.

It is not that the ancients were unaware of beauty's charms, of course, far from it. Plutarch himself makes an observation that pre-empts Petrarch by well over a thousand years: 'The soul of a lover lives in another body and not in his own' he remarks, describing Antony's flight from Actium, though the romantic effect of his words is somewhat negated by the image that follows, at least in North's translation:

> He was so carried away with the vaine love of this woman as if he had beene glued unto her  
> and that she could not have removed without moving of him also.

It is, however, a momentary lapse on Plutarch's part. The tenor of his account conveys the idea of passion as a 'sweete poysoun'. Plato called lust 'a horse of the mind' because of its tendency to run out of control and North's rendering employs the resounding phrase: 'the unreyned lust of concupiscence', a sentiment that is typically Roman in its implications.

The Stoics and the Epicureans both regarded love as a form of madness, almost a mental disease. The standard Roman epithet was *insanus*. Love was supremely irrational and, taken to extremes, threatened order and stability. Let poets indulge in it if they would. In statesmen it was an affliction to be mocked or pitied. Cicero, a great believer in moral restraint as a virtue in itself, warned of the dire consequences that ensued when appetites ran riot. The controlling hand of reason must always be applied. Animals are motivated solely by physical pleasure, he argued, but man has the gift of reason. The man who is too prone to succumb to sensual
delights should beware of becoming an animal himself, he opined darkly in the De Officiis.

In Shakespeare's play, Enobarbus is the principal spokesman for this Roman view of love. 'The tears live in an onion', he tells Antony, 'that should water [his] sorrow' at Fulvia's death. By the Roman code, to show emotion, even at the death of a wife, is to suggest weakness and deficiency. Later he says censoriously that Antony

... would make his will
Lord of his reason.

(Ant. III.xiii.4)

He contemptuously dismisses his love for Cleopatra as a minor ailment, calling it 'the itch of his affection', though it is, he concedes, powerful enough to 'have nick'd his captainship'.

The play's opening line establishes the Roman stance.

Nay but this dotage of our general's ...

Three of the first four words carry negative connotations, Shakespeare telling the audience at the outset to expect Roman moderation and common sense to be weighed against the irrational force of love. Bottom, that most improbable of romantic lovers, pointed out that 'Reason and love keep little company together' (MND. III.i.138) and his observation might serve as a synopsis of the tragedy. The marriage to Octavia is founded upon reason rather than love and founders upon the same implacable rock. In the words of Ovid:

Conscience and common sense and all Love's enemies
Will be dragged along with hands tied behind their backs.

Rome's dignified orderliness seems incompatible with passionate love and yet the very precariousness of the protagonists' love, in fact, ensures its endurance, paradoxically.

The theme of amor does not bulk large in the totality of extant Roman literature but it enjoyed a spectacular, if shortlived, flowering in the latter days of the Republic and at the beginning of the Empire, precisely the period covered by Shakespeare's two 'Antony' plays.

Horace, like Cicero, felt that passion should be an indulgence left to the young. In the older man libido becomes an absurdity. It is a game of musical chairs, not something to be taken too seriously. He would no doubt have endorsed Rosalind's dry comment in As You Like It: 'Men have died ... and worms have eaten them—but not for love!' Ovid echoes this irreverent attitude but extends it further. For him love is a fascination, even an artistic pursuit. His celebrations of promiscuity were felt by Augustus to undermine his new edicts against adultery and in consequence, it is said, his books were banned from libraries and the poet himself sent into exile on the shores of the Black Sea. Even Ovid, however, sometimes kept both feet on the ground, conceding cheerfully that 'love yields to business: be busy and you are safe.' Frivolity, in the end, must give way to the solemn concerns of politics once the young have had their fling. The lustful youth was urged to expend his energies upon tarts and prostitutes, a course of action advocated with particular vehemence by Cato and by Terence.

Marriage, in Roman thinking, was not a matter of passion but a means toward the formation of alliances advantageous in the world of public affairs. Certain of the love elegists themselves employed terms such as nugae and lusus— trifles or playthings—to describe their writings, their self-deprecation making it clear that
they did not expect these outpourings to be considered alongside verse devoted to more serious themes. Again we may turn to Enobarbus to represent the characteristically Roman point of view:

> Under a compelling cause let women die: it were pity to cast them away for nothing, though between them and a great cause they should be esteemed nothing.

(*Ant. I.ii.134*)

One hears in his words another echo of Cicero.

> We were not created by nature to spend our time in frivolous jesting.... Frivolity has its place ... but as a means of recreation when serious and important matters have been attended to.

(*De Officiis I.29.103*)

The ridiculous contortions inflicted upon humankind by such unseemly indulgences provided entertainment for the gods, we are told. Ovid's comment to this effect in the *Ars Amatoria* is translated by Shakespeare, almost word for word, in Juliet's gentle teasing of Romeo on the balcony:

> At lovers' perjuries
> They say Jove laughs.

(*Rom. II.ii.92*)

'The sweete, wittie soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare', wrote the schoolmaster Francis Meres in *Palladis Tamia*. Later in the same passage he compares Shakespeare to Catullus as among 'the best lyric poets ... the most passionate among us to bemoane the perplexities of love'.

Catullus, together with Propertius and Tibullus, defied the traditional Roman attitude towards the passions. For them love was no game but life's most serious occupation. Catullus loved in the teeth of common sense, torn, in his feelings for Lesbia, between ecstasy and pain. *'Odi et amo'*, he wrote in one celebrated verse.

> I hate, yet love: you ask how this may be.
> Who knows? I feel its truth and agony.

(*Carmina lxxxv*)

Like Antony he struggles against his mistress' allure, breaking away from her only to be drawn back by her irresistible magnetism. 'A woman's words to her lover should be written in wind and running water', Catullus says, and we are reminded of Antony's baffled despair at Cleopatra's desertion of him at Actium.

> Betray'd I am.
> O this false soul of Egypt! this grave charm
> Whose eye beck'd forth my wars and call'd them home;
> Whose bosom was my crownet, my chief end,
> Like a right gipsy, hath at fast and loose
> Beguil'd me, to the very heart of loss.

(*Ant. IV.xii.24*)

Catullus' work contains a fervour comparable to that of Robert Burns. He is the first writer to chronicle, in all its sharp intensity, through a whole series of poems, one particular love affair and his influence upon the Renaissance was profound. Petrarch is greatly indebted to him and both Shakespeare and Marlowe, among
many others, fell beneath his spell.

Tibullus, like Antony, finds that the claims of love are as alluring as the prospect of military fame.

Here among the brawls of love, I am general
and valiant soldier.

*Militia amoris*, the service of love, detains both from more literal battlefields.

Propertius, who has been likened to Byron and Rossetti, was a great romantic well over a millennium before such a concept came to be recognised. His tempestuous affair with 'Cynthia' prompted the most passionate amatory verse to be found—in European literature at least—before the late middle ages. All orthodox Roman values he throws to the wind in his blind obsession with his mistress. Like Shakespeare's lovers he asserts his passion's own rationale, its own validity. 'Conquered nations mean nothing to one in love', he declared, his feelings for Cynthia outweighing all considerations of wealth, power and nobility. He surrenders himself totally to *amor* and has no wish to be rescued from its grip. In his frenzied desire he comes close to madness, feeling the torments of a Tantalus. The frustrated lover finds that 'the water deceives his thirst, ever moving away from his parched lips'.

It is a situation that would have appalled the conventional Roman mind with its staid insistence upon order, balance and proportion—a mind, in fact, like Philo's who, in the play's opening speech, informs us that Antony's infatuation

… reneges all temper
And is become the bellows and the fan
To cool a gipsy's lust.

*(Ant. I.i.8)*

The metaphor suggests that the sexual act simultaneously quenches and rekindles desire, as though the lover is a Sisyphus condemned to roll a rock up a hill whose summit is unattainable. Hamlet recalls his mother's passion for his dead father in similar terms:

Why, she would hang on him
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on.

*(Ham. I.ii.143)*

Again it falls to Enobarbus to express Rome's bewilderment—not untinged with awe—at Cleopatra's limitless fascination.

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety: other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies.

*(Ant. II.ii.235)*

Whatever the source of her mysterious allure it is a matter of some convenience for Pompey, another of sound Roman temperament.

Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both,
Tie up the libertine in a field of feasts,
Keep his brain fuming.

(Ant. II.i.22)

This sexual paranoia will, he hopes, detain 'the ne'er-lust-wearied Antony' safely in Egypt, 'proroguing' his Roman honour and thus leaving the seas to him. From the traditional Roman standpoint it is the fulfilment of the prophecy Venus makes on the death of Adonis when, in Shakespeare's early poem, she says of love:

> It shall be raging mad and silly mild,
> Make the young old, the old become a child.

(V & A 1151)

Antony experiences this madness more than once during the course of the play. 'The shirt of Nessus is upon me!' (Ant. IV.xii.43) he cries out, for example, when the 'triple-turn'd whore' deserts him at the height of battle.

Troilus, forced to confront a still more devastating betrayal of love, probes the nature of rationality's collapse:

> O madness of discourse,
> That cause sets up with and against itself!
> Bifold authority! Where reason can revolt
> Without perdition, and loss assume all reason
> Without revolt. This is, and is not, Cressid.

(Troil. V.ii.141)

Like Tibullus he is faced with a 'traitoress, but, though traitoress, still beloved'.

To Antony we may apply, in reverse, Brutus' celebrated comment about Caesar:

> I have not known when his affections sway'd
> More than his reason.

(Caes. II.i.20)

In the later play, received Roman wisdom is flouted at every turn. Antony's challenge to these conventional values reflects the sense that, in the process of establishing the Empire, the old Republican certainties are beginning to dissolve. *Antony and Cleopatra* contains much harking back to the Republic. Octavius, for example, recalls how Antony once, in time of famine, subsisted upon horse urine, hedge berries and the bark of trees, bearing the privation 'like a soldier'. Now, in his 'dotage', he feasts kings in Alexandria and lets a woman wear the sword with which he overcame Brutus and Cassius at Philippi. The *virtus* cult is undermined and Stoicism gives way to dissipation. Philo invites us to watch

> The triple pillar of the world transform'd
> Into a strumpet's fool.

(Ant. I.i.12)

Antony has fallen short of the rigorous Roman ideal as he himself admits to Octavia: 'I have not kept my square' (Ant. II.iii.6).

As the play progresses, however, we see an alternative value system emerge. The 'squareness' of Octavian Rome comes to seem increasingly unappealing. Grey, efficient, solid, linear, its attractions pall beside the colourful, fluid world of warmth and feeling that Egypt represents and out of which the lovers create their own private raison d'être. High Octavian principle degenerates, by contrast, into shabby compromise and
expediency. Roman firmness now comes to seem tedious and sterile against the lovers' quicksilver world of
the imagination.

Octavius' own world can be measured, indeed it is circumscribed, predicated upon calculation, security and
limit. Antony, on the other hand, finds beggary in that which can be reckoned.

The earlier works are not without their questioning of Roman values, but here Shakespeare subjects them to
the intensest scrutiny and finds them deeply flawed. There is no doubting the relentless practicality of the
Roman system. Organised, cautious and industrious, Octavius epitomises the virtues of his people.
Will-power and obedience ally themselves to seriousness, discipline and moderation. Individuality is always
subordinate to the larger interests of the state. He has a weightiness, dignity and self-control which is
impressive, certainly, but highly unromantic. By comparison with Egyptian *brio* Rome seems staid and dull.
Octavius is called, by Thidias, 'the universal land-lord' and the phrase suits him well. His personality, like his
sister's, is 'cold and sickly', lending 'narrow measure' to his rare words of approbation. Antony's generous
warmth had, we are told, 'no winter in't' but was autumnal, growing (like his lust) 'the more by reaping'.
When, near the end, Cleopatra declares 'tis paltry to be Caesar and reduces Octavius to the status of 'ass
unpolicied' we readily find in him and all he represents that very 'diminution' of which Enobarbus spoke in
condemning Antony.

Unlike that of his more successful counterpart, however, Antony's stature grows, posthumously, in the final
act, achieving through the lens of Cleopatra's soaring rhapsody, a god-like aura. By comparison Octavius
seems strictly earthbound and unheroic. When he says to Maecenas:

> Within our files there are,
> Of those that serv'd Mark Antony but late
> Enough to fetch him in. See it done.  
>  
> *(Ant. IV.i.12)*

he refers, of course, to units of his army and not to the systematised documentation of the modern
administrator but, by an etymological quirk, the latter sense would not be inappropriate, for he is every inch
the efficient bureaucrat.

There are, it should be said, two Antonies. 'A Roman thought hath struck him' *(Ant. I.ii.80)*, observes
Cleopatra with a certain irony. He switches easily from Egyptian back to Roman mode, even his syntax
changing to the measured rhythms and careful articulation appropriate to this context, as Julian Markels points
out in his perceptive study of the play [*The Pillar of the World*].

The marriage to Octavia is the essence of Roman statesmanship. Devotion to Cleopatra does not make him
any the better able to endure the bitterness of military defeat, although it is his despair at her supposed death
rather than his soldierly honour that propels him the final step towards his very Roman suicide.

In both the lovers, passion and politics are inextricably mingled—indeed each becomes, in some sense, an
expression of the other. Cleopatra understands her partner's need to maintain his Roman honour, irksome to
her though its consequences are. Antony's status as 'world sharer' earns her chronicle as well as his, and in it
her love for him is spectacularly affirmed.

> I made these wars for Egypt and the queen
> Whose heart I thought I had, for she had mine.  
> *(Ant. IV.xiv.15)*
It is ironic that Cleopatra should undermine those Roman virtues in her lover which she most admires, only to assume, at the end, that marble constancy which for so long eluded Antony. Her own stoic death emphasises the inseparability of love and power in the play. The poison takes her with Antony's name upon her lips and the crown of Egypt upon her head. How characteristically Shakespearean a touch that it should have slipped a little out of true.

The choice between love and worldly power is an impossible one for either of them to make which is why, ultimately, they refuse to choose at all. In seeking to inhabit both worlds they are crushed between the two. But then, as Ovid wrote in the *Amores*:

Love on a plate soon palls—
Like eating too much cake …
If you want what's easy to get,
Pick leaves off trees, drink Tiber water!

Roman tradition, as we have seen, insisted in excluding *amor* from the pursuit of statesmanship. The softer feelings had no place in public affairs of any kind. On a battlefield they are preposterous. To be defeated in the normal way is shame enough. Antony's humiliation, like his love, 'o'erflows the measure'.

Now I must
To the young man send humble treaties, dodge
And palter in the shifts of lowness, who
With half the bulk o'the world play'd as I
pleas'd,
Making and marring fortunes. You did know
How much you were my conqueror, and that
My sword, made weak by my affection, would
Obey it on all cause.

(*Ant. III.xi.62*)

In Antony, manliness and love refuse to be made incompatible. Cleopatra's 'Pardon! Pardon!' is swiftly answered.

Fall not a tear, I say. One of them rates
All that is won and lost. Give me a kiss.
Even this repays me.

(*Ant. III.xi.69*)

It is not a sentiment to be found in the earlier Roman plays, nor does Coriolanus arrive at the recognition until just before the end.

O, a kiss
Long as my exile, sweet as my revenge!

(*Cor. V.iii.44*)

One is reminded of Macduff's words on hearing that his wife and children have been slaughtered by Macbeth. 'Dispute it like a man!' Malcolm urges, to receive the striking answer:

I shall do so;
But I must also feel it as a man.

(*Mac. IV.iii.221*)
The passage points towards Shakespeare's growing dis-satisfaction with that hard-edged austerity which previously engaged his admiration. Where was the room for human warmth in the Roman code? Even John Calvin, not most people's idea of a sentimentalist, had commented upon this deficiency:

We observe then how completely the Romans were without natural affection, loving neither their wives nor the female sex …

Confronted by his mother, wife and child, Coriolanus' stubborn virtus finally yields, and he is forced to the realisation that 'doves' eyes … can make gods forsworn'. To his discomfiture he feels his Roman hardness start to dissolve.

I melt and am not
Of stronger earth than others.
(Cor. V.iii.28)

This imagery of melting is the key motif in Antony and Cleopatra. Indeed it might well be argued that in no play of Shakespeare's is more meaning conveyed by one particular strand of metaphor.

Rome has a massive firmness and solidity, an austere grandeur which lacks the capacity to accommodate itself to the urgings of the heart as opposed to the head. Its values are frozen in the past, marmoreal, statuesque. They tower forbiddingly over each new generation which feels, in its turn, daunted by the legacy it has been bequeathed, as though a weight is bearing down upon its shoulders, pressurising it towards conformity. Octavia epitomises this intimidating petrifaction. 'Cold and still' as she is,

She shows a body, rather than a life,
A statue, than a breather.
(Ant. III.ii.20)

She represents that 'squareness' which her husband, by his own admission, has failed to keep. Against this measured angularity we find juxtaposed images of fluidity and evanescence. The positive manner in which this 'Egyptian' imagery is presented leaves little doubt as to where Shakespeare's sympathies lie. Roman firmness and linearity have come to seem rigid, tedious and sterile.

At Egypt's heart is her mercurial Queen. Varium et mutabile semper femina,' wrote Virgil in the Aeneid. 'Woman was ever fickle and volatile.' Aeneas is referring to Dido, Queen of Carthage, Cleopatra's alter ego it might be said. Her love is uncontrollable, spilling over far beyond the 'bourn' that, teasingly, she sets down for it in the opening scene. If Rome is the sea wall then Cleopatra is the turbulent sea. Water is her element. Her power depends upon a navy not an infantry. Our most vivid picture of her, painted again by Enobarbus, depicts her on the River Cydnus, her barge rowed by silver oars

Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke and made
The water which they beat to follow faster
As amorous of their strokes.
(Ant. II.ii.199)

There is, as Susan Snyder has demonstrated, [in Patterns of Motion in Antony and Cleopatra], a purposelessness and a frivolity in the movements we associate with Egypt—drifting, fanning, floating, hopping—which contrasts tellingly with Roman stolidity and stasis. Skittishness and caprice are in the very air which, but for the laws of physics, would have
… gone to gaze on Cleopatra too
And made a gap in nature.

(Ant. II.ii.218)

Antony's whimsical observation of the sky reflects his uneasiness at the shifting nature of the values in this Egyptian world from which hard-edged restraint is so markedly absent.

Sometimes we see a cloud that's dragonish,
A vapour sometime, like a bear or lion …
That which is now a horse, even with a thought
The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct
As water is in water.

(Ant. IV.xiv.2-11)

Enobarbus' lame response—'It does, my lord'—conveys a characteristic Roman bewilderment in the face of what appears to him a moral free-for-all. Antony shares this perplexity, wrestling with its implications but never able to find the firm ground upon which Octavius stands.

What our contempts doth often hurl from us
We wish it ours again. The present pleasure,
By revolution lowering, does become
The opposite of itself.

(Ant. I.ii.120)

Such insecurity is the inevitable concomitant, Shakespeare seems to imply, of that intense outpouring of passionate feeling which dominates the play and which is so alien to the Roman cast of mind as revealed in earlier texts such as Titus Andronicus and Julius Caesar. A love like Antony's and Cleopatra's cannot be built upon secure foundations but bobs upon a swaying tide of precariousness and ambiguity. The play's central image is dissolution and mutability, as we have seen. The lovers, like the cloud, are unable to 'hold this visible shape', losing distinction in a way that recalls The Phoenix and the Turtle.

So they lov'd, as love in twain
Had the essence but in one:
Two distincts, division none;
Number there in love was slain.

Love unlocks a power to pass beyond the physical limitations of the self, Shakespeare suggests.

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

(Ant. I.ii.17)

It is an idea that would have been incomprehensible in Rome.

Like the moon and the Nile—both important emblems in the play—the lovers are in perpetual flux and yet, underlying this, is a deeper constancy than that embodied by Octavian rigorousness. By overflowing its bounds the Nile fertilises the surrounding land. New life emerges from the slime, putrescence being another mode of melting.

Lay me stark-nak'd, and let the water-flies
Blow me into abhorr ing,
proclaims Cleopatra in a vehement flight of rhetoric. She must, emblematically, decay into the fluidity of the river in order to be reborn as 'fire and air'.

Poets like Tibullus and Propertius, possessed as they were by love, regarded it as slavery and imprisonment. In Shakespeare's hands, however, it becomes release. Just as, in its setting, *Antony and Cleopatra* ranges far more widely than any of the other Roman plays,—spanning, in purely geographic terms, most of the known world,—so, equally, in the values it affirms, we recognise a much broader vision, a more comprehensive sensibility.

Here defeat can be liberating, victory a hollow mockery as it is for Octavius in Cleopatra's monument. Antony's suicide differs fundamentally from those of Brutus and Cassius. Theirs are relatively straightforward deeds, true to the spirit of the Roman honour code, but Antony's death serves many ends in one. Like them he dies, in part, to avoid the humiliation of defeat and with an eye to his posterity,

... a Roman by a Roman

Valiantly vanquish'd.

*(Ant. IV.xv.57)*

Thus far, at least, he conforms to the tradition of Stoic fortitude and heroism. His suicide, additionally, like Cleopatra's, 'Shackles accidents and bolts up change' *(Ant. V.ii.6).* In a world of dynamism and fluctuation they are finally at rest. Not for them the *Pax Augusta*, stretching ahead, flat, methodical and colourless, but the more vibrant fixity of myth.

No grave upon the earth shall clip in it
A pair so famous,

*(Ant. V.ii.357)*

Octavius declares with unconscious ambiguity. Uniquely among Shakespeare's Romans they die for love in true romantic vein, like a Romeo and a Juliet, while, at the same time, affirming their *virtus* and their Stoic spirit. Suicide is the ultimate validation of their love.

Unlike their Roman predecessors they envisage a personal survival beyond the grave.

Stay for me
Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand
And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze.

*(Ant. IV.xiv.50)*

They die to be mystically reunited, as in a marriage of fire and air, and to find a constancy denied to them in the turbulence of this life. Antony runs like a bridegroom to a lover's bed while Cleopatra completes the wedding ceremony:

Husband, I come:
Now to that name my courage prove my title.

*(Ant. V.ii.286)*
Love and death form a 'knot intrinsicate'. Earlier she has been all 'winds and waters', as Enobarbus reports. One is reminded of a line in *Venus and Adonis*:

> For men have marble, women waxen minds.  
> *(V & A 1240)*

Whatever her earlier vacillation, however, she becomes 'marble constant' in making away with herself 'after the high Roman fashion'. Like Antony she combines cold fortitude with hot, erotic flame.

> We have no friend  
> But resolution and the briefest end.  
> *(Ant. IV.xv.90)*

Shakespeare's choice of the word 'resolution' here ingeniously encapsulates the essence of the play. Through the firm 'resolve' of her suicide her problems will be 'resolved', or melted, in the 'resolution' of her life from Octavian substance to an insubstantiality that belongs to a dimension of the imagination of which such as he can have no inkling.

Only Propertius, of Roman poets, envisages love's power to transcend death in any personal sense.

> Others may clasp thee now—soon I alone;  
> Thou shalt be mine and mingle bone with bone.

His elegies, with their mysterious loveliness, their eerie glamour, are quite alien to the Roman cast of mind as we traditionally understand it. Like Shakespeare's famous couple, he feels passion so intensely that he cannot believe even death will bring it to an end. There must be something beyond.

> Not so lightly has Cupid clung to my eyes  
> That my dust could forget and be free of love.

'There is a world elsewhere', as Coriolanus discovers, both in the geographical sense and as an alternative to the harsh *virtus* code. Antony, too, makes choices between 'Octavian' values—by which criteria he is 'the abstract of all faults / That all men follow'—and the intuitions of the leaping heart. Though he clings to the remnants of his *Romanitas*, it is the romantic impulse which takes possession of him. Shakespeare suggests that the political world is irredeemably flawed and that it must yield before the higher claims of a personal commitment and devotion. We are confronted with the startling thought that the love of two individuals can outweigh piled centuries of disembodied state.

> Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch  
> Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space,  
> Kingdoms are clay: our dungy earth alike  
> Feeds beast as man; the nobleness of life  
> Is to do thus. *[He embraces Cleopatra.]*  
> *(Ant. I.i.33)*

Rome 'melts' for him as it does for Coriolanus, when, finally, he too becomes sufficiently 'a gosling to obey instinct' and, implicitly, to reject those 'colder reasons' that governed his behaviour to that point.

> I will appear in blood.  
> I, and my sword, will earn our chronicle.  
> *(Ant. III.xiii.175)*
The words are Antony's, yet might easily be mistaken for Coriolanus'. Antony, though, fights that he may 'return once more / To kiss these lips' and, on the eve of battle, calls for yet 'one other gaudy night'.

Both men agonise about their identity. Coriolanus is conscious of being forced into a charade in which his true self becomes a mockery while Antony feels the need for defiant assertion of his selfhood.

I am Antony yet!

(Ant. III.xiii.93)

Like other Roman leaders, he speaks of himself frequently in the third person as though somehow to mythologise his own image. Indeed he goes further, claiming Hercules as his ancestor and identifying himself with Aeneas, another heroic figure to break from the arms of a weeping African queen.

The lovers, in a sense, dissolve into the higher reality of each other as an escape from the painful isolation of their own separate subjectivity. The exchange of clothes during what Octavius calls their 'lascivious wassails' may be seen as an external symbol of this merging. Octavius accuses Antony of effeminacy, declaring that he

… is not more manlike
Than Cleopatra; nor the queen of Ptolemy
More womanly than he.

(Ant. Liv.5)

It is a charge not levelled against any other of Shakespeare's Romans and, in itself, indicative of the very different view of *virtus*—manliness—that predominates in this play.

What the classical world saw as weakness and decadence in Antony, Shakespeare presents as a superior strength. It is his love for Cleopatra that earns his place in posterity rather than his triumphs on the battlefield. It is not, however, a question merely of joining the Roman pantheon of fame or becoming, like Julius Caesar, some 'glorious star'. Here love challenges time in a far more personal sense.

Antony and Cleopatra inhabit a realm of idealisation that has little in common with the other Roman plays, quarrelling with the mundance in their search for a superior reality. The Queen insists that

… to imagine
An Antony were nature's piece, 'gainst fancy,
Condemning shadows quite.

(Ant. V.ii.98)

Even fantasy balks at the task entrusted to it in recreating her dead lover. We are now 'past the size of dreaming'.

In their search for absolute value in their love the pair run up against the cruel paradox so cogently expressed by Troilus whose aching idealism is strongly reminiscent of their own:

This is the monstruosity in love, lady, that the will is infinite and the act confin'd; that the desire is boundless and the act a slave to limit.

(Troil. III.ii.77)

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, however, the lovers deny measure and limitation, regarding them as Octavian territory. Caesar may have the world if they may have each other.
Ah but a man's reach should exceed his grasp
Or what's a heaven for?

wrote Robert Browning. In this play, though, reach seems endlessly extensible, the lovers bursting through conventional constraint and glimpsing a kind of heaven that lies beyond. 'Measure' itself overflows as early as the second line. 'Octavian' quantification is denied with a wild abandon that recalls Catullus' most famous poem to Lesbia.

Give me a thousand kisses—more!
A hundred yet: add to the score
A second thousand kisses: then
Another hundred, and again
A thousand more, a hundred still,
So many thousands we fulfil …

For Shakespeare's lovers even such extravagant reckoning is the merest beggary. It is, therefore, peculiarly apt that, in the play's final moments, the coldly prosaic Octavius, the very epitome of Roman-ness, should be touched to lyricism by this ardent flame as he stands, wondering, by Cleopatra's throne. It is as though he recognises in the dead Queen a nobility that overshadows his own.

She looks like sleep,
As she would catch another Antony
In her strong toil of grace.

(\textit{Ant.} V.ii.344)

The ambivalent image of the 'toil' or net suggests her power to catch and hold an Antony in life or to let him slip, fluid, through the mesh like wind and water, to follow after and be reunited with her wherever she has gone.

The haunting words of Brutus spring to mind: 'I shall find time, Cassius, I shall find time' (\textit{Caes.} V.iii.103). Northrop Frye defined the heroic as 'something infinite imprisoned in the finite' \cite{Frye1961}, and in \textit{Antony and Cleopatra} Shakespeare is much concerned with the transcending of time's limitation. He takes issue with Plutarch, who declared that Antony

\ldots yielded him selfe to goe with Celopatra into Alexandria, where he spent and lost in childish sports and idle pastimes the most pretious thing a man can spende and that is, time.

In the other Roman plays the emphasis is heavily on the past. Here, by contrast, Shakespeare searches for an accommodation between austere, illustrious history and the urgent immediacy of love. Works such as \textit{Titus Andronicus} and \textit{Julius Caesar} represent Rome as monolithic permanence, sheer durability, as well as encouraging us to look forward to its semi-mystical destiny, as Virgil does in the \textit{Aeneid}. It has, therefore, a timelessness of its own.

In this later play, however, Shakespeare is concerned with what, in Sonnet 15, he calls 'crowning the present'.

Make war against proportion'd course of time.

\textit{(RL.} 774)

Lucrece's demand is answered in \textit{Antony and Cleopatra}. Time, like other aspects of quantification, exists to be defied. Antony, in particular, seeks refuge from the mocking reminders of his former greatness, earning Octavius' contemptuous comparison with
… boys, who being mature in knowledge,
Pawn their experience to their present pleasure
And so rebel to judgement.

(Ant. I.iv.31)

He, for his part, urges Octavius to 'be a child o'the time'. 'Possess it', answers Caesar, and this is what Antony sets out to do.

There's not a minute of our lives should stretch
Without some pleasure now.

(Ant. I.i.46)

he tells Cleopatra, as though he has in mind Horace's famous maxim:

Harvest the day and leave as little as you can
for tomorrow.

Feste's poignant song strikes a similar note in Twelfth Night:

What is love? 'Tis not hereafter;
Present joy hath present laughter.

(Tw.N. II.iii.46)

'All length is torture' to Antony who will foreshorten time into a permanent 'now', a word which occurs forty-five times in the play. His preoccupation is shared by Cleopatra who feels a desperate need to locate him in the present moment:

Where think'st thou he is now? Stands he or sits he?
Or does he walk? Or is he on his horse?

(Ant. I.v.19)

Her crowning ambition is to lose herself totally in the immediacy of him:

O my oblivion is a very Antony
And I am all forgotten.  

(Ant. I.iii.90)

'I must stay his time', she resolves, and in Alexandria the pair live their lives up to the hilt. The lamps burn late, as they do in the Boar's Head tavern, another world of garish anarchy. 'What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the day?' (1H.IV I.ii.6) says Hal to Falstaff as though he existed in a different dimension from the one encompassing ordinary men. Time, in other words, may be experiential and not dependent upon some disembodied clock.

The lovers absorb each moment with a fullness, an intensity, that is totally subjective, dissolving, as it were, potentiality out from the frozen world the Octavias inhabit into the passionate heat of actualisation. What Ulysses calls 'envious and calumniating time' may be cheated not in prolongation but in its opposite, that is by speeding the fleet-foot moment on its way. It is the philosophy expounded in Andrew Marvell's famous lines:

Rather at once our time devour
Than languish in his slow-chapt power;
Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Thorough the iron gates of life:
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run!

Octavius imagines he can thwart time by exhibiting Cleopatra in his victory parade.

Her life in Rome
Would be eternal in our triumph.

(Ant. V.i.66)

But he is wrong. Time belongs to the lovers.

Eternity was in our lips and eyes.

(Ant. I.iii.35)

'Eternity was.' The temporal paradox cuts direct to the heart of the play. Rome's statuesque grandeur looms above the lovers, cold and inexorable as an iceberg. In its huge shadow they rush together, to disappear in a blaze of splendour that is inversely proportionate to its duration in 'measurable' time. As Friar Lawrence tells their younger selves:

These violent delights have violent ends,
And in their triumphs die, like fire and powder
Which, as they kiss, consume.

(Rom. II.vi.19)

At the last the assembled Romans stand blinking in the incandescent afterglow of a passion they can never begin to comprehend.

Cleopatra

Phyllis Rackin (essay date 1972)


[In the following essay, Rackin examines the significance of a widely discussed speech by Cleopatra (V.ii.215-20).]

The quick comedians
Extemporally will stage us, and present
Our Alexandrian revels: Antony
Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I' the posture of a whore.

In these lines, Shakespeare's Cleopatra describes for her women the treatment they will receive in the theater if they allow themselves to be taken to Rome. The speech was troublesome to Shakespeare's nineteenth-century editors, who were reluctant to read boy as a verb. Schmidt suggested that "Cleopatra-Boy" be read as a compound. Sprenger advised that boy be emended to bow. Most modern editors accept the passage without comment, and those critics who do discuss it vary widely in their assessments of its impact.
Shakespeare's strategy in this speech is worth exploring, for it is daring to the point of recklessness, and it provides a major clue to his strategy in the play as a whole. The treatment Cleopatra anticipates at the hands of the Roman comedians is perilously close to the treatment she in fact received in Shakespeare's theater, where the word boy had an immediate and obvious application to the actor who spoke it. Insisting upon the disparity between dramatic spectacle and reality, implying the inadequacy of the very performance in which it appears, the speech threatens for the moment the audience's acceptance of the dramatic illusion. And the moment when the threat occurs is the beginning of Cleopatra's suicide scene—her and her creator's last chance to establish the tragic worth of the protagonists and their action.

Recklessness, perhaps most apparent here, is in fact the keynote of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra: it is the characteristic not only of the love and the lovers the play depicts but also of its dramatic technique. The play seems perfectly calculated to offend the rising tide of neoclassical taste and to disappoint rational expectation. The episodic structure, with its multiplicity of tiny scenes ranging in setting from one end of the known world to the other, directly opposed the growing neoclassical demand for the Unities; and even in the twentieth century it has often seemed unsatisfactory. Most recent critics, of course, argue that the structure is necessary to do "justice to the dimensions of the heroic portrayal," to present the thematic conflict between Roman and Egyptian values, and to evoke a world where "time and place do not matter," since "the dimensions of the play are not temporal but eternal; not local but spatial" [Eugene M. Waith, The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare and Dryden]. And these demonstrations are generally convincing. In the long run, the structural peculiarities reveal themselves as functional embodiments of the peculiar vision that informs the play. But in the short run they remain disturbing. The bewildering parade of tiny, scattered scenes requires explanation, as does the diffusion of the catastrophe through the last two acts. If the issue of the action is to unite the lovers in death, surely the wide separation between Antony's suicide and Cleopatra's is troublesome.

Recklessness is apparent also in the language of the play, with its curious mixture of the most elevated Latinisms and the coarsest contemporary slang, its mixed metaphors, its elliptical constructions, and its exuberant disregard for grammatical convention. That boy is a verb is no anomaly in a play where hearts can "spaniel" at Antony's heels and the moon can "dispose" the damp of night upon Enobarbus. Anthimeria, or "the substitution of one part of speech for another" [according to Sister Miriam Joseph in Rhetoric in Shakespeare's Time], was an accepted figure of Elizabethan rhetoric, but like all figures, it was held to be a vice if used excessively. Moreover, by the time Shakespeare wrote Antony and Cleopatra, the neoclassical demand for a style "pure and neat," "plaine and customary" was beginning to discredit the older fashion for rhetorical exuberance ["Timber: or Discoveries," in Ben Johnson, edited by C.H. Herford]. The inconstancy of style may seem less problematical than the structural eccentricity, for it can be explained as characteristic of Shakespeare's practice in his later plays or justified as the natural embodiment of the inconstancy in the behavior of the protagonists. Recent critics have also seen in the style an embodiment of the "metaphysical" quality of the play, showing "the same strain and discord within harmony, the same sense of diversity embraced and fused that is so characteristic of metaphysical poetry." In this view, the style becomes the necessarily paradoxical and hyperbolic expression of a vision that defies the limitations of logical categories. Yet here, as in the case of the structure, if the style is finally necessary, it is also initially reckless; and our initial impression of indecorum and irrationality contributes as much to the total effect as does our final recognition of its propriety as the necessary embodiment of a meaning that transcends rationality.

What is perhaps most rackless of all, and most offensive to neoclassical taste, is Shakespeare's presentation of his heroine, for his Egyptian queen repeatedly violates the rules of decorum. If Sir Philip Sidney found the mingling of kings and clowns distasteful, one can imagine his reaction to a queen who not only consortied with clowns but behaved suspiciously like one herself. "A boggler ever," Cleopatra repeatedly betrays Antony's trust. Moreover, in many scenes, her behavior is not simply ignoble but comical as well. In the first act, she repeatedly interrupts Antony's farewell with a ludicrous harangue. In the second, she hales the messenger from Rome up and down the stage, threatening, "I'll spurn thine eyes like balls before me; I'll unhair thy
head." In the third, she extracts from that same messenger a patently falsified description of Octavia and drinks it in with absurd gullibility. What makes all this reckless, of course, is that Cleopatra is not finally a comic character or an object of scorn. This same Cleopatra is also, we are told—and told in the longest and most memorable speech in the play—the apotheosis of magnificence that greeted Mark Antony on the Cydnus. In the face of the conflicting evidence, some critics have ignored the comedy, and others have denied the nobility, but most today would agree with T. J. B. Spencer [in "The Roman Plays," in Shakespeare: The Writer and His Work], that "the behaviour of Cleopatra in the play, at least in the first four acts, does not quite correspond with the way in which some of the others talk about her," although they differ widely in their explanations of the incongruity.

The question of Cleopatra's worth can hardly be answered by reference to Antony's enslavement, for if Cleopatra is an ambiguous character, so is Antony, and his ambiguity is inextricably bound up with hers. In Antony's case, just as in Cleopatra's, the hard facts tend to suggest—and a number of the critics tend to agree—that the unsympathetic view is justified. The mismanagement of his military and political affairs, the repeated vacillations of his allegiance, and the bungling of his suicide provide ample evidence that Antony has diminished from the triple pillar of the world into a strumpet's fool. To the rationally minded this evidence is conclusive. George Bernard Shaw, for instance, was thoroughly convinced: "I always think of what Dr. Johnson said: 'Sir, the long and short of it is, the woman's a whore!' You can't feel any sympathy with Antony after … Actium.… All Shakespeare's rhetoric and pathos cannot reinstate Antony after that, or leave us with a single good word for his woman."

It is significant that Shaw quotes the reasonable doctor, for, as Shaw recognized, Shakespeare's play calls the very basis of reason into question. In the tenth book of The Republic, Plato argues the inferiority of the imitative arts to those activities that spring from the "rational principle of the soul" by pointing out the unreliability of appearance and the consequent necessity of "the arts of measuring and numbering" to rescue the human understanding from the delusions imposed by the senses:

> The same object appears straight when looked at out of the water, and crooked when in the water; and the concave becomes convex, owing to the illusion about colours to which the sight is liable. Thus every sort of confusion is revealed within us; and this is that weakness of the human mind on which the art of conjuring and of deceiving by light and shadow and other ingenious devices imposes, having an effect upon us like magic…. And the arts of measuring and numbering and weighing come to the rescue of the human understanding—there is the beauty of them—and the apparent greater or less, or more or heavier, no longer have the mastery over us, but give way before calculation and measure and weight…. And this, surely, must be the work of the calculating and rational principle in the soul.

Plato's view here is very much like Shaw's and Johnson's and very much like that of the Romans in the play. The play opens with Philo's contemptuous judgment that Cleopatra is a worthless strumpet and Antony her degraded fool. The Romans, like Shaw and Johnson, are contemptuous of Antony's devotion to Cleopatra: to them it represents the enslavement of his reason to his baser passions. They are almost puritanical in their scorn for the sensuous delights of Egypt, and in this too they resemble the great rationalists. But what is perhaps most important is their epistemology. Philo's opening statement—"this dotage of our general's o'erflows the measure"—demonstrates his rationalistic reliance upon measurement as an index of truth. In direct opposition, Antony's opening statement—"There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd"—asserts the inadequacy of a merely quantitative, reckoning standard and denies that the real is always measurable.

This opposition between the rationalistic view and its antithesis is thus represented within the play as well as among its critics. Philo's opening speech ends with the words "behold and see"—an invitation to the audience, but more obviously to Demetrius. Within the play as without, the rationalistic view insists upon the faults of the lovers, relies upon ocular proof, weighs what Antony sacrifices—a third of the Roman world—against what
he gains—the illicit love of the notorious Egyptian—and finds his action foolish. The rationalists within the
play, like those among its critics, are unmoved by Cleopatra's arts. They pity and scorn Antony's enthralment
because they discount the rhetoric by which the lovers claim for themselves a greatness surpassing the
limitations of the Roman world. Antony's and Cleopatra's dialogue in the opening scene implies the
inadequacy of a merely reckoning standard because it invokes a transcendent world in which the claims of
time and space and measurement are irrelevant. To Demetrius, however, there is only one salient fact to be
derived from their performance—Antony's failure to hear Caesar's messengers. When the lovers leave the
stage, he speaks one line only—"Is Caesar with Antonius priz'd so slight?" The language here is significant:
according to Demetrius, Antony has made an error in measurement. Antony has prized Caesar too "slight" to
satisfy Demetrius' rational standard of reckoning. Thus, Antony's performance has corroborated Philo's
opening statement—his dotage does "o'erflow the measure." Ignoring the rhetoric, Demetrius has assessed the
actions, and although he is sympathetic to Antony and "will hope of better deeds tomorrow," what he has seen
today is just what Philo said he would see.

This refusal of the rationalists, inside and outside the play, to be impressed by delusory shows and seductive
rhetoric accounts for their low estimate of Cleopatra. For the critics, it also means that the play itself is
deficient. When Shaw says, "after giving a faithful picture of the soldier broken down by debauchery, and the
typical wanton in whose arms such men perish, Shakespear finally strains all his huge command of rhetoric
and stage pathos to give a theatrical sublimity to the wretched end of the business, and to persuade foolish
spectators that the world was well lost by the twain," he is demonstrating his rationalistic and neoclassical
predilection for "true" imitations of the "typical" and his Platonic distrust for the delusory powers of the
imitative arts. Shaw's objection to the play rests on the same premises as the Roman objection to its heroine:
in each case what is finally at stake is the nature and value of art.

Cleopatra's incredible parade of shifting moods and strategems, together with Shakespeare's notorious
reticence about her motives, has led even her admirers to conclude that her one salient quality is,
paradoxically, her lack of one—the magnificent inconstancy that Enobarbus calls "infinite variety." To the
unsympathetic, of course, it is inconstancy pure and simple—the moral weakness of her sex, the vice that
directly opposes the Roman virtue of steadfastness. Behind all her turnings, however, one motive does remain
constant: from beginning to end, Shakespeare's Cleopatra is a dedicated showman. In the opening scene of the
play, she tells the audience, "I'll seem the fool I am not; Antony will be himself," a remark that serves as a
pithy keynote to her character. Cleopatra's action throughout, like that of the playwright or actor, is seeming:
she is a contriver of shows, mostly for Antony's benefit, but he is by no means her only audience. Cleopatra's
strategy in love is to present a series of shows, to keep Antony unsure of her feelings and motivations, but in
most of the play, the audience is also unsure. As Granville-Barker points out [in Prefaces to Shakespeare], she
is "never … left to a soliloquy. Parade fits her character." Some of Cleopatra's shows are obviously
trivial—"play" in both senses of the word—as when she changes clothes with Antony or has a salt fish hung on
his fishing line or acts as his armorer. Others are more calculated strategems, contrived to insure her hold over
Antony:

  See where he is, who's with him, what he does:
  I did not send you. If you find him sad,
  Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report
  That I am sudden sick. Quick, and return.
  (I.iii.2-5)

But at the end of the play they prove the last best weapon in the lovers' arsenal, for it is by means of
Cleopatra's trickery that Caesar suffers the only defeat inflicted upon him in the course of the play. For once,
the luck of Caesar fails him, the great emperor is "beguiled," and the lovers have their triumph. The death of
Cleopatra is in fact a double triumph of showmanship—hers and her creator's. But the two are so entirely
related that neither can be seen unless the other is appreciated.
Thus, in a very important sense, the entire play turns on the question of the proper response to a show. To the Romans, and to the critics who follow them in discounting the seductions of rhetoric and the delusions of the senses, the shows are false and their sublimity merely "theatrical." To the sympathetic among her audience, Cleopatra's wiles identify her with her creator as a fellow artist—an identification that is especially easy today, when we have read Joyce and Mann and Gide. In contemporary literature this association between the artist and the confidence-man has become almost a cliché. But in Antony and Cleopatra, the ancient version of the same association—Plato's charge that the poet is a liar—is also relevant. The Romans in Shakespeare's play, like Socrates in Plato's Republic, are able to make a good case against the creator of illusions when they appeal to our rational faculty to discount the evidence of the senses in favor of calculation and measurement. And the too-easy dismissals of these charges by Romantic lovers of art and of Cleopatra have never really succeeded in answering them. Shakespeare's play dramatizes the oppositions and relationships between the two versions: only by appreciating both can we approach its dramatic and thematic center.

Enobarbus clearly illustrates this interplay. Ordinarily, his medium is prose and his perspective rational and ironic. He tends to reduce romantic love to physical appetite and to describe the business in bawdy jokes. Cleopatra is Antony's "Egyptian dish." To him Antony's devotion is inordinate and therefore irrational. But Enobarbus can also see Cleopatra very differently. Joking with Caesar's followers about Antony's Egyptian life, he suddenly abandons his characteristic ironic prose for the soaring poetry that creates for his listeners a Cleopatra who transcends anything they could see with the sensual eye or measure with the calculating and rational principle of the soul. In his famous set speech, Enobarbus evokes Cleopatra's arrival on the Cydnus to meet Mark Antony in terms that invite his audience—off the stage as well as on—to rise above these inferior modes of perception and to participate instead in the imaginative vision of the poet. "I will tell you," he says, introducing the speech that creates one of Cleopatra's greatest scenes. Only the telling will do it: the physical spectacle we have beheld is ambiguous at best. This scene, in contrast, is not physically present: it is evoked by and for the imagination, and it pays tribute not only to Cleopatra's beauty and her incredible powers to enchant but also to the beauty and powers of the medium in which she is created. It is a commonplace of the older criticism that Shakespeare had to rely upon his poetry and his audience's imagination to evoke Cleopatra's greatness because he knew the boy actor could not depict it convincingly. But he transformed this limitation into an asset, used the technique his stage demanded to demonstrate the unique powers of the very medium that seemed to limit him. Like Cleopatra's own art, the economy of the poet's art works paradoxically, to make defect perfection.

It is well known that Shakespeare took most of Enobarbus' speech from the narrative in North's Plutarch. The details he added, moreover, instead of making the speech more concrete or dramatic, emphasize that narrative is its necessary medium. They say, in effect, that the scene by its very nature is impossible to stage, and they also suggest that that impossibility is part of its meaning. The speech is full of hyperbole and paradox, rhetorical manifestations of the impossibility of its subject to be contained within the categories of logic and measurement. The subject cannot be represented but only created, embodied in the uncategorical and alogical shifts the poet works with words. Cleopatra's barge, for instance, can perform the miracle of burning on the water because it is "like a burnish'd throne," and "burn'd" is contained in "burnish'd," not logically, and not visually, but verbally. The effect of these words, like that of Sidney's "golden" world of the poet's making, is that Nature herself is out-done. To Sidney [in his Apologie],

There is no Arte delivered to mankinde that hath not the workes of Nature for his principall object, without which they could not consist, and on which they so depend, as they become Actors and Players, as it were, of what Nature will have set forth. So doth the Astronomer looke upon the starres, and, by that he seeth, setteh downe what order Nature hath taken therein. So doe the Geometrician and Arithmetician in their diverse sorts of quantities. So doth the Musitian.... The naturall Philosopher ... the Morali Philosopher ... The Lawyer ... The Historian.... The Grammarian ... the Rethorician and Logitian.... The Phisition.... the Metaphisick.... Onely the Poet, disdayning to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the
vigor of his owne invention, dooth growe in effect another nature, in making things either better then Nature bringeth forth, or, quite a newe, formes such as never were in Nature … so as hee goeth hand in hand with Nature, not inclosed within the narrow warrant of her guifts, but freely ranging onely within the Zodiack of his owne wit.

Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapistry as divers Poets have done, neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet smelling flowers, nor whatsoever els may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brasen, the Poets only deliver a golden.

Clearly Enobarbus is speaking of this golden world when he says the winds which filled Cleopatra's sails "were love-sick with them" and the waters beat by her oars did "follow faster, as amorous of their strokes." Moreover, in the description of Cleopatra herself—

She did lie
In her pavilion—cloth of gold, of tissue—
O'er-picturing that Venus where we see
The fancy outwork nature

(II.ii.198-201)

Enobarbus refers directly to the transcendent power of the artistic imagination in terms that closely echo Sidney's, as well as North's.

But my words here are ill-chosen, for Enobarbus does not really describe the queen—he evokes her. "Her own person," he tells us, "beggar'd all description." It transcended description or measurement, for these methods are not applicable to the golden world. To create the golden world, "the fancy outworks nature." The world of Nature is the world we can behold, the world the Romans can measure. The world Enobarbus sees here is created by art in the fancy of those who can respond to it. This opposition between the two worlds is implicit from the beginning of the play. Antony and Cleopatra's opening lines, immediately following Philo's "behold and see," declare it:

*Cleopatra.* If it be love indeed, tell me how much.
*Antony.* There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd.
*Cleopatra.* I'll set a bourn how far to be belov'd.
*Antony.* Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth.

Antony's new heaven and earth, like Sidney's golden world and Enobarbus' vision, defies logical scrutiny, but its surpassing magnificence makes beggarly the reckonings of the Romans.

In this perfected world, where the ordinary forms of logic are inapplicable, paradox takes over:

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety: other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry,
Where most she satisfies. For vilest things
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
Bless her, when she is riggish.

(II.ii.235-40)
Enobarbus here leaps beyond measurement, ordinary morality, and logic itself, for these are the categories our minds design to enable us to cope with the world of time and change and limitation, and in the world produced by the fancy, outworking nature, they are no longer necessary or even relevant.

Enobarbus' vision of Cleopatra is not, of course, a creation ex nihilo. It represents his imaginative response to Cleopatra's creative arts. The entire scene here as in North's Plutarch is also her tour de force of artifice. The aging queen who describes herself earlier (I.V.28-29) as "black" "with Phoebus' amorous pinches ... and wrinkled deep in time," has staged an elaborate spectacle complete with stage props, perfume, background music, supporting actors, and a carefully constructed setting. And, as Enobarbus five times reminds us, the entire creation belongs to the world of seeming: Cleopatra's barge is "like a burnish'd throne," the "pretty dimpled boys" who wield her fans are "like smiling Cupids," the wind they make "did seem to glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool," the gentlewomen tending her are "like the Nereides," and the helmsman is "a seeming mermaid." In creating the spectacle, Cleopatra deals in likenesses and seemings, not in the stuff that Plato would call reality. If she shares the power of the poet, she also shares his limitations.

Thus Cleopatra's ambivalence—the strange combination of degradation and sublimity that seems to lie at the center of her characterization—is best understood in connection with the ambivalence of the artist himself. The priests who bless her when she is riggish are not, of course, Christian priests; but the fact of their blessing attests to the lawless and mysterious powers that she, like the artist, possesses. Shakespeare insists upon this ambivalence, for it is not simply the characteristic of his heroine but also the informing principle of the entire dramatic structure. It represents the clash between two radically opposed views of poetry, both of them nicely illustrated in Sidney's Apologie, although Sidney seems unaware of the opposition.

Answering Plato's charge that the poet is a liar, Sidney points out that the golden world of poetry is not amenable to ordinary truth-criteria: the poet "nothing affirmes, and therefore never lyeth":

What childe is there that, comming to a Play, and seeing Thebes written in great Letters upon an olde doore, doth beleive that it is Thebes? If then a man can arive, at that childs age, to know that the Poets persons and dooings are but pictures what should be, and not stories what have beene, they will never give the lye to things not affirmatively but allegorically and figurativelie written. And therefore, as in Historie, looking for trueth, they goe away full fraught with falshood, so in Poesie, looking for fiction, they shal use the narration but as an imaginative groundplot of a profitable invention.

However, Sidney contradicts himself in a later portion of the essay and undercuts this defense when he attacks Gorboduc for being "faulty both in place and time, the two necessary companions of all corporall actions":

For where the stage should alwaies represent but one place, and the uttermost time presupposed in it should be, both by Aristotles precept and common reason, but one day, there is both many dayes, and many places, inartificially imagined. But if it be so in Gorboduck, how much more in al the rest? where you shal have Asia of the one side, and Affrick of the other, and so many other under-kingdoms, that the Player, when he commeth in, must ever begin with telling where he is, or els the tale wil not be conceived. Now ye shal have three Ladies walke to gather flowers, and then we must beleive the stage to be a Garden. By and by, we heare newes of shipwracke in the same place, and then wee are to blame if we accept it not for a Rock.

Sidney here offers a standard argument for the Unities—the need to bring the stage as close as possible to the reality of this world. As acting time approaches the time represented in the action, the gap between the poet's imagined world and the world of the spectator's ordinary experience is narrowed—not by appealing to the spectator's imagination to carry him beyond the bounds of his ordinary experience, but by subjecting the poet
to the rules of rational expectation in the world of Nature. The Unity of Place is also a means of fixing and limiting the action of the play: in the neoclassical theater it would collaborate with representational stage sets to localize the production in a finite world recognizably like the one outside the theater. Thus, when Sidney argued for the Unities as necessary for verisimilitude, he implicitly repudiated his own notion of the golden world of poetry. The golden world, he had said, is separate from the brazen world of Nature experienced by "our degenerate soules, made worse by theyr clayey lodgings" in "the dungeon of the body" since the Fall. The poet, in this view, redeems his audience for the moment, enabling them to recapture that prelapsarian vision of perfection. In contrast, the universals imitated by the neoclassicists are firmly rooted in Reason and Nature. What is to be imitated is the highest truth of this world, and the playwright is therefore answerable to all the rationalistic criteria designed to cope with this world.

Although Sidney's essay seems to imply that the golden world conforms to neoclassical rules of decorum, his claim that the poet of the golden world, "disdayning to be tied to any … subjection" to Nature, creates a world which is not amenable to ordinary truth-criteria actually denies the great sanction underlying those rules—the assumption that it is the poet's business to provide just imitations of general Nature. The contradiction in Sidney's essay, like the conflict in Shakespeare's play, is finally a conflict between two theories of poetry and two orders of reality; but while Sidney seems unaware of the contradiction, Shakespeare insists upon it.

Antony and Cleopatra depends for its workings upon a defiance of the rules of decorum, but the defiance is meaningless unless we know the rules and appreciate the arguments by which they were justified. When Shakespeare refuses to be bound by the Unities of Time and Place, he is able to evoke a vision of a transcendent world of the imagination only because we first see that his settings are in fact unreal by the standards of "common reason" that we bring to "all corporali actions." Similarly, his squeaking boy can evoke a greatness that defies the expectations of reason and the possibilities of realistic representation only because we share those expectations and understand the limits of those possibilities. Before the boy can evoke Cleopatra's greatness, he must remind us that he cannot truly represent it. In Egypt—and to the Egyptian imagination—he could become the queen he enacted on Shakespeare's stage, but only after he reminded us that he would appear in Rome—and that he was in fact in Shakespeare's London—a squeaking boy.

By admitting the reality of Rome, Shakespeare is able to celebrate the power of Egypt: by acknowledging the validity of the threat, he can demonstrate the special power that shows have to overcome the limitations of a reality that threatens to refute them. The Roman comedians Cleopatra describes, like the neoclassical writers in England, derived their authority from their submission to an authority they acknowledged to be higher than their own. They dedicated their art to imitations of the natural world and confined it within the bounds of rational expectation in that world. But since their authority was borrowed, it was also tenuous. Their very scrupulousness in imitating the world of Nature subjected them to its logic and rendered them vulnerable to the charges that banished poets from Plato's Republic. In claiming to satisfy that world's criteria for truth, they became guilty of deception. In contrast, Shakespeare violates those criteria, and admits that he violates them, in order to present a show that cannot lie because it does not affirm.

In this view, Shakespeare's reckless dramatic strategy is not simply justified but necessary. The structure, for instance, must employ frequent and abrupt shifts from Egypt to Rome, not only to convey the scope of the action, and not only to make us finally contemptuous of that scope, but also because the audience, like Antony, must vacillate between the two worlds. When Antony is in Egypt, as in the opening scene, he repudiates Time and Space and Roman thoughts in favor of sensual pleasure, of immersion in the timeless moment of immediate experience. But every time Antony steps outside that moment, into the world of Time and Roman thoughts, its charm evaporates. Like Antony, the audience is swept back and forth between the two worlds until the final scene when they are brought to rest in Egypt to behold Cleopatra's suicide, to see in it the nobility Antony saw in her, and thus, several scenes after Antony's death, to see the full significance of his action.
Similarly, the other structural peculiarity, the wide separation between the deaths of the lovers, can also be seen as a necessary part of Shakespeare's strategy. If the play ended with Antony's suicide, the Roman view would seem fairly well justified. He has given up virtue, honor, and one third of the Roman world and got in return the possession of an aging, treacherous courtesan, the weak and unreliable support of the Egyptian forces, and, in the end, an ambiguous death. These are the observable facts of his behavior and its measurable results. Moreover, his suicide, far from being an efficient Roman triumph over mortality, is a rather messy affair. Cleopatra shows her very worst when, her navy having betrayed Antony to his final defeat, she orders Mardian to take him a false report of her death. Her very language—"Say, that the last I spoke was 'Antony,' and word it, prithee, piteously. Hence, Mardian, and bring me how he takes my death to the monument"—condemns her. For although her concerns here resemble those of the poet, they are those of Plato's poet, who is indistinguishable from a simple liar. She even uses the same term—"word it"—with which she later discounts Caesar's attempt to deceive her about his intentions ("He words me, girls, he words me, that I should not be noble to myself" v.ii. 190-91). That Antony is taken in by her lie surely diminishes him in the eyes of the audience, and the awkwardness of his suicide does little to redeem him.

The monument scene, however, complicates the matter. At the beginning, Cleopatra's fearful refusal to descend to Antony reminds us again how little he has got in return for all his sacrifices; and the stage business that follows, in which she and her women laboriously draw him up, has a ludicrous effect which is only partly relieved by the characteristically Shakespearean puns with which she accompanies it:

Here's sport indeed! How heavy weighs my lord!  
Our strength is all gone into heaviness,  
That makes the weight.  
(IV.xv.32-34)

But of course the spectacle is not simply ludicrous. North describes it as "lamentable," a "pitiefull… sight." Modern criticism has taught us to expect and appreciate mixed effects in Shakespeare's tragedies and to recognize that some of his most serious scenes are marked by this kind of bitter, grating humor. In this particular case, the effect is qualified by the fact that Antony's raising provides a visual "metaphor of elevation" for his death [according to Charney]. Being physically presented, the metaphor is especially impressive, and the impression created should remain throughout much of the next act until it is finally overlaid by the next great visual spectacle in the play—Cleopatra's own suicide.

The action of Antony's death thus ends on a much higher note than it began; for once he has ascended into the monument, the language undergoes "a corresponding heightening of style." Similarly, the play itself ends on its grandest note. Just as Cleopatra raises Antony into her monument in Act IV, in Act V she raises the entire action beyond the reach of Roman power. At the beginning of Act V, her character is still ambiguous. She sends a sub-missive messenger to Caesar:

A poor Egyptian yet; the queen my mistress,  
Confín'd in all she has, her monument,  
Of thy intents desires instruction,  
That she preparedly may frame herself  
To the way she's forc'd to.  
(V.i.52-56)

In the scene that follows, she seems to be taken in by Proculeius' deceit, and in this both lovers are diminished; for just before he died, Antony had warned her to trust none of Caesar's men but Proculeius. In the much-debated interview with Caesar, there is at least some warrant for believing she is still "boggling," looking for opportunities to preserve herself and her treasure by coming to ignominious terms with her conqueror. As is attested by the critical debates, the scene with Seleucus is sufficiently ambiguous that the
audience, like Caesar, is very likely to take at face value the act she performs with her treasurer. It is not until Caesar leaves the stage that Cleopatra turns to her women and says, "He words me, girls, … that I should not be noble to myself," thus revealing that she has only pretended to trust him.

At this point, Cleopatra takes charge of the action. She says, "I have spoke already, and it is provided," "it" being the basket of figs which is the necessary prop for the show by which she will dramatize her nobility and Antony's. Up to this point, her manipulations have been covert and her motives ambiguous, but in her suicide she will stage directly before us the spectacular vision of herself that Antony had seen and Enobarbus recalled. But first she must describe the Roman comedies. Just as her knowledge of their sordidness and vulgarity helps to motivate her suicide, her allusion to them helps the audience to appreciate it. When Cleopatra contracts for a moment to the squeaking boy who acted her part, she reminds us that what we have been watching is a deceitful show. The reminder should make us doubt the validity of the conclusions we have reached on the basis of what we have beheld. In effect, she turns Plato's argument against poetry inside out and uses its major premise to refute its conclusion. For if the objects of our perception are delusive and inadequate misrepresentations, then how seriously can we take the calculations we have made on the basis of what we have seen? The audience is thus forced into a kind of "double take" which prepares them to reorganize their disparate and jarring impressions of Cleopatra into a new synthesis.

The squeaking boy speech brings to a head the two major issues of the play—the issue of Cleopatra's character and the issue of the nature of plays. Throughout, Cleopatra has been depicted as a showman: showing has been her great defect and also her consummate virtue. In this speech, and in the scene that follows, the question of her worth is directly associated with the question of the worth of shows. Here she seems to set the two at odds: only if we reject the shows we have seen can we accept the unseen greatness of Cleopatra. But in her suicide she will present a new show that validates both, and even in this speech the validation begins. The very fact that Cleopatra can talk about the show and claim that it is a poor parody implies that she has access to a level of reality beyond what has been presented. By implying the inadequacy of the representation, she implies also that she can transcend it.

That Cleopatra's suicide is a show would be apparent in the theater: she even changes costume for it onstage. "Show me, my women, like a queen," she says, "go fetch my best attires." Much is made of dressing, and Charmian's dying gesture is to straighten her dead queen's crown. Her words, "Your crown's awry, I'll mend it and then play," echo Cleopatra's order for the costume, "when thou hast done this chare, I'll give thee leave to play till doomsday." The word play emphasizes both the hedonistic and the theatrical aspects of the very Egyptian death these women are contriving, but the fact that the crown is their central concern unites these aspects with another—the wholly serious matter of royalty. For the crown is the emblem of Cleopatra's royalty, and when she puts it on here, it establishes in a fully theatrical manner the nature of this queen who is so thoroughly involved with the world of art and illusion that she is incomprehensible except within its terms.

Cleopatra commands her women to "show" her "like a queen," but for the characters onstage, as well as the audience, the likeness becomes reality. After Cleopatra dies, Charmian says, "golden Phoebus, never be beheld of eyes again so royal!" When Caesar's guard asks, "Is this well done?" she replies, "It is well done, and fitting for a princess descended of so many royal kings." Discovering Cleopatra's death, Caesar says, "Bravest at the last, she level'd at our purposes, and being royal took her own way." Of these lines, only the interchange with the guard is taken from North, and North's adjective is "noble." All these tributes to Cleopatra's royalty act as refutations to the earlier charge that she violated the decorum of her station. Those charges remained valid only so long as she was content to "seem the fool" in a performance susceptible to neoclassical standards of propriety and realism. Once she repudiates that performance, she can invoke a fully theatrical world where she can put on her royalty with its emblems. In this world, the costume we see, the poetry we hear, and the act we see performed are sufficient, for they satisfy the only kind of truth-criteria available within the context of the theater. The strategy is very much like that of Enobarbus' great speech, as we are reminded when Cleopatra says, "I am again for Cydnus, to meet Mark Antony." But Enobarbus' vision
is only now fully validated, for he evoked it by words alone and only to the inner eye. In this scene it will be evoked by all the resources of Shakespeare's theater, by spectacle as well as poetry, and the show will be theatrical reality. The stage itself, no less than the audience, is here freed from the demands of rationally plausible neoclassic veri-similitude, and for once in the play we can see before us the greatness that was only boyed in what we beheld earlier.

The interview with Dolabella, which has no real basis in North, indicates the difference. It contrasts not only with the interview with Proculeius, which immediately precedes it, but also with the scene where Enobarbus describes his vision at the Cydnus. When Cleopatra tells Dolabella her dream of Antony, he betrays Caesar's confidence to tell her the truth that Antony's experience of Rome made him expect Proculeius would tell. In effect, her conquest of Dolabella is a microcosm of her conquest of the whole texture of values and aspirations with which he, as a member of Caesar's party, is associated. Her dream of Antony, like Enobarbus' vision of her, evokes a greatness that is not physically present, and it uses the language of paradox and hyperbole: "For his bounty, there was no winter in 't: an autumn 'twas that grew the more by reaping…. In his livery walk'd crowns and crownets: realms and islands were as plates dropp'd from his pocket." There are some important differences, however. The cosmic imagery—"His face was as the heavens, and therein stuck a sun and moon, which kept their course, and lighted the little O, the earth…. his voice was properties as all the tuned spheres"—directly establishes the translunary context of the vision. In Enobarbus' vision, Cleopatra was associated with "that Venus where we see the fancy out-work nature." In Cleopatra's, Antony is "past the size of dreaming: nature wants stuff to vie strange forms with fancy, yet to imagine an Antony were nature's piece, 'gainst fancy, condemning shadows quite." At this point the truth of the imagination has become reality for Cleopatra: her dream is a vision of the golden world from a vantage point within that world rather than outside of it.

Cleopatra's ascent to the golden world is also an ascent from comedy, which shows men worse than they are, to tragedy, which shows them better. When the clown arrives to bring her the means by which she will ascend, she says, "Let him come in. What poor an instrument may do a noble deed!"; and in the scene that follows he serves as her scapegoat, for he attracts the laughter which has become a fairly well-conditioned response to the figure of the queen while she preserves the decorum of her superior station. Similarly, the clown's speeches serve, as Donald C. Baker has remarked [in "The Purging of Cleopatra" in Shakespeare Notes], to purge "the baser elements of the language of the play as Cleopatra purges herself and leaves her other elements 'to baser life.'" The clown's basket helps to define the transition. Early in the play (I. ii. 32), Charmian says, "I love long life better than figs." Now she and her mistress will choose the deadly figs and by their choice transform themselves from comic characters devoted to the life and sensual pleasures of this world to tragic characters who have the nobility to choose a good higher than mere survival. The asps as well as the figs are the products of the Nile, and the deaths of the Egyptian women demonstrate that their "o'erflowing" river breeds material for high tragedy as well as low comedy. Like Cleopatra's description of the asp as a babe that sucks its nurse asleep, the clown's basket unites appetite and death to sublimate both. His jokes make the same point: if "a woman is a dish for the gods," appetite is godly.

Cleopatra's death sublimes appetite, but first she rejects it, in both its Roman and its Egyptian manifestations. She rejects the coarse diet available in Rome, where "mechanic slaves with greasy aprons … shall uplift us to the view. In their thick breaths, rank of gross diet, shall we be enclouded, and forc'd to drink their vapour"; and she also resolves, "Now no more the juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip." Similarly, she denies the woman's nature that made her a boggier in the sublunary world—"I have nothing of woman in me: now from head to foot I am marble-constant; now the fleeting moon no planet is of mine"—before she assumes the name of Antony's wife in the world of immortal longings. In each case, and in the case of all the other qualities that have led us to doubt her nobility, the renunciation is only a prelude to redefinition and fulfillment.
During the suicide scene, Cleopatra systematically and explicitly renounces the weaknesses charged against her by the Romans and made credible to the audience by her earlier performance. If she drank Antony under the table, she will now renounce the grape. If she was his strumpet, she will now become his wife. If her vacillation lost him battles, she will now be marble-constant. If his devotion to her made him effeminate, she will now renounce her sex. But she does not renounce her sex in order to collapse into a squeaking boy, any more than her rejection of his shows meant that she was done with showing. Her character, like her showmanship, is not destroyed in the final scene but sublimated. Even her sensuality remains: "the stroke of death is as a lover's pinch, which hurts, and is desir'd"; and the new heaven and new earth she anticipates with Antony, where he is "curled" just as he was "barber'd ten times o'er" at the Cydnus, will abound in sensuous delights. One way to describe this process of sublimation is to say that we are now made to share the romantic lovers' own vision of their passion; another way is to say that the passion in the world of Nature is destroyed in order to be reborn in a new incarnation in the golden world, which is also the afterlife that Cleopatra envisions with Antony.

In the opening scene, Antony's rhetoric rejected the world for a kiss:

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space
Kingdoms are clay: our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man; the nobleness of life
Is to do thus: when such a mutual pair,
And such a twain can do't.

In the final scene, Cleopatra's act validates his choice. In the first scene, Antony suggested that to know the limits of their love, Cleopatra "find out new heaven, new earth." Here she prepares to find them out. In this final vision of Cleopatra's, Antony at last triumphs over Caesar. "Me-thinks," she says, "I hear Antony call…. I hear him mock the luck of Caesar, which the gods give men to excuse their after wrath." In the natural world, the soothsayer's warning to Antony holds true: Caesar will win at any game, for "of that natural luck, he beats thee 'gainst the odds. Thy lustre thickens, when he shines by … thy spirit is all afraid to govern thee near him; but he away, 'tis noble." Cleopatra can see Antony triumphing over Caesar because she looks beyond the world of time and change and luck where Caesar is always triumphant to a world where Antony's magnanimity can find its proper milieu. In the brazen world of Nature, where most of the play is set, Caesar is the master politician, but when Cleopatra chooses to leave that world, she can call him "ass, unpolicied" and his intents "most absurd."

After Cleopatra's death, when she has in act as well as in vision repudiated Caesar's world, her vision becomes reality in Caesar's world as well as her own. Caesar, says the guard who finds her dead, has been "beguil'd." And Caesar is beguiled in two, equally significant, senses. In the first place, he is tricked out of his triumph: Cleopatra outwits the master manipulator at the end. But just as important, he is beguiled in the sense that he responds to Cleopatra's charm. Seeing the dead queen, Caesar says, "she looks like sleep, as she would catch another Antony in her strong toil of grace." For the first and only time in the play, Caesar sees what Antony saw in Egypt. He now knows Cleopatra's charm, not as an abstract consideration to be reckoned in Rome, troublesome or useful to him in his political maneuverings, but as a response within himself. Caesar has come to Egypt for his final vision of Cleopatra, and his response, like Enobarbus' memory of the Cydnus, attests the validity of the vision that drew Antony from Rome. Caesar is moved by Cleopatra's act and her staging of it. The audience, having seen the entire spectacle, is even better prepared to appreciate her worth. And once they have done so, Antony is necessarily elevated. When he died in Act IV, there was still considerable reason to believe him a strumpet's fool. But when the strumpet turns out to be a queen, Antony's sacrifice is shown to be worthwhile.
The last speech in the play, like the first one, is spoken by one Roman to another. And, like the first, it ends with an injunction to "see":

Our army shall
In solemn show attend this funeral,
And then to Rome. Come, Dolabella, see
High order, in this great solemnity.

If we make the kind of association I have been suggesting and identify the Roman view of the lovers with the perceptions available to fallen man in the brazen world of mundane life, we might say that the audience, about to leave the theater, is about to return to the "Rome" from which they entered it. Like Caesar, however, they have been in the interval to Egypt where they have, at first, beheld Cleopatra's deceptive show and, at the end, seen her in another show, of "high order" and "great solemnity."

Before the final scene can be enacted and the sight of Cleopatra's greatness made available to the audience, Shakespeare must establish and then undermine the comic conception of her character that was based on the boy actor's imitation of her appearance in the natural world to which the Roman comedians are limited. Like the Romans, we must accept its verisimilitude before we can appreciate the force of Cleopatra's charge that it is a poor parody of the greatness she possesses in the golden world which is the high product of the tragic poet's making. Thus the ambivalence of our reactions to the first four acts is as important an element of our total experience of the play as is our response to the final scene, which resolves the ambivalence. The golden world of poetry became necessary only after the Fall of man, and the worth of the poet can only be seen when his handiwork is compared to the products of the arts that are bound by the limitations of Nature.

L. T. Fitz (essay date 1977)


[In the following essay, Fitz argues that numerous critical discussions of Antony and Cleopatra have been informed by sexist biases, with one of the most blatant misunderstandings being the inability to perceive Cleopatra as a tragic hero in her own right.]

Most critics are united in proclaiming that Antony and Cleopatra is a magnificent achievement; unfortunately, they are not united on the question of exactly what the play achieves. It is difficult to think of another Shakespearean play which has divided critics into such furiously warring camps. A. P. Riemer describes, fairly accurately [in A Reading of Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra"], the positions defended by the two main critical factions: "Antony and Cleopatra can be read as the fall of a great general, betrayed in his dotage by a treacherous strumpet, or else it can be viewed as a celebration of transcendental love." Derek Traversi also speaks of this interpretive impasse [in Shakespeare: The Roman Plays]: "The student of Antony and Cleopatra has, in offering an account of this great tragedy, to resolve a problem of approach, of the author's intention. Sooner or later, he finds himself faced by two possible readings of the play, whose only difficulty is that they seem to be mutually exclusive." A significant difficulty indeed; however, I would suggest, not the "only difficulty."

Both the reduction of the play's action to "the fall of a great general" and the definition of the play's major interest as "transcendental love" make impossible a reasonable assessment of the character of Cleopatra. There is a word for the kind of critical bias informing both approaches: it is "sexism." Almost all critical approaches to this play have been colored by the sexist assumptions the critics have brought with them to their reading. These approaches, I believe, have distorted the meaning of what Shakespeare wrote.
Before I take up the sexist criticism in its particulars, I have one general observation. I have noticed, in male critical commentary on the character of Cleopatra, an intemperance of language, an intensity of revulsion uncommon even among Shakespeare critics, who are well enough known as a group for their lack of critical moderation. I do not think it would be going too far to suggest that many male critics feel personally threatened by Cleopatra and what she represents to them. In Cleopatra's case, critical attitudes go beyond the usual condescension toward female characters or the usual willingness to give critical approval only to female characters who are chaste, fair, loyal, and modest: critical attitudes toward Cleopatra seem to reveal deep personal fears of aggressive or manipulative women. Alfred Harbage, in his *Conceptions of Shakespeare*, looked at the personal lives of some anti-Stratfordians and found evidence of persistent neurotic delusions of the sort Freud had labeled "family romance fantasies": perhaps it would be revealing to examine the lives of anti-Cleopatra critics for evidence of difficulties in relationships with women.

But to the particulars. Obviously, most of the sexist distortion has centered on Cleopatra, and it is most revealing to observe with whom Cleopatra has been compared. A favorite game among Shakespeare critics has always been to compare characters from one play with characters from another; so Hamlet is said to have more "inner life" than Othello, King Lear is said to die less self-centeredly than Hamlet, and so forth. With whom is Cleopatra compared? Lear? Macbeth? Othello? No, Cleopatra is compared only with female characters—Viola, Beatrice, Rosalind, Juliet. Juliet is most frequent, and it must be confessed that there are certain similarities. Both appear in tragedies (the rest of the women used for comparison are comic heroines); both are allegedly in love; and they share the distinction of being two of the three women to have made it into the titles of Shakespeare plays. Otherwise, the two are as apt for comparison as Mae West and St. Cecilia. Critics do not compare King Lear with Osric, Bottom the Weaver, or Sir Toby Belch because they are all men, but they persist in comparing Cleopatra (usually unfavourably) with female characters because they are all women. Clearly, Cleopatra is cut off at the outset from serious consideration as a tragic hero by being relegated to consideration alongside various heroines, most of whom inhabit the comedies.

Related to this habit of discussing female characters as a group is the critical tactic of describing Cleopatra as "Woman." Cleopatra is seen as the archetypal woman: practicer of feminine wiles, mysterious, childlike, long on passion and short on intelligence—except for a sort of animal cunning. Harold C. Goddard, [in The Meaning of Shakespeare], referring to the end of the play, states, "Now for the first time she is a woman—and not Woman." S. L. Bethell informs us [in Shakespeare and the Popalac Dramatic Tradition], "In Cleopatra [Shakespeare] presents the mystery of woman." Swinburne sees Cleopatra as Blake's "Ettemal Female" [in A Study of Shakespeare]. Georg Brandes calls her "woman of women, quintessentiated Eve" [in William Shakespeare: A Critical Study]. E. E. Stoll says, "Caprice, conscious and unconscious is her nature.... She is quintessential woman" ['"Cleopatra" in Poets and Playwrights (1930)]. Harley Granville-Barker enlightens us: "The passionate woman has a child's desires and a child's fears, an animal's wary distrust; balance of judgment none, one would say. But often ... she shows the shrewd scepticism of a child" [Prefaces to Shakespeare (1930)]. And Daniel Stempel brings us up to date on the alleged Elizabethan attitude [in "The Trans-migration of the Crocodile" in Shakespeare Quarterly, 1956]:

> Here our knowledge of Elizabethan mores can come to our aid ... Woman was a creature of weak reason and strong passion, carnal in nature and governed by lust. She could be trusted only when guided by the wisdom of her natural superior, man.... The misogyny of Octavius Caesar is founded on right reason.

It is surely questionable whether there is such a thing as a "typical woman" or even a "typical Elizabethan woman." And if there is such a thing as a "typical Shakespearean woman," Cleopatra is not the woman. In particular, she is almost unique among Shakespeare's female characters in her use of feminine wiles—by which I mean her deliberate unpredictability and her manipulative use of mood changes for the purpose of remaining fascinating to Antony.
If you find him sad,
Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report
That I am sudden sick

(I. iii. 3-5)

It is ironic that her use of feminine wiles has been one of the only Cleopatran features to have proven appealing to critics. Dowden writes:

At every moment we are necessarily aware of the gross, the mean, the disorderly womanhood in Cleopatra, no less than of the witchery and wonder which excite, and charm, and subdue. We see her a dissembler, a termagant, a coward; and yet 'vilest things become her'. The presence of a spirit of life quick, shifting, multitudinous, incalculable, fascinates the eye, and would, if it could, lull the moral sense to sleep.

Schlegel writes [in Lectures on Dramatic Poetry]: "Cleopatra is as remarkable for her seductive charms as Antony for the splendor of his deeds." Philip J. Traci [in The Love Play of Antony and Cleopatra, 1970] defends the feminine wiles on the grounds that such behavior is prescribed for courtly lovers by Andreas Capellanus and Ovid.

It is ironic, I say, because it seems probable that Shakespeare disapproves of such behavior. With the exception of Cressida, no other woman in Shakespeare's plays practices it. Indeed, Shakespeare's women for the most part actively resist it, preferring instead to woo their men, straightforwardly, themselves. It is Miranda's father, in The Tempest, who tries to put obstacles in love's way "lest too light winning / Make the prize light" (I. ii. 454-55), while Miranda forthrightly approaches the man she has known for about an hour with "Hence, bashful cunning … I am your wife, if you will marry me" (III. i. 81-83).

Of course, if I am to claim that Shakespeare treated his women as individuals, I can hardly postulate that he criticizes Cleopatra for behaving differently in this respect from other Shakespearean women. But there is evidence in the play that Shakespeare sees such behavior as humanly undesirable: he has Cleopatra herself try, in the latter part of the play, to overcome her deliberately inconstant behavior—behavior which she (not Shakespeare) sees as being quintessentially female:

My resolution's placed, and I have nothing
Of woman in me: now from head to foot
I am marble-constant: now the fleeting moon
No planet is of mine.

(V. ii. 238-41)

But while Shakespeare may disapprove of feminine wiles, he understands why Cleopatra feels (perhaps rightly) that she must practice them: she is getting old, and Shakespeare understood that women, unlike men, are valued only when they are young and beautiful. Cleopatra's famous self-portrait—

Think on me,
That am with Phoebus' amorous pinches black
And wrinkled deep in time

(I. v. 27-29)

—comes at the point where she has just characterized her fantasy of Antony ("He's speaking now, / Or murmuring, 'Where's my serpent of old Nile?" [I. v. 24-25]) as "delicious poison"—delicious in its confirmation of Antony's loyalty, poisonous in its contrast with the fact of Antony's absence and the fact of her decaying beauty. This passage is immediately followed by a reverie on sexual successes of her youth. The
scene is, I think, too often read with attention only to Cleopatra's rejoicing in her own sexuality, to the neglect of its clear undercurrent of fear and insecurity.

The feminine fear of aging had been introduced early in the play, with Charmian's "Wrinkles forbid" (I. ii. 21). That Shakespeare well understood the danger of a woman's losing the affection of her lover as she loses her looks to age is clear from the discussion between Duke Orsino and Viola (masquerading as a boy) in Twelfth Night:

DUKE Let still the woman take
An elder than herself: so wears she to him,
So sways she level in her husband's heart;
For, boy, however we do praise ourselves,
Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,

Than women's are …
Then let thy love be younger than thyself,
Or thy affection cannot hold the bent;
For women are as roses, whose fair flow'r,
Being once displayed, doth fall that very hour.

VIOLA And so they are; alas, that they are so.

(II. iv. 29-40)

There is no evidence in Shakespeare (or in Plutarch, his source) that Cleopatra employed feminine wiles when she was younger. It seems more reasonable to conjecture that in Shakespeare's interpretation, she has adopted desperate measures to compensate, by being fascinating, for the ravages of age.

Although many critics see Cleopatra as the archetypal woman, others more magnanimously recognize that there are, in fact, two types of woman in the world, both of which appear in Antony and Cleopatra: the wicked and manipulative (Cleopatra), and the chaste and submissive (Octavia). This dipolar view usually results in an overemphasis on Octavia, who after all speaks only thirty-five lines in the play, as a viable alternative to Cleopatra. These critics seem to be united in their belief that the love of a good woman could have saved Antony and prevented the whole tragedy. A. C. Bradley complains bitterly of Antony's mistreatment of Octavia [in Oxford Lectures on Poetry]. Charles Bathurst feels that "The character of Antony [Shakespeare] meant to elevate as much as possible; notwithstanding his great weakness in all that concerns Cleopatra, and unmistakable misconduct with regard to his wife" [Remarks on the Differences in Shakespeare's Versification in Different Periods of His Life (1857)]. Laurens J. Mills regrets that "after the seeming cure during his marriage to Octavia, he falls more and more inextricably into the coils of the Egyptian." Harley Granville-Barker, who places Octavia third, after Antony and Cleopatra, in his group of character studies for the play says "How should we not, with the good Maecenas, trust to her beauty, wisdom, and modesty to settle his chastened heart?"

Leaving aside these touching encomia and turning to the play, one notes that Antony calls his marriage to Octavia "the business" (a term favored by the Macbeths in reference to the murder of Duncan). It is very likely that had Antony lived in connubial bliss with Octavia from the time he first remarked "Yet, ere we put ourselves in arms, dispatch we / The business we have talked of" [II. ii. 167-68], the remaining three-and-a-half acts would have been very different, less concerned with disaster and death, although perhaps somewhat lacking in those qualities we have come to associate with drama. Nevertheless, it is a fact that in Shakespeare Antony treats Octavia better than he does in Plutarch, where he turns her out of his house. And Shakespeare much reduced Octavia's importance: Plutarch's account ends with a vision of Octavia bringing up
all of Antony's children, including one named Cleopatra.

Another sexist response to the play has resulted from a distaste for the play's overt sexuality. Traci claims that Shakespearean critics, even bawdry expert Eric Partridge, have been loath to acknowledge the extent of sexual double entendre in the play, and that when they have acknowledged it, they have been disgusted by it. Traci gallantly takes up the challenge by declaring that the whole play is structured in imitation of the sex-act, starting with fore-play in the first several scenes, proceeding to pre-sex drinking and feasting, and finally culminating, after the significant entrance of the character Eros, in intercourse itself—represented, according to Traci, by twenty-one uses of the word "Eros," twenty-three uses of the word "come," and sixteen puns on "dying." Traci's theory may be a little far-fetched, but it brings a whole new world of meaning to passages like "What poor an instrument may do a noble deed," "The soldier's pole is fallen," and "Husband, I come."

Traci feels that critical neglect of the naughty bits in the play has been prompted by prudery, from which he, fortunately, does not suffer. "Drink … like lechery," he declares, "is a universal manly, social sin.… Indeed, they are surely heroic sins, when compared to gluttony and sloth, for example." What Traci fails to account for is the oddity of encountering critical prudery in this day and age. After all, the days of Bowdlerizing are over; nobody blenches any more at "an old black ram is tupping your white ewe." I submit that what bothers critics about the bawdy remarks in *Antony and Cleopatra* is that so many of them are made by Cleopatra—like "O happy horse, to bear the weight of Antony!" (I. v. 21), or "Ram thou thy fruitful tidings in mine ears, / That long time have been barren" (II. v. 23-24). The prudery is of a sexist variety: what appalls the male critic is that a woman would say such things. It is, to a certain extent, Cleopatra's frank sexuality that damn her.

Robert E. Fitch, writing from his post at the Pacific School of Religion, observes, "It is altogether incredible that the Shakespeare who … early and late in his career rejoiced in innocence, loyalty, and love, before lust with all its cruel splendors, could have presented Cleopatra as a model of the mature woman in mature emotion" ["No Greater Crack?" *SQ*, 19 (1968), 12]. J. W. Lever tells us that "Her wooing of Antony is comic and sensual, immoral and thoroughly reprehensible." ["Venus and the Second Chance," *Shakespeare Survey*, 15 (1962), 87].

One might expect Cleopatra to appeal at least to the closet prurience of a few readers. And indeed there are a number of grudging and embarrassed tributes to the power of Cleopatra's sexuality. Schlegel writes: "Although the mutual passion of herself and Antony is without moral dignity, it still excites our sympathy as an insurmountable fascination." Coleridge writes, "But the art displayed in the character of Cleopatra is profound in this, especially, that the sense of criminality in her passion is lessened by our insight into its depth and energy, at the very moment that we cannot help but perceive that the passion itself springs out of the habitual craving of a licentious nature." Traci sums up the attitude of several modern Cleopatra apologists: "From beneath the exuberance of the adjectives … there emerges the critic's apology for having himself become a slave of Passion."

*Antony and Cleopatra* has never been admitted to the holy circle of the "big four" Shakespearean tragedies—*Hamlet, Othello, King Lear*, and *Macbeth*. Many reasons for this have been adduced. Perhaps the most popular reason, as stated by A. P. Riemer, is that *Antony and Cleopatra* "deals with issues intrinsically much less important than those of the great tragedies." Nevertheless, Cleopatra's first line, "If it be love indeed, tell me how much" (I. i. 14), is strikingly similar to Lear's opening question to his daughters. Both *Antony and Cleopatra* and *King Lear* are, as far as I can see, concerned with love and its relationship to public issues like proper ruling, as well as love's place in the individual's hierarchy of values. If *Antony and Cleopatra* deals with "much less important issues," it would seem to follow that love between the sexes, as in *Antony and Cleopatra*, is "much less important" than familial love, as in *King Lear*. This is an argument one might expect of Victorian critics, perhaps, but why should we find it today? And if love between the sexes is an unworthy topic for tragedy, why is *Othello* permitted to stand as one of the "big four," while *Antony and Cleopatra* is not? The unavoidable answer, I believe, is that *Othello* focuses uncompromisingly on a male hero.
Another way in which sexism rears its head in *Antony and Cleopatra* criticism is that in assessing the respective actions of Antony and Cleopatra, critics apply a clear double standard: what is praiseworthy in Antony is damnable in Cleopatra. The sexist assumption here is that for a woman, love should be everything; her showing an interest in anything but her man is reprehensible. For a man, on the other hand, love should be secondary to public duty or even self-interest. Almost every scene in which either character appears has been subjected to this double-standard interpretation. I will focus on three examples.

First, in the Thidias scene, where Cleopatra apparently makes some political overtures to Caesar after Caesar has defeated Antony in the battle of Actium, Cleopatra has repeatedly been damned by critics for trying to save her political skin, and perhaps her actual skin, at the expense of her love for Antony. At the beginning of the play, when Antony follows his fervent protestations of love for Cleopatra by leaving Egypt to patch up his political situation in Rome through marriage to the sister of Octavius Caesar, he receives nothing but critical praise—for putting first things first and attempting to break off a destructive relationship with Cleopatra. According to the critics, men may put political considerations ahead of love; women may not.

Second, while Antony is roundly criticized when he neglects public affairs, critics never take seriously Cleopatra's desire to play an active part in great public enterprises. Cleopatra's participation in the battle of Actium, it must be confessed, is less than an unqualified success, but there is no warrant in the play for doubting her motives for being there in person:

> A charge we bear i' th' war,  
> As the president of my kingdom will  
> Appear there for a man. Speak not against it,  
> I will not stay behind.  
> (III. vii. 16-19)

Nevertheless, Julian Markels infers [in *The Pillars of the World*], on no evidence, that "the entire function of the president of her kingdom is to become the object of universal gaze and wonder…. Her business at Actium was to cavort upon that stage where Antony made war."

Third, a double standard is almost always applied in discussions of Antony's and Cleopatra's respective motives for suicide. Cleopatra is repeatedly criticized for thinking of anything but Antony: this would seem to follow from the sexist precept that nothing but love is appropriate to a woman's thoughts. "Does she kill herself to be with Antony or to escape Caesar? It is the final question," Mills tells us, after explaining to us the difference between Cleopatra's unworthy death-bed thoughts and Antony's noble ones:

> In her final moments, as she carries out her resolution, Cleopatra has "immortal longings," hears Antony call, gloats over outwitting Caesar, addresses Antony as "husband," shows jealousy in her fear that Iras may gain the first otherworld kiss from Antony, sneers at Caesar again, speaks lovingly to the asp at her breast, and dies, with "Antony" on her lips and a final fling of contempt for the world. But, it should be noted, she does not "do it after the high Roman fashion," nor with the singleness of motive that actuated Antony.

Stempel, coming upon the lines, "He words me, girls, he words me, that I should not / Be noble to myself" [V. ii. 191-92], is indescribably shocked that Cleopatra speaks two whole lines without reference to Antony: "No word of Antony here. Her deepest allegiance is to her own nature."

If, however, we look at the play, we see that Cleopatra adduces the following reasons for taking leave of the world: (1) she thinks life is not worth living without Antony; (2) she sees suicide as brave, great, noble, and Roman; (3) she wants to escape the humiliation Caesar has planned for her, and desires to have the fun of making an ass of Caesar; (4) she sees suicide as an act of constancy which will put an end to her previous
inconstant behavior and to the world's inconstancy which has affected her; and (5) she wants to be with Antony in a life beyond the grave. Antony adduces the following reasons for his suicide: (1) he has lost his final battle, and he thinks Cleopatra has betrayed him; (2) he (later) thinks Cleopatra is dead, and feels that life is not worth living without her; (3) he wants to be with Cleopatra in a life beyond the grave; (4) he thinks Cleopatra has killed herself, and he cannot bear to be outdone in nobility by a mere woman; (5) he wants to escape the humiliation Caesar has planned for him; and (6) he sees suicide as valiant and Roman. It is thus apparent that the "singleness of motive" which Mills thinks "actuates Antony" is a myth: Antony has six motives to Cleopatra's five, and four of Cleopatra's five motives are identical with Antony's. Yet although Cleopatra is constantly taken to task for the multiplicity of her suicide motives (we all know that women cannot make up their minds), I have yet to see the critic who complained of the multiplicity of Antony's motives.

This double standard, arising from the critics' own sexist world view—that is, that love, lust, and personal relationships in general belong to a "feminine" world that must always be secondary to the "masculine" world of war, politics, and great public issues—can seriously distort the play. Some critics see the tragedy as growing out of the finally irreconcilable conflict between public values and private values, but many critics come down unequivocally on the side of public values—assuming, of course, that these public values belong to a world of men. Symptomatic of this tendency is the fact that Enobarbus, a boringly conventional antifeminist who voices just such a view in the play, is almost always taken to be a mouthpiece for Shakespeare. E. C. Wilson, for example, writes:

> Antony, sobered by news of Fulvia's death, declares that he must from "this enchanting queen break off." Enobarbus banteringly cries, "Why, then we kill all our women. We see how mortal an unkindness is to them. If they suffer departure, death's the word." But in his next speech, a reply to Antony's "I must be gone," his clear sense of Antony's folly pierces through his banter. "Under a compelling occasion, let women die. It were pity to cast them away for nothing, though, between them and a great cause they should be esteemed nothing." Nowhere in the play is there a more incisive judgment on Antony's conduct.

Because these interpretations of the play are slanted in favor of the "rightness" of public, Roman values (in spite of the unsavory character of almost all the Roman activities which appear in the play, from the bride-bartering of Octavius and Antony, to the cut-throat scramble for political ascendancy, to the unctuous hypocrisy of Octavius in the closing scenes), Cleopatra, who after all shares top billing with Antony in the play's title, is demoted from the position of co-protagonist to the position of antagonist at best, nonentity at worst.

The most flagrant manifestation of sexism in criticism of the play is the almost universal assumption that Antony alone is its protagonist. The following are only a few critical pronouncements on the subject, which I have culled from a mass of interpretive writings that make the same point. Oliver Emerson: "the dramatic movement of the play is the ruin of Antony under the stress of sensual passion" ["Antony and Cleopatra," Poet Lore, 2 (1890), p. 126]. Georg Brandes: "Just as Antony's ruin results from his connection with Cleopatra, so does the fall of the Roman Republic result from the contact of the simple hardihood of the West with the luxury of the East. Antony is Rome. Cleopatra is the Orient. When he perishes, a prey to the voluptuousness of the East, it seems as though Roman greatness and the Roman Republic expires with him." Harley Granville-Barker: "Antony, the once-triumphant man of action, is hero…. [The play's theme] is not merely Antony's love for Cleopatra, but his ruin as general and statesman, the final ascension of Octavius, and the true end of 'that work the ides of March begun'…. If but in his folly, [Antony] has been great. He has held nothing back, has flung away for her sake honour and power, never weighing their worth against her worthlessness." Lord David Cecil: "the play would have been better entitled The Decline and Fall of Antony" ["Antony and Cleopatra" W. P. Ker Memorial Lecture (Glasgow: Jackson, 1944), p. 21]. S. L. Bethell: "Antony's position is central, for the choice between Egypt and Rome is for him to make." Willard Farnham
Shakespeare does not organize his tragedy as a drama of the love of Antony and Cleopatra, but as a drama of the rise and fall of Antony in the struggle for world rulership that takes place after he has met Cleopatra." John F. Danby [in Poets on Fortune's Hill: Studies in Sidney, Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher]: "The tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra is, above all, the tragedy of Antony." Austin Wright: "The main theme" of Antony and Cleopatra is "the clash between Antony and Octavius" ["Antony and Cleopatra," Shakespeare: Lectures on Five Plays by Members of the Department of English, Carnegie Institute of Technology (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Press, 1958), p. 39]. Julian Markels: "Antony and Cleopatra focuses upon the conflict within Antony between public and private claims." A. P. Riemer: "On a strictly formal level, Antony and Cleopatra fulfils the requirements of orthodox tragedy in its depiction of Antony's fall (and, incidentally, Cleopatra's) in reasonably decorous terms." Janet Adelman [in The Common Liar]: "Antony is the presumptive hero of the play."

When, in 1964, Leurens J. Mills set out to find critics who agreed with him that Antony and Cleopatra were coprotagonists, he could find only two other critics who "agreed." One of these was Virgil Whitaker, who I find once remarked [in Shakespeare's Use of Learning], that "the tragic action of the play is centered upon Antony, who has so yielded himself to the passion of love that it has possessed his will and dethroned his reason." And Mills’s own study does little to advance the cause. His summary of the two tragic falls is that the tragedy of Antony consists of the "pathetic picture" of a man who "by love for a thoroughly unworthy object comes to a miserable end," whereas the tragedy of Cleopatra "cannot be a 'tragic fall', for there is nothing for her to fall from." The critical camp that sees Antony and Cleopatra as coprotagonists does not muster impressive forces.

The critical consensus, then, is that Antony is the protagonist. There is a small catch, however. Antony dies in Act IV, and Cleopatra has the whole of Act V to herself, during the course of which she speaks some of Shakespeare's greatest poetry. How have the pro-Antony forces dealt with this embarrassment? A substantial number of them have chosen the stalwart expedient of ignoring it altogether. For the rest, the critical contortions to which they have been forced to resort are instructive and amusing.

Some feel that Shakespeare knew what he was doing when he gave Cleopatra the last act to herself. For example, Daniel Stempel says, "If… the major theme is the safety of the state, then the death of Antony does not remove the chief danger to political stability—Cleopatra: she has ensnared Julius Caesar, Pompey, and Antony—how will Octavius fare? This last act shows us that Octavius is proof against the temptress, and the play ends, as it should, with the defeat and death of the rebel against order. The theme is worked out to its logical completion, and the play is an integrated whole, not merely a tragedy with a postscript." Robert E. Fitch says, "Naturally Antony, the middle-man in the generic tension of values, must be disposed of by the end of Act IV, so that the last act may be given to the stark confrontation of pleasure and of power in the persons of Cleopatra and Octavius." Julian Markels says, "the grand climax of the whole action is reserved for Cleopatra, who now learns the lesson of Antony's life … and by her loyalty to him confirms Antony's achieved balance of public and private values." John Middleton Murry says [in Shakespeare], "Up to the death of Antony it is from him that the life of the play has been derived…. He is magnificent: therefore she must be. But when he dies, her poetic function is to maintain and prolong, to reflect and reverberate, that achieved royalty of Antony's…. We [watch] the mysterious transfusion of his royal spirit into the mind and heart of his fickle queen." Harley Granville-Barker says, "The love-tragedy … is not made the main question till no other question is left…. Antony dead, the domination of the play passes at once to Cleopatra…. But Antony's death leaves Shakespeare to face one obvious problem: how to prevent Cleopatra's coming as an anticlimax." Peter Alexander says [in Shakespeare's Life and Act], "Antony dies while the play still has an act to run, but without this act his story would be incomplete. For Cleopatra has to vindicate her right to his devotion." Other critics feel that in giving Cleopatra Act V to herself, Shakespeare simply made a dreadful mistake, one which destroyed the whole structure of the play. As Michael Lloyd quite rightly points out, "If we see Antony's tragedy as the centrepiece of the play, its structure is faulty" ["Cleopatra as Isis," Shakespeare Survey, 12 (1959), 94].
Cleopatra is present throughout the whole of the play, she has Act V to herself, and she dies at the end. Thus, she would seem to fulfill at least the formal requirements of the tragic hero. One might think that in the verbose history of Shakespearian criticism, at least one critic would have suggested that she is the protagonist—the sole protagonist—of the play. As a matter of fact, one did. A critic named Simpson—Lucie Simpson—wrote in a forgotten article in 1928 that "the play, in fact, might have been called Cleopatra as appropriately as Hamlet is called Hamlet or Othello Othello:" ["Shakespeare's 'Cleopatra,'" Fortnightly Review, NS 123 (March 1928), 332]. Although Antony and Cleopatra critics as a rule refer to each other's works more often than to the play, I have seen Lucie Simpson's work referred to only once, and then with a summary dismissal. (Such heretical works are hard to get hold of; for example, an intriguing book by a critic named Grindon—Rosa Grindon [A Woman's Study of "Antony and Cleopatra," 1909]—which advances the delightful and provocative thesis that "the men critics in their sympathy for Antony, have treated Cleopatra just as Antony's men friends did, and for the same cause" has been out of print for over fifty years.) In fact, it is for the most part only the occasional female critic who dares to suggest that a woman might be the protagonist of any Shakespearian tragedy.

But changes Shakespeare made in using his source, Plutarch's Life of Marcus Antonius, indicate that he had a much greater interest than had Plutarch in Cleopatra as a human being. He elevated her position in the play by paying more attention to her motivation, allowing her to speak in her own defense, and making numerous small alterations in Plutarch's story, the effect of which is almost always to mitigate Cleopatra's culpability. That exonerating and elevating Cleopatra was a conscious intention is suggested by the fact that the changes are consistently in that direction. It is also notable that except for these changes, Shakespeare adheres quite closely to his source.

In Plutarch, Antony embarks on his Parthian campaign with 100,000 men. He loses 45,000 of them, we are told, mainly because "the great haste he made to return unto Cleopatra" caused him to abandon heavy artillery and put his men to forced marches: "the most part of them died of sickness." In Plutarch, then, 45,000 men lost their lives because Antony was in haste to meet Cleopatra by the sea-side—and then she was late! This distasteful episode, which provides Plutarch with ample occasion to revile Cleopatra, is omitted altogether by Shakespeare.

In Plutarch, Cleopatra is given a reason for wanting to appear in person at the battle of Actium: she fears "lest Antonius should again be made friends with Octavius Caesar by means of his wife Octavia," and the reasons she gives Antony for wanting to appear are spurious. In Shakespeare, there is no hint of this personal reason; Cleopatra simply declares "A charge we bear i' th' war, / And, as the president of my kingdom, will / Appear there for a man" (III. vii. 17).

Antony's reason for fighting the battle of Actium by sea is reported twice by Plutarch. "Now Antonius was made so subject to a woman's will that, though he was a great deal the stronger by land, yet for Cleopatra's sake he would needs have this battle tried by sea." "But … notwithstanding all these good persuasions, Cleopatra forced him to put all to the hazard of battle by sea." One very frequently finds critics adducing this as one of the charges against Shakespeare's Cleopatra. But in fact the sea battle is not Cleopatra's idea in Shakespeare's play. Shakespeare instead introduces a different motive, not mentioned in Plutarch: Caesar's dare.

ANTONY Canidius, we
Will fight with him by sea.
CLEOPATRA By sea; what else?
CANIDIIUS Why will my lord do so?
ANTONY For that he dares us to't.
ENOBARBUS So hath my lord dared him to single fight.
CANIDIUS Ay, and to wage this battle at Pharsalia,
Where Caesar fought with Pompey: but these offers,
Which serve not for his vantage, he shakes off;
And so should you.
ENOBARBUS Your ships are not well manned;
Your mariners are muleters, reapers, people ingrossed by swift impress. In Caesar's fleet are those that often have 'gainst Pompey fought;
Their ships are yare, yours, heavy: no disgrace shall fall you for refusing him at sea,
Being prepared for land.
ANTONY By sea, by sea.
(III. vii. 27-40)

In Shakespeare, the emphasis is entirely on Caesar's dare. Cleopatra finds the choice of sea-battle a natural one, since Egypt's military strength is in its navy, but she does not initiate the disastrous plan.

Cleopatra's departure from the battle of Actium, which prompts Antony to follow her and results in the loss of the battle, Shakespeare could hardly have omitted from the play, as it eventuates in the tragic deaths of Antony and Cleopatra. Nor would one wish this changed, since, despite Enobarbus' disclaimer (III. xiii. 3-4), it leaves Cleopatra with a large share of the blame for the ensuing tragedy—an important consideration, in view of the fact that in Shakespeare's mature plays the chain of events culminating in tragedy is initiated by the protagonist. In Plutarch, the focus in this scene is entirely on Antony—Cleopatra's leaving the battle is seen only in relation to its effect on Antony. In Shakespeare, Cleopatra considers whether she is to blame ("Is Antony, or we, in fault for this?" [III. xiii. 2]), indicates fear as her motivation ("Forgive my fearful sails" [III. xi. 55]), offers as her excuse that she acted in ignorance of the consequences ("I little thought / You would have followed" [III. xi. 55-56]), and apologizes profusely ("Pardon, pardon" [III. xi. 68]). Plutarch does not present Cleopatra's reactions to this crucial turn of events at all.

After the Thidias scene, Plutarch gives no hint of Cleopatra's impassioned declarations of innocence and love for Antony, declarations that do appear in Shakespeare's text. And although Shakespeare includes in the Thidias scene (as Plutarch does not) the imputation that Cleopatra has stayed with Antony out of fear, not love (III. xii. 56-57), this piece of dialogue is a transmutation of a much more damning passage in Plutarch—where after Antony's death, "Cleopatra began to clear and excuse herself for that she had done, laying all to the fear she had of Antony." Shakespeare has removed this imputation of disloyalty from the latter part of the action, putting it in the mouth of Caesar's messenger, not Cleopatra. And while Cleopatra acquiesces in the interpretation, she prefaces her acquiescence with the very-likely ironic "He is a god, and knows / What is most right" (III. xiii. 60-61).

As to Antony's suspicion, after the final aborted battle, that Cleopatra "has / Packed cards with Caesar" (IV. xiv. 18-19), neither Plutarch nor Shakespeare includes any evidence that she has. But Shakespeare has her messenger issue a denial (IV. xiv. 120-23), whereas Plutarch leaves the question entirely open.

In Plutarch, Cleopatra betakes herself to the monument "being afraid of [Antony's] fury." Shakespeare gives her much stronger reasons for her fear, since Antony declares four times, very convincingly, that he is going
to kill her (IV. xii. 16; IV. xii. 39-42; IV. xii. 47, 49; IV. xiv. 26). This is not in Plutarch.

In both authors, Antony's suicide is a result of Cleopatra's sending word that she is dead. But again, Shakespeare takes pains to mitigate this action. First, he makes the death-message Charmian's idea (IV. xiii. 4), not Cleopatra's. Second, he has Cleopatra foresee the possible effect of her message and send an emissary to revoke it; unfortunately, the emissary arrives too late (IV. xiv. 119-26). This is a significant departure from Plutarch.

In Plutarch, Cleopatra will not open the gates of the monument to Antony, and no reason for this refusal is given. In Shakespeare, Cleopatra gives a reason and apologizes: "I dare not, dear; / Dear my lord, pardon: I dare not, / Lest I be taken" (IV. xv. 21-23).

Plutarch gives three reasons for Antony's suicide, but none at all for Cleopatra's, apart from the implication that her wits were distracted "with sorrow and passion of mind." She is reduced to a babbling, self-mutilating neurotic: "She had knocked her breast so pitifully, that she had … raised ulcers and inflammations, so that she fell into a fever…. her eyes sunk into her head with continual blubbering, and moreover they might see the most part of her stomach torn in sunder." Shakespeare gives Cleopatra's suicide full motivation, and allows her to die with dignity and even triumph.

Finally, Plutarch reports simply, "Her death was very sudden." The great dying speeches of Cleopatra are Shakespeare's addition.

Shakespeare's greater interest in Cleopatra first manifests itself in his changing Plutarch's title from *The Life of Marcus Antonius* to *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra*, and continues to manifest itself throughout the play.

Although Shakespeare's departures from Plutarch are consistently in the direction of mitigating the harshness of Plutarch's view of Cleopatra, they do not by any means amount to a whitewash. By granting Cleopatra motivation and the chance to speak in her own defense, Shakespeare lifts her from the level of caricature, which would be appropriate for satiric treatment, to the level of fully developed individuality, which qualifies her for treatment as a tragic figure. To be treated as a tragic protagonist, Cleopatra need not—indeed should not—be absolved of every failing; after all, no one tries to prove that Macbeth did not really commit murder before granting him the stature of tragic hero.

The most significant difference between Shakespeare's mature tragic practice and Aristotle's tragic theory is that while Aristotle at one point says that "pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune," Shakespeare insists on eliciting audience sympathy for characters who, to a greater or lesser degree, have brought their misfortunes on themselves. Shakespeare seems to ask his audience to understand, to empathize—even to forgive. In the later tragedies, Shakespeare seeks audience sympathy for inherently unsympathetic figures—a stubborn and mentally infirm octogenarian, a murderer, a misanthrope, a mama's boy, and (most difficult of all) a disreputable woman. As Willard Farnham points out in *Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier*, such an attempt involves great risks—what is gained in granting characters some say in their own destiny might easily be lost in diminution of audience sympathy. It seems to have been a risk that Shakespeare deliberately elected to take. In his last few tragedies, he made increasing demands on the humane tolerance (or perhaps on the Christian charity, in the most radical sense) of his audience. We are not expected to agree, in every case, that the protagonist is more sinned against than sinning; we are expected, on the basis of our common humanity with the offending protagonist, to offer sympathy unqualified by the necessity for exoneration. It is a demand too radical for Aristotle, for Farnham, for most audiences. Most are too ready to rue the absence of less deeply-flawed heroes, too ready to accuse Shakespeare of having sat down to eat with publicans and sinners. But although this is a tendency in the criticism of all the late tragedies, the fact remains that critics have been readier to sympathize with the murderer than with the wanton woman.
Any attempt to reach a canonical decision on the identity of a single hero in a play of such generic unorthodoxy as *Antony and Cleopatra* is probably foolhardy and possibly distorting in itself. Nevertheless, since so many critics before me have unblushingly insisted on establishing Antony as the play's sole protagonist, for the sake of argument I will suggest that there are good reasons for considering Cleopatra to be the play's protagonist—or, shall we say (ignoring the usual deprecatory sex-designation "heroine"), the hero. Not only does the play culminate in Cleopatra's death scene, but she has (according to the statistical evidence of the Spevack Concordance) more speeches than Antony; indeed, the most in the play (although, giving the lie to the received opinion that women talk too much, her speeches contain fewer total lines than Antony's). But most important, she learns and grows as Antony does not.

A. C. Bradley declares that the play is not a true tragedy because he cannot find the tragic hero's inner struggle in Antony. But Cleopatra has that inner struggle. She struggles against her own artificial theatricality (as Richard II never does): she who so often threatens to die that Enobarbus credits her with a "celerity in dying" (I. ii. 145) finally does truly kill herself. She who in a self-dramatizing gesture had sent word to Antony that she was dead and asked the messenger to "Say that the last I spoke was 'Antony' / And word it, prithee, piteously" (IV. xiii. 8-9), finally really dies with the words "O Antony" on her lips. She struggles against her own inconstancy—the inconstancy that had previously led her to change moods and to change lovers—and approaches death with the words

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My resolution's placed, and I have nothing
Of woman in me: now from head to foot
I am marble-constant: now the fleeting moon
No planet is of mine.
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(V. ii. 238-41)

As Lear learns that he is a man before he is a king, so Cleopatra learns that she is a woman before she is a queen:

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No more but e'en a women, and commanded
By such poor passion as the maid that milks
And does the meanest chares.
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(IV. xv. 76-78)

The composition of *Antony and Cleopatra* followed close upon that of *King Lear*, that great play of self-knowledge. Surely, then, it is no coincidence that while Antony simply fears his own loss of self-knowledge, Cleopatra actually admits to her less-than-admirable actions ("I … do confess I have / Been laden with like frailties which before / Have often shamed our sex" [V. ii. 121-24]) and tries, however late, to change—to "be noble to myself." Surely after watching what Lear was and what Lear became, we should not be too ready to damn what Cleopatra has been while ignoring what she becomes.

Of the critics I have discussed, A. P. Riemer comes the closest to declaring that Cleopatra is the hero of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Rehearsing all the reasons for not considering Antony the hero, he trembles on the verge—and then withdraws, unwilling to take the final step. He tells us that "Her death (and this assumption must be faced squarely) is not offered in any sense as the play's structural culmination…. The play does not share [her] feelings and ideas, and the audience does not participate in [her] emotional state to the extent that it partakes of Hamlet's, Othello's or Lear's emotions at the climactic points of the tragedies in which these characters appear…. It is not possible for us to share her emotions."

I find this statement very odd. Is Cleopatra such an aberrant being that her emotions lie outside the pale of human comprehension? Is her practice of the tawdry old game known as feminine wiles really sufficient to render her forever as mysteriously and darkly inscrutable as male critics suggest? Is it really true that in
contrast to the great universal audience which participates with no difficulty in the emotional state of a man who is troubled by incest, court drinking, the feasibility of revenge, and the authenticity of ghosts, there are no readers and no audiences who can participate in the emotions of a woman who dies thinking of politics, wine, her lover, and her baby?

The persistent idea that Cleopatra cannot be understood, underlying as it does so many of the sexist responses I have discussed, owes much to the notion that women in general are impossible for men to understand. But, pace Dowden and others, one might ask exactly what she does that is so dazzlingly mysterious. True, she engages in unqueenly activities such as hopping forty paces through the public street or wandering about incognito to observe the qualities of people. But then, Hal drinks in taverns and takes part in robberies as prince, and later wanders incognito among troops as king; there is disagreement over his motives, of course, but at least critics assume that he has understandable motives. I cannot recall anyone describing Hal as "quick, shifting, multitudinous, incalculable." And as for feminine wiles, Cleopatra's behavior here, far from being incomprehensible, is so obvious as to be almost crude: having bound herself to performing, not what is unexpected, but what is exactly the opposite of the expected, she has allowed herself no scope for creativity whatsoever. Milton's Satan, by vowing to oppose whatever God initiates, renders himself dependent on God's will; similarly, Shakespeare's Cleopatra, by obliging herself to determine what Antony expects and then to do the opposite, will very soon forfeit the element of surprise in all her actions. "If you find him sad, / Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report / That I am sudden sick"—this is not the statement of a Woman of Mystery: it is a blueprint for action which, for the reader if not for Antony, renders the unpredictable predictable.

Shakespeare has taken pains to let Cleopatra explain her contrary behavior and give the reasons for it (I. iii). He has created a complex but far from inscrutable being. Cleopatra's variety is, at last, finite. In short, Cleopatra needs to be demythologized. What she stands to lose in fascination she stands to gain in humanity.

Cleopatra may or may not be the protagonist of Antony and Cleopatra. At the very least, however, it should now be clear that her part in the play needs to be reassessed with more fairness—without the sexist bias that has so far attended most efforts to come to terms with her, without the assumption that readers and theatregoers will never be able to treat her as anything more than an exotic and decadent puzzle, inaccessible to rational thought, remote from human feeling.

I find it hard to believe that there are no readers and audiences who find it possible to share Cleopatra's emotions, or even simply to concede to Cleopatra the attributes of a human being. It seems, after all, that Shakespeare did.

Further Reading

Presents selected essays divided into three categories: critical reactions to the play before 1900, the play in performance, and twentieth-century criticism of the work.


Discusses plot and use of language in Antony and Cleopatra.


Focuses on the characterization of Cleopatra in relation to Shakespeare's use of language in Antony and Cleopatra.

Discusses Antony and Cleopatra from a historical perspective, evaluating the possible influence of the court of King James I on Shakespeare's composition of the work.


Offers an analysis of Antony and Cleopatra, with an emphasis on elements of ambiguity in the work.


Examines the conclusion of Antony and Cleopatra, maintaining that "[there] is no attempt, as there is in the earlier tragedies, to untangle the confusion of values."


Examines the poetry of Antony and Cleopatra in relation to the play's ambiguous morality and the characters' changing emotions.


Attempts to "trace the path of change in Antony and Cleopatra, giving particular attention to the mythological resonances with which Shakespeare surrounds his tragic figures."


Mason attempts a departure from the standard methods of critical analysis to offers a reading of Antony and Cleopatra informed by his impressions as a viewer of the play.


Focuses on language and action in Antony and Cleopatra, particularly in relation to the characterization of Antony.


Discusses the performance history of the play and presents an overview of recent critical interpretations.


Focuses on the language of Antony and Cleopatra.


Argues that "Shakespeare has set images of solid fixity or speedy directness against images of flux and of motion unpurposive but beautiful to express kinetically the opposition of Rome and Egypt and, through their incompatibility, the nature of Antony's tragic dilemma."
Antony and Cleopatra

Cleopatra is one of the most fascinating women in world history and literature, largely thanks to Shakespeare’s multifaceted characterization of her. Volatile and passionate, impetuous and manipulative, trivial and dignified, she commands not only Mark Antony and Egypt but the audience as well.

The play revolves around their love, yet its focus is political, for its principals are rulers of the world and scenes take place all over the Roman Empire in the 4th century B.C. Cleopatra is the Queen of Egypt; Antony, Octavius Caesar (later Augustus), and Lepidus form the triumvirate ruling the Roman Empire. Caesar and Antony, however, are frequently at odds, especially because Antony spends more time amid the pleasures of Egypt than on the field of battle.

Caesar is a cool, calculating politician, while Antony is more the fiery soldier. Caesar tries to win Antony back from Cleopatra’s spells by having him marry Octavia, his sister, but Cleopatra’s appeal is too strong.

Unfortunately, Cleopatra’s hold over Antony leads to his defeat. Yet their suicides signify a triumph over Caesar, for at least they shall not be his captives. In their deaths, they regain the valiant nobility absent from many of their prior acts.

The play’s perennial conflicts--between reason and passion, politics and personal feelings--can never be resolved. Yet, however far from admirable these characters may sometimes appear, they have a grandeur of personality and magnificence of language that makes the reader or viewer perceive them almost as gods.

Bibliography:


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Traversi, Derek. Shakespeare: The Roman Plays. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1963. In chapter 3 of this classic study, Traversi offers a methodical, analytical commentary on Antony and Cleopatra. Sees the play as a profound work of art that in its spaciousness, episodic form, and morally ambivalent valuations of Rome and Egypt escapes traditional definitions of tragedy.
Antony and Cleopatra (Vol. 47)

Introduction

Antony and Cleopatra

For further information on the critical and stage history of Antony and Cleopatra, see.

Antony and Cleopatra is often analyzed in dialectical terms, with critics positing Egypt in opposition to Rome. Within this framework, Egypt is equated with love and desire, art and imagination, and comedy, while Rome is the locus of politics and power, reason and restraint, and tragedy. These analyses further cite Cleopatra as Egypt's chief representative, and likewise Antony as Rome's, or, in another version, Caesar embodies Rome while Antony stands with a foot in each realm. What such examinations reveal, according to many critics, is that by the end of the play there is no discernible victor in the war between these worlds, and no consensus has been reached as to which philosophy, mindset, or lifestyle Shakespeare advocated. The dialectical approach remains a popular avenue for a number of critics who use it in order to study topics such as the play's treatment of theatricality, issues regarding characterization, the nature and role of love and desire in the play, as well as the play's comic elements.

In studying the way the play explores theatricality and role-playing, critics demonstrate that Egypt is the land of acting, theatrics, and playing. Sidney R. Homan (1970) and Jyotsna Singh (1989) have both commented on the way in which Antony and Cleopatra reflects the ambivalent attitude toward the theater prevalent in Shakespeare's England. Homan has detailed the way the theater is denigrated throughout the play, from the way Cleopatra draws an association between sex and art, and the way the imagination is viewed as fickle, to the Roman detachment of "passion" from "speech." Yet Homan also has argued that theatrical arts are shown, through Cleopatra, to have the power to transform reality. Similarly, Singh has observed how theatricality is celebrated through the figure of Cleopatra and condemned through the Roman resistance to it. Singh has tied this ambiguous portrayal directly to the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century polemical attacks on the theater and women both as duplicitous in nature. Like Singh, Robert Ornstein (1966) has located the play's praise of art and acting in Cleopatra. Ornstein has outlined the tension in the play between the imagery and plot and characterization. The play's imagery and plot, Ornstein has stated, both seem to emphasize the way Cleopatra, through her art and sensuality, manipulates Antony into forgetting his Roman duties. Yet, as Ornstein has observed, Cleopatra's own actions appear to valorize love, imagination, and art as the tools that reveal honesty of emotion and reality. Anthony S. Brennan (1978) has noted as well that to Cleopatra, role-playing is not an act of deception but a means of heightening one's self-knowledge.

Critics discussing the characterization in the play often examine Cleopatra as the embodiment of everything Egyptian, and Antony as a representative of Rome, but one who struggles with the conflict between Roman honor and duty and his attachment to Egypt and Cleopatra. Philip J. Traci (1970) has stated that many critics overemphasize the importance of characterization in Antony and Cleopatra. Commenting that too often the protagonists and minor characters alike are examined out of context, Traci has maintained that it is the interaction between Antony and Cleopatra that should be of primary interest. In an analysis of Antony's character, W. B. Worthen (1986) has studied the relationship between the actor, the role of Antony, and Antony's character. Worthen has emphasized that the way Antony is perceived by the audience is affected by a tension between the way Antony is described by other characters in the play, and the way Antony's own actions reveal his character.

In analyses of the play's treatment of love and desire, Egypt holds claim to these emotions and their power, in contrast to Rome's concern with imperial politics and war. Some critics, such as Linda Charnes (1992), have urged that the play's main concern is not love. Charnes has stated that there is little evidence to suggest that the play was popular in Shakespeare's day, or that it was viewed as anything but a thoroughly political play.
Charnes has maintained that the attention of nineteenth-century Romantics, followed by a pattern of "critical revisionism" has resulted in the play's being read as a "legendary love story." Explaining further, the critic has argued that the play does make use of rhetorical strategies designed to valorize the love shared by Antony and Cleopatra, but that this discourse is undercut by the play's more urgent emphasis on politics. Evelyn Gajowski (1992) has taken another approach to the focus of love in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Gajowski has observed that Cleopatra is often seen either as a manipulative courtesan who lures Antony from his Roman values and political and military duties, or as a superhuman figure, the "archetype" of eternal femininity who offers Antony what Rome can never hope to. These readings, the critic has maintained, fail in that they dehumanize Cleopatra. Gajowski has contended that Cleopatra should be seen as a woman whose love for Antony "ennobles" him in the same manner that Juliet's love elevates Romeo.

When critics review the comic elements in *Antony and Cleopatra*, they often note that Egypt is the realm of comedy, while tragedy reigns in Rome. Barbara C. Vincent (1982) is one such critic. Vincent has traced a movement from the dominance of tragedy to a dominance of comedy at the play's end, noting that despite this shift, *Antony and Cleopatra*’s tragic vision has not been invalidated. Similarly, Martha Tuck Rozett (1985) has discussed the comic aspects at the end of *Antony and Cleopatra* and has compared them to similar features in *Romeo and Juliet*. Rozett has shown how both plays demonstrate elements of comic resolution, but has stressed that Shakespeare was more successful in portraying these elements in *Antony and Cleopatra* than he was in *Romeo and Juliet*. Rozett has observed that although the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra represent "an extraordinary fusion of comedy and tragedy" in that they occur as the inevitable end to the lovers' "folly and self-indulgence," the deaths also symbolize Antony's and Cleopatra's triumph over Caesar and the release from the pressure of obstacles to their love inherent in the world they inhabited.

Overviews

**Harold Fisch (essay date 1970)**


[In the following essay, Fisch argues that the mythic and ritualistic elements in Antony and Cleopatra are more than just components of the dramatic structure of the play, but rather that these elements comprise the play's very subject. Some of the ideas set out in this essay are further elaborated in Harold Fisch, The Biblical Presence in Shakespeare, Milton and Blake: a Comparative Study (Oxford University Press 1999), pp. 35-65.]

I

When critics speak of myth and ritual in Shakespeare they have in mind chiefly the symbolic structure of the plays. Thus *The Winter's Tale* which begins in winter ('a sad tale's best for winter', I, i, 25) and ends in high summer ('not yet on summer's death nor on the birth of trembling winter', IV, iv, 80) perfectly corresponds to the fertility rhythm. The accent on fertility in the sheep-shearing in Act IV gives to the structural form its emotional and spiritual content, whilst the symbolic revival of Hermione at the end rounds off the pattern of death and resurrection so basic to 'the myth of the eternal return'. Such an archetypal structure is older than Christianity (in spite of the Christian colouring) and perhaps older than the conscious memory of man.

In *King Lear* the symbolic structure of the play viewed as myth-ritual is defined by the image of the wheel. Lear speaks of himself as being bound on a wheel of fire (IV, vii, 47); Kent bids Fortune turn her wheel (II, ii, 173); the Fool speaking of the fate of his master bids himself 'let go thy hold when a great wheel runs down a hill' (II, iv, 71); whilst Edmund acknowledges at his death that 'the wheel is come full circle' (V, iii, 174). The circular movement thus intimated has behind it a sense of a cyclical order, the rise and fall of kings ordained as a means of guaranteeing the fertility of the land and the orderly sequence of the seasons. Such imagery, more than it is a statement about Lear as a Nature-god (though he is that too), is a statement about his
predetermined fate, and about the structure of the play in which that fate is projected.

In *Antony and Cleopatra* the myth-ritual pattern is undoubtedly central. But one should add that it is not so much a structural principle (as in *King Lear*) as the actual subject of the play. Shakespeare is dealing directly in this play with a pair of characters who lay claim to mythological status and who at every turn adopt the posture of figures in a fertility ritual. The first such myth pattern is that connected with the names of Mars and Venus.¹ From the first scene the personalities of Antony and Cleopatra are mythologically inflated and presented in terms of the conjunction of the god of war and the goddess of love. Philo in the opening speech of the first scene declares that Antony's eyes 'have glow'd like plated Mars', and Antony's first speeches to Cleopatra introduce an allusion to the goddess Venus:

> Now for the love of Love, and her soft hours

(I,i,44)

—the reference being of course to the 'hours' and 'graces' which wait on the queen of love. It is because they are enacting the archetypal union of the god of war and the goddess of love that they may properly claim:

> Eternity was in our lips, and eyes,
> Bliss in our brows' bent; none our parts so poor,
> But was a race of heaven.

(I, iii, 35-7)

The full miming of this myth-pattern is achieved in Cleopatra's sailing on the Cydnus as described by Enobarbus: 'The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne, / Burn'd on the water' (II, ii, 199-200). The text continues with an explicit reference to Venus:

> For her own person
> It beggar'd all description: she did lie
> In her pavilion—cloth of gold, of tissue—
> O'er picturing that Venus where we see
> The fancy outwork nature.

(lines 205-9)

Plutarch, from whom this detail (like so much else in this speech) is derived, develops the link even further and remarks that Cleopatra's ladies were apparelled 'like theymphes Nereides . . . and like the Graces'; and he continues that on her arrival 'there went a rumor in the peoples mouthes, that the goddesse Venus was come to play with the god Bacchus, for the generali good of all Asia'.² Antony thus combines in himself aspects of both Mars and Bacchus, the god of war as well as the god of wine, Venus having been at various times the consort of both. The whole scene on the Cydnus naturally recalls the most famous scene associated in mythology with the goddess Venus, *viz.*, her riding on a sea-shell wafted by Zephyrs to the foot of mount Cythera. On that occasion she was accompanied by Nereids, Cupids, and Graces. Since she is traditionally produced by the foam of the sea, it is natural that she should thus first appear before Antony. Enobarbus' conclusion confirms once again the supernal, absolute character of her charms. She is not a lovely woman, simply, but the principle of love itself, love, so to speak, carried to the infinite degree. Hence in sober truth it may be stated that

> Age cannot wither her, nor custome stale
> Her infinite variety.
Her changeless, timeless character is also clearly marked in her own speech where she asserts her antiquity, her immortal, fixed and absolute quality:

Think on me,
That am with Phoebus' amorous pinches black,
And wrinkled deep in time.

(I, v, 27-9)

Clearly she is not simply 'Miss Egypt', but the eternal feminine, Tiamat, Venus, Aphrodite. She is as old as the race of man, the source of passion, reproduction, and death.

Now whilst Shakespeare very clearly presents his two main characters in this inflated way, and has them claim all the divine honours, the transcendent status which belongs to them in their mythological capacities, he does so not without considerable irony. We may note here the same dialectical syntax as in Homer or as in Troilus and Cressida where the legendary theme of Helen and Paris becomes a subject for barrack-room jokes ('all the argument is a cuckold and a whore'). In the conversation of Agrippa and Enobarbus following the Cydnus passage we have the same deflating tendency. 'Royal wench' Agrippa calls her, whilst Enobarbus with as little sense of awe before the power of the queen of love describes how he once saw her 'hop forty paces through the public street'. Cleopatra's own servants also tend to burlesque the mythological theme:

Cleopatra. Hast thou affections?
Mardian. Yes, gracious madam.
Cleopatra. Indeed?
Mardian. Not in deed, madam, for I can do nothing
But what indeed is honest to be done:
Yet have I fierce affections, and think
What Venus did with Mars.

(I, v, 12-18)

To think of the eunuch aping in his imagination the deeds of Mars and Venus produces the inevitable comic reaction at the expense of the whole mythological construction on which the personalities of the main characters are based.

The Mars-Venus theme is, however, not carried through to the end, and instead, the two main characters merge into another mythological grouping of much greater significance for Shakespeare's purpose, namely the Isis-Osiris-Set triangle with Cleopatra functioning as Isis, goddess of nature and fertility, and Antony as Osiris, the dying Sun-god who is resurrected in eternity. Octavius Caesar seems in some sense to function as Set (or Typhon) the brother of Osiris who seeks to replace him with Isis, only to be thwarted by Isis who gathers the mangled remains of Osiris together and thus guarantees that he becomes immortal and reigns as king of the underworld. The blending of the two groups together—Venus-Mars-Bacchus and Isis-Osiris-Set is no accident, since Osiris has a close connection with Dionysus (Bacchus) being also the god of wine, and Isis is the ultimate goddess from whom all the lesser deities including Aphrodite (Venus) are derived. Typhon again is a war-god like Ares (Mars). Shakespeare could have gathered his knowledge of the myth from a number of sources. It seems natural to suppose that he drew on Plutarch's Of Isis and Osiris (still to this day...
the chief source of our information on the subject) since he had made use of Plutarch's *Lives* as the chief
source for the play as a whole, and Philemon Holland had translated a version of this in 1603. He could also
have read an account of the appearance of Isis and Osiris in Spenser. But a particularly tempting possibility is
that he had read all about the goddess Isis in Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* which had reached four editions in the
English translation of Adlington by the end of the sixteenth century. It is perhaps worth quoting the epiphany
of the goddess as experienced by Lucius in his dream at the end of the book. Since Isis is the moon- and
sea-goddess—just as Osiris is the Sun—it is natural that she should reveal herself to Lucius as he lies on the
beach in the light of the full moon, and that her garment should be stuck with fiery stars, with—in the
middle—a full moon. It should also be noted that on the boat-like vessel which she holds in her hand 'an asp
lifted up his head with a wide-swelling throat'. The association with Cleopatra is arresting. But the account of
the goddess's claims are more to our present purpose:

Behold, Lucius, I am come; thy weeping and prayer hath moved me to succour thee. I am she
that is the natural mother of all things, mistress and governess of all the elements, the initial
progeny of worlds, chief of the powers divine, queen of all that are in hell, the principal of
them that dwell in heaven, manifested alone and under one form of all the gods and
goddesses. At my will the planets of the sky, the wholesome winds of the seas, and the
lamentable silences of hell be disposed . . . For the Phrygians that are the first of all men call
me the Mother of the gods of Pessinus; the Athenians, which are sprung from their own soil,
Cecropian Minerva; the Cyprians, which are girt about by the sea, Paphian Venus; the
Cretans, which bear arrows, Dictynnian Diana; the Sicilians, which speak three tongues,
infernal Proserpine . . . and the Egyptians . . . do call me by my true name, Queen Isis.5

Isis is no ordinary goddess. She is in fact the ultimate matrix of nature. She represents what Leslie Fiedler has
called 'the huge, warm, enveloping darkness of unconscious life'.6 But as well as her universal aspect she also
has a distinct local connection with the Nile waters, the slimy, fertile ooze which through the annual rise and
fall of the Nile guarantees life and sustenance to man and beast.

Shakespeare shows himself profoundly conscious of the full implications of the Isis-Osiris myth, and modern
students of mythology could, if they were wise, learn of it in both depth and detail from this play. In Act III,
scene vi, we are told that in the division of the middle east between their progeny, Cleopatra and Antony had
been enthroned in chairs of gold, she enacting the part of the goddess Isis:

she
In the habiliments of the goddess Isis
That day appeared.

(lines 16-18)

Cleopatra's monument in which the latter part of the play takes place was (according to Plutarch) 'set up by the
temple of Isis', and Shakespeare shows himself aware of the ritual framework. Antony's ritual death has all the
slow elaborate ceremonial we would expect. His connection with the Sun is made clear. As he arrives in the
monument, Cleopatra declares

O sun,
Burn the great sphere thou mov'st in, darkling stand
The varying shore o' the world.

(IV, xiii, 9-11)

And again:
His face was as the heavens, and therein stuck
A sun and moon, which kept their course, and lighted
The little O, the earth.

(V, ii, 79-81)

Mythological enlargement could not be more emphatic. She herself speaks of her own connection with the moon:

Now the fleeting moon
No planet is of mine.

(V ii, 239-40)

And Antony had spoken earlier of her unflatteringly as Our terrene moon' (III, xi, 153).

But all this is of minor interest compared with the vividness of Shakespeare's evocation of the principles of death and fertility as personified by Cleopatra, a conjunction closely tied in with the image of the Nile waters. She is the 'serpent of old Nile' (I, V, 25), and she swears by 'the fire/That quickens Nilus' slime' (I, iii, 68-9), the verb suggesting fertile life but also a swarming and insalubrious abundance, breeding produced by putrefaction. A later speech imaginatively stresses the link between death, putrefaction and fertility:

Rather a ditch in Egypt
Be gentle grave unto me, rather on Nilus' mud
Lay me stark-nak'd, and let the water-flies
Blow me into abhorring.

(V, ii, 57-60)

The vivid sexuality of the image ('lay me stark nak'd') binds together its various components. Cleopatra joins in mythic union the principle of love and death: she represents the Liebestod, the downward drag of nature into unconsciousness and death. And this is entirely in keeping with her archetypal character: Enobarbus humorously remarks at the beginning of the play:

I do think there is mettle in death, which commits some loving act upon her, she hath such a celerity in dying

(I, ii, 152-4)

—whilst she herself testifies at the end to the same phenomenon:

The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch,
Which hurts and is desir'd.

(V, ii, 297-8)

We recall that among the other personae of Isis (according to Apuleius) is the goddess Proserpine, and she is the bride of death ruling with him in the underworld. For Antony too death is 'a lover's bed' (IV, xii, 101). Modern psychologists would have no difficulty in identifying here the archetypal link between the libido and the death-wish which is so central for Shakespearian tragedy as a whole.
But death is only one side of the coin: the other and sunnier side is immortality. For it is the peculiar achievement of the ancient Egyptians that they managed to swallow death in immortality. Osiris is a dying god who dies into eternity. And here at the climax of the play Shakespeare celebrates not so much the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra as their translation into immortal life. Antony himself declares:

I come my queen . . . stay for me,
Where souls do couch on flowers.

(IV, xii, 50-1)

At the very heart of the Osiris legend is this notion of immortality, the mumified remains of the dead man living on eternally in 'the field of peace'. Shakespeare had somehow penetrated into this region of ancient belief; creating for us in the last act of the play a dramatic realization of the active attainment of immortality. It is achieved especially in the speeches of Cleopatra as she mourns over the mutilated Antony-Osiris, in this re-enacting perfectly the classic pose of Isis whose long lament over the dead Osiris is recorded by Plutarch. Behind all this we hear the echo of the lament for all the dead and rising gods, Adonis, Tammuz, and the rest. But here the accent is more especially on the revival of the dead hero. Shakespeare presents in the fifth act a ritual of apotheosis in which Antony and Cleopatra in the most ceremonial fashion put off mortality and announce their union as god and goddess eternally united in the field of peace. She performs a ritual marriage between herself and the dead Antony which is going to be consummated in the afterworld:

Give me my robe, put on my crown, I have
Immortal longings in me . . .
Husband I come:
Now to that name, my courage prove my title!
I am fire, and air; my other elements
I give to baser life.

(V, ii, 281-3; 289-92)

It is an amazing piece of virtuosity, this latter-day dramatization of the most primitive and powerful of fertility myths; the one which holds within itself the key to the entire system of nature religion, linking the inner drives of flesh with the varying seasons of the world, and seeking by ritual and by magic ceremonies to overcome the most dreadful of all terrors—death itself, and convert it into love and sweetness, uniting the most disgusting of its aspects with the most alluring dream of which man is capable, viz., the dream of eternal life.

But Shakespeare is no innocent and ingenuous worshipper of nature and fertility. He holds the entire archetypal pattern in his hand; he displays it to us; he penetrates to its inner heart, but there is no final identification either between us and the displayed forms, or between the author and his characters in their mythic personalities. There is a tonal distance. It is enough to quote Frazer's account of the manner in which the ancient Egyptians received the death of Osiris to realize how far away from such simple beliefs the play of Shakespeare takes us:

In pity for her [Isis'] sorrow the sun-god Ra sent down from heaven the jackal-headed god Anubis, who, with the aid of Isis and Nephthys, of Thoth and Horus, pieced together the broken body of the murdered god, swathed it in linen bandages, and observed all the other rites which the Egyptians were wont to perform over the bodies of the departed. Then Isis fanned the cold clay with her wings: Osiris revived, and thenceforth reigned as king over the dead in the other world. There he bore the titles of Lord of the Underworld, Lord of Eternity, Ruler of the Dead.7

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Shakespeare by contrast presents the whole apotheosis of Antony and Cleopatra within a framework of irony.

II

The entry of the Clown with his basket of figs in Act V, ii and the subsequent conversation in vulgar realistic prose between him and Cleopatra represents more than a comic deflation of the whole mythic hyperbole on which much of the play is based: it brings a Biblical realism vigorously to bear on the dream-world of Paganism. The Clown functions like Edgar the bedlam-beggar in King Lear, or like the Porter in Macbeth, or like the Gravediggers in Hamlet. And like the Gravediggers he makes death real, showing it to us in a handful of dust. His opening words parody the Egyptian myth of immortality in the fields of peace—that Shangri-la escape from the absoluteness of human responsibility—which forms the very essence of the Isis-Osiris legend:

Cleopatra. Hast thou the pretty worm of Nilus there,
That kills and pains not?

Clown. Truly I have him: but I would not be the party that should desire you to touch him, for his biting is immortal: those that do die of it, do seldom or never recover.

The finality of death as in the Old Testament ('shall the dust praise thee?') is here given a comic form—'those that do die of it do seldom or never recover'; and in the phrase 'his biting is immortal' the whole notion of immortality is beheld in the perspective of irony. It is the death-bringing worm which becomes immortal. We are reminded of Isaiah 66:

And they shall go forth and look upon the carcases of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die.8

But this is not the only Biblical locus which the Clown's immortal worm recalls to us. It is also the serpent of Eve in the garden of Eden: he tells us that he knew of an honest woman 'but something given to lie . . . how' she died of the biting of it, what pain she felt. And he goes on—

truly she makes a very good report o' the worm: but he that will believe all that they say, shall never be saved by half that they do: but this is most falliable, the worm's an odd worm.

The man who believed what the woman said of the serpent (worm) but could not be saved by what she had done is of course Adam; just as Cleopatra is Eve, no longer the eternal feminine principle of fertility, goddess of love and nature, but the erring female who leads man into sin and consequently forfeits the gift of immortality. Even the fig-leaves fit into place in the new pattern. There is a reversal of values, a sudden refocusing of the whole dream within an archetypal frame entirely different from that which the Isis-Osiris-Set legend had provided. Here man is tested and found wanting within the limits of his brief span of three-score years and ten. Those who die of the worm—that is to say, the whole race of man—do seldom or never recover. A cold, sharp, but morally bracing wind of realism blows through this dialogue. At the end we have Cleopatra reduced to size; she is indeed 'no more but e'en a woman' (IV, xiii, 73)—a woman who might have been 'a dish for the gods' but who has been unfortunately marred by the devil. Here the worm (the serpent of Eve) has been—as in the standard Christian exegesis—enlarged into the devil. He has become the undying worm who preys on mortal man and woman. The whole ritual of apotheosis on which the latter part of the play is based is hereby exploded, and the hero and heroine become, for the moment, actors in the Judeo-Christian drama of salvation and damnation.

III
But the dialectical syntax is not provided just by this intrusion of Christian terminology in the speech of the Clown: it is there throughout in the juxtaposition of the Roman and Egyptian worlds. Both sides of the plot are Pagan: both the Egyptians and the Romans pursue a mythical grandeur, a cosmic delusion. In the one it is the delusion of an immortal feast of love, in the other, of an immortal feast of power. But there is a sharp distinction in ethical and dramatic content. The one world is timeless, the other is governed by the inexorabilities of time—it is time-ridden. In Egypt, Antony's honour's 'prorogued . . . Even till a Lethe'd dulness' (II, i, 26-7). Cleopatra seeks escape from time; she proposes to 'sleep out this great gap of time/My Antony is away' (I, V, 5-6). Her time is biological; it is the time of Nature; birth, copulation, and death. There is no advance. Lepidus, by contrast, expresses the urgency which characterizes the Roman sense of existence in his words on the forthcoming confrontation with Pompey:

    Time calls upon's.
    Of us must Pompey presently be sought,
    Or else he seeks out us.

(II, ii, 164-6)

And in the race for Mount Misenum between Lepidus and Maecenas there is the careful synchronization of watches that we associate with Roman life. (We recall that Shakespeare's feeling for the Roman obsession with time had led him to his famous anachronism in Julius Caesar II, ii.) After peace is made between Pompey and the triumvirate, Menas makes his infamous proposition: he offers to kill Pompey's enemies now that they are in his power. Pompey's reply is that he is already too late:

    Ah this thou shouldst have done,
    And not have spoken on't.

(II, vii, 80-1)

Caesar has the same sense of opportunity: he too like Pompey has his finger on the trigger. At Actium he declares that 'our fortune lies/Upon this jump' (III, viii, 5-6). Against the indolence, the drunkenness, and the sleepiness of the Egyptian world (shared paradoxically by the Romans in their Bacchanalian revels on Pompey's barge) there is the pressure set up by the need to act in the heat, the sense of a world in constant motion. It was a Roman poet who wrote 'Carpe diem', a love ditty composed by a man with one eye on the clock.

And behind this sense of the passage of time, its inexorability and quality of challenge, there is an awareness of the vaster historical process by which human life is governed. Caesar urging his active star at Misenum, at Actium, and in Egypt, is obeying a force mightier than himself: thus he knows no rest:

    Caesar through Syria
    Intends his journey, and within three days
    You with your children will he send before:
    Make your best use of this.

(V, ii, 199-202)

Against this plan of world-conquest, the life and death of Cleopatra becomes almost an incident, sad, diverting, and remarkable, but hardly more than an incident. The world moves on, as it must, towards the 'time of universal peace' of which Octavius speaks in Act IV, vi, recalling to us Virgil's vision of the ages of the world in the fourth Eclogue. The drama of universal history sets up its rhythm in the play, and the ritual enactments of Isis and Osiris in their temporary incarnations as Cleopatra and Antony are accordingly
diminished in size and significance. Their own tragedy observes the mythic unity of place; it is confined to one corner of Egypt: but the play as a whole, as is notorious, bursts the last fetters of classical restraint. The structure of the play does not mirror the 'myth of the eternal return'. In fact it is its opposite. The play lacks the rounded form, the satisfying, self-completed, cyclical rhythm of ancient tragedy which we still respond to in *King Lear* with its controlling image of the wheel of Fortune. Here in *Antony and Cleopatra* time and place extend so as to enclose the theme of universal history as it unfolds itself in power upon the vast amphitheatre of the world. The closed myth-world of tragedy is exploded, for the theme of world history has taken its place. And in this new epic context the mimic apotheosis of the two lovers shrinks to a little measure.

**IV**

This is the phenomenological paradox of the play, and on the whole Shakespeare is content to leave us (as he does in the other Roman plays) with the paradoxes unresolved, and with a sense of mutually contradictory value-systems. And yet there is in the final act of *Antony and Cleopatra* a hint of resolution. As Cleopatra takes the centre of the stage for her final exit she is not only herself rehabilitated in a characteristically Shakespearian fashion, but the world of mythology is rehabilitated too. And this is achieved paradoxically through an injection of Roman 'virtue'. She chooses to die 'after the high Roman fashion'; and she chooses to conceive of her relationship to Antony under the Roman figure of marriage. The marriage between Antony and Octavia in Act II had been a marriage of convenience, another example of the Romans knowing how to seize opportunities and bend them to their will. Yet it had been weighted with moral responsibility, with a sense of the need to further the ends of an historical programme. This had charged it with an almost religious character: it had become an 'act of grace'.

Let me have thy hand.  
Further this act of grace: and from this hour,  
The heart of brothers govern in our loves,  
And sway our great designs.

(II, ii, 152-5)

But the words sound hollowly. The great designs are convincing, impressive, and real, but the brotherly love is not. The Romans lacked the affective content. They had discovered history, but they had failed to discover the individual spiritual force, the quality of human participation, which should give it meaning. They had no notion of dialogue. Cleopatra on the other hand knows what it is to love and be loved: in her relationship with Antony, and especially towards the close of the play, she glimpses a reality which raises man beyond the 'dull world':

Noblest of men, woo't die?  
Hast thou no care of me, shall I abide  
In this dull world, which in thy absence is  
No better than a sty?

(IV, xiii, 59-62)

These words would not have fallen from Roman lips, not even from Antony's. They point to love as a transcendent reality discovered within human relationships. Such love transcends the value-system of Romanism, but it equally transcends the Egyptian myth-world; for within the Isis-Osiris pattern proper there is no room for the marriage of true minds, but only for fertility and death. And yet it is in the notion of a marriage that this new-found transcendence finds its place in the last speech of Cleopatra:
Husband I come:
Now to that name, my courage prove my title.

(V, ii, 289-90)

Mr John Holloway points out that the two lovers in this play always seem to require an audience: when declaring their love to one another they desire to be the cynosure of all eyes. This I would suggest is closely bound up with the ritual character of those appearances: they function in a fertility ceremony in which all are vitally concerned. But here at the end, it is surely the private character of the relationship which is uppermost. Cleopatra is withdrawing into that private mysterious world where only the still small voice of true love will be heard. She will deny Octavius his triumph: and she wishes for no more public appearances either of love or state in this 'vile world'.

Cleopatra's death is in one sense a ritual apotheosis: in another sense, it is a deserved punishment for a sinful life (this is the motif stressed in the conversation with the Clown): and in a third sense it is a marriage ceremony, in which Cleopatra rises above her conquerors showing them in the ceremony of love the true human dimension that they had missed. The final words of Caesar underline the religious solemnity of Cleopatra's death:

but she looks like sleep,
As she would catch another Antony
In her strong toil of grace.

(V, ii, 347-9)

The word 'grace' has now a multiplicity of meaning: it suggests the irresistible beauty of Cleopatra, as goddess of love; but it also carries a suggestion of a heavenly and transcendent virtue.

At this level we may look upon the deaths of the two chief characters not as an event which climaxes a fertility ritual, but as an event which brings the whole orgiastic world of Paganism to an end. It also brings to an end the sterile, world-conquering inhuman conception of time and history which the Romans had achieved, a history which had no room for salvation. If the Romans understood that history drives us on, if they felt its inexorable stress, its purposive direction, they had no means of discovering what that purpose was, to what end the labouring soul of man was striving. The final speeches of Cleopatra suggest not the meeting of Mars and Venus nor of Isis and Osiris, but rather of Cupid and Psyche—'latest born and loveliest vision far/Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy'. And at this point where the soul is born and its grace is discovered, Paganism transcends itself and glimpses those permanent and fundamental relations of love which give meaning not only to all human marriages but to the vast and seemingly impersonal march of history itself.

Notes

1 On this aspect, see Raymond B. Waddington, 'Antony and Cleopatra: What Venus did with Mars', Shakespeare Studies, II (1966), 210-27, who also points out the link between Antony and his ancestor, Hercules (p. 216).


3 The link with Isis as a more than casual feature of Cleopatra's personality was proposed by the eighteenth-century editors Capell and Warburton. (See M. R. Ridley (ed.), Antony and Cleopatra (London, 1954), notes to III, xiii, 153 and V, ii, 239.) It is surprising that present-day scholars have not shown more interest in this suggestion. But see M. Lloyd, 'Cleopatra as Isis', Shakespeare Survey 12 (Cambridge, 1959),
pp. 88-94.

4 Cf. Spenser's description of the priests of Isis, *Faerie Queene*, V, vii:

They wore rich Mitres shaped like the Moone,
To shew that *Isis* doth the Moone portend;
Like as *Osyris* signifies the Sunne.

Antony is also connected in the play with the sun-god Phoebus-Apollo. Cf. S. L. Bethell, *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition* (London, 1944), p. 127: "Deep in time" gives her an infinite age: it does not suggest an old woman, but an immortal . . . she is an immortal lover of the sun-god, of Phoebus-Apollo.


8 And see also Mark ix. 44 f.


**Janet Adelman (essay date 1973)**


[In the essay below, Adelman maintains that the action of Antony and Cleopatra centers around the characters' attempts to understand themselves and each other, and that the basis for the play's dramatic structure rests more upon the characters' interpretations of actions and events than it does on the actions and events themselves.]

The critical history of *Antony and Cleopatra* can be seen largely as a series of attempts to assess the motives of the protagonists and to arbitrate between the claims of Egypt and Rome. But this search for certainty often encounters the stumbling block of the play itself: at almost every turn, there are significant lapses in our knowledge of the inner state of the principal characters; and we cannot judge what we do not know. The characters themselves continually tell us that they do not know one another, that their judgments are fallible. Nor can we attribute the critics' persistent search for answers merely to their stubbornness: for the play demands that we make judgments even as it frustrates our ability to judge rationally. This frustration is not an end in itself: it forces us to participate in the experience of the play and ultimately to make the same leap of faith that the lovers make. In this sense, our uncertainty is an essential feature of the play.

The moral of recent Shakespeare criticism may be that any tragedy studied long enough reveals that it deliberately provokes uncertainty; and in fact, there are some mysteries of plot, motivation, value, and
judgment in all of them. But in other plays, we are usually certain of a few central facts; and we usually have our moral bearings. Despite our doubts about the ghost, we know that Claudius killed old Hamlet. We may question the value of vengeance or of any action in a corrupt state, but our questioning does not usually shake our conviction that the state must be set right. Despite the foolish irascibility of the old king or the foolish credulity of the Moor, we know who is right in King Lear or Othello; despite Macbeth's eloquent grandeur, we are morally satisfied when he is killed by Macduff. But no such satisfaction awaits us in Antony and Cleopatra, where both the presentation of character and the dramatic structure work to frustrate our reasonable desire for certainty. Certainty, even of a limited kind, seems essential to the tragic experience. But Antony and Cleopatra is only partly tragic; or at least the tragic vision is subject to the same questioning as everything else in the play.

Character and Knowledge

Not know me yet?

[3.13.157]

Although the play continually raises questions about motives, it simply does not give any clear answers to them. Almost every major action in the play is in some degree inexplicable. Why did Antony marry Octavia if he planned to return to Cleopatra? Was Octavius ruthless or merely blind in his plan to marry his sister to Antony? Does Antony return to the East for love of Cleopatra or because his spirit is overpowered when he is near Octavius? As the play progresses, the questions accumulate around Cleopatra; and they become more urgent. Is Cleopatra merely exercising her powers over Thidias for the sake of the game, or does she really hope to woo Octavius through him? Is her scene with Seleucus a cunningly staged device to convince Octavius that she has no desire to die, or does she in fact have hopes of a future life without Antony in which some lady trifles will be useful? Even the most critical action in the plot goes unexplained: Antony has won a victory against Octavius and regained the loyalty of his own men (a victory greatly magnified in importance from the account in Plutarch); but in the next encounter, his fleet yields to Octavius and his defeat is certain. Did the ships join with Octavius under Cleopatra's orders, as Antony assumes? If not, then who is responsible for this final betrayal of Antony? These questions are not all equally unanswerable; and our preferences and critical ingenuity will usually combine with the text of the play to produce satisfactory answers to most of them. But most of the time the answers will satisfy only ourselves. I for one am as unwilling to imagine a fundamentally disloyal Cleopatra as the most romantic critic and will argue for the best possible interpretation of her actions; but the fact is that the play will support the arguments of my opponents almost as readily as mine. We simply are not told the motives of the protagonists at the most critical points in the action.

Shakespeare was not accustomed to leaving his audience entirely in the dark on central issues in his tragedies. We may not know why Lear chooses to divide his kingdom so arbitrarily; but once we have accepted the initial situation, we are given frequent insights into his mind through his own soliloquies and asides and through a technique of projection called "umbrella speeches" by Maynard Mack, in which the fool, for instance, serves "as a screen on which Shakespeare flashes, as it were, readings from the psychic life of the protagonists." But in Antony and Cleopatra, the only major soliloquy is Enobarbus'; and the asides are almost exclusively the property of the minor characters. Antony does tell us in soliloquy of his determination to return to the East (2.3) and of his rage and love for Cleopatra (4.12; 4.14); but these speeches are by no means the meditations on his own inner state which we associate with soliloquy in the major tragedies. Moreover, the "umbrella speeches" and speeches by other characters which seem to reflect the state of the protagonists accurately often turn out upon examination to be wrong. No play in which the characters remain so essentially opaque to each other and to the audience can satisfy us in the way of Macbeth—in the way, that is, of character revelation and moral certainty.
There are, of course, moments at which the characters are opaque in the other tragedies, but these mysteries are, I think, of a slightly different order. Generations of critics have argued, for instance, about why Hamlet does not kill the king while he is praying. Is it really because he does not want to send Claudius's soul to heaven, or must we look deeper into Hamlet's character toward those philosophic or psychoanalytic scruples which keep him from action altogether? We must note that Hamlet himself gives us a perfectly good reason for not killing Claudius praying: that heaven is no recompense for hell. Although we may choose (at our peril) to disbelieve his reason, it is at any rate evident that Hamlet believes it. Moreover, we are informed at this critical moment of the process of Hamlet's mind: although we may feel that we have not been told the whole truth, at least the illusion of insight into Hamlet's motivation has been given by the soliloquy. If an aura of mystery persists nonetheless, it is perhaps because the literary figure in this instance creates so absolute an illusion of reality that he breeds all the mysteries of character which we find in real life. The sense of opaqueness comes more from the success of the illusion than from any failure to explicate character: Shakespeare gives us insight into Hamlet's inner state at virtually every turn in the play.

A fully realized character like Hamlet will necessarily appear mysterious at some moments precisely insofar as he is fully realized; a relatively unrealized character like Iago will engender mysteries of another sort. Iago's frequent soliloquies reveal his motives and his machinations: Cassio has got the job he wanted; he suspects both Cassio and Othello of cuckolding him; and the daily beauty of Cassio's life makes his own ugly. But the more motives Iago gives us, the less likely they seem as explanations of his actions. His motives do not seem equal to the deed, nor can they account for that fundamental hatred of life and love of contrivance which rule him. "I hate the Moor," he says, and then explicitly denies that he hates him for any particular reason:

And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets  
He's done my office; I know not if t be true . . .  
Yet I, for mere suspicion in that kind,  
Will do, as if for surety.

[1.3.385-88]

We are not here fundamentally concerned with Iago's character; mere ordinary human motivation is serving as the excuse for some more essential hatred which it surely could not have caused. Our impression, despite the soliloquies and their revelation of motivation, is not that the byways of Iago's character have been revealed to us but rather that essential evil of Iago's sort is a self-perpetuating, self-aggrandizing, and finally self-annihilating machine to which motivation is almost wholly irrelevant after the initial move is made. We become more interested in watching the diabolical principle at work in a human being than in the character of Iago per se and his inconsistent motivation. It is with a similar disinterest in the intricacies of character that we watch the redemptive principle working through Cordelia. Figures like Iago or Cordelia tend to function less as fully realized characters than as embodiments of moral principles. And in proportion as they are less fully human than Hamlet, as they are more purely symbolic, we are less interested in their inner states. They can afford to be opaque because we are not fundamentally interested in them as characters: mysteries of motivation simply evaporate insofar as they take their places as parts of a symbolic action.

But in Antony and Cleopatra, the protagonists neither reveal their motives to us nor are they content merely to take their places in a symbolic action. They create the same sort of illusion of reality that Hamlet creates but do not give us even the partial insights into their souls that Hamlet gives. We are forced to concern ourselves with their characters as we are not with Iago's or Cordelia's; and yet their characters remain opaque. True, a desire to understand character in the play may be dismissed by some modern critics as naïve; and there is little question that Antony and Cleopatra becomes a more unified and explicable whole if it is read as a lyric poem or an allegory to which questions of character are largely irrelevant. But we may not be able to believe entirely in the play-as-lyric-poem of Knight and Knights or in the character-as-a-bundle-of-stage-conventions.
of Schücking and Stoll or in the character-as-symbol of Bethell; or at least these theories may not be able to explain away character altogether. However convincing they are in part, they do not quite allay the nagging suspicion that the illusion of character is in some measure relevant to drama, and particularly to this one. Critics have persisted in trying to find answers to the questions of motivation and emotion in *Antony and Cleopatra*; and though questions of character may occasionally be irrelevant, this critical persistence suggests that they are not irrelevant here. If the same questions are continually asked, then I think we must conclude that the questions have been elicited by the play; the search is interminable not because the questions are wrong but because the answers are not given.

To explain character away, and with it the unanswerable questions, is in this instance to explain the play away: for the whole play can be seen as a series of attempts on the parts of the characters to understand and judge each other and themselves. We see Cleopatra dallying with Thidias in act 3, scene 13: Enobarbus thinks he sees Cleopatra betraying Antony and transferring her allegiance to Caesar; Antony thinks he sees the operations of lascivious habit. What have they seen? Do we watch a cunning queen outfox a wily politician in the scene with Seleucus, or a servant betray his mistress? This uncertainty is apparent not only in the critical moments of the play (did Cleopatra's ships join Caesar's on her orders?) but during numerous small scenes. And we are as baffled as the characters; like them, we see only the bare event and are left to speculate upon its meaning.

Throughout the play, the characters themselves question its meaning for us; the questioning is so habitual that it occurs explicitly even in those relatively minor scenes where the meaning does not seem to be at issue. When the soothsayer tells Charmian that she shall be far fairer than she is, the two women debate his meaning:

*Char.* He means in flesh.

*Iras.* No, you shall paint when you are old.

[1.2.17-18]

Their debate is poignant because neither can guess the true meaning of his prophecies. The question of meaning is most explicitly raised in the small scene in which Antony bids his servants farewell; there it is raised four times in thirty-five lines. We would expect Cleopatra to know Antony as well as anyone; yet she asks Enobarbus, "What means this?" (4.2.13) and, ten lines later, "What does he mean?" Enobarbus then asks Antony directly: "What mean you, sir, / To give them this discomfort?" (lines 33-34). Antony immediately denies that he meant his words as Enobarbus and the servants have taken them:

*Ho, ho, ho!*
*Now the witch take me, if I meant it thus!*
*Grace grow where those drops fall, my hearty friends;*
*You take me in too dolorous a sense,*
*For I spake to you for your comfort.*

[4.2.36-40]

Antony's attempt to console his followers by rearranging his meaning explicitly raises the issue of interpretation; even here, we are faced with one of the central dilemmas of the play. Virtually the only way out of this dilemma is the way that Antony takes at the end of the scene, when he in effect plays Horatio to his own Hamlet: "Let's to supper, come, / And drown consideration" (lines 44-45). In the scene which follows immediately, we are shown another farewell embedded in controversy:
Sec. Sold. Heard you of nothing strange about the streets?

First Sold. Nothing: what news?

Sec. Sold. Belike 'tis but a rumour.

[4.3.3-5]

The rumor is of course instantly verified: the music of Hercules departing is heard and debated.

Fourth Sold. It signs well, does it not?

Third Sold. No.

First Sold. Peace, I say: What should this mean?

Sec. Sold. 'Tis the god Hercules, whom Antony lov'd, Now leaves him.

[4.3.13-16]

Nothing goes unquestioned in this play. In most literature there is a convention that character is knowable as it rarely is in life, that characters act in accordance with certain constant, recognizable, and explicable principles which we and they can know. This convention does not operate in Antony and Cleopatra. There the characters do not know each other, nor can we know them, any more clearly than we know ourselves. In the midst of Antony's rage against Cleopatra and Thidias, Cleopatra asks him, "Not know me yet?" (3.12.157). Antony can scarcely be blamed for not knowing Cleopatra; the question stands as central to the play. From Cleopatra's "If it be love indeed, tell me how much" (1.1.14) to the First Guardsman's "Is this well done?" (5.2.324), questions of motive, of value, and of the truth of the emotions are insistently raised. Emotions are unreliable and constantly changing; characters question their own emotions as well as those of others. From the beginning we see Cleopatra stage emotions for Antony's benefit ("If you find him sad, / Say I am dancing" 1.3.3-4; "I am sick, and sullen" 1.3.13). She accuses Antony of playacting his rage ("You can do better yet; but this is meely" 1.3.81). We know that Antony "married but his occasion" (2.6.128) in marrying Octavia, for he himself tells us, "I make this marriage for my peace" (2.3.38). But what of Fulvia? "Why did he marry Fulvia, and not love her?" (1.1.41). Even Antony muses on his inconstant emotions: "she's good, being gone, / The hand could pluck her back that shov'd her on" (1.2.123-24). Is Antony's emotion love indeed? Cleopatra asks, "Why should I think you can be mine and true . . . / Who have been false to Fulvia?" (1.3.27-29). Why indeed? Antony thinks Cleopatra's passions are feigned: "She is cunning past man's thought" (1.2.143). But Enobarbus answers that "her passions are made of nothing but the finest parts of pure love" (1.2.144-45); and whatever his tone of voice, his words at least contradict Antony's. Enobarbus and Agrippa mock Lepidus's protestations of love for both Antony and Caesar (3.2). Cleopatra idly asks, "Did I, Charmian, / Ever love Caesar so?" (1.5.66-67), and is most displeased with Charmian's teasing answer.

The tears wept by Antony's crocodile are characteristic of this persistent questioning of emotion. Cleopatra assumes that Antony will weep crocodile tears for her: "I prithee turn aside and weep for her, / Then bid adieu to me, and say the tears / Belong to Egypt" (1.3.76-78). "The tears live in an onion, that should water this sorrow" (1.2.167-68), Enobarbus says of Fulvia's death; yet even when Enobarbus is genuinely moved by Antony's farewell to his servants, he calls himself "onioney'd" (4.2.35). When Caesar weeps at parting from Octavia, Agrippa recalls Antony's tears:

When Antony found Julius Caesar dead,
He cried almost to roaring; and he wept
When at Philippi he found Brutus slain.

[3.2.54-56]

Characteristically, Enobarbus points the moral:

That year, indeed, he was troubled with a rheum;
What willingly he did confound, he wail'd,
Believe'rtill I wept too.

[3.2.57-59]

Antony's weeping over Brutus recalls his sorrow over Fulvia; in both instances he grieves for what he himself has helped to destroy. The movement is characteristic of the play: we shall see Caesar too weep at what willingly he did confound when Decretas reports Antony's death ("The gods rebuke me, but it is a tidings / To wash the eyes of kings" 5.1.27-28); Agrippa comments upon the inconsistency of the emotion much as Enobarbus and Antony have already commented ("And strange it is, / That nature must compel us to lament / Our most persisted deeds" 5.1.28-30). During Cleopatra's suicide, Charmian asks in effect for cosmic crocodile tears, for the show of cosmic grief: "Dissolve, thick cloud, and rain, that I may say, / The gods themselves do weep!" (5.2.298-99).

The full acknowledgement of all this uncertainty is in Antony's quiet lines, "I made these wars for Egypt, and the queen, / Whose heart I thought I had, for she had mine" (4.14.15-16). Does Antony have her heart? Or does she too discover that Antony is good only when he is gone? In the end, the uncertainty implicates us as well as the characters: we must question Cleopatra's love for Antony as she plans her suicide; Shakespeare's insistence upon her dread of a Roman triumph forces us to question it. But in this play, not even skepticism is a secure position: Enobarbus shows us that. He persistently questions the sincerity of the passions, but when he follows his reason, he dies of a broken heart. At his death, we who have agreed with his rational skepticism are at a loss: skepticism itself is no more reliable than passion. If we are finally convinced of Cleopatra's love—and I think we are—we have had to develop a faith nearly as difficult as Antony's, a faith in what we cannot know.

The Dilemma of Judgment

Though he be painted one way like a Gorgon, The other way's Mars.

[2.5.116-17]

If we are forced to participate in this questioning of emotion, with all its consequences, we are also forced to participate in the act of judgment. The desire to judge and be judged correctly is one of the dominant passions of the play; it is no wonder that the critics have spent so long trying to judge between Rome and Egypt when the characters themselves are so concerned with right judgment. "Is Antony, or we, in fault for this?" (3.13.2), Cleopatra asks after Actium: it is another of those questions which seem central to our experience of the play. Enobarbus answers "Antony only" without hesitation; but he can afford to give this partial judgment because he had already condemned Cleopatra before the fact ("Your presence needs must puzzle Antony" 3.7.10). Antony's desire to die nobly, Cleopatra's dread of a Roman triumph: both are part of this overriding concern with judgment. Throughout the play, we see people making images of themselves, rearranging their own story. Cleopatra virtually stage-manages her death; and Caesar tries to arrange for correct judgment of himself with nearly every word he speaks. When first we see him, he is busily justifying himself to Lepidus ("You may see, Lepidus, and henceforth know, / It is not Caesar's natural vice to hate / Our great competitor" 1.4.1-3). His last words in the play are a judgment on the pity of the lovers' story and inevitably on his own
glory ("their story is / No less in pity than his glory which / Brought them to be lamented" 5.2.359-61). Enobarbus, that inveterate judge of others, dies judging himself as well as Antony:

...O Antony,
   Nobler than my revolt is infamous,
   Forgive me in thine own particular,
   But let the world rank me in register
   A master-leaver, and a fugitive.

[4.9.18-22]

In a sense, the play is a series of conflicting judgments passed on the protagonists, even by the protagonists themselves. In the first scene Antony attempts to "bind, / On pain of punishment, the world to weet / We stand up peerless" (1.1.38-40); but the world is watching, in the form of Demetrius and Philo, and its judgment is quite otherwise. For in this play, no judgment is absolute. If we see Caesar's "old ruffian" (4.1.4), we also see Cleopatra's "man of men" (1.5.72); if we see "salt Cleopatra" (2.1.21), we also see "a lass unparallel'd" (5.2.315). Cleopatra herself calls attention to this conflict in judgments: "Though he be painted one way like a Gorgon, / The other way's a Mars" (2.5.116-17).

Argumentation is the central mode of the play; not even the Romans can agree with one another. The first words of the play are "Nay, but": enter Philo and Demetrius, arguing. We later see Enobarbus and Antony arguing about Cleopatra (1.2) and Caesar and Lepidus arguing about Antony (1.4). The habit of contrariness infects even the watchmen who oversee Enobarbus's death and quibble about whether he is asleep or has swooned. Throughout, one man's meat is another man's poison. There is no room here for a moral scheme which tidily apportions the world according to vices and virtues. In that sense, the basis for judgment is itself continually challenged. Enobarbus says that Cleopatra "did make defect perfection" (2.2.231): "vilest things / Become themselves in her" (2.2.238-39). Even the Romans describe the lovers as creatures beyond the reach of ordinary judgment. Lepidus defends Antony precisely by pointing out his faults:

   I must not think there are
   Evils enow to darken all his goodness:
   His faults, in him, seem as the spots of heaven,
   More fiery by night's blackness.

[1.4.10-13]

A metaphor in which goodness is blackness and faults stars mitigates against the possibility of any simple moral judgment. Caesar himself is willing to grant for the sake of argument that vilest things may become Antony; he answers Lepidus,

   ...say this becomes him,—
   As his composure must be rare indeed
   Whom these things cannot blemish,—yet must Antony
   No way excuse his foils, when we do bear
   So great weight in his lightness.

[1.4.21-25]

And if the lovers' defects may be their perfections, Enobarbus knows that Octavia's perfections may be defects in Antony's judgment (2.6.117-23).
The very process of judging is unreliable: as Cleopatra's image of the perspective painting (2.5.116-17) suggests, judgment depends on where one stands. Pompey is quite certain that he knows the lovers and can judge them; and his judgment seems intended to persuade us that he is right. His great condemnation of the lovers is frequently cited as though it were Shakespeare's own judgment and one which we ought to share.

. . . Mark Antony
In Egypt sits at dinner, and will make
No wars without doors. . . .

. . . but all the charms of love,
Salt Cleopatra, soften thy wan'd lip!
Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both,
Tie up the libertine in a field of feasts,
Keep his brain fuming; Epicurean cooks
Sharpen with cloyless sauce his appetite,
That sleep and feeding may prorogue his honour,
Even till a Lethe'd dulness—

[2.1.11-13, 20-27]

If other characters in disparate situations make the same observations, then we feel that the judgment is corroborated and hence trustworthy. Several elements in Pompey's judgment are in fact verified by the play. Antony himself suggests that Cleopatra is a witch: he has already called her "this enchanting queen" (1.2.125) and will later call her "this false soul of Egypt! this grave charm" (4.12.25). The fair field of feasts which Pompey evokes is described in some detail by Enobarbus in the next scene (2.2.127 ff); also in the next scene Antony admits to Caesar that his brain has occasionally been kept fuming by feasts ("Three kings had I newly feasted, and did want / Of what I was i' the morning" 2.2.76-77). Consequently we must trust Pompey's judgment. Or must we? Pompey might have continued his diatribe forever if he had not been interrupted by a messenger at the very height of it. Pompey's eloquence is so great that too few critics have noticed an important detail: the messenger contradicts absolutely the judgment which Pompey has just delivered.

Pom. Even till a Lethe'd dulness—Enter Varrius
How now, Varrius?

Var. This is most certain, that I shall deliver: Mark Antony is every hour in Rome Expected.

[2.1.27-30]

This is most certain indeed. Pompey's reply is a little weak: "I did not think / This amorous surfeiter would have donn'd his helm" (lines 32-33). But this new piece of information does not cause Pompey to change his fundamental judgment of Antony: he is still "this amorous surfeiter" and "the ne'er-lust-wearied Antony" (line 38) even when the messenger has just belied this judgment. Pompey's judgment asks us simultaneously to believe and disbelieve it: for an audience accustomed to knowing where it stands, this uncertainty is intolerable. And Pompey's judgment is in this sense typical of all judgments in Antony and Cleopatra: each tells us as much about the judge and his perspective as it does about the accused.22

The degree to which we can rely on a character's judgment is often at issue in Shakespeare. Edgar's assessment of events in King Lear is generally undercut by the events themselves, perhaps most vehemently when his blinded father is led in immediately after he has pronounced that "the worst returns to laughter" (4.1.6). At the end of many of the tragedies we are given judgments which are significantly challenged by the play as a whole: we do not, for example, accept Malcolm's "this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen"
(Macbeth 5.9.35) as the whole truth about Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. But in the other tragedies, there are usually some reliable judgments interspersed among those which are clearly partial. When Regan tells us that Lear "hath ever but slenderly known himself" (1.1.292), we accept her judgment, in spite of our distrust of the judge. And despite the occasional inaccuracies of judgment, the analogy of the perspective painting is wholly inappropriate to Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, or Macbeth; its inappropriateness is the measure of the distance between these plays and Antony and Cleopatra. In fact, part of the effect of the tragedies depends precisely on our ability to make moral judgments: that something is rotten in the state of Denmark, that Desdemona is chaste and Iago evil, that Lear is more sinned against than sinning. But in Antony and Cleopatra we frequently find that we can make no judgment at all, or that our judgments are no more reliable than Pompey's.23

Our involvement in the shaky business of judging is essential to the play; and it depends on precisely that uncertainty about the characters which so often frustrates us. We know of Hamlet's or Edgar's designs because they tell us about them. We know when Iago is feigning honesty or Macbeth loyal hospitality; we know precisely to what degree we can rely upon Claudius's or Gloucester's or Othello's or Duncan's judgment of the situation. But we do not always know when Antony and Cleopatra are feigning; and it is essential that we should not know. In order to be engaged in the movement of judgments, in order to see both the validity and the limitations of all perspectives, we must be able to accept each of the various judgments as true at least momentarily. To do so we cannot know substantially more about the protagonists than the characters who judge them know. And it is this movement of perspectives, rather than the revelations of a psychodrama or the certainties of a morality, which is most characteristic of Antony and Cleopatra.

The uncertainty of judgment characteristic of Antony and Cleopatra depends on our ignorance of the inner states of the characters and on their own insistent questioning; but it is also built into the dramatic structure of the play. In one sense, the experience of Antony and Cleopatra is curiously indirect: the play consists of a few actions and almost endless discussion of them.24 Antony is the presumptive hero of the play; when he appears in act 2, scene 2, he has been absent for three scenes during which Caesar, Cleopatra, and Pompey have in their speculations created three distinct Antonys, each to their heart's desire. Which Antony do we know? We never actually see Cleopatra in mythological garb, yet she is twice described in the habiliments of a goddess: Enobarbus reports her appearance as Venus, and Caesar her appearance as Isis. These two reports are strikingly different in attitude; the difference between them suggests two possible perspectives on Cleopatra, and on the quasidivinity sometimes associated with her, far more economically than any dramatic action could. We do not see Antony's return to Egypt: we learn of it only as Octavia does, from the not impartial report of her brother. This insistence upon report and discussion makes us suspect that the actions are unimportant except insofar as they are interpreted; in fact, the dramatic design of Antony and Cleopatra forces us to acknowledge the process of judgment at every turn. When the audience is persistently told one thing and shown another or told two conflicting things, when it sees minor characters speculating about the protagonists almost as often as it sees the protagonists themselves, then its own process of judgment becomes part of the experience of the play. It is the very indirectness of Antony and Cleopatra that insures the direct participation of the audience in it.

The most characteristic dramatic technique in Antony and Cleopatra is the discussion of one group of characters by another. In its purest form, it is strikingly simple: a group of minor characters who are alone on stage discuss an action that is about to take place among the protagonists; the protagonists then appear on stage, act, and disappear; and a group of minor characters, frequently the same as the initial group, are left to discuss the action.25 The scene is thus framed so that the major characters become in effect actors and the minor characters their interpretive audience. This pattern appears with astonishing consistency throughout the play. Occasionally one half of the frame is missing; but in these instances the framing effect is generally achieved by the presence of commentary on the part of the minor characters throughout whatever action is engaging the protagonists. Either partial or complete framing of this sort occurs in no less than twelve scenes; significant elements of this process occur in many more scenes. Act 1, scene 1, is the paradigm for this
structural framing just as it is the paradigm for the varying perspectives of the play. Demetrius and Philo comment on the lovers; the lovers appear and simultaneously substantiate and reveal the limitations of their judges; and they are left to comment once again. Philo's language virtually forces us to see the lovers' appearance as a spectacle or a play within the play, a play with a very specific moral:

Look, where they come:
Take but good note, and you shall see in him
The triple pillar of the world transform'd
Into a strumpet's fool: behold and see.

[1.1.10-13]

In act 2, scene 2, Enobarbus and Lepidus discuss the meeting of Antony and Caesar; the great triumvirs meet and the marriage with Octavia is arranged; and Enobarbus and Maecenas are left to discuss Cleopatra, Octavia, and the proposed union. The concord is a formal spectacle for which the prologue and epilogue provide the appropriate interpretation. The same pattern of formal concord and interpretive discussion is repeated in act 2, scene 6: Pompey, Antony, and Caesar meet and come to terms; Enobarbus and Menas are left to discuss the terms and to prophesy of the union between Antony and Caesar. Pompey's servants discuss the drunkenness of the world leaders before we see them in act 2, scene 7; Enobarbus and Menas stand aside and comment during part of the scene (lines 86-94). In act 3, scene 2, Enobarbus and Agrippa discuss the farewells of Octavia, Caesar, and Antony; we then see the brothers parting while Enobarbus and Agrippa comment on their tears. Act 3, scene 7, is a variation on the pattern: Cleopatra and Enobarbus discuss the effect of Cleopatra's presence on Antony; Antony enters and apparently under Cleopatra's influence informs Canidius that he will fight by sea; Canidius and a soldier are left commenting on Cleopatra's effect on Antony and on the forthcoming battle. The most complex of these scenes is act 3, scene 13, which consists of four separate actions and Enobarbus's commentary on each of them. When the scene opens, Enobarbus and Cleopatra as prologue are discussing Antony's flaw. Antony appears and sends Caesar a challenge to single combat; Antony leaves and Enobarbus comments extensively on his folly. Next, Thidias enters and Cleopatra flirts with him; Enobarbus comments on her disloyalty to Antony. In the third section of the scene, Antony returns, oversees their dalliance, and orders Thidias punished; Enobarbus comments on his rage. Finally, after his rage, Antony is reconciled to Cleopatra and vows to do wondrous deeds in the next battle; Enobarbus comments on that diminution in his captain's brain which has restored his heart. With this final commentary, Enobarbus is again alone on stage, summarizing and judging the entire scene. But in this scene Enobarbus's asides not only function as a commentary on the main action, but become an impetus to action in themselves. In the process of commenting on Antony's folly, Enobarbus begins to judge his own ("The loyalty well held to fools does make / Our faith mere folly" lines 42-43). His commentary and his consequent decision to leave Antony begin to take center stage. His death is the result of this decision; it is fitting that in his death scene the constant commentator has become the central actor upon whom others comment. In act 4, scene 9, the watchmen stand aside and comment throughout his soliloquy and after his death.

These scenes are not the critical dramatic moments in the play; they are interesting because they indicate the extent to which this pattern is habitual even in relatively peripheral scenes. And the most critical moments—Actium, Antony's suicide, and Cleopatra's suicide—all have essentially the same structure, the central action and the series of comments. In the Actium scene (3.10) the frame has in fact replaced the picture. In this scene and the one that follows, we are given a hierarchy of commentary upon a scene which takes place off-stage: Enobarbus and Scarus comment; then the general Canidius comments; then, finally, Antony comments upon himself. Once the pattern has been established, it can function even when the frame appears without the picture: all those scenes in which characters discuss one another's activities serve to some extent as prologues and epilogues to actions which occur offstage. Each time the pattern occurs, it is analogous to the structure of the play as a whole—to our opaque protagonists, surrounded by critics and commentators.
By the device of partial or total framing, the structure of these scenes emphasizes the process of discussion. The effect of all this framing is to insure that we as audience will get at least as much information from the minor characters as from the protagonists. In many of Shakespeare's plays, the sources of information and their reliability are of critical importance: *Hamlet* would be a totally different experience if our principal informants throughout were Claudius or Polonius rather than the ghost and Hamlet himself. But in *Antony and Cleopatra*, information of all kinds is unreliable. The number of messengers in the play is symptomatic of this breakdown in direct and reliable communication. There are eight characters designated simply as "messenger": to their company we must add Alexas as messenger from Antony to Cleopatra in act 1, scene 5, Menas and Varrius as news bearers to Pompey in act 2, scene 1, Antony's ambassador to Caesar in act 3, scenes 12 and 13, Thidias as Caesar's messenger to Cleopatra in act 3, scene 13, Mardian as Cleopatra's messenger to Antony in act 4, scene 14, Proculeius and Dolabella as Caesar's messengers to Cleopatra in act 5, scene 2, and the protagonists themselves when they are news bearers. Even given the military and political information which must be reported to Antony, Caesar, Pompey, and Cleopatra, the number of messengers is extraordinary. If the main function of the messengers is expository, surely Shakespeare could have found some simpler device. As it is, the audience is continually bombarded with messengers of one kind or another, not so much to convey information as to convey the sense that all information is unreliable, that it is message or rumor, not fact. In this uncertain world, even the simplest of factual messages is subject to doubt; it is no wonder that Varrius insists on the certainty of his report when he tells Pompey of Antony's whereabouts ("This is most certain, that I shall deliver" 2.1.28). And since Shakespeare keeps us in the dark about the motivations and actions of his main characters, we as well as the characters must frequently rely upon these reports for information.

In the first scene, Antony refuses to listen to the messengers from Rome; he resolves to Cleopatra to hear "no messenger but thine" (1.1.52). When he finally listens to the two messengers from Rome and Sicyon in the next scene, their reports are unimpeachable; in the next scene, where Cleopatra tells Alexas to vary his report according to Antony's mood (1.3.2-4), we see the reliability of her messenger. But as the play progresses, reliability and unreliability are no longer so tidily apportioned between Rome and Egypt. Most of the messages in the play are in the pattern of Pompey's unsuccessful prayer: they come too late to be useful. Pompey prays that Cleopatra keep Antony in Egypt only after we know that he is on his way to Rome, thus illustrating his own maxim: "Whiles we are suitors to their throne, decays / The thing we sue for" (2.1.4-5). Immediately after we have seen Antony take his leave of Cleopatra (1.3), Caesar enters with news of Antony's revelry in Alexandria—news which is obsolete by the time we hear him speak it (1.4.3-5). Shakespeare could perfectly well have gained our full credence for Caesar's report merely by placing it one scene earlier, but instead he chooses to bewilder us: Caesar's news has been true, but we know that it is true no longer. This misalignment of report and deed is strikingly consistent in the messages which follow. Alexas presents the pearl from "the firm Roman to great Egypt" (1.5.43); when next we see the firm Roman, he is arranging his marriage with Octavia (2.2). Even the messenger who brings Cleopatra news of Antony's marriage is part of this sequence: he brings his news (2.5) only after we have heard Antony resolve to return to Egypt (2.3). Again and again, we are made aware that message and fact are askew. How does one act or judge on the basis of such information? At the end of the play, we will see the consequences of this unreliability: it is Mardian's false message from Cleopatra that causes Antony's suicide. But even Mardian's false message will be in some sense true three scenes later, when Cleopatra does indeed kill herself for Antony.

The messenger who tells Cleopatra of Antony's marriage is subject to harsh treatment. Cleopatra demands that he rearrange his report to escape punishment: "Say 'tis not so, a province I will give thee" (2.5.68). The messenger is justifiably baffled: "Should I lie, madam?" (line 93). When he next appears, his report is suitably rearranged with Cleopatra's help. The messenger says that Octavia is less tall than Cleopatra and low voiced; Cleopatra transmogrifies his report to "dull of tongue, and dwarfish!" (3.3.16). The messenger quickly learns the game of turning perfections into defects. When Cleopatra asks him to describe Octavia's gait, he is ready with a suitable answer: "She creeps" (line 18). Cleopatra wants to have the certainty of this newly appealing report confirmed:
Cleo. Is this certain? Mess. Or I have no observance.

Char. Three in Egypt Cannot make better note.

Cleo. He's very knowing, I do perceive't, there's nothing in her yet. The fellow has good judgment.

[3.3.21-25]

It is no wonder that the messenger is found "most fit for business" (line 36). Perhaps three in Egypt cannot make better note; but what of those in Rome? According to Maecenas, Octavia has "beauty, wisdom, modesty" (2.2.241); according to Enobarbus she is of a "holy, cold, and still conversation" (2.6.120); but according to Cleopatra's rearranged report she is "dull of tongue and dwarfish." Antony is evidently not the only person in the play who can be seen as either god or monster. Even this unwelcome messenger can: "Hadst thou Narcissus in thy face, to me / Thou wouldst appear most ugly" (2.5.96-97). Cleopatra's report of Octavia is obviously false; or is it? We know that Antony would probably concur more in her version than in the others; and that is, after all, what matters to her. In the midst of the comedy, a central point is made: the truth of report is a more delicate matter than we may suspect; ultimately, Cleopatra's game questions the meaning of true report.

Truth itself may depend on one's perspective. Antony addresses the first Roman messenger in terms which suggest that Roman truth may not be Egyptian truth:

Speak to me home, mince not the general tongue:  
Name Cleopatra as she is call'd in Rome;  
Rail thou in Fulvia's phrase, and taunt my faults  
With such full license, as both truth and malice  
Have power to utter.

[1.2.102-6]

*Both truth and malice*: the truth is told, but presumably with a little warping by malice, when it is Roman truth. Octavia chides Caesar for precisely such warping:

*Caes.* That ever I should call thee castaway!

*Oct.* You have not call'd me so, nor have you cause.

[3.6.40-41]

"Read not my blemishes in the world's report" (2.3.5), Antony asks Octavia: though that report may be true, it is not the whole truth. Suggestions of this flexibility of truth permeate the play:

Who tells me true, though in his tale lie death,  
I hear him as he flatter'd.

[1.2.95-96]

... They are so still,  
Or thou, the greatest soldier of the world,  
Art turn'd the greatest liar.
... By this marriage,
... truths would be tales,
Where now half tales be truths.

If Enobarbus's report of Cleopatra as Venus is a half tale, is not Caesar's report of Cleopatra as Isis the sort of truth that malice would utter? At the end of the play, the Clown brings us word of the joys of the worm from "a very honest woman, but something given to lie, as a woman should not do, but in the way of honesty" (5.2.251-53). Truth and lie are bound together, as they are at the end of Chaucer's House of Fame; their union has already been suggested by Demetrius in the first scene of the play. We have just seen Rome's valuation of the lovers and their own valuation of themselves. The lovers leave the stage, and Demetrius says,

I am full sorry
That he approves the common liar, who
Thus speaks of him at Rome.

If the liar's speech is verified by Antony's deeds, is he nonetheless a liar? Is truth itself the common liar? Throughout the play, the audience hears characters ask apparently unanswerable questions and watches them discuss one another without reaching any accord. We listen to a series of reports and judgments which are neither true nor false, or are both together, until even the concepts of truth and falsity lose their meanings. Shakespeare is not dallying with us only to confuse us. He is instead deliberately playing with these dramatic techniques in order to draw us into the act of judging. In effect, we are forced to judge and shown the folly of judging at the same time: our double responses are an essential part of the play. Antony and Cleopatra constantly insists on its status as a play: characters stage emotions and accuse one another of bad acting; the pattern of framing suggests that we see the central figures as actors in a play within the play; and Cleopatra seems to allude to one very limited interpretation of the very play that we are seeing when she fears that she will see "Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / I' the posture of a whore" (5.2.219-20). The function of all this insistence on the play as play is not merely to suggest the metaphysical proposition that all the world's a stage; it is specifically to involve us as audience in the action of the play. For we are, in a sense, the most minor of the characters who stand aside and comment; or at least we as audience are silent extensions of them.

The Various World

... darking stand
The warying shore o' the world,

Tragedies do not normally ask us to identify ourselves with the minor characters. But in Antony and Cleopatra we participate in the experience of the commentators more often than in the experience of the lovers: we are forced to notice the world's view of them more often than their view of the world. There are of course moments of framing commentary in the other tragedies, moments when we are more engaged with the commentator and his perceptions than with the protagonist. Horatio in Hamlet and the fool in Lear are...
temporarily allowed to assert their points of view. But such moments are indeed rare; we more readily accept
the protagonist's definition of himself and the world than the world's definition of him. Even in Macbeth,
Macbeth's own sense of himself as loathsome moves us far more than the world's condemnation of him. But in
Antony and Cleopatra the device of framing forcibly dissociates us from the lovers; their vision of themselves
becomes merely one in a series of competing visions. For much of the play, we live outside their immediate
universe and see them with distressing clarity from perspectives which are alien to them.

This emphasis on alien perspectives accounts, I think, for one of the structural peculiarities of the play. In
most of the tragedies, virtually every event in the play is related either directly or by analogy to the tragic plot.
The most common charge against the structure of Antony and Cleopatra is that it violates this very simple
structural principle: there are several distracting scenes that have nothing in particular to do with the tragic
plot, that is, with the downfall of the lovers. Even the play's staunchest supporters often find themselves
embarrassed by such apparent excrescences as the Ventidius scene (3.1). We cannot blame this apparent
structural laxity on the unwieldy nature of the source material; for in fact Shakespeare quite ruthlessly omits
everything in Plutarch's account that does not serve his purpose. We must assume, then, that Shakespeare did
not give his play that concentration of structure typical of most of the tragedies for reasons of his own.

The world of Antony and Cleopatra is defined by violent juxtapositions and contrasts. The most powerful of
these contrasts are unavailable to the reader in his study; they are made in purely theatrical terms, through
what Charney calls "presentational imagery." In act 1, scene 5, we see Cleopatra lounging among her
attendants, imagining Antony's soldiership and recalling Caesar and great Pompey, who "would stand and
make his eyes grow in my brow" (line 32). There is an absolute indolence about the scene, as though we have
all drunk mandragora to sleep out the great gap of time. The next scene must follow immediately upon this
one (it is only through the accidents of editorial scene division that it does not); it presents the sharpest
possible dramatic contrast. "Enter Pompey, Menecrates, and Menas, in warlike manner" (2.1). Everything
about this scene is as upright and energetic as the previous scene was indolent; here we see warfare in good
earnest, not the version which Cleopatra chooses to imagine or recall. This scene is by no means necessary to
the plot; we do not need to see Pompey in his camp. He serves merely to necessitate the temporary union of
Antony and Octavius; a report of his sea power would accomplish the same end. In fact he is so superfluous a
character that Shakespeare kills him off in a subordinate clause: Antony "threats the throat of that his officer / That murder'd Pompey" (3.5.18-19). Even the fate of poor Lepidus receives more extended treatment. But we
do see Pompey in his own camp; we do see from his perspective, however momentarily. Precisely the same
sort of theatrical contrast is made when Ventidius enters in triumph; again the scene has been separated from
its complement by editorial whim. In act 2, scene 7, we see the world leaders drunk, reclining or dancing; they
leave the stage and suddenly "Enter Ventidius as it were in triumph . . . the dead body of Pacorus borne before
him" (3.1). As in the Pompey scene, the contrast is made explicit in the stage direction. Moreover, we have
just heard the treacherous Menas address Enobarbus as "noble captain" in the last line of act 2, scene 7; five
lines later, Ventidius is addressed as "noble": the echo should emphasize the theatrical point. Again the scene
is unnecessary for the plot; again it provides us with a radically disjunctive perspective.

In the earlier tragedies, we are not given perspectives which are totally unrelated to those of the protagonists;
in Antony and Cleopatra, we are. We expect to see Caesar at Actium as we expect Malcolm at Dunsinane, but
we do not expect to see Pompey at the Mount; it is rather as though we were to pay a momentary visit to
Fortinbras before he left Norway or to the captain of the Turkish fleet in Othello. To clarify this distinction, let
us look for a moment at two scenes: the appearance of Fortinbras in Hamlet (4.4) and the appearance of
Ventidius here. These scenes are superficially similar: both function fundamentally to contrast a strong and
decisive man of action, an efficient soldier, with the protagonist; both are interpolated into the main action and
apparently unrelated to it. But it is precisely the similarity in the two scenes of martial activity that allows us
to see their fundamental difference. However surprised we are by Fortinbras's appearance in Hamlet, he does
reappear at the end of the play as a figure of some consequence. Moreover, Hamlet himself speaks with one of
Fortinbras's captains; we are essentially aware of Hamlet's responses in this scene. Fortinbras's appearance is
the occasion for a soliloquy; the hero not only watches the action but explicitly comments on the contrast between Fortinbras and himself. But what of Ventidius? He appears on the outer edges of the empire; none of the protagonists witnesses his appearance. They never discuss him in the course of the play, though he discusses them. And while his bearing serves as a contrast to the bearing of the drunken world leaders on Pompey's galley and his fear of carrying the battle further serves to indicate the effects of triumviral degeneracy on subordinate officers, he is related to the protagonists only in the most tenuous way; he cannot in any sense be said to explicate Antony's condition as Fortinbras explicates Hamlet's. Both the Pompey and the Ventidius scenes provide a radical contrast to the perspective of the protagonists; and it is precisely in forcing us to move from one perspective to the next abruptly and without mediation that *Antony and Cleopatra* achieves its most characteristic effects. Such unanticipated shifts in perspective force upon us an awareness of *scope*, of how various a place the world is.

In the other tragedies, even the most minor of the characters tend to take part in the one great tragic event. The musicians in *Othello* give us an image, however imperfect, of that harmony which Iago will successfully untune. Macbeth's devil-porter identifies his castle as a kind of hell, in case we were in danger of forgetting; and Macbeth is of course his masterdevil. The gravedigger in *Hamlet* represents a point of view strikingly different from that of the over-curious prince; but he introduces us to Ophelia's maimed rites and moreover serves as a significant teacher in Hamlet's education to accept mortality. But what of similar scenes in *Antony and Cleopatra*? The serving men on Pompey's galley do not reflect Antony's condition, nor are they involved in any way in his action. When Lepidus, Maecenas, and Agrippa arrange to meet at Mount Mesena (2.4), they scarcely mention the protagonists; nor is the farewell of these subordinates in any way significant to the protagonists. The varied personages in *Antony and Cleopatra* come forth, posit their own diverse points of view, and then disappear; they remain autonomous and insist that we notice the multiplicity of this world.

This insistence on the varying shores of the world is not common in Shakespearean tragedy. In the major tragedies, the presentation of character and the structure generally function to focus our attention on the protagonists, to force us to participate in their experience and to live for a time within the moral contours of their universe. To participate fully in the tragic experience, we must be willing, for the moment, to see the universe through the eyes of the protagonist and entirely in relation to him: we must experience Lear's storm as he himself experiences it. This concentration of vision allows us to perceive the sufferings of Edgar and the fool on the heath as fragmentary versions of Lear's suffering; it allows us to feel that Gloucester's blinding is part of Lear's experience even before Lear is aware of it. In order to achieve this concentration of vision, we must be given some knowledge of the inner state of the protagonist; we must be allowed to see how he perceives the world before we can participate in his perceptions. Lear on the heath conducts a virtually continuous soliloquy, whether other characters overhear him or not; Hamlet, Othello, and Macbeth constantly tell us how the world seems to them. But this kind of knowledge is usually denied us in *Antony and Cleopatra*; and the dramatic structure functions to diffuse and dissipate our attention throughout a wider universe than that which the protagonists know. We expect to see the universe only insofar as it reflects the experience of the protagonists; but we see the universe as prior to and independent of them.

It is of course true of all the tragedies that the audience sees a more varied world than the protagonists; we never share their vision entirely. But in the other tragedies, the exclusiveness of the protagonist's vision and our partial absorption into it are essential to the tragic effect. Their vision becomes progressively narrowed until fewer and fewer possibilities are left open to them: Lear's world contracts until it does not include the possibility of kindly daughters, Othello's the possibility of Desdemona's innocence; Macbeth gradually loses sight of any world outside his own diseased fantasy. In these plays, the audience participates both in the narrowing of vision and in an awareness of what is excluded; we share in the constriction although we see the protagonist trapped by it. *Othello* is horrifying partly because we are made to experience Othello's abused perception even while we know it is wrong; for most of *Macbeth*, our experience is as claustrophobic as Macbeth's. When we are finally given sight of King Edward's or Cordelia's healing nature, our relief is enormous precisely because we too have been trapped by the protagonist's vision. Part of the effect of these
plays depends on our ability to see through the protagonist's eyes, even when we see possibilities unacknowledged by him. But this progressive narrowing and widening of our vision is foreign to *Antony and Cleopatra*: there the exclusivity of the protagonists' vision never becomes part of our experience; we are given competing visions throughout.

Multiplicity of all kinds is essential to the structure of *Antony and Cleopatra*: throughout most of the play the world is an enormously crowded place. This multiplicity is achieved not only through the introduction of apparently unrelated characters and scenes but also through a structural principle of varied repetition, rather like a musical theme and variations. The audience continually sees the same actions, hears the same metaphors, but always with a slight variation; and this structural repetition suggests widely varying versions of experience just as the framing commentary suggests varieties of judgment. We are given, for instance, a series of servants who desert their masters and masters who desert their servants, each of whom comments by implication on the rest. Shortly after Enobarbus has announced that he will "seek / Some way to leave" Antony (3.13.200-201), Antony himself addresses his servants "as one that takes his leave" (4.2.29): Enobarbus weeps over Antony's leave-taking even as he plans his own. In the next scene, we hear that "the god Hercules, whom Antony lov'd / Now leaves him" (4.3.15-16). This action reiterates the central action of Actium, in which Antony quite literally leaves his servants; and it complements the action of all those servants who leave their masters throughout the play. Menas deserts Pompey because Pompey is not sufficiently ruthless to deserve service; Alexas and Canidius and the rest desert Antony because Antony has deserted his followers and in some sense himself at Actium; Enobarbus deserts Antony because it appears to him that Cleopatra and his own discretion have deserted Antony. Seleucus deserts Cleopatra for reasons that remain obscure: if his betrayal is not staged (and there is no real reason to assume that it is), then his behavior is, at the least, ungenerous. Dolabella temporarily deserts Octavius for love of Cleopatra; his betrayal of his master's plans is one of the few moments of compassion at the end of the play. Decretas deserts Antony, presumably because dead masters are not profitable to work for; but his eulogy of Antony reminds us that he knows his master's worth and is willing to assert it even to Caesar. If Decretas complicates the pattern of betrayal, Scarus reverses it altogether. He too seems inclined to desert Antony after Actium (3.10.32-33), but in the proof, he is magnificently loyal. Enobarbus dies of a broken heart because he has deserted Antony. Eros kills himself to avoid obeying his master's command; his magnificent disobedience may be seen as a commentary on the disobedience of all the unreliable servants in the play. Antony has previously deserted Fulvia, Octavia, and Cleopatra; Cleopatra seems momentarily to regard his death as a desertion ("Noblest of men, woo't die? / Hast thou no care of me?" 4.15.59-60). Servants and masters desert, in short, with every reason and under every circumstance; the pattern is repeated with endless variation. Our impression is simultaneously that nothing changes and that nothing is the same.

The same sense of endless likeness and endless difference is achieved by this kind of repetition throughout the play: in the reception of bad news, for instance, or in the repeated episodes of handshaking or hand kissing. After Actium, Scarus tells us that Antony has "kiss'd away / Kingdoms, and provinces" (3.10.7-8); Antony himself kisses Cleopatra and says, "Even this repays me" (3.11.71). Cleopatra wishes that her kiss could quicken the dying Antony (4.15.39), but her kiss kills Iras (5.2.292). Has she the aspic in her lips? We are given both Charmian's figs (1.2.32) and the figs that bring death to Cleopatra and her maidens; the reverberations set up between the first fig and the last suggest a whole complex of attitudes toward life and its pleasures. Decretas's theft of Antony's sword would not be so shocking if we had not seen Eros practice a different swordplay only a few moments before. Eros draws his own sword to kill himself for love of Antony; Decretas steals Antony's sword to make matters right with Caesar. The contrast could scarcely be more sharply drawn than by the repeated use of the sword. The three images of entrapment in the play suggest the variety of perspectives with extraordinary economy. Cleopatra decides to go fishing and imagines each fish an Antony (2.5.11-14); she obviously thinks of herself as an amiable trap. But there is nothing amiable about the image of the trap when she greets Antony after his victory: "com'st thou smiling from / The world's great snare uncaught?" (4.8.17-18). Cleopatra as snare or the world as snare? Which finally captures Antony? Caesar complicates the image further: Cleopatra looks "as she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil..."
of grace" (5.2.345-46). For him, Cleopatra is clearly the snare; nonetheless, there are presumably worse fates than being caught in a toil of grace.

The achievement of simultaneous perspectives through varied repetition works throughout the play. When we hear the music of Hercules departing, we are reminded of a thematic pattern of enormous complexity. The music of the departing god is the first we know of his presence; we recognize the supernatural only as it withdraws. This pattern of the presence known too late is a variation of the "She's good, being gone" (1.2.123) theme initiated by Antony's reaction to Fulvia's death and repeated whenever we see someone weep what willingly he did confound; it anticipates such critical moments as Enobarbus's discovery of Antony's full generosity only after he has deserted him, Antony's reaction to the report of Cleopatra's death, and Cleopatra's deification of Antony after his death. Cleopatra's dream of her emperor and the political tears which Octavius sheds for Antony are variations on the same theme. The function of varied repetition is most striking in the association of love, war, and death, an association posited by widely differing characters with widely differing perspectives. For Philo and Pompey, the association represents the misapplication of a soldier's talents (1.1.6-10; 2.1.12-13). Agrippa is more amused than appalled by the association: "She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed" (2.2.227). The death of the character named Eros, with his sword drawn, is the objectification of the association on stage; in his death, the comic perspective is transformed utterly. Enobarbus's comment on Cleopatra's "celerity in dying" (1.2.142) will be similarly transformed when Caesar tells us of Cleopatra's pursuit of easy ways to die. At their suicides, each of the lovers reiterates the association of love and death (4.14.99-101; 5.2.294-95) as part of their transformation of death into reunion. But the sexual suggestiveness of the asp and the Clown's banter insure that we will not forget the other perspectives possible.

The insistence upon scope, upon the infinite variety of the world, militates against the tragic experience. We simply are not permitted the luxury of the tragic vision: our attempt to see the universe solely in terms of the protagonists is continually thwarted. For in Antony and Cleopatra the vision of tragedy is only part of the story. The protagonists find themselves to be of primal significance in the universe; but we must see them from other, less comfortable perspectives. We have heard of Antony's almost magical soldiership from Pompey and Caesar. In the Ventidius scene, we see it for a moment with the satiric impulse of a subordinate who works while his master plays: "I'll humbly signify what in his name, / That magical word of war, we have effected" (3.1.30-31). In Decretas, we see briefly from the point of view of a man who seems even more perfectly political than Caesar when he greets Antony's suicide with "This sword but shown to Caesar with this tidings, / Shall enter me with him" (4.14.112-13); but we also see him deliver a potentially dangerous eulogy of Antony to Caesar. The dramatic contrasts and the varied repetitions insist that we move among several versions of experience, among the comic and satiric as well as the tragic.

**Comic Perspectives**

. . . If you find him sad,
Say I am dancing.

[1.3.3-4]

The uncertainty and variety characteristic of Antony and Cleopatra frequently militate against its tragic effect. But if the play is not simply a defective tragedy, then what is it? In most tragedies, the protagonists confide in the audience; we can usually take the tragic hero as seriously as he takes himself. But in Antony and Cleopatra we see through the eyes of the commentators more often than through the eyes of the protagonists; and the commentators seldom take the protagonists as seriously as they might wish. In fact, a dramatic structure in which the minor characters continually intervene between the protagonists and the audience is more characteristic of farce than it is of tragedy: at moments, Antony and Cleopatra is closer to Plautine comedy than to Hamlet, Take, for instance, the long scene in which Antony's challenges to Caesar, his rage
against Thidias, and his renewed promises of derring-do are punctuated by Enobarbus's caustic asides. The relation of actor to commentator in this scene has a venerable ancestry in the tradition of the *miles gloriosus*: Antony boasts and rages like the braggart soldier; Enobarbus undercuts him like the tricksy slave. Maynard Mack has pointed out that these "paired voices" occur in all the tragedies. But in the other plays, the heroic voice is, I think, strengthened by the presence of the opposing voice; in *Antony and Cleopatra*, our allegiance is more often divided. There are surely moments of a tragic involvement with the protagonists; but there are also moments of a comic detachment.

The very process of varying perspectives is essentially a comic technique. In tragedy, everything usually tends to confirm the experience of the tragic hero; by process of analogy even the most diverse scenes will work to substantiate his version of the world. Comedy tends, on the other hand, to work toward variety of experience, a multiplicity of versions, as tragedy does not. In *King Lear* we have a hierarchy of meaningful figures and events which have their end in the experience of Lear; in *As You Like It*, we are more interested in the juxtaposition of several contrasting figures than in any single figure. To put it, perhaps, overtidily: all the figures on the heath comment on Lear's experience in a way that all the figures in the Forest of Arden simply do not comment on the duke's or Rosalind's or Orlando's. We think of all the versions of love which exist simultaneously in the Forest of Arden; and though we find Rosalind's the least constricting, our experience of the play depends not solely on her version but on the simultaneous perception of them all. Juxtaposition of this sort is of course essential to the structure of plays like *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and, to a lesser degree, *The Tempest*; and it is foreign to the structure of the tragedies. Simultaneous versions of experience which can compete on equal footing are generally not given us in the tragedies; in *Antony and Cleopatra*, we are given precisely this simultaneity of competing versions.

I am of course oversimplifying this distinction; *Antony and Cleopatra* has more in common with *King Lear* than with *Midsummer Night's Dream*. But there is a surprising prevalence of essentially comic technique in the structure of *Antony and Cleopatra*; and to regard these comic techniques as surface excrescences on a fundamentally tragic play is surely as serious an error as to overemphasize them. There are comic elements in other tragedies: Othello, like Antony, is a type of the *miles gloriosus*. But in *Othello*, this comic structure is transformed to serve a tragic purpose: the tragedy consists precisely in the relationship between him and his tricksy servant. Generally, comic elements in the other tragedies are subsumed into the tragic vision as they are not in *Antony and Cleopatra*. For the comic moments in this play—such moments as Charmian's baiting Cleopatra about her love for Caesar—are not isolated phenomena: the entire tragic vision of the play is subjected to the comic perspective. If this double perspective is perilous to the structure of the play as tragedy, it is nonetheless its peculiar triumph. It is the unique excellence of *Antony and Cleopatra* that it does not allow us to maintain the comfortable and certain attitudes of either comedy or tragedy for very long. We are not permitted the luxury of total engagement with the protagonists; nor are we permitted the emotional safety of total detachment from them. We think we know where we stand; and then we feel the ground shifting under our feet. To restrict the play solely to either the tragic or the comic perspective is to make it a much safer play than it actually is: there is always safety for an audience in certainty, even if the certainty is as painful as it usually is in Shakespearean tragedy. But we do not know how to regard *Antony and Cleopatra*: for the play is essentially a tragic experience embedded in a comic structure. In that sense it is as treacherous and painful as life itself: each of us has moments in which we experience our lives with a tragic concentration and intensity; but each of us must know that these moments can equally well be experienced as comic, if seen from the perspective of the varying shore. The bare experience is susceptible to either perspective; both inhere in it. If we can nonetheless experience the tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra as they experience it, it will be more moving precisely because we have also seen it through foreign eyes, because it can take the criticism of the comic structure and nonetheless survive.

**Notes**

For the convenience of the reader, I have restricted all discussion of specific critical works to the notes. Read with the text, they should provide some sense of the critical approaches to the play, but my argument is not dependent on them.

There is a venerable tradition of doubt about the place of the play as tragedy; unfortunately, many of the critics find fault with the play rather than with their expectations. Coleridge thought that the highest praise he could bestow on *Antony and Cleopatra* was "the doubt... whether it is not in all exhibitions of a giant power in its strength and vigor of maturity, a formidable rival of the *Macbeth, Lear, Othello, and Hamlet,*" a doubt which assumes the play's place apart (Shakespearean Criticism, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor [London, 1960], 1: 76-77), A. C. Bradley answers Coleridge's doubt: "To regard this tragedy as a rival of the famous four, whether on the stage or in the study, is surely an error" ("Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra,*" Oxford Lectures on Poetry [London, 1909], p. 282). He adds, rather cryptically, "Although *Antony and Cleopatra* may be for us as wonderful an achievement as the greatest of Shakespeare's plays, it has not an equal value" (p. 282). Other critics attempt to redefine the genre of the play. M. W. MacCallum, for instance, in *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and Their Background* (London, 1910), distinguishes between the Roman plays and the tragedies throughout his discussion. G. S. Griffiths ("*Antony and Cleopatra,*" Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, vol. 31 [1945], collected by V. de S. Pinto [Oxford, 1946], pp. 34-67) discusses the play as a Dionysian praise of passion and attacks Bradley for crudely treating *Antony* as though it were one of the four tragedies; his attack is curious, particularly in view of the fact that Bradley is the earliest commentator to distinguish clearly between *Antony* and the other tragedies. G. B. Harrison, in "*Antony and Cleopatra,*" Shakespeare's Tragedies (London, 1951), comments that "the story is not by any standard essentially tragic" (p. 226). Ernest Schanzer (The Problem Plays of Shakespeare [London, 1963]) defines *Antony* as a problem play. The most recent attempt to dissociate *Antony and Cleopatra* from the four major tragedies is A. P. Riemer's *A Reading of Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra"* (Sydney, 1968). His analysis of the faults that critics are heir to when they consider the play only as tragedy is excellent. Unfortunately, once he has disqualified it as a tragedy, he does not seem to know what to do with it. Curiously, he seems to find the main significance of the play in the relative insignificance of its concerns and in our indifference to them: "Since the opening scene of *Antony and Cleopatra* deals with issues intrinsically much less important than those of the great tragedies, Shakespeare can afford to sustain in his audience an ambivalence of attitude which the universal, metaphysical and at times supernatural concerns of the other plays cannot allow. Precisely because we are able to remain indifferent to Antony's behavior in Egypt (as we cannot be indifferent to Hamlet's dilemma or Lear's blind folly), we can participate in Shakespeare's superbly detached, intellectual presentation of this world where the magnificence and daring of the poetry is contained by its surrounding ironies and by our rational awareness of the situation" (p. 105). To rescue the play so thoroughly from our interest seems unwise. Nonetheless, his argument is suggestive throughout.

When I discuss these questions individually, there will be a roll-call vote of representative critics. Most of the interpretations are variations on the theme of Antony as noble fool and Cleopatra as lively and energetic harlot, but there is considerable disagreement possible within this range.

A few critics believe Antony to be perfectly sincere in his protestations to Octavia: Laurens J. Mills (The Tragedies of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* [Bloomington, Ind., 1964], p. 18) and Schanzer (p. 145) are here in agreement. Others, such as Bradley (p. 296) and Griffiths (p. 46), believe that Antony has no intention of being faithful to her and has merely taken the easy and cowardly path of political appeasement. MacCallum rescues Antony from his embarrassment by suggesting that Antony has the born orator's ability to believe absolutely in what he is saying while he is saying it (p. 401).
Nearly everyone agrees that Octavius married off his sister to further his own political purposes (Bradley, p. 289; Harold C. Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare* [Chicago, 1951], p. 572), but many critics nonetheless accuse Octavius of genuine family feeling. MacCallum's statement of faith in Octavius as a man of feeling is most touching: "It really means something when a man like Octavius, busy with the affairs of the whole world, spares time for frequent domestic correspondence" (p. 381).

It is generally assumed that Antony returns to Egypt for love of Cleopatra; Antony himself seems less certain. He tells us that his pleasure lies in the East only after lengthy discussion of his ill luck near Octavius: the emphasis is by no means clear. Matthew N. Proser, in *The Heroic Image in Five Shakespearean Tragedies* (Princeton, 1965), p. 187, suggests that Antony leaves for political reasons and as a matter of honor.

Responses range from clear-cut condemnations to clear-cut vindications on this issue. MacCallum believes she is betraying Antony and also enjoying this new test of her power (p. 423). Harrison suggests that she is a whore who would of course desert her lover for one more fortunate (p. 217). William Rosen (*Shakespeare and the Craft of Tragedy* [Cambridge, 1960], p. 153) accuses her of treachery; Willard Farnham (*Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier: The World of His Final Tragedies* [Berkeley, 1950], p. 192) doubts her faithfulness to Antony. Cleopatra's devotees either ignore this charge or see her dalliance with Thidias as an attempt to trick Octavius in the course of remaining faithful to Antony (cf., for instance, Donald A. Stauffer, *Shakespeare's World of Images: The Development of His Moral Ideas* [New York, 1949], p. 236).

Edward Dowden (*Shakespere: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art* [London, 1901], p. 315) and MacCallum (p. 426) accuse her of wanting to keep her jewels; Rosen (p. 154) takes this scene as evidence that she would be willing to live without Antony; E. E. Stoll ("Cleopatra," *Modern Language Review* 23 [1928]: 159) suggests that she is here playing the game for the game's own sake. MacCallum later speculates that she wants to keep the jewels to defray her funeral expenses (p. 435) and adds that the scene is impossible to explain (p. 426); Farnham (p. 199) agrees that Shakespeare simply does not let us know. Griffiths ignores Cleopatra's motivation altogether and instead praises the noble excess of her passion unleashed upon this unworthy object (p. 65). Goddard (p. 585) states that the entire scene with Seleucus has been staged to convince Caesar that she wants to live so that she will be more easily able to trick him by her suicide for Antony's sake.

This issue causes critical embarrassment and is usually avoided altogether. Proser is almost alone in stating clearly that Cleopatra surely betrayed Antony in hopes of bargaining with Caesar (p. 204). Stoll (p. 162) suggests that she is possibly but not probably to blame for the conduct of the fleet. Harold S. Wilson (*On the Design of Shakespearean Tragedy* [Toronto, 1957]) is typical in his desire not to have to make up his mind: "We need not raise the question whether Cleopatra has indeed betrayed Antony to Octavius. We assume from what follows that she has not; but we can understand Antony's suspicions: constancy is not her strong point. Shakespeare, with fine artistry, ignores the issue. It does not matter, since in the outcome Cleopatra is magnificently true to Antony" (p. 170). That we do not know the cause of one of the single most decisive events in the play seems to me to matter very much. Moreover, most critics take the fact that Shakespeare ignores the issue not as evidence of his fine artistry but rather as evidence of Cleopatra's innocence. MacCallum says, "For the final treason of the fleet at any rate . . . she seems in no way responsible. Plutarch mentions Antony's infuriated suspicion but adds no confirmation, and Shakespeare, who would surely not have left us without direction on so important a matter, is equally reticent. Such hints as he gives point the other way" (p. 424). Despite these speculations, Farnham (p. 193) says that we have no reason whatever to suspect Cleopatra of treason here. Bradley rescues the reputation of his beloved Cleopatra by somewhat dubious means, as he himself realizes: "Can we feel sure that she would not have sacrificed him if she could have saved herself by doing so? It is not even certain that she did not attempt it. Antony himself believes that she did—that the fleet went over to Octavius by her orders. That she and her people deny the charge proves nothing. The best we can say is that, if it were true, Shakespeare would have made that clear" (p. 301). As far as I know, no critic suggests any other possible betrayer; no one suggests that the fleet went over to Caesar spontaneously or of its own accord. Alternatives to Cleopatra as traitor simply are not given by the critics,
although they are almost unanimous in exonerating her.


11 The absence of soliloquies by the major characters is especially striking if we consider the traditional dramatic representations of Antony and Cleopatra. Both Garnier's *Antonie* and Daniel's *Cleopatra* are virtually all soliloquy: although the lovers are talking to servants rather than to themselves, they explore their own inner states with an apparently endless fascination. Perhaps these earlier versions are indirectly responsible for the reticence of the Shakespearean lovers.

12 Dr. Johnson initiates the complaints about the presentation of character: "except the feminine arts, some of which are too low, which distinguish Cleopatra, no character is very strongly discriminated" (*Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. [New York, 1960], p. 107). Bradley objects to the play as tragedy partly because "not a line portrays any inward struggle" (p. 287). Virgil Whitaker is particularly disturbed by our ignorance of the characters' inner states: "Being provided no insight into the hero's own mind by which to test or interpret what others say and do, we are left confused as to what interpretation Shakespeare wished us to place upon Antony's death, and we are even more puzzled about Cleopatra's. We sorely miss the careful soliloquies and asides of earlier plays and the revelation of motives contained in them" (*The Mirror up to Nature* [San Marino, 1965], p. 281).

13 When he rewrote *Antony and Cleopatra* as a regular tragedy, Dryden introduced the certainty that Shakespeare excluded. In *All for Love*, the motivation and emotion of the protagonists is always clear; this added clarity is an implicit criticism of *Antony and Cleopatra*.

14 G. Wilson Knight, in *The Imperial Theme* (London, 1931), is the most brilliant and influential of those critics who read the play predominantly as a lyric poem.

15 The first major allegorical reading of the play was that of S. L. Bethell in *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition* (London, 1944). Bethell found that Egypt and Rome stand for Intuition and Reason; Intuition is extolled as the means to the good life. Bethell reaches this conclusion by insisting upon a separation of character from symbol; the implication is that, whatever we may think of Cleopatra's character, she is poetically the goddess who alone can save Antony from the clutches of Reason. Bethell meets his equal and opposite force in John F. Danby (*Poets on Fortune's Hill: Studies in Sidney, Shakespeare, Beaumont, and Fletcher* [London, 1952]). Danby concludes that Egypt and Rome are the Flesh and the World; both are repulsive, but the Flesh is a little more repulsive. Both critics are brilliant, and they are perfect foils; the two readings taken together probably give the most comprehensive reading of the play. By ignoring the totality of the play (Bethell ignores character and Danby poetry), both are able to find consistent allegorical readings. Both readings are in their own terms convincing; but unfortunately they are absolutely irreconcilable. There are other, less striking allegorical readings of the play: Goddard, for instance, suggests that Egypt and Rome represent Love and Power and that Love wins in our judgment. The oddest interpretation is that of Beryl Pogson (*In the East My Pleasure Lies: An Esoteric Interpretation of Some Plays of Shakespeare* [London, 1950]), who sees the play as a representation of the mystical marriage of Man with his Soul, a marriage which necessitates giving up the World. Although it is put in disturbingly esoteric terms, this interpretation is only slightly more overstated than many others and contains some interesting insights.

16 Stoll, for instance, raises the questions about Actium, Seleucus, and Thidias and then says, "Are we not considering too curiously? We treat Shakespeare as if he were Browning" (p. 146). He suggests that in Shakespeare we are fundamentally interested in character in action and hence not in motivation. But surely there is a difference between considering too closely and a reasonable desire to understand the action at a few
crucial points: without expecting a full-drawn psychoanalyzable character, we may nonetheless want to be told some of the protagonist's motivation at some point. Bethell is generally brilliant in his analysis of character as it shifts from the realistic to the symbolic, but he is too inclined to use the symbolic to get the realistic character off the hook. "Regarding the play psychologically, one cannot reconcile the vicious, the vulgar, and the commonplace in Antony and Cleopatra, with the sublimity with which they are invested, especially as they face defeat and death" (p. 117); he suggests therefore that we turn to the poetry and read the characters symbolically. Unfortunately these characters impress us enormously with their life and refuse to dwindle into symbols; reconciling the naturalistic and the symbolic views of them becomes one of the major occupations of the play, and to discount the naturalistic deprives the play of its occupation. Moreover, to present people as both vulgar and sublime seems to me the height of naturalistic and consistent presentation, since it avoids altogether the convention that people can be expected to be always the same. Irving Ribner (Patterns in Shakespearean Tragedy [New York, 1960]) also suggests that the symbolic design makes for psychological inconsistency in the character of Cleopatra (p. 3). It seems to me that, by relying on such arguments, these critics are explaining away one of the major elements in the play: people such as Antony or Cleopatra are mysterious, are even inconsistent; they must not be "rescued" from themselves by such arguments.

17Philip J. Traci (The Love Play of Antony and Cleopatra [The Hague, 1970]) calls attention to this "question structure" (p. 144), but he discusses this structure only insofar as it questions the nature of love, his major theme.

18Coleridge seems to regard Cleopatra's passion as lust which partly redeems itself by its depth and energy (p. 77); Dowden is more firm in his condemnation ("We do not mistake this feeling of Cleopatra towards Antony for love; but he has been for her . . . the supreme sensation" p. 312). Daniel Stempel, in "The Transmigration of the Crocodile" (Shakespeare Quarterly 7 [1956]: 56-72), accuses Cleopatra's sympathetic critics of romantic sentimentality and proclaims her a fleshy witch, overthrown for the good of the empire. MacCallum is willing to admit that it is love (p. 444). Her apologists and devotees (Knight, Griffiths, and Stauffer, for example) are sure that it is love, not mere lust. Many critics find that she begins in lust but achieves love by the end of the play: Goddard (p. 584) notes this change in her; Ribner finds that Cleopatra casts off her sin in the last act; Dolora G. Cunningham ("The Characterization of Shakespeare's Cleopatra," Shakespeare Quarterly 6 [1955]) suggests that Cleopatra undergoes the conventional Christian pattern of repentance. Most critics find elements of both love and fear of triumph in her death: as usual, her devotees emphasize love; her censors emphasize fear; and those on the middle ground generally suggest that she needs the fear of triumph to perfect her love toward death (cf. Farnham, p. 196, for instance).

19Most critics see the contrast between Rome and Egypt as central to the play. Octavius and Octavia are usually seen as the representatives of Rome, but occasionally the Roman values are found in the old Antony. Those critics who find Octavius representative of Rome generally can give Rome only a limited approval, since Octavius is almost universally denounced as cold; critics such as Proser, who locate Roman virtue in the old Antony, can generally give the Roman values a fuller approval. Those critics who extol Egypt must sublimate the love. . . . Generally those who favor Egypt and love will find Cleopatra the dominant figure in the play; cf., for instance, Bethell, Knight, and Griffiths.

Those who favor Rome will see the play as the tragedy of a man ruined by lust and will consequently find Antony the key figure; cf. Dowden, Rosen, and Ribner. Derek Traversi (An Approach to Shakespeare [Garden City, 1969], vol. 2) is almost alone in stressing at once the contrast between Rome and Egypt and the continuity between them: "The decadence thus shown, and poetically integrated into the spirit of the play, in the public affairs of the Roman world is balanced, where more intimate relations are concerned, by a corresponding effect in the expression of the love of Antony and Cleopatra with its consistently Egyptian setting; indeed, the connection which underlies these contrasted realities, presented dramatically in terms of character and poetically by continuity in the use of imagery, is one of the principal keys to the total effect" (p.
Both worlds share the same essential corruption; love triumphs only insofar as its roots are in this corruption (pp. 227-39). Essentially the same view is expounded at much greater length and with somewhat less clarity in Traversi's *Shakespeare: The Roman Plays* (Stanford, 1963).

Recently many critics have come to the conclusion that no judgment is absolute in the play. Bradley's statement is beautifully balanced: "Neither the phrase 'a strumpet's fool,' nor the assertion 'the nobleness of life is to do thus,' answers to the total effect of the play. But the truths they exaggerate are equally essential" (p. 293). David Cecil ("Antony and Cleopatra," *Poets and Story-Tellers* [London, 1959], p. 21) notes Shakespeare's rigorous impartiality. Farnham defines the protagonists of the final tragedies as men whose flaws are presented as inseparable from their greatness and describes the process by which we come to admire and criticize the flaws at the same time. Danby sees the play as Shakespeare's "critique of judgment" (p. 136), in which every judgment is revealed as partial. Marion Bodwell Smith (*Dualities in Shakespeare* [Toronto, 1966]) sees the two extremes of Rome and Egypt as absolute and irreconcilable alternatives, neither of which is possible for a full life. Traversi insists on the need for "a balance in judgment" (*An Approach to Shakespeare*, p. 215) but does not find the judgments irreconcilable: "The working out of the contrast so presented until, through a fusion of poetic and dramatic resources as comprehensive and complete as anywhere in Shakespeare, its diverse elements are shown to belong to a single range of emotion, is the true theme of *Antony and Cleopatra*" (p. 217). Norman Rabkin finds the "unresolvable dialectic between opposed values that claim us equally" characteristic not only of *Antony and Cleopatra* but of Shakespeare and all great art (*Shakespeare and the Common Understanding* [New York, 1967], p. 188). Riemer emphasizes the "dialectical manner" (p. 27) of *Antony and Cleopatra* as opposed to that of the other Shakespearean tragedies; his analysis of the function of the opening speech in this light is useful. In *Lear*, the opening scene "is truly expository in that it transmits necessary information without in any way preëmpting attention for itself (p. 26). He argues that Philo's speech, by its very vehemence, disqualifies itself as exposition: we are less concerned with the information that it gives than with its expression of a particular point of view. Thus the process of dialectic is established at the start. Unfortunately, he does not analyze other structural elements in the play in any detail. As far as I know, the precise structure by which judgments are shown to be partial and the function of this relativity has never been fully discussed. My own discussion is throughout heavily indebted to Maynard Mack's introduction to the Pelican *Antony and Cleopatra* (Baltimore, 1960).

Shakespeare may intend to contrast the male god of war with the female monster in order to emphasize the sexual confusions of the play as well as the multiple perspectives. But it is also possible that he is simply using the abbreviated form of Demogorgon, lord of chaos; Spenser, for instance, uses this form in *The Faerie Queene* 1.1.37 ("Great Gorgon, Prince of darknesse and dead night").

If the process of judgment is treacherous for the characters, it is equally treacherous for the critics: almost every critic who writes about the play reveals his own moral predispositions as surely as Pompey does here. Few critics are willing to posit their own moral convictions as a precondition for their interpretation of the play; they appear to rest their interpretation on the supposedly objective data of the poetic texture. But the moral bias nonetheless comes through, whether in Knight's praise of the love or Danby's condemnation of it. Of all major critics, only William K. Wimsatt is courageous enough to avow his own convictions; and because he does so, he is not forced to "prove" them in his interpretation of the play. In "Poetry and Morals: A Relation Reargued" (*The Verbal Icon* [New York, 1964], pp. 85-100), he argues that poetic and moral value can be distinguished; *Antony and Cleopatra* is his test case precisely because it celebrates an immoral passion and is nonetheless of great poetic value. (A lesser man would simply have made the play into a condemnation of the passion in order to save himself the pain of this perception; many other critics have done so.) In the end, Wimsatt acknowledges that moral and poetic values are interdependent: for the Christian reader, *Antony and Cleopatra* will not be as great as *King Lear* because it is less fully moral and hence does not share as fully in "the designed complexity of what is most truly one or most has being" (p. 100). I agree entirely with his judgment of the two plays, though we would probably disagree about the meaning of the "designed complexity"; but I cannot fully agree with his discussion of *Antony and Cleopatra* because I am not certain
that the passion celebrated is immoral. In any event, Wimsatt's essay is the only serious attempt to deal with these issues; in that sense, it is one of the most truly humane works of criticism that I know.

23 This unreliability of judgment is the basis for Virgil Whitaker's condemnation of the play. According to him, "The point . . . [of a tragedy] as moral *exemplum* must . . . be made perfectly clear" (p. 54). This clarity is absent in *Antony and Cleopatra*: "In dramatic clarity and in emotional impact it cannot stand beside *Othello*, which is also a tragedy of one that loved not wisely but too well—if such is the judgment, and this uncertainty is part of the trouble with the play, that Shakespeare intended us to form of *Antony and Cleopatra*" (p. 276). He describes the guide posts by which Shakespeare normally directs our responses in the tragedies and then notes, "The guideposts such as Shakespeare provided in all his tragedies are in this play as likely to mislead the audience as to aid it in understanding the play. Perhaps the metaphor would be improved by saying that he provided guideposts but did not line them up" (p. 287). His condemnation is interesting precisely because it rests on his fine description of the process by which certainty is normally achieved in the tragedies and the confusion of these processes in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Other critics will of course find the uncertainty of *Antony and Cleopatra* grounds for praise rather than condemnation. But Schanzer praises the uncertainty of the play only after he has declared it a problem play rather than a tragedy: the problem play is one in which "we find a concern with a moral problem which is central to it, presented in such a manner that we are unsure of our moral bearings, so that uncertain and divided responses to it in the minds of the audience are possible or even probable" (p. 6). His discussion of this element in *Julius Caesar* is illuminating; unfortunately, in his discussion of *Antony and Cleopatra* he is more concerned to vindicate the lovers than to illustrate his contention that the play satisfies his own criteria for a problem play.

24 Bradley questions the status of the play as tragedy partly because of this comparative lack of action: in the first three acts, "People converse, discuss, accuse one another, excuse themselves, mock, describe, drink together, arrange a marriage, meet and part; but they do not kill, do not even tremble or weep. We see hardly one violent movement" (p. 284). Whitaker also notes this element in the play and dismisses it as a fault: Shakespeare's excessive reliance on expository devices in *Antony and Cleopatra* "can be ascribed only to his failure to work out a sound dramatic structure for his play—that is, to haste or to fatigue" (p. 286).

25 Rosen notes this technique of framing but seems to think that we must always take what the framing characters say as gospel truth. He cites, for instance, Pompey's view of Antony and concludes, "Our view of Antony's life depends, for the most part, on the reflections of others" (p. 129). He finds that the lovers' behavior always substantiates the view of their critics, whereas I find that it is precisely the discrepancy between the two that is most interesting.

26 And, as critics, we are noisy extensions of them.

27 Bradley, for instance, finds the structure of the play "defective" (p. 283) and points to several scenes which are not necessary to the tragic plot. MacCallum suggests that the abundance of short scenes is a fault due to the recalcitrance of the historical materials (pp. 315-16). Harley Granville-Barker notes that the short scenes are problematical only insofar as producers and editors attempt to localize them (*Prefaces to Shakespeare* [Princeton, 1946], 1: 381-90); on the Shakespearean stage, they would serve to create the effect of "history directly dramatized" (p. 389). Unlike MacCallum, he suggests that this effect is one of the chief virtues of the play. Whitaker thinks that the short scenes are à flaw; he is, as usual, revealing in his condemnation. According to him, *Antony and Cleopatra* reverts to an episodic structure which Shakespeare had previously outgrown. "A sound dramatic structure in the fashion of the mature tragedies would have required that Shakespeare narrow the action to a single theme—say the destruction of a great soldier by sensual love—and then select episodes that would pose the issue, force Antony to a decisive choice and a decisive act, and illustrate the degeneracy of his character and his fortunes under Cleopatra's spell" (p. 286). But so eminent a critic as Dr. Johnson suggests that the delight of the play derives from its episodic structure, even while he condemns its diffuseness: "This play keeps curiosity always busy and the passions always interested. The
continual hurry of the action, the variety of incidents, and the quick succession of one personage to another, call the mind forward without intermission from the first act to the last. But the power of delighting is derived principally from the frequent changes of the scene. . . . The events, of which the principal are described according to history, are produced without any art of connection or care of disposition” (p. 107). Cecil notes the presence of scenes in which both Antony and Octavius are absent but suggests that the characteristic uncertainty and complexity of the play depend partly on these scenes.

28 Dryden eradicated this prime fault in Antony and Cleopatra by the expedient of eliminating Eros, Enobarbus, and a host of other minor characters and replacing them with the single figure of Ventidius. That he compressed all their functions into the one character who had been least related to the protagonists in Shakespeare is evidence of his desire to improve the structure of our play.

29 Julian Markels, in The Pillar of the World: "Antony and Cleopatra" in Shakespeare's Development (Columbus, Ohio, 1968), frequently notes the discontinuities and violent juxtapositions in the play. He is chiefly concerned to explicate the theme of public and private in Shakespeare's development and to demonstrate that Antony subsumes both values into himself; consequently, he tends to relate the discontinuities to the portrayal of Antony's disjunctive character rather than to any widening of perspective.


31 Granville-Barker calls attention to the place of the Ventidius scene in the dramatic flow of the play (pp. 374-75); Riemer analyzes its function in terms similar to my own (p. 47).

32 Repetition is one of the key elements in the structure of Antony and Cleopatra, as of most plays: in general, we tend to notice only the repetitive concerns of any work. But the pattern of varied repetition is especially characteristic of Antony and Cleopatra. . . .

33 The reversal of the pattern of betrayal is striking because Shakespeare reverses Plutarch in order to achieve it: the nameless figure on whom Scarus is based deserts Antony immediately after Cleopatra gives him his golden armor ("The Life of Marcus Antonius," Shakespeare's Plutarch, ed. T. J.B. Spencer [Baltimore, 1964], p. 273).

34 Throughout the play, bad news is received differently by different people: compare Antony's reception of the news of the wars and Fulvia's death (1.2), Cleopatra's reception of the news of Antony's marriage to Octavia (2.5), and Antony's reception of the news of Cleopatra's suicide (4.14).

35 Handshaking: Antony and Caesar shake hands as a pledge when the marriage with Octavia is arranged ("Let me have thy hand. . . . There's my hand" 2.2.146, 149); Pompey shakes hands with Antony when they meet (2.6.48) and again on the galley (2.7.126). Menas and Enobarbus shake hands (2.6.95), although Menas presumably would have killed Enobarbus as readily as the triumvirs if Pompey had consented. The type of all these unsteady unions is the dance on Pompey's galley, where "Enobarbus places them hand in hand," according to the stage direction. Enobarbus's comment on his own handshake with Menas could serve as motto for all these: "if our eyes had authority, here they might take two thieves kissing" (2.6.95-96). Antony joins hands with his servants in an entirely different spirit (4.2.10). Hand kissing: We know that Antony (to say nothing of Julius Caesar and various unnamed kings) has kissed Cleopatra's hand, whether or not we see him; we do see her hand elaborately kissed by Caesar's servant Thidias and later by Scarus. The first is an amorous dalliance which enrages Antony; the second is a reward for courage in battle performed under Antony's instructions. All this hand play becomes significant as the lovers prepare for death: both the lovers trust to their own hands in their suicides (4.15.49; 5.1.21); and Antony's vision of them "hand in hand" in Elysium (4.14.51) subsumes both handshaking and hand kissing. Finally, they can trust only their own hands.
and each other's.


37Appreciation of the comic elements in the play is increasing. Cecil notes the variety of the play well, but he tends to relate this variety to the necessity of presenting a faithful image of the great world: "A convincing picture of the great world cannot be steeped in the consistently tragic atmosphere which envelops King Lear. To a detached observer, the life of the great world is never consistently tragic; it is an extraordinary compound of sad and comic, prosaic and poetic" (p. 19). Proser finds the comedy essential to the effect of the play: "Comedy in Antony and Cleopatra is a calculated device which questions the entire issue of heroic possibility only in turn to be questioned itself, and by Cleopatra. The result of this dialog between the heroic, grandiloquent, and super rational elements in the play and the comic, the satirical, and the realistic, is a widening of the drama" (p. 189). Daniel Stempel notes the comic and satiric elements in the play totally to the exclusion of any other: in his view, the play is exclusively a satire. Riemer notes comic elements frequently, but his insistence on the comic sometimes leads him astray. He finds Antony's death scene at least partly comic because the suicide is based on Cleopatra's ruse (pp. 57-58); this situation does not seem inherently comic to me. Traci finds the comedy of love's bawdry essential to the play as love dialogue (pp. 78 ff).

Drama As Deception

Robert Ornstein (essay date 1966)


[In the essay that follows, originally written in 1966, Ornstein states that while Antony and Cleopatra is not an allegory of art, it nonetheless uses Cleopatra and Egypt to defend art as the means by which reality and truth are revealed.]

The last scene of Antony and Cleopatra would be less difficult if it were more obviously solemn and serious. There is no lack of grandeur in the dying Cleopatra, but the comic note struck in her conversation with the Clown persists and mingles with the ceremonial mystery of her death. She is amused as well as ecstatic; when she thinks of Octavius, her visionary glances turn into a comic wink. She jests with Iras and Charmian, and she plays a children's game with the asps at her breast. It is difficult, of course, to complain about a scene that comes so very near the sublime. But now and then we may wish that Cleopatra had a more sober view of her own catastrophe, which she treats as a marriage feast (not where she eats, but where she is eaten), a tender domestic scene, an apotheosis, and a practical joke on the universal landlord.

Those who see no majesty in the earlier Cleopatra argue that the glitter of the Monument scene is not gold or complain that the Cleopatra of the last act is a new and exalted creation fashioned for the sake of a resplendent artistic conclusion. But for most of us the problem of the last scene is not focused in Cleopatra's character as such. Here at least her emotions are translucent: she has no thought but of Antony and no desire except to join him in death. What vexes us is Cleopatra's immortal longings. For even as we cannot resist the spell of her rapturous lyricism, neither can we assent to her vision of eternal love, which is embarrassingly physical, and worse still, smacks of a literary conventionality—of the Petrarchan "forever." We expect Cleopatra to dream of a long love's day since she is a creature of illusion. But we are not ready to equate her dream with Shakespeare's vision of love, which, in the sonnets at least, belongs very much to this world. Unlike other Renaissance poets, Shakespeare does not deny the brief hours and weeks of human love; it is enough for him that love triumphs to the edge of doom.
There would be no problem in the final scene if there were an Enobarbus to comment on Cleopatra’s immortal longings as he comments on Antony's attempts to outstare the lightning; or if there were a Charmian, immune to her mistress's self-intoxication, to mock Cleopatra's last imaginings. Octavius disappoints us by speaking ambiguously of Cleopatra's "strong toil of grace"; and before him there is only the Clown, who speaks paradoxically of "a very honest woman, but something given to the lie, as a woman should not do, but in the way of honesty." Are we to assume that Cleopatra is at her death a very honest woman but something given to the lie? The question of honesty is very important in the play: Enobarbus and his honesty begin to square; Antony's misfortunes corrupt honest men; and Octavius' words to Cleopatra bear little relation to his thoughts. We have heard Cleopatra lie many times before, even as we have seen Antony again and again turn his back on reality. An honest thought would almost seem out of place among the illusions, charms, and enchantments of Egypt. It is a land of dreaming, playing, and acting, where deaths are not quite deaths (or not quite believable); where illnesses, like tears, are profuse but only momentary; and where spectacles like that at Cydnus and the Monument are contrived to seduce the senses and the imagination. We have to admit that Cleopatra's barge, which Enobarbus describes as the purest mythic fancy, is a glorious and very honest illusion. But her death scene, which is a second Cydnus, is more difficult to judge because it envisions a reality that is past the size of dreaming and it seems to demand from us an impossible act of poetic faith. Shall we say than some jesting about the worm alters the fact of Cleopatra's death, or that her queenly robes make Octavius' victory illusory? She speaks of the babes milking her breast, but the drowsiness she feels is of death, not of maternal fulfilment.

We lose the profounder meanings of *Antony and Cleopatra* if we insist that questions of truth and honesty are irrelevant to Cleopatra or that her splendid poetic vision is beyond reason itself. For nothing less is at stake in the final scene than the honesty of the imagination and the superiority of its truths to the facts of imperial conquest. What we share with Cleopatra is not a visionary experience but the delight of her conspiracy with the Clown that unpolicies Octavius. She is used to playing jokes on these Romans, and her skill as a comedian shines brightly in the farce of the Seleucus episode, and in the irony of her grave submission to the sole sir of the world. Even as she earlier tormented Antony with references to the immortal Fulvia ("Can Fulvia die?") in the last Act her thoughts dwell humorously on Octavia, the Roman matron, who is demurely sharpening her fingernails in anticipation of Cleopatra's arrival in Rome. There is so much laughter earlier in the play that the comedy of the last Act does not surprise us. It does bother us, however, because we think that the story of Antony and Cleopatra should have been as tragic to Shakespeare as it was to the illustrators of De Casibus tales and to Shakespeare's French and English contemporaries. Or if we do not insist that it is tragic despite its final mood of joyous triumph and release, then we would have it an ironic comedy like *Troilus and Cressida*, in which ageing sensual love is shadowed by deceptions, jealousies, and fears. Ignoring the contrary evidence of the poetry, we imagine a relatively detached Shakespeare, who could delight in the paradoxical qualities of his lovers, but who would not have us take their professions at face value.

Most of the ironies in *Antony and Cleopatra* are not present in Plutarch's account, because they arise from the extravagant declarations and sublime aspirations which Shakespeare gives to his lovers. Antony would die a bridegroom, but his longing is prompted by the lie of Cleopatra's death, and he fails to imitate the noble Roman suicide of Eros. Cleopatra melts into lyric grief but she will not open the Monument, and so Antony must be hauled aloft to die in her arms. Then he speaks bravely of dying in the high Roman fashion but equivocates with life, charms Dolabella, and trifles with Seleucus before she shackles up all accidents. Even as we list these ironic episodes, however, we wonder if irony is the primary effect which these scenes have upon an audience. And when we take a larger view of plot we see that again and again irony is transformed into paradox by a felicitous turn of events that offers to the lovers something like the second chance given to the characters of the late romances. Though only for a dying moment, Antony and Cleopatra have the opportunity to call back yesterday, and to rediscover the love which they had thought was lost forever. Indeed, if Antony's death in Cleopatra's arms is a mocking irony, then it is an irony devoutly to be wished for.
Though some critics dwell on Antony's disillusionment, his rages more often approach the melodramatic hyperbole of Leontes' speeches than the torments of Troilus'; in fact Antony is most comic when he takes a high moral tone with his Egyptian dish and laments his Roman pillow left unpressed. We are urbane enough, of course, to admit some joking about adultery in The Winter's Tale. We smile at the thought of Sir Smiles fishing in his neighbour's pond because we know that Hermione is chaste. But we would have a more serious view of sexuality in Antony and Cleopatra because Cleopatra's innocence is only a pose and her fidelity is open to question. Why should her promiscuous past be cheerfully dismissed as "salad days"? And why should the lack of honesty in women, which is so bitter a theme in Hamlet and Troilus and Cressida, be reduced at last to the Clown's silly joke? If we assume that a personal disillusion lies behind the view of sex in the great tragedies, then we can infer from Antony and Cleopatra (as from the late romances) that in time Shakespeare recovered from the sexual nausea and sickness of generation expressed in Hamlet and King Lear. But biographical interpretations are at best dubious; what we find in Antony and Cleopatra is not a changed attitude towards sexual love, but rather a new perspective on the relations between the sexes. In his great tragedies and in the problem comedies, Shakespeare is concerned with the masculine view of sex. Hamlet's lines, for example, express a typically masculine contempt for woman's frailty and a masculine horror at the sexuality that breeds generations of sinners. Similarly Troilus and Othello are haunted by the masculine desire for sexual possession, a desire that is accompanied by the fear of loss and of the general mock. The darker side of romantic (i.e. masculine) ideals of fidelity is revealed in the anguish of the corrupted Moor, who would not keep a corner in the thing he loved for others' uses.

Where the masculine hunger is for sexual possession and domination, Cleopatra's womanly desire is to be possessed, and to triumph in surrendering. She would be taken: she would yield and feel again the weight of Antony. In his moments of rage, Antony is tormented by the thought that other men have enjoyed Cleopatra. Her womanly jealousies are of another kind: she envies in Fulvia and Octavia the title and place of a "married woman." Only superficially does the imagery of feeding in Antony and Cleopatra recall that of Troilus and Cressida, for Cleopatra's lines do not express the pang of unsatisfied appetite or of frustrate longing: her thoughts linger over the delicious memory of a fulfilment that is maternal as well as sexual. She has borne the weight of Antony in her womb as on her body: she has fed the lover and the babes at her breast. It is striking, moreover, how often Cleopatra's sexuality is an emotion recollected, not an immediate desire. Her scenes with Antony are filled with talk of war, with wranglings, and reconciliations. Only when Antony is absent is Cleopatra's thought "erotic," and then her longing is not of the flesh but of the total being, one that is rapturously satisfied by news of Antony. In an ageing Falstaff passion is merely ludicrous; but the love which survives the wrinkles and grey hairs that Shakespeare adds to Plutarch's portrait of the lovers is not quite Time's fool. The injurious gods cannot cheat Cleopatra as the stars cheat Juliet, because she has known years of love and revelry with Antony. Even the sorrow she feels in bearing his dying weight is transmuted by the memory of their earlier dyings. And if her last dream of Antony is an illusion, it is an illusion born out of the deepest reality of her experience—she is again for Cydnus.

Vaster than orgiastic memory, the past touches every character and every scene of Antony and Cleopatra. We hear of Antony's former greatness as a soldier, of Caesar and Pompey, Brutus and Cassius. The historical events depicted in Julius Caesar are recalled, and the past seems to live again in the present as Antony takes Brutus' place as Octavius' antagonist, and as once again love is opposed to imperial ambition. The ruthless impersonalism of the Triumvirate depicted in Julius Caesar lives on in the cold efficiency of Octavius, and the fidelity which the defeated Brutus inspired is reflected again in the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra and of those who loved them. To look back at Julius Caesar is to realize that Shakespeare did not expeditiously darken his portrayal of Rome in Antony and Cleopatra in order to soften our judgement of Egypt. He saw Caesar's ambition as a symptom of the decay of the Roman state, and he saw the decline of Roman political idealism as a process which had begun even before the assassination of Caesar unloosed the spirit of empire in Antony and Octavius. The end of an era of nobility was marked in Julius Caesar by the execution of a hundred Senators and by the suicides of Portia. Cassius, Titinius, and Brutus. In Antony and Cleopatra the decay of Roman idealism is so advanced that it is difficult to say whether a Roman thought is of duty or of disloyalty.
Yet the decay of the Roman state is paradoxical, because it is not a melting into Egyptian softness but a hardening into the marble-like ruthlessness of the universal landlord. No trace of Brutus' stoicism remains in Octavius' Rome; the prevailing philosophy is the cynical prudence of the Fool's songs in Lear. Weakness is merely despised, misfortune corrupts honest soldiers, and loyalty belongs only to the rising man. The pattern of Roman history unfolds for us on Pompey's galley. At present Rome is led by men who (with the exception of Octavius) would rather feast than rule and who make treaties of convenience they do not intend to keep. The Rome that was is recalled by Pompey, who is kept from treachery, not by a personal sense of honour, but by a memory of the honour once sacred to Rome—by a nostalgia for the ethic of his father. Unable to play falsely, Pompey loses the future, which belongs to a Menas who will desert the half-corrupted Pompey, and to an Octavius, whose honour demands only the justification of unscrupulousness. Far more than in the days of Brutus, Rome is bent on empire and rules by the sword; yet compared to the past, the present is not a time of great soldiery. The continual talk of war only emphasizes that the great military exploits live in memory. All the leaders, including Antony, deal in lieutenantry, and their lieutenants fear to win great victories. Except for the moment when Antony and Scarus beat back Octavius' legions, the battlefield is not a place where honour is won. It is a place where great men defeat themselves; it is the scene of shameful weakness or of the shameless policy that places revolted legions in the van.

The echoes of a nobler past are important because they remind us that the Rome which Octavius rules is not the eternal reality of political life. Only here and now must men like Enobarbus choose between the ways of soldiery and of personal loyalty, that were before a single path. But even as Shakespeare bounds his present scene by placing it in a larger historical framework, his use of archetypal imagery suggests that the worlds of Rome and Egypt are eternal aspects of human experience and form a dichotomy as elemental as that of male and female. The hard masculine world of Rome is imaged in sword, armour, and terms of war, in geometry and stone, and in the engineering that builds or destroys. The soft yielding feminine world of Egypt is poetically imaged as uniting the artifices of sexual temptation to the naturalness of fecundity and to the processes of growth and decay which depend on sun, wind, and water. But the absolute distinctions between Rome and Egypt which the imagery enforces are qualified by the dramatic action, that reveals the extent to which these worlds are mirror images of one another and divergent expressions of the same fundamental human impulses. Although by Roman standards, Antony is unmanned, the Roman standard of masculinity is itself examined by the dramatic action and found deficient. Moreover, although Antony's decline in Egypt is from the Roman measure, his decline also measures the decay of the Roman ideal of soldiery.

The tension between image and plot in Antony and Cleopatra leads again and again to paradox. The patterns of imagery insist that Egypt is a Circean land of mandragora and lotus-eaters, where sensuality breeds forgetfulness of Rome and duty. But the action shows us that it is Cleopatra, the Serpent of Old Nile, not Antony, who would hear the Roman messengers; and it is Cleopatra, not Octavia, who demands her place in the war by Antony's side. Thus it may not be completely ironic that the finest Roman words of the play are spoken by Cleopatra to Antony in Act I, Scene iii:

Your honour calls you hence,
Therefore be deaf to my unpitied folly,
And all the gods go with you! Upon your sword
Sit laurel victory, and smooth success
Be strew'd before your feet!

The imagery contrasts the enduring monumental quality of Rome to the melting evanescence of Egypt. But the Roman leaders know that the marble-constancy of Rome is founded precariously on the shifting loyalties of a disaffected populace and is forever subject to the battering ram of ambition. The violent spasms of destruction common to Rome are alien to Egypt, where there is permanence in the recurring cycle of growth and decay that dungs the earth, and where the bounty of the Nile requires that nothing be cultivated except the human sensibility. While the imagery insists upon the oversophisticated appetites of Egypt, the Roman leaders
tell of wars that make men drink the stale of horses and eat flesh that men die to look upon. Recurrent allusions to snare, serpent, toil, and charm depict Cleopatra as archetypal temptress and seducer. And yet there is no Egyptian snare or temptation as degrading as that which Menas offers Pompey or that which Octavius twice offers Cleopatra. How, indeed, shall we compare Cleopatra's toils with the politic duplicities of Octavius, who tries to patch a quarrel with Antony, engineers the cynical proposal of the marriage to Octavia and breaks his treaty with Pompey and his bond with Lepidus? The lies of Egypt are amateurish compared with those of Octavius and of the trustworthy Proculeius; not one Roman speaks the truth to Cleopatra at the end except Dolabella, and he must be seduced into telling the truth.

I do not mean that we are supposed to shudder at Rome. Though its political principles have decayed, it is in other respects a healthy and capable world, led by an Octavius who is cold not inhuman, unprincipled yet eminently respectable. His ambition is not seen as an anarchic force in an ordered world; it is rather the normal bent of a society shaped by masculine ideals of politics and power. Morally there is not much to choose between Rome and Egypt; in matters of the heart and of the imagination, however, they are polar opposites. Where Antony and Cleopatra's thoughts have a cosmic poetic amplitude, the Roman measure of bigness is earthbound and philistine; its imagination stirs at thoughts of triumphal spectacle and arch. (Octavius would have the trees bear men and the dust ascend to heaven when his sister enters Rome.) Untouched by art, and unsoftened by feminine influence, the Romans pride themselves on their masculine hardness and reticence. Cold, and to temptation slow, they scorn tears and womanish emotion. Despite the protective attitude they adopt, they are crass and patronizing in their relations with women whom they value as sexual objects and political pawns. Cleopatra rightly fears Antony's callousness because she knows that by Roman standards she is a diversion that should not be missed or overprized. The coarseness of the Roman view of sex is apparent throughout the play—in the lines of Octavius as well as Enobarbus, in Pompey's smutty jests, and in the salacious eagerness of Caesar's lieutenants to hear tales of Cleopatra. Although Enobarbus describes her lightness, her artfulness, her wit, and her infinite variety, the other Romans (like so many modern critics) can picture her only in the conventional posture of a whore, drugging Antony with cloying lascivious wassails.

In most respects the priggish Octavius is the very opposite of Antony. In his treatment of women, however, he is Antony's Roman brother. Antony adopts the pose of Cleopatra's general when he flees his Egyptian "dotage." Octavius sends Thyreus to Cleopatra with solemn assurances that her honour is unsullied. Antony babbles to Octavia about his honour when he deserts her; Octavius marries his sister to a man he despises and then wars to erase her dishonour. Octavius, like Antony, hungered for Cleopatra but his desire to possess her is more shameless and more contemptible. Indifferent to Antony's fate (he would be content if Cleopatra murders her lover), he lies to Cleopatra, cajoles her, and threatens her children in order to keep her alive so that she may be displayed as his trophy in Rome. He has no doubt that a woman like Cleopatra will be seduced into ignobleness when

want will perjure
The ne'er-touched vestal.

Warm and generous as well as callous, Antony is able to respond to the arts of Egypt, and he is so deeply altered by his response that it is difficult to say what is Antony or when he is less than Antony or when he is himself again. A legend in his lifetime, he is the hero of fantastic exploits and the stuff of soldierly brags and mythic imaginings. Contemning his Egyptian dotage, Philo, Demetrius, and Octavius recall a plated Mars and contrast Antony's earlier feats of battle to his present wassails. But Cleopatra and Enobarbus remember another, more sensual, Antony—Plutarch's game-ster and reveller, the lover of plays in Julius Caesar, who did not learn the arts of dissipation in Egypt or desert them when he returns to Rome. When plagued by his Roman conscience, Antony sees his salvation in a flight from Egypt; in Rome he momentarily recovers his ability to command, which allows him to look over Octavius' head. But Antony is not reinspired by Roman ideas; on the contrary, his superiority is a personal honesty that contrasts with Octavius' devious and politic
attempts to provoke a quarrel. No salvation awaits Antony in Rome because there is no honourable purpose to engage him; the Triumvirate feasts and gambles and despises the populace. The only Roman dedication is Octavius' desire to be the sole sir of the world. Moreover, if Antony's faults are Egyptian, he does not lose them in Rome, where he displays the very weaknesses that are later to destroy him: a desire to put off issues and to escape unpleasantness. In Egypt he is led by Cleopatra; in Rome he is led by Octavius' lieutenants into the foolish expediency of the marriage to Octavia. There is no point in the play, therefore, at which we can say, here Antony falls. His decline is a process that began in years past and which seems the inevitable destiny of a sensualist and opportunist who never shared Octavius' ambition to possess the entire world, but who wanted empires to play with and superfluous kings to feast and do his bidding. If we must have a reason for Antony's decline, we can say that he lost the desire before he lost the ability to command. He is never defeated in battle during the play. After the disaster at Actium, his fleet is intact and his army powerful though kings and legions desert. A doting braggart might have brushed aside the reality of his cowardice at sea; but Antony is shattered by the very trait which ennobled him in his dealings with Octavius, by an honourable shame at his failings as a leader.

It is characteristic of the handling of events in Antony and Cleopatra that we do not see Antony's failure of nerve at Actium; we see Canidius', Searus', and Enobarbus' response to it, and, following that, we see Antony's reaction. Much use is made of messengers bearing tidings of conflict, disaster, and death, because this is a play of reaction rather than of action. We know Octavius, Cleopatra, Enobarbus, Pompey, and Lepidus by the way that they respond to news of Antony. And we know Antony by his response to Cleopatra and to his fading powers, by his alternating moods of depression and elation, by his moments of impotent rage or of bluster, when he will outstare the lightning, and by his reconciliations with Cleopatra. This vacillation of mood in Antony reminds us of Richard II, except that Richard's journey is towards the nihilism of endlessly circling thoughts, while Antony becomes a fuller man in his decline, more bounteous in his love and in his generosity. When he tries to express, after the second disaster at sea, his loss of soldierly identity, he convinces us that he has changed, not lost, his identity. The soldier has become a lover, the spendthrift a mine of bounty, and the callous opportunist a meditative poet.

The growth of poetic sensitivity in Antony was apparent to earlier generations of critics. It is less apparent to us, ironically, because our desire to read Shakespeare "poetically" blurs our awareness of the poetic attributes of the characters in the plays. And to avoid critical naiveté, we make artificial distinctions between the form and substance of Shakespeare's dramatic verse. When Antony compares his state to the evanescent shapelessness of clouds in a dying afternoon, we grant to him the sense of weariness and loss which the lines convey; but the heavenly imagery and the poetic sensibility revealed in this passage we reserve for Shakespeare, who, we say, merely lends Antony his poetic faculty for artistic purposes. But it is only a step from this "sophisticated" approach to Antony's speeches to the notion that the morbidity of Hamlet's soliloquies is "saved" by the nobility of Shakespeare's poetry. If we grant Hamlet the nobility of his utterances, how shall we deny Antony his poetry? Not all the characters who speak in verse are poetic. Although Octavius' lines are at times richly metaphorical, he seems to us thoroughly prosaic, because the impression of poetic sensibility in Shakespeare's characters depends upon the nature of their response to life, not on the mere presence of figurative language in their speeches. Who but a poet would see the clouds as Antony does, and who but a poet would remember this heavenly image at the point of death? Antony's leave-taking of the world is an imaginative reverie untouched by the grandiosity that marks so many of his early "poetic" declarations.

At the beginning of the play it is obvious that Antony does not know Cleopatra because he does not yet know what is evident to the audience, that his only desire is to be with this woman. We feel that the hyperbole of his early speeches is strained, because his extravagant professions of love are undercut by his harsh, grating response to news from Rome and by his sensitivity to the Roman view of Cleopatra. Though he says here is my space, he is unable to conceive of a world limited by love; and he is unaware that he uses Cleopatra to excuse his indifference to political issues. We smile at Cleopatra's role of betrayed innocence, but not at her
keen perception of the emotional dishonesty of Antony's gestures of devotion and of the callousness that underlies them. She knows how easily an Antony who shrugs off Fulvia's death may desert her in turn. The first scenes show us an Antony who is caught between what he tells Cleopatra, and in part believes, and what he tells himself about her, and in part believes. In Rome he is irritated by every reference to her: he never speaks her name though his is always on her lips, and he never regards her as an equal or as having any claims upon him. When he decides to return to Egypt, he speaks of her as his pleasure.

As Antony's world shrinks, his hyperbole becomes, paradoxically, more convincing. When he is confronted by Octavius' legions, his chivalric pose becomes more than a pose, because at last he does fight for Cleopatra; and thus his arming before battle with Cleopatra's aid is more than one last parody of medieval romance. Now when Antony acts, he is aware of his pretendings; tutored by Cleopatra, he imitates after Actium her celerity in dying and, like her, he plays on the feelings of those who love him, making Enobarbus onion-eyed. His talk of death and his shaking of hands is an artful appeal to his followers' emotion and yet an honest piece of acting, because it expresses a true warmth and generosity of spirit. There are times, of course, when Antony's gestures are less honest, when he abuses Cleopatra for her treachery. But his Herculean rages are short-lived and his self-pity is untouched by genuine suffering. His despondency is always more painful to those who love him than it is to Antony, who is never deeply in conflict with himself, and who is more a spectator to, than a participant in, the final disaster at sea. His catastrophes are strangely beautiful: his gods desert to music, his loss of empire is signalled by shouts of joy in the fleets. Even at his nadir he shakes hands with Fortune as with an old familiar friend.

Whatever ironies attach to the manner of Antony's death, he is raised visually, and poetically, above the earth on which the melancholy Enobarbus sinks. The moralizing critic interprets Antony's fate as a warning to adhere to the path of reason; he forgets that Enobarbus follows reason to a fate more wretched than Antony's. Enobarbus chooses Rome lest he lose himself in Antony's dotage and like Antony be made a woman. In itself this choice is not shameful; Enobarbus' act has a hundred Roman precedents, and he has no reason—or, at least, no Roman reason—to follow a leader who can no longer command. What is shameful is Enobarbus' betrayal of himself, because he allows his reason and his honesty to square. Worse still, he goes over to Octavius knowing that to have stayed with Antony was to have "won a place in the story." Yet the place which Enobarbus wins is not as ignoble as he thinks, for we sense that his desertion of Antony is, like his death, an act of love. He leaves Antony when he can no longer bear to watch Antony's failure as a general, and he is redeemed by his response to Antony's generosity even though he has no chance to express to his master the full measure of his devotion. The lie of Cleopatra's death saves Antony from Enobarbus' fate because it ends the lie of his rage while Cleopatra is still alive. And Antony's failure to die in the high Roman fashion makes possible the final expression of his bounteous love, his dying wish that she save herself by making terms with Octavius.

Between the disaster at Actium and his final reunion with Cleopatra, Antony is the centre of the dramatic action. At the Monument, however, the dramatic focus shifts: the dying Antony plays the chorus to Cleopatra's impassioned grief, and she is from that moment on the supreme figure of the play. At Antony's death, we are told, a new Cleopatra is born—the wanton temptress rises to regal majesty. But what is really new in the Cleopatra who mourns over Antony? Her royalty, her poetic sensibility, and her capacity for profound emotion were evident before: her grief is hardly surprising when, from the beginning, her every thought is of Antony, and she is haunted by the fear of losing him. Is it the new Cleopatra who says, "Husband, I come?" Or is she the same Egyptian who in the first scene of the play reveals her envy of Fulvia, the married woman, and her longing to be more to Antony than his pleasure?

Only Shakespeare could have imagined that the greatest courtesan of all time hungered to be Antony's wife—to be made "an honest woman." Only he could have dreamed of a Cleopatra who is, despite her lies and pretendings, always emotionally honest. When the messenger brings news of Antony's remarriage, she is furious, but her fury is directed at the messenger, not at Antony. If she pretends to die when Antony leaves
her, it is because their partings are a form of death which leaves only the desire to sleep and dream of Antony. Those who read her thoughts announce that she intends to betray him when she listens to Thyreus. The text indicates only the elaborate irony of her submission and her comic surprise at Octavius' concern for her honour. It is quite explicit, moreover, that Enobarbus is able to uncover Cleopatra's intended treachery only because she insists that he be present at the interview with Thyreus. How foolish of this cunning woman to plan a betrayal of Antony in the presence of Enobarbus! What we witness is not Cleopatra's duplicity but Enobarbus' jealous revenge and the confusion of rage in Antony, who has Thyreus whipped for kissing the "kingly" hand of that "boggier" Cleopatra.

According to Plutarch, Cleopatra demanded a role in the war against Octavius because she feared that in her absence Antony and Octavius might be reconciled. Shakespeare fails to give Cleopatra a similar explicit motive. Against Enobarbus' warning and against her own nature, she insists upon bearing a charge in the war; she will have Antony fight by sea so that she may command her fleet at Actium. If Cleopatra were nothing more than the seductress whom critics describe, her desire to fight by Antony's side would seem to us incredible. It does not astonish us, however, because we see from the beginning her desire to be worthy of this Herculean Roman, and to imitate the noble Roman fashion of words and deeds. She bids a Roman farewell to Antony in the first Act even as she seeks a Roman death in the last act. Her desire to be a Roman wife, which becomes explicit at her death, leads Cleopatra to attempt at Actium the role of Fulvia, the only part she plays falsely before Antony.

Like Antony, Cleopatra does not die in the high Roman fashion; and though she earns the title of Antony's wife she remains more Egyptian than Roman, more various than marble-constant. Timidity, vanity, and womanly fears plague her Roman resolution; she dies a sensual creature of the Nile, artful, theatrical, jealous to the end of Antony. Part of the mystery of her death is the fullness with which it expresses the multiplicity of her nature. She is Antony's mistress and his wife, the graceful courtesan and the tender mother, the great queen and the simple lass. Her drowsiness is at once sensual, maternal, and child-like, for though she nurses her imaginary babes, she is, as so many times before, very like a child, who plays now at being mother, and who is dressed in a royal costume to surprise Octavius. Her crown slips, but Charmian mends it before she too plays.

More than a triumph over Octavius, Cleopatra's death is a triumph over her own fears and over a deeply rooted instinct for life. She is not, however, in love with death though she allows it to commit a loving act upon her; she dreams of life and of Antony. And though she makes a fellow-conspirator of the worm which will eat her, she knows it is not worth the feeding; she knows too the horror of physical decay, which she has envisioned before in striking images of fly-blown bodies. Her death will not be a melting into eternal natural change; it will be a change into changelessness that robs Octavius of his victory and that mocks his immortal longings. He thinks that Cleopatra's "life in Rome/Would be eternal in our triumph" and he meditates in his last speech on the glory he has won by the deaths of the lovers. But it is paltry to be Caesar, whose quest of fame earns an ignominious place in the story.

Cleopatra's sense of the comedy of imperial ambition is not a new intuition that reaches "beyond the tragic." The paltriness of Caesar was evident to the youthful Shakespeare, whose sonnets contrast the vital power of art to the lifeless marble and gilded monuments of princes. There are echoes of the sonnets, I think, in the antithesis of Egypt and Rome, and in the depiction of a love which finally admits not even the impediment of death. The themes of the sonnets are also relevant to the echoes in the final scene of Capulet's Monument, where another pair of lovers found in death the marriage union which life denied. As Romeo and Juliet draws to a close, we sense that the true memorial to the lovers is not the gilded statues which Montague and Capulet promise to raise, but Shakespeare's play. And we know that Cleopatra will live in art because she fashions her own incomparable memorial, the scene in the Monument, which overshadows the mythic wonder of Cydnus. It is the artist in Cleopatra who stirs Shakespeare's deepest imaginative sympathies and who receives the immeasurable bounty of his artistic love, which is immortality itself.
We need not turn *Antony and Cleopatra* into an allegory of art to see that its final paradox is the final paradox of Donne's "Canonization": though deserted by those who observe Octavius' face, the lovers die and rise the same, and prove mysterious by their love. The defect of their passion becomes perfection because ultimately theirs is not a sublunary love: their "faults" shine like the unchanging stars. Donne's lover is a poet who builds in sonnets' pretty rooms, and who fashions the legend of his love in immortal verse. Cleopatra is an artist who fashions out of her life a legend that is unfit for hearse or for Octavius' half-acre tombs. Her "place in the story" is beside the legendary figures who live in ancient myth. She is another Thetis, an Isis, a Venus, a Dido; Cupids and Nereides attend her, the winds are enamoured of her, and she is wooed by Phoebus and, at last, by Death himself. She teaches a plated Mars an artful way of loving; and she turns this demi-Atlas after death into a very god who spreads the masculine seed of his inexhaustible bounty over the earth. In her mythopeic imagination Antony bestrides the ocean, making cities on the waves, and creating empires through a divinely prodigal carelessness—he drops realms and islands out of his pockets.

The foolish Clown is right after all. The biting of Cleopatra's worms is immortal, because it brings a death that lives in the artistic imagination. She dies in the last scene of Shakespeare's play as she has died so many times before in Plutarch, in medieval "tragedy," and in Renaissance plays and poems. And because Shakespeare has written, she will die many times again and be staged over and over to the show—so long as men can breathe or eyes can see, Cleopatra is again for Cydnus. The terms act, play, and show are not metaphorical when applied to her, because she is in her essential being an actress. Her poses are too extravagant to deceive; they are meant to bewitch and captivate by their infinite variety. She will not allow herself to be carted through the streets of Rome in the posture of a whore or to be staged to the show in vulgar Roman fashion. But as if she knows that her destiny is art, she dons her robes and prepares one last dazzling scene that draws a gasp of admiration from Octavius. We have seen her metamorphoses before—her sudden changes from tears to laughter, from pettiness to regality, and from sickness to health. None of them is comparable, however, to the metamorphosis of her death, which turns life into art.

As early as the sonnets, Shakespeare knew that the enemy of love is not time or death; these can only refine its worth. Love's adversary is the unfeeling heart—those who are "as stone/Unmoved, cold and to temptation slow." He can accept a world of mutability in *Antony and Cleopatra*, as in the tragedies and the late romances, because it offers the possibility of renewing change, in later generations, and in the heart of a Lear, and Antony, or a Leontes. Shakespeare does not retreat in his later plays from the exalted humanism of his tragedies, which stresses the irreplaceableness of a Cordelia; he does not find comfort in a naturalistic faith in the continuance of life. The security of *Antony and Cleopatra* and of the late romances is founded on the paradox of tragic art, which depicts immeasurable loss and yet preserves forever that which the artist supremely values. Although great creating Nature may reincarnate some of the rareness of Hermione in Perdita, the true miracle of *The Winter's Tale* is Paulina's art, which preserves and enriches the wonder of Hermione herself.

In Shakespeare's great tragedies illusion and seeming are opposed to moral reality. But in Cleopatra's artful spectacles as in the masques of Prospero and Paulina, illusion and reality intermingle. Sober realists may agree with Dolabella that the Antony whom Cleopatra ecstatically recalls is only a dream of her imagination; they forget, however, that Dolabella, like Cleopatra, is only a dream of Shakespeare's imagination. The triumph of love and art in *Antony and Cleopatra* will not allow us to believe that Shakespeare, who celebrated in the sonnets the miracle of poetry, expressed in Prospero's lines a disillusioned awareness of the vanity of his dramatic art. After a lifetime spent in creating the magic of the stage, Shakespeare must have known that the "idle" dreamlike play of an artist's imagination is the deepest reality of his experience, if not a clue to the fundamental reality of all experience:

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.
Sidney R. Homan (essay date 1970)


[In the following essay, Homan demonstrates the ways in which Antony and Cleopatra both praises and denigrates acting and the theater, and contends that the play's ambivalent aesthetic statement reflects the ambiguous Renaissance attitudes toward art and imagination.]

Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra contains both praise and ridicule of acting, the theater, the use of illusions, and, in general, the artist and his profession. In considering these aesthetic issues I do not mean to reduce the play to an allegory of art but rather to quality and deepen the simpler dichotomy between Rome and Egypt that emerges from a good many thematic studies. More partisan views tend to take one of two extremes, reading Antony and Cleopatra either as a morality-like condemnation or an unqualified celebration of the lovers. There has also been a reaction to these extremes, for other critics have argued that Shakespeare establishes a dialectic between politics and love, that by skillfully balancing the claims of Rome and Egypt he allows for no clear choice between them.

I think, however, that the play's complex and paradoxical aesthetic statement is also important in its own right. Moreover, it parallels an ambiguous attitude toward art and the imagination both in the literary criticism of the age and else where in Shakespeare's work. A review of Renaissance commentators reveals great divisions of opinion: the playwright as charlatan or creator, the artist as a man mocking reality with a counterfeit world or creating forms beyond the reach of nature, art itself as a baseless illusion or an intimation of some higher reality. If Anne Righter is correct in her interesting study of Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play, Shakespeare himself, over a lifetime of work, expresses a similarly divided attitude, making shallow or pleasant allusions to actors and the stage in his early plays, championing the theater and art in later plays, and yet also revealing in the dark comedies and the tragedies the "tendency to insult the theater," to use "the play metaphor . . . to express emptiness and deceit." Interestingly enough, Miss Righter finds the theatrical metaphors in Antony and Cleopatra rather one-sided, and thereby classes the play with those mocking the theater. I believe the aesthetic statement is actually more catholic and complex. Again, it is this statement which is my concern, for it at once provides a deeper, more dramatic approach to the play than does the simpler politics-love dichotomy and illustrates a grand moment in Shakespeare when aesthetics and theme are ultimately one.

Very often in Antony and Cleopatra the theater is spoken of with contempt. Cleopatra abhors the possibility that the lovers' story will be brought to the stage:

. . . The quick comedians
Extemporally will stage us, and present
Our Alexandrian revels. Antony
Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I'th' posture of a whore.

(V.ii.216-21)

The audience, she fears, would consist of nothing but slaves wearing greasy aprons, smothering the actors with their thick breaths (209-13). Caesar's garish victory parade is branded as an "imperious show" (IV.xv.23), and Enobarbus similarly describes Antony's own desperate plan to duel with Octavius as a mere "show" (III.xiii.30). Ridiculing Antony's vows of fidelity, Cleopatra chides him to "play one scene / Of excellent dissembling, and let it look / Like perfect honour" (I.iii.78-80). But the most thorough questioning of...
the power to give momentary credence to an illusion occurs when Cleopatra, though at first praising the fancy that creates "strange forms" beyond the power of nature, finds in the real Antony "nature's piece 'gainst fancy, / Condemning shadows quite" (V.ii.97-100). The real Antony, in Professor Kittredge's explication of these lines, is Nature's "masterpiece that would quite discredit even Imagination's shadowy figures." At first the queen wishes for "another sleep" so that she might have a second vision of the Antony whose "face was as the heavens" (76-79), but she soon confesses that the real Antony can only be approximated by a vision, albeit majestic, and that a man of flesh and blood is to be preferred to a lifeless illusion. And when Antony denounces himself in a conversation with Eros, he does so by equating "black Vesper's pageants"—the shifting forms of a cloud which one minute assumes the shape of a dragon and the next that of a towered citadel—with his own shameful wavering between the demands of empire and his personal indulgence in Egypt (IV.xiv.1-14). Pageant, that general word that can refer to everything from the floats of mystery plays to court masques, is used here to describe at once the clouds whose own shows "mock our eyes with air" and the once-famous soldier who now "cannot hold [his] visible shape," torn as he is between love and politics.

This censure of mere theatricality and of the imagination as fickle or uncontrollable is at one, it seems, with the denunciations we may bring against Cleopatra's own seductive arts. Indeed, in Antony's speech just quoted it is the woman's sexual power which has robbed a soldier of his "visible shape," thereby inciting him to draw a parallel between himself and those illusions which are the combined product of the imagination and formless clouds. The word "play," in the sense of sexual play, is frequently interchangeable with "play" as it refers to the illusion produced by an actor. Perhaps the most intricate use of this double meaning occurs when Cleopatra comments that in Antony's absence her eunuch Mardian is no worse than a woman as a sexual partner. She then distinguishes between the poor actor who can at least "plead pardon" from his audience for a bad performance and the sexually incapable man who has no such recourse when he is found "too short" (II.v.3-9).

This association of sex and art culminates in the queen's own character. It is a common observation that she is a skillful actress, conjuring up moods to lure or deceive Antony and the other men in the play, a creature, in Barbara Everett's words, who lives entirely in a "world of 'play'." The gay, world-weary aristocrat or the martyred lover "sudden sick" (I.iii.3-5)—her repertoire is no less varied than our responses to her. Able to switch roles at a moment's notice, to "be Cleopatra" (III.xiii.187) whenever the occasion demands, she is at once actress and playwright. Granville-Barker in listing her several charms stresses her extraordinary "imagination," while Derek Traversi speaks of her ability to "impose upon her surroundings a vitality which is not the less astonishing for retaining to the last its connection with the environment it transcends." By her so-potent art she is able to imagine fish as "every one an Antony" (II.v.14) or the horse on which he rides as herself.

Her sexuality, which the Romans and many commentators find so degrading, is inseparable from this ability to transform, to put her unique stamp on anything falling within her sphere. Sex as creation and art as creation are correlatives here, and any encounter with Cleopatra's world involves a transformation. When he is with her the soldier must change to a lover; he cannot play two roles at once. This is as true for Antony as it was for Caesar: "She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed" (II.ii.227). The most complex statement regarding these powers of transformation that are at one with Cleopatra's sexuality is made by Enobarbus as he describes her first meeting with Antony, where the queen's very presence transmuted sails and winds, the water and the ship's oars, her cheeks and the divers-colored fans, and flower-soft hands and silken tackle into love symbols of the receiving female and the aggressive male (II.ii.190-218). The richness of her love is this power to change all objects and elements, even the wind itself, into something preeminently sexual.

Still, the description of the barge is a statement after the fact, a past event not witnessed by the audience. Cleopatra's "performance" at her death—and I mean this literally because she herself thinks of it as a scene, even wearing her "best attires" for the occasion (V.ii.228)—provides, instead, a direct and present example. In less than twenty lines (V.ii.294-312) she manages to translate even the horrors of death into the pleasures of
love. The asp's bite becomes a "lover's pinch" and then the asp is metamorphosed into a baby suckled at his mother's breast. Applying a second asp, the queen imagines it to be an Antony, and thus we have the almost sentimental family tableau of the mother embracing her husband and their sleeping child. Even Charmian, upon her mistress' death, thinks of herself as part of a stage performance as she adjusts Cleopatra's crown and then readsies herself to "play" a part, to die like her queen, before Octavius enters. The whore Cleopatra, by the sheer force of her imagination, has become a married woman; Antony will be her husband in death if she skillfully plays what remains of her earthly role, if "to that name [husband] my courage prove my title!" (V.ii.286-87). Her next stage will be one of otherworldly dimensions, that pagan paradise to which a lonely wife hastens now that there is no good cause to "stay" (312) longer on this world's stage.

Again, this Act V transformation is a mere illusion. Souls less given to the theater are perfectly right in calling an asp an asp. And the moment we rhapsodize over Cleopatra's last scene we must remember the pettiness, the selfishness which accompanies her even to the end. It remains a moot point for some scholars whether she dies for the love of Antony or to avoid being led through the streets of Rome. Perhaps no more certain are her motives for hiding half her wealth from Octavius. Moreover, the clown with his cheap puns mocks not only concepts of immortality but the "worm" itself, Cleopatra's liberating instrument of death. The illusion itself is a paradox since Cleopatra offers us not an empire, nothing as solid as Rome, but merely words, words, words. Antony speaks accurately, I believe, when he finds her "cunning past man's thought" (I.ii.138).

This power to control the audience's response as well as one's own view of an otherwise grim situation is often thought of as womanish and unbecoming. Enobarbus, finding in Antony a similar power as he threatens to draw tears from hardened soldiers, begs his leader that he "Transform us not to women" (IV.ii.36). One critic sees Antony developing a "poetic sensitivity" like that of his mistress when he too speaks of death in pleasurable, sexual terms, calling it a "lover's bed" to which he, the "bridgroom," hastens (IV.xiv.99-101). Yet we must also admit that this sensitivity demands an abdication of responsibility, a loss of empire. On the negative side, then, the artist and the imagination are linked with what is a delusion, unbecomingly womanish, something for the moment, antithetical to the real world, something potentially dangerous. This same paradox also marks the Sonnets, where Shakespeare is both lover and poet, stimulated and yet repulsed by his passion for a dark lady, alternately confident that his verse will immortalize his love for the young man and cynical that his tongue-tied Muse will produce only a counterfeit art falling far short of its subject. If Shakespeare views love impartially, both celebrating and condemning it, perhaps he may be equally impartial in viewing that imagination and the actor's skill which distinguish Cleopatra no less than her patent sexuality.

To some degree every aspect of her imagination, then, is ironic. Robert Ornstein, for example, points out how it functions best in the remembrance of past events and how dormant it tends to be in the present. Cleopatra's finest poetry, indeed, springs from memories of earlier affairs or from the sight of Antony dead before her; when the lovers are together and healthy they are more likely to quarrel and bicker. Even the most ardent admirers among the critics cannot overlook this fact. Furthermore, the fullest expression of their love in the play occurs as death approaches. Despite Cleopatra's wish to join Antony where souls couch on flowers, the basic stimulus and metaphor for love here is the very agent which separates and destroys the lovers—at least in the present world. Conversely, Cleopatra's visions into the future are no less qualified. Diomedes speaks of the "prophesying fear" which drives the queen to lock herself in a monument (IV.xiv.120), and Cleopatra shudders to see "In Fulvia's death" a grim portent of her own thankless end (I.iii.64-65).

Perhaps this paradoxical attitude toward the poetic power is epitomized in her own line immediately following Iras's death: "Have I the aspic in my lips?" (V.ii.292). There have been many references earlier in the play to the organ of speech: "mouth-made vows / Which break themselves in swearing!" (I.iii.30-31), "wan'd lips" (II.i.21), gold melted and poured down ill-uttering throats (II.v.34-35), women who are "shrilltongu'd" or "Dull of tongue" (III.i.15, 19), kisses laid upon lips (IV.xv.21). Now the asp, like Yorick's skull the ultimate death symbol, merges with the voice, with Cleopatra's "lips." And while, as we have seen, she manages to metamorphose the asp into an Antony and their child, it also remains the agent which will literally stop her
Yet once we have made such qualifications of Cleopatra's imagination, we must still admit that there is nothing comparable to her in Rome. By this statement, though, I do not mean to place Rome and what is said or thought there at completely opposite ends from the poetry of Egypt. There is, in fact, a speech describing Octavia's entrance, or the entrance that should have been hers in a world where Antonys were not lured away by Cleopatras, which may put in a proper perspective the aesthetic dimensions of the two worlds:

The wife of Antony
Should have an army for an usher, and
The neighs of horse to tell of her approach
Long ere she did appear. The trees by th' way
Should have borne men, and expectation fainted,
Longing for what it had not. Nay, the dust
Should have ascended to the roof of heaven,
Rais'd by your populous troops.

(III.vi.43-50)

This is not poetry for a Cleopatra, but it still has a special majesty, despite the irony of the occasion. While not brilliantly erotic like the description of Cleopatra's barge, Octavius' speech is somehow triumphant, respectful. Cleopatra's messenger may have dismissed Octavia as "a statue [rather] than a breather" (III.iii.24), but then a statue has a permanence and a loveliness to which the queen cannot lay claim.

However, it is fair to say that the Romans are somewhat deficient in the Egyptian gifts of imagination and acting. Octavia is reported to be of a "cold, and still conversation" (II.vi.118-19), and even at moments of great emotion, such as when she must part with a brother and a husband, there is a division between her "tongue" and her "heart" (III.ii.47-50). As opposed to Cleopatra, who is nothing if not passionate, the Romans cultivate the art of separating "speech" from "passion" (II.ii.12-13), and if wine is one stimulus for imaginative speech, as it is for the queen, Octavius himself wisely limits his drinking aboard Pompey's galley. The Roman way of talking is more given to "thought" (I.ii.76), "judgment" (II.ii.55), and "oath" (87)—words associated with reason and a sense of responsibility. In Egypt one takes pleasure in responding to what is immediate and sensuous, but in Rome Antony is given to "a studied, not a present thought" (II.ii.138). He later describes himself as "well studied" to express his debt to Pompey (II.vi.47).

But if Rome is a world of solid achievement, something sure and masculine as opposed to something illusory and feminine, it is also an often graceless, unimaginative world. At the meeting between Antony and Octavius in Lepidus' house, the conversation in the first half of the scene is formal, tensely polite, and, in that discussion about an expedient marriage, repulsively businesslike. Mr.Traversi's word for this Roman conversation is "witless," and in a very perceptive essay Michael Lloyd goes one step further, arguing that the Roman tongue is one "not merely of . . . self-seeking but of . . . insensitiveness and incomprehension." However, once the triumvirs depart Enobarbus, encouraged by his friends Agrippa and Maecenas, describes Cleopatra's barge and her first meeting with Antony in a speech that is surely the finest long piece of poetry in the play. The paradox of the situation mirrors that of the play's general aesthetic statement, for in Enobarbus' speech we have exquisite poetry spoken by a Roman, concerning a past rather than a present event (we may recall Mr. Ornstein's remarks about the ex-post-facto nature of the poetry), and delivered by a soldier who has known but also condemns the splendors of Egypt.

If art is timeless, if Cleopatra's remembrances and visions of the future remove or transform her from a tragic, sordid present reality, Rome is itself caught in time and has become, like its leader, "Fortune's knave" (V.ii.3) and "vassal" (29). And yet we may also think of Cleopatra as the victim of her own escapism, her role itself as
a mere delusion, while Rome, however degenerate and unimaginative, represents the one hope for the future, Octavius himself the master bringing in a "time of universal peace" (IV.vi.5).

Thus the complexities of the aesthetic issues, the praise and ridicule of art and the imagination, qualify a reading of the play which would establish a simple dichotomy between Rome and Egypt, with Shakespeare giving his preference to one or the other.

Notes

1The text I use is that of G. L. Kittredge (ed.), The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra, 2nd ed., revised by Irving Ribner, (The Kittredge Shakespeares), Waltham, Mass., 1966.

2J. Leeds Barroll, for example, describes Antony as a man reduced to "nothing through his own vices," as one who dies "unreclaimed and deluded": "Antony and Pleasure," JEGP, LVII (1958), 708-20; for Thomas Stroup, Cleopatra is a sort of Vice figure seducing her lover from his proper role as world leader: Microcosmos: The Shape of the Elizabethan Play (University of Kentucky Press, 1965), pp. 194-95. Yet Jan Kott can argue that the political world is ultimately inferior to Egypt because it is "small, because one cannot escape it": Shakespeare Our Contemporary (Garden City, N. Y., 1966), p. 173; to S. L. Bethell, Cleopatra is Antony's "good, and not his evil genius, rescuing him from an undue preoccupation with the world, which is a snare and a delusion": Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition (London, 1944), p. 131.

3John Danby was one of the first to argue this way in "The Shakespearean Dialectic: An Aspect of Antony and Cleopatra," Scrutiny, XVI (1949), 203. Norman Rabkin, for example, speaks of Rome both as a place where "honor is the watchword" and as a "vicious political arena": Shakespeare and the Common Understanding (New York, 1967), p. 186. Maynard Mack comments that the love-making elicits at once "laughter" and "admiration," while the play "like life itself, gives no clear-cut answers": Introduction to his edition for the Pelican Shakespeare (Baltimore, 1964), pp. 16, 23. Mr. Rabkin also provides a good bibliography of what he would call "complementarious" readings of the play, p. 191 (fn. 22).

4One might cite as champions (sometimes with qualifications) of the imagination: Mazzoni in his Defense of Comedy, Richard Willis in De re poetica disputatio, Sir Philip Sidney in An Apology for Poetrie, Sir John Davies in "Nose Teipsum." As opponents or skeptics: Burton in his Anatomy of Melancholy; Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola in what must be one of the age's most sustained attacks on the imagination, De Imaginacione; Bacon in The Advancement of Learning; and, most prominent among the Puritans, Gosson in his School of Abuse. But even defenders of art, such as Tasso in his Discourses, were quick to distinguish between true (ictastic) and false (phantastic) images born of the same basic process. And for all his glorious descriptions of the poet's "bewitfull visions" and his ability to devise some "new or rare thing," Puttenham in his Arte of English Poesie devotes most of the work to showing how and why the poet should be a methodical craftsman, one whose art finds its real strength in sound proportions and what Bacon would commend as a judicial balance between fancy and reason, with reason being the final arbiter. G. G. Smith in his Elizabethan Critical Essays, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1904) and J. E. Spingarn in Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1908) provide most of the basic texts. I personally find one of the most thorough and sober modern commentaries on the age's literary criticism to be that of J. W. H. Atkins, English Literary Criticism: The Renascence (London, 1955). A good study of the Puritan attack is Elbert N. S. Thompson's The Controversy between the Puritans and the Stage (New York, 1903).


It is a commonplace of criticism that Shakespeare untiringly explored the implications of the idea that all the world's a stage. In a number of his works he presents a formal play within a play. In virtually all of his dramas there are examples of what can be called 'undeclared plays' in which characters put on performances for each other. One of the most significant aspects of his tragic art is the development of the self-dramatizing propensities of his heroes. Nowhere, perhaps, does he go so far as in *Antony and Cleopatra* where richly explored concepts of identity are couched constantly in terms of the way man projects himself. Philo insists to Demetrius, at the opening of the play, that the role of general, which he takes to be Antony's essence, has been usurped by his degrading performance as a strumpet's fool. The paradox of essence and role is neatly encapsulated at the end of the first scene: "Sir, sometimes when he is not Antony,/ He comes too short of that great property/ Which still should go with Antony" (I, i, 57-59).

The first vision we have of Antony and Cleopatra finds them locked in a series of games. Briefly they are involved in a word-game about measuring love (I, i, 13-17). On the announcement of the news from Rome, Cleopatra falls into a scornful teasing of Antony concerning the apron-strings which tie him to his homeland. Antony counters this by what seems the equivalent of an aria in grand opera "Let Rome in Tiber melt"—a spacious declaration which Cleopatra undercuts with "Excellent falsehood!" Cleopatra's scornful "Antony will be himself adds to what will become a riddling cross-cutting series of versions of what Antony is. Is Cleopatra referring to the peerless Antony who loves her, Fulvia's Antony, Caesar's Antony, Antony as actor playing at being Antony the lover to hide his quintessential Roman soldier's heart? When Demetrius says: "I am full sorry/ That he approves the common liar, who thus speaks of him at Rome" (I, i, 59-61), we have a different formulation of the same problem. Demetrius indicates that the behaviour he has seen corroborates a lie—that the real Antony is living up to parodies of himself as doting lover. This idea of conflicting versions of a single identity is pursued throughout the play as Shakespeare presents characters who from the very outset are fully aware of the problems of juggling roles.

Cleopatra is a star and a scene-stealer, and she "sends-up" her co-star when she does not like the scene she is asked to play. It is interesting to speculate how much Shakespeare's understanding of the complex and mercurial character of Cleopatra was derived from his observation of the stars in the London theatre.
companies of his day. Cleopatra will never play second fiddle to anyone. If there is to be a farewell scene she is determined to dominate it. It will not be about Antony's political necessities but about her sense of betrayal, desolation, anger, scorn. She knows intuitively that where two self-willed people are concerned, the relationship thrives on conflict not on subjection:

*Cleopatra* If you find him sad,
Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report
That I am sudden sick. Quick, and return.
[Exit Alexas.]

*Charmian* Madam, methinks, if you did love him dearly,
You do not hold the method to enforce
The like from him.

*Cleopatra* What should I do I do not?

*Charmian* In each thing give him way; cross him in nothing.

*Cleopatra* Thou teach est like a fool—the way to lose him.

(1, iii, 3-10)

Cleopatra is involved here in a strategy of acting, but she must know that she cannot dissuade Antony from leaving. Antony knows that her tearing of a passion to tatters is acting. But, like Cleopatra, he knows that great figures have to live up to the roles demanded of them. Why else would he be going to Rome to make his presence felt? What holds him to Cleopatra is that she never ceases to play up to the role she owes her position. She is a woman and a queen. She is not pretending to be angry—she is angry. It is simply that she is 'milking the part.' Everyone in the audience knows that and everyone on stage knows that—so there is no split in levels of awareness here, no undeclared play within a play. For Cleopatra acting is not disguise but heightened self realization, and it must be so for Antony too. He knows that he has got the part of the heavy here, and he sticks to it doggedly. Cleopatra steals the scene with a virtuoso performance that reveals her essence: for her, acting is a way of life, a method of expressing her real self.

Cleopatra sends Antony up; she throws him out of his part by an inventive exploitation of her griefs, attacking him as an actor. She claims to have penetrated his performance. His rejoicing now at Fulvia's death must be pretence. Either that or he was pretending when he declared his love to Fulvia. What is one to make of such a man?

I prithee turn aside and weep for her;
Then bid adieu to me, and say the tears
Belong to Egypt. Good now, play one scene
Of excellent dissembling, and let it look
Like perfect honour.

*Antony* You'll heat my blood; no more.

*Cleopatra* You can do better yet; but this is meetly.

*Antony* Now by my sword—
A world without passion is intolerable to Cleopatra. Surely their parting deserves an immense scene. By mocking Antony as an actor, she seems to be trying to get him out of his stolid stance, which she regards as a disguising of the emotion he owes her. It is the cold, controlled Antony who is an actor, the Roman Antony. When he begins to drop that part under her goading, when he is, in fact, becoming her Antony, she accuses him of acting to egg him on so that he will be like herself—filling out her part as the occasion demands. Having aroused Antony, she has to handle a delicate transition. She has to turn the roused emotion towards love. She makes an initial attempt with a wonderful change of pace that is heart-stopping in the theatre. After all the tirades she achieves a sudden simplicity: "Courteous lord, one word./ Sir, you and I must part—but that's not it./ Sir, you and I have lov'd—but there's not it./ That you know well" (I, iii, 86-90). But Antony's response is a cold impatience at the idle, trifling games she has played. Her response indicates how clearly she is aware of the function of her acting technique:

'Tis sweating labour
To bear such idleness so near the heart
As Cleopatra this. But sir, forgive me;
Since my becomings kill me when they do not
Eye well to you.

(I, iii, 93-97)

What may seem trifling histrionics to Antony is clearly the hard work that she undertakes to project fully the feelings of her heart. If Cleopatra does not act, then she does not exist for Antony or for herself. At the end of the scene, by making a simple, generous submission, she wins from Antony a generous declaration of love (I, iii, 97-105). We can see that she has earned the harmony by consciously building a dramatic structure to achieve it.

That Cleopatra has been a scene-stealer from the outset of her relationship to Antony we learn later in the famous account in Act II, Scene ii of their meeting on the Cydnus. Everything about Enobarbus' description indicates her theatrical self-consciousness, her ability to use all the costumes and props to make a grand entrance. The crowds flocked to Cleopatra:

and Antony
Enthron'd i' th' market-place, did sit alone,
Whistling to th' air; which, but for vacancy,
Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,
And made a gap in nature.

Agrippa Rare Egyptian!

Enobarbus Upon her landing Antony sent to her,
Invited her to supper. She replied
It should be better he became her guest
Which she entreated
Her triumph was to offer an unmatchable spectacle.

From the beginning Cleopatra endeavours to make Antony play on her terms. The drama of her life, however, is radically affected by events in spheres beyond her control. Her fury at this vulnerability is graphically presented in Act II, Scene v, when she receives news of Antony's marriage to Octavia. The messenger bringing the news of Antony's betrayal is featured as someone who has come in with the wrong part, with a script that has no authority. He is interrupted, praised and castigated half a dozen times before he can get to the substance of his message. Cleopatra, with a script in her head of how the scene must go, acts as though she were an imperious director dealing with a recalcitrant actor. She issues a shower of gold at every hint that the scene fulfills her expectations. When the messenger reaches the dreadful words "But yet," the shower turns to lightning bolts. As a dramatist Shakespeare seems to have delighted in the irony of how the monarch, lost in the illusion of his own power, could be imagined as attempting to gain the total control of the artist in organizing the drama of his life. The characters who attempt to gain such control are the chief exhibits of Shakespeare's own power. Cleopatra, in her fury, is even willing to kill the messenger and has to be advised by Charmian, "Good madam, keep yourself within yourself (II, v, 75). The queen's nature is to do precisely the opposite. She can be herself only by displaying herself.

We can see just how potent absolutism is in creating its own ambiance of illusion in the subsequent scene with the messenger. By Act III, Scene ii, the messenger has obviously taken some coaching to accommodate himself to the role the queen demands of him. And the messenger comes in precisely on cue to create the brittle illusion Cleopatra cannot do without. The scene derives its pathos from the fact that she is reduced to such shifts.

Since Antony and Cleopatra are both bound up in projecting impressive images of themselves, Shakespeare, through Caesar, chooses to report how public and dramatic the reunion of the lovers is when Antony, abandoning Octavia, returns to his "Egyptian dish":

I' th' market-place, on a tribunal silver'd,
Cleopatra and himself in chairs of gold
Were publicly enthron'd; at the feet sat

Caesarion, whom they call my father's son,
And all the unlawful issue that their lust
Since hath made between them. Unto her
He gave the stablishment of Egypt; made her
Of lower Syria, Cyprus, Lydia,
Absolute queen.

Maecenas This in the public eye?

Caesar I' th' common show-place, where they exercise.
His sons he there proclaim'd the king of kings:
Great Media, Parthia, and Armenia,
He gave to Alexander; to Ptolemy he assign'd
Syria, Cilicia, and Phoenicia. She
In th' habiliments of the goddess Isis
That day appear'd; and oft before gave audience,
As 'tis reported, so.
This neatly indicates the distinction between a backroom politician and manipulator like Caesar and those public stagers—Antony and Cleopatra. Caesar, on the galley, was afraid of making a drunken, public exhibition of himself. Public exhibition is one of the principles of his opponents' existences.

Virtually all of the central section of the play dealing with the battles is concerned with the conflicting roles that tear Antony apart. The play is full of statements such as Canidius' comment on Antony's behavior at Actium, "Had our general/ Been what he knew himself, it had gone well" (III, ix, 26-27), or Cleopatra's, when Antony has recovered heart: "It is my birthday./ I had though t' have held it poor; but since my lord/ Is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra" (III, xiii, 185-187). It is not merely that these characters have to act as leaders for their own self-satisfaction. They gain strength from the fact that their followers treat them like leaders. The cyclic movements from desperation to gaiety in Antony's camp are keyed to the general's alternating senses of internal division and of recovered wholeness.

Increasingly, as he loses power, Antony is forced into a role that combines player-king and stage-braggart. Enobarbus' function, like the Fool's in King Lear, is to alert the audience to this change. Antony sends a challenge to Caesar:

I dare him therefore
To lay his gay comparisons apart,
And answer me declin'd, sword against sword,
Ourselves alone. I'll write it. Follow me.

[Exeunt Antony and Euphronius.]

Enobarbus [Aside] Yes, like enough high-battled Caesar will

Unstate his happiness, and be stag'd to th' show
Against a sworder!

(III, xiii, 25-31)

A leader must maintain a perspective on his role so that he can manipulate it. In all of the histories and tragedies Shakespeare wrote, the only central character who achieves this difficult feat is Henry V. The rest are engulfed by the, conflicting demands that break down their ability to maintain their roles. The consequent loss of power means that they become mere players. Antony attempts to cling to power by an assertion of the identity which was once so potent:

Now gods and devils!
Authority melts from me. Of late, when I cried 'Ho!'
Like boys unto a muss, kings would start forth
And cry 'Your will? Have you no ears? I am
Antony yet.

(III, xiii, 89-93)

When he thinks Cleopatra has betrayed him to Caesar, he indicates she has lost her identity by playing a part that is out of character: "Were't twenty of the greatest tributaries/ That do acknowledge Caesar, should I find them/ So saucy with the hand of she here—what's her name/ Since she was Cleopatra?" (III, xiii, 96-99). He attempts to reinforce his sense of power by imperiously ordering Thyreus to be whipped—a gratuitous and absurd gesture which indicates his desperate hope that if he continues to act like an emperor he will remain
It is interesting to speculate how much Shakespeare's daily experience in the theatre might have reinforced his understanding of human nature. A star whose day is passing may often resort to the tricks that once gave him power over an audience; he tends to imitate his former self in trying to maintain his claim to the limelight. Antony at the height of his frustration with Caesar's disdain for him says:

look thou say
He makes me angry with him; for he seems
Proud and disdainful, harping on what I am,
Not what he knew I was. He makes me angry;
And at this time most easy 'tis to do't,
When my good stars, that were my former guides,
Have empty left their orbs and shot their fires
Into the abysm of hell.

(III, xiii, 140-147)

What both Antony and Cleopatra fear is that they will become mere actors in a puppet-show organized by Caesar to mock their former greatness. When Antony, finally defeated, believes Cleopatra has betrayed him he threatens her with this shame:

Vanish, or I shall give thee thy deserving
And blemish Caesar's triumph. Let him take thee
And hoist thee up to the shouting plebians;
Follow his chariot like the greatest spot
Of all thy sex; most monster like be shown
For poor'st diminutives, for doits, and let
Patient Octavia plough they visage up
With her prepared nails.

(IV, xii, 32-39)

These aristocrats have no distaste for show itself, because it is an attribute of leadership. But when you are not in charge of the show you cannot choose your audience or calculate the effect of your performance. You are in the power of the public. Antony's fear is like that of an actor forced to play to a hostile public:

Eros,
Wouldst thou be windowed in great Rome and see
Thy master thus with pleach'd arms, bending down
His corrigible neck, his face subdu'd
To penetrative shame, whilst the wheel'd seat
Of fortunate Caesar, drawn before him, branded
His baseness that ensued?

(IV, xiv, 71-77)

Antony is constantly aware of himself as a figure performing for a public. Hearing of Cleopatra's death he can think of only one audience worthy of them:
I come my queen.—Eros!—Stay for me;
Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,
And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze.
Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops,
And all the haunt be ours.

(IV, xiv, 50-54)

It is perfectly in consonance with the self-dramatizing propensities of these stars that, being denied a stage on earth, they expect to become scene-stealers in heaven.

All of this helps to indicate that Antony is prepared for death. After the confusion of roles Antony has suffered, it takes only the news of Cleopatra's death to resolve all problems in a superb and simple understatement: "Unarm, Eros; the long day's task is done/ And we must sleep" (IV, xiv, 35-36). Antony triumphs over death by embracing it: "But I will be/ A bridegroom in my death, and run into 't/ As to a lover's bed" (IV, xiv, 99-101). All this preparation, however, does not diminish the fact that he dies as the result of a trick. Increasingly as the lovers lose a sense of their own identities, they lose a sense of security in each other.

They have been playing a game of love. By describing their relationship as a game I am not trying to diminish it, but rather to indicate that it is based on particular rules of which both contestants are aware. Cleopatra can dramatize her anger, pretend to swoon or be sick, or Antony can be sullen, cold or angry—always within prescribed limits that do not rupture the relationship but tend to cement it together. The elasticity in this highly dramatized game of give and take is a mark of maturity not of childishness. However, the gulf they are required to bridge in winning each other over grows wider all the time, and the ploys they are forced into become accordingly more daring and dangerous. Antony becomes convinced that Cleopatra has transgressed the rules and betrayed him to Caesar. He, who had never really been deceived by Cleopatra's wiles, begins to believe that she is ensnaring him in an 'undeclared' play by conspiring with Caesar. Since the essence of their relationship is that they should "stand up peerless," his faith in the transcendant quality of their love is corrupted. Cleopatra, finding it impossible to stem the tide of his anger, resorts to her most extreme trick. The declaration of her death effectively stops Antony. She cannot expect to win Antony back by a deception he can see through. She must now break the rules of the game in order to save it.

This is an intriguing development in Shakespeare's view of the world as theatre. Antony and Cleopatra have from the outset been trying to steal scenes from each other, but they have done it entirely to ensure that they remain together at stage-centre. Eventually it becomes difficult for them to distinguish the real anger, which breaks the bounds of their understanding, from the self-dramatization which once reinforced it. A pretence of death produces an actual death. Theatre begets reality. Antony's death is the polar opposite of that of most of Shakespeare's tragic heroes. They live in a world of illusion that they must claw aside to get at the truth. Antony's real world is that role-playing game with Cleopatra. He is not blasted and killed by the sudden sweeping aside of illusions. His death is not a triumph over illusion, but a submission to an illusion that he had never been a victim of. The illusion that he has been a victim of is his desire to feature in the real world of power. As soon as he hears of Cleopatra's 'death' he relinquishes it. He dies, admittedly, by a ruse, but this illusion helps him to resolve his own conflicting roles, enables him to achieve his own sense of reality.

It is not, however, a fully tragic, unequivocal triumph. Nothing demonstrates more clearly Shakespeare's sense of what he has in reserve than his dramatization of the sense at the monument. The laborious heaving up of the dying Antony and Cleopatra's reluctance to expose herself to danger audaciously border on comedy' Everything about the death is messy and awkward. Shakespeare is setting us up for Cleopatra's death, which is deliberate and staged with dramatic precision. Cleopatra's performance has literally acted Antony off the stage. It leaves her to play a bit part on Caesar's stage of power. Even before Antony dies, she is aware that she wants no part in a new drama from which her lover is absent: "Not th' imperious show/ Of the full fortun'd
Caesar ever shall/ Be brooch’d with me. If knife, drugs, serpents, have/ Edge, sting or operation, I am safe” (IV, xiv, 23-26). The play balances itself neatly around the idea that this actress, who destroyed her man of men by pretending to be dead, will destroy her oppressor by pretending to want life.

Shakespeare brings characters to the point where they submit to their fate in full knowledge. This fact is intricately bound up with Shakespeare's concept of the theatrical nature of existence. The heroes gradually perceive that their lives have the ordered structures of works of art. The exhilarating sense of release in tragedy seems to me to be exactly the breaking down of the barrier of theatrical illusion. We are given the privilege of foreknowledge in the audience. It is a heavy burden, but when the hero becomes aware that he is trapped in a tragedy, he frees us by insisting that he is no longer a victim but an agent. If the audience has the privilege of foreknowledge, if the whole drama must follow inescapable historical events, how can the hero have any freedom? By taking the entire play out of our hands and willing those actions in history of which the playwright and audience are already aware. When it appears to the heroes that there is nothing more to be gained from performance, they put on a farewell act. The whole English aristocratic concept of 'dying well' can still be heard in accounts of the way soldiers met their deaths in the World Wars of this century. It is no accident that the inevitable response to such accounts is, as it always has been, "Good show!" The only way to triumph over death is to take charge of the staging. Nowhere in Shakespeare is the farewell show more explicitly developed than in the ending of Antony and Cleopatra.

What Cleopatra is looking for when all the avenues of escape have closed down is the most theatrical tour de force to crown her theatrical life. She has to find a way of avoiding the use Caesar has for her as a cheap sideshow exhibit in order to be true to her concept of her own role. When she breaks out in tears after Antony's death, she finds herself betraying her majestic role: "No more but e'en a woman, and commanded/ By such poor passion as the maid that milks/ And does the meanest chares" (IV, xiv, 73-75). She mocks her destiny:

It were for me
To throw my sceptre at the injurious gods;
To tell them that this world did equal theirs
Till they had stol'n our jewel. All's but nought.
Patience is sottish, and impatience does
Become a dog that's mad. Then is it sin
To rush into the secret house of death
Ere death dare come to us?

(IV, xiv, 75-82)

She approaches this closing phase entirely in terms of show: "We'll bury him; and then what's brave, what's noble./ Let's do it after the high Roman fashion./ And make death proud to take us." (IV, xiv, 86-88). The attraction of death for her, as for so many tragic heroes, is that it is a decisive, self-determined act which rings down the curtain on the stumbling drama of accommodating unwelcome roles, "it is great/ To do that thing that ends all other deeds,/ Which shackles accidents and bolts up change" (V, ii, 4-6). She challenges Proculeius by juggling concepts of her role alternatives: "If your master/ Would have a queen his beggar, you must tell him/ That majesty, to keep decorum, must/ No less beg than a kingdom" (V, ii, 15-18). Cleopatra will have to fight to achieve the tragic ending that we are already familiar with from history. That will involve outsmarting Caesar as theatrical producer and postponing for ever his attempt to feature her in a satirical comedy. Caesar wins the first round by breaking into the monument and capturing the queen. Proculeius, aware of the theatrical potentiality of Caesar's displaying and magnanimously forgiving the captured Cleopatra, tries to dissuade her from suicide, "Let the world see/ His nobleness well acted, which your death/ Will never let come forth" (V, ii, 44-06).
Following Cleopatra's eulogy to Dolabella of Antony as a titanic figure (V, ii, 79-92), we have a riddling speech, which, in suggesting that her dead lover is "past the size of dreaming," indicates the paradoxical nature of Shakespeare's technique. "Nature wants stuff/To vie strange forms with fancy; yet t'imagine/An Antony were nature's piece 'gainst fancy./Condemning shadows quite" (V, ii, 97-100). Fancy or imagination, the gift of dreamers, is the gift also of the poet, and 'shadows' is a common word for actors. Cleopatra is saying that no-one has sufficient imagination to create anything close to the reality of Antony and that no actor could ever imitate him. Shakespeare has the effrontery here to give one of his characters a speech that denies his own artistry even at the moment that she is demonstrating it.

Cleopatra features herself briefly in Caesar's satiric comedy in order to act him off the boards later. She seems to submit compliantly to her role as mere stage decoration in the triumphal procession in Rome. What could more feed Caesar's belief that she will fulfill the ignoble role he intends for her than to see her do this audition gratis? On Caesar's departure she makes her real intentions clear: "He words me, girls, he words me, that I should not/Be noble to myself (V, ii, 190-191).

Cleopatra has an unequivocal view of her fate couched in theatrical terms. It is one of those Chinese-box moments in Shakespeare:

> Now, Iras, what thinkst thou?
> Thou an Egyptian puppet shall be shown
> In Rome as well as I. Mechanic slaves,
> With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers, shall
> Uplift us to the view; in their thick breaths,
> Rank of gross diet, shall we be enclouded,
> And forc'd to drink their vapour.

> Iras The gods forbid!

> Cleopatra Nay, 'tis most certain, Iras. Saucy lictors
> Will catch at us like strumpets, and scald rhymers
> Ballad us out o'tune; the quick comedians
> Extemporally will stage us, and present
> Our Alexandrian revels; Antony
> Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
> Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
> I' th' posture of a whore.

(V, ii, 206-220)

The boy actor in Shakespeare's company in Jacobean England plays the real Cleopatra in ancient Egypt anticipating the time when some boy actor in Rome, in just such a theatre as the Globe with its mechanic slaves in their greasy aprons, will act out her part which, we may anticipate, will pass down in tradition to exactly this moment in Jacobean England when her story will be/is being/has been presented. It is characteristic of Shakespeare's art that he reminds us of Cleopatra's fears about her dramatic representation through someone who is doing what she fears—"boying her greatness."

Everything that Cleopatra does now is designed to leave an effective tableau of herself—a tragic queen who has lived up to the full expectations of her role and an image that will leave Caesar a "great ass unpolicied." Caesar would have her be a mere player-queen, but she will play the queen to the hilt to assert that she is inseparable from the role. To achieve that image she has to separate herself from life. She uses her death to assert her vitality. What we are to remember is not the fact of death, of destiny bringing the queen low, but the
act of death—the mockery of destiny. "Now, Charmian!/ Show me, my woman, like a queen. Go fetch/ My best attires" (V, ii, 225-227). She is again for Cydnus. This is to be an encore of one of her greatest performances. Since power is only real if asserted before an audience, a leader cannot escape the pressure to make even his death meaningful. The recorded end of someone's life, the closing of the script, presupposes that history is the audience. Cleopatra is seen by Shakespeare here as living in ancient Egypt preparing a scene for the play of her life that he is to write. This is a game to be well played. "And when thou has done this chare, I'll give thee leave/ To play till doomsday. Bring our crown and all" (V, ii, 230-231).

This play does not require a critical theory to explain the transcendence achieved at the ending. Cleopatra herself provides the commentary for the audience. Of the Clown with the asp she says: "He brings me liberty/ My resolution's plac'd, and I have nothing/ Of woman in me. Now from head to foot/ I am marble-constant;" (V, ii, 236-238). She tells us she is becoming a monumental statue before our eyes. With her attendants as stage-dressers she translates herself into the empyrean. Charmian finds the performance so moving she declares "The gods themselves do weep!" The skill of this scene lies in the fact that this private death is so public. It would seem that this farewell show is put on only before her attendants. In effect, however, Charmian and Iras are shills—they pull out all stops and prompt us, the real audience. Cleopatra appears to have taken over Shakespeare's play. She is not the victim of the script but the creator of it. We are there with Cleopatra whose behaviour is providing the inspiration for people like Shakespeare.

Shakespeare gives one last cheeky touch before he leaves the tableau for Caesar to find. Charmian says "Your crown's awry, I'll mend it, and then play" (V, ii, 317-318). After all this tremendous preparation to achieve the exhilaration of tragedy he indicates that there is a flaw in the stage-setting which could precipitate us towards comedy. Cleopatra's crown has, perhaps, slipped down over one eye ruining the whole effect. Charmian ends her career as a stage-dresser by being fully professional even at the moment of death. She bilks Caesar and history of the laugh it might have had at Cleopatra's expense. This is Shakespeare, like a wild gambler, risking everything on one throw. What we achieve, of course, is not bathos but a cathartic surge of emotion of even greater intensity.

**Jyotsna Singh (essay date 1989)**


[In the essay that follows, Singh examines the parallels between Antony and Cleopatra and the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century polemical attacks on women and the theater as deceitful and subversive entities. Singh notes that the play both celebrates theatricality, primarily through the figure of Cleopatra, and dramatizes, through the Romans, the objections to and fear of theatricality.]

Audiences and readers of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* generally remember Cleopatra in terms of her varied histrionic moments. In wooing Antony, she displays contrary and shifting moods: "If you find him sad, / Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report / That I am sudden sick" (1.3.3-5). In ruling her subjects, she commands distant adulation by staging herself in pageants, displays a playful familiarity toward her serving-women, or cruelly strikes a slave; and in responding to Caesar's victory, she declares her obedience, but then undermines his authority by enacting a grand suicide and an imaginary union with Antony: "I am again for Cydnus, / To meet Mark Antony" (5.2.228-29). While the range and virtuosity of Cleopatra's performances is dazzling, one is particularly struck by a pervasive connection between her histrionics and the blurring of gender boundaries. A scene that immediately comes to mind is when Cleopatra finds delight in her memory of cross-dressing with Antony:

... and next morn,  
Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed;
Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst
I wore his sword Philippan.

(2.5.20-23)

Here, Cleopatra stirs the worst Roman fears of effeminacy by bringing to life the myth of Hercules in women's clothes serving Omphale, or of Venus armed in victory over Mars. Why this image of Antony in female attire makes the Romans anxious is understandable. Very quickly in the play one can note that their condemnation of Egypt, where Antony is "transformed / Into a strumpet's fool" (1.1.12-13), is in essence a fear of a mutable, and thereby "effeminized," identity. In fact, what they consistently uphold as the "true" Roman self—whether individual or collective—reveals itself as an ideal of masculinity premised on an exclusion of the feminine. From their perspective, when Antony is with Cleopatra, he is "not Antony" (1.1.57), as his "sport" in Egypt makes him "not more manlike / Than Cleopatra, nor the queen of Ptolemy / More womanly than he" (1.4.5-7). Thus, if Antony is to remain the Roman hero, Cleopatra must be marginalized as the temptress, witch, adultress.

This ideology of exclusion through which the Romans perceive the power relations—and gender relations—of their world is repeatedly dismantled by Cleopatra as she represents, and in the scene of crossdressing literally reconstitutes, the Roman divisions between the masculine and the feminine. Categories such as these, she demonstrates, are flexible and open to improvisation. In her dramatic plots Antony can play both warrior and lover as she shows him that these roles are not antithetical to one another, and that combining them does not imply effeminacy. Moreover, Antony's Roman "honour [that] calls [him] hence" to Rome, Cleopatra points out, can be played as a "scene / Of excellent dissembling" (1.3.78-80) so that Egypt and Rome can enact the same fiction of "perfect honour," which need not be a Roman or masculine prerogative. By thus drawing attention to the particular ways in which gender differences are constructed, the theatrical queen puts into question the very notion of a unified, stable identity.

To suggest that Cleopatra is a performer and playmaker has become a critical commonplace. While traditionally, critics considered the Egyptian queen's histrionics intrinsic to her nature as a femme fatale, recent feminist studies view her theatricality as a source of empowerment and as a positive value in the play. Most, however, essentialize Cleopatra into a special, charismatic individual given to self-dramatization. My interest lies in examining Cleopatra's theatrical function in the play, as outlined above, in relationship to specific, historically situated debates about the theater and women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially as they were articulated in the anti-theatrical and antifeminist writings of the period. I am not seeking to establish a direct influence between the documents and the play—which has its recognized sources in Plutarch's Lives of the Romans and Vergil's Aeneid: but rather, I wish to explore the ways in which the associations between women and the theater emerge as a significant concern in both dramatic representation and social commentary.

It has already been suggested that the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century detractors of the theater and of women represent theatricality in the rhetoric of feminine appeal and vice versa. In their response to Cleopatra, the Romans also perceive the feminine and the theatrical in similar interchangeable terms. For them, as for the tract writers, authentic human identity is clearly the prerogative of a universalized and coherent male subject, who must resist being seduced and "feminized" by the possibility of changeable, multiple selves. The fact that both the social and dramatic contexts focus on the notion of a histrionic personality suggests the lingering influence of the orthodox doctrine of a hierarchical universe. In the official homily of obedience of 1559, as read in Elizabethan services, all English subjects were exhorted to accept their God-given roles:

Everye degree of people in theyr vocation and calling, and office hath appointed to them [by God], theyr duety and ordre. Some are in hyghe degree, some in lowe, some kynges and
prynces, some inferiors and subjects, . . . Fathers and chyldren, husbandes and wives, riche and poore . . . For where there is no ryghte ordre, there reigneth all abuse, carnal libertie, syn and Babilonicall confusyon.6

While this picture of the world was undoubtedly appealing to those who benefited from it, it could not contain the sweeping social and economic transformations affecting English society in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Social historians testify to unprecedented displacements in society caused by a complex interplay of factors such as population growth, inflation, changes in agrarian modes of production, and a widening gap between the privileged and growing numbers of poor, masterless, landless, and indigent.7 The effect of this social flux was a widespread perception of a "crisis of order," a major feature of which was a perceived threat to the patriarchal structures of the time—or specifically, to "natural" distinctions between gender roles (Underdown 37-40).

While the polemicists respond to these social changes by discursively constructing a static society in which identities are fixed, Shakespeare's text, which itself is a play, celebrates theatricality—with all its implications of social and ontological instability—even as it dramatizes a resistance to it. Thus, read in relationship to the antitheatrical and antifeminist tracts, Antony and Cleopatra seems both to reproduce and to contest their conception of a social order in which women and actors are seen as duplicitously subverting the "natural" boundaries of social and sexual difference. Through this formulation, I hope to open the play to the historical moment of its genesis, underscoring its particular response to the tension between "official" theories of order and the actual disruptions in traditional social hierarchies and gender roles in Renaissance England.

II

The proponents of antitheatricalism in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England launched their attacks on the stage from 1577 to the closing of the theaters in 1642. There are variations in the approaches taken by individual polemicists, suggesting in part an increasing unease about the popularity of drama, but there are also remarkable similarities that express consistently shared concerns.8 I will examine some tracts of writers such as Northbrooke, Gosson, and Rankins among others, covering the years till about 1600, in an attempt to show that while some of their objections are grounded in practical reasons such the fostering of idleness by the public theaters, in general, the polemicists' overwrought rhetoric is aimed sweepingly at anything associated with pleasure, sexuality, femininity, with succumbing to feeling, and consequently, with the dissolution of all familiar boundaries.9 In conceiving of theatrical performance in these erotic terms, the antitheatricalists, it seems, are revealing their fear of both effeminacy and femininity. As an overt expression of their concern, they condemn transvestism on the stage for effeminizing the young actors and their male audiences who, supposedly titillated by homoerotic fantasies, lose their manhood or manliness.10 But in a more insidious sense, their criticism of the stage, I believe, reflects a dread of an unrestrained femininity disrupting the conventional boundaries of sexual difference crucial to the preservation of the patriarchal culture of the time.11 Thus their attack on the "immoral" effects of stage plays reveals itself as an anxiety about fixing the meaning of masculinity and femininity.

The condemnation of plays and other pleasurable pastimes, found as early as 1577 in John Northbrooke's A Treatise wherein Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine playes, or Enterluds . . . are reproved, carries with it a prescriptive definition of manhood and womanhood. Northbrooke's criticism of all forms of idleness expresses the Protestant work ethic in a developing mercantile economy (Fraser 52-76). Within this context, however, he constructs an ideal of stoic manhood whereby in a dialogue between youth and age, the (male) youth is exhorted to distinguish between a "beastly and slothfull idlenesse . . . [and] an honest and necessarie idleness" (F.iii), and to remember that the Sabbath is not for "carnali pleasures, as the wicked and ungodlye are wonte, but for godlynesse and virtues sake" (F.iiij). "Vaine playes and Enterludes," like Bathsheba's charms that snared David, are among the pastimes that Northbrooke considers a threat to men's virtue (J.iiij). Furthermore, as plays and players represent "whoredome," "no wives or maydens, . . . that . . . content and please . . . honest
men, [should] be found and seen at common Playes” (J.iii). Being seen at the theater where she may be "desired with so many eyes," and where her virtue may be compromised, a woman may lose her socially acceptable identity.

Northbrooke’s anxiety about the theater as a site of idleness and immorality pales in contrast to the intensifying dread of the disruptive effects of theatricality found in later tracts. Stephen Gosson, in his last tract, *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (1582), launches a broad attack on all plays as the creations of the devil (Kinney 59). In Gosson’s idealist construction of the world, "there can bee no truce, no league, no manner of agreemente [between God and the Devil], because the one is holy, the other unpure; the one good, the other evill" (B4). Central to his moral scheme is the notion of a fixed God-given human identity; "God hath made us in his owne likenesse" (B4), Gosson reminds his readers, and goes on to attack plays as satanic inventions that draw actors and audiences to participate in lying fictions: "In Stage Playes for a boy to put on the attyre, the gesture, the passions of a woman, to take upon him the title of a Prince with counterfeit porte and traine, is by outward signes to shewe themselves, otherwise than they are, and so within the compass of a lye" (E4). Like the other polemicians, Gosson is particularly disturbed by the blurring of gender boundaries on stage. Citing a number of biblical and medieval religious sources, the writer asserts, "The Law of God straitly forbides men to put on women's garments that are set downe for signes distinctive between sexe and sexe, to take unto us those garments that are manifest signs of another sexe is to falsifie, forge, and adulterate contrarie to the express rule of God" (E3).

In Gosson's eyes the stage is a site of contamination—a place where natural distinctions of identity are blurred, confused, and adulterated in a parody of God's act of forming human nature (Kinney 61). Audiences are simply seduced by the dramatic effect that "whets [them] to wantonness . . . and [through which] the mind like a stringe, being let downe, [is] pitcht . . . to this key of carnali delight" (F5). Repeatedly, in Gosson's attack, theatricality is represented in the rhetoric of feminine sexual appeal: theatrical spectacles evoke troubling desires that "breedeth a hunger, a thirst after pleasure" (F6), and make gazers "unfit for manly discipline" (C2), as they "effeminate and soften the hearts of men" (G4). What emerges from this line of argument is an assertion of masculinity predicated on a denial of pleasure, of desire—and of anything associated with female sexuality.

Not only Gosson, but other antitheatrical writers also emphasize the erotics of dramatic performance. William Rankins, in *A Mirrour of Monsters* (1587), views players as deceiving "monsters" who are sent by Satan "to lead the people with intising shewes to the divell, to seduce them to sinne" (B.ii), and envisions the stage as a site on which the marriage of pride and lechery takes place—a site which Rankins terms "for [its] abomination, the chappell Adulterinum" (B.iiij). The union of the bride and bridegroom in this simple allegory signals the loss of a heroic manliness: the bridegroom is "Like as Mars when he hadde beene weared with warlike exploys, used to entertaine his Lady Venus when . . . they were taken in a nette" (C.ii). Rankins goes on to attack players for a host of undesirable attributes such as idleness, flattery, ingratitude, and blasphemy, but, in general, seems obsessively focused on their threat to virtuous masculine identity: players present before the eyes of "young wits" such "inchaunting Charmes, and bewitched wyle, to alienate theyre mindes from vertue, that hard wyll it for a wit well stayde to abyde the same" (E.i). Weakening masculine discipline, plays "bewitcheth the myndes of menne" away from "the profitable fruits of virtuous labour" (C.iii). Frequently comparing the deceitful flattery of players to seductive female charms, Rankins exhorts his readers to beware of their dangerous allure: "Let us arme ourselves against the damnable enticings of these hellish feendes [the players] with the wise regard of prudent Ulises, who for feare lest he should be mooved with the pleasant harmonie of singing Syrens, bound himself and his Mates to the mast of his Shippe" (E.i). In another instance, he rallies theater audiences to resist temptation as the "young Egyptian did" when placed in a "sumptuous Chamber" with the "fayrest Concubine in all his Courte, with her embracings and sweete perswasions" (E.i).
Such cautionary anecdotes are typical of the views held by most polemicists. However, it is interesting to note that while they recognize that theaters may snare "faire women" into wantonness and adulterous trysts, they generally imagine the spectators as male. And nothing preoccupies them as much as the pernicious effects of plays on the "manhood" of their viewers. While there is a certain irony in their fear, considering that corporeal representations of female sexuality were excluded from the stage during the period, the source of it lies in the powerful cultural stereotype of women as duplicitous seducers—a stereotype that is easily transferred to actors. In order to understand fully the connection between the theater and female sexuality forged by the antitheatricalists, let us now turn to its parallel in the antifeminist polemic of the period. Katharine Maus makes a strong case for this interrelationship when she suggests that in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, women and the theater were subject to attack from the same rhetorical position—and that "suspicion of female sexuality and suspicion of the theater can be considered two manifestations of the same anxiety" (602-03).

Just as the antitheatricalists perceive all play-acting as a form of satanic deceit, a cover-up for one's real identity, antifeminists deride women for hiding their sinful interior by their alluring appearance.

Most antifeminist tracts draw heavily on the stereotype of the duplicitous seductress. Edward Gosynhill, in The Schoolhouse of women (1541?), like other misogynist pamphleteers, warns men against women's "fair, glozing countenance" and "sugared utterance" and gives instances of how simple men are "Deceived . . . where they most trust" (154). Mentioning legendary women, like Herodias, Jezebel, Delilah, whose names are synonymous with sexual appeal and deceit, the critic suggests that all women delude men by their physical attraction, "Trim[ming] themself every day new. / And in their glasses pore and pry, / . . . to allure the masculine" (145). Female fashions are thus a frequent target of attack among antifeminists. For instance, Gosson, in his lighthearted pamphlet Pleasant quippes for upstart newfangled gentlewomen (1596), asks: "these painted faces which they [women] weare, / can any tell from whence they cam? / Don Satan, Lord of fayned lyes, / All these new fangles did devise" (5). And Joseph Swetnam accuses women of similar hypocrisies at greater length in The Arraignment of Lewd, froward, idle, and unconstant women (1615). Women, according to him, "are in shape Angels but in qualities Devils'. . . . They have myriad devices to entice, bewitch, and deceive men" (205); "some they keep in hand with promises, and some they feed with flattery, and some they delay with dalliances, and some they please with kisses" (201).

What is under attack in both the antitheatrical and antifeminist tracts is the notion of a changeable, histrionic personality. Critics such as Katharine Maus and Jean Howard point out that in the eyes of the polemicists women and actors by their very changeability erase boundaries. In general, the tract writers fear that social hierarchies are no longer stable or clearly demarcated when we "disdaine the callinge he [God] hath placed us in" (Gosson, Playes Confuted G7.v). Quite understandably, then, their condemnation of plays and of women reveals itself as a desire to hold in place an essentialist ideology that views human identity as immutable and God-given rather than socially constructed. While actors in this ideal, stratified world are to be suppressed, women are exhorted to curb their fickle, changeable natures and conform to static stereotypes of feminine virtue, often taken from the Bible.

From the polemicists' general concern for the breakdown of established categories by tampering with God's handiwork, there emerges, as we have seen, an obsessive concern for the erotic effects of histrionic displays on gazers. Of course, whether stirred by women or plays, lust characterizes disorder and corruption. But when the tract writers condemn all forms of enticing play-acting they are, I believe, expressing a specific masculine fear of a loss of identity through attraction to the female. Making little distinction between the self-adornment of women and dramatic spectacles that "ravish the sense," the polemicists warn against all displays that stir sensual desires in men and "effeminate the mind like pricks unto vice." Therefore, for a man to allow himself to be engulfed by sensual pleasures signals a loss of masculinity.

It is particularly telling to observe how this specter of the effeminized male haunts the antitheatricalists: while they attack theaters for specific social evils such as the breeding "of plague and vice, traffic congestion and mob violence, inefficient workers and dangerous ideas" (Montrose 57), their anxieties about this site of social
disorder often coalesce on the image of threatened masculinity. Gosson, in *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579), explains the appeal of plays and other pleasurable activities by lamenting how the "olde discipline of Englande" has changed since "wee were schooled with these abuses" (B8). The prevailing interest in "banqueting, playing, pipying, and dauncing" (B8v), according to him, has blurred sexual differences by effeminizing men: "Our wrestling at armes, is turned to wallowying in Ladies laps, our courage, to cowardice, our running to ryot, our Bowes into Bolles, and our Dartes to Dishes" (C1). Thus it seems that their discussion of theatricality, so dependent on their fear of changing gender roles, inevitably returns to the issue of what it means to be masculine or feminine. Such polarizing tendencies clearly place these anti-theatrical and antifeminist narratives within a larger body of cultural texts—sermons, homilies, proclamations, and preambles to statutes—devoted to naturalizing a hierarchical scheme of social, political, and cosmological order. Common to all these texts are distinct standards of exclusion and inclusion by which the Elizabethans and Jacobians imagined their lived relation to the world, but which were often not sustained by reality (Marienstras 9-25, Wrightson 18-23).

III

By 1608, when *Antony and Cleopatra* first appeared in the Stationers' Register, Shakespeare, among others, had already glorified on stage a number of histrionic figures—self-conscious actors and dramatists like Richard III, Falstaff, and Hamlet as well the playful heroines of comedy like Rosalind and Viola. An interest in the theatrical nature of human identity is evident in most of Shakespeare's works. In this play, however, associations between the feminine and the theatrical, as embodied in Cleopatra, function specifically both to reveal and to subvert the existing ideology of order by which traditional sexual and social hierarchies were held in place. Conventionally, the play has been read as a clash between abstract categories such as reason versus passion or politics versus love. Inherent to such readings is the tendency to naturalize patriarchal stereotypes that often equate Rome with reason and public duty and Egypt with sensuality and emotional excess. Recent critics have tried to break free from traditional gender prejudices, but they too, in most instances, tend to view the play as being non-ideological. However, when one contextualizes the play within the controversial public debates on the theater and on women, one realizes that the issues at stake in the Rome/Egypt opposition are far from being abstract or universal, and instead, are closely linked to the preservation of the patriarchal order in Renaissance England.

The terms of the conflict between the Romans and Cleopatra emerge early in the dialectical structure of the play. While Roman actions and speech promote a hierarchical view of political order and an essentialist conception of human identity, Cleopatra's histrionic mode of being disrupts such notions of fixity. In their formal rhetoric, at least, the Romans evoke the image of a stable empire; Caesar, who rules over the "third o'th'world" (2.2.67) imagines that a "hoop should hold [him and Antony] staunch, from edge to edge / O'th'world" (2.2.120-21). Quite arbitrarily, he draws boundaries: their empire is to be divided among all three "world Sharers" [Lepidus, Octavius, Antony] whom Pompey acknowledges as "The senators alone of this great world, / Chief factors for the gods" (2.6.9-10), and "Wars 'twixt [them] would be / As if the world should cleave" (3.4.30-31). The basis of such assertions of power is the exclusion or control of women. By the Roman creed, Antony must remain the "triple pillar of the world," and if he faces a choice "between [women] and a great cause [women] should be esteemed nothing" (1.2.140). Octavia, of course, is quite literally "esteemed nothing" and therefore acceptable as a woman—and as a convenient pawn in Octavius's and Antony's power struggle.

Implicit to the Roman ideology of exclusion is a fear of the loss of male identity through an attraction to the female. The picture of a threatened masculinity the Romans construct seems to give validity to the anti-theatrical and antifeminist polemic, especially in its negative associations between female charms and duplicitous shows. The Egyptian queen's "infinite variety," as they portray it, applies interchangeably to her sexual appeal and to her role-playing, and is clearly antithetical to the Roman myth of a stable and unified male subject. From the opening scene, it is apparent that in Roman eyes Antony's image as a warrior, and as a
Roman, becomes diffuse in his moments as lover. Seeing him with the Egyptian queen, Antony's comrades regret that the "plated Mars" has become a "strumpet's fool" (1.1.13). Now, they believe, "he is not Antony, as / He comes too short of that great property / Which still should go with Antony" (1.1.57-59), and wish for "better deeds" which will make him reject his "dotage" to a woman and reclaim his honor. This scene prefigures the continuing Roman impulse to defend themselves against Cleopatra's repertoire of charms. Even as they devalue her "playfulness," they often recognize its appeal to their senses and feelings—a recognition expressed by Enobarbus ("We cannot call her winds and waters sighs and tears; [yet] they are greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report" [1.2.148-50]) and more fully experienced by Antony as he seeks to break away from the "enchanting queen" (1.2.129) who alienates him from his Roman self.

Octavius Caesar marks the precise boundaries of the desired Roman identity on his first appearance on stage in 1.4, when he mocks at Antony's "revels" with Cleopatra in Alexandria:

he fishes, drinks, and wastes
The lamps of night in revel; is not more manlike
Than Cleopatra, nor the Queen of Ptolemy
More womanly than he . . .
 . . You shall find there
A man who is the abstract of all faults.

(4-9)

As Caesar sees it, Antony's sport in Egypt has collapsed divisions that are crucial to the Romans. He has conflated his masculinity with femininity, being "not more manlike than Cleopatra"; he has equated the importance of his "kingdom" with a "mirth" and forgotten his noble identity in "tippling with a slave" (18-19).

Soon afterwards, in the same scene, Octavius wistfully recapitulates Antony's past heroism in battle, extolling masculinity as a form of stoicism:

 . . . When thou once
Was beaten from Modena, where thou slew'zt
Hirtius and Pansa, consuls, at thy heel
Did famine follow, whom thou fough'tst against,
Though daintily brought up, with patience more
Than savages could suffer. Thou didst drink
The stale of horses and the gilded puddle
Which beasts would cough at. Thy palate then did deign
The roughest berry on the rudest hedge.

On the Alps
It is reported thou didst eat strange flesh,
 . . . And all this—

Was borne so like a soldier that thy cheek
So much as lanked not.

(56-71)

Speaking in the "official" Roman voice, Octavius clearly promotes a definition of masculinity that preserves the myth of Roman greatness. And while his distinction between Egypt, where Antony fills "His vacancy with his voluptuousness" (1.4.26), and Rome, which beckons him to "th'field," anticipates Roman fears about
contaminating their manhood with female attributes, it also reveals their impossibly idealist view of the "true" warrior. There is enough evidence in the play to show that the deeds of Rome's heroes do not conform to their inflated reputations. Therefore, they must mark Cleopatra as an external threat in order to sustain their myth. Throughout the play, Antony's men blame Cleopatra for their general's decline: she is the "Egyptian dish" (2.6.124), and Antony has given his "potent regiment to a trull" (3.6.95). They regret that their "leader's led, / And [they] are women's men" (3.7.69-70) and, in the end, believe that the "god Hercules, whom Antony loved, / Now leaves him" (4.3.17-18). Thus, instead of allowing Antony his moments as a lover, they label him as effeminate and repudiate his authority.

A useful way of viewing this Roman discourse is to note its resemblance to what one critic describes as "the logocentric, masculine tradition of Renaissance historiography, written by men, devoted to the deeds of men, glorifying the masculine virtues of courage, honor, and patriotism, and dedicated to preserving the names of past heroes" (Rackin, "Anti-Historians" 329). Plutarch's moralizing history, on which the play is based, is also male-centered, and in its simplest form, tells the tale of a "Great Man and a Temptress" (Mack 1169). Detractors of plays and of women seem equally dependent on these cultural and historical paradigms. Freely, and quite eclectically, they draw on masculine traditions in history and literature to bolster their argument. Just as the Romans in Antony and Cleopatra evoke images of Aeneas, Mars, and Hercules as prototypes for Antony's struggle in the snare of female charms, tract writers allude to similar figures—"Ulises" and "Mars," for instance—as notable examples of men resisting feminine wiles. In both the Roman discourse and the social texts, the particular choice of literary/historical models is important only insofar as it perpetuates the threat of the alluring, duplicitous female. What we learn here is how particular cultural mythologies are circulated and affirmed in the service of specific interests—in this case those of the patriarchy.

To sum up, the Roman discourse in the play embodies the orthodox impulse to fix identity—or, specifically, to secure the myth of the male hero against threats of demystification. Thus, quite understandably, their vision in the play closely approximates Plutarch's version of history which privileges the male perspective, and in which the Herculean Antony suffers from the "sweet poison of Cleopatra's love" (Bullough 272). Critics who look for a moral center in the play often privilege the Roman perspective, reinforcing the intentionality of Plutarch's account, but overlooking Shakespeare's own ambivalent response to an "official" reading of history. A fact that escapes their notice is that the play does not ask to be seen as a univocal construct, shaped by a single, monolithic tradition. Instead, what is more obvious is that Cleopatra's histrionic revisions of the Roman myth repeatedly disrupt the continuity between Plutarch's account and Shakespeare's play—even though Caesar's final victory is assured by history.

Cleopatra's sense of self, as opposed to the Romans, is consistently "playful." When life is experienced as a performance, she demonstrates, then all assumptions of selfhood become tenuous. Cleopatra's subversion of the Roman claims to a stable identity gains particular significance when we note her identification with the figure of the alluring, changeable seductress who figures prominently in the antitheatrical and antifeminist narratives. There is enough evidence to suggest that the Romans perceive her as bewitching and duplicitous. Creating her own theatrical space in Egypt, where, as Pompey puts it, "witchcraft join[s] with beauty, lust with both!" the Egyptian queen transforms the noble Antony into a "libertine in a field of feasts" (2.1.22-23).

Cleopatra's changeableness obviously attracts the Romans, who often resemble fascinated but uneasy spectators of a play. In the opening scene, Philo urges his companion to "Behold and see" (1.1.13) as Cleopatra incites and stages their general's transformation:

\[ \ldots \text{his goodly eyes,} \]
\[ \quad \text{That o'er the files and musters of the war} \]
\[ \quad \text{Have glowed like plated Mars, now bend, now turn} \]
\[ \ldots \text{[and] His captain's heart,} \]
is become the bellows and the fan
To cool a gypsy's lust.

(1.1.2-10)

Later, Enobarbus's imaginative response to her grand self-presentation on the barge dramatizes her effect over her own people as well as the suppressed Roman attraction for her and for Egypt. On this occasion, when her femininity is synonymous with "seeming" as her person "beggared all description" (2.2.203), the Romans listening to Enobarbus seem enthralled by the "infinite variety" of Cleopatra's histrionic and sexual enticements. Like them, the play's audiences are forced to recognize that "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale / Her infinite variety"(2.2.240-41).

Clearly then, we can make a significant connection between Cleopatra's performances and stage plays in the light of the antitheatrical conception of theatrical experience as female and of the generic spectator as male. A stage play, the polemicists argue, is like a "painted woman," beckoning its viewers into a sexualized engagement that few can resist. In Antony and Cleopatra, Shakespeare does not refute this argument, but he clearly puts a more positive construction upon the conflation of the feminine and theatrical than was found in the cultural orthodoxies of the time. The very qualities that characterize the Renaissance stereotype of the duplicitous female—beauty, eroticism, changeability, ingenuity—are those that enrich and empower Cleopatra's artistry in shaping her own self-representations and in challenging those of the Romans.

Why does the playwright make the Egyptian queen's specifically "feminine" qualities the source of her theatrical power? To answer this question, I will first examine some aspects and effects of Cleopatra's distinctive mode of dramatic improvisation. Throughout the play one can observe how Cleopatra uses the Roman myth of honor as a manipulable fiction. Philo evokes one version of this myth in the opening scene when he idealizes Antony as Mars and implicitly designates Cleopatra as a Venus of sensual temptation, weakening the great general. Cleopatra does not accept this or any other fixed identity. Instead, she constantly revises and reworks their narrative of Venus and Mars to dramatize in positive terms her "playful" engagement with Antony and her queenly role before her subjects.

In the opening scene, she undermines Philo's judgment by enacting before Antony a vital and positive scenario of their love, leading him to exult in the dissolution of familiar Roman boundaries: "Let Rome in Tiber melt. . . . The nobleness of life / Is to do thus" (1.1.33, 37). Later, when Antony departs for Rome, with the firm resolve to break the "Egyptian fetters," Cleopatra challenges the reductive Roman view of herself and Antony with a transcendent vision of love: "Eternity was in our lips and eyes, / Bliss in our brows' bent" (1.3.35-36). Her model of eternal love, however, immediately reveals its tenuousness when faced with Antony's wavering affections: "I am quickly ill and well, / So Antony loves" (1.3.72-73).

These exchanges establish the pattern for Cleopatra's strategy of improvising on Roman fictions and revealing them as constructed and arbitrary. At one moment, she upholds the Roman view of Antony as the "greatest soldier of the world," and then calls him the "greatest liar" (1.3.38-39) in denying their love. Or, when she addresses Antony as a "Herculean Roman" (1.3.86), she suppresses the Roman view of him as an enfeebled Hercules held captive by feminine charms. By improvising on Antony's identification with Hercules, Cleopatra questions not only the Roman version of the myth, but also their assumptions about her marginality. After these opening scenes, we do not see Antony in Egypt again until 3.7, but through her many "becomings," Cleopatra reminds us of his role as a lover—which the Romans trivialize and Antony tries to suppress. She plays out his divided disposition in Rome: "He was not sad . . . / . . . he was not merry, / . . . his remembrance lay / In Egypt with his joy" (1.5.55-58). More subversively, she violates the Roman concept of manhood by evoking the famous cross-dressing scene, mentioned earlier in this essay. On this occasion, the exchange of clothes, and to some extent of sexual characteristics, disrupts the sexual hierarchy of the Romans whereby Rome is perceived as a heroic and masculine empire and Egypt a kingdom of women and eunuchs.
While Cleopatra evokes an association with the armed Venus in the cross-dressing scene, she enhances and complicates her role as Venus in the public pageant described by Enobarbus. Here, her feminine charms—her sensuality and eroticism—coalesce with her artifice to hold her audiences in rapture:

For her own person,  
It beggared all description. . . .

O'erpicturing that Venus where we see  
The fancy outwork nature. . . .

. . . From the barge  
A strange invisible perfume hits the sense.  
. . . The city cast  
Her people out upon her.

(2.2.203-19)

In Cleopatra's various roles, then, the legend of Venus emerges as many-sided and contingent: while seeming to threaten Antony's masculinity in the crossdressing scene, she also transforms the Venus/Mars myth into a context for a playful eroticism in which sexual identities are confused. But when she plays Venus on the "burnished throne," her erotic appeal merges into a larger picture of queenly grandeur and power. In thus shaping her self-representations, for public or private consumption, Cleopatra seems particularly responsive to assertions of power through improvisational role-playing.

These histrionic revisions of the Venus/Mars myth afford one instance of the diverse, manipulable elements making up Cleopatra's repertoire. They are clearly a part of her sustained strategy of collapsing the distinctions made by the Romans between Antony's role as effeminized lover and masculine warrior. Repeatedly in the play Antony tries to deny his attraction for Cleopatra and thereby, to deny his fickle and changeable nature. Near the end of the play, however, a new character, Eros, appears on stage, and his name signals Antony's fuller acceptance of his own role as lover, and more importantly, of a new playful sense of self. Only now is he able to experience an utter dissolution of personality:

Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish:  
A vapour sometime like a bear or lion,

That which is now a horse, even with a thought  
The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct  
As water is in water. . . .  
My good knave Eros, now thy captain is  
Even such a body. Here I am Antony,  
Yet cannot hold this visible shape.

(4.14.2-14)

In response to Antony's feelings of annihilation, Cleopatra, the consummate actress, improvises a moment of high tragedy: "To th'monument! / Mardian, go tell him I have slain myself; / Say that the last I spoke was 'Antony'" (4.13.6-8). The purpose of Cleopatra's fiction is to help him recover a sense of selfhood that is heroic in a fuller sense of the word than the Romans allow. As a result, even while committing suicide in the high Roman way, Antony ascribes more meaning to his role as lover: "I will be / A bridegroom in my death, and run into't / As to a lover's bed" (4.14.99-101).
At the moment of his death, Antony transcends the rigid boundaries dividing Egypt and Rome—as well as the rigid conception of self. If the Roman value system defines him as a feminized male, a Hercules in bondage to Omphale, a Mars trapped by Venus, Cleopatra invests his effeminacy with a richness not in exclusion from, but within the context of, the Roman heroic model. We still see him in the image of Aeneas, but her vision reformulates the Roman ideal of public duty by emphasizing Aeneas's commitment to Dido over his duty to war. Therefore, beyond death, Antony can visualize his reunion with Cleopatra in a transmuted image of Aeneas and Dido in the Elysian Fields, rather than forever separated as in Vergil's version: "Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand. / . . . / Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops, / and all the haunt be ours" (4.14.51-54).

If Antony dies by imaginatively evoking the values of love—what the Romans decry as the effeminate in him—Cleopatra resolves her suicide by infusing into her feminine being the masculine constancy claimed by the Romans: "... I have nothing / Of woman in me. Now from head to foot / I am marble-constant" (5.2.238-40). And subsequently, in her imaginative rendering of an afterlife, all human categories of sexual difference seem to dissolve in their union: "Husband, I come. / . . . / I am fire and air; my other elements / I give to baser life" (5.2.286-89). Cleopatra daringly celebrates love's victory in a world of dramatic illusion in these final moments of the play, even while acknowledging that if removed from her milieu—and from the Renaissance stage—"Some squeaking Cleopatra [will] boy [her] greatness" (5.2.220). While the autonomy of her histrionic role is curtailed by the image of the boy actor emerging from his disguise, it also ironically serves as a reminder that no identity is fixed and immutable, and that agents of representation on the Renaissance public stage could freely take on identities that transgressed boundaries of gender and hierarchy.

IV

In Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, as in the antifeminist and antitheatrical narratives, the figures of the alluring, histrionic temptress and the effeminized male repeatedly emerge as the focus of concern about changing gender boundaries in Renaissance England. The tract writers' preoccupation with preserving "true" masculinity is, in effect, an attempt to naturalize the orthodox doctrine of a static social and sexual order. In Shakespeare's play, however, this ideology of order—with its clear standards of otherness and exclusion—is revealed as a contingent fiction open to revision. Human identity, as Cleopatra dramatizes it, is multiple, varied, and protean, and, as we have seen, the playwright affords her many occasions to exult in her playful disruptions of the Roman gender polarities. Thus both dramatic text and public debates, when read in relationship to each other, present a complex picture of Renaissance society caught between the pressures of mobility and a desire for stasis. Or more specifically, they bring to light the cultural dilemma of choosing between God-given identities and new, socially constructed ones.

Another, related concern that gains urgency in such a reading of the literary and social texts deals with the use and control of theatrical power. Considering that all spectacles were popularly conceptualized as female and viewers as male, it is not surprising that the Renaissance culture feared feminine displays even as it acknowledged their overwhelming appeal. Thus when the antitheatricalists attack actors for effeminizing themselves and their audiences, they seem to concede immense theatrical power to unrestrained femininity, and to counter that, exhort women to conform to static models of virtue. Shakespeare radically revises these negative associations between women and actors. By conflating femininity and theatricality in such positive and powerful terms in the figure of Cleopatra, the playwright is identifying femininity as one of power's
crucial modes.

Like the Romans in Antony and Cleopatra, the orthodoxies of the Renaissance culture would have certainly been critical of Cleopatra's dramatic shows, considering that they are the creation of female dissembling. Yet, in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, large audiences flocked to the theaters every night. So the Egyptian queen has always had her audiences. Caesar's victory is inscribed in history, but by writing this play, Shakespeare has given Cleopatra endless performances.

Notes

1 All references are to the New Penguin edition, ed. Emrys Jones.

2 An analogy for this paradigm can be found in Stephen Greenblatt's Renaissance Self-Fashioning (1-9).

3 Cleopatra has been variously identified as an actress, dramatist, performer, or in broad terms, as a character wholly defined by her histrionic temperament. Phyllis Rackin ("Cleopatra" 201-12) describes Cleopatra as a "dedicated showman" and a "contriver of shows" whose action throughout is "like that of a playwright or actor" (203). Her essay is important to my argument in that she views Cleopatra's showmanship as Shakespeare's calculated response to those who oppose all "shows" and "seeming"—i.e., the "golden world of poetry" (204-09). Sidney Homan (177-91) relates Cleopatra's artifice and theatricality to her sexuality: "the word 'play,' in the sense of sexual play is frequently interchangeable with 'play' as it refers to the illusion produced by an actor" (179). Linda Bamber (45-70) perceives Cleopatra as a self-conscious actress who, unlike Antony, "does not deny that she performs her love, plays roles, puts on shows" (67). Her drama, with all its energy and struggle, becomes her vehicle for asserting control over her life. While studies such as these see Cleopatra's theatricality in positive terms, earlier criticism often considered her histrionics as a part of her inscrutable, or even duplicitous, female charm. For an account of the latter, see Fitz 297-316.

4 Mary Beth Rose's observations (223-27, 246-47) on the interaction between social and dramatic texts have contributed to the way in which I have constructed my argument, both in the introduction and conclusion.

5 Katharine Maus (603-09) points to the similarities between the rhetoric of the antitheatrical and antifeminist tracts. Jean E. Howard (163-87) also reveals pointed connections between antitheatricalism and the misogyny found in other modes of polemical writing of the period.

6 Cited in Montrose (53-54).

7 For a full discussion of the social changes of the period, as well of the accompanying preoccupation with problems of order and degree, see Underdown 9-43 and Wrightson 17-38. See also Newman 91-93.

8 For a useful account of the antitheatrical discourse in Renaissance England, see Barish, Antitheatrical Prejudice 80-190.

9 See Jonas Barish's observations (Antitheatrical Prejudice 85-87) on the connection between the antitheatricalists' attack on the theater and their unease about female sexuality.

10 Lisa Jardine (8-33) discusses at length the homoeroticism associated with the "effeminate boy[s] . . . of stage cross-dressing" (17).

11 Both social and literary historians observe that the culture's preoccupation with the changing social arrangements in Renaissance England was frequently expressed as an anxiety about the patriarchal order. See Woodbridge's observations (152-83) on the controversial debates regarding the "nature" of women and the
transformations taking place in the traditional sex roles in the early seventeenth century. Also see Underdown (36-43) for an account of the social fears of the breakdown of patriarchal family arrangements.

12 Critics such as Maus and Howard clearly show how the image of the duplicitous seductress occurs frequently in antitheatrical and antifeminist literature. For further discussion of this stereotype see Henderson and McManus 47-50.

13 Maus (607) and Howard (169) arrive at the same conclusion.

14 Gosynhill's references to biblical stereotypes of female virtue typify such an impulse (Mulierum 165-66, 168).

15 Maus (606-17) develops the implications of this observation.

16 Typical of such traditional approaches is that of Julian Markels (3-49), who reads the play as a clash between public and private value systems, and of John Danby, who designates Rome and Egypt as "the World and the Flesh" (148).

17 For a useful analysis of the play's dialectical structure, see Adelman 14-52.

18 Edward Dowden (245-309) exemplifies a long and influential tradition of such moral readings. He views the play as Antony's tragedy and considers Cleopatra as putting the "moral sense to sleep" (278).

19 Greenblatt (227-32) identifies improvisation as the talent for perceiving given structures as a manipulable fiction to be reinscribed into one's own scenario. This essay identifies Cleopatra as such an improviser.

20 In her detailed analysis of the play's treatment of the Venus/Mars myth (167-90), Barbara Bonogives a rich account of the various perspectives on this myth by showing how "Shakespeare reflects the many Renaissance interpretations of Venus in his characters' responses to Cleopatra and to what she does with the martial Antony" (167-68).

21 Bono's discussion (151-90) of Antony's identification with changing images of mythic heroes such as Mars and Hercules contributes to my argument.

Works Cited


——. *The Schoolhouse of women*. 1541 [?]. Henderson and McManus 136-55.


Characterization

Philip J. Traci (essay date 1970)


[In the following essay, Traci argues against many critics' overemphasis on characterization in Antony and Cleopatra and contends that it is the interaction between Antony and Cleopatra that forms the basis of the plot and which should be the main focus of study.]

Attention to Antony and Cleopatra as characters has usually passed for attention to Antony and Cleopatra as play. Whether or not the two have been considered gypsy and doting general, Venus and Mars, or Passion and Man, they have been viewed as if somehow the essence of their characters contained the essence of the play. Shakespeare's understanding of human nature has often been lauded, but the resulting view of the tragedies
as character studies of great men has seldom been challenged.

The chief objection to such a view of the plays is that it separates the character from the play of which he is but a part. Thus, in addition to such irrelevancies as "what confidence Shakespeare must have had in the boy actor for whom he wrote so subtle and rich a role" as Cleopatra's, we have those studies which link Cleopatra with Shakespeare's alleged personal fascination for the dark-lady-Cleopatra before whom "every man is an Antony, Shakespeare no less than another". One critic flatly admits, "I definitely violate one of the standards of dramatic criticism in which I believe; I separate a character from the play in which this character is but one segment of the plot." One example of this kind of separation, so characteristic of studies of the play, will suffice:

If we now regard the Cleopatra of Shakespeare's drama we are astonished to find how inferior she is to the original. It is true that Plutarch gives us no clearly outlined picture of her character, but she certainly is not the great courtesan whom Shakespeare shows us in the first act of his play. We are told nothing about her ability to negotiate with foreign peoples in their own language. As a matter of fact, we never see her acting as queen at all. Nobody would suspect that this woman, as Plutarch informs us, has, for years, quite unaided, ruled a great kingdom. She never gives audience, never exercises the function of her great office. Love seems to be her only aim in life.

If Shakespeare's Cleopatra is inferior to Plutarch's as a person, she is surely not so as an artistic creation. Plutarch's creation is admittedly an indistinct "picture of her character". Indeed, by the same criterion, we might observe that Falstaff is inferior to Oswald, or that Hamlet would make an unsuitable roommate. If Shakespeare's Cleopatra, unlike Plutarch's, "never gives audience, never exercises the function of her great office", but seems to have love as "her only aim in life", we might well ask why. Rather than the implied rewriting of Shakespeare's play, a more reasonable response would include the observation that the play is not concerned with Cleopatra as a political figure, but with her love for Antony. While Shakespeare's varying from his source may provide us with clues as to the emphases of the play, we should, nonetheless, keep in mind Furness' admonition that it is "necessary that we should accept Cleopatra, at SHAKESPEARE'S hands, with minds unbiased by history. We should know no more of her than what we hear on stage. Of her past, of her salad days, we should know nothing but what we are told." The Dark Lady, Plutarch's Queen, and Dante's damned "Cleopatras lussuriosa," are as irrelevant to Shakespeare's Cleopatra as Plutarch's or Julius Caesar's Antony are to the Antony who loves Cleopatra.

Few even of the more recent studies of Shakespearean drama have been exempt from separating character from play. Hamlet is still equated with Hamlet. Despite his title of Form and Meaning in Drama, H. D. F. Kitto emphasizes characterization in Elizabethan Drama, chiefly, however, to distinguish it from Greek Tragedy (if indeed anything so broad as Elizabethan or Shakespearean Drama can be distinct). He carefully adds, "Not of course that the Greek was philosophical with no interest in individuals, and the Elizabethan interested only in individuals with no philosophical foundations: the difference lies in the balance which each strikes between the two." He draws the contrast yet more strikingly, if less truly, later in his discussion: "More important, from our present point of view, is the fact that the minor characters and subordinate incidents in the Elizabethan drama have their independent reality. Launcelot Gobbo is not as important in the play as are Antonio and Shylock, but he is just as 'real'; we appreciate him for his own sake." A negative approach here yields a more precise insight into the characterizations in the play. Launcelot Gobbo is no more real than Antonio, whose role in the play is more important than his, or Old Gobbo, whose role is considerably less important (but none the less vital to the artistic whole). He is obviously more caricature than characterization. Nor is Launcelot's lack of psychological reality intended as a pejorative comment, for "the truest poetry is the most feigning". We do not look to comedies, even problem comedies, for deep character studies. That we "appreciate him for his own sake", we can partially agree; but that "the minor characters and subordinate incidents in the Elizabethan drama have their independent reality", we cannot. Independent reality
implies a separation from the rest of the unified work of art. In II, ii, for example, Launcelot is clearly not introduced "for his own sake". During the course of his first speech alone he mentions the word "conscience" ten times. The significance of the contrast between Shylock's servant's conscience and Shylock's own is no less subtle than effective. The dramatic sympathy that is directed away from Shylock as his servant leaves him has more relevance in the play than the credibility of a common servant using the word "conscience" ten times in a single speech. As a clown, his words and actions are willingly believed within the context of the scene. Although both he and the scene are comic in themselves, they have no "separate identity". Their only existence is that created by the artist within the artistic whole.

This lack of psychological probing, moreover, extends beyond the stock characters of comedy to the tragedies as well. While we can hardly question the sympathetic treatment of Ophelia and Cordelia, neither can we point to them as examples of full characterization. They are not called for in the emphases of the play. Whether or not Gertrude is guilty of the murder of Old Hamlet (or, if so, what her motives are) is a question which scholarly clubwomen have long debated, but with which Hamlet is relatively unconcerned. The repeated overemphasis of characterization in studies of tragedy leads us to ask whether the convention of shortening The Tragedy of King Lear to King Lear might not have more pejorative ramifications than its convenience warrants.

The "separate identity" of minor scenes and characters that Kitto speaks of has been applied to Antony and Cleopatra, perhaps most often in Cleopatra's messenger scenes (II, v; III, iii). The actions and reactions of the messenger, like those of Launcelot Gobbo, Charmian, Banquo, and Oswald exist as comparisons and contrasts to the actions and reactions of the protagonists. The interactions of these comparisons and contrasts compose the dramatic import of the play. To take these minor characters or scenes out of the context of the unified play distorts this meaning. By considering the separate identity of the messenger scenes, for example, some critics have been led to speak of Cleopatra's cruelty. But the so-called cruelty all but vanishes within the context of the unified play. The effect of the scenes upon the spectator is one of Cleopatra's complete concern with Antony. Like Beatrice in Much Ado (I, i, 30-31; II, i, 7-10; cf. Benedick, I, i, 192 ff; II, i, 209-210), she mentions her love at the least suggestion—even when it is a non sequitur. She begins her first scene with the messenger (II, v) by indirectly contrasting Antony's company with that of another woman or a eunuch. Fishing reminds her of catching Antonies. Charmian is reminded of a particular time that Antony and Cleopatra fished. Then Cleopatra remembers the many "times" (I. 18) she and Antony have had.

As if Shakespeare had not made the point of Cleopatra's love for Antony clear enough in the scene, Joseph Stull feels it necessary to read literal "Jewelry" into Cleopatra's figurative "merchandise" (I. 104), emphasizing her "magnanimity", rather than her concern for the news that her love has remarried. But Cleopatra's first thoughts when the Messenger enters (like her first thoughts in the scene itself) are those of Antony:

O, from Italy!

Enter a Messenger.

Ram thou thy fruitful tidings in mine ears,
That long time have been barren.

(11. 23-25)

The forcefulness of her concern is underlined by the physical urgency of her word choices. The Messenger attempts to begin, but is interrupted by the anxious Queen:
Antonius dead!—If thou say so, villain,
Thou kill'st thy mistress: but well and free,
If thou so yield him, there is gold, and here
My bluest veins to kiss; a hand that kings
Have lipp'd, and trembled kissing.

(11. 26-31)

Her impatience again dramatizes her love for Antony. The tone of her plea, moreover, recalls Rosalind's when Celia refuses to answer concerning Orlando (As You Like It, III, ii, 189 ff), or Juliet's when the Nurse refuses news of her love (II, v).

Neither are Cleopatra's threats that she will "melt and pour" gold "down thy ill-uttering throat" (11. 34-35) evidence of her cruelty. They demonstrate instead the intensity of her fear that Antony is dead. She does, after all, offer the Messenger "more gold" (1. 31) once he has told her Antony is well. She has already told us that her whole well-being depends upon Antony: "I am quickly ill, and well./ So Antony loves" (I, iii, 72-73).

Cleopatra's cruelty within context, then, is as illusionary as that which Holloway sees when she exclaims that Antony "shall have every day a several greeting./ Or I'll unpeople Egypt" (I, v, 77-78). The speech emphatically dramatizes not her cruelty, but the firmness of her resolution, a firmness, moreover, which reflects the intensity of the love that motivates it. We need not follow Johnson's suggestion that Cleopatra means to unpeople Egypt "By sending out messengers" in order to disprove Holloway's reading of cruelty. Neither need we accept Traversi's suggestion: "To 'unpeople Egypt,' should this be needed if she is to send daily messengers to Antony, is clearly as impossible as it would be irresponsible. . . ." Nor need we point to other Shakespearean lovers sending daily greetings (in Sonnet 117 or "The Rape of Lucrece", 1. 1289). The best commentary on the conscious exaggeration of her "I'll unpeople Egypt" is made clear by Cleopatra herself in III, xiii, when Cleopatra responds to Antony's question:

Ant. Cold-hearted toward me?

Cleo. Ah, dear, if I be so,
From my cold heart leave heaven engender hail,
And poison it in the source, and the first stone
Drop in my neck: as it determines, so
Dissolve my life; the next Caesarion smite
Till by degrees the memory of my womb,
Together with my brave Egyptians all,
By the discandying of this pelleted storm,
Lie graveless, till the flies and gnats of Nile
Have buried them for prey!

(11. 158-167)

The coupling of "the memory of my womb" with both the maternally possessive "my" and the admiring "brave" illuminate the point in I, v, as well: not that she cruelly wishes to kill either her subjects or her children, but that she loves them as much as she loves herself ("my neck")—indeed almost as much as she loves Antony.

The constant concern for Antony in II, v, moreover, is foreshadowed in I, v, when Alexas enters with a message and is greeted by
How much unlike art thou Mark Antony!
Yet coming from him, that great medicine hath
With his tinct gilded thee.

(I, v, 35-37)

Not only are eunuchs and women unlike Antony (II, v, 4 ff.), so are all other men. She bluntly informs the Messenger that "Hadst thou Narcissus in thy face, to me/Thou wouldst appear most ugly" (II, v, 96-97), for he brings her news of Antony's marriage to Octavia. When he tells her of Octavia's faults (III, iii), however, she agrees with Charmian that he is "a proper man" (11. 37-38). Again, all Cleopatra's actions and reactions are motivated by her thoughts of Antony.

While the obvious mirth that results when Cleopatra ("No more but e'en a woman", IV, xv, 73) "hales him up and down" (SD ff. II, v, 64) also lessens her supposed cruelty, it hardly lessens the intensity of her loving concern for Antony. Cleopatra herself, in a more reasonable moment, realizes that "These hands do lack nobility, that they strike/ A meaner than myself (II, v, 82-83). The explanation for her actions is, of course, the donnée of drama, if not life, that "reason and love keep little company" (A Midsummer-Night's Dream, III, i, 147).20 This same emphasis may be seen in Antony's whipping of Thidias, the "most kind messenger" (III, xiii, 73) who kisses Cleopatra's hand, for here too the lover's jealous rage and the motivation for that rage overshadow the cruelty of the whipping. Although the whipping here is not applied by a woman, it is administered off-stage: "Take hence this Jack, and whip him" (III, xiii, 93). Cleopatra's gold (III, iii, 33), moreover, must mollify both messenger and spectator, by serving "to cure that blow of thine" (Cf. Richard III, IV, iv, 516). Antony's scene with Thidias hardly exists as "a separate incident", but derives and conveys part of its meaning from comparisons and contrasts with those of Cleopatra and her messengers. The chief similarity is the jealous and total love they feel for one another.21 A contrast is further seen between Antony's insistence upon truth (I, ii, 95; I, ii, 102 ff.) and Cleopatra's attempts to create her own truth by prodding the Messenger to tell her only what pleases her.22

Thidias himself has no more separate identity than Charmian, Octavia, Caesar, or the very scene in which he appears. Surely Charmian, Mardian, Alexas, and Iras are more comic types than believable people, and both Octavia and Octavius are as wooden in characterization as in character. Their roles in the artistic whole supersede any attempt at characterization. Although they have not been often noted, the most obvious and recurring contrasts are those made between Charmian and Cleopatra. Just as the coarse bawdry of the servants in Romeo and Juliet contrasts with both the sophisticated sexual wit of Mercutio and the intense, naive passion of the lovers,23 so do deliberate contrasts interact in Antony and Cleopatra. The urbane and bawdy wit of Enobarbus, the coarse and hilarious bawdry of Charmian and Iras, the sensual intensity of Antony and Cleopatra, and even the lack of all these in Octavia and Octavius comment dramatically upon one another. Charmian's own "worky-day fortune" (I, ii, 52), like that she asks for Iras (1. 51), parallels the "dull world" (IV, xv, 61) which Cleopatra abhors. The proximity of the parallel argues for artistry over accident. Charmian, like Caesar, would be Fortune's knave (V, ii, 2-3), while Cleopatra desires

To do that thing that ends all other deeds,
Which shackles accidents, and bolts up change;
Which sleeps, and never palates more the dung,
The beggar's nurse, and Caesar's.

(V, ii, 5-8)

The "worky-day fortune" of Charmian and Iras reminds us also of the one Cleopatra later envisions in Rome, once Antony is dead, "And there is nothing left remarkable/Beneath the visiting moon" (IV, xv, 67-68), and in which
... mechanic slaves
With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers shall
Uplift us to the view. In their thick breaths,
Rank of gross diet, shall we be enclouded,
And forc'd to drink their vapour.

(V, ii, 208-212)

Charmian's asking to "be married to three kings in a forenoon, and widow them all" (I, ii, 25-27), along with her specific request "to marry me with Octavius Caesar" (11. 28-29) sharply contrasts the coarseness of both her prose and wishes with the poetry and actions of her mistress. Her exclaiming, "I love long life better than figs" (1. 32), moreover, differs from Cleopatra's wishes and actions concerning "long life" as well as "figs". Yet another contrast is dramatized between Charmian, who "shall be more beloving than belov'd" (1. 22) and the beloved Cleopatra.

Another important contrast offers itself when Charmian's feelings for Julius Caesar conflict with those of her Queen. When Cleopatra asks, "Did I, Charmian/ Ever love Caesar so?" she receives a rhapsodic? "O that brave Caesar" and later "the valiant Caesar". Charmian persists, even after threats of receiving "bloody teeth" for daring to compare Caesar with her mistress's "man of men". It is Cleopatra, not Charmian, who speaks of her love for Caesar as a result of the "green" judgment and "cold" blood of her "salad days" (I, v. 66 ff.). Cleopatra, moreover, has already admonished Charmian by declaring it "treason" to say that she thinks of Antony "too much" (11. 6-7). The contrast between Charmian and Cleopatra here strongly resembles that between Juliet and the Nurse concerning Romeo and Paris:

*Nurse.* Faith, here it is.
Romeo is banish'd; and all the world to nothing
That he dares ne'er come back to challenge you;
Or, if he do, it needs must be by stealth.
Then, since the case so stands as now it doth,
I think it best you married with the County.
O, he's a lovely gentleman!
Romeo's a dischclout to him. An eagle, madam,
Hath not so green, so quick, so fair an eye
As Paris hath. Beshrew my very heart,
I think you are happy in this second match,
For it excels your first; or if it did not
Your first is dead; or 'twere as good he were
As living here and you no use of him.

(III, v, 214-227)

Juliet cannot believe the all-too-reasonable "comfort" and "counsel" and asks, "Speak'st thou from thy heart?" Once the Nurse replies, "And from my soul too; else beshrew them both", Juliet's "Well, thou hast comforted me marvellous much", assumes a meaning for the audience unlike that understood by the Nurse. The Nurse is no more heroic than Charmian (although no less reasonable than Octavius), and tragedies are not made of their stuff. But they do serve to direct the course of the audience's sympathy toward Juliet and Cleopatra. This surely is the kind of parallel that Coleridge had in mind when he proposed that *Antony and Cleopatra* "should be perused in mental contrast with *Romeo and Juliet*, with which it composed "Shake-speare's double portrait of Love".26
Charmian's very first giddy words with Alexas, moreover, immediately following the first scene with Antony and Cleopatra, distinctly differ from Cleopatra's toward Antony: "Lord Alexas, sweet Alexas, most any thing Alexas, almost most absolute Alexas" (I, ii, 1-2). Neither does Alexas' own comment that "if it lay in their hands to make me a cuckold, they would make themselves whores" (11. 73-74) provide mere filler for the scene. Again a contrast is asked for between Cleopatra and her servants. The Queen, once choosing Antony as her spiritual "Husband" (V, ii, 286), never considers cuckolding her dead husband by submitting to another man. Iras' choice of her "inch of fortune" somewhere other than her husband's nose (11. 55 ff.) lacks the poetry of Cleopatra's response to Antony:

I would I had thy inches, thou shouldst know
There were a heart in Egypt.

(I, iii, 40-41)

The very tone of the verse glimpsed in the decorous "thou" and majestic "Egypt" stands in direct opposition to the coarse comedy of Iras. Cleopatra's reply, with the suggestiveness of poetic art, provokes at least several readings: "I would I were a man, for in a man's role, I could tell you of my love"; "I wish that I had thy inches in height, then I should be both taller and in command"; and "I desire thy inches in an erotic sense, for at that moment you'd know that the Queen of Egypt is a passionate woman who loves you."

But if the actions and reactions of the minor characters comment upon those of the protagonists, this does not suggest that Antony and Cleopatra have any more "separate identities" than their servants. Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra have life only within the confines of the play itself (if so "spacious" a play may be termed "confined"). Whether or not they are either worthwhile or psychologically believable people outside the play is irrelevant. Indeed, even within the play itself we are asked to consider a number of views of the lovers. 27

In addition to studies of Antony and Cleopatra as people, there are those in which the main characters are viewed as they adhere to Aristotelian concepts of "hero." That Renaissance commentaries on and translations of Aristotle abound is common knowledge to Renaissance scholars. 28 That Shakespeare's protagonists are not bound by Aristotle's descriptive criticism of Greek Tragedy seems less well-known. Perhaps because "tragic heroes" are easier to discuss—Aristotle supplies us with such useful classroom-discussion words as anagnorisis, hamartia, and peripeteia—most approaches to The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra have been through its protagonists. Most of these pseudo-Aristotelian studies, however, assume that the play is "the story of Antony". 29 Indeed, one critic suggests that "the play would have been better entitled The Decline and Fall of Antony". 30 Although such a limited view of the play reveals little awareness of either theme or tone, let us not concern ourselves with titles, for they are, especially in Shakespearean drama, outside of the artistic whole.

As if to answer the male critic above, Lucie Simpson states that "the play, in fact, might have been called Cleopatra as appropriately as Hamlet is called Hamlet or Othello Othello". 31 But Antony and Cleopatra, of course, is no more about Cleopatra than Hamlet is merely about Hamlet. While we are prone to deride earlier notions of the tragedies as character studies, we still hear Hamlet spoken of most often as the story of a man who procrastinates and Richard II as the story of a poet who could not be King. We still approach the plays in the classroom through such Aristotelian terms as hamartia. We know not what else to do with them.

Undoubtedly the strongest argument against such an emphasis on characterization, however, derives from Aristotle himself. While Aristotle does mention character as one of the six parts which compose every tragedy, he lists it second in importance. The parts he mentions, of course, are "plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and music". 32 That character is not the exclusive concern of Tragedy, Aristotle makes clear:

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The most important of these is the putting together of the separate actions, for tragedy is an imitation not of men but of actions and life. And happiness and unhappiness reside in action, and the end is some sort of action, not a quality, for according to their characters men are what they are, but according to their actions they are happy or the reverse. They do not, then, act in order to represent character, but in the course of their actions they show what their characters are; so in the actions and the plot is found the end of tragedy, and the end is more important than anything else. Besides, without action there can be no tragedy, but without characters there can be one. The tragedies of most recent writers are deficient in character, and in general the same thing is true of many poets.

He quickly defines character as "that which reveals an agent's moral habit, showing of what sort it is", before proceeding to his discussion of "the arrangement of incidents", which, he reiterates, is "the first and most important matter in tragedy".

This same emphasis on plot underlies Sidney's description of the poet, "with a tale forsooth he cometh unto you", and the ballad-making minstrel immediately comes to mind as predecessor and comrade of the poet. Indeed, the tale seems often to be the structural dulce by which the dramatist captures the spectator in order to show him the utile.

Unfortunately, however, Aristotle's descriptive comments on the nature of Greek tragic heroes have become more widely known than his comments on the relative importance of character:

With respect to the characters there are four things it is necessary to aim at. The first is that they be good. There will be character, as has been said, if speech or act clearly shows a moral choice indicating what sort of person an agent is; his character will be good if his choice is good. There is goodness in every type of person, for a woman is good and so is a slave, though one of these is perhaps inferior, the other paltry. The second necessity is that character be appropriate, for there is a manly character, but it is not fitting for a woman to have a masculine character or to be powerful. The third necessity is that character have resemblance. For this is something else than to make characters good and appropriate, as has been said above. The fourth necessity is that character be consistent. For if a character is not consistent because the man who is imitated was such a character, nevertheless it is necessary that he be consistently inconsistent.

Even in introductory courses in Shakespeare, then, we are likely to hear such questions as: "Does Macbeth become so immersed in evil that he can no longer be a tragic hero?" "Does Othello satisfy Aristotle's demands for tragic stature?" "Does Hamlet achieve anagnorisis or does he remain an ignorant instrument of Providence?" "If he does not achieve this tragic recognition, is the tragedy deficient?" The questions are viewed as central to the play's meaning, and Aristotle's descriptions are seen as demands.

Aristotle himself would surely be aghast at the application of his criticism to Shakespeare's black-sheep tragedy, Antony and Cleopatra. It is almost as if Shakespeare were maliciously attempting to foil those who would approach his play from a strictly Aristotelian point of view. The play is nominally and integrally about two people instead of one—and one of these is a woman. The two, moreover, indulge in what some Elizabethans and some twentieth-century scholars consider deadly sin, although "of the deadly seven it is the least" (Measure for Measure, III, i, 111). Perhaps because he was less aware of Medieval and Elizabethan background than some recent scholars, Shakespeare—or rather Antony and Cleopatra—does not categorically place his lovers (like Francesca and Paolo) in the Inferno. The question of love's sinfulness is one of the questions of the play.
While the Aristotelians have catalogued such references as "Egypt", "Venus", "Mars", and "Demi-Atlas of the world", too often to warrant another such list, we must not be led to believe that the play utilizes the terms only to demonstrate the tragic stature of its protagonists. The comparisons with Venus and Mars, for example, connote more about love than about "men of high reputation and good fortune, such as Oedipus and Thyestes and famous men of similar families". This is not to suggest that Antony and Cleopatra are common folk, but that their tragic stature depends less on earthly rank than on their symbolic implications. In Cleopatra's name as well as Antony's "lay/ A moiety of the world" (V, i, 18-19). The utilization of Aristotle's definition of hero to judge all Shakespearean protagonists, moreover, not only ignores the domestic dramatic tradition, Shakespeare's uniqueness as artist, and that of the play itself, but also mistakes descriptive criticism for prescriptive and goes on to place it above creative art.

One of the problems created by imposing Aristotelian criteria upon the play is the view that in spite of their earthly and metaphorical stature, Antony and Cleopatra are "conceived in essentially non-heroic terms", and "encased in a heroism of words which do not integrate with the action itself". This same critic even suggests that we inquire "whether the cosmic images in Antony and Cleopatra do not appear, at least to a certain extent, forced and imposed upon rather than integrated with the central theme". The critics who note the "inadequacy" of Antony and Cleopatra as Aristotelian tragic heroes also view them as having little rapport with the audience—even that they are laughable. The problems are those of the critics, however. The audience is unaware of them. We have to remember only Macbeth, if not Antony and Cleopatra themselves, to realize that dramatic sympathy is something quite apart from life. Surely they, more than Macbeth, occupy "the mean between saintliness and depravity". In both Macbeth and Antony and Cleopatra, one point becomes clear: that with Shakespeare, as with Aristotle, plot came before character.

In Antony and Cleopatra this sympathy becomes not only more relevant than such concepts as tragic stature and hamartia, but more revealing. Whether the decisions of Antony and Cleopatra are complete "errors" is a question raised, but not decided, in the play. We as audience would hardly have them do otherwise. Indeed, the soothsayer (so consistently important in Elizabethan and Greek Tragedy) advises Antony to leave Octavius' side:

> Therefore, O Antony, stay not by his side:  
> Thy demon, that thy spirit which keeps thee, is  
> Noble, courageous, high, unmatchable,  
> Where Caesar's is not. But near him, thy angel  
> Becomes afeard; as being o'erpower'd, therefore  
> Make space enough between you.

(II, iii, 17-22)

Almost without exception the play directs our sympathy toward Antony and Cleopatra and away from Octavius and his sister. Octavius himself, in a speech praising Antony after his death, is as aware as the Soothsayer and the audience that "we could not stall together./ In the whole world" (V, i, 39-40).

Easily the most obvious way in which Shakespeare directs our sympathy in favor of the judgments of the lovers is through a dramatic contrast with Octavius Caesar. Caesar's judgments, nonetheless, are those some critics would have Antony and Cleopatra make in order to qualify them as suitable Aristotelian heroes. They are not those that we as audience and participants in the drama would have them make. If, for example, Octavius is unlike Antony in being immune to the charms of Cleopatra, so is Mardian (I, v, 9-12). And Mardian is a quite unheroic eunuch. Indeed, even in her carefully prepared scene with Seleucus, Cleopatra feels it necessary to suggest that her Treasurer is less than a man not to have remained adoringly loyal to her. "Wert thou a man", she chides him, "Thou wouldst have mercy on me" (V, ii, 173-174). When Caesar asks, "Which is the Queen of Egypt?" (V, ii, 111) we hardly think of his question as heroic. We must consider him
either stupid and unfeeling not to recognize so rare a creature, or an insolent boy to be rude to Cleopatra so soon after Antony's death. When Cleopatra calls him "Sole sir o' the world" (1. 119), we can only chuckle at her conscious irony, for she has just told us she considers it "paltry to be Caesar" (1. 2). The contrast asked for in the text between this boyish "Sole sir" and her literally unique "Arabian bird" (III, ii, 12) needs no Richard Burbage\textsuperscript{51} to capture the sympathy of the audience. The contrast, moreover, becomes yet more ludicrous when we measure "the young Roman boy" (IV, xii, 48) with the dream proportions the Emperor Antony has now attained by which his legs bestride the ocean and his face is as the heavens (V, ii, 76-100).

Indeed, we sympathize more with the drunken Lepidus (II, vii, 4; II, vii, 90ff.) than we do with the abstemious Caesar. Lepidus' condition, by its extremity as it mirrors Antony's own, also serves to prevent our bringing "Antony . . . drunken forth" (V, ii, 217-218) with any humorously degrading connotations.\textsuperscript{52} Neither is Caesar's lack of participation in the festivities left to the staging. The text itself affirms it in Caesar's own words:

\begin{quote}
What would you more? Pompey, good-night. Good brother
Let me request you off: our graver business
Frowns on this levity. Gentle lords, let's part,
You see we have burnt our cheeks. Strong Enobarb
Is weaker than the wine, and mine own tongue
Splits what it speaks: the wild disguise hath almost
Antick'd us all. What needs more words?
\end{quote}

(II, vii, 118-124)

In fact the wild disguise of wine has "antick'd" all but Caesar, and Antony, if foolish, is also sympathetically human. Caesar's refusal to continue drinking with the others demonstrates not the isolation of the tragic hero who needs must act his dismal scene alone (Cf. \textit{Romeo and Juliet}, IV, iii, 19), but the unsympathetic non-participant who thinks that because he is "virtuous, there shall be no cakes and ale". Drink, moreover, like lechery, is a universally manly, social sin. Like love, it belongs to the particular realm of the soldier.\textsuperscript{53} Indeed, they are surely heroic sins, when compared to glutony and sloth, for example. While Falstaff's lack of honor and love of anarchy, glutony, and sloth may argue against him, the social nature of his drinking demands the sympathy of the audience. It is a tradition of both life and literature (which too seldom agree) that we sympathize not only with lovers,\textsuperscript{54} but also with "one that loves a cup of hot wine with not a drop of allaying Tiber in't" (\textit{Coriolanus}, II, i, 52-53).

The contrast between the manner in which Antony and Caesar behave toward Lepidus also directs our sympathy toward Antony and away from Caesar. Because Antony

\begin{quote}
frets
That Lepidus of the triumvirate
Should be depos'd, and being, that we detain
All his revenue,
\end{quote}

(III, vi, 27-30)

he is dramatically contrasted not only with Caesar, who speaks these lines unapproving of his behavior, but also with his own actions after Enobarbus deserts him (IV, v). When Caesar invites only Antony "to my sister's view" (II, ii, 167), Antony generously remembers the third pillar of the world (weak though it be) and thoughtfully adds, "Let us, Lepidus./ Not lack your company" (II, ii, 168-169). The effect of this generosity upon the audience is voiced by Lepidus himself, who replies to the "Noble Antony" (II, ii, 169). The deliberateness of the contrast is underscored by Antony's criticism of Lepidus in \textit{Julius Caesar}:
This is a slight unmeritable man,  
Meet to be sent on errands; is it fit,  
The threefold world divided, he should stand  
One of the three to share it?

(IV, i, 12-15)

But these are the words of a young Antony—another play, "another Antony" (V, ii, 350).

At two specific points in the play, when we know for certain that what Caesar says is not true, our sympathy is directed toward Antony when it might well be elsewhere. Caesar says, for example,

Why have you stol'n upon us thus? You come not  
Like Caesar's sister: the wife of Antony  
Should have an army for an usher, and  
The neighs of horse to tell of her approach.  
Long ere she did appear. The trees by the way  
Should have borne men, and expectation fainted,  
Longing for what it had not. Nay, the dust  
Should have ascended to the roof of heaven,  
Rais'd by our populous troops: but you are come  
A market-maid to Rome, and have prevented  
The ostentation of our love; which, left un shown,  
Is often left unlov'd: we should have met you  
By sea, and land, supplying every stage  
With an augmented greeting.

(III, vi, 42-55)

Here we might easily sympathize with him in feeling that his sister is a "cast-away" (1. 40). But, we, like Octavia herself, know that he has no cause (1. 41) to do so. When she replies, "To come thus was I not constrain'd, but did it/ On my free will" (11. 56-57), our remembrance of Antony's parting words verifies her claim:

Provide your going,  
Choose your own company, and command what cost  
Your heart has mind to.

(III, iv, 36-38)

In addition to the contrast between Octavia's entrance and the Cleopatra-like one that Caesar dreams for his sister (in which expectation should have fainted "longing for what it had not"), the lengthy speech deliberately undercuts any wrong we might feel concerning Antony's unseen flight to Cleopatra. Another contrast between Octavia and Cleopatra presents itself in Octavia's arrival as a "market-maid to Rome," and Cleopatra's dying to avoid such an arrival there. The connotations of "market-maid" here are clearly pejorative, for Octavia lacks the self-awareness that accompanies Cleopatra's description of herself as

No more but e'en a woman, and commanded  
By such poor passion as the maid that milks,  
And does the meanest chares.
We are also aware of the lack of truth in Caesar's statement to Lepidus:

You are too indulgent. Let's grant it is not
Amiss to tumble on the bed of Ptolemy,
To give a kingdom for a mirth, to sit
And keep the turn of tippling with a slave,
To reel the streets at noon, and stand the buffet
With knaves that smell of sweat: say this becomes him,—
Whom these things cannot blemish. . . .

Although Caesar disbelieves it, we are to learn that Antony is "rare indeed". We note it in Agrippa's statement that "A rarer spirit never/ Did steer humanity" (V, i, 31-32). He is truly an "Arabian bird" (III, ii, 12). The audience, moreover, might easily respond, as Lepidus does that Antony's faults do indeed "become" more than they "blemish" him:

I must not think there are
Evils enow to darken all his goodness:

His faults, in him, seem as the spots of heaven,
More fiery by night's blackness.

More important, we realize that Caesar is wrong again. It is not in the sweaty streets at noon that Antony reels, but at night and alone with his love. There is no tippling slave. We have already heard Antony specifically say to Cleopatra, "And all alone/ Tonight we'll wander through the streets, and note/ The qualities of people" (I, i, 52-54). The differences noted here are hardly trivial. Antony speaks of wandering Arabian-night-fashion in the evening more like "A little touch of Harry in the night" (Henry V, prologue, IV, 47) than the indecorous mixing with Bardolph or a tippling slave. It is no accident that the persona in Vaughan's famous poem saw Eternity "the other night", rather than in the realistic, sweaty day. Night is the time for lovers as well as mystics. The fact that he and Cleopatra are going to "note/ The qualities of people" surely excludes any mingling with slaves. It is in North's Plutarch, not in Shakespeare's play, that Antony wanders "disguised like a slave" (accompanied by Cleopatra "in a chambermaid's array") peering into poor men's windows. Shakespeare's Cleopatra, moreover, far more than Caesar, makes clear her disgust with both sweat and slaves, when she says,

Mechanic slaves
With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers shall
Uplift us to the view. In their thick breaths,
Rank of gross diet, shall we be enclouded,
And forc'd to drink their vapour.

Both Antony and Cleopatra are also compared and contrasted with the eunuch Mardian. With Antony and Cleopatra as well as with Mardian, these dramatic comparisons supersede any deep, psychological probing—indeed, they form the very characterizations in question. So exclusively concerned is the play with
Mardian's lack of sex that at one point he is called "Photinus, an eunuch" (III, vii, 14). His role's the thing. The contrast of Antony (and indirectly of Cleopatra) with Mardian begins before their very first entrance on stage. The contrast is dramatic, as we hear Philo say that "Antony is become the bellows and the fan/To cool a gypsy's lust" (I, i, 9-10), and then see what follows in the original stage direction that continues the scene:

Flourish. Enter ANTONY, CLEOPATRA, her Ladies, the Train, With Eunuchs fanning her.

Surely with so conscious a craftsman as Shakespeare, the textual and palpable fan offers no accidental comparison. While it may at first seem strange to compare the virile Antony with a eunuch, it is a paradox of life and literature that that which most easily proves a man "masculine" may most easily subdue and unsex him. It is a paradox that the play dramatically presents more than once in the play. More often, however, Mardian the eunuch (and the word is repeatedly used in the play, even as an epithet, e.g., I, v, 7) by contrast directs our attention to the physical attractiveness of Antony (I, v, 7-18; II, v, 3-9).

Enobarbus, as reasonable as Mardian and Caesar, but wittier and more feeling, also directs dramatic sympathy toward Antony. Although he has choric functions, Enobarbus is also a character. This is one of the differences in "balance" that Kitto speaks of between Elizabethan drama and Greek Tragedy. Aristotle himself advises the combination: "The chorus should be treated as one of the actors, should be an integral part of the whole, and should participate in the action. . . ." What Enobarbus says and when he says it are more dramatically significant than whether or not his speeches are either consistent or psychologically believable. He speaks almost omnisciently when he tells us that "men's judgements are/ A parcel of their fortunes" (III, xiii, 31-32). Neither is he "in character" in his ironic condemnation of his later actions when he describes his present ones:

He that can endure
To follow with allegiance a fall'n lord,
Does conquer him that did his master conquer,
And earns a place i' the story.

(III, xiii, 43-46)

Yet he is also a character to be himself judged by the audience (with the assistance of his own choric tongue) as "alone the villain of the earth./ And feel I am so most" (IV, vi, 30-31). That Enobarbus here serves as a contrast to direct the audience's sympathy toward Antony is made clear by his following line:

O Antony,
Thou mine of bounty, how wouldst thou have paid
My better service, when my turpitude
Thou dost so crown with gold?

(IV, vi, 31-34)

Enobarbus as character remains completely unaware, when he says, "No, I will go seek/ Some ditch wherein to die: the foul'st best fits/ My latter part of life" (IV, vi, 37-39), that he provides a dramatic contrast in this ditch with that which Cleopatra will, later propose:

Shall they hoist me up,
And show me to the shouting varletry
Of censuring Rome? Rather a ditch in Egypt
Ben gentle grave unto me, rather on Nilus' mud
Lay me stark-nak'd, and let the water-flies
Blow me into abhoring; rather make
My country's high pyramids my gibbet,
And hang me up in chains.

(V, ii, 55-62)

Cleopatra's choice is a ditch to an ignoble life, while Enobarbus' ditch is a punishment for an ignoble choice. This ignominy, then, contrasts with the nobility (V, ii, 284) and majesty (V, ii, 279) of Cleopatra's death, and the contrast dramatically and deliberately comments on the play's themes.

While Enobarbus' reasonable nature may at times cause him to be as sympathetic as Horatio, there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in their philosophies. Antony and Cleopatra dramatizes some of these "things". It is this very lack of the foolhardy and foolish in both Enobarbus and Horatio that prevents them from attaining the stature of a Hamlet, a Prometheus, an Antony, or a Cleopatra. While the reasonable man becomes Fortune's knave (V, ii, 3), Prometheus steals from the very gods, and Antony and Cleopatra "do that thing that ends all other deeds./ Which shackles accidents and bolts up change . . ." (V, ii, 5-6). Whether or not the tragic hero succeeds in defying order, or the gods, or Fortune, matters little. Perhaps it is "impossible". But tragic heroes are those who make the attempt, regardless. The reasonableness of the cynical Enobarbus, who must be reprimanded for his "light answers" (I, ii, 174), becomes relevant in the evaluation of his comments. It is his reason and cynicism that heightens the attraction of Cleopatra, for despite his joking of Cleopatra's "business" (I, ii, 171) and bawdy punning on women's dying, he delivers both the famous barge speech (II, ii, 191 ff.) and the equally famous one that soon follows:

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety: other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry,
Where most she satisfies. For vilest things
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
Bless her, when she is riggish.

(II, ii, 235-240)

Shakespeare, not Plutarch, assigns the speeches to Enobarbus. Neither would Enobarbus wish that Antony "had never seen her" (I, ii, 150), for he "had then left unseen a wonderful piece of work, which not to have been blest withal, would have discredited [his] travel" (I, ii, 151-153). That Enobarbus here speaks in prose hardly undercuts the poetic force of the feeling with which the values of the play ultimately agree. The audience would no more have Antony banish this "wonderful piece" than would Hal "banish plump Jack, and banish all the world" (I Henry IV, II, iv, 526-527). Falstaff and what he represents are as important for Hal to experience in his growth to Henry V as Cleopatra and what she represents are to Antony's growth to dream proportions (V, ii, 74 ff). Cleopatra, moreover, unlike Falstaff, who is necessarily discarded, herself grows to dream proportions (V, ii, 288-289; V, ii, 344-346).

That even this utterly reasonable man feels Cleopatra's attractions not only emphasizes her fascination, but also serves to underscore the unsympathetic, almost unnatural restraint of Mardian and Octavius. They alone are immune to her. The point is not that Octavius is a eunuch, but that in terms of the values of the play he is unsympathetically, excessively reasonable. Thus while Lily B. Campbell's famous study admirably sets forth the thesis that Shakespeare's tragic heroes are slaves of passion, no study of either the comedies or the tragedies has delved deeply into the problem of excess of reason. Yet the excess of reason pervades both. We may note it, for example, in Lear's diabolical daughters, whom he must admonish to "reason not the need" (II, iv, 267), but rather to respond to natural, human feelings. Perhaps the most fully developed example of
extreme reason without feeling is the unnatural Angelo, who, the Duke tells us, "scarce confesses/ That his blood flows, or that his appetite/ Is more to bread than stone . . ." (Measure for Measure, I, iii, 51-53). So unnatural is the extremity of his reason that Lucio even suggests "this Angelo was not made by man and woman after this downright way of creation (III, ii, 111-112), but "was begot between two stockfishes" (III, ii, 116). So inhuman is he that he is spoken of as "a man who blood/ Is very snow-broth" (I, iv, 57-58) and one, who "when he makes water his urine is congealed ice" (III, ii, 117-118). Extreme reasonableness in a lover, of course, belongs only to the comedies—and even there only to the rejected one Shakespeare's satire of those who recognize only man's angelic reason without acknowledging his animal appetites is also seen in such characters as Malvolio and Jacques. The attitude of the audience toward the unsociable pair is well reflected in their devastatingly comic names. If Jacques is last seen going to the "abandon'd cave" (As You Like It, V, iv, 202) and Malvolio is "notoriously abused (Twelfth Night, V, i, 388) and promising revenge (V, i, 386), Angelo joins the final festivities of the comedy only because of Marianna's feelings for him, not because of his own reason. Only "by her election may be truly read/ What kind of man he is". While the line is from Cymbeline, the idea that "all he needs is a nice girl" is one central to the comic view. It is equally true in literary and theatrical tradition that sympathy resides with lovers (whether or not Cleopatra is a "nice girl" matters not). While physical love may be less reasonable than angelic reason, it is an heroic fault, and if the "gods will give us/ Some faults to make us men" (Antony and Cleopatra, V, i, 32-33), what more heroic and universally sympathetic fault could they select?

Indeed, we might argue that sympathy is least with Antony when his reason proves him unfeeling toward Cleopatra. We hardly sympathize with his speaking of his hours with her as "poisoned" (II, ii, 90) or of the Queen herself as "a boggier ever" (III, xiii, 110), a "foul Egyptian" (IV, xii, 10), or a "Triple-turned whore" (IV, xii, 13). Regardless of our willingly suspended personal judgments concerning Cleopatra, Antony's words here, like Cleopatra's actions earlier, "lack nobility" (II, v, 82). We surely admire the pair most when they are suffering at the bottom of Fortune's wheel. We are well aware that Jupiter's statement; "Whom best I love I cross" (Cymbeline, V, iv, 101), is as relevant to Antony and Cleopatra as it is to Prometheus and Oedipus. It is a concept central to Tragedy that "Nothing almost sees miracles/ But misery" (King Lear, II, iii, 172-173).

If Enobarbus, Mardian, and Caesar direct sympathy chiefly toward Antony, Octavia directs our sympathy chiefly toward Cleopatra. If Octavia is wronged, and surely she is, that is only half the story. That she is "of a holy, cold, and still conversation" (II, vi, 119-120), we have Enobarbus' word. The play makes clear from the beginning of her forced marriage that it is no love match; Antony married "but his occasion here" (II, vi, 128-129). While Cleopatra's "something it is I would" (I, iii, 89) implies the intensity of her emotion, Octavia sounds somewhat silly in her analogous inability to communicate:

Oct. Sir, look well to my husband's house; and—

Caes. What, Octavia?

Oct. I'll tell you in your ear.

Ant. Her tongue will not obey her heart, nor can
Her heart inform her tongue—the swan's down feather,
That stands upon the swell at the full of tide,
And neither way inclines.

(III, ii, 45-50)

By inclining neither way, like one of Dante's trimmers, this "swan's down feather" surrenders the dramatic sympathy that a Desdemona, for example, gains by replying to her father that while she recognizes "a divided duty" (Othello, I, iii, 180), yet
hers, my husband;
And so much duty as my mother show’d
To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor, my lord.

(11. 185-189)

Even the comic Hermia defies the command of both her father and Theseus in order to wed Demetrius (A Midsummer-Night's Dream, I, i). She gives her father the same forceful reason in the precedent set by her mother and wins the approval of the audience. Ultimately, the play shows her choice to be "the right one" (Elizabethan attitudes toward arranged marriages notwithstanding).

We should, nonetheless, agree with John Holloway's assertion that

A marriage to cement an alliance need have nothing cynical, shameful, or dishonourable about it; and the play gives no reason whatever to suppose that the "helpless sister Octavia" either was helpless in respect of her devoted brother (Shakespeare seems to follow Plutarch here), or would have wished to help herself in any way other than by furthering his wishes. Attitudes like this may have become obsolete, but they are neither incomprehensible nor unattractive.

Later, however, when speaking of Plutarch's account of Octavia as "the most fortunate woman on earth . . . wife and sister of the two great commanders", Holloway adds, "These attitudes are nearer to Shakespeare's by far than those of today." This is the danger of background studies. Shakespeare's personal attitude is both unknown and irrelevant. Regardless of The Elizabethan Attitude toward arranged marriages, we have already noted the sympathetic treatment of Hermia's and Desdemona's refusal to adhere to them. The audience's sympathy is as clearly with Cleopatra as it is with Juliet. Octavia and Paris have little of this sympathy. We rarely even see Octavia and she has no spokesman, as Cordelia does, in Kent or the Fool. When we do see Octavia, we hear little that proves any profound love for Antony (see, for example, II, iii, 1-9). In Dryden's play, she meets Cleopatra. In Shakespeare's she is not even comparable. When Cleopatra's messenger leads her to believe what she wants to believe of Octavia (that she is "dull of tongue, and dwarfish", III, iii, 16), we laugh with Cleopatra and at Octavia. When Cleopatra in the final scene of the play speaks of "dull Octavia", we must agree with her. In spite of her infrequent presence on stage, Octavia is surely one of those women who "cloy/ The appetites they feed . . ." (II, ii, 236-237). And a lack of sympathy for her causes us to muse that despite the brevity of her role in the play, "None ever wished it longer than it is."

Cleopatra's ability to "make hungry./ Where most she feeds" (II, iii, 237-238), on the other hand, represents the audience's attitude as well as Antony's. This is still true at the play's end. Even on Antony's deathbed, she pleases both him and the audience by her playfulness. Some seem to prefer the whining of an Octavia, and complain of Cleopatra's selfish cruelty when she asks,

Noblest of men, woo't die?
Hast thou no care of me, shall I abide
In this dull world, which in thy absence is
No better than a sty?

(IV, xv, 59-62)

Yet within the context of the scene, her speech is as playful as that in which she says, "Here's sport indeed! How heavy weighs my lord!" (IV, xv, 32). The loving (rather than cruel) nature of her playfulness becomes
apparent when we note that her purpose is to save Antony his breath (11. 42-43), and when we contrast it with the intense sorrow with which she breaks forth once he is dead (11. 64 ff). We care not for the "dull Octavia", who is undoubtedly a part of the "dull world" of which Cleopatra speaks. The playfulness adds pathos rather than cruelty to the scene, just as the punning of Mercurio (III, i, 100-102) and Gaunt (Richard II, II, i, 82) increases the pathos of their death scenes. Would we instead, with the cruelty of Richard II, ask, "Can sick men play so nicely with their names?" (II, i, 84).

Cleopatra, moreover, pictures Antony as the "noblest" of men, just as she does in her discussion of Julius Caesar with Charmian (I, v, 66 ff). Octavia, on the other hand, divides her love between Antony and Octavius:

A more unhappy lady,
If this division chance, ne'er stood between,
Praying for both parts:
The good gods will mock me presently,
When I shall pray, "O, bless my lord, and husband!"
Undo that prayer, by crying out as loud,
"O, bless my brother!" Husband win, win brother,
Prays, and destroys the prayer, no midway
'Twixt these extremes at all.

(III, iv, 12-20)

To be certain that this "love is not love/ Which alters when it alteration finds" (Sonnet 116), we have only to remember Juliet's contrasting words after Romeo has killed Tybalt (III, ii). Juliet can divide her love no more than Cleopatra. While, out of the context of the play, one could easily argue for the selfish and cruel Cleopatra as opposed to the loyal Octavia of the golden mean, the tone and context argue otherwise. The extent of the deliberate direction of our sympathy toward Cleopatra is reflected not only by such omissions as Octavia's pregnancy in Plutarch, but also such additions as Cleopatra's erroneous forecast that in Fulvia's death she sees how hers will be received (I, iii, 65-65). When Antony hears Mardian report Cleopatra's death, he does indeed echo the very words he speaks when he hears of Fulvia's death (Cf. I, ii, 154-157 and IV, xiv, 34). But the word's and actions that follow Antony's speech contrast his deeper love for Cleopatra with that he feels for either Octavia or Fulvia. We are shown little, if any, of these "loves".

In Shakespeare's play this dramatic sympathy and tone are of more relevance than character-probing or *hamartia*. Indeed, the comic tone created by the foolishness of the protagonists, by which some would deny them tragic stature, strongly contributes to their heroism. In addition to directing our sympathy toward them by making them more human, their foolishness is often foolhardy and daring. Like Coriolanus' entering the city "alone/ To answer all the city" (I, iv, 51-52), Antony dares Caesar to single combat "sword against sword./ Ourselves alone" (III, xiii, 27-28). Caesar prudently and unheroically refuses (IV, i, 4-6). Again when Antony and Cleopatra foolishly agree to fight by sea (III, vii, 27-28), when even a common soldier realizes the necessity to fight by land (III, vii, 60 ff), we feel a sense of heroism in their foolish defiance. Even when Antony's daring extends to raging, "I would they'd fight i' the fire, or i' the air./ We'd fight there too" (IV, x, 3-4), we feel we have witnessed the bravado of a Hotspur in his excess of passion. Neither raging madness, dotage, nor foolishness, moreover, can categorically deny Antony and Cleopatra their tragic stature. All three elements are present in another who is both a tragic hero and "every inch a king". Perhaps it is an awareness of this foolishness as an essential ingredient of tragic heroes from Prometheus to Antony that has led many to translate *hamartia* as "error in judgment" rather than "tragic flaw". Cleopatra foolishly jabbars with Mardian.

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She argues with Charmian. She talks of Antony and catching fish. She even beats a messenger. But her foolish lack of reason dramatizes her complete love of Antony, even after his death. Would we have her give way to Antony in all things, and reasonably cross him in nothing (I, iii, 9)? If so, she might well respond to us, as to her serving maid, "Thou teachest like a fool: the way to lose him" (1. 10). Charmian's advice is Octavia's way.
Even on her own deathbed, Cleopatra foolishly becomes jealous that Antony will make demand of Charmian, "and spend that kiss/ Which is my heaven to have" (V, ii, 301-302). But her jealousy proves her love. Cleopatra's supposed selfishness here, like Antony's clumsy death earlier, have been pointed to as undercutting their stature. But in the context of the play, their foolishness gains our sympathy and reflects their love. Their most flagrant foolishness, moreover, their defiance of Fortune, demonstrates that the foolishness itself heightens their stature.

Rather than studies of tragic stature or hamartia or psychological reality, then, studies of the characterizations of Antony and Cleopatra should include a summation of what we see and hear them do and say in the light of comparable and contrasting actions. This interaction forms their dramatic characterizations. When Austin Wright, then, proposes that "the main theme" of Antony and Cleopatra is not probing into the character of either Antony or Cleopatra, but into "the clash between Antony and Octavius", he does note at least one of the interactions of the play. When Lord David Cecil, however, adds that "the love story is seen always in its relation to the rivalry between Octavius and Antony", we note (as in Wright's terming this relation "the main theme") that the emphasis of the play is shifted from the lovers to Antony and Octavius. No one in the audience ever shifts the focus of the play from Antony and Cleopatra. The shift comes only from "study". Both Octavius' and Octavia's love for Antony depend on Antony's love for Cleopatra. The very use of such love terms as Caesar's speaking of Antony as "my mate in empire" (V, i, 43), moreover, when multiplied in the play, demonstrates that the emphasis is not on Antony and Octavius, indeed not on Antony and Cleopatra as people, but on love. The danger of the view that "the central theme of The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra is the relationship of Antony and Cleopatra" is the extension that the focus of the play is on "the purely personal relations of the lovers" and lacks "the public nature" of Julius Caesar or Coriolanus. Antony and Cleopatra, like The Winter's Tale, The Tempest, and Timon of Athens (rather than the so-called Roman Plays with which it is consistently grouped), is more symbolic than either personal or public.

While Hazelton Spencer has argued that "Antony and Cleopatra are too well-known to be ideal tragic figures: they resist the symbolizing tendency of all serious and poetic drama", other critics have equated Cleopatra, for example, with Isis, Ceres, Lilith, "Eve and the serpent in one", Omphale, Venus, "everlasting woman", or Antony's "absolute", "his heart's desire made perfect". The difficulty comes in the equation. Antony is no more Mars, Adam, or Hercules, than Cleopatra is Venus, Eve, or Omphale. But the comparisons are made in the play. We can speak more precisely of the "allegorical bent" of Antony and Cleopatra than speak of it as an allegory.

The most common failing in the approach to the play, however, has not been the exclusion of the personal level of the lovers, but the exclusion of all else. Dr. Johnson, for example, viewing the play from the literal plot alone, objects to its lack of characterization:

Except the feminine arts, some of which are too low, which distinguish Cleopatra, no character is very strongly discriminated. Upton, who did not easily miss what he desired to find, has discovered that the language of Antony is, with great skill and learning, made pompous and superb, according to his real practice. But I think his diction not distinguishable from that of others: the most timid speech of the play is that which Caesar makes to Octavia.

Rather than a failing in characterization, the lack of distinguishable diction and any real soliloquies demonstrates instead Shakespeare's symbolic method in the play. This it not to say that the servants and protagonists speak the same language, which Kitto points to as a characteristic of Greek Tragedy. While we do not focus exclusively on the universal aspects of the characters of Antony, Cleopatra, or Antigone, for example, we do note a difference in the "balance" Kitto mentions. We are concerned as reader or spectator with Antony and Cleopatra both as lovers and as symbols. That Antony and Cleopatra are historical figures,
gives dramatic substance to the symbolic story presented. The combination is significant:

It is not that the Greek tragic poets were too high-minded "corruptly to gratify the people"; the satyric play did nothing else than to serve this reprehensible purpose. But if we go back to the fundamental difference between the Greek and the Elizabethan drama we find a very natural explanation. We argued that a background of ordinary life is an essential part of Elizabethan drama; that it is one of the means by which the central action is given solidity and reality. . . . Since introduction of the comic and the low—Eastcheap, gravediggers, jesters—helps us to feel that the play is "true to life," for here is the tragic action, surrounded by life.96

The individual natures of Antony and Cleopatra, then, participate in and comment on the symbolic nature of the play of which they are a part. But the characters themselves are both individual and symbolic. The individuality is attested to by their historical basis and their unique excellence: Cleopatra as "A lass unparallel'd" (V, ii, 315) and Antony as the "Arabian bird" (III, ii, 12) or phoenix. Neither does this individuality exclude their symbolic or universal nature. Cleopatra is both that Queen of Egypt unlike all other women who cloy the appetites they feed, and "No more but e'en a woman, and commanded/ By such passion as the maid that milks,/ And does the meanest chares" (IV, xv, 73-75). Antony is both the greatest soldier in the world and "the abstract of all faults/ That all men follow" (I, iv, 9-10). And they are more. Only the play can contain their infinite variety. No study should even presume to do so.

The most common fault of character studies of Antony and Cleopatra, however, has not been to attempt too much, but to exclude either their individual or symbolic nature. Those who insist on interpreting all Shakespeare's tragic protagonists as psychologically believable characters might well object to the insincerity or hypocrisy of either Othello's oft-quoted blank verse assertion that "Rude am I in my speech,/ And little bless'd with the soft phrase of peace . . ." (I, iii, 81-82) or Henry V's felicitously phrased prose apologies to Katharine for being similarly awkward (V, ii). The different dramatic effect of the speeches is attested to by the tone of the passages and the reaction of the audience. Few in the audience worry about either consistency or consistent inconsistency. When an idea is to be introduced into a play, one of the characters on stage does so. It may or may not be "in character". Antony as character, for example, may have no idea that "These strong Egyptian fetters I must break,/ Or lose myself in dotage" (I, ii, 113-114), but we as audience must be introduced to and prepared for this idea at this time. Antony, likewise no more knows at the time that "though I make this marriage for my peace,/ I' the east my pleasure lies" (II, iii, 38-39) than Hal at another moment knows

you all, and will a while uphold
The unyok'd humour of your idleness.
Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
To smother up his beauty from the world,
That when he please again to be himself
Being wanted, he may be more wond'red at
By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
Of vapours that did seem to strangle him.

(I Henry IV, I, ii, 218-226)

Indeed, in character, Hal might well be charged with a prideful, if not bombastic, self-comparison with the sun. While it is not contradictory to believe Cleopatra as character is aware both that she is "with Phoebus' amorous pinches black,/ And wrinkled deep in time" (I, v, 28-29) and that the Messenger who has seen her "hath seen some majesty" (III, iii, 41), it is more an awareness of the play than a self-awareness that she
demonstrates when she says

Be it known, that we, the greatest, are misthought
For things that others do; and when we fall,
We answer others' merits in our name,
And therefore to be pitied.

(V, ii, 175-178)

Antony's sudden reversals of love and hate of Cleopatra are no more to be questioned as to consistency of character than Aufidius' sudden "My rage is gone" (Coriolanus, V, vi, 148), which follows his equally sudden aside against Corialanus (V, ii, 200-202). We are not asked whether or not they are consistent: our judgments are willingly suspended and we are shown.

Commenting on those who would view Cleopatra purely as a believable character study, S. L. Bethell exclaims, "No wonder Cleopatra's character worries the psychologist; it is not so much a character as an extended metaphysical conceit."97 He says that for this reason in his "treatment of the 'character' of Cleopatra . . . I tried to show that we were not so much concerned with psychology, as with the concrete poetic description of a complex interpretation of experience". But in his treatment, unfortunately, Bethell seems to discard his "not so much" and the individuality of the lovers to proclaim that "Octavius Caesar stands for the Roman qualities as Cleopatra does for the Egyptian", and that "Octavia is the translation of Rome into woman".98 But Cleopatra also "stands for" the historical Queen of the Nile, just as Octavia also "is" the second wife of Antony and the sister to Octavius. Much like Isabella in Measure for Measure, they function as both character and symbol. An exclusion of either level renders any study deficient. Isabella is surely "out of character" when as a kind of allegorical mercy she can say (without fear of egotism), "You do blaspheme the good in mocking me" (I, iv, 38). But she is hardly inconsistent when as character (and but a human reflection of the qualities she symbolizes), she exclaims, "O, I will to him and pluck out his eyes!" (IV, iii, 124) or unmercifully cries out for "justice, justice, justice, justice" (V, i, 25). In much the same way Falstaff is both "the reverend vice" (I Henry IV, II, iv, 499) and Hal's companion, and the Fool in Lear is both jester and "Lear's shadow" (I, iv, 251). So then Antony is Phoenix, Adam, and Cleopatra's "man of men", just as she is both the only woman who cloys not Antony and "no more but e'en a woman". The two, then, function as both character and symbol. Neither symbol nor character, however, exists except as a part of the unified play. The dancers are but a part of the dance.

Notes

1 See, for example, Schücking, Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays and A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy and Oxford Lectures. . . Also see Leo Kirschbaum, Character and Characterization in Shakespeare (Detroit, Michigan, Wayne State University Press, 1962), and Frank Harris, The Women of Shakespeare (London, Methuen and Co., 1911).


Cf. Harley Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare, p. 125: Shakespeare "carefully . . . avoids writing any scene in which a boy could not act without unpleasantness or in fear of ridicule".

Louis B. Wright and Virginia A. LaMar, "Egyptian Enchantress" in William Shakespeare, Antony and Cleopatra (New York, Washington Square Press, 1961), p. xiii: "Metaphor and suggestion take the place of visual love-making which would have been distasteful."

Cf. Austin Wright, p. 45: "But Shakespeare feels Cleopatra's fascination, and one guesses that he was drawn to her against his will just as Antony was—and just as the poet had been to the heartless heroine of the sonnets."

Ivor Brown, *Shakespeare* (Garden City, New York, Doubleday and Company, 1949), p. 185: "The Dark Lady may or may not have been dead. But something snapped. The ecstasy and the agony were over."


Neilson and Hill, p. 1245: "It could hardly have been insight alone. . . . If the richer music of *Antony and Cleopatra* does not invite recollection of the Sonnets, the amorous theme does, and it is conceivable that through his enigmatic Dark Lady, Shakespeare was assisted in imagining what Antony's Cleopatra was like."

See also Frank Harris, pp. 196-216 in which the "original" of Cleopatra is seen as Mary Fitton!

4 Kirschbaum, p. 99.

5 Schücking, p. 121.

6 See discussion, Chapter IV.


11 That Antonio is not a "psychologically real" character is clear from the first lines of the play, in which he obviously speaks "out of character":

> In sooth, I know not why I am so sad:  
> It wearies me; you say it wearies you;  
> But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,  
> What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,  
> I am to learn:  
> And such a want-wit sadness makes of me,  
> That I have much ado to know myself.

(*Merchant of Venice*, I, i, 1-7)

12 See discussion, Chapter I, footnote 48, p. 19 above.
See, for example, John Holloway, *The Story of the Night: Studies in Shakespeare's Major Tragedies* (Lincoln, Nebraska, University Press, 1961), pp. 113-114: "Antony confirms his status as a gigantic outlaw among mankind by his treatment of Thyreus [or Thidias]. The ill-treatment of a messenger is as much a conventionalized act of decisive self-condemnation as Lear's division of the kingdom. . . . Cleopatra's ill-treatment of the messenger bringing news of Antony's marriage is plainly part of the same carefully-pointed sequence of events."


Holloway, p. 113.

Dr. Johnson, cited in the note to this line in The Variorium Edition of the play.


See discussion, Chapter V.

G. B. Harrison, for example, in *Shakespeare's Tragedies* speaks of Cleopatra's supposedly "weak maternal feelings" (p. 224).

See discussion of excess of reason below.

See discussion of love and jealousy, Chapter IV.

See Bryant for a discussion of the truth of nature versus the Truth of art as a theme in the play.

See, for example, Mercutio's wit in I, iv, and II, iv. Contrast this physical stress with the idealized and religious language of the young lovers (e.g., I, v) and the coarseness of the language of the servants in I, i, and that of Peter and the Nurse in II, iv.

See "fig" in Eric Partridge, *Shakespeare's Bawdy: A Literary and Psychological Essay and A Comprehensive Glossary* (New York, E. P. Dutton and Co., 1960), p. 112. Even Partridge's "comprehensive glossary", however, fails to include the example here or in the basket in which Cleopatra finds her asps.

Coleridge, I, 86.


Cf. William Rosen, *Shakespeare and the Craft of Tragedy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 105: "The most important reason why *Antony and Cleopatra* has been interpreted in so many ways is that we, as audience, are constantly forced to change our point of view."

See discussion "question structure", Chapter V.


Hardin Craig, *An Interpretation of Shakespeare*, p. 268.
Cf. Willard Farnham, *Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier. The World of his Final Tragedies* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1950), p. 175: "Shakespeare does not organize his tragedy as a drama of the love of Antony and Cleopatra, but as a drama of the rise and fall of Antony in the struggle for world rulership that takes place after he has met Cleopatra."


See discussion of Structure, Chapter V.

30 Lord David Cecil, p. 21.


36 See discussion of Cleopatra's "masculinity" and Antony's supposed "effeminacy", Chapter IV.


38 Resemblance to what, Aristotle does not explain. Gilbert in his note to the line suggests "mythic prototypes" as one possibility. Indeed, the reading is lent authority by what Aristotle says later in the *Poetics* of metaphor: "this alone cannot be learned from others and its use is a sign of genius, for to use metaphors well is to see resemblance" (p. 103).

39 Aristotle, pp. 89-90.


41 See Brents Stirling, *Unity in Shakespearian Tragedy. The Interplay of Theme and Character* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1956), p. 159: "It is interesting that Shakespeare seems to have anticipated the problem of sexual infatuation as a tragic theme by actually posing the question as a theme in the play."

Cf. discussion of "question structure", Chapter V.

42 Aristotle, p. 86.

43 See discussion below.

44 Nicoli, p. 152.

45 Rosen, p. 133: "A. C. Bradley and Arthur Sewell are dissatisfied with him [Antony] because little rapport exists between protagonist and audience."

47 Ibid.

48 Aristotle, p. 86. See also p. 86n.

49 Cf. E. E. Stoll, "Cleopatra", *Modern Language Review*, XXIII (1928), 151: "Plot came first with the poet [Shakespeare], not, as the critics often say and continually imply, the central character. The action gave birth to the character, not the character to the action."

50 The word "dramatic" as used in this study means that which we see and hear on the stage as it interacts with the rest of the play.

51 Although there is no actor list or direct knowledge of the first performances recorded in any contemporary diary, it is more than probable that Richard Burbage played the role of Antony. The DNB gives Burbage's dates as 1567?-1619 so that he would have been alive and about the right age for the part. It is well-known that he "had all the best parts" (as the DNB states). Burbage is also assigned the role in Thomas Whitfield Baldwin, *The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company* (Princeton, University Press, 1927).

52 Lepidus, then, absorbs by his extremities the pejorative aspects of Antony's condition, much as Edgar's assumed and fantastical madness accomplishes the same dramatic purpose in Lear's mad scenes.

53 Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Rev. A. R. Shilleto (London, G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1903-1916), III, 40. While Burton in his anatomy of the lover's melancholy mentions the soldierly virtue of love, the association of the soldier with "love" is still a common one.

54 Francis Bacon, "Of Love" in *Works*, ed. James Spedding *et al.* (London, Longmans and Co., 1870-72), VI, 397, observes that "the stage is more beholding to Love, than the life of man". Plato in *The Symposium*, trans. B. Jowett (Boston, International Pocket Library, [n.d.]), however, mentions the "encouragement which all the world give to the lover" (p. 41). He even speaks of "the entire liberty which gods and men allow the lover . . ." (p. 42).


57 Cf. Aristotle, p. 77: "They do not, then, act in order to represent character, but in the course of their actions they show what their characters are . . .".

58 See also III, vii, 14n. Note in addition that Shakespeare often designates profession or role (e.g., clown, constable, mother), rather than name.

59 See for example, Antony's "She has robb'd me of my sword" (IV, xv, 23) immediately after Mardian enters.

60 Aristotle, p. 97.
61 See "piece" in Partridge's glossary. The word could mean more than simply "masterpiece". Cf., for example, Titus Andronicus, I, iii, 309.


63 See, for example, "I am glad this parcel of wooers are so reasonable, for there is not one among them but that I dote on his very absence, and I pray God grant them a fair departure" (Portia in Merchant of Venice, I, ii, 118-121).

64 The many Elizabethan puns on "jakes" even in the heroic "Ajax" are common and are still, of course, made on the modern equivalent of "a john". See "jakes" in Partridge.

65 See discussion above.

66 Dante, Inferno, III.

67 Holloway here is "answering" Traversi, An Approach to Shakespeare, pp. 244-245.

68 Holloway, pp. 110-111.

69 Ibid., p. 111.


71 See discussion of Cleopatra's "cruelty" above.

72 Plutarch, II, 54.

73 Cf. I, ii, 115 for the first time Fulvia's death is reported.

74 See discussion below.

75 See discussion of love and jealousy, Chapter IV.

76 See footnote 57. . . .

77 Austin Wright, p. 39.

78 Lord David Cecil, p. 13

79 See discussion of love and empire, Chapter IV.


83 Hazelton Spencer, p. 341.

84 See Michael Lloyd, "Cleopatra as Isis".

85 Ibid.


87 Brandes, p. 462.

88 Maizitis, pp. 142 ff.

89 Ibid., pp. 144 ff.


93 Johnson, X, 212-213.

Cf. Bethell, pp. 117-118: "The employment of such imagery is not limited to one or two personages in the play, but is characteristic of them all. There is, in fact, no attempt to differentiate character by the verse they speak, except to some extent with Octavius Caesar, whose verse is normally dull and flat and impersonal, or else staccato as he issues orders. But when he speaks of Antony, or Cleopatra, of the Empire, his verse too takes on the grandeur and dignity met with in the others. . . ."


95 Kitto, p. 229.

96 Ibid.

97 Bethell, p. 132.

98 Ibid.

**Bibliography**


Cecil, Lord David, *"Antony and Cleopatra ", The Fourth W. P. Ker Memorial Lecture delivered in the University of Glasgow, 4 May 1943* (Glasgow, Jackson, Son and Company, 1944).


W. B. Worthen (essay date 1986)


[Below, Worthen studies the factors that influence how the character of Antony is viewed by the audience, noting that the primary factor is the tension between the way Antony is described by other characters in the play and what Antony's own actions reveal about his character.]

Here's sport indeed! How heavy weighs my lord!
Our strength is all gone into heaviness,
That makes the weight. Had I great Juno's power,
The strong-wing'd Mercury should fetch thee up,
And set thee by Jove's side. Yet come a little,
Wishers were ever fools, O, come, come, come.

[They heave Antony aloft to Cleopatra]

And welcome, welcome! Die when thou hast liv'd,

Quicken with kissing: had my lips that power,
Thus would I wear them out.

All. A heavy sight!

(IV.xv.32-40)

"It was a hard thing for these women to do, to lift him up"; like Plutarch, Shakespeare finds the "dramatic capital" of the monument scene in the challenge of its acting, the "apparent difficulty" of hoisting "a full-grown man ten or twelve feet in the air." Cleopatra must seem to lay "all the weight of her weake bodie" into the "swounding body there / Of pale Antonius," while the inert soldier "mooues againe, and then againe," held in her womanish, or boyish, grasp. "This was no easy task," Constance Benson recalled of her 1898
The actors' attention is taxed as well, fully tested by this theatrical sport. A high monument aloft, a missed handhold, a flimsy railing, frayed "rowles of taffatie": the exigencies of the theater threaten a slapstick catastrophe, as Antony plummets to the stage, leaving the actors to "strut / To our confusion" and their own (III.xiii.114-15). And yet, despite its possibly distracting humor, this subtle, stagey, even athletic sport seems to register the deep play of Antony and Cleopatra. As Antony's peerless "space" withers, his "visible shape" endures (IV.xiv.14). Antony is momentarily suspended between legendary greatness and its tragic acting, his body resisting the Roman gesture and its lofty rhetoric while it gains an affecting weight of its own.

Michael Redgrave rightly pinpoints one function of Enobarbus's rough poetry: to frame the principal actors' performances sharply into view, dramatizing the double vision that the theater requires of its audience as part of our experience of the play. In the theater, we attend to the "paradox" of stage acting, to the dialectic between the actor's presentation on the stage (his characteristic style of engagement with the dramatic role), his precise attack on that series of actions), and the representation of "character" that his roleplaying seems to convey. In the monument scene, and elsewhere in Antony and Cleopatra, Shakespeare forces our attention to the means of theater—the relationship between actor, role, and "character"—as part of our attention to the drama itself. Actors have long recognized that characterization poses one of the play's most troublesome problems:

For instance, Antony is described as "noble" on no less than eight occasions. But, excepting for his generosity towards Enobarbus, and possibly in his death-scene, Antony is never shown to do one noble thing. . . . Whoever plays the parts of Antony and Cleopatra should look to it that they have a first-rate Enobarbus, for Enobarbus creates Antony's nobility and Cleopatra's fascination as much as the protagonists can hope to do.

Michael Redgrave rightly pinpoints one function of Enobarbus's rough poetry: to frame the principal actors' performances, and to suggest the kind of effect that Antony and Cleopatra can have on their on- and offstage public. In Antony and Cleopatra, though, such descriptions tend to establish a narrative "text" for certain characters, a markedly ideal or ironic "character" that often seems to ensure the relative inadequacy of performed characterization, engrained as it is in the materiality of the individual actor and his talents. Perhaps not surprisingly, few actors have succeeded unequivocally as Antony; like Garrick, most have seemed to want "one necessary accomplishment: his person was not sufficiently important and commanding to represent the part." Davies's account of Garrick highlights the problem of characterization, and of reading "character," that Antony and Cleopatra presents to its audience. Commanding enough for Richard III, Lear, and Macbeth, Garrick was defeated not by the role of Antony—the series of actions he was required to perform as an actor—but by the "character" so often described by others in the play. In performance, the actor's "Antony" may seem too "opaque": the actor's sensuous surface—usually the charismatic center of our attention—may seem to pale beside the novelistic "character" others have framed with words alone. Antony and Cleopatra is, of course, centrally concerned with how events are written into narrative, transformed into history, literature, and myth. The fascination of the play's address to an audience lies, in part at least, in the way this contest between narrative and drama, text and performance, animates the characterization of the play's major roles, and so sustains the "giant strength" of the play's theatrical design.

In the opening scene, for instance, Philo invites us to "behold and see": if we "Take but good note," the acting of Antony and Cleopatra ought to illustrate the text that Philo provides: "The triple pillar of the world transform'd / Into a strumpet's fool" (I.i.11-13). As spectators, how will we have to look in order to see what Philo sees? To Philo, Antony's acting both recalls and denies the heroic "character" of the Roman general, and to see Antony as Philo does we must read the actor's performance as the negative ("Nay, but") of that now-absent "character": his "goodly eyes" no longer glow like plated Mars, his manly passion "reneges all temper," his martial bounty has become the "bellows and the fan" of hollow lust. Philo instructs us to see, but from an "anamorphic" perspective, to bend and turn our attention from the performance of character in
order to lend a more privileged view to Philo's moralized emblem of "dotage." Not that Philo's measure of Antony is wrong—Antony himself fears to be lost in dotage—or inconsistent with the events of the scene. Antony arrives, after all, accompanied by the epitome—to a certain cast of mind—of theatrical "effeminacy": the "female wanton boy" of stage crossdressing. The action that follows quite systematically deflates Antony's grand ostentation: plated Mars enters on a surprisingly domestic note, wrangling rather than commanding; the "new heaven, new earth" of his love is instantly bounded by the reckoning of Rome and Fulvia; even his romantic "space" is pricked by Cleopatra's dry wit, as "Excellent falsehood!" (I.i.40). Philo's portrait is in sync with the characterization that the actor's performance will provide for the audience. But by allowing the text of "character" derived from Antony's history to determine his reading of the performance he observes, Philo sidesteps the challenge of "theatrical perception" that Antony and Cleopatra requires of its theater audience: to learn to see "character" as an effect of acting. Antony's performance is too "opaque" for Philo; Antony seems out of character, "comes too short" of Philo's privileged script, "that great property / Which still should go with Antony" (I.i.58-59).

In the theater, to see in this way is hardly to see at all. Performed "character" is inseparable from its enactment, created moment to moment by the actor's efforts. And yet, because those efforts are marked as "acting," the performance inscribes an undecidable, yet palpable, difference between the actor's persona and the fictive, dramatic "other" he engages and represents. The actor seems both to inform and to stand apart from his "character," and our task is to enable this double perspective to become part of our play, rather than a necessary failure of art, the falling short it may otherwise seem to be. Theatrical spectating requires us to see in much the way that Antony sees Cleopatra:

Whom every thing becomes, to chide, to laugh,
To weep: how every passion fully strives
To make itself, in thee, fair and admired!

(I.i.49-51)

The passions gain reality and force, fully become themselves, only through Cleopatra's acting of them. As a result, Cleopatra is becomingly effected in performance, graced by her chiding, laughing, weeping. Antony alerts us to the more difficult kind of seeing that the theater entails, for he requires us to take good note of the relationship between theatrical "becoming" and the "great property" of character. To see this scene as theater means to allow the actor his means of characterization, means which will inevitably falsify, seem to fall "too short" of the verbal precision of a characterizing text, Philo's text in particular. For only through the actors' means will the characters "become themselves" onstage, earning a place in the dramatic "space" as well as in the narrative "story."

Philo's challenge to "behold and see" is amplified through the "great gap of time" (I.v.5) during which Antony's vacancy from the stage is supplemented by narrative characterization. In the fourth scene, Caesar draws our attention to the discrepancy between narrative and performative characterization by reciting the events we have just seen, or something like them:

From Alexandria
This is the news: he fishes, drinks, and wastes
The lamps of night in revel; is not more manlike
Than Cleopatra; nor the queen of Ptolemy
More womanly than he.

(I.iv.3-7).
Although the acting of the earlier scenes will partly determine the relative accuracy of Caesar's portrait of Antony (a "ne'er lust-wearied Antony" will confirm Caesar's view more fully than a martial one), this account necessarily simplifies and distorts the action we have seen, and will be further belied by Antony's sober manner on his next appearance. Though rash, Antony is hardly more effeminate than Cleopatra, who practices her womanly wiles with great art in the opening scenes, and he has sternly vowed to break his Egyptian fetters. Throughout the play, Caesar relies on narrative—the "news" of Alexandria, Antony's "reported" (I.iv.67) exploits in the Alps, perhaps even in the "writings" he offers in his defense after Antony's death (V.i.76)—to characterize his general, means which enable Caesar more easily to assimilate Antony's actions to an interpretive text: Antony becomes the "abstract of all faults / That all men follow" (I.iv.9-10). Caesar's characterization of Antony consistently privileges the absent "character" of history over the present "character" of performance. What impresses Caesar about Antony's retreat from Modena, after all, is that abstract "honour" once found a direct expression in the body, so that even famine could be borne "in character," "so like a soldier" that Antony's cheek "So much as lank'd not" (I.iv.69-71).

Caesar demands a thorough identification between the moral "abstract" of Antony's character and the aging soldier who must continue to play the part. Cleopatra, in her parallel evocation of an absent Antony, reverses Caesar's subordination of enacted to abstracted character, transforming a notoriously sensual portrait of Antony's bodily presence—

Where think'st thou he is now? Stands he, or sits he?
Or does he walk? or is he on his horse?
O happy horse to bear the weight of Antony!

(I.v.19-21)

—into a "character" of divine dimensions, "The demi-Atlas of this earth, the arm / And burgonet of men" (I.v.23-24). While Caesar represents Antony's extremes of passion as actions which make him fall short of his "great property," Cleopatra's Antony becomes himself, the "man of men," through the violence of his passions: "Be'st thou sad, or merry, / The violence of either thee becomes, / So does it no man else" (I.v.59-61). Caesar, rather like Thomas Davies, asks the actor to submit to an "abstract," to re-create in action a "character" that can only be constituted through narrative reconstruction and interpretation, only as history. But as Cleopatra suggests, the actor's substantial presence inevitably violates such a "character," and that to discover character in performance, we must be able to find this contradictory violence becoming.

The body that lanks and discandies and wrinkles deep in time tangibly qualifies the texts of "character" so often provided in the play. Furthermore, while the relationship between a given actor, role, and "character" will seem to fluctuate throughout the play, each role also tends to construe the relative "opacity" or "transparency" of that relationship somewhat differently. Observing Antony, for instance, we weigh the performed character against the readings supplied by Philo, Caesar, Cleopatra, Pompey, Enobarbus, and others. Not all of the roles invite this recalibration of the actor's performance, or lend it such resonance in the drama. The "conditions" of the two competitors are strikingly "differing in their acts" (II.ii.113-14); Caesar's role generally protects the actor from the more revealing demands imposed on his colleagues. I don't mean to imply that "Caesar" is not a demanding, elusive part, or that Caesar's backslidings and betrayals are not, in their own way, as contradictory as the lustier vicissitudes of Antony and Cleopatra. Nonetheless, the play never forces the actor's histrionic characterization into overt competition with a narrative "character." The role of Antony challenges the actor to fill that "captain's heart, / Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst / The buckles on his breast" (I.i.6-8); most trained, "scarce-bearded" (I.i.21) actors should be able to command the authority of the "universal landlord" (III.xiii.72). Indeed, both Caesar and Octavia are so "holy, cold, and still" (I.vi.119-20) that actors may well be challenged to characterize these roles in enough detail to be credible. Antony, like Cleopatra, may seem in performance too violent and varied for the "great property" of his character; Caesar, like Octavia, may too easily seem "a body, rather than a life, / A statue, than a breather"
Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra at Cydnus (II.ii.190-240) typifies the different prism of characterization required of the play's title roles, and begins to clarify the function of narrative in the design of *Antony and Cleopatra* as a whole. In her fine article on the play, Phyllis Rackin argues that Enobarbus imagines a scene that "is not physically present: it is evoked by and for the imagination, and it pays tribute not only to Cleopatra's beauty and her incredible powers to enchant but also to the beauty and powers of the medium in which she is created." Poetry is certainly the "necessary medium" of this "impossible" portrait, but only one of the arts that creates Cleopatra for her theater audience. On her next appearance, the actress will have to "square" Cleopatra with this "report" in her own medium—acting—and in a scene where Cleopatra's behavior both violates the grandeur of Enobarbus's text and demonstrates the violence of "infinite variety" (II.ii.236). At the center of the play, Shakespeare juxtaposes the two forms of representation on which *Antony and Cleopatra* depends. The actress's—or boy actor's—performance inevitably seems to boy the greatness of the "character" that Enobarbus describes, but Enobarbus's text is itself only a verbal "abstract," "beggar'd" (II.ii.198) by the original performance at Cydnus. The point is not so much that Cleopatra "cannot be represented but only created" in poetry, but that she can now only be represented, and that each medium—narrative and drama—will be "beggar'd" in its own way, both by the majesty of the inaccessible original and by the limits of its art.18

*Antony and Cleopatra* dramatizes the duality inherent in the idea of "character," that while it seems to be revealed both through present action and through retrospective reconstruction, these two modes of characterization—and the "character(s)" they evoke—often seem incommensurable. David Kaula rightly suggests that the characterization of each of the major roles has a different temporal orientation: Cleopatra is committed to a flamboyant, actor-like present; Antony to recovering the epic greatness of his past; Caesar to the future, and to the historicizing of his career it will contain.19 The play in performance articulates this temporal aspect of characterization by defining the relationship between the actor's present effort on the stage and the "chronicle" (III.xiii.175) from which the title characters have emerged, and to which they will return once the play is finished. Antony, for instance, often seems out of his part; his attempts to recreate his epic "character" look like bad acting, strutting in confusion. Onstage, the role polarizes the outsized hero of the play's past against the tragic actor of its present, as Antony's actions progressively deface the commanding warrior: "Experience, manhood, honour, ne'er before / Did violate so itself (III.x.23-24). While the "authority" of that "character" melts from Antony, he becomes more fully bound by the flawed body, which even the land is "asham'd to bear" (III.xi.2). Relinquishing his "visible shape," then, becomes a critical process in Antony's characterization, dramatizing his attempt to transmigrate from the dramatic to the narrative mode, from the actor's lanking body to a changeless "place i' the story" (III.xiii.46).

For this reason, the role scrupulously draws our attention to the actor's body as a part of our attention to the drama: "I, that with my sword / Quarter'd the world, and o'er green Neptune's back / With ships made cities, condemn myself (IV.xiv.57-59). Antony summons the swordsman of the past to execute the "sworder" (III.xiii.31) he has become, but the botched suicide and subsequent lingering of his "miserable change" sharply qualify this final heroic gesture. Antony invites the audience, as he invites Cleopatra, to "please your thoughts / In feeding them with those my former fortunes / Wherein I liv'd" (IV.xv.51-54), to project onto the dying "case of that huge spirit" the "character" he would signify, "the greatest prince o' the world" (IV.xv.54). As Bergson might have observed, by dramatizing this "anxiety about the body"—both Antony's and the actor's body—the monument scene strikes a dissonant, comic note, one echoed in the weighty puns of Cleopatra and her attendants: "heavy sight," indeed.20 The scene threatens to disrupt the play, and our sympathetic playing, by attending to the disjunction between the mortal actors before us and the romantic "space" of their dramatic representation. And yet, what seems in part to prevent the final scene from becoming "ludicrous" is the "ludic" aspect of its theatrical playing, the precise physical and histrionic challenges that the performers engage to present the tragic scene on the stage.21 The monument scene foregrounds the theatrical sport of the actors' playing in order to train our attention precisely on the transformation that "Antony" is to undergo. "Antony" is
suspended in the rich gap between the dramatic performance and the narrative "abstract" of character. Only when the actor's "long day's task is done" (IV.xiv.35), when he has no more acts to perform, can Antony's "character" be returned to the narrative forms of characterization—history, literature, myth—that stand as backdrop to the play. Shakespeare emphasizes this restoration of Antony's "character" to the narrative mode in the play's final scenes, as Decretas, Caesar, and Cleopatra all vie to characterize Antony descriptively. Free of the body, the "character" of Antony is free of the actor's lumbering weight. The colossus—face like the heavens, voice like thunder, arm cresting the world—once again can be "writ," not "in the acts it did" (V.i.22), but in the mythopoetic words of Cleopatra's dream. Cleopatra's final portrait fulfills Antony's restoration from stage to story by construing a "character" not merely "past the size of dreaming," but past the physical resources of acting as well, a "piece, 'gainst fancy, / Condemning shadows quite" (V.ii.97-100).

Antony's departure from the play dramatizes the affective polarity between acting and narrative that guides the play's rhetoric of "character." Cleopatra's resolutely theatrical play in the final scenes is more explicitly situated within a continuum of performance, located between the actions of the past—now the play's narrative history—and the appalling dramatizations to come.

The quick comedians
Extemporally will stage us, and present
Our Alexandrian revels: Antony
Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I' the posture of a whore.

(V.ii.215-20)

Like Caesar earlier, Cleopatra recalls scenes we have seen in the play, now threatened with trivializing representation not as narrative "abstract," but as vaudevillian caricature. It's a daring moment in Shakespeare's theater, one that invites us to attend to the means of theatrical "character"—the boy actor's performance—in order to deny it, to affirm that "Cleopatra" somehow transcends those means. Cleopatra's "grotesquely skeptical" self-portrait asks us to "behold and see" the boy actor only to insist that we overlook him, and enter Cleopatra's imaginative perspective, if we are to "see" the play through to its finale.22 At the same time, the speech also reminds us that Antony and Cleopatra is only the latest in the history of such stagings, most of them having more in common with the Roman play that Cleopatra fears than with the romantic play that Shakespeare has written. Conceived as an escape from Caesar's theater, Cleopatra's performance suggests that the theater, with all its defects, provides the only tangible means to restore "Cleopatra" to our view. While Antony urges us to recall the "character" he can no longer play, Cleopatra replays her splendid history—the meeting at Cydnus—as play, subtly transforming the scene from an image of legendary wantonness to one of unexpected fidelity. Antony unarms himself, but Cleopatra dons the trappings of her part—"Show me, my women, like a queen" (V.ii.226)—in order to insist that play can constitute "character," a name and title proven through a "noble deed":

My resolution's plac'd, and I have nothing
Of woman in me: now from head to foot
I am marble-constant: now the fleeting moon
No planet is of mine.

(V.ii.237-40)

Cleopatra's reenactment of her performance at Cydnus epitomizes the relationship between text and performance explored throughout Antony and Cleopatra, a relationship captured in Richard Schechner's term "restored behavior." Schechner refers to the relation between performed events—plays and rituals, for
instance—and the "virtual," sometimes even "original" events they represent. Although such performances are often developed from a basic score, outline, or script, rehearsals and performances test different ways of enacting those texts, and obviously change the precise texture of the behavior they restore to action. As a result, what is "restored" is patently a performative reinterpretation, rather than a precise repetition, a played enactment that nonetheless retains the authority of the "original" it recalls, replaces, and inevitably alters. In many cases,

the event to be restored is either forgotten, never was, or is overlaid with other material, so much so that its historicity is irrelevant. What is recalled are earlier performances: history not being what happened but what is encoded and transmitted. Performance is not merely a selection from data arranged and interpreted; it is behavior itself and carries with it a kernel of originality, making it the subject for further interpretation, the source of further history.23

Cleopatra's final scene attempts to strike an accommodation between the restorative mode of performance and the abstracting mode of history, the two modes of characterization syncopated throughout the play. Reenacting the Cydnus scene, Cleopatra both restores herself to that legendary moment and at the same time restores that scene to the audience as her final, definitive, performed portrait. Yet while Cleopatra understands herself to be playing her meeting at Cydnus, we know of that meeting only through Enobarbus's admittedly inadequate, nonetheless magnificent "abstract." Enobarbus's speech stands in the same relation to Cleopatra's final scene that North's Plutarch and the various literary and legendary accounts of "Antony and Cleopatra" do to Antony and Cleopatra in performance. Far from being "illustrated" or "realized," the absent narrative text is staged, traced into a performance which finally must rely on its own means of representation. For this reason, among others, the Victorian practice of actually staging Cleopatra's barge at some point in the play seems an exuberant banality: the play forces us to negotiate the difficulties of its own representation, the "restoration" of an inaccessible, nearly unimaginable greatness—one known to us only through words, as a text—to the stage.

To accept Cleopatra's play we must accept it as play, be willing to accept the efficacy of acting to restore such a scene even while being "beggar'd" by it: there will be no barge burnishing, no music, no Cupids and Nereides, only a barren platform and two weeping servants. Shakespeare certainly strains "all his huge command of rhetoric and stage pathos to give a theatrical sublimity to the wretched end of the business," but in so doing he provides a paradigm of theater.24 For better and worse (as puritans ancient and modern have recognized), theatrical sublimity is all that Cleopatra, or Shakespeare, can have to offer.

Antony and Cleopatra opens by showing legendary characters claiming a resonantly theatrical "space," one in which their actions seem both to confirm and to belie the texts of "character" provided by others in the play, and by the familiar traditions of judgment that the play recalls. Antony and Cleopatra closes in a similarly evocative space, in which the performed characters relinquish the discandying flesh of the stage—"I am fire, and air; my other elements / I give to baser life" (V.ii.288-89)—to take their place among the less ephemeral monuments of art, in "story," "chronicle," tomb, perhaps even in dreams. Like Caesar, we see "perform'd the dreaded act" (V.ii.330), an act which transforms Cleopatra finally from player to "character," the "lass unparallel'd" of Cydnus, looking "As she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace" (V.ii.345-46). By involving our assessment of the knot intrinsicate binding actor and character, Shakespeare invites us to weigh both the story and its acting, and to find in the case of these huge spirits the specific gravity of the stage.

Notes


2 From North's translation of Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans, in Ridley, p. 281.
Harley Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978), 1:404, my emphasis. I am, of course, assuming that the scene was, or could have been, staged in this manner; on problems of staging, see Ridley, pp. 247-57.


Adelman discusses patterns of negation and affirmation, p. 110; see also her fine discussion of "framing" in the play, pp. 31-37.


14 See Raymond J. Pentzell's discussion of this problem in "Actor, Maschera, and Role: An Approach to Irony in Performance," *CompD* 16 (1982): 201-26. Recently, William E. Gruber has argued that modern audiences, perhaps because they approach Shakespearean performance principally as readers of the plays, "have extreme difficulty seeing how an actor can simultaneously be 'in' and 'out' of character," while "Tudor and Stuart theatergoers—unlike modern audiences—not only tolerate visible contradictions between actor and role, but apparently they consider them to be the affective basis of spectating." While the precise terms of this double vision may well be specific to a given theater and its culture, I would argue that such perceptual "dissonances between actor and character" are essential to the act of theatrical seeing. Gruber nonetheless develops several suggestive lines of inquiry regarding the play's performative characterization; see "The Actor in the Script: Affective Strategies in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*," *CompD* 19 (1985): 30-48; I quote here from pp. 33-34.

15 See Goldman's discussion of "becoming" in the play, pp. 123-26.

16 See Beckerman, p. 163.

17 The actor who characterizes Caesar memorably has usually turned in either an eccentric or a brilliant performance, as Keith Baxter did in 1969; see Lamb, p. 164.

18 Rackin, pp. 204-205.


21 "Ludicrous" is Rackin's term, p. 207.

22 The phrase is Janet Adelman's, p. 110; see also Rackin, pp. 208-209. Cleopatra's histrionic dimension has been treated by most of the critics cited here; see also Robert Ornstein, "The Ethic of the Imagination: Love and Art in *Antony and Cleopatra*" in *Later Shakespeare*, ed. John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), pp. 31-46; and Robert Kimbrough, "Androgyny Seen Through Shakespeare's Disguise," *SQ* 33 (1982): 32. It should be noted that the act of negation that Shakespeare requires of his audience here is consistent with the ideology of gender generally in his theater; the audience sees "Cleopatra"—female character—only as an absence, a negation of the male actor's stage presence.


24 Several turn-of-the-century productions staged Cleopatra's barge at some point in the play; see Lamb, pp. 79-91, passim.

Comic Aspects

Barbara C. Vincent (essay date 1982)


[In the essay that follows, Vincent analyzes Antony and Cleopatra as a play first dominated by tragedy and later by comedy, maintaining that the movement of the play from tragedy to comedy parallels the movement within the play from Rome to Egypt.]

. . . yet the Alexandrians were commonly glad of this jolity, and liked it well saying verie gallantly, and wisely: that Antonius shewed them a comicall face, to wit, a merie countenaunce: and the Romanes a tragi call face, to say, a grimme looke.

—The Life of Marcus Antonius

That The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra contains many elements of comedy is increasingly noticed in criticism. Cleopatra has been called "the queen of comedy," and the play has been regarded as a transition between the tragedies and the romances. Yet the study of the opposing dramatic genres and their interrelations can be pursued more specifically than one might at first imagine. Borrowing the play's geographical imagery, we can say that Shakespeare provides a map of his literary universe, with its worlds of tragedy and comedy, in the play's opposing realms of Rome and Egypt. Only the map is not static; like an evolving political map, it chronicles the relations between the two generic worlds. These relations undergo a total revolution in the course of the play: from the dominance of tragedy and the separate, subordinate existence of comedy of the Roman literary world (as Shakespeare portrays it), to the inclusion of tragedy in comedy and consequent elevation of the latter in Renaissance and Shakespearean literature.

But before tracing the vision of literary history in the play, it must be shown why we can properly identify Rome as the world of tragedy, and Egypt, comedy. Ironically, the concept of the "Roman play," which is traditionally used to define the genre of Antony and Cleopatra, has sometimes been used to set the play off from Shakespeare's preceding tragedies, as if it were some new form Shakespeare slid into as he grew tired of writing tragedies. Instead, I think, the Roman play, and particularly the Roman world of Antony and Cleopatra, should be regarded as Shakespeare's attempt to portray the archetype of tragedy. As Reuben Brower has shown, the world of Shakespearean tragedy is influenced by the Graeco-Roman heroic tradition. Hence, what more fit setting for tragedy than the source of this tradition, the world in which it was not mere literature, but the dominant ethos, as yet unchallenged by the later comic ethos of romantic literature or Christianity? The figure of the great warrior, who embodies a potent ideal of manhood in three of the four "great" tragedies, is naturally a central figure in the imaginative life of Rome. As Hamlet's father's ghost and the manly ideal he embodied haunts Hamlet, so the Homeric ideal warrior haunts the more modern, limited, civilized society of Rome on the verge of the Augustan era.

That Rome is a pre-Christian world is also convenient for tragedy. Roman culture sanctions the pursuit of power and individual greatness more uninhibitedly than the post-Roman, Christian world, and tragedy, like Rome, is the world of the supreme individual. The ironic religious vision which counterpoises the heroic individualism in tragedy is also best associated with the classical world. The classical gods are jealous of human greatness, and seek to destroy great men lest they rival the gods, as Cleopatra says she and Antony threatened to: "It were for me / To throw my sceptre at the injurious gods,/ To tell them that this world did equal theirs./ Till they had stol'n our jewel" (IV.xv.75-78). The feeling in tragedy that human greatness is likely to provoke a fatally jealous reaction from the gods is, on the other hand, not well suited to the
personality of the Christian God, who, far from seeking to prevent man from becoming god, himself became man.

Rome fulfills the special blend of the heroic and the ironic which is tragedy in many other ways. It is an elevated world by virtue of its antiquity and its enduring literary models. Roman civilization can be imagined as a great creator of forms, not the least reason being that it developed the rules of decorum, both ethical and dramatic, which are central in Shakespeare's characterization of it. Cleopatra's ideal of "the high Roman fashion" acknowledges Rome as the standard-maker for what is noble and lofty in conduct. The elevated verbal style which tragic decorum demands sounds unusually appropriate on the lips of Romans, who can employ Latinate diction more naturally than most characters. Rome is also an ironic world, because it is dead. Not only has its empire vanished, but its values and vision have been supplanted.

According to the principles of dramatic decorum, tragedy is generally based on an historical subject, while the subject of comedy, in contrast, is the poet's invention. Shakespeare both sharpens and expands this point of distinction between the kinds. Rome on the verge of fulfilling her imperial destiny is not just any tale out of a chronicle. The establishment of Augustan Rome could be seen from Shakespeare's viewpoint as the historical subject: the vision of the world of the past, the old order of our civilization. The historicity of Rome also contributes to our sense of it as an ironic world: it is a realistic, unpredictable, nightmarish world from which we would like to awake. It has been called "the sublunar world," or simply "the World." Perhaps because Caesar's Rome does not have its energies deflected by the contemplation of unearthly kingdoms, it seems a concentratedly temporal world, hyperactive in the world of time: "With news the time's in labour, and throws forth, / Each minute, some" (III. vii. 80-81).

The comic world of Egypt, in contrast, is serenely unburdened by any historical mission, and love, playing, and eating are the central activities. More than just an invented world, Egypt is an archetypally poetic realm. Cleopatra is a particularly compelling embodiment of the conventions of romance. Like the maiden in the Song of Songs, Cleopatra is a woman who is also a nation, calling herself Egypt. She is a cynosure of magnetic attractive powers at her appearance on Cydnus. She is a serpent-woman. She is a dying and reviving heroine, usually with the aid of the conventional amatory trope identifying death with sexual consummation. As Antony is identified with the sun, "the fire / That quickens Nilus' slime," so is Cleopatra with the Nile Valley. Like Spensers' Garden of Adonis, the Nile Valley is a kind of golden world or earthly paradise, a place of seed where things grow to their fullest effortlessly and without cultivation: "The higher Nilus swells, / The more it promises: as it ebbs, the seedman / Upon the slime and ooze scatters his grain, / And shortly comes to harvest" (II. vii. 20-23). As well as imaging a beneficent and intriguingly polymorphous sexuality in Egypt, overflowing Nilus also offers an analogue for the vitalizing effect of experiencing the swollen torrents of magnified human passions projected by the histrionically gifted queen. In contrast to the busily temporal world of Rome, Egypt is an eternal realm, which transfixes Romans in the endlessly recurrent and fertilizing experience of love.

Rome is also a fitting setting for tragedy because it is an unabashedly masculine world, in contrast to female-dominated Egypt. The anti-romantic attitudes which seem such a sinister aspect of Iago's tragic villainy in Othello are practiced freely in the open daylight in Rome, not simply by Caesar, who is as quick as Iago to equate love with lust, but also by such a genial spirit as Enobarbus. While Egypt has as its symbol of female ascendancy Mardian, the eunuch, Rome has a female eunuch—Octavia. In Egypt Antony is a lover and a lady's man, in danger of losing his manly self-sufficiency; in Rome Antony is a man's man, a soldier-general, and a competitor with Caesar, and he is subject to some embarrassment for having been a lady's man. This simple and profound distinction is not generally cited in discussions of the principles of decorum, yet it accurately dramatizes more explicit points of decorum, such as that comedy conventionally treats of love, while tragedy of violence and war, or that tragedy deals with illustrious actions of great public significance, while comedy treats of private and domestic actions. The sexual dimension of generic distinction also generally accords with previous Shakespearean practice in the genres. The male hero does tend to be the
imaginative center in Shakespearean tragedy, while the heroine tends to overshadow the hero in comedy, much as Cleopatra generally upstages Antony in Act I.\textsuperscript{9}

Women are not heroic individuals in comedy, as men are in tragedy; rather, they act as conduits of natural feeling which seeks to form marriages and knits societies together. Another generic commonplace is that while tragedy is concerned with man as an individual, comedy sees man as a member of a social group. Shakespeare signals this distinction even in his titles: in all his tragedies and in the generically akin histories, the name of the play is the name of an individual, while none of his comedies (except two of the romances) have an individual's name in their titles. And Rome is like tragedy in being most interested in man as an individual. The stoic ideals of constancy and imperturbability, of remaining "like oneself," fortify the individual man and help him resist the pull of common, natural appetites and passions—comic impulses, which appear vulgar, promiscuous, or somehow perverse in the value system of tragedy.

While Rome exalts aloof individuality, Egypt brings about the loss of individual identity, the dissolving of discrete forms, or the overflowing, like Nilus, of the boundaries of form. In Egypt, Antony loses himself and becomes like Cleopatra. This confusion of identities which is typical of romantic lovers is grossly indecorous in the Roman world; Caesar complains that Antony "is not more manlike / Than Cleopatra; nor the queen of Ptolemy / More womanly than he" (I. iv. 5-7). Cleopatra generally disregards advice to "keep yourself within yourself" (II. v. 75), she threatens to burst "the sides of nature" (I. iii. 16), and Antony "o'erflows the measure" especially under her influence. Always the actress, she nonetheless has an emotional integrity behind her "becomings" which gives her acting great power. When Antony senses an histrionic storm approaching as he prepares to leave Egypt and accuses her of cunning, Enobarbus, astute detector of frauds, ascribes the sensational power of her passions to their authenticity: "Alack, sir, no, her passions are made of nothing but the finest parts of pure love. We cannot call her winds and waters sighs and tears; they are greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report" (I. ii. 144-48).

Cleopatra fittingly has immense and vital passions, for she is Eros, that comic deity. She takes Eros' place at the arming scene (IV. iv. 14-15), she enters to his name (IV. 12. 19-20), and Antony mingles her with Eros when apostrophizing the presumably dead Cleopatra: "Eros!—I come, my queen:—Eros!—Stay for me" (IV. xiv. 50). Cleopatra is less troubled than ordinary mortals by the loss of self, since Eros thrives as discrete individual identities are dissolving. Thus, in contrast to the form-making and individuating energies of the tragic Roman world, the comic Egyptian world is governed by form-dissolving Eros.

Rome and Egypt are also like tragedy and comedy in their relationship of opposition, which structures more detail than can ever be mentioned in a list of the elements of tragic or comic decorum. Although one point of the idea of decorum is that each world has its appropriate place, neither world is content with a discrete half of the universe. Rome and Egypt go beyond the sets of values, attitudes or styles appropriate to central areas of human experience like war or love. They are also mental worlds, which become modes of interpreting all experience—the tragic and the comic vision. Each world o'erflows the measure of decorum and seeks to appropriate the entire universe of human experience, ratifying its own vision by showing the values and pursuits of its rival world to be illusory, ephemeral, or childish. The claims of Rome, which seem to Antony like urgent matters of great public concern, or tragic material, after a Roman thought has struck him in I. ii., are reduced by Cleopatra to the petulant demands of shrewish women and youths:

\begin{center}
Fulvia perchance is angry; or who knows
If the scarce-bearded Caesar have not sent
His powerful mandate to you, "Do this, or this;
Take in that kingdom, and enfranchise that;
Perform't, or else we damn thee."
\end{center}

(I. i. 20-24)
Like all Shakespeare's comic and tragic worlds, Egypt and Rome are neither static nor unmixed models; in fact, each at times resembles its opposite because of its imperialistic ambitions. Octavius wants to extend Rome's dominion to the realm of Antony's love life: he arranges a marriage. At Actium, Cleopatra wants to perform in the Roman theater of war. Shakespeare characteristically mingles the genres for good dramatic reason: each kind is most lively as it is invading and conquering the provinces of its rival, though this attempt also brings on its dissolution.

One might object to the attribution of personality to the genres implied in seeing them as rivalrous and imperialistic. But the worlds of Rome and Egypt each do have a human personality attached to them: the characters of Caesar and Cleopatra. These characters owe their mighty assurance to their roles as spokesmen for a tragic or a comic vision. The more unstable Antony at times seems weak beside the forceful authority of both Caesar and Cleopatra. Yet Antony, unstable because he participates in both worlds, exercises the imaginations of Cleopatra and Caesar profoundly, because he also belongs in ways neither Caesar nor Cleopatra can to their rival world, which both stimulates and threatens them.

If seen as part of the action of the play, the contest of genres explains the conflict of interpretations which the play has generated. Does Cleopatra unman and destroy Antony, ironically weakening and dividing him until he suffers the torment of defeat by a lesser man? Or does she help him achieve his quest for identity, completing the Roman warrior in a greater, more magnanimous hero, and raising him out of the dying world of history—the fortunate Caesar's dominion—into the sublime comic realm of legends, demi-gods, and ever-reviving theatrical heroes? Since each genre is all-encompassing, each can supply a credible interpretation of almost any aspect of Antony's story. One man's "dotage" is another man's (or woman's) "nobleness of life." Each vision elicits the beholder's profound imaginative participation and inspires him with a strong conviction of its truth. Yet so does its opposite. There is no ultimate value structure outside the genres to judge them by; the genres, in their largest conceptions, are the source of all value judgments, as they are of all interpretation. This is why their contest matters, as well as why it is not easily resolved. Yet, although the tragic and ironic vision is never invalidated, the play does move, I think, from a world in which the tragic vision predominates to one in which the comic vision does.

Seeing Rome and Egypt as generic worlds also helps us account for their curiously changing relationships better than other dichotomies—such as power and love, reason and intuition, public life and private life, or the World and the Flesh—into which Rome and Egypt have been allegorized. (The content of these dichotomies is encompassed by the generic one). The opposition between the worlds is insisted upon for the first three acts, reflecting the fact that in the first half of the play we are in the Roman literary universe, where the classical ideal of decorum, or the separation of the kinds, reigns. Rome and Egypt here have a relationship which is typical of tragic dichotomies: they are mutually exclusive. At the end of this tragic Roman phase of the action, Antony, who belongs to both worlds and to "be himself must bestride the ocean which separates them, sinks symbolically beneath the ocean in his failure at Actium. Yet in the latter half of the play, the opposition disappears. All the Romans come to Egypt, and Egypt and Rome become less important as geographical places than as qualities; hence they can enter into a comic, mutually enhancing integration, and take on individual human form in Antony.

II

The contest of genres begins in the opening scene, as spokesmen of each claim their values encompass those of their rival world. The Roman commentary of Philo and Demetrius surrounds the appearance of the lovers, and it also morally claims to comprehend entirely the value of the world which Antony is deluding himself about. This Roman bid for dominance is quite self-assured, because tragedy is unquestionably the dominant kind in the contemporary literary world. When Antony in Egypt steps aside from the epic, public, heroic, martial world of Philo's Roman ideal (the world of tragedy), he enters that society of buffoons and courtesans which populates Roman comedy: "The triple pillar of the world transform'd / Into a strumpet's fool" (I. i.
Romantically attuned audiences, of Shakespeare's age and later, may be surprised to hear love and the stuff of comedy treated with such contempt, and many feel that the Romans' commentary does not comprehend the experience of seeing the famous pair.

This feeling is created in part by the prophetic glimpses we are given of the coming comic dispensation, when the world of comedy will no longer be a low one. The lover's appearance, ushered in with the biblical echo "behold and see," has the quality of a revelation, and Antony's reference to "new heaven, new earth" also hints of a great mythic change to come. Antony's bold conceit, "Let Rome in Tiber melt," may remind us that Rome's worldly power has indeed melted by the time of this enactment. He declares that love is "the nobleness of life," which love indeed becomes in future literary worlds, such as the world of heroic romance. Antony uses a word which points us toward this literary world in his challenge to "the world to weet / We stand up peerless" (I. i. 39-40). "Weet" is a literary archaism in the 17th century; this is its only use in Shakespeare, and it is associated with Spenserian romance.

Yet Antony's commitment to an exalted romantic conception of the comic world is as yet only "mouth-made," as Cleopatra says. We see two conceptions of the comic world subtly conflicting in the lovers' interchange. Cleopatra wants Antony to hear the news from Rome; she argues from a romantic conception of the comic world, in which it can contain seriousness and the matter of tragedy. In contrast, Antony resists her by arguing for the observance of decorum, from a classical conception of the comic world, in which serious business is out of place: "Let's not confound the time with conference harsh: / There's not a minute of our lives should stretch / Without some pleasure now. What sport to-night?" (I. i. 45-47). Although he appears to be flattering Cleopatra and her world by sweeping Rome aside entirely, Antony's Roman conception of decorum leads to the eventual triumph of Rome and tragedy, because it trivializes the comic world. Cleopatra's attempt to make Antony "be himself," including his Roman self, is an effort to involve the whole Antony in her comic world, and hence make his valuing of it more permanent—an attempt which is thwarted by the argument for keeping decorum. The classical ideal of decorum as Shakespeare dramatizes it elevates tragedy at the expense of comedy not just by trivializing the comic world, but by disallowing its basic impulses. Like Caesar in his disapproval of mingling business and pleasure ("our graver business / Frowns at this levity," II. vii. 119-20), classical decorum frowns not only on the mingling of dramatic genres, but on all the minglings and marriages of opposites which comedy delights in. Comedy must break decorum and o'erflow its restraining, separating measures if it is not to remain subordinate.

After the prophetic glimpses of scene one, things begin falling apart, and the Roman literary schema of separation reasserts itself in scene two. The scene is in two halves, visiting each of the separate camps into which the women and men have drifted. In the first half of the scene, we are given a tranche de vie portrayal of the female-dominated comic realm in one of its typical serene, unthreatened, and thoughtless moods. Charmian and Iras aggressively tease Alexas and try to cajole the soothsayer into "giving" them good fortunes. A banquet is being brought out; the conventional feasting of comedy goes on constantly in Egypt. The soothsayer tells Charmian and Iras of their inevitable tragic fortunes and they make fun of him. Fortune is one of the many things taken seriously in Roman moods and mocked in Egyptian ones.

In the second part of the scene, "a Roman thought" has invaded the thoughtless, playful, passionate feminine world and reversed its value for Antony: "He was dispos'd to mirth; but on the sudden / A Roman thought hath struck him" (I. ii. 79-80). From the Roman, masculine perspective, Egypt now appears an irrational world of monstrous fertility, an ever-breeding female which has none of masculine regard for the active cultivation of individual worth, and hence produces a nightmarish growth of cripples, weeds, and serpents: "O then we bring forth weeds, / When our quick minds lie still, and our ills told us / Is as our earing" (I. ii. 106-08). Antony himself has become female in his inactivity, helping to breed this loathsome excess of dangerous vitality: "Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know, / My idleness doth hatch" (I. ii. 126-27). Roman thoughts bring a dark vision of Antony's identification with Cleopatra—of that exchange of identities which is so natural and typical of lovers in the comic world of romance. At the same time, Roman thoughts elevate,
rather flatteringly, the importance of Antony's manly, individual Roman self. The ever-breeding female who brings forth life without male assistance (as weeds grow up without an "earing" cultivator, or as serpents grow asexually from horsehairs) is not confined to Egypt, but has spread to the world of Roman politics in Antony's absence. Antony says of Pompey's rising, "Much is breeding. / Which like the courser's hair, hath yet but life, / And not a serpent's poison" (I. ii. 190-92). Antony himself represents that masculine discipline and control that the world lacks—an implication flattering to the Roman Antony, though Pompey and Caesar soon confirm Antony's impression of his own consequence. Since no one fears Caesar's soldiership, Antony's absence from Rome leaves a power vacuum and is responsible for the dangerous political fecundity there.

"A Roman thought" is thought conditioned by the awareness of intractable external realities, such as Roman public opinion: "Name Cleopatra as she is called in Rome" (I. ii. 103). Like the tragic vision, Antony's Roman thoughts originate in messages from the outside world—outside, that is, the world of one's desires, that personal comic realm which often seems subjective and illusory, but which is given a wonderful substantiality by the experience of love. Messages from the outside have been actively trying to reach Antony, in the persons of the messengers, since early in scene one. Though Antony's Roman thoughts, like the tragic vision, begin in an awareness of external realities, they go beyond them, accumulating the power to effect a complete reinterpretation of all Antony's Egyptian experience, and extending, with the wholeness of a generic structure, to the interpretation of things that cannot be known from experience: "Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know, / My idleness doth hatch."

The messengers import more of the matter of tragedy. There is a grim reminder of the fact of death—a messenger brings word of Fulvia's—and some guilt-generating news of the great deeds of younger men such as Pompey. This news of martial adventure injects the presence of heroic epic, recalling the glorious and spacious realm of Homer, or the theatrical recreation of the heroic universe in Tamburlaine:

Mess. Labienus—
This is stiff news—hath with his Parthian force
Extended Asia: from Euphrates
His conquering banner shook, from Syria,
To Lydia, and to Ionia;
Whilst—

Ant. Antony, thou wouldst say.
(I. ii. 96-101)

The geographical world, the wide-arched empire which Antony cheerfully dismissed in scene one ("Here is my space"), now seems wider and more impressive. The ideal of martial heroism, and the sovereign sway and masterdom over the earth to which it entitles one, is a compelling one in most of Shakespeare's tragedies, and is fittingly one of the strongest attractions of the tragic world of Rome.

Roman thoughts gain further ascendancy over Antony when, in his discussion with Enobarbus at the end of scene two, a Roman, masculine kind of comedy supplants the feminine, romantic kind. Enobarbus presents a vision of love found in the Ovid of the Amores or the Ars Amatoria. English readers are most familiar with the features of this classical comic kind in the amatory verse of Donne—the frankly sexual interest in women, the playful and ironic enacting of romantic extravagances, the celebration of masculine wit. In spite of the amatory subject, the dramatic situation closest to the experience of Ovidian lyric would not consist of a man talking to a woman, but instead, one man talking to another about a woman. This is the situation we have in Antony's discussion of Cleopatra with Enobarbus, a man-to-man talk which helps Antony, in the throes of romantic involvement, acquire some comic detachment on the lover in himself.
In his Ovidian mode, Enobarbus demonstrates an ability to appreciate the comic Egyptian world which can yet be encompassed within a Roman, masculine hierarchy of values. After Antony's comic viewpoint is put to rout by Roman thoughts, he wants to excise the stuff of comedy from his life completely: "Would I had never seen her!" (I. ii. 150). But for Enobarbus, masculine ascendancy need not be maintained by a rigid exclusion of women:

Under a compelling occasion let women die: it were a pity to cast them away for nothing, though between them and a great cause, they should be esteemed nothing, Cleopatra catching but the least noise of this, dies instantly. I have seen her die twenty times upon far poorer moment: I do think there is mettle in death, which commits some loving act upon her, she hath such a celerity in dying.

(I. ii. 134-42)

As in the Ovidian amatory tradition, Enobarbus allows the experience of love to be included, with some ironic detachment, in a world which believes in the supremacy of masculine pursuits.

The Ovidian mode is not simply ironic; it also genuinely celebrates love, as in Hero and Leander, or Enobarbus' account of Cleopatra's appearance on Cydnus. Because Enobarbus can appreciate Cleopatra and her world (unlike Octavius, who, as J. L. Simmons says, can make every moment of life a "compelling occasion," leaving no room for comedy)\textsuperscript{11} and yet maintain his masculine, Roman priorities (which Antony tends to forget in Egypt), his Roman self seems admirably comprehensive. He is the only major character besides Antony whom we see in both Egypt and Rome in the first half of the play, and he is notably better than Antony at recalling the claims of the absent world and balancing them against those of the present world. He does not "go to, and back, lackeying the varying tide"; he has sufficient individuality to stand against the tide in each world, speaking in favor of Egypt in Rome, and vice-versa. Because of his ironic detachment, in the unintegrated Roman system with its separated genre worlds, Enobarbus appears to have more integrity than Antony, whose heroic desire for a total engagement of himself leads him to over-commit himself in each world.

Since he is a Roman comic character, Enobarbus naturally exemplifies classical comic decorum better than Cleopatra. He speaks in the plain, humble, colloquial diction of comedy (his plainness is pointed out by Pompey in II. vi. 78), while she of course lays claim to the styles of greatness and invades the verbal provinces of tragedy. As we move toward the tragic world of Rome, we hear at the end of II. ii. a distinct transition from the playful, bawdy, low diction of comedy to the elevated, Latinate, authoritative, impersonal voice of tragedy, which is also punctuated by a shift from prose to blank verse:

\textit{Ant.} The business she [Fulvia] hath broached in the state
Cannot endure my absence.

\textit{Eno.} And the business you have broach'd here cannot be
without you, especially that of Cleopatra's, which
wholly depends on your abode.

\textit{Ant.} No more light answers. Let our officers
Have notice what we purpose. I shall break
The cause of our expedience to the queen,
And get her leave to part. For not alone
The death of Fulvia, with more urgent touches,
Do strongly speak to us; but the letters too
Of many our contriving friends in Rome
Petition us at home.

(I. ii. 169-81)

Enobarbus, the comic Roman, is a helpful intermediary for Antony between Egypt and Rome. Encountering the comic in this more detached, masculine form makes it easier to control than in the person of Cleopatra.

The Roman counterpart to I. ii. in its juxtaposition of the opposing genres is II. ii., the reconciliation scene between Antony and Caesar. The first part of this scene is conducted in tragic decorum; in fact, there is a heavy emphasis on decorum. Self-consciousness about the need for rhetorical dignity is betrayed by repeated congratulations of the speakers on their fine styles: "'Tis spoken well," "'Tis noble spoken," "Worthily spoken, Maecenas." Caesar and Antony jealously insist upon the dignity and decorousness of their treatment of one another, concealing their personal rancor by defensively observing the punctilios of an increasingly evanescent honor:

Caes. I must be laugh'd at,  
If for nothing, or a little, I  
Should say myself offended, and with you  
Chiefly i' the world: more laugh'd at, that I should  
Once name you derogately, when to sound  
Your name it not concern'd me.

(II. ii. 30-35)

Ant. . . . as nearly as I may,  
I'll play the penitent to you. But mine honesty  
Shall not make poor my greatness, nor my power  
Work without it. Truth is, that Fulvia,  
To have me out of Egypt, made wars here,  
For which myself, the ignorant motive, do  
So far ask pardon, as befits mine honour  
To stoop in such a case.

(II. ii. 91-98)

To gain acceptance in the exclusivist tragic world, Antony must disavow allegiance to the comic one. A recurrent theme of the reconciliation scene is Antony's lack of control over his women, a source of grievance between Antony and Caesar, and of increasing embarrassment to Antony. Antony coolly betrays Cleopatra, calling his hours with her "poisoned," to excuse his betrayal of an oath to aid Caesar. Octavia is brought forward to fill the need for a submissive woman, who will make love serve the designs of masculine policy rather than disrupting them.

The hierarchies of tragedy suppress the concerns of comedy by making them appear insignificant: "Small to greater matters must give way" (II. ii. 11). Personal and private feeling, of central importance in comedy, is here out of place. "'Tis not a time / For private stomaching" (II. ii. 8-9), Lepidus, the fatuous keeper of decorum, tells the aggressively personal and passionate comic Roman, Enobarbus. Caesar and Antony come to realize that their differences are based not so much on material injuries, but on differences of personality and style:

Caes. I do not much mislike the matter, but  
The manner of his speech; for't cannot be
We shall remain in friendship, our conditions
So differing in their acts.

(II. ii. 111-14)

Yet both men are willing to suppress this vital truth, because of the decorum of their situation. Mere personal differences are trivial and embarrassing, and ought to be suppressed in the grave public arena of world politics. The hierarchies of tragedy smother the viewpoints of comedy most dramatically when Antony silences Enobarbus, who keeps violating tragic decorum. As a spokesman for comic values, for personal and private feelings, Enobarbus refuses to behave as if he were Antony's subordinate. Unlike Caesar's officer Agrippa, he doesn't politely ask leave before he speaks. He resists the decorous tragic fiction that the leaders' expedient alliance out of fear of Pompey is "noble," and should be grounds for a permanent accord. And he registers his dissent by divagating into the comic low style: "Or if you borrow one another's love for the instant, you may, when you hear no more words of Pompey, return it again: you shall have time to wrangle in, when you have nothing else to do" (II. ii. 103-06).

At the end of the reconciliation, the scene becomes comic without having to return to Egypt. The recently suppressed Enobarbus now asserts himself; he speaks with intimacy and licence about the great, enacting the saturnalian side of comedy. His description of Cleopatra on Cydnus is of course a powerful celebration for its own sake of those comic and romantic elements which the Roman leaders seek to subordinate to their political ends. We also hear of a genuinely courteous Antony, unlike the pretender to courtesy we see in Rome. And we hear of a Cleopatra who is all the more majestic while flouting the decorum which weighs so heavily upon the would-be magisterial Romans. So II. ii. dramatizes the human consequences of classical decorum. The comic world is a distinctly subordinated one in Rome; Enobarbus is not allowed a jest in the presence of the great, let alone his account of Cleopatra's marvelousness as she appeared on Cydnus. However, the potency of his description is part of that groundswell of forces we sense building towards the release of the suppressed energies of comedy.

III

As we have seen, the classical principle of the separation of the genres tends to favor the dominion of tragedy. Antony generally obeys this Roman schema in the first half of the play: he resists Cleopatra's desire to include Roman business in Egypt, leaves Egypt for Rome, and tries to get along in the Roman world by subordinating Egyptian values. Yet each genre is undermined by decorous separation from its opposite. When Antony attempts to make Egypt into a realm which contains only pleasure, Egypt instead becomes the reverse of pleasurable: "The present pleasure, / By revolution lowering, does become / The opposite of itself (I. ii. 121-23). When Antony returns to Rome and works at eliminating all things Egyptian from his life, we see the genre world he is trying to build again dissolve in the feast on Pompey's galley. The plan for fighting with Pompey, for an heroic, tragic action, degenerates instead into a comic feasting and drinking bout with him, and the Roman world becomes, rather queasily, the opposite of itself:

_Pom._ This is not yet an Alexandrian feast.

_Ant._ It ripens toward it.

(II.vii. 95-96)

Shakespeare's critique of classical decorum emerges in the paradox that one cannot fulfill the distinctive natures of either genre without mingling them.
The Roman world ends as a parody of the Egyptian one. Language used about Octavia presents her as a simulacrum of Cleopatra, a love goddess who can make opposites mingle and become one: "her love to both / Would each to other and all loves to both / Draw after her" (II. ii. 135-37). But Octavia can't encompass and harmonize opposition; instead she becomes a part of it, a further source of hostility between Antony and Caesar. Rome is like Egypt, but it is also Egypt's opposite—the world of ironic comedy. It co-opts and preys upon the matter of comedy, while depriving comic actions of their meaning and value, like the ironic action of Caesar and Antony's imperial rivalry, which, as Enobarbus remarks, devours and makes empty the world: "Then, world, thou hast a pair of chaps, no more, / And throw between them all the food thou hast, / They'll grind the one the other" (III. v. 13-15). These haunting lines are a comment upon the liquidation of Lepidus, who is another would-be comic mediator, like Octavia, between Antony and Caesar. At the feast on Pompey's galley, Lepidus tries to contain the hostilities between the leaders in himself and convert them to comedy. He tries to divert the other men "as they pinch one another by the disposition" by making himself more and more drunk. But he "raises the greater war between him and his discretion"; the attempt to internalize the conflict seems to explode the mediator's ability to maintain a discrete identity, and Lepidus is blown up into a titanic nonentity: "To be called into a huge sphere, and not to be seen to move in't, are the hole where eyes should be, which pitifully disaster the cheeks" (II. vii. 14-16). This eyeless Lepidus is a parody of the titanic being which Antony eventually does become in Cleopatra's dream, after he has brought together opposing worlds in himself and "bestrid the ocean":

His face was as the heaven, and therein stuck
A sun and moon, which kept their course, and lighted
The little O, the earth.

(V. ii. 79-81)

Caesar, the personality of Rome, expands and fleshes out the ironic vision. In responding to a rumor that Pompey "is belov'd of those / That only have fear'd Caesar," he dissociates himself from the Roman people, popular leaders, and the processes of history since "the primal state":

I should have known no less;
It hath been taught us from the primal state
That he which is was wish'd, until he were;
And the ebb'd man, ne'er lov'd till ne'er worth love,
Comes dear'd, by being lack'd. This common body,
Like to a vagabond flag upon the stream,
Goes to, and back, lackeying the varying tide,
To rot itself with motion.

(I. iv. 40-47)

The great classical metaphor of the body politic, which typically endows collective humanity with the virtues of an individual man, is subverted here by Caesar to deny the individuality and humanity of the populace. He emphasizes inert, bodily qualities in the body politic: it is mindless, whorish, passive, determined by processes outside itself, and rotten. Like the Parthian darters, those ironic warriors who shoot backwards while retiring from the zone of combat, Caesar withdraws from the world of temporal processes as he attacks it. Past participles—"wish'd," "lov'd," "dear'd," "lack'd"—turn processes into fixed states, making them more purely ironic. Pompey is loved because he is lacked; he is lacked because his fortunes have ebbed; his fortunes have ebbed because he is worthless. Caesar's is an objective vision: he refuses to identify with the world outside his mind and animate it with any humanizing qualities. Instead his vision transforms people into inert objects, in a kind of inversion of the poetic act of personification.
Caesar's objective vision of Pompey's rise to power may be contrasted with Antony's view of it. Antony also remarks upon the ironic tardiness of the people's love:

Our slippery people,
Whose love is never link'd to the deserver
Till his deserts are past, begin to throw
Pompey the Great, and all his dignities
Upon his son, who high in name and power,
Higher than both in blood and life, stands up
For the main soldier: whose quality, going on,
The sides o'the world may danger.

(I. ii. 183-90)

Antony increasingly respects Pompey; the son begins to grow into the borrowed robes of his father's fame, perhaps because the memory of the heroes of the past has, for Antony, a genuine power to raise the men of the present. Pompey's ambition to be "the main soldier" is identifiable with Antony's own conception of himself. Pompey becomes, to Antony, a considerable and threatening figure, while Caesar sees Pompey's power as a mindless, effeminate creation. A masculine principle—the principle represented in Antony's reflections by Pompey's father, who, together with the "slippery people" helps generate Pompey's greatness—does not seem to exist for Caesar in the world outside his mind. A dramatic irony lies behind Caesar's emasculating criticisms of both Pompey and Antony (whom he chides "as we rate boys") in I. iv. Caesar feels himself inadequate to deal with the masculine aggressions, the "hot inroads" (I. iv. 50) that Pompey and his pirates are making in Italy, without the assistance of Antony's soldiership.

Caesar both speaks from an ironic vision and dwells in an ironic world, the polar opposite of Cleopatra's vision and world. Northrop Frye elucidates some aspects of this polarity: "All myths have two poles, one personal, whether divine or human, and one natural: Neptune and the sea, Apollo and the sun. When the world of sea and sun is thought of as an order of nature, this polarization becomes a god or magician who controls the natural machine at one end, and the natural machine itself at the other. Tragedy, irony, and realism see the human condition from inside the machine of nature; comedy and romance tend to look for a person concealed in the mechanical chess player." Caesar gives us an inhuman, mechanical, threatening vision of what we see in human form in Cleopatra. In Cleopatra, who identifies with the moon goddess Isis, we glimpse a personality in the tides and the ebb and flow of human desire, those fluctuating processes which Caesar sees as devoid of and destructive to human personality. Combining the human and natural worlds, she makes the winds lovesick and the waters amorous at her manifestation on Cydnus. Her passions are like the elements—"greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report." Caesar doesn't see the same Cleopatra that the other characters and the audience do. His famously imperceptive entering line, "Which is the Queen of Egypt?" (V. ii. 112) indicates more than a social maladroitness. The majesty which is Cleopatra's identifying attribute is understandably invisible to Caesar, since it is made up of qualities which erode or threaten his notion of human greatness. Caesar of course only sees others, not himself, as "inside the machine of nature." His aloof perspective seems an appropriate way to dramatize a purely ironic vision—a vision of the world entirely devoid of human sympathy, with which its creator refuses to identify himself.

Antony returns to Rome hoping to find a freer, more spacious and heroic realm than Egypt. He finds instead an anti-Egypt, which is engaged in co-opting and destroying the stuff of comedy. The central actions of Antony's Roman sojourn are his empty political marriage and the treacherous feast on Pompey's galley. That the world of Rome devolves from an high heroic world into a world of ironic comedy is significant in the characterization of Shakespeare's literary universe. Shakespearean tragedy has many affinities with what was a comic world in Rome, and what we would call the world of ironic comedy. Many critics have noticed that Othello makes tragic use of characters and situations associated with the Roman comic tradition.
remarks that "Hamlet and King Lear contain subplots which are ironic versions of stock comic themes, Gloucester's story being the regular comedy theme of the gullible senex swindled by a clever and unprincipled son." The affinity of Shakespeare's tragic worlds with the world of Roman or ironic comedy is understandable when we realize the extent to which the world of tragedy is the world of comedy reversed, frustrated, turned inside out—in short, the world of ironic comedy. The realization of the opposition of the genres is also prelude to their union: the conception of tragedy as an anti-comic world allows it to be subsumed into a comic structure, as the anti-comic movement typical of comedy.

A central difference between Shakespearean tragedy and Roman comedy is the heartlessness of the latter. Situations that were evidently mirth-provoking in a Roman comedy can be heart-breaking in a Shakespearean tragedy, where we become more engaged with the inner lives of the characters. "Heart" is an important word in Antony and Cleopatra. The heart often stands out as the central subject of the action, and the word (or its relatives, like hearts, hearty, or hearted) occurs forty-nine times, making its most memorable appearances especially resonant:

\[\text{Phi. . . . his captain's heart,}
\text{Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst}
\text{The buckles on his breast. . . .}\\
\text{(I. i. 6-8)}\]

\[\text{Cleo. I would I had thy inches, thou shouldst know}
\text{There were a heart in Egypt.}\\
\text{(I. iii. 40-41)}\]

\[\text{Cleo. 'Tis sweating labour',}
\text{To bear such idleness so near the heart}
\text{As Cleopatra this.}\\
\text{(I. iii. 93-95)}\]

\[\text{Ant. Egypt, thou knew'st too well,}
\text{My heart was to thy rudder tied by the strings,}
\text{And thou shouldst tow me after.}\\
\text{(III. xi. 56-58)}\]

\[\text{Ant. Cold-hearted toward me?}\\
\text{Cleo. Ah, dear, if I be so,}
\text{From my cold heart let heaven engender hail. . . .}\\
\text{(III. xiii. 158-59)}\]

\[\text{Eno. A diminution in our captain's brain}
\text{Restores his heart.}\\
\text{(III. xiii. 198-99)}\]
Ant. Ah, let be, let be! thou art
The armouer of my heart.

(IV. iv. 6-7)

Eno. This blows my heart:
If swift thought break it not, a swifter mean
Shall outstrike thought, but thought will do't, I feel.

(IV. vi. 34-36)

Ant. O thou day o' the world,
Chain mine arm'd neck, leap thou, attire and all,
Through proof of harness to my heart, and there
Ride on the pants triumphing!

(IV. viii. 13-16)

Eno. Throw my heart
Against the flint and hardness of my fault,
Which being dried with grief will break to powder,
And finish all foul thoughts.

(IV. ix. 15-18)

Ant. O this false soul of Egypt! this grave charm, . . .
Like a right gipsy, hath at fast and loose
Beguil'd me to the very heart of loss.

(IV. xii. 25-29)

Ant. I made these wars for Egypt, and the queen,
Whose heart I thought I had, for she had mine:
Which whilst it was mine, had annex'd unto't
A million moe, now lost.

(IV. xiv. 15-18)

Ant. Off, pluck off,
The seven-fold shield of Ajax cannot keep
The battery from my heart. O, cleave, my sides!
Heart, once be stronger than thy continent,
Crack thy frail case!

(IV. xiv. 37-41)

"Heart" is a frequently-used word in many Shakespearean plays, and it is fittingly prominent in a work which characterizes Shakespeare's own literary world in relation to that of his predecessors. The importance of hearts is linked to the elevation and expansion of the domain of comedy in Shakespearean and Renaissance literature. The world of human desire, the life of the heart, becomes noble and heroic, rather than clownish and low, in the course of literary history from Rome to the Renaissance. As Frye has said, "Shakespearean
comedy illustrates, as clearly as any mythos we have, the archetypal function of literature in visualizing the world of desire."\textsuperscript{15} The importance of hearts also provides a link between the genres. It also manifests a deepening tragic world, a greater vulnerability to emotional hurt—to what Antony feels about Cleopatra's presumed betrayal, or what Enobarbus feels upon discovering that his desertion was a mistake. In the Shakespearean universe we grow into in the course of the play, characters can be both more high-hearted and joyous, and also more broken-hearted, than in the Roman world of the first half of the play, in which the genres and the emotional life they embody are kept separate.

The play achieves a unity of the kinds which also preserves and indeed heightens their opposition. Such a unity is difficult for the logical mind to accept, which is another reason the play has provoked such controversy about whether it is finally comic and romantic, or tragic and ironic. The kind of unity most congenial to the rational mind is a golden mean which balances extremes and cancels out the excesses of each. But the unity of the play is more like that "heavenly mingle" which Cleopatra admires in Antony as he leaves Egypt:

\begin{quote}
O heavenly mingle! Be'st thou sad, or merry,  
The violence of either thee becomes;  
So does it no man else.
\end{quote}

(I. v. 59-61)\textsuperscript{16}

The achievement of unity in opposition depends upon the power of language to be at once single and double; the simplest form of this power is seen in the pun, which is at once one word and two discrete words. Antony's lament at hearing that Cleopatra is dead, "now / All length is torture: since the torch is out" (IV. xiv. 45-46), links with wordplay the opposites (in terms of desire) of his torch and his torture. The sound suggests that Cleopatra is both, even while the sense seems to make an ultimate distinction between them. The crucial pun of the play is of course the one on "dying," which identifies the culminating act of a tragic action with that of a comic, romantic one.\textsuperscript{17}

The dramatic image of Antony falling on his own sword is also a kind of gestural pun: it gives profound and powerful expression to opposite meanings. It is the ultimate ironic action, since Antony is turned against Antony. This is what Caesar, the complete ironist, has been trying more and more explicitly to accomplish: "Plant those that have revolted in the vant, / That Antony may seem to spend his fury / Upon himself (IV. vi. 9-11). Yet this ultimate ironic act also puts an end to irony; it prevents Caesar from taking Antony alive and continuing to humiliate him. This image shows the ironic merging into the heroic, as befits tragedy.

Falling on the sword is also a romantic and erotic gesture. In heroic romance, one of the signs of love is the stab wound, usually self-inflicted. Swords are inevitably phallic symbols, and Antony talks himself into suicide by imagining it as an erotic act. To achieve heroic stature, Antony must manage to effect a noble death (at least on some level), so falling on his sword, like an erotic act, is also a regenerative one: it entitles Antony to his rebirth in poetry and the theater.

IV

The play, then, moves beyond the Roman world of Antony and Cleopatra's historical origin. The hero and heroine earn their transcendence of time, for they take the stuff of comedy more seriously than men do in the Roman world, a world in which Antony is accused of "lightness" and "traduc'd for levity" (III. vii. 13). Charles Hallett has argued recently that \textit{Antony and Cleopatra} would have been recognized by a Jacobean audience as a portrayal of the "sublunar" world, an ironic world in which permanent value cannot exist, for everything is subject to change, time, and fortune.\textsuperscript{18} Hence we must beware of exalting the characters of such a world, who are distanced from their intended audience by an inevitable, historically-determined inferiority.
of metaphysical knowledge. But we do not stay in the dead Roman past, nor in the sublunar world, which becomes the fortunate Caesar's dominion. And while Hallett accurately compiles all the evidence presenting the play world as the ironic, lost, sublunar realm, he has neglected to notice the presence of the moon's personification in Cleopatra, who practices changeableness deliberately, as a stimulus to passion. Cleopatra becomes identified with the moon in her manifestations as Isis, the moon goddess, and in Antony's beautiful epithet for her, "our terrene moon" (III. xiii. 153). Her hoisting of Antony aloft in his death scene symbolizes his rising out of the mutable sublunar realm, where Caesar and fortune are all-powerful. "Our terrene moon" laments that, upon the death of Antony, "there is nothing left remarkable / Beneath the visiting moon" (IV. xv. 67-68). The visiting moon prepares to depart for a sphere of greater fixity. Striving to be "marble-constant" in her resolution to die, Cleopatra bids farewell to the moon: "now the fleeting moon / No planet is of mine" (V. ii. 239-40). As Cleopatra claims to become "fire and air" and consigns her lower elements to baser life, Charmian's choric comment, "O eastern star!" (V. ii. 307), suggests a transformation beyond the lunar sphere. Though higher than the moon, the eastern star, Venus, enskies another goddess with whom Cleopatra has been associated, and who, rising from the foam, contains the remembrance of Cleopatra's lower elements and fluid, changeable nature. To see the world of temporal flux and passionate change as a self-destructive, ironic one is true enough to the play, but it is only one of the play's visions—the Roman view, where things rot themselves with motion. We can also glimpse in the mutable world the emergent personality of a majestic queen, whose powers to destroy stability and masculine self-sufficiency are consummating, providential. Antony escapes the world of time and tide by passing through its vortex. For any coherent perception about life one finds in the play, the opposite genre always has an eloquent contrary vision.

After Antony departs from Rome, we have suggestions that we are moving beyond the Roman literary world. In the middle of Act III, allegorical characters, Eros and Scarus, appear on the scene and indicate that we are nearing the precincts of romance. In IV. iv, Antony crosses the threshold into the serious comic realm of Christianity. This scene is repeatedly concerned with meaning: "What means this?"; "What does he mean?"; "What mean you, sir, . . . ?" Antony is holding a last supper, at which one of the men present, "perchance tomorrow," will betray him. He talks of a resurrection of his honor, redeemed with his blood, of the identification of one man with many men, of masters and servants changing places, and of being married to his loyal followers. His meaning is lost on his immediate, pre-Christian audience; only his off-stage audience can find meaning in these biblical topoi. Enobarbus is somewhat sympathetic at first, but he becomes too moved himself, and accuses Antony of an unmanly indulgence in feeling. But Antony's critic here has a particular reason to desire the concealment of feeling. He has recently disclosed that "I will seek / Some way to leave him" (III. xiii. 200-01). So Antony's meditative reflection, "Perchance to-morrow / You'll serve another master," applies only too accurately to the naturally anguished Enobarbus. Antony's response to his followers' tears, "Grace grow where those drops fall, my hearty friends," calls for a larger-hearted kind of comic response, for hearts that are capable both of sympathy and joyousness. Antony heartily invites them "to burn this night with torches," and to "drown consideration" in a communal feast. He is o'erflowing the measure of his Roman context.

The following scene (IV. iii), of Hercules' departure, also deals with the subject of the changing of the gods. After the brilliance of the preceding scene, we are back out in the uncertain dark, and in the classical religious world of darkness and mystery, omens and portents. The form of this scene is that of mystery play. The stage space is used emblematically to represent the world, with soldiers placed in every corner of it. The characters are simple watchmen, and they witness a miracle, represented by hautboys under the stage. Instead of shepherds watching the appearance of a new star in the sky which portends the birth of a divinity, we have soldier-watchmen hearing music under the earth which signifies the disappearance of a god. The scene is a classical version of a mystery play, a kind of inverse nativity play. It reveals a mythic dimension to Antony's story: the change in Antony from the warrior-general to the lover is involved with the great transformation of our civilization from Roman antiquity (and the Greek antiquity which informs Rome) to the Renaissance. The change in the hero's identity is one that seems to impinge on an encyclopedic variety of literary styles, while his quest for identity is a human form of the literary quest to find an order behind and coherent relationships
among divergent ancient and modern styles.

The scenes of Antony's successful land battle (IV. iv-viii) move us into the heroic comic world of romantic epic. Antony is at last, for the first time in the play, an inspiring warrior-general as he fights for his love. He calls Cleopatra his "squire." In his triumphant return to Alexandria, he speaks of his "gests," and addresses Cleopatra as "this great fairy," recalling the greatest literary fairy, the faerie queene. Out of the ashes of the Homeric warrior hero, who is withering away, made obsolete by policy in the ironic world of Rome, is born the hero of romance, who reanimates the warrior ideal—"O Antony, O thou Arabian bird!" (III. ii. 12). Antony recalls an Homeric hero in praising his men: "you have shown all Hectors." In defending Egypt, he has achieved the heroic soldierly ideal of Rome; he has bestrid the ocean. His comic integration of the opposing worlds seems threatened not so much from without, by Caesar, but from within, by its own expansive dynamic; Antony's forces threaten to grow too large and o'erflow the measure of all worldly containers: "Had our great palace the capacity / To camp this host, we all would sup together, / And drink carouses to the next day's fate, / Which promises royal peril" (IV. viii. 32-35). The comic union of former opposites is inauspicious for wars. Battle is not joined between Antony's navy and Caesar's; instead, the navies themselves join, and Antony is festively defeated: "My fleet hath yielded to the foe, and yonder / They cast their caps up, and carouse together / Like friends long lost" (IV. xii. 11-13).

As in Antony's naval defeat, comic and tragic actions are also deeply intermingled in Enobarbus' death scene. The coup de grace for Enobarbus is not a tragic gesture of exclusion or rejection, but a comic one of love. Enobarbus too at last o'erflows the measure of the Roman world at his death; the Roman watchmen who witness his last scene without his knowledge, and without themselves comprehending that what he utters does not concern Caesar, dramatically give the measure of the distance Enobarbus has come from the Roman world. Formerly a detached mocker of other men's displays of passion, now he pours out his heart to the "blessed moon." He has previously spoken in the light, witty, detached mode of Ovidian lyric, in which love has the same effects on men as it has on horses. As Antony enters a new Renaissance heroic mode, Enobarbus at his death scene broaches the new mode of Petrarchan lyric:

O sovereign mistress of true melancholy,
The poisonous damp of night dispone upon me,
That life, a very rebel to my will,
May hang no longer on me. Throw my heart
Against the flint and hardness of my fault,
While being dried with grief, will break to powder,
And finish all foul thoughts.

(IV. ix. 12-18)

Enobarbus uses familiar Petrarchan tropes: sovereign mistresses, inward rebellions, naked thinking hearts. As the possibilities for jubilation go beyond anything in Roman comedy in the scenes of Antony's triumph, so new possibilities for serious feeling are opened up in these signs of a lyric style which aims at absolute sincerity, sanctions introspection, elevates women and the life of the feelings, and makes love an entirely serious, even tragic poetic theme. As in Shakespeare's own sonnets, the theme is a universal one, not confined to sexual love. Another echo of the sonnets can be felt in IV. v. Antony perfectly embodies that high constancy of love in Sonnet 116; his response to Enobarbus' desertion is a firm refusal "to bend with the remover to remove." The high seriousness about love and the life of the feelings embodied in the Renaissance lyric has of course been suppressed in the worldly, classical, masculine vision which Enobarbus has embodied so admirably.

The bursting of Enobarbus' heart, as he gasps out Antony's too great, too noble name with his dying breaths, seems a physical enactment of the expansion of the world of comedy. In his Ovidian mode, Enobarbus has
represented a comic vision which is contained within a Roman set of values. Hence, as comedy overflows the measure of its place in the Roman world, Enobarbus fittingly bursts. Enobarbus also seems to cross quietly into the Christian world in the manner of his death; he repents, and prays for forgiveness.

V

John Danby, who has given one of the most interesting accounts of the play as a tragedy, sees Antony and Cleopatra as a vision of the world in terms of two great contraries, with no "third term" which reconciles them.²⁰ But for those who see in the play a comic pattern which includes and completes tragedy, Antony is clearly cast in the role of a reconciling third term, who bestrides the ocean and unites the realms of Egypt and Rome. Qualities which can enter into a destructive conflict in Antony, such as youth and age, brown hairs and grey ones, at the Battle of Actium (III. xi. 13-15), can also form a mutually enhancing mixture in him, as when the brain power of the older man seems to nourish the "nerves"—the toughness, strength, and valor characteristic of a youth (VI. viii. 19-22). Each failure and disintegration of Antony's identity is prelude to his grander and more powerful integration of himself, a pattern that is reinforced by his association with the sun. Antony's sinking and rising again prepares for his glorious re-creation after death in Cleopatra's dream, as well as his many revivals as a theatrical hero.

The image of an Antony who gives human personality and form to the cosmos in Cleopatra's dream is more than an idle fantasy or airy nothing. This god-like, triumphant Antony is a metaphor for the paradoxically comic, integrating and renewing powers of tragic art. The paradox of tragedy is closely analogous to that at work in religious communion, which, as Frye describes it, involves "the dividing of a divine or heroic body among a group which brings them into unity with, and as, that body." One way of interpreting the Antony of Cleopatra's dream is as an image of the new larger identity created in the society of play-goers and readers out of the division and fall of Antony.

The possibility of an integrative, comic outcome arising out of a tragic action depends for its credibility not, primarily, on Christian analogies, but on an awareness of the literary and theatrical realm which enables such paradoxes to occur—which is one reason why this play is self-conscious about its identity as a work of art. In literature and the theater, of course, one does not participate in the hero's identity by eating a piece of his body, but rather through the imaginative process of identification with him. The identity of the hero, and the role in it of other people's identification with him, is a recurrent subject of the play's internal action; attending to it enables us to see the most powerful connection between the genres, as well as some mature Shakespearean reflections on the theory of art.

It is a convention of Shakespearean tragedy that the identity of the hero is a central concern and a unifying principle, and concern with the hero's identity is especially emphatic in Antony and Cleopatra. Most of the major characters—Caesar, Cleopatra, Enobarbus—as well as a number of minor choric figures, and of course Antony himself, participate with passionate intensity in the motive of wanting Antony to be a good Antony, as well as in the dramatic debate about what that is. Their concern is related to the degree to which the audience identifies with him, or, conversely, feels detachment and criticism. Though the preoccupation of so many characters with Antony augments our interest in him, the audience is at first inhibited in its identification with him by the presence of critical audience-surrogate commentators on stage. The ironic remarks of Philo and Demetrius, or Enobarbus with Maecenas and Agrippa or with Menas, can foster critical detachment in the off-stage audience. However, the on-stage critical attitudes toward Antony are disarmed in the course of the play. At the last supper scene, for example, the on-stage critic, Enobarbus, is himself inadequate to understand the meditations of this Antony who is fast outgrowing Roman horizons. Antony's off-stage audience here is in a better position to sympathize with his desire for a last communion with his loyal followers. This outer audience seems alluded to in the identification of one man and many men Antony desires, because of his use of an odd term—"clapp'd"—for uniting people: "I wish I could be made so many men, / And all of you clapp'd up together in / An Antony." The failure of Antony's attempt at a communion with his Roman audience is
painful to his modern one, and tends to deepen his communion with them.

Detachment and dissociation from Antony is made to seem a most untenable position in the desertion of Enobarbus, an action which ironically recoils on Enobarbus. After Enobarbus leaves, there are no more detached observers in Antony's camp; Antony's attendant is the devoted Eros. At Antony's death scene, all the on-stage observers participate profoundly in, echo, and amplify his agony. In a discussion of the generic associations of engagement and detachment, Maynard Mack observes that "the total moral weight of comedy inclines generally toward the detached man as that of tragedy inclines toward the man engaged." Detachment is of course fundamental to an ironic vision, so it naturally is characteristic of ironic Roman comedy. Yet the engaging powers of tragedy can serve comic ends: because it can move the audience to identify with the hero, tragedy can work to create a new comic society which is unusually unified—which is one man and many men. In the desertion of the witty and ironic comic Roman, Enobarbus, the detachment of comedy is being repudiated in the service of a greater comic end.

Even Caesar, in spite of being Antony's enemy and embodying the desire for detachment from the rest of humanity in its purest form, cannot help identifying with Antony at the last. After the Battle of Actium, the conflict between Antony and Caesar becomes a contest between the actions of engagement and detachment on many levels, from the inner psychic lives of the two men, to the quality of their forces which are embarking upon a world war. Caesar's camp, the camp of detachment, is associated with the deserters who detach themselves from Antony; they take the vanguard of Caesar's army. Caesar remains aloof even from his own soldiers, and his cause is associated with the triumph of impersonal bureaucratic methods—"coin, ships, legions," and "lieutenancy"—over heroic personal power. Caesar employs indirect, personally evasive tactics, such as trying to madden Antony by detaching Cleopatra's affections through the detached "eloquence" of a hireling, Thidias. Antony, in contrast, seeks a direct personal confrontation, "sword to sword," and a last passionate engagement of his previously divided self for its own sake. He engages the hearts of his men and makes them identify passionately with his cause, and he refuses to dissociate himself from Enobarbus in spite of the latter's desertion. At the land battle where these forces of engagement and detachment finally encounter, the dramatic engagement culminates as Caesar's lieutenant gives the order "Retire, we have engag'd ourselves too far" (IV. vii. 1).

Antony and the powers of engagement ultimately win the dramatic contest, if they lose the military one. Though he has seemed to operate with cool detachment to defeat and destroy Antony as efficiently as possible, Caesar rather surprisingly weeps upon hearing that Antony is dead. Maecenas and Agrippa, who know Caesar best, are genuinely struck by the degree to which "Caesar is touch'd." They offer some conventional eulogies of Antony, and then, among themselves, a more sincere explanation for their leader's unusual emotion: "When such a spacious mirror's set before him, / He needs must see himself (V. i. 34-35). Though containing the ironic hint that Caesar is capable of tears only for himself, these lines also point out Antony's remarkable capacities as a tragic hero, who can all but compel men to identify with him. Even Caesar, with his stringently objective vision, his utter lack of sympathy for the universe outside his mind, can't help but see himself in Antony.

This notion of a "spacious mirror" signals a shift in the theory of art from that embodied in conventional mirrors for magistrates, such as Hamlet's mirror held up to nature. The spacious mirror metaphor for drama implies less interest in moral realism than Hamlet's theory of drama evinces; it gives a more flattering reflection to its beholders, magnifying them and giving greater scope to their desires for images of human greatness. Though the concept of a spacious mirror perhaps strains the analogy of art with actual mirrors, it emphasizes the emotional mirroring process of identification. Since it is flattering, the spacious mirror works better to make us see ourselves than mirrors which give less scope to our desires.
The theory of art embodied in *Antony and Cleopatra* could be characterized as comic because desire plays a greater role in creating the reality of the play than allegiance to an objectively realistic vision. The attempt to achieve an objective vision is of course discredited in the characterization of Caesar; it is presented as a negative enterprise, a vision of the world unendowed with any of the imaginative life of the perceiver, and hence a reductive, ironic vision. If as Frye says, Shakespearean comedy is engaged in "visualizing the world of desire," it is not surprising that desirers play an active and creative role in shaping the reality of the play's final comic triumph.

Cleopatra is the prime desirer in the play, and she also plays a prominent role in creating Antony's ultimate identity. In contrast to Caesar, who can always easily believe the worst, Cleopatra's desires so govern her perception of reality that she has great difficulty crediting news, such as Antony's marriage to Octavia, which contradicts them. The opposite ontological positions of Caesar and Cleopatra are dramatized in the two characters' treatment of messengers, who bring news from and symbolize the presence of an unmanipulable external reality. While Caesar listens with diligent attention and respect to messengers, Cleopatra tries to bribe, seduce, or threaten them into telling her what she wants to hear. Cleopatra's relationship to external realities may not always be admirable, but it is consistent with her role in helping to create a more elevated and heroic Antony. Both the hero and the heroine are ennobled by their attempts to live up to the spacious images of themselves in the desiring imaginations of their lover. Antony's belief in Cleopatra's noble death (which the audience knows to be a lie) helps inspire him to attempt the same, which in turn elevates Cleopatra, moving her to realize the spacious image of herself which Antony's suicide has reflected. The soothsayer in I. ii. jokingly suggests that wishes might have wombs, and Caesar also (contemptuously, of course) attests to the creative role of desirers: "It hath been taught us from the primal state / That he which is was wish'd, until he were" (I. iv. 41-42). Cleopatra's desiring imagination is the womb of the heroic Antony. Not only does she inspire him, but she speaks, in her dream of Antony, for the most glorious and transcendent image of him; she is the guardian, through her loyalty, of his image as a hero, rather than a dupe; and she is the agent of his final triumph over Caesar.

Critics with a preference for realism might disapprove of the degree to which Antony is a creation of the desires of those who identify with him. Yet it is the case with many fictive heroes that their identities are dependent on the process of identification: their final consequence to the world depends on how successfully they engage the desires of beholders. *Antony and Cleopatra* is simply more explicit than preceding tragedies about the role played by audience responses in creating its reality, and it contains built-in versions of them. Its realism includes the realities of art. Cleopatra's vision of Antony parallels and eloquently articulates the response of auditors who identify with him. As Antony meditates on the evanescence of earthly pageants and even of his own visible shape, and movingly laments his loss of a million hearts, he is annexing millions more in the theater and is on his way to acquiring the visionary shape of Cleopatra's dream.

In Cleopatra's final scene we are perhaps in the most sublime comic world in our language, a world which encompasses tragedy and is only made the loftier for it, which grows the more by reaping. We are witness to a comic victory over death, as Cleopatra the actress prepares for suicide as her last "noble act." The queen is at her most becoming—both beautiful, and full of transformation. She uses all the resources of the tiring house to dramatize her discovery of her immortal theatrical identity. In dressing up to die, she plays against the conventional association in Renaissance drama of death with undressing. The end of an actor's role, the dissolution of his identity, is often symbolized by the removal of costume. Antony removes his armor and is "no more a soldier" as he prepares to die. The most perfect dramatic contrary to Cleopatra's regal dressing for death is perhaps Lear's simple "Pray you, undo this button." Cleopatra's deliberate dressing "like a queen" for her death tells us visually that death is not here, as it usually is, the end of role-playing; it is the beginning of theatrical life.

Cleopatra reminds us of the theatrical world she is entering by repudiating a version of it:
Cleo. The quick comedians  
Extemporally will stage us, and present  
Our Alexandrian revels: Antony  
Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see  
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness  
I' the posture of a whore.

Iras O the good gods!

(V. ii. 215-20)

This theater is not, of course, the same as the one Cleopatra enters in Shakespeare's play; it is a return to the Roman comic world of strumpets and fools in which Philo sees Antony and Cleopatra performing in scene one. Caesar's triumph over Antony and Cleopatra would result in their enforced relocation back into the debased, captive comic world of Roman comedy. But the boy actor stikes closer home. This allusion to the theater serves primarily as a reminder of the theatrical being that Cleopatra is becoming.

The references to the theater and to Cleopatra's immortality as an actress have a paradoxical effect on our sense of closure, especially, in a live performance, where we have a stronger sense of the temporal sequence of the drama, since we must surrender to it—we cannot stop and go back as in reading. In a performance, as Cleopatra prepares to die, we feel the unmistakable approach of the ending of this long and powerfully engaging drama. Yet the reminders we are given that Cleopatra is an actress, and this is a play, a recurrent event, make this ending filled with an unusually lively sense of beginning anew: "I am again for Cydnus, / To meet Mark Antony" (V. ii. 227-28). As we feel the time frame of her death closing in on her, she o'erflows the measure yet once more.

VII

Though Shakespearean comedy typically contains and completes a tragic movement, the union of the genres in Antony and Cleopatra is on an epic scale, and informs a coherent vision of literary history. Tragedy here includes its literary matrix in the Graeco-Roman tradition, and comedy, the Renaissance, romantic tradition. One achievement of this coherent vision of literary history is the resolution of one of the central artistic problems of Renaissance heroic tragedy, the problem of reconciling the ancient warrior ideal of heroic manliness with modern, Christianized conceptions of greatness, which is at the heart of Hamlet and Macbeth. Antony successfully bestrides the ancient and modern heroic traditions. He is a gentle, Renaissance hero, capable of reflection and selfless feeling at his last supper scene, in his forgiveness of Enobarbus and Cleopatra, or in his meditations on evanescent pageants with Eros; he is also capable of the glorious and exuberant martial prowess and the passionate egotism of ancient heroes. He can out-rage Hercules, or be "more mad / Than Telamon for his shield." No other hero, I think, acts out these opposing versions of greatness so fully and eloquently.

The central action in the play's vision of literary history is a movement from a world in which the mythos of tragedy dominates to one in which that of comedy does. The perspectives of tragedy are not, however, disallowed, as many readings of the play attest. It is the nature of the comic vision to include, not to reject, and Shakespeare revitalizes the values and vision of his literary forebears at the same time that he encompasses them in his own more capacious structure.

Notes

Among the best discussions of comic elements in the play are J. L. Simmons, "The Comic Pattern and Vision in Antony and Cleopatra" *English Literary History*, 36 (1969), 493-510, and Janet Adelman, *The Common Liar* (New Haven and London, 1973). Adelman has an excellent discussion of how "the entire tragic vision of the play is subjected to the comic perspective" in her first chapters (pp. 1-52), but she seems uninterested in the converse—the critique of the comic vision by the tragic perspective—or in the part generic worlds play in governing our interpretations. She eschews pursuing literary and critical issues in the play in favor of its "human fact" (pp. 12-13), while I will argue that the human situations of the play dramatize its literary concerns and are not separable from them.


5 Something should be said about the conceptions of tragedy and comedy used here. I think the most significant elements of generic identification—that comedy deals with love and festivity and is generally characterized by mirth, and that tragedy deals with wars and great political events, contains deaths, and is characterized by a generally grimmer view of things—is still a part of the common understanding of the genres and needs no explanation. Other conventional points of classical decorum—that the characters of tragedy are great persons, that its actions are often historical, and that it employs an elevated verbal style, while comedy deals with private and domestic actions of ordinary citizens or even slaves in a plain, humble style—are familiar enough to students of the period. (Though Cleopatra is in fact a queen, this doesn't prevent her from being classed by various Romans as a strumpet, trull, or whore, a low and conventionally comic character.)

The main sources for the conceptions of tragedy and comedy informing the characterizations of Rome and Egypt are previous Shakespearean practice in the genres and classical theory, which is used to sharpen and amplify points of generic distinction. The chief difference between these components—that Shakespearean practice in comedy typically manifests a more elevated, romantic conception of the comic world than that found in classical theory—is at the center of my argument about the rise of comedy embodied in the play. A good contemporary discussion of classical decorum can be found in Sidney's *Defense of Poetry*. Discussion of the elements of classical decorum, its relationship to Aristotle's theory of tragedy and to Roman and Elizabethan dramatic practice can be found in Madeleine Doran, *Endeavors of Art* (Madison, 1964), pp. 101-11 and passim, and also J. E. Spingarn, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance* (New York, 1920), pp. 60-106 and pp. 282-90.

Reuben Brower has enlarged my conception of Shakespearean tragedy in his demonstration of its affinity with the Graeco-Roman heroic tradition in *Hero and Saint*. Northrop Frye has revealed a similar generic affinity between Shakespearean comedy and romance in its characters, situations, and ethos. My generic analysis is indebted also to Frye's perceptions of how the genres can mingle (in opposition to classical decorum) and comedy can contain and complete tragedy, in "The Argument of Comedy," *English Institute Essay, 1948* (New York, 1949). Frye's defense throughout *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, 1957) of comedy and romance from criticism which judges them by the standards of tragedy, irony, and realism is a most interesting exposition of the intellectual and philosophical content of the contest of genres. (Frey's conceptions of tragedy and comedy are based on or else consistent with classical formulations.)

Warning should be given that Shakespeare's generic thinking in this play, although it has elements of a grand, overarching simplicity, is also highly complex, and would require much longer exposition to be handled with
adequate subtlety. For example, the generic worlds are not static entities, although the geo-political metaphor might at first lead one to expect them to be. The generic worlds are mental realms as well as external realities, and they shift with the rhythms of Antony's psychic life. The festive spirit disappears and Egypt becomes a mere colony of Rome when Roman thoughts strike Antony and make him reevaluate Egypt in I. ii. Rome becomes Alexandrian in II. vii. The forms of tragedy and comedy, which we usually think of as so distinct, tend here to dissolve and flow back and forth into one another. Of course, external geographical entities are themselves surprisingly fluid as conceived in this play, which asks us to entertain thoughts of Rome in Tiber and Egypt into Nile melting, and lets us travel in the theater from one world to another with the speed of thought.

Another complexity arises from the fact that, as I will discuss, both Rome and Egypt seek to expropriate elements of their adversary worlds. Like any Shakespearean tragic or comic world, neither Rome nor Egypt is unmixedly tragic or comic.


8 Many excellent discussions of the play turn upon this point of decorum, e.g., Herbert Rothschild Jr., "The Oblique Encounter: Shakespeare's Confrontation of Plutarch with Special Reference to Antony and Cleopatra," English Literary Renaissance, 6 (1976), 404-29.

9 This aspect of generic decorum, mentioned cursorily by many, is concentrated upon by Linda Bamber, "Comic Women, Tragic Men: Genre and Sexuality in Shakespeare's Plays," Diss. Tufts 1975. Bamber uses Antony and Cleopatra, among other plays, to demonstrate the thesis that "the central comic woman is whole, whereas the central comic man becomes whole." This applies well to Antony's quest for identity, I think; as he integrates the conflicting aspects of himself, Antony becomes in the course of the play more like Cleopatra, who has embodied from the first a more seamless union of paradoxical contraries.

10 These interpretations are set forth in the following studies: Harold Goddard, The Meaning of Shakespeare (Chicago, 1951), S. L. Bethell, Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition (Durham, N.C., 1944), Markels, The Pillar of the World, and Danby, Poets on Fortune's Hill.

11 "The Comic Pattern and Vision," p. 502. It should also be noted how beautifully the historical Octavius' banishment of Ovid fits in with Shakespeare's characterization of him.


13 Rosalie Colie, Shakespeare's Living Art (Princeton, 1974), pp. 135 and 147. See Colie's notes, p. 147, for other treatments of this subject.

14 Anatomy of Criticism, p. 175. Frye's word "ironic" here seems to me redundant, since these comic themes are from a tradition which is itself already ironic to begin with.

15 Anatomy, p. 184.

16 The play is clearly distinguishable from the genre of tragicomedy in that rather than seeking a middle ground between the genres, it mingles extremes without modifying them. It proceeds straight into a full-blown tragedy, and its final comic elements arise out of the development of the tragic action rather than being any
kind of check on it. The play's treatment of the genres can be contrasted with the spirit of compromise in conventional tragicomedy, which can be seen in Guarini's definition of the genre. He says that the writer of tragicomedy takes from tragedy "great persons but not great action; a plot which is verisimilar but not true; passions, moved but tempered; the delight, not the sadness; the danger, not the death; from the other [comedy], laughter which is not dissolute, modest amusement, feigned complication, a happy reversal, and above all, the comic order." Taken from Eugene Waith's translation in The Pattern of Tragicomedy in Beaumont and Fletcher (New Haven, 1952), p. 48.

17 The luxuriance of puns in the play is more than a means of forging links between opposing genres and interpretations. See Sigurd Burckhardt's richly suggestive discussion of the role of punning in creating an artistic medium out of language, which builds on Empson's demonstrations that one word in great poetry can have many meanings, but changes the emphasis to the ability of many meanings to have one word. In "The Poet as Fool and Priest," Shakespearean Meanings (Princeton, 1968), pp. 22 ff.

18 Hallett, pp. 77 ff.

19 John Middleton Murry, Shakespeare (London, 1936, rpt. 1954), also calls this scene "Antony's Last Supper" (p. 362). And he says that the story of Enobarbus is Shakespeare's version of the story of Judas (p. 367).

20 Danby, p. 149.


22 Antony, when "stirr'd by Cleopatra" in scene one, refuses to listen to messengers too.

Martha Tuck Rozett (essay date 1985)


[In the following essay, Rozett compares the comic elements in the endings of Romeo and Juliet and Antony and Cleopatra, arguing that in Antony and Cleopatra Shakespeare more successfully dramatized the comic factors of a tragic situation.]

In tragedies of love, as distinct from tragedies in which love is made subordinate to revenge, ambition, or some other emotion, the two lovers theoretically have equal claims on the role normally reserved for a single protagonist. In the Shakespeare canon this equal claim is signaled by the title: Romeo and Juliet, Antony and Cleopatra, and, if one wishes to include a play that is not generically a tragedy, Troilus and Cressida. Although love tragedy, broadly defined, was eventually to become a popular form on the Jacobean stage, the genre was a new one when Shakespeare wrote Romeo and Juliet in 1594 or 1595. As Clifford Leech observes, until Romeo and Juliet appeared, love on the public stage seems to have been solely an element in comedy or in those romantic plays which Sidney mocked in his Apology for Poetry. In choosing the well-known Romeo and Juliet legend for his first tragedy of love, Shakespeare either stumbled upon or deliberately sought out a solution to the major problem inherent in the two-protagonist tragedy: that of orchestrating an ending in which two characters separately yet jointly undergo tragic downfalls and deaths. What particularly interests me about the pattern of events with which Romeo and Juliet ends is that Shakespeare used it again, several years later, in Antony and Cleopatra. Both love tragedies conclude with a tragic sequence consisting of the feigned death of the heroine, followed by the suicide of the lover, then the heroine's "resurrection," and finally, a second suicide. This pattern confers upon each of the four title characters a role characteristic of the tragic
protagonist—that of causing the death of another. Each lover indirectly and inadvertently brings about the death of the beloved, and each dies nobly by his or her own hand, believing that death is preferable to life without the beloved.

Tragic as such endings are, they also function as resolutions to dramatic structures exhibiting a number of comic traits. As critics have frequently observed, Shakespeare mingles comedy and tragedy in many of his plays. But what makes *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra* unusual among Shakespearean tragedies is the way the principal characters' identities as lovers shape the action and determine the denouement. As love stories in which women share the protagonist's role with men, moreover, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra* give to their heroines a prominence that links them more closely with the women of the comedies than with the women of the tragedies. Shakespeare places Romeo and Juliet, and to a lesser extent Antony and Cleopatra, in typically comic situations: both sets of lovers must overcome social and political obstacles to be united; both are surrounded by variations on comic character types who contribute to the complications in the love plot; and both entangle themselves in tragic renditions of the pattern of misunderstanding and confusion leading to clarification and reunion so prevalent in Shakespeare's romantic comedies. While some of these comic elements are present in Shakespeare's other tragedies, most notably *Hamlet* and *Othello*, the love tragedies conclude very differently from the tragedies that center upon isolated single protagonists. Both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra* end with a resounding affirmation of the power of love to resolve differences and elevate the human spirit, leaving the audience feeling that what they have just experienced is not altogether tragedy.²

Notwithstanding these similarities, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra* are very different plays in respect to plot, tone, and characterization. What the differences—and the similarities—reveal about Shakespeare's use of comic strategies in tragic contexts will be the main focus of this essay. In particular, I wish to examine the comic structures implicit in the double suicides, which in both plays turn upon essentially comic acts of trickery. In comparing the two endings, I hope to show that Shakespeare had become more comfortable with the comic aspects of a tragic situation by the time he wrote *Antony and Cleopatra*, and that he more successfully exploited the comic possibilities he found in his source.

I

By the time Shakespeare discovered it in the 1590s, the Romeo and Juliet story already had a long history. Arthur Brooke's long poem "The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet," first published in 1562, was sufficiently popular that Tottell reprinted it in 1582 and it was reissued again in 1587. Brooke based his poem on Boiastuau's French adaptation of an Italian novella by Bandello, which in turn was an adaptation of da Porto's version of the story, published in 1530. The device of the sleeping potion goes back much further, however, to the *Ephesiaca* of Xenophon of Ephesus (fifth century A.D.), in which the heroine's feigned death is one of a string of escapades, rather than the culminating event leading to tragedy.³

As the history of drama reveals, the dangerous adventure of feigned death and promised resurrection was one of the oldest and most popular comic traditions on the English stage. The resurrection of a seemingly dead character was the central event in the mummers plays, for example, which celebrated the miracle of seasonal renewal by dramatizing the death of the old year and the birth of the new. And once the drama ceased to be so closely linked to religious ritual, the resurrection motif continued to appear in comic plots. As an ironic reversal of expectations, it constituted a moment of festive triumph over the inevitable exigencies of time and death, for characters and audience alike.⁴

Shakespeare used the device of the heroine's feigned or reported death and subsequent reappearance in five of his comedies and romances: *Much Ado About Nothing*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Cymbeline*. Each time, the play concludes with a reunion of the married or betrothed couple.⁵ In every case the heroine's feigned death is part of a sequence of events that tests her virtue and endurance. Even when
much of the action occurs off-stage, she generally emerges as a strong (or at least stronger) character who overcomes adversity and upholds the play's comic values—perseverance, loyalty, and the ability to forgive. Frequently assisted by friends who help devise the deception, she engages in an act of trickery that is intrinsically comic. Her false death is a form of disguise, misleading the lover or husband about her identity and serving as a trap (All's Well) or a penance (Much Ado, The Winter's Tale) that is curative or corrective in typically comic fashion. Her discovery of her true identity may take the form of an unmasking (Much Ado), a return from afar (Pericles), or a more elaborate enactment of resurrection (The Winter's Tale). In the romances, in particular, it is one of the many revelations and discoveries with which the play ends.

In nearly all of Shakespeare's comic renditions of the false death and resurrection motif, timing is an essential element. The comic characters suffer temporary setbacks and mishaps due to accidents of timing, but ultimately good fortune, assisted by the manipulative skills of the stage manager character, brings events to a satisfying conclusion. In his discussion of "chance" or "accident" in Shakespearean Tragedy, A. C. Bradley observes that while such occurrences have a role in most of the tragedies, Shakespeare "really uses it [chance or accident] very sparingly," since "any large admission of chance into the tragic sequence would certainly weaken, and might destroy, the sense of the causal connection of character, deed, and catastrophe." Bradley adds in a footnote that comedy is quite different, for there "the tricks played by chance often form a principal part of the comic action." The final scenes of Romeo and Juliet, although tragic in outcome, are comic by nature inasmuch as everything hinges on accidents of timing. Capulet's unreasonable insistence on an early marriage date, the wholly unprepared-for plague which prevents Romeo from receiving Friar Laurence's letter, and the Friar's tardy arrival at the tomb are all examples of timing gone awry, as is the way Juliet awakens a mere twenty-five lines after Romeo dies, an interval so ironically brief as to be reminiscent of the comic near misses in A Comedy of Errors. Not all of these accidents are part of the Romeo and Juliet story in its original form. The da Porto and Bandello versions had kept Romeo alive until Juliet awoke, but Shakespeare followed the sequence introduced by Boiastuau and retained by Brooke, whose narrative draws attention to timing with the line "an houre too late fayre Juliet awaked out of siepe." Shakespeare's awareness of the comic aspect of this kind of accidental event becomes all too evident when one compares Romeo and Juliet with its slapstick parody, the Pyramus and Thisby play in A Midsummer Night's Dream. There the arbitrary and unlikely presence of the lion, the misleading evidence provided by the bloodied scarf (a case of inadvertent trickery), and the speed with which Pyramus dispatches himself all contribute to the comic effect of the tedious and mirthful tragedy.

The basic situation Shakespeare found in Brooke's poem contained traditionally comic character types whose relationships to one another were at least potentially comic: the young lovers, the obdurate father, the loquacious and devoted Nurse, and the wise and manipulative Friar. In writing Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare successfully grafted onto Brooke's narrative some of the most effective comic strategies of the early comedies: practical joking, bawdy wordplay, flights of poetic fancy, teasing, and comic testing. Most of these elements stand apart from the forward progress of the plot, however, consisting as they do of humorous interludes focused on secondary characters. Generally these comic moments are designed to elicit laughter rather than delight, to use Sidney's distinction in An Apology for Poetry. Brooke's poem does, interestingly enough, introduce and then reject one comic idea that Shakespeare would develop elsewhere. Brooke's Juliet responds to the prospect of Romeus' exile by offering to disguise herself as a servant and accompany him. Romeus dismisses this suggestion as the counsel of "rashe hastiness and wrath" and advises her to obey "the lore of reasons skill" and await the change of inconstant Fortune in Verona (Bullough, I, 327-28). In omitting this exchange, Shakespeare quite wisely chooses not to mention a comic possibility that, if entertained, might weaken whatever tragic inevitability the ending possesses. He also emphasizes Romeus's passivity and immaturity; rather than giving advice, Romeo succumbs to despair and must be counseled by Friar Laurence and the Nurse. Juliet is similarly dependent on the Friar and the Nurse, although unlike Romeo she has some of the comic heroine's strength of character and ability to take charge of the situation in which she finds herself. This is evident early in the play, when she forthrightly cuts off Romeo's elaborate vows ("O, swear not by the moon . . .") and expeditiously directs the discourse to the matter of marriage, the traditionally comic
outcome of honorable love affairs. This potential strength of character is overshadowed, however, by her growing dependency on the Friar.

The lovers' frequent consultations with the Friar have very few counterparts in Shakespearean comedy; in the comic world the heroes and heroines are capable, by and large, of bringing about a festive ending with little or no assistance (Measure for Measure is a striking exception). The Friar is nevertheless an intrinsically comic character type, with analogues in those comedies and romances which employ the false death and resurrection motif. Like his counterparts in Much Ado or The Winter's Tale, the Friar has a plan to extricate the heroine from the disastrous events which have suddenly disrupted her life; unlike his counterparts, however, he proves to be an ineffectual manipulator, and certainly no match for Fortune, which works against the star-crossed lovers at every turn. In a variety of ways, Shakespeare makes us realize that, notwithstanding our desire to believe in Friar Laurence's ability to set everything right, the play has fixed its course toward a tragic outcome.

One way in which Shakespeare does this is through comedy; unlike Brooke, whose Friar is an unambiguous repository of wisdom, Shakespeare makes his Friar ever so slightly pompous in his first scene (II.iii), displaying some of the characteristics of comic old men with his penchant for aphoristic pronouncements. The Friar's final line in the scene, "Wisely and slow, they stumble that run fast," reveals him to be utterly out of step with the rest of the characters in this fast-moving play, and he is sometimes played as a doddering old man trying unsuccessfully to impose his ways on others. Although we do not develop the kind of contempt toward the Friar that we feel toward a character like Polonius, we remain aware that he never succeeds in transcending his comic origins, even in his most sensible and prudent moments. Indeed, part of the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet stems from the fact that the sensible and prudent have no place in a world of impetuous and passionate creatures.

Shakespeare continues to use comic strategies in Romeo and Juliet until the very end of the play, even though, according to the laws of tragedy, a comic resolution becomes impossible once Tybalt and Mercutio are dead, just as, once Hamlet kills Polonius, he is doomed to die. The play's depiction of the other members of the older generation—the Capulets and the Nurse—offers particularly good examples of the way Shakespeare transformed a tragically ironic error in perception into a series of incidents that reveal the comic blindness and folly of characters in positions of authority. In Brooke's poem, there is no mention of a match between Juliet and Paris until after Tybalt's death, when Lady Capulet, who is profoundly distressed by her daughter's inexplicably prolonged grief, stumbles upon the notion that Juliet envies her married friends and would be revived in spirit by the prospect of a husband. Juliet fiercely resists her mother's solution, whereupon Lady Capulet involves her husband, a "testy old man," as Brooke calls him, who announces that he has promised Juliet to County Paris and that he will marry Juliet to the County on "Wensday next" (Bullough, 1, 335-36). Shakespeare's Capulet is testy like his predecessor, but he is also comically foolish in speech and manner, so much so that the Nurse scolds him to his face and Lady Capulet tells him he is "too hot." Betrayed by her parents, Juliet turns to the Nurse for "comfort" and "counsel." In one of the most interesting additions he makes to his source, Shakespeare has the Nurse abandon Juliet as well. In the spirit of practical accommodation to the inevitable, the Nurse advises Juliet to marry the County. Her homely comparison of the two men ("Romeo's a dishclout to him") is a daring use of comic language in a situation that is inherently tragic (III.v.175-219).

Juliet's expectations of loyalty and support—and the audience's similar expectations—are cruelly overturned and Juliet is truly alone.

In a comedy this challenge posed by Juliet's dilemma would rouse the heroine to new heights of ingenuity. In the Romeo and Juliet story, however, it reduces Juliet to suicidal desperation, and she places herself in the hands of the Friar. Surrounded by preparations for the marriage festivities with which comedies so often end, Juliet has a tragic scene that, perhaps more than any other part of the play, anticipates moments of decision in the later tragedies. Although he follows Brooke quite closely in staging Juliet's "dismal scene," Shakespeare introduces an element of doubt that brings his heroine closer to tragedy than her predecessor. Whereas
Brooke's Juliet worries about becoming "the peoples tale and laughing stocke" (p. 346) if the potion fails to work. Shakespeare's Juliet experiences deeper fears: she wonders if the Friar is trying to kill her to save himself from disgrace. This suspicion parallels Juliet's disillusionment with the Nurse, further unsettling the certainties she has relied on up to this point. For a moment, she experiences a fear of betrayal, followed by a horrifying vision of madness and loss of control brought on by the sights and sounds of the corpse-ridden tomb. Through an extreme act of will, she rouses herself from these nightmare imaginings and ends her speech with a desperate and courageous version of a festive toast: "Romeo! Here's drink—I drink to thee" (IV.iii.58).

The aftermath of Juliet's apparent "death" returns us to the comic world. The preparations for the feast, the arrival of the bridegroom, and the comic business between Peter and the musicians are briefly interrupted by fifty lines of stiff and formal lamentation, concluding in the Friar's moralizing speech offering the traditional consolation that Juliet is better off in heaven. Very few of the 400 lines that intervene between Juliet's soliloquy and Romeo's death focus on Romeo's feelings about her; instead the stage is given over to other kinds of business—the purchase of the poison, the return of Friar John, the fight between Romeo and Paris. Romeo's "mistake" thus becomes part of a series of comic errors: he is misled by his well-meaning servant, betrayed by his own impatience and self-pity, and like the other, less perceptive characters, unable to see through Juliet's disguise.

As events rush toward their inevitable conclusion, the audience acquires the kind of discrepant awareness—focused on facts the characters do not know—which makes the endings of Hamlet and Othello ironic. Also similar to the later tragedies is the accumulation of deaths. In adding the death of Paris to the story he received from his source, Shakespeare makes Romeo's subsequent suicide even more tragically inevitable. Although Paris has not engaged our sympathy to any great degree, we feel a pang of regret that he must die needlessly, caught up in a tragedy of nature of which he is entirely ignorant. Shakespeare explicitly contrasts Paris, for whom there will be no lovers' union, however tragic, with Romeo, who finally approaches the wife he parted from in Act III, scene v. His last speech is a celebration of Juliet's beauty, transforming death into an amorous lover who sucks the honey of Juliet's breath and keeps her as his paramour. Romeo's directions to himself ("Eyes, look your last! / Arms take your last embrace . . .") make it seem as if he is playing a role, like the actors in the Pyramus and Thisby play whose valedictories his speech curiously resembles. Like Juliet, Romeo consumes his potion with a toast, and dies immediately. When Juliet awakens, she bravely dismisses the Friar, whose fearfulness is a comic characteristic inasmuch as it causes the audience to feel scornful toward him. She then turns to her husband and chides him: "O churl, drunk all, and left no friendly drop / To help me after?" (V.iii.163-64). Then she unhesitantly embraces death with "a cheerful alacrity" (to use Leonora Brodwin's words) that looks forward to Cleopatra's final moments.

Unlike Cleopatra's last scene, however, Juliet's dying speech is so brief that it is nearly lost in the confusion of the watchmen's arrival. As the stage fills up, the lovers are quickly relegated to the background, for Shakespeare has left himself a lot of explaining to do. This kind of fifth act, filled with the unraveling of evidence, lengthy revelations, and acts of forgiveness, is more common to comedy and romance than to tragedy. The audience's attention is focused on the two families, whose recognition of the costly lessons their children's deaths have taught them overshadows the lovers' union in death. In this respect the ending anticipates the mature tragedies, where the survivors prepare to carry on the business of living and preside over a restored body politic. Any resemblance to comedy the ending retains is due largely to the long-awaited reconciliation which culminates in celebratory tokens of concord, the golden statues of Romeo and Juliet.

II

The deaths of the lovers in Antony and Cleopatra seem to occupy a much larger part of the play than do those in Romeo and Juliet; indeed, critics have frequently commented upon the drawn-out sequence of events that begins with Antony's resolution to die in IV.xiv and ends some 565 lines later with Cleopatra's death and
Octavius' final speech.\textsuperscript{16} Antony and Cleopatra are simultaneously legendary characters of heroic proportions and aging lovers whose flaws and follies invite a critical appraisal more proper to satiric comedy than to romantic tragedy. The play's prolonged ending has the extraordinary effect of focusing our attention on the lovers' grandeur while reminding us repeatedly of their comic fallibility. At the end, when their greatness transcends their failings, the final effect is exhilarating; we share in their triumph over Caesar and join Cleopatra in celebrating a love that defies time and circumstance. And yet we cannot altogether forget the betrayals, the self-deluding posturing, and the violent outbursts that have preceded the lovers' union in death.

Shakespeare's use of the device of the reported death in \textit{Antony and Cleopatra} is strongly reminiscent of the comedies. Whereas in \textit{Romeo and Juliet} the heroine's false death is a test of her own courage and devotion, the reported deaths in \textit{Much Ado, All's Well} and \textit{Measure for Measure} each represent a deliberate act of trickery contrived against a character who has wronged the heroine. In \textit{Antony and Cleopatra}, Shakespeare's adaptation of North's Plutarch emphasizes the comic aspects of the situation, although like North, Shakespeare is ambiguous about the issue of betrayal. Plutarch's description of the decisive battle comes immediately after the mysterious account of the music signaling Hercules' departure. Plutarch observes that "it seemed that this dance went through the city unto the gate that opened to the enemies, and that all the troop that made this noise they heard went out of the city at that gate." This apparent act of abandonment is then repeated in the battle scene: when Antony's galleys approached the Roman ones, according to Plutarch, "they first saluted Caesar's men, and then Caesar's men re-saluted them also, and of two armies made but one, and then did all together row toward the city." Seeing this, Antonius "fled into the city, crying out that Cleopatra had betrayed him unto them with whom he had made war for her sake." Neither in Plutarch nor in Shakespeare is there any indication that Cleopatra actually did so, however. Indeed, the succession of defections that precedes this scene in the play could lead the audience to conclude that she had nothing to do with this final betrayal. Our uncertainty about Cleopatra's behavior qualifies our sympathy for Antony, and leads us to wonder whether he is, indeed, "more mad / Than Telamon for his shield" (IV.xiii.1-2). North reports that Cleopatra fled into her tomb and "sent unto Antonius to tell him that she was dead."\textsuperscript{17} Shakespeare's adaptation gives Charmian credit for the idea: in her role as loyal confidante and clever servant, she suggests the deception, taking charge of events in typical comic fashion. Despite her fright, Cleopatra rather enjoys the prospect of hearing how Antony will respond to the news. "And word it, prithee, piteously," she instructs Mardian, "And bring me how he takes my death." Whether or not Cleopatra has been unjustly accused, her false death seems more a self-protective ruse than a device designed to achieve reconciliation. In this respect it is a little like Falstaff's comically anti-heroic feigned death at the end of \textit{1 Henry IV}.

Antony's violence is short-lived, and gives way to thoughts of suicide even before Mardian arrives with his news. The hero's suicide is frequently described as "bungled," and critics are divided about whether or not it debases Antony in the audience's eyes.\textsuperscript{18} In contrast with the noble Eros, Antony seems oddly lacking in courage, as he himself observes:

\begin{verbatim}
I, that with my sword
Quartered the world and o'er green Neptune's back
With ships made cities, condemn myself to lack
The courage of a woman—less noble mind
Than she which by her death our Caesar tells
'I am conqueror of myself
\end{verbatim}

(IV.xiv.57-62)

That he is honest enough to acknowledge this falling off elevates him in stature, as does the audience's knowledge that Cleopatra is even less courageous than Antony at this moment. However hesitant and clumsy, his deed is nevertheless nobler than hers, although he doesn't realize it. Part of the comic effect here is owing to Shakespeare's reiteration of the trickery motif: having just been tricked by Cleopatra, Antony allows
himself to be tricked again by Eros, who deliberately arouses Antony's—and the audience's—expectations, and then shocks both his master and us by stabbing himself. When Antony rushes toward death like a bridegroom to a bride, only to be deceived a third time ("How? not dead? not dead?") the effect is ironic, to say the least. Antony continues to behave like a gulled, ineffectual comic figure for most of the scene, as he pleads unsuccessfully with his followers to kill him, and as he listens to Diomedes' revelation that Cleopatra is alive. Not until he is borne aloft by the guardsmen and carried off the stage does he begin to regain his heroic stature.

Shakespeare's deftly comic handling of a tragic situation becomes even more apparent when Antony is brought to Cleopatra's monument in Act IV, scene xv. "A heavy sight" becomes "sport indeed" as Cleopatra and the others make puns on the word "heavy" while Antony's body is hauled awkwardly aloft. The poignancy of the leave-taking is further tempered by the fact that the lovers are comically at odds: "let me speak a little," begs the dying Antony, only to be cut off by Cleopatra, who says "No, let me speak, and let me rail so high..." Antony's parting words of advice are dismissed and ignored by Cleopatra, and when he breathes his last the final words he hears are her querulous complaint: "Has thou no care of me? Shall I abide / In this dull world, which in thy absence is / No better than a sty?"

Interspersed with these comic touches are the parting embraces and marvelous speeches of two lovers, who appeal to us precisely because their dramatic posturing, as they themselves sometimes seem to realize, is both rhetorically splendid and slightly absurd. Again and again, they regard and admire themselves, commenting, as if from a distance, on the spectacle they are presenting to their onstage audience, but with a maturity of historical perspective, tempered with ironic self-awareness, that Romeo and Juliet, in their impetuous passion, lack. Here, for example, is Antony, describing his own death: "Not Caesar's valor hath o'erthrown Antony / But Antony's hath triumph'd on itself; he is, as he grandly proclaims, "a Roman, by a Roman / Valiantly vanquish'd." Cleopatra's roles are more varied; she sees herself at once as the woman "commanded / By such poor passion as the maid that milks / And does the meanest chores" and as a defiant queen throwing her sceptre "at the injurious gods, / To tell them that this world did equal theirs / Till they had stol'n our jewel" (IV.xv.14-78). This role-playing motif becomes much more explicit in the highly theatrical final scene.

The trickery motif returns in Act V, scene ii, as both Cleopatra and the audience are surprised by the seemingly kindly Proculeius. Relieving Proculeius of his charge, Dolabella listens respectfully as Cleopatra delivers her magnificent celebration of Antony's greatness, while time seems to stand still and the horrors of captivity magically recede. When Caesar enters, Cleopatra is prepared for him, since Dolabella, won over by her poetry, has betrayed his master by revealing Caesar's intentions to lead her in triumph. There follows a scene of elaborate play-acting in which Cleopatra enacts the humble and self-belittling captive and Caesar the gracious captor.

The ambiguous scene with Seleucus can be viewed as a carefully staged trick designed, in Willard Farnham's words, "to mask a full-formed intention to die by giving the appearance of wanting to live." That Cleopatra is fully aware of Caesar's efforts to deceive her is evident in her mocking comment upon his performance: "He words me, girls, he words me, that I should not / Be noble to myself (V.ii.191-92). The differences between North's Plutarch and Shakespeare's play are particularly significant in this scene. North notes that Cleopatra successfully deceived Caesar; but rather than emphasizing the comic aspects of her sense of triumph, he dwells at length upon her grief over Antony's death. He recounts an incident that Shakespeare deliberately omits, in which Cleopatra is carried to Antony's tomb; there in Plutarch she delivers a long, tearful lament to her beloved, dwelling upon her fear of being carried away to Italy, and begging him to intercede with the gods "to let me be buried in one self tomb with thee." This is the last speech by Cleopatra recounted by North; the remainder of his narrative passes quickly over the manner of her death. Shakespeare chooses instead to dramatize the scene with the clown and its aftermath, inventing his own dialogue for this purpose.
Her spirits restored by her success in tricking Caesar, Shakespeare's Cleopatra embarks upon preparations for her final act with a contagious liveliness that makes the characters seem as if they are participating in a comic resolution—which, in a sense, they are. Like Rosalind orchestrating the multiple marriages at the end of *As You Like It*, Cleopatra does not reveal her plan to the audience; instead she whispers something to Charmian, then asks for her "best attires," complete with "crown and all," all the while gloating that "that's the way / To fool their preparation, and to conquer / Their most absurd intents" (V.ii.224-26).

The comic interlude with the clown is reminiscent of Hamlet's conversation with the gravediggers. In much the same way, Shakespeare introduces a common workingman whose relationship with death (or, in this case, the agent of death) is so matter-of-fact and casual that we are compelled to see death from a radically different perspective. The clown's cheerful farewell, "I wish you joy of the worm," ironically reminds us that this is a joyful occasion, and that Cleopatra's impatience with him is caused by her eagerness to embrace death. As soon as the clown departs, the festive preparations resume, with the ritual of attiring performed onstage. Characteristically conscious that she is about to perform an "act," Cleopatra transforms the moments preceding her death into the procession that leads to the wedding celebration: "Husband, I come: / Now to that name my courage proves my title!"

Dying is a sensual experience ("The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch"), as the Elizabethans' punning use of the word "die" affirms. There is even a joke concerning sexual jealousy: when Cleopatra realizes that Charmian is dying, she hastens to kill herself lest Charmian "first meet the curled Antony" and he "make demand of her, and spend that kiss / Which is my heaven to have." Cleopatra's language in these final speeches brings together the marriage ceremony, its consummation, and the bride's subsequent anticipation of motherhood, all important aspects of the traditional comic resolution's celebration of fertility and the perpetuation of the social order. The asp, now become "the baby at my breast, / That sucks the nurse asleep," is metamorphosed from an instrument of death to a symbol of new life (V.ii.260-310).

Cleopatra's joyous pleasure in taking her own life owes as much to her triumphant sense of having tricked Caesar as it does to her "immortal longings" for reunion with Antony. She thinks she hears Antony mock Caesar's "luck," a deceptive gift "which the gods give men / To excuse their after wrath," and she revels in the imaginary prospect of the asp calling "great Caesar ass / Unpolicied" (V.ii.286-87, 307-8). As the culminating event in a carefully planned trick (one is again reminded of *As You Like It*, or *The Winter's Tale*) and as a marriage ceremony, the final masque-like tableau has far more in common with comedy than tragedy. Janet Adelman remarks that "the play is essentially a tragic experience embedded in a comic structure." As in comedy, the lovers have triumphed over the obstacles that repeatedly threatened and delayed their union, and have achieved a form of release from the realities of daily life that would forever impede such a union. That this release and triumph take the form of death may seem tragic. But as Anne Barton notes, "In a way for which there is no parallel in any other Shakespearean tragedy, we want Cleopatra to die." What makes the ending an extraordinary fusion of comedy and tragedy, however, is the audience's realization that the lovers' deaths remain, in Derek Traversi's words, "the inevitable end of a line of conduct in which folly and self-indulgence have consistently played their part," even as they also recognize that these deaths constitute a triumphant achievement and an instrument of release.

In contrast to the ending of *Romeo and Juliet*, timing in *Antony and Cleopatra* works to the protagonists' advantage; Cleopatra succeeds in dying just before the Romans return. Furthermore, Shakespeare has stripped away nearly all of the comic character types who are so central to the traditional comic sequence in which confusion is ultimately resolved by a series of unmaskings. The stage manager figure (Friar Laurence), the parents, the authority figure who presides over the resolution (Prince Escalus)—these have no counterparts in *Antony and Cleopatra*. There remains only Octavius Caesar, who bears a curious resemblance to Paris in the triangular structure of the two plays—except, of course, that Paris is among the dead in *Romeo and Juliet*. Inasmuch as he is both "beguiled" and left to assume controls, Caesar displays some aspects of the overruled parents and the presiding authority figure who participate in comic resolutions. He has lost the battle but won
the war, and in keeping with the comic tone of the ending, he joins the audience in celebrating Cleopatra, who, he says, looks "As she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace" (V.ii.347-48). The spirit of successful trickery persists to the very end, as Caesar and his retinue puzzle over the manner of Cleopatra's death. They nevertheless join in the conciliatory spirit of the comic ending. Although he has been thwarted in his effort to reap political profit by belittling a captive Cleopatra, Caesar announces that he will give the lovers the solemn show their greatness deserves. He thus contributes his share to the satisfying resolution, and emerges as a more sympathetic character than he has been at any other point in the play.

III

With Caesar's announcement that the lovers shall be buried together, "no pair so famous," Antony and Cleopatra arrives at an ending seemingly reminiscent of Romeo and Juliet. The atmosphere, however, is utterly different: while in Romeo and Juliet the speeches are filled with the language of sorrow and punishment, sacrifice and woe, and an emphasis on the survivors' ability to learn from their mistakes, in Antony and Cleopatra the scene is best summed up by the dying Charmian, who triumphantly responds to the Guardsman's reproach with "It is well done, and fitting for a princess / Descended of so many royal kings." The triumph Charmian feels suffuses the ending; for all three women, "this wild world" is a place no longer "worth leave-taking" (V.ii.326-27, 314, 298). The stage littered with bodies is thus not the tragic spectacle one would expect it to be, for it serves as a reminder that all the deaths in the play are voluntary and self-imposed acts which assert the individual's power over his or her own fate. How different, then, is Antony and Cleopatra from Romeo and Juliet and the later tragedies, where death is violent, arbitrary, and caused by treachery and misunderstandings, abruptly cutting off the lives of characters who unwittingly find themselves caught up in the tragic momentum of the play. For the characters in Antony and Cleopatra suicide is a noble gesture, an assertion of love toward a friend or lover, a positive and purposeful act, triumphant in the way that the deaths of saints and heroes are. This sense of triumph has no place at the ending of Romeo and Juliet, where the intrinsically comic structure of false death and resurrection is rendered tragic by the irrevocable losses and the burden of guilt that confront the survivors. As Romeo and Juliet draws to an end, the audience has nothing corresponding to Cleopatra's magnificent vision of Antony dolphin-like in his delights, bestriding the ocean and dropping realms and islands from his pockets. Instead, we are left with the Prince's moralizing scolding and a keen sense of regret at the waste of five young lives resulting from the follies of the older generation.

It would be interesting to know whether Shakespeare was thinking of Romeo and Juliet when he decided to dramatize North's translation of Plutarch's "Life of Marcus Antonius." We can speculate that the untapped dramatic potential in the pattern of double suicides was one of the things that attracted him to the story of Antony and Cleopatra, and that he was conscious of the structural echoes as he wrote the play. He was clearly at a turning point in his work; by 1606 or 1607 the four big tragedies were completed, and a year or so later he would begin writing the romances. Although Antony shares certain characteristics of the complex and self-destructive protagonists of the tragedies, Antony and Cleopatra looks ahead to the romances in a number of ways. Like Pericles, Cymbeline, and The Winter's Tale, it ranges freely through space and time, encompassing a large cast of characters and a dazzling succession of events. But while the romances move successively from tragic complication to comic resolution, Antony and Cleopatra combines comedy and tragedy into an integrated whole. There are very few self-contained humorous interludes like the ones in Romeo and Juliet (for example, Romeo and Mercutio baiting the Nurse or the Nurse teasing Juliet by withholding her news). Instead, there is an overarching comic vision that is elastic enough to contain deaths and defeats, because it is founded upon the powerful attraction that binds the audience to the protagonists.

Shakespeare sifted through the wealth of detail in North's Plutarch, culling incidents and descriptions from which he created two unconventional lovers whose comic potential stems from their own mixture of flaws and greatness, rather than simply inhering in the structure of events in which they find themselves. Antony and Cleopatra delight us with their poetry, with their unpredictable—and sometimes predictable—responses (an
example of the latter is Cleopatra's treatment of the messenger who brings news of Antony's marriage to Octavia), and with their ability to command the love and admiration of the people around them. In a way that Romeo and Juliet never do, they repeatedly delight us with comic insights into the mysteries of human nature. Foremost among these mysteries is the paradoxical way in which lovers alternately torment and celebrate one another, which is one of the most timeless subjects of comedy.

Notes


2 Cf. Susan Snyder, The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1979). In her study of Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello, and King Lear, Snyder shows how "traditional comic structures and assumptions operate in several ways to shape tragedy." Her approach has been helpful to me, particularly in its premise that "literary convention can operate to shape and enrich a work that is moving in a direction opposite to that convention" (pp. 4, 16).


4 C. L. Barber remarks that in the folk plays the miraculous cure of St. George or the Fool "is the ultimate turning of the tables on whatever is the enemy to life," and notes that the most popular of Elizabethan jigs, "The jig of Rowland," involved "a device of playing dead and pretending to come back to life which may well be a rationalized development of this primitive resurrection motif." See Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1959), p. 154 n.


7 About this kind of accident of timing, Susan Snyder observes that "Too late is not in the comic vocabulary. There is always time to keep the appointment, to undo the mistake, or even to neglect the action altogether for a display of wit or clowning. In tragedy, our sense that time is limited and precious grows with our perception of an inevitable outcome, time cut off (p. 28).

8 Bullough, I, 355.

9 Sir Philip Sidney, "An Apology for Poetry," Elizabethan Critical Essays, ed. G. Gregory Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904), I, 199. Sidney distinguishes laughter from delight as follows: "laughter almost euer commeth of things most disproportioned to our selues and nature. Delight hath a ioy in it, either permanent or present. Laughter hath onely a scornful tickling. For example, we are rauished with delight to see a faire woman and yet are far from being moued to laughter."

10 Leech, p. 74; Snyder, p. 109.

11 This and all other quotations from Shakespeare's plays are taken from The Riverside Shakespeare, gen. ed. G. Blakemore Evans, et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).
Shakespeare belabors this device to comic effect in Pyramus and Thisby's sing-song rhymes in A Midsummer Night's Dream:

Pyramus: Come tears, confound
Out, sword, and wound
The pap of Pyramus

Thisby: Tongue, not a word!
Come, trusty sword!
Come, blade, my breast imbrue!

(V.i.295-97, 342-44)

The similarity is even more striking when Romeo addresses the poison: "Come, bitter conduct, come unsavory guide!" (V.iii.116).


It is perhaps worth noting that there are comparable moments in Othello and King Lear that have similar comic overtones, and that slow down the final tragic conclusion in a slightly awkward way—one thinks, for example, of the letters found in Roderigo's pocket and Edgar's and Kent's unmaskings.

In his discussion of Romeo and Juliet, Leech wonders if the play is really tragic. He feels that the Prince's long speech undermines any "sense of mystery" with its emphasis on reconciliation and the "lesson" the survivors have learned. Friar Laurence's speech, he adds, is "too much like a preacher's résumé of the events on which a moral lesson will be based" (pp. 68-70).

See, for example, Anne Barton's discussion of the "divided catastrophe" in "Nature's piece 'gainst fancy': The divided catastrophe in Antony and Cleopatra," an inaugural lecture delivered at Bedford College, University of London, in 1973. Barton notes that the divided catastrophe is rare in Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy, and that most dramatized versions of the Antony and Cleopatra story avoided it (p. 11).


Sidney R. Homan, "Divided Response and the Imagination in Antony and Cleopatra," Philological Quarterly, 49 (1970), 460-68. Homan notes that in fewer than twenty lines (V.ii.294-312) Cleopatra manages to translate even the horrors of death into the pleasures of love: "... we have the almost sentimental family tableau of the mother embracing her husband and their sleeping child ..." (p. 464). See also J. L. Simmons, "The Comic Pattern and Vision in Antony and Cleopatra," ELH, 36 (1969), 493-501. As Simmons describes
her, Cleopatra "steps forward like the queen of comedy, arranging the happy ending of marriage and thereby
winning the admiration and approval of the Roman world's highest moral sense. The comic purging and
reconciliation take place to our delight while we are moved by the tragedy of its requiring the lovers' death"
(p. 503).

21 Mark Rose, "Introduction," Twentieth Century Interpretations of Antony and Cleopatra, ed. Mark Rose
notes how different Shakespeare's ending is from North's, which describes Cleopatra in her "smocke," in "a
little low bed of poor estate" (p. 353).

1973), p. 52. Cf. Simmons, who sees a "merging of the tragic with what is essentially the comic vision," and
adds that death is a victory, with Cleopatra triumphant and Caesar "defeated" (p. 493). The comic tone in the
play was noted first by A. C. Bradley.

23 Barton, p. 16.


Love And Desire
Evelyn Gajowski (essay date 1992)

SOURCE: "Antony and Cleopatra: Female Subjectivity and Orientalism," in The Art of Loving: Female
Subjectivity and Male Discursive Traditions in Shakespeare's Tragedies, University of Delaware Press, 1992,
pp. 86-119.

[In the following essay, Gajowski argues that from a critical standpoint, Cleopatra is alternatively viewed as
the Romans see her—the whore responsible for Antony's fall from Roman honor and duty—or as the "archetype
of the eternal feminine principle" who presents Antony with a life that surpasses anything Rome can offer.
Gajowski rejects both of these views and presents a reading of Cleopatra as a woman who "ennobles" Antony
through her love.]

She's beautiful and she's laughing.

—Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa"

Whereas military action is relegated to the background in Othello, it is interwoven into the love story in
Antony and Cleopatra. The intricate alternation of scenes of war and scenes of love, in fact, makes the
obitation of the feud upon the love story in Romeo and Juliet (3.1) appear somewhat mechanical by contrast.
Indeed, the loose structure of the play, especially the quick, frequent shift of scene throughout acts 3 and 4,
has drawn criticism. Nor does Antony and Cleopatra share the atmosphere of domesticity of Othello. The
larger political context is not confined to the Venetian Senate and reports of battles off stage—it determines the
action. Like Marlowe's Dido, Queen of Carthage, as Roger Stillings points out, Shakespeare's play represents
"a clash between the values of empire and the values of love" (1976, 278). Whereas Aeneas chooses empire,
however, Antony chooses love.

The impulses of possession and power—held to the level of petty social rivalry in Romeo and Juliet, turned
inward and concentrated in Iago's nihilism in Othello—are set loose in Antony and Cleopatra to rule the entire
known western world. There is no Iago-like exploitation, manipulation, or teasing out of masculine attitudes
as in Othello. Instead, they are embedded in the very foundation of empire and are freely expressed by every
male character in the play. Because of their preoccupation with imperial ideals, Roman men—Philo, Antony, Enobarbus, Octavius, Agrippa, Pompey, Menas, Canidius, Scarus—disparage love, sex, and women, although Antony and Enobarbus stand apart from the others in their capacity to idealize as well.

Beginning with Philo's opening slurs on the protagonists, much of the play offers an exposition of the dominant ideology of male Roman superiority and female Egyptian inferiority:

Nay, but this dotage of our general's
O'erflows the measure. Those his goodly eyes,
That o'er the files and musters of the war
Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
The office and devotion of their view
Upon a tawny front; his captain's heart,
Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper,
And is become the bellows and the fan
To cool a gypsy's lust. Look, where they come!
Take but good note, and you shall see in him
The triple pillar of the world transform'd
Into a strumpet's fool. Behold and see.

(1.1.1-13)

Yet here we have something new, not just a patriarchal construction of gender difference as in Othello and Romeo and Juliet, but an imperialistic construction of cultural difference. Cleopatra, therefore—before we have met her—undergoes a series of double reductions. Her status is diminished not merely to that of a whore, or "strumpet," but to that of an alien, or "gypsy." Her body is reduced by synecdoche not merely to her woman's part, or "front," but to that of a particular racial hue, "tawny." As imperialists, Romans are, of course, required to revile Cleopatra as the colonized other. And, good representative of the empire that he is, Philo perfectly articulates the ideology of his dominant culture. He is no more capable of seeing the relationship between Cleopatra and Antony as the love of a woman and a man for one another than he is capable of mythologizing Cleopatra as a Venus, although he is capable of valorizing Antony as a "plated Mars." Because Philo views the world in strictly political and military terms, he sees his "general," his "captain," his "triple pillar of the world" reduced to the status of a "fool" by the "lust" of a "gypsy." Cleopatra, as the mysterious cultural other, is endowed with a sexuality so powerful it has the effect of emasculating Antony. As Queen of Egypt, she represents what Freud calls "the dark continent" of female sexuality—Africa—and, as such, is the source of profound anxiety to the Romans.

Because the Roman ideology angrily expressed by Philo in the opening lines of the play is insisted on throughout the dramatic action, it is not difficult to understand why so much critical response to Antony and Cleopatra strikes so moralistic a note. Schücking, Stoll, and their followers represent an approach to the play that is more responsive to the political plot and the outer military experience it conveys—ideals of honor and duty, empire and war—than it is to the play's poetry. In this view, the protagonists are seen largely through Philo's eyes: the whore Cleopatra is responsible for Antony's fall from indisputably honorable Roman ideals.

This view is problematic, however, because it more accurately describes the moralism of Shakespeare's source, Plutarch's The Life of Marcus Antonius, than his dramatization of that source. And, as we know, whenever Shakespeare draws on a single source for his story—in Antony and Cleopatra as in Othello and Romeo and Juliet—he transforms conventional morality. Time and again he takes what strikes the author of his source "as being the whole moral bearing of the story," as Kermode puts it, and delimits its place in his play, placing it in conflict with other issues or subordinating it to them (1974, 1056). Michael Goldman, for one,
takes issue with the critical view that "th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame" is the emblem of the lovers' relationship. This sentiment describes "not what happens between Antony and Cleopatra," he insists, but rather "the typical Roman view of sex in the play" (1985, 121-22, my italics). In allowing the skeptics in the play the full expression of their views, Shakespeare quite disarms criticism, as Janet Adelman points out. The entire drama is, in effect, "a test of the lovers' visions of themselves," she observes; "if the imaginative affirmations were not so persistently questioned, they could not emerge triumphant" (1973, 110).

Immediately following the sentiments of Philo, Shakespeare allows the sentiments of the lovers:

*Cleopatra.* If it be love indeed, tell me how much.

*Antony.* There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd.

*Cleopatra.* I'll set a bourn how far to be belov'd.

*Antony.* Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth.

(1.1.14-17)

A. C. Bradley, G. Wilson Knight, and their followers represent an approach that is more responsive to the play's poetry and the inner psychological experience it conveys—imagination and creativity, pleasure and love—than to the military plot. Critics such as Mack, therefore, emphasize phases of the male protagonist's psychic change—delineation, conflict, and recovery—rather than the phases of external action—exposition, conflict, crisis, catastrophe, and so on ([1960] 1970, 342 and 335). In this view Cleopatra, rather than being seen in Roman terms as a whore, is often glorified as an archetype of the eternal feminine principle. She offers Antony an alternative vision of life that rivals, even surpasses, that of Rome. Rarely is she humanized, though, or seen as a woman whose love ennobles Antony in the way Juliet's love ennobles Romeo and Desdemona's love has the potential to enoble Othello, or seen as a subject in her own right.

**Androcentrism**

Shakespeare consistently associates the idea of nobility not with military deeds but with personal bonds, from Antony's declaration in the opening scene that "the nobleness of life / Is to do thus" (1.1.36-37) as he embraces Cleopatra, to her vision of Antony at her death: "I see him rouse himself / To praise my noble act" (5.2.284-85). While Cleopatra's final statement is consistent with the depth and totality of her emotional commitment to him throughout the play, however, Antony's emotions are at first ambivalent. While he speaks extravagantly of Cleopatra and himself as "a mutual pair" (1.1.37), mutuality between the two lovers is in fact impossible. Until he extricates himself from the complex web of Roman ideology—interwoven with its beliefs in male Roman superiority and female Egyptian inferiority—any equality between partners, upon which mutuality, depends, is impossible.

Antony, a middle-aged libertine who has enjoyed years of revelry with Cleopatra and, no doubt, other women before her, is no novice in love. But like Romeo, he, at first, is unable to make an authentic emotional commitment; like Othello, he attempts to apply the values of military experience to the realm of intimate relationships. He participates in both idealizing Petrarchan discourse, as does Romeo, and denigrating Ovidian discourse, as does Othello. Desire for Cleopatra and revulsion for her conflict with one another, therefore, making Antony's response to her more ambivalent than that of either Romeo to Juliet or Othello to Desdemona. Roman constructions of gender difference—Petrarchism and Ovidianism—are complicated by Roman constructions of cultural difference—or, what Edward Said calls *Orientalism*. *Orientalism* is to culture as Petrarchism and Ovidianism are to gender. All three are constructions of colonized or sexual others by imperialistic or patriarchal dominant ideologies.⁴ All three Roman constructions of other operate powerfully,
from Philo's opening lines, throughout the play.

A grandiose tone marks Antony's earliest declaration on the worlds of Rome and Egypt that tug at his conscience and vie for his allegiance: "Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch / Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space" (1.1.33-34). His sentiments seem utterly honest, true to himself and true to Cleopatra. Yet we feel that Antony does not understand the love of which he speaks with such hyperbole. It is obvious at the beginning of the play that he does not know Cleopatra, as Robert Ornstein notes, that he "does not yet know what is evident to the audience, that his only desire is to be with this woman" ([1966] 1967, 398). The action of the love story charts his discovery of the "new heaven, new earth" of which he speaks so uncomprehendingly in his first utterance in the play. His (re)orientation from an autonomous to a relational perspective allows him in the end to apprehend a humanized Cleopatra.

Antony's romantic hyperboles barely conceal his deeper need for escape from Roman duty in epicurean enjoyment of sensual pleasures:

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

(1.1.44-47)

He holds a Roman view of sex early in the play; his appetite for Cleopatra, therefore, is not unlike his appetite for food, drink, and revelry. The emphasis on Antony's appetitive nature continues these traits from *Julius Caesar*, of course. Yet it suggests as well a level of development—that of self-interest—from which he evolves. The emphasis on his enjoyment of sensual pleasures suggests not only his utter incompatibility with the "holy, cold, and still" Octavia but his potential for a fuller emotional life as well. His capacity for giving is as great as his capacity for consuming, and it is this generosity that the power of Cleopatra's imaginative command immortalizes after his death. In the early Antony are revealed attitudes and responses to love that are not simplified, but complicated with maturity; they do not constrict but dilate with age.

The most evocative description of Cleopatra in the play, of course, is that of Enobarbus, not Antony. His set piece on the lovers' meeting at Cydnus reveals and elicits—rather than Philo's political and sexual revulsion—fascination. It is an invitation to rise above the delimiting Roman constructions of cultural and gendered other—what Phyllis Racklin calls "these inferior modes of perception"—and, instead, to participate in "the imaginative vision of the poet" (1972, 204). His description of Cleopatra on her barge is appreciative of her uniqueness:

The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne,
Burnt on the water. The poop was beaten gold,
Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
The winds which they beat to follow faster,
As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
It beggar'd all description: she did lie
In her pavilion—cloth of gold, of tissue—
O'er-picturing that Venus where we see
The fancy outwork nature.

(2.2.191-201)
He most closely approaches the truth when he describes Cleopatra in paradoxical terms: "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale / Her infinite variety" (2.2.234-35). Yet even this poetic tribute gives way to a more ordinary Roman view of her sexuality. Her complexity—her totality of being—is imagined merely as her capacity to defy masculine appetite: "Other women cloy / The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry / Where most she satisfies" (2.2.235-37). His extravagant homage to Cleopatra contains distant echoes of the courtly love tradition, indeed, echoes of Romeo's compliments to Rosaline's beauty and sexual frustration at her chastity.

That Enobarbus does not have a higher view of Cleopatra or of women than do other Romans is evident in his earliest advice to Antony: "Under a compelling occasion, let women die. It were pity to cast them away for nothing, though between them and a great cause, they should be esteem'd nothing" (1.2.137-40). No matter how significantly Cleopatra figures in Antony's life while he indulges in the pleasures of Egypt, her value is minuscule compared to imperial issues. Antony's vows of devotion in her presence yield in her absence to expressions of guilt about his dereliction of Roman duty:

These strong Egyptian fetters I must break,  
Or lose myself in dotage. . . .  
The present pleasure,  
By revolution low'ring, does become  
The opposite of itself. . . .

I must from this enchanting queen break off;  
Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know,  
My idleness of doth hatch. . . .  
She is cunning past man's thought. . . .  
Would I had never seen her!

(1.2.116-52)

He appeals to the idea of duty to justify leaving her, using a Roman language and tone similar to that of Philo.

Roman constructions of woman are several, but all are objectifications of male desire. Women are objects that satisfy men's sexual appetites; they are prizes of war; they are political pawns to be used as the means of cementing opportunistic alliances. Conflicting with the political rejection and wish to eliminate Cleopatra—the view most forcefully articulated by Philo—is a fascination with and even desire for her. Although despised by the Romans, Cleopatra obviously operates powerfully upon their imaginations. Politically she may be peripheral to the business in Rome, but symbolically she is central:

Enobarbus. . . . you had then left unseen a  
wonderful piece of work, which not to have  
been blest withal would have discredited  
your travel.

(1.2.153-55)

Caesar. Let's grant it is not  
Amiss to tumble on the bed of Ptolomy. . . .

(1.4.16-17)
Agrippa. Royal wench!
She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed;
He ploughed her, and she cropp'd.

(2.2.226-28)

Antony. I' th' East my pleasure lies. (2.3.41)

Pompey. . . . your fine Egyptian cookery
Shall have the fame. I have heard that Julius Caesar
Grew fat with feasting there.

(2.6.63-65)

Enobarbus. He will to his Egyptian dish again.

(2.6.126)

As these passages reveal, the Roman opinion of her is unanimous. Viewed from an androcentric perspective,
Cleopatra is but the supreme erotic delight among the vast array of exotic experiences that the conquest of
diverse cultures offers up to the policemen of the empire. Viewed from a gynocentric perspective, however, it
is obvious that she exists for Rome as a projection of its own sexuality—as, to quote Peter Stallybrass and
Allon White in another context, the "primary eroticized constituent of its own fantasy life" (1986, 5).9
Politically reviled and sexually desired, then, Cleopatra is the source of profound ambivalence for all the
Romans, although Antony dimly apprehends a Cleopatra that is object of neither repugnance nor fascination.

Like his fellow Romans, Octavius, too, wishes to possess Cleopatra, but his desire is not for a sexual
possession. Military defeat reduces all—cultures and cities, peoples and individual human beings—to spoils of
war.10 What Octavius pants for is to keep Cleopatra alive as a war trophy, even as she is determined to deny
him this aim in their final battle of wits and wits. He has no doubt of her corruptibility because he believes it
to be a characterizing trait of her sex: "Women are not / In their best fortunes strong, but want will perjure / The n'er-touch'd vestal" (3.12.29-31).11 Despite his flattery about her honor and his lies about her future,
however, his behavior is governed by the imagined spectacle of Cleopatra as the chief prize of his victory over
Antony and the guarantor of his Roman immortality. Seduced by the spectacle of his own glory rather than by
her, he is capable only of envisioning that "her life in Rome / Would be eternal in our triumph" (5.1.65-66).
The threats of Proculeius and the warnings of Dolabella reveal this intention to Cleopatra:

Proculeius. Cleopatra,
Do not abuse my master's bounty by
Th' undoing of yourself. Let the world see
His nobleness well acted, which your death
Will never let come forth.

(5.2.42-46)

Dolabella. Though he be honorable,—

Cleopatra. He'll lead me then in triumph?

Dolabella. Madam, he will, I know 't.
Dolabella. Caesar through Syria

Intends his journey, and within three days
You and your children will he send before.

Octavius's use of flattery, lies, and threats to dissuade Cleopatra from killing herself obviously conflicts with the references to his "nobleness" and "honor." The Roman discourse of honor, here, as elsewhere in the play, clashes with the dishonorable acts that it would mask.

The women of Rome are as subject to degradation as are women of the colonies as the handling of Octavia's marriage to Antony discloses. In Plutarch, she is an active, persuasive figure whose diplomacy affects the behavior of Octavius and Antony (1964, 278, 282-83, 288-93). In Shakespeare, however, she is a sacrificial victim upon the altar of political ambition; her conciliatory words have no power over either Roman. Why does Shakespeare make this alteration in his source? It is a puzzling one for a writer who characteristically ameliorates or enhances the female characters in his source material. It is plausible that here, as in the history plays, Shakespeare uses women "who seem the most at the mercy of the male world," as Dusinberre puts it, "to assert values which measure its worth and find it wanting" (1975, 293).

Agrippa's words make clear that the marriage is but an opportunistic device:

To hold you in perpetual amity,
To make you brothers, and to knit your hearts
With an unslipping knot, take Antony
Octavia to his wife. . .
By this marriage,
All little jealousies, which now seem great,
And all great fears, which now import their dangers,
Would then be nothing.

The marriage he proposes is, in effect, "not between Antony and Octavia," as Stilling points out, "but between Antony and Octavius" (1976, 282). Perhaps Antony is led on by Octavius's lieutenants because he seeks to pay homage in his return to Rome to the ideals of nobility and honor of a bygone republic. He is as capable as his fellow triumvir, however, of traducing the ideal of honor by using it to justify dishonorable action.

Octavius, in the calculating manner that marks his every move, is capable of cynically marrying his sister to his enemy and then using the occasion of her abandonment as an excuse to wage war against that enemy. His first words to Antony use the fact of Antony's marriage to Fulvia to "patch a quarrel": "Your wife and brother / Made wars upon me, and their contestation / Was theme for you; you were the word of war" (2.2.42-44). It comes as no surprise, then, that Octavius exploits the occasion of Octavia's abandonment to make his move against Antony: "You are abus'd / Beyond the mark of thought; and the high gods, / To do you justice, makes his ministers / Of us and those that love you" (3.6.86-89). Antony, for his part, is capable of speaking of his honor as he packs Octavia off to Rome, "If I lose mine honor / I lose myself (3.4.22-23), even as he is later capable of berating Cleopatra for having seduced him from a marriage that he never honored:

Have I my pillow left unpress'd in Rome,
Forborne the getting of a lawful race,
And by a gem of women, to be abus'd
By one that looks on feeders?

(3.13.106-9)

As these passages make clear, it is not Antony's liaison with the Queen of Egypt but his marriage to the sister of Caesar that causes the rift between the two triumvirs. It is not his relationship to Cleopatra but his political marriage—"his flirtation with Caesar's rather than with Cleopatra's values," as Marsh maintains—that brings about his political overthrow (1976, 167).

Throughout the tragedy Octavius is the epitome of the politician, "always a bad word in Shakespeare," as Kermode wryly notes (1974, 1345). The most accurate description of the atmosphere of political instability and treachery that prevails in his empire, significantly, is his own: "he which is was wish'd, until he were; / And the ebb'd man, ne'er lov'd till ne'er worth love, / Comes dear'd by being lack'd" (1.4.42-44). Shakespeare's plays often emphasize the instability of male ideals, such as those of Octavius's empire, by juxtaposing them to the stability of female values. Viewed from an androcentric perspective, women in the plays are "the grievous survivors of wars men make and die in," as Dusinberre puts it. Viewed from a gynocentric perspective, however, women stand for "permanence and fidelity against shifting political sands" (1975, 294). When the primary motivation of marriage is political, in Rome as in the history plays, it is degrading. When its vows of commitment between two individuals are used to cement political alliances, it does not promote stability. Against the crudeness of the Roman view of women and the humiliating treatment of Octavia as a pawn in a chess game between two men, Shakespeare represents the possibility of a intimate relationship that is honorable, heroic, and noble.

Gynocentrism

In the comedies, Shakespeare focuses on the female view of heterosexual relations; in the tragedies, he focuses on the male view. In Antony and Cleopatra, however, even more so than in Othello and Romeo and Juliet, he focuses equally on the female view. Lear's nausea at his daughters' sexuality and Hamlet's contempt for his mother's frailty are absent even though Antony's repeated alienations from Cleopatra recall the sexual possessiveness and jealousy of Othello. One reason the love relationship in Antony and Cleopatra is more complex than that in either Othello or Romeo and Juliet is that Cleopatra is even more fully realized as a sexually active woman than are either Desdemona or Juliet. Yet that is not to say that it is the representation of Cleopatra as an object of Roman sexual fantasies that is relevant. It is, rather, Shakespeare's representation of her sexual subjectivity that is significant.

Shakespeare's comic and tragic explorations of ideals of love intermingle in Antony and Cleopatra. Although the first half of the play forebodes tragedy, as Bradley notes, it is not decisively tragic in tone. "Certainly the Cleopatra scenes are not so," he says. We read them and we witness them in delighted wonder and even with amusement" ([1909] 1964, 222-23). This comic atmosphere prevails in the Egyptian scenes in acts 1 and 2 that portray Cleopatra trying to convince Antony to stay; Cleopatra left with her women and longing for him; Cleopatra receiving news of his marriage; Cleopatra questioning the messenger about Octavia. To give up the battle with time and live intensely in the present is, Barbara Everett remarks, "to create a small and circumscribed area in which to exist, in an exhilarated moment of freedom and vitality" (1964, xxxvi). It is a way or vision of life that is more native to comedy, of course, than to tragedy. It is the way of jouissance, or pleasure, that Cleopatra lives and breathes in every fiber of her being.¹⁵

Rosalind's stinging advice to Phebe, "Sell when you can, you are not for all markets" (As You Like It, 3.5.60), urges females, because aging devalues the "product," not to be too coy lest they alienate their potential "customers." But Cleopatra has no regard (no more than Desdemona or Juliet) for Rosalind's strategy. Where Juliet should play hard to get, she is instead forthright in declaring her love: "I'll prove more true / Than those
that have more coying to be strange" (*Romeo and Juliet*, 2.2.100-1). Conversely, Cleopatra knows that to hold Antony's interest she must intrigue him and keep him off balance. Those critics who dislike her build their case for her scheming, deceptive nature by fastening on her exchange with Charmian. To the advice, "In each thing give him way, cross him in nothing," Cleopatra responds, "Thou teachest like a fool: the way to lose him" (1.3.9-10). Indeed, it is possible to see her at the outset of the drama as implementing this principle, as attempting to get Antony to stay in Egypt by encouraging him to leave for Rome. Five times she urges Antony to listen to the messages from Rome. To his, "Grates me, the sum," she answers, "Nay, hear them, Antony" (1.1.18-19); to his, "Let's not confound the time with conference harsh," she responds, "Hear the ambassadors" (1.1.45-48). The effect of her words, however, is to undercut his escapist attitude. Cleopatra is down-to-earth. Her accessions of realism, as Rosalie Colie points out, "puncture Antony's simplistic view of love and Cleopatra as satisfaction to his appetite" (1974, 188).

Always underlying Cleopatra's humor is an awareness of the disparity between broad declarations of love and authentic emotional commitment. Her rejoinder, "Excellent falsehood! / Why did he marry Fulvia, and not love her?" (1.1.40-41), pierces Antony's inflated talk of "a mutual pair." She is mindful as well of his view of marriage and pleasure as antipodal experiences. Married to Fulvia, he enjoys his "pleasure in Egypt; declaring "here is my space" to Cleopatra, he deserts her for Rome; married to Octavia, he leaves her for Egypt. Beneath Cleopatra's mocking tone is cognizance that Antony's unfeeling response to Fulvia's death is an indication of his possible treatment of her:

O most false love!
Where be the sacred vials thou shouldst fill
With sorrowful water? Now I see, I see,
In Fulvia's death, how mine receiv'd shall be.

(1.3.62-65)

Despite his romantic hyperboles she is fully aware of the political expediency of his actions: "Good now, play one scene / Of excellent dissembling, and let it look / Like perfect honor" (1.3.78-80). Her ironical common sense "pierces her own theatricals," as Colie notes; she knows herself, she knows Antony, and she knows the precarious, politicking world she lives in (1974, 189).

Shakespeare emphasizes the ease of Antony's betrayal of Cleopatra by enclosing it between scenes that accentuate her loyalty to him: her response to Antony's absence (1.5), to the news of his remarriage (2.5), and to reports of his new wife (3.3). Perhaps it is the alternating lyrical and farcical humor of these scenes that causes critics to overlook the fact of her devotion to him. The void of his absence adumbrates the void of his death. Both drain life of meaning. Her reluctance to remain conscious after his departure for Rome—"Give me to drink mandragora. . . . / That I might sleep out this great gap of time / My Antony is away" (1.5.4-6)—anticipates her reluctance to remain alive after his death: "Shall I abide / In this dull world, which in thy absence is / No more than a sty?" (4.15.60-62). Her imaginings of his every move fill the void: "Where think'st thou he is now? Stand she, or sits he? / Or does he walk? Or is he on his horse? / O happy horse, to bear the weight of Antony!" (1.5.19-21). She speaks knowingly, of course, as someone who has borne the weight of Antony. We do not miss the irony of her imagining her name on Antony's lips—"He's speaking now, / Or murmuring, 'Where's my serpent of old Nile?'" (1.5.24-25)—because he never speaks her name in Rome. Nor do we miss the irony of her reference to herself as a trader in love—"Give me some music; music, moody food / Of us that trade in love" (2.5.1-2)—because it follows the political business of Octavius cynically trading Octavia to Antony.

Aside from the more obvious humor and ironies of the Alexandrian scenes in the first three acts, their lightness and comedy also derives from Cleopatra's complete lack of possessiveness. Despite the full expression of her insecurity in response to Antony's departure for Rome and the news of his remarriage, what
is striking in her actions and speech is the absence of any sense of possession or ownership on her part or any complaint of failed obligation on his part. Similarly, while critics inevitably note Antony's magnanimity, generosity, and forgiveness, particularly that toward his soldiers in the last half of the play, they overlook Cleopatra's refusal to berate him for his repeated acts of disloyalty and mistrust.

Although the protagonists in Shakespeare's romantic comedies and love tragedies are flesh and blood, the stuff that attracts and binds men and women to one another in a relationship surpasses sexual desire. While sex obviously is an integral element of her relationship with Antony, Cleopatra is nothing like the cunning sensualist that the Romans (and some critics) imagine. Shakespeare does not represent a lusting Cleopatra. Rather, he represents a woman who has a range of interests and a man who, if we agree with Irene Dash, thinks only of lovemaking (1981, 214). Cleopatra's dialogues with Antony are devoted to talk of politics and battle, to alienations and reconciliations. Despite Pompey's lewd jokes, Maecenas's lusty appetite for stories of her, and Agrippa's lip-smacking interruptions of Enobarbus's poetic tribute to her, Shakespeare does not depict her as an object of Roman sexual fantasies. While the text of *Antony and Cleopatra* is laden with sensual and sexual innuendos, any genuinely erotic moments in the play are not Roman fantasies about Cleopatra, but Cleopatra's jouissance: her pleasurable recollection of her revelries with Antony, for example, during his absence in Rome and her orgasmic revery of joining him in death. As opposed to the delimiting Roman construction of Cleopatra, moreover, her longing for Antony is "not of the flesh," as Ornstein emphasizes, "but of the total being" ([1966] 1967, 391). If the Roman view insists on reducing her to a "strumpet" and "gypsy," her awareness of Antony's "heavenly mingle" is an awareness of his capacity for surpassing Roman ideals: "He was not sad, / . . . he was not merry, / . . . but between both. / O heavenly mingle!" (1.5.53-59).

Rigid constructions of masculinity and femininity are as crucial to empire as are constructions of dominant and colonial cultures; the two, as we have seen, are intricately bound up in one another in this play. Any blurring of the boundary between the sexes gives the Romans considerable anxiety because it undermines or even threatens to expose the myths of male Roman superiority and female Egyptian inferiority for what they are. The disparaging tone of Octavius at his initial entrance and his first mention of the lovers is unmistakable. The news from his spies in Alexandria reveals to him that Antony "fishes, drinks, and wastes / The lamps of night in revel" (1.4.4-5). It is the fact that Antony and Cleopatra indulge in the pleasures of the orient together, though, that is most disturbing to Octavius. Curiously, the shared nature of the lovers' activities has the effect, for Octavius, of emasculating Antony, while at the same time, disconcertingly for Octavius, masculinizing Cleopatra. Antony "is not more manlike / Than Cleopatra, nor the queen of Ptolomy / More womanly than he" (1.4.5-7). All of male Rome exhibits a similar regard for rigidly gendered experience. The rumors that Enobarbus relates to Cleopatra object to the intervention in war by those who clearly do not belong there: "'tis said in Rome / That Photinus an eunuch and your maids / Manage this war" (3.7.13-15). Later Enobarbus sees Antony's ability to move his troops to tears as neither the manipulative oratory of a practiced politician nor the genuine feeling of a man increasingly aware of the relational aspect of his nature. Instead, he sees it as the ability to induce female weakness: "Look, they weep, / And I, an ass, am onion-ey'd. For shame, / Transform us not to women" (4.2.34-36).

The lovers' references to a blurring of the boundary between the sexes, on the other hand, are playful in tone and reveal flexible notions of maleness and femaleness. Their exchange of clothes is cause for Cleopatra's delighted recollection: "I drunk him to his bed; / Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst / I wore his sword Philippan" (2.5.21-23). Antony remarks in a similar vein as he embraces her after military victory: "leap thou, attire and all, / Through proof of harness to my heart, and there / Ride on the pants triumphing!"
The point is made even in the trivial detail of Cleopatra's preference in billiards partners. She would play Mardian as soon as Charmian: "As well a woman with an eunuch play'd / As with a woman" (2.5.5-6). More significant is her motive for fighting at Actium. Whereas in Plutarch her motive is suspicion of Antony's betrayal (1964, 291-92), in Shakespeare it is political responsibility: "A charge we bear i' th' war, / And as the president of my kingdom will / Appear there for a man" (3.7.16-18). Her insistence on fighting by Antony's side echoes Desdemona's insistence on accompanying her husband to Cyprus. Antony reiterates Othello's reference to Desdemona as his "fair warrior" when he refers to Cleopatra as his armorer: "Thou fumblest, Eros, and my queen's a squire / More tight at this than thou" (4.4.14-15). At rare moments of felicity such as these, both soldiers describe their relationship with their lovers in military terms.

Cleopatra's desire to participate in the male realm of battle is profoundly disturbing to the Romans. Enobarbus may joke that Fulvia's warlike spirit makes sex a desirable diversion from battle: "Would we had all such wives, that the men might go to wars with the women!" (2.2.65-66). But he would not have Cleopatra fight at Actium. He voices anxiety at the thought of female intervention, and more particularly, at the power of female sexuality to disrupt battle: "If we should serve with horse and mares together, / The horse were merely lost; the mares would bear / A soldier and his horse" (3.7.7-9). Echoing Philo in perpetuating the myth of the sexualized, colonized other, Enobarbus not only reduces Cleopatra to the sexual and the bestial. He further endows her with the power to reduce the Romans to the sexual and the bestial in a scenario in which she transforms the classic, organized field of battle into a grotesque, chaotic field of copulating bodies. Canidius and Scarus see Antony's flight from battle less metaphorically, as an emasculating experience: "our leader's led, / And we are women's men" (3.7.70-71); "Experience, manhood, honor, ne'er before / Did violate so itself (3.10.22-23). Yet Shakespeare contests the adequacy of Roman ideals of masculinity, as of femininity.

**Oscillation**

When Shakespeare devotes acts 3 and 4 of *Antony and Cleopatra* to three military battles between the two triumvirs and three quarrels between the two lovers, he forces upon the audience the question of the relationship between the diverse realms of human experience—love and war. It is nearly impossible to discern whether Antony's oscillation between insecurity and confidence in love causes his alternating military fortunes, or whether his alternating military defeat and victory cause his oscillation in love.

Time and again Antony expresses his conflict with Octavius as that between age and youth. He refers to this disparity in positive terms when he feels confident and in negative terms when he feels insecure. In moments of confidence Antony sees his conflict with Octavius as one between a man and a boy, between mature and immature masculinity, and between military experience and inexperience. The repeated references of both lovers to Octavius's immaturity, in fact, reveal their contempt for the emotional, relational sterility he represents:

*Cleopatra*. . . who knows
If the scarce-bearded Caesar have not sent
His pow'rful mandate to you. . .

(1.1.20-22)

*Antony*. To the boy Caesar send this grizzled head,
And he will fill thy wishes to the brim
With principalities. . .
. . . tell him he wears the rose
Of youth upon him; from which the world should note
Something particular. His coin, ships, legions,
May be a coward's, whose ministers would prevail
Under the service of a child as soon
As I th' command of Caesar.

(3.13.17-25)

In moments of insecurity, however, Antony seems to fear the virility of a younger Octavius and to fear his own impotence as an older man. He insists on fighting Octavius by sea despite his soldiers' warnings that his ships are not well manned. When Canidius asks "Why will my lord do so?" he responds, significantly, "For that he [Octavius] dares us to 't" (3.7.29). Octavius's dare catches at Antony's vulnerable ego like a barb; caught, he must disprove the sense of inadequacy that is disclosed in his repeated references to immature and mature masculinity. Octavius, incapable of any similar feelings of insecurity or inadequacy, is caught by neither Antony's challenge to single combat nor his challenge to wage battle at Pharsalia (3.7.30-32). Antony's chivalric challenge—"I dare him . . . / To lay his gay comparisons apart, / And answer me declin'd, sword against sword, / Ourselves alone" (3.13.25-28)—and Octavius's response—"these offers, / Which serve not for his vantage, he shakes off (3.7.32-33)—signify the conflict between Roman values old and new, between honor and opportunism, between desperation and cold practicality.

The pattern of Octavius's and Antony's mutual challenges and responses reflects the issues of the political plot—the reduction of two triumvirs to one. One of them fixes his eyes on the end and uses everything and everyone as a means to that end; the other has no such singleness of aim (Bradley [1909] 1964, 225). Antony's sense of vulnerability lies in his shifting values, in his disorientation from Roman ideals, and his (re)orientation to Egyptian ideals. It also lies in his disentanglement from Roman constructions of Cleopatra and Egypt as sexual and cultural other and his discovery of a human connection with the woman, Cleopatra, beneath the myth that is Cleopatra. As his autonomous self erodes, there is nothing to replace it until he discovers his relational self.

The lovers' alienations from one another, or more accurately, Antony's repeated lapses of belief in Cleopatra, are characterized by self-loathing on his part combined with anger directed at her. But every alienation is followed by reconciliation. Disgust and anger repeatedly melt into forgiveness in a pattern, we feel, most closely approximating day-to-day relations between any two lovers. Unlike the linear pattern of Othello (or Troilus and Cressida) this cyclical pattern of repetition of Antony and Cleopatra grants the lovers the ability, as Marianne Novy puts it, to "recreate their relationship after its apparent destruction" (1984, 122). The repetition of the estrangements between the protagonists has the further effect of suggesting the gradual change in Antony. The position he comes to as a result of each of these episodes—after Actium, after the Thidias episode, after the final defeat—is always one we recognize as "more noble than the one he has taken in disgust," as Goldman notes, "more appealing, more in keeping with that great property which should be Antony's" (1985, 122).

Antony's first lapse of belief in Cleopatra after Actium focuses as sharply on the disparity between past and present, between remembered victory and fresh defeat, as it does on her. The memory of the battle at Philippi, where his experience dominated Octavius's inexperience, pricks at his ego, tormenting him:

... he at Philippi kept
His sword e'en like a dancer, while I strook
The lean and wrinkled Cassi us, and 'twas I
That the mad Brutus ended. He alone
Dealt on lieutenantry, and no practice had
In the brave squares of war. . . .

(3.11.35-40)
Imaginative recollection operates powerfully throughout the play; the heroic values of a bygone Rome are lost except through Antony's vivid memory of them. Here as elsewhere recollection of past heroism only accentuates his present humiliation: "Now I must / To the young man send humble treaties, dodge / And palter in the shifts of lowness" (3.11.61-63).

Although Rome is now corrupt, Antony has difficulty disentangling himself from its values. The dishonor of defeat is so shattering that it brings not only his reputation but his whole identity into question: "I / Have lost my way for ever. . . . / I have fled myself. . . . / I have lost command" (3.11.3-23). As he earlier uses the temptation of Cleopatra to excuse his dereliction of Roman duty, he now finds emotional relief by placing blame upon her. He says to his men, "I follow'd that I blush to look upon" (3.11.12); he says to her:

O, whither hast thou led me, Egypt? See How I convey my shame out of thine eyes By looking back what I have left behind 'Stroy'd in dishonor. . . .

(3.11.51-54)

His insistence on Cleopatra's awareness of his emotional dependency on her—an act of projection—serves, of course, to emphasize his own dawning awareness of the same:

Egypt, thou knew'st too well My heart was to thy rudder tied by th' strings, And thou shouldst tow me after. O'er my spirit Thy full supremacy thou knew'st, and that Thy beck might from the bidding of the gods Command me. . . .

You did know How much you were my conqueror, and that My sword, made weak by my affection, would Obey it on all cause.

(3.11.56-68)

His incipient understanding of her significance in his life is an indication of the change in him. The lovers are reconciled when her forthright acknowledgment of fear—"Forgive my fearful sails! . . . / O my pardon! . . . / Pardon, pardon!" (3.11.55-68)—is matched by his generous response: "Fall not a tear, I say, one of them rates / All that is won and lost" (3.11.69-70).

The Thidias episode dramatizes Antony's second alienation from Cleopatra. It also emphasizes her continued loyalty to him and Enobarbus's betrayal of him. That she remains loyal is not surprising; it is inconceivable, given her complete devotion to him in every word and deed, that she behave in any other way. The rich sarcasm of her response to Octavius's messenger is unmistakable:

_Thidias_. He [Octavius] knows that you embrace not Antony As you did love, but as you fear'd him.

_Cleopatra_. O!
Thidias. The scars upon your honor, therefore, he
Does pity, as constrained blemishes, Not as deserved.

Cleopatra. He is a god and knows
What is most right. Mine honor was not yielded,
But conquer'd merely.

(3.13.56-62)

Cleopatra is as acutely aware here as she is after Antony's death that Octavius's avowal of concern for her honor is a lie.22

What the episode does reveal is the inadequacy of Roman constructions of Egypt and Cleopatra. Enobarbus's suspicion of her political betrayal and Antony's suspicion of her sexual betrayal both contribute to the exposure. Shamed by military defeat into thoughts of desertion, Enobarbus readily misinterprets the exchange between Thidias and Cleopatra. He says to himself that he will desert Antony because she does: "Sir, sir, thou art so leaky / That we must leave thee to thy sinking, for / Thy dearest quit thee" (3.13.63-65). The fact of the lovers' second reconciliation does nothing to alter his course. Antony, for his part, again expresses his sense of disorientation as a threatened loss of identity: "I am / Antony yet" (3.13.92-93). He is again painfully aware of the disparity between past reputation and present humiliation: "he [Octavius] seems / Proud and disdainful, harping on what I am, / Not what he knew I was" (3.13.141-43). Yet his obsession fastens less on the fiction of her political conniving than on the fiction of her sexual betrayal. It is Thidias's kiss of her hand that prompts his rage of sexual jealousy: "To flatter Caesar, would you mingle eyes / With one that ties his points?" (3.13.156-57). He turns on her as Othello turns on Desdemona:

Ah, you kite! . . .
You have been a boggier ever. . . .
I found you as a morsel, cold upon
Dead Caesar's trencher; nay, you were a fragment
Of Cneius Pompey's. . . .

(3.13.89-118)

Both men are keenly aware of the humiliation of being cuckolded. Othello seeks relief in the thought that cuckoldry is inescapable: "this forked plague is fated to us / When we do quicken" (Othello, 3.3.276-77). Antony raises his humiliation to mythological proportions: "O that I were / Upon the hill of Basan, to outnumber / The horned herd!" (3.13.126-28).

Cleopatra's simple question—"Not know me yet?" (3.13.157)—deflates Antony's emotional turmoil. He cannot, however, understand her without understanding himself. After he vents his wrath on her, as Goldman points out, "she wins him back to her and to himself" (1985, 122). Antony is untrue to himself when untrue to Cleopatra, true to himself when true to her. His awakening and response to her love embodies the paradoxical truth that love offers the possibility of both the greatest absorption in the lover and the deepest awareness of the self. Cleopatra expresses an awareness of their interdependency directly and simply: "It is my birthday. / I had thought t' have held it poor; but, since my lord / Is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra" (3.13.184-86). Her remark on the change in him echoes Mercutio's remark on the change in Romeo: "now art thou Romeo; now art thou what thou art" (Romeo and Juliet, 2.4.89-90). Even as Cleopatra celebrates her birthday, Antony, like Romeo after meeting Juliet, is in the process of undergoing a transformation, of shifting from one phase of identity to another. And his recognition of her love has the immediate effect of buoying him up; renewed confidence in love contributes to renewed confidence of war—he is victorious in the next day's battle.
The defeat at Actium and the Thidias episode suggest that military defeat profoundly undermines Antony's confidence in love. Conversely, his only military victory is suffused in his confidence in love. He reveals this confidence in his departure from Cleopatra before battle: "O love, / That thou couldst see my wars today, and knew'st / The royal occupation, thou shouldst see / A workman in 't" (4.4.15-18). And he reiterates it in his joyous greeting of her afterward: "O thou day o' th' world, / Chain mine arm'd neck, leap thou, attire and all, / Through proof of harness to my heart, and there / Ride on the pants triumphing!" (4.8.13-16). His elated words are more intimate in tone than grandiose; his embrace, in contrast to that at the opening of the play, is an honest expression of his love, not an extravagant gesture. Cleopatra being him back from a moment in which "he feels his greatness is gone," Goldman maintains, to one in which "we—and his audiences on stage—feel that he is exercising it again" (1985, 122).

Just before Antony's "triple turn" or third lapse of belief in Cleopatra, Scarus describes his wildly oscillating swings of emotion: "Antony / Is valiant, and dejected, and by starts / His fretted fortunes give him hope and fear / Of what he has, and has not" (4.12.6-9). Antony does not lead his navy, but overlooks the battle from a hillside; his interpretation of events turns, significantly, on a non sequitur. His description of his navy's betrayal sounds like an accurate enough depiction of the scene before him: "My fleet hath yielded to the foe, and yonder / They cast their caps up and carouse together / Like friends long lost" (4.12.11-13). His projection of blame for their betrayal onto Cleopatra, however, marks a departure from experiential reality: "This foul Egyptian hath betrayed me" (4.12.10). The illogicality of the passage reveals more about his state of mind, of course, than the scene before him. He blames her for the defeat at Actium because she flees battle in fear; he blames her for the final defeat even though there is no indication that she is present in battle. The only indication in the text, in fact, is that she is not present: "Swallows have built / In Cleopatra's sails their nests" (4.12.3-4). Antony, therefore, occupies a position midway between Othello, who requires "ocular proof to sustain the fiction of Desdemona's betrayal, and Leontes, who needs none at all to sustain the fiction of Hermione's betrayal."

Antony's insistence upon viewing Cleopatra in these terms is a twisted distortion of the heartfelt desire to fight at his side that she voices earlier. Yet his third and final outburst of rage at her is not wholly surprising in a man whose shifting confidence and insecurity in love and war mirror and magnify one another. Military vulnerability collapses into sexual vulnerability; he imagines himself at the moment of military defeat as victim of the combined treachery of both lover and enemy:

   Triple-turn'd whore! tis thou
   Hast sold me to this novice. . . .
   The witch shall die.
   To the young Roman boy she hath sold me. . . .

(4.12.13-48)

Antony's jealousy focuses not on Octavius's factotum as in the Thidias episode, but on Octavius himself. References to his enemy's youth again erupt in this context: "this novice," "blossoming Caesar," "the young Roman boy." Once more he imagines Cleopatra's political betrayal in sexual terms, finding Othello's emotional relief in calling his lover "whore." In the posture of impotent victim of their conspiracy, he pictures his connection to her not in human terms—his emotional dependency on her, as earlier—but instead, in mythological terms—her power over him. He, therefore, resorts to the Roman construction of the myth of Cleopatra, taking up Philo's imperialistic discourse of fear and revulsion for the cultural other. She is not like Desdemona merely "whore," but rather, a threat, a mystery, a supernatural entity: "this grave charm," "thou spell," "most monsterlike," a "witch."

Cleopatra's one utterance in the scene—"Why is my lord so enrag'd against his love?" (4.12.31)—pierces through Antony's irrational invective. Like her earlier question—"Not know me yet?"—it echoes Desdemona's
bewildered response to the accusations of her husband. If Antony's repeated rages are insufficient to expose the tenuousness of his belief in her, then her bewilderment at his behavior makes the point. So out of character is he—so unlike his true self—that she thinks (and we think) that "he's more mad / Than Telamon for his shield, the boar of Thessaly / Was never so emboss'd" (4.13.1-3). Shakespeare presents male delusions about female betrayal in *Antony and Cleopatra* as in *Othello* only to accentuate the reality of female constancy and to expose male inconstancy.24

**Intersubjectivity**

If any sense of greatness exists in *Antony and Cleopatra*, it is primarily as the command over the imaginations of other characters, as Goldman maintains; "it depends on what people think of you and what you think of yourself" (1985, 113). The long concluding movement of the play is dominated by a series of what he calls "imaginative transformations" which bring about a "corresponding emotional movement of enhancement—from meanness and agitation of spirit to generosity and peace."25 These range from Antony's final outburst of rage and Cleopatra's response, through the false report of her death and his attempted suicide, to his death in her arms and the final spectacle of her death (1985, 128).

The lie of Cleopatra's death is not one of her own making. Contrary to her earlier repudiation of Charmian's advice, she now follows it. After the length and the intensity of Antony's final rage, her willingness, even innocence, in resorting to such a solution does not strike us as strange. In its impact upon the dramatic action—prompting the male protagonist's death by suicide—the device of her false death reiterates that of Juliet. In its regenerative effect upon the repentant male protagonist, it reiterates and anticipates the deaths and resurrections of such female protagonists as Hero, Helena, Thaisa, Imogen, and Hermione in the comedies and the romances. Antony approximates Othello in his wish for the death of his lover: "one death / Might have prevented many. . . . / The witch shall die. . . . / She dies for 't" (4.12.41-49). Because Shakespeare's interest in *Antony and Cleopatra*, as in *King Lear* and *The Winter's Tale*, is in the regeneration of the male protagonist, however, the emphasis is on the reconciliation between the lovers. Antony represents in this play, therefore, a line of male protagonists that extends from the romantic comedies through the love tragedies to the romances.

The change in Antony is apparent in his poetic meditation upon the clouds just moments before he receives the news of Cleopatra's death. It is one of the play's great "emblems of transformation" (Goldman 1985, 126). No longer acting out any soldierly role, he speaks more to himself than to Eros. His final expression of his sense of loss of military identity, therefore, reveals no regard for audience:

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Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish,
A vapor sometime like a bear or lion,
A tower'd citadel, a pendant rock,
A forked mountain, or blue promontory
With trees upon 't that nod unto the world,
And mock our eyes with air. Thou hast seen these signs,
They are black vesper's pageants. . . .
That which is now a horse, even with a thought
The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct
As water is in water. . . .
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(4.14.2-11)

His reflection upon the clouds draws an equation between himself and their ephemeral nature: "My good knave Eros, now thy captain is / Even such a body. Here I am Antony, / Yet cannot hold this visible shape" (4.14.12-14). Paradoxically, though, as Goldman points out, even while Antony claims that he has lost command, the passage reveals the power of his imaginative command. The feeling of the passage contradicts
its logic, so that not a sense of weightlessness but instead a sense of solidity dominates our impressions. "We are not meant to feel an insubstantial Antony here, but a weighty one" (1985, 126-27).

There is something in the quality of Cleopatra's references to Antony that is lacking in the quality of his references to her until he thinks she is dead. His response to the false report of her death reveals a man who, in coming to terms with her death, finally comes to terms with his life:

Unarm, Eros, the long day's task is done,
And we must sleep. . . .
I will o'ertake thee, Cleopatra, and
Weep for my pardon. So it must be, for now

All length is torture; since the torch is out.
Lie down and stray no farther. Now all labor
Mars what it does; yea, very force entangles
Itself with strength. Seal then, and all is done.

(4.14.35-49)

The simplicity of statement and intimacy of tone with which he expresses his singular desire to join his lover—"I will o'ertake thee, Cleopatra"—echoes that of Romeo: "Juliet, I will lie with thee tonight" (Romeo and Juliet, 5.1.34). But Antony has cause, as Romeo does not, to weep for pardon. While Lear and Leontes undergo prolonged suffering or years of remorse, Antony's change of heart is immediate.

The paradox that Antony becomes "a fuller man in his decline," as Ornstein puts it ([1966] 1967, 397), is understandable when we consider the dual pattern of the dramatic action. Even as he loses all in the conquest of empire, he gains immeasurably in his quest into the realm of emotional intimacy. As he loses his autonomous self, he finds his relational self. He is a "mine of bounty" to his men; his familiarity and ease with his soldierly identity allow him the confidence necessary for the expression of his generosity in this arena. His magnanimity is revealed in the detail of his treatment of Eros—"I did make thee free" (4.14.81)—as well as in his self-incriminating response to the desertion of Enobarbus:

. . . send his treasure after; do it,
Detain no jot, I charge thee. Write to him
(I will subscribe) gentle adieus and greeting;
Say that I wish he never find more cause
To change a master. O, my fortunes have
Corrupted honest men!

(4.5.12-17)

The coffers of his largesse are often empty when it comes to Cleopatra, however, as his repeated rages emphasize. His unfamiliarity and unease with his emerging identity of lover deny him the confidence necessary for the expression of his generosity. In the end, however, he treats Cleopatra as he treats Enobarbus; he is no less generous and forgiving of the woman he loves than he is of the man he loves. He treats her as neither detestable "whore" nor supernatural "witch" but as an equal, and it is this change in Antony that allows for the possibility of a mutual, reciprocal exchange between two partners in love that was impossible earlier. Antony and Cleopatra become at last "the mutual pair" of which he speaks so extravagantly—and uncomprehendingly—at the beginning of the play. Both lovers make explicit the nature of their relationship at their deaths, proclaiming their bonds to one another in marital terms: Antony declares, "I will be / A bridegroom in my death" (4.14.99-100), as he attempts to run himself through; Cleopatra declares, "Husband,
I come!" (5.2.287), as she applies the asps to her breast.

The multiple references to the nobility and honor of love interpenetrating the play culminate in the final tributes to one another of Enobarbus, Antony, and Cleopatra. In the end, Enobarbus embodies the value of honor in love, not war. His potential for change is suggested throughout the drama. He epitomizes Roman cynicism about women, yet Cleopatra's "infinite variety" elicits from him the most poetic tribute to her in the play. He epitomizes Roman control of emotions, yet he dies out of love for Antony rather than fight "in the van" against him:

O Antony,
Nobler than my revolt is infamous,
Forgive me in thine own particular,
But let the world rank me in register
A master-leaver and a fugitive.

(4.9.18-22)

His cynicism, so useful while he holds his career and everyone and everything around him in the comic focus of detachment, as Mack points out, "withers in the face of his engagement to ultimate issues" ([1960] 1970, 328). Enobarbus dies heartbroken, speaking with the same density of feeling as the lovers.

Antony says, "Since Cleopatra died / I have liv'd in such dishonor that the gods / Detest my baseness" (4.14.55-57), yet he is not a man who has lost all as he prepares to take his life. Deeply moved by Cleopatra's and Eros's deaths, he is inspired by their nobility. He knows Cleopatra well; he intimates her attitude toward Octavius and her own death precisely, as the final moments of the play bear out:

I, that with my sword
Quarter'd the world, and o'er green Neptune's back
With ships made cities, condemn myself to lack
The courage of a woman—less noble mind
Than she which by her death our Caesar tells,
"I am conqueror of myself."

(4.14.57-62)

Eros appears in the tragedy just before Antony's suicide so that he may kill himself rather than kill Antony, eliciting this response:

Thrice-nobler than myself!
Thou teaches me, O valiant Eros, what
I should, and thou couldst not. My queen and Eros
Have by their brave instruction got upon me
A nobleness in record. . . .

(4.14.95-99)

His name and his deed echo in a minor key the other deaths for love (Mack [1960] 1970, 328).

The final reconciliation of the alienated lovers is one of those resonant scenes, like the reunion of Desdemona and Othello at Cyprus, that allows us to partake of several dimensions of emotional and artistic experience at once. The reunion at the monument reminds us of the male protagonist below and the female protagonist
above in the orchard scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, Both of these scenes, in turn, reiterate the image of the woman at the window that permeates the courtly romance tradition. Indeed, the physical elevation of Antony on stage to the level of Cleopatra emblematizes his ennoblement. He sees himself at his death as "the greatest prince o' th' world, / The noblest" (4.15.54-55), and she echoes his description. His generosity is at last concentrated in a lack of possessiveness and a concern for her welfare. His dying words are devoted to her making peace with his enemy: "Of Caesar seek your honor, with your safety" (4.15.46). The selflessness of his devotion to Cleopatra, together with his solicitude for her welfare, echoes the altruism of the speaker in Sonnet 71: "No longer mourn for me when I am dead / For I love you so, / That I in your sweet thoughts / Would be forgot / If thinking on me then should make you woe."26 Antony experiences compassion; his participation in the suffering of another—Cleopatra as well as Enobarbus and Eros—is the mark of his humanity.

The reunion at the monument enables Antony to die in Cleopatra's arms. In Lear's entry with Cordelia's body critics see an inversion of the pietà; the emblem of Cleopatra embracing the dying Antony conflates the grief of the pietà and the nurturance of the Madonna. Yet Christian emblems such as these are but appropriations of older cultures, such as images of Isis, Osiris, and Horus in Egyptian iconography (Campbell 179). Cleopatra's extraordinary use of humor discloses the intimacy of the lovers: "Noblest of men, woo 't die? / Hast thou no care of me?" (4.15.59-60). She feigns selfishness, echoing Juliet's response to Romeo's death: "O churl, drunk all, and left no friendly drop / To help me after?" (Romeo and Juliet, 5.3.163-64). Cleopatra lives beyond Antony's death in one last enactment of loneliness, desolation, and mourning: "Shall I abide / In this dull world, which in thy absence is / No better than a sty?" (4.15.60-62). Her description of the utter void left by his death has the solidity and weight of Antony's sense of loss at his moment of greatest desolation in 4.14:

O, see, my women:
The crown o' th' earth doth melt. My lord!
O, wither'd is the garland of the war,
The soldier's pole is fall'n! Young boys and girls
Are level now with men; the odds is gone,
And there is nothing left remarkable
Beneath the visiting moon.

(4.15.62-68)

Like Antony, she is describing loss. Even while she says that life is drained of meaning, however, the audience is again subject to the power of imaginative command. The feeling of the passage, as earlier, defies its logic. There is no greater representation of female theatrical subjectivity in Shakespeare's plays than Cleopatra, and nowhere is that subjectivity represented more powerfully than in Cleopatra's response to Antony's death.27

To the soldier Antony is the pole star by which a course can be charted, "an image that suggests both the brightness of his glory and the seeming impossibility of his fall," as Marsh maintains (1976, 191-92). But the image also suggests the dependency on him of those around him. In love as in war, for Cleopatra as for his men, Antony is the pole star. His emotional dependency on her is matched and balanced by her dependency on him in a continuous, reciprocal, attracting and counter attracting, responsive and counter-responsive interrelationship. This is not to ignore the sexual innuendo of the "soldier's pole." But Cleopatra's image reminds us of the absoluteness of the "ever-fixed mark" of Sonnet 116 "that looks on tempests and is never shaken; / It is the star to every wand'ring bark, / Whose worth's unknown, although his hight be taken." The artist possesses the ability to "make [love] a permancy," E. M. Forster maintains, despite the reality that "all history, all our experience, teaches us that no human relationship is constant." An intimate relationship is as unstable as "the living beings who compose it, and they must balance like jugglers if it is to remain" ([1927] 1985, 55). In Antony's oscillation and Cleopatra's depth and totality of emotional commitment, Shakespeare
represents both the human capacity for instability and the capacity for constancy in intimate relations.\textsuperscript{28}

Shakespeare's outrageous artistic choice—killing off the male protagonist in act 4 and devoting act 5 to the female protagonist—has drawn critical attention and provoked negative response, especially from those incapable of understanding or accepting the "unique compliment," as Bradley puts it, he pays Cleopatra ([1909] 1964, 235-236).\textsuperscript{29} In Shakespeare's greatest departure from Plutarch, he devotes act 5 to her poetic celebration of Antony and her determination to die. Her death is at once an act of defiance of Octavius and an enactment of marital union to Antony. Her dealings with Octavius dramatize the turn of her back on this world; her poetic tribute to Antony anticipates her eager embrace of him in the next. Remarkably, yet quite like all her earlier scenes, her last scenes are characterized by "an expression of ineffaceable lightheartedness," as Everett puts it—one that evokes a mood closer to the experience of the comedies than the tragedies (1964, xxiv). Cleopatra is given, as Cameo Moore claims, "the theatrical license to destabilize the tragic genre" (1989).

Even as Cleopatra's humor punctures Antony's easy romanticizing earlier in the play, the power of her imaginative command immortalizes him. She achieves the effect that the persona in Sonnet 55 so deliberately intends: "Not marble nor the gilded monuments / Of princes shall outlive this pow'rful rhyme." Her earlier references to Antony as "the demi-Atlas of this earth, the arm / And burgonet ofmen," "the crown o' th' earth," and a "huge spirit" culminate in her portrait of him as a colossus:

\begin{quote}
His face was as the heav'ns, and therein stuck
A sun and moon, which kept their course, and lighted
The little O, th' earth. . . .
His legs bestrid the ocean; his rear'd arm
Crested the world; his voice was propertied
As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends;
But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,
He was as rattling thunder.
\end{quote}

(5.2.79-86)

His capacity for giving is such that each act of magnanimity and forgiveness of both Cleopatra and Enobarbus makes him not a diminished but a greater figure:

\begin{quote}
For his bounty,
There was no winter in 't; an autumn it was
That grew the more by reaping. His delights
Were dolphin-like, they show'd his back above
The element they liv'd in. In his livery
Walk'd crowns and crownets; realms and islands were
As plates dropp'd from his pocket.
\end{quote}

(5.2.86-92)

The paradox of his infinitely renewing generosity echoes that of the infinite bounty that Juliet so eloquently proclaims (Romeo and Juliet, 2.2.133-35). Cleopatra envisions the infinitude of Antony's "bounty" in seasonal and cosmic imagery and the world he discards in imperial imagery; it is not insignificant that empire is dwarfed by the cosmos in the comparison.

The fate Octavius has in store for Cleopatra—being led caged through the streets of Rome—symbolizes the conquest of a nation in the conquest of a single female body. Imperialistic constructions of cultural other and
patriarchal constructions of sexual other conflate: the conquest of Egypt is emblematized in sexual terms as an Ovidian fantasy—the complete domination of a woman:

Now, Iras, what think'st thou?
Thou, an Egyptian puppet, shall be shown
In Rome as well as I. Mechanic slaves
With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers shall
Uplift us to the view. In their thick breaths,
Rank of gross diet, shall we be enclouded,
And forc'd to drink their vapor. . . .
Saucy lictors
Will catch at us like strumpets, and scald rhymers
Ballad's out a' tune. The quick comedians
Extemporally will stage us, and present
Our Alexiandrian revels: Antony
Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I'th' posture of a whore.

(5.2.207-21)

Those who believe that Cleopatra dallies with Octavius out of a desire to strike a bargain with him ignore in her speeches her repeated, explicit preference of death to anything he offers her:

Not th' imperious show
Of the full-fortun'd Caesar ever shall
Be brooch'd with me, if knife, drugs, serpents have
Edge, sting, or operation.

(4.15.23-26)

'Tis paltry to be Caesar;
Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave,
A minister of her will: and it is great
To do that thing that ends all other deeds,
Which shackles accidents and bolts up change,
Which sleeps, and never palates more the dung.

(5.2.2-7)

Know, sir, that I
Will not wait pinion'd at your master's court. . . .
Rather a ditch in Egypt
Be gentle grave unto me! rather on Nilus' mud
Lay me stark-nak'd, and let the water-flies
Blow me into abhorring! rather make
My country's high pyramides my gibbet,
And hang me up in chains!

(5.2.52-62)
Here, as always, Cleopatra is fully aware of Octavius's imperialistic ideology, its implications for women and for Egypt, and more particularly, the imperatives by which he would reduce her to the most precious of prizes. Likewise, those who interpret her evasion of the fate Octavius has in store for her as motivated by female vanity ignore Antony's identical sentiments:

Eros, Wouldst thou be window'd in great Rome and see
Thy master thus with pleasch'd arms, bending down
His corrigible neck, his face subdu'd
To penetrative shame, whilst the wheel'd seat
Of fortunate Caesar, drawn before him, branded
His baseness that ensued?

(4.14.71-77)

If the desire to avoid humiliation plays a part in motivating Cleopatra to take her life, then the same must be admitted of Antony.

Far from depicting Cleopatra as overcome by self-interest, vacillating in her determination to die as she seriously entertains Octavius's lies, Shakespeare emphasizes her resolution. Like Antony, she comes to terms with the fear of death to take her life. From the moment of his death to that of her own she invokes the courage needed to perform the final deed:

My resolution and my hands I'll trust,
None about Caesar.

(4.15.49-50)

Come, we have no friend
But resolution and the briefest end.

(4.15.90-91)

My resolution's plac'd, and I have nothing
Of woman in me. . . .

(5.2.238-39)

Husband, I come!
Now to that name my courage prove my title!

(5.2.287-88)

The richly comic exchange in which she exploits and manipulates Octavius's belief in female "frailty" further discloses her resolution. Her strategy of dissembling with the "sole sir o' th' world" guarantees the success of her practical joke: "I . . . do confess I have / Been laden with like frailties which before / Have often sham'd our sex" (5.2.121-24).

The pleasure Cleopatra takes in outfoxing Octavius at his own game dominates the final moments of the play: "Why, that's the way / To fool their preparation, and to conquer / Their most absurd intents" (5.2.224-26). Twice she underscores her success. Of Antony she exults, "I hear him mock / The luck of Caesar"
To the asp she laughs, "O, couldst thou speak, / That I might hear thee call great Caesar ass / Unpolicied!" (5.2.306-8). Four more times the text insists upon her success. Nearly every character on stage—Charmian, the First Guard, Dolabella, and Octavius himself—accentuates Cleopatra's victory and Octavius's defeat in this final battle of wills and wits:

> Charmian. Now boast thee, death, in thy possession lies 
> A lass unparallel'd.

(5.2.315-16)

1. Guard. . . . all's not well; Caesar's beguil'd.

(5.2.323)

> Dolabella. Caesar, . . .
> thyself art coming
> To see perform'd the dreaded act which thou
> So sought'st to hinder. . . .
> That you did fear is done.

(5.2.329-35)

> Caesar. She levell'd at our purposes, and
> being royal
> Took her own way.

(5.2.336-37)

Cleopatra transforms the humiliating procession Octavius intends for her in Rome into the final procession of her intent: the final theatrical emblem is that of Octavius bearing her dead body off stage.

As self-aggrandizing at the end of act 5 as at the beginning ("her life in Rome / would be eternal in our triumph"), Octavius proclaims the heroism of the lovers' story only to glorify his own role in it:

> High events as these
> Strike those that make them; and their story is
> No less in pity than his glory which
> Brought them to be lamented.

(5.2.360-63)

A Roman is as great, in other words, as those he degrades. Octavius's "place i' th' story" of Antony and Cleopatra, as we well know, however, is but a footnote. Despite Antony's humiliation and defeat at Octavius's hands, Cleopatra subverts Octavius's attempt to reduce her "infinite variety" to the status of a war trophy. The final impression of affirmation and triumph, release and joy, lies in the one more opportunity granted Antony—one that reiterates the reconciliation of Lear to Cordelia and anticipates the second chance granted such protagonists as Leontes in the romances. And it lies in the success of Cleopatra's practical joke on "the universal landlord" as she enacts a marital union to Antony.

Time and again she emphasizes the nobility of joining him: "what's brave, what's noble, / Let's do 't after the high Roman fashion, / And make death proud to take us" (4.15.86-88). Throughout the final scene she insists
on the nobility of her death:

He words me, girls, he words me, that I
should not
Be noble to myself.

(5.2.191-92)

What poor an instrument
May do a noble deed!

(5.2.236-37)

Methinks I hear
Antony call; I see him rouse himself
To praise my noble act.

(5.2.283-85)

She obviously does not yearn to emulate Octavius's Rome, as some critics believe. Instead; her death surpasses the phallic standard of Roman suicide, as Goldman insists. Her death is "no terse, stoic acceptance of a sword in the belly"; rather, it is "a conversion of death into something gentle, regenerative, sovereign" (1985, 132). Indeed, the final orchestrated spectacle of her death—the fullest manifestation in the play of the power of her imaginative command—is all of these things. Its theatrical power lies, to a large extent, in its expression of the multiplicity of her nature: she is at once wife, queen, mother, goddess. Her singular aim is to join Antony: "Husband, I come!" (5.2.287). The final tableau—regal queen seated on her throne—deliberately recalls the choreographed majesty of their meeting: "I am again for Cydnus / To meet Mark Antony" (5.2.228-29). Yet the peaceful, intimate atmosphere that pervades the scene as she nurses the asps at her breast suggests all domestic scenes of maternal bliss. Finally, Cleopatra is "serpent of old Nile," theatrically emblematizing the figure of a prepatriarchal goddess entwined with snakes.31

Shakespeare's representation of Cleopatra humanizes her, disrupting centuries of treatment of the legend of the two lovers. In Antony and Cleopatra women are most emphatically not as they are valued by men. More so than is true of any of Shakespeare's female protagonists, Cleopatra's estimation of herself is independent of male estimations of her. She forever eludes and defies delimiting Roman constructions of her and Egypt—Petrarchism, Ovidianism, and Orientalism. It is Cleopatra's theatrical subjectivity—the complete independence of her self-evaluation from their conflicting desire and repugnance for her—that accounts for her "infinite variety." Cleopatra is, literally, more than they can comprehend. She is an artist who "fashions out of her life a legend that is unfit for hearse or for Octavius' half-acre tombs." She dies instead seated on the throne of Egypt, and like the Isis of Egyptian iconography, she represents that throne. Her "place i' th' story" is beside the legendary figures who live in ancient myth. She is "another Thetis, an Isis, a Venus, a Dido," Ornstein concludes ([1966] 1967, 402-3). Indeed, Shakespeare's treatment of the legend of Cleopatra and Antony is richly reminiscent of the legend of Isis and Osiris, the prime myth of the goddess as redeemer from the prepatriarchal period. The goddess Isis—or Cleopatra—goes in quest of her lost lover Osiris—or Antony—and through her loyalty and descent into the realm of death—Octavius's Rome—recovers him. In Shakespeare's final representation in the love tragedies of the woman as regenerator, Cleopatra is a manifestation of a prepatriarchal goddess.

Notes
I find Edward Said's *Orientalism* useful in understanding Roman views of Egypt in the play. *Orientalism* is the word he uses to describe the construction of a colonized other, such as the Middle East, by an imperialistic culture, such as England, France, or the United States, to legitimate its own superiority. See, especially, his Introduction (1978, 1-28).

L. L. Schücking, in a "realistic" interpretation of Cleopatra's "double" character, reconciles the early wanton and the later tragic queen by posing the notion of her transformation (1922, 119-41); E. E. Stoll, reacting against "sentimental" views of Cleopatra, judges plot to be more important than character ([1930] 1958, 3-29); Stirling sees the play as a satire that denies the lovers' nobility (1956, 157-206); Dickey uses the same historical approach he uses with *Romeo and Juliet* to find a moral lesson in the excesses of passion (1957, 144-202); Whitaker follows Schücking in discovering a transformed Cleopatra at Antony's death (1965, 276-96); Mason denies any meaning to the love relationship, writing that "the interest aroused by Cleopatra at the end is too ideal" and that "she has ceased to be part and parcel of the real" (1970, 229-76).

Bradley believes in a "triumph which is more than reconciliation" ([1909] 1964); Knight sees in the play's "transcendental humanism" Shakespeare's sublest and greatest play ([1931] 1951, 199-342); John Middleton Murry says we cannot judge the play "as a record of action merely; if we do, its essence escapes our judgement" (1936, 294-318); Harold Goddard makes the point that Cleopatra deceives some readers as well as the Romans in the play as to her determination to die with her "husband" (1950, 2:184-308); John Dover Wilson emphasizes Antony's magnanimity and Cleopatra's glory ([1950] 1973); D. A. Traversi echoes Knight's interpretation that the lovers find not death but life in his view that "death becomes release" ([1956] 1969, 2:212-39).

See n. 1. I am indebted to Peter Stallybrass's and Allon White's distinctions between self and other, top and bottom, high and low, especially their views on the conflicting attraction and repulsion of the first in each set for the second (1986, 1-26).

Anyone familiar with this essay will recognize its influence on this chapter.

It is useful to note, in this connection, the kundalini system of psychic centers, or chakras, running up the spine. Early on, Antony would seem to be mired in the lower two centers, seats of the animal instincts for eating and reproduction. Throughout the course of the play he can be seen to evolve to the fourth center, at the level of the heart—seat of compassion and concern for the other rather than the self.


Goldman, Rackin, and Ornstein all emphasize the power of imaginative command in the play.

Again, although I do not wish to press the point, the link between this characterizing trait of Octavius and the third psychic center in the kundalini system—the seat of aggressiveness and the desire for dominance and power over others—is striking. See n. 6 above.

The similarity of Octavius's generalized sentiments on female "corruptibility" and those of Iago on female "appetite" links these two inflections of the Ovidian discursive tradition to one another.

Cf. Shakespeare's emblematized marriage ceremony when Othello and Iago kneel side by side at the conclusion of 3.3.
For a theatrical interpretation that emphasizes Octavius's genuine feeling for his sister, however, see Alan Dessen's review (1988) of the Peter Hall production at the National Theatre.

According to recent findings by archaeologists of prepatriarchal cultures, such as Marija Gimbutas, "the female principle was conceived as creative and eternal, the male as spontaneous and ephemeral" (1982 Women 29). I find that this differentiation has striking resemblances to Shakespeare's representation of gender difference.

Among Shakespeareans, see Neely (1985, 138) and Bamber (1982, 59-60) as well as Dusinberre for discussions of this gender difference in Antony and Cleopatra. I read Neely's chapter while revising mine for publication; although we arrived at our conclusions independently, our interpretations intersect at points.

"Women's jouissance carries with it the notion of fluidity, diffusion, duration. It is a kind of potlatch in the world of orgasms, a giving, expending, dispensing of pleasure without concern about ends or closure" (Marks and de Courtivron 1980, 36-37, n. 8). See also Kristeva (1980).

I find that my view of Antony's potential is akin to the materialist conception of subjectivity as articulated by Jonathan Dollimore. Insofar as subjectivity "retains the concept of essence," he says, it "construes it not as that which is eternally fixed but as social potential materialising within limiting historical conditions" (1984, 251).

The most stunning opening of this play I have seen is that of the 1988 Shakespeare/Santa Cruz production on the University of California campus, in which Cleopatra and Antony enter 1.1 crossdressed in the way Cleopatra describes. Her recollection is thus given material, symbolic weight in being theatrically enacted on stage in this way.

I do not mean that Antony takes up Cleopatra's use of a garment metaphor here; my point is that the verb, ride, in the sense of "to mount sexually," is conventionally used with a male, not a female subject. See Eric Partridge ([1948] 1969, 175).

I am here, as elsewhere, drawing on the work of Stallybrass and White, who, in turn, draw on Mikhail Bakhtin's distinctions between the classic and the grotesque. See, especially, their Introduction (1986, 1-26); see also Bakhtin (1968).

The relational and emotional sterility of Shakespeare's representation of Octavius contrasts, of course, with his representation of the lovers, but it is all the more striking in light of Roman projections of sexuality onto Cleopatra.

Cf. Othello's identity crisis—"Othello's occupation's gone" (Othello, 3.3.357)—which is prompted by the delusion of Desdemona's adultery.

It is difficult to understand how critics find evidence of her betrayal of Antony in her obvious dissembling with Thidias.

Indeed, Neely labels this passage Antony's "boldest declaration of passion in the play" (1985, 146).

See n. 14.

26 I am not unaware of the sarcasm of this sonnet. Indeed, it can be argued that it makes sense only if the lover does not love the speaker, and that the speaker is aware of this fact.

27 Even those critics who revile Cleopatra have not been able to ignore this passage; instead, they are forced to erect notions of two Cleopatras—one, a whore; the other, a tragic female protagonist. See n. 2. To other critics, those who would deny Cleopatra her subjectivity because "she dies for love," only the obvious can be pointed out: so does Antony. Desdemona dies for love, but so does Othello; Juliet dies for love, but so does Romeo. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that what is under attack here is any or all human affective affiliation, rather than strictly female affective affiliation.

28 See n. 14.


30 It may be true, as the Pelican edition notes, that when the Clown says, "his [the asp's] biting is immortal" (5.2.246), he means mortal, not immortal, and, further, that Cleopatra playfully takes up his malapropism: "I have / Immortal longings in me" (5.2.280). Consider, though, that the snake was the vehicle of immortality in prepatriarchal iconography, according to Gimbutas. "The involved ornamentation of Cucuteni and East Balkan ceramic painting is a symbolic glorification of nature's dynamism," she notes. "Its graphic expression is organized around the symbol of the snake, whose presence was a guarantee that nature's enigmatic cycle would be maintained and its life-giving powers not diminish" (1982 Goddesses 95).

31 The emblem of Cleopatra seated on her throne applying asps to her body bears striking resemblance to the artifacts of prepatriarchal Europe: "from the Early Neolithic to ancient Greece the snake appears in an anthropomorphic shape as a Snake Goddess," Gimbutas points out. "Her body is usually decorated with stripes or snake spirals, while her arms and legs are portrayed as snakes, or she is entwined by one or more snakes" (1982 Goddesses 101).

Works Cited


But what if the Devil, on the contrary, the Other, were the Same? And what if the Temptation was not one of the episodes of the great antagonism, but the mere insinuation of the Double? What if this duel developed in the space of the mirror?

Michel Foucault
This essay examines the relation between Elizabethan versions of Ovid's Narcissus myth and Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. In doing so, it may seem to tiptoe through that tired terrain which Stephen Greenblatt has termed "the elephants' graveyard of literary history"—source study. I do not intend to suggest that Shakespeare had read contemporary versions of the myth, although there are a number of telltale fingerprints in the play—borrowed phrases, motifs—suggesting this may have been the case. Rather I wish to use the tale of Narcissus to reread *Antony and Cleopatra* in a way that challenges orthodox understandings of gender difference in the play, in particular the status of Cleopatra as the quintessentially female object and origin of heterosexual desire—both the desire of her Roman suitors and, perhaps just as important, the desire of her heterosexual male spectators and readers, past and present. Hence this essay engages in "source" study of another kind: a critical reappraisal of the source of heterosexual eros in Elizabethan versions of the Narcissus myth as well as in Shakespeare's play.

I

Criticism of *Antony and Cleopatra* has repeatedly returned to Shakespeare's representations of Rome and Egypt, a topographical and cultural opposition that is undeniably central to the play. Much attention has been devoted to showing how, in contrast to Rome's "measure" and Lenten restraint, Egypt is represented as a land of excess in the thrall of an endless Bacchanal. What is perhaps most notable about many past accounts of the Rome/Egypt opposition, however, is the extent to which these accounts have also elaborated an absolute gender polarity or, more accurately, a gender hierarchy. Rome has been characterized as a male world, presided over by the austere Caesar, and Egypt as a female domain, embodied by a Cleopatra who is seen to be as abundant, leaky, and changeable as the Nile. Significantly, it is this changeability, manifest in her legendary "infinite variety" (2.2.236), that has prompted critics such as George Brandes to style Cleopatra somewhat negatively as "the woman of women, quintessentiated Eve." Within this disparaging assessment of Cleopatra as the archetype of a fallen femininity, there lurks a fascination with her as the irrepressible origin of male desire. For example, G. Wilson Knight's notorious observation that "Cleopatra and her girls at Alexandria are as the Eternal Femininity waiting for Man" is accompanied by the claim that she is "all romantic vision, the origin of love, the origin of life." Whether viewed as the wily perpetrator of original sin or the redemptive source of romantic love, Cleopatra has been cast within literary criticism as the Ur-Woman, the archetypally female origin of male heterosexual eros.

Not surprisingly, more recent criticism has taken issue with such sexist interpretations of Cleopatra and her "quintessentiated" femininity. In the wake of feminist, poststructuralist, and cultural-materialist critiques of gender essentialism, most modern Shakespeare scholars are inclined to be far more skeptical about claims that Shakespeare possessed a unique insight into a timeless "femininity." Nevertheless, despite the historicizing impulse that has rescued Cleopatra from the negative pole of an oppressively essentialist gender opposition, much criticism continues to abide by the gendered topographical binaries that dominate romantic and formalist interpretations of the play. In a powerful reading that undermines many of the conventional assumptions about Cleopatra's "femininity," Janet Adelman claims, for example, that "the contest between Caesar and Cleopatra, Rome and Egypt, is in part a contest between male scarcity and female bounty." Leonard Tennenhouse asserts that "Cleopatra is Egypt," and that by virtue of her difference from patriarchal Roman "measure," "she embodies everything that is not English according to the nationalism which developed under Elizabeth as well as to the British nationalism later fostered by James. . . . She contrasts Egyptian fecundity, luxury and hedonism to Rome's penury, harshness and self denial." I would argue that the play is far less secure in asserting the differences that Adelman's and Tennenhouse's assessments seem to uphold. While Cleopatra may appear to incarnate everything exotic and bountifully "feminine," the play suggests at crucial moments that the relationships between Egypt and Rome, Cleopatra and Antony, are less ones of opposition than of specularity—a specularity that, as we shall see, parallels and even critically interrogates the historically specific relation between the Cleopatra of the play's first performances and her Jacobean audience.
Instances of specularity recur throughout the play. Gnaeus Pompey "would stand and make his eyes grow in . . . [Cleopatra's] brow" (1.5.2); Caesar fills the front line of his army with deserters from Antony's army, so that the latter would "seem to spend his fury / Upon himself (4.6.10-11); the defeated Antony sees himself reflected in the changing clouds of the Egyptian sky (4.14.1-14); the triumphant Caesar glimpses himself in the "spacious mirror" of Antony's demise (5.1.33). The self-scrutinizing gaze of Rome's triumvirs is thus obliquely but suggestively aligned with that of Narcissus, rapt in contemplation of his reflection on the surface of Ovid's spring. Yet critics have more customarily, albeit indirectly, associated Narcissus with Cleopatra and her quintessential "femininity." If essentialist interpretations have regarded Cleopatra's lack of coherent selfhood, her inconstancy, as characteristic of her "sex," there has also been a paradoxical tendency to emphasize her excessive love of self as a uniquely "feminine" quality. For example, Anna Jameson in 1832 noted "her consistent inconsistency" yet lambasted her "love of self." Likewise, Schlegel noted Cleopatra's narcissistic "royal pride [and] female vanity." A. C. Bradley drew attention to Cleopatra's "comic vanity" in the tirade against the messenger, which contains the play's one explicit reference to Narcissus: "Hadst thou Narcissus in thy face, to me / Thou wouldst appear most ugly" (2.5.96-97). Cleopatra invokes Narcissus here primarily to contrast his surpassing beauty with the ugliness of the messenger's shocking news about Antony's marriage to Octavia; but the allusion serves also as a sly reminder of Cleopatra's own narcissism, displayed in her insistence earlier in the scene that the messenger tell her only what she wants to hear, even if it deviates from the truth. She berates the messenger precisely because he does not have Narcissus in his face: he has failed to reflect her desire.

Curiously, however, other moments in the play suggest that Cleopatra has less in common with Narcissus than with his reflection. When Enobarbus says of her "she makes hungry / Where most she satisfies" (2.2.237-38), he reprises an important motif in early modern English versions of the Narcissus myth. In Ovid's text Narcissus stares hungrily at his reflection in the spring and, trying in vain to kiss it, utters "inopem me copia fecit"—"My very plenty makes me poor" (Metamorphoses III, 1. 466). Tudor and Stuart writers reworked this line to emphasize the thirst or hunger-inducing insubstantiality of the narcissistic reflection. Edmund Spenser compared his own gaze to that of "Narcissus vaine / whose eyes him staru'd: so plenty makes me poore." In Henry Reynolds's 1630 Mythomystes, Narcissus is described as growing "thirsty as his thirst he slakes." And in Thomas Edwards's 1595 poem "Narcissus," to which I shall soon return in greater detail, Narcissus complains of his reflection that "Neuer the greedie Tantalus pursued, / To touch those seeming apples more than I." Cleopatra is thus accorded by Enobarbus the paradoxical power of the narcissistic reflection—like the reflection, she is depicted as possessing both an ineluctable power to "make hungry" and a frustrating insubstantiality. To this extent Cleopatra may appear to conform to the conventional misogynist archetype of the "hard-to-get" temptress, an assessment endorsed by critics like Knight with his reading of Cleopatra as the "Eternal Femininity waiting for Man." But I shall argue that the identification of Cleopatra with the hunger-inducing satisfaction of the narcissistic reflection generates resonances that seriously disrupt the essentialist perception of her as the "Eternal Femininity."

II

The motif of the hunger-inducing reflection was just one feature of the many appropriations of the Narcissus myth in early modern England. In addition to Arthur Golding's English translation of Ovid's entire Metamorphoses in 1567, there were a number of versions of the tale in wide circulation before 1630. Most united in condemning Narcissus for his pride; he was, according to both the 1560 anonymous translator and Richard Brathwayte in his poem "Narcissus Change" (1611), guilty of a hubris comparable to Lucifer's. Significantly, such conventional attacks on pride were often made to serve a Neoplatonic critique of appearances: Henry Reynolds inveighed against Narcissus's reflection as a "deceiptfull shadow" "the transitory thinges of this world are not to be trusted," argued the author of the 1560 translation. For these writers, therefore, Narcissus's crime was less self-love than the fatal overvaluation of a mere reflection; he misrecognized surface for depth, an image for the real thing, an effect for the source. As Reynolds remarked in his version of the tale, Narcissus mistook the "deceiptfull shadow" of his reflection for a "sun-beame,"
oxymoronic juxtaposition that highlights his debilitating confusion of origin and effect.

For writers like Reynolds, Echo—the disembodied nymph spurned by Narcissus—assumed allegorical importance not only as the authentic and legitimate object of a heterosexual desire opposed to Narcissus's self-rapture but also as the representative of a cosmic origin opposed to "deceiptfull shadow": "adore Ecco," Reynolds commanded his readers. "This Winde is the Symbole of the Breath of God."²⁵ As Barry Taylor remarks in his excellent study of Neoplatonism and the Narcissus myth in early modern England, "Echo represents the 'reflex' of the image produced in the mind by the breath of God, which conduces to intellectual unity and the direction of the soul's parts towards God. Narcissus, on the contrary, is the soul which denies this process and attends instead to the reflection supplied by the sense and 'corporeal shadows.'"²⁶ In symbolizing the Neoplatonic origin, Echo offers the "possibility of a re-engagement with truth through the restoration of a heterosexual mutuality which stands for all forms of 'natural' relationship."²⁶ Within the Neoplatonic interpretation of Ovid's tale, therefore, Echo functions powerfully as a twin figure of legitimacy: she is the cosmically sanctioned origin of both "true" understanding and "natural" male heterosexual eros.

The Neoplatonic understanding of Narcissus's crime is partially evident also in Thomas Edwards's 1595 "Narcissus," which is a somewhat elliptic rewriting of the story as it appears in Metamorphoses. Edwards's Narcissus is not the antisocial Sylvan solipsist of Ovid's poem; instead he is an urban sex-tease who plays it fast and loose and is proud of his substantial wardrobe. Narcissus, who narrates most of the poem, is accosted by a never ending stream of suitors, both male and female. He accepts jewels and garments as gifts from them and, in the process, undergoes a curious transformation: "like a lover glad of each new toy," he exclaims, "So I a woman turned from a boy."²⁷ When Edwards's Narcissus stares into the spring, therefore, he falls prey to a double misrecognition. He follows Ovid's protagonist in believing his reflection to be substantial, but he parts company with the classical Narcissus in also believing it to be a woman: "my lips hers to have touched, / I forc'd them forward, and my head down crouched."²⁸ Narcissus perceives his reflection to be not only female but also spellbindingly exotic. He compares his discovery to that of "the English globe-incompasser" Francis Drake, who "by same purueying found another land." In a fascinating variation on the paradoxical Ovidian motif of riches coupled with poverty, satiety with hunger, the intensity of Narcissus's gaze serves to deprive him of sight: in a further development of the trope of the European witness in the New World, he declares himself to have been struck blind by "gazing on this Orient sunne."²⁹ The confusion of reflection and celestial source hinted at here is made explicit with Edwards's oxymoronic description of Narcissus's image (reminiscent of Reynolds's yoking of "deceiptfull shadow" and "sun-beame") as a "Sun-shine-shadow."³⁰ This disjunction serves to underline Edwards's Neoplatonic interpretation of Narcissus's crime as a failure to recognize the "true" source of his desire: Narcissus himself is the "sun" that produces the image on the spring's surface.

In directing attention to Narcissus as the source, Edwards deviates from other Neoplatonic versions of the myth in that he notably fails to include Echo in his tale. Thus the customary Neoplatonic redress to Echo as the origin of legitimate heterosexual desire and allegorical incarnation of "the breath of God" is also omitted. In the process Edwards invites a subtly different understanding of the source of male heterosexual eros: in the world of his poem, the "real thing" is neither Echo nor any female object of desire but Narcissus himself, "a woman turned from a boy." His "heterosexual" desire, therefore, is in a crucial sense homoeroticized, its origin and object disclosed as male. Edwards's Narcissus eventually understands his predicament. But unlike Ovid's Narcissus, for whom the realization that he has fallen in love with his own reflection proves fatal, Edwards's protagonist remains very much alive, musing wistfully and not particularly repentantly on the nature of his self-love.

Edwards's poem contains three important motifs: the projection of Narcissus's own sunlike qualities onto the surface of the spring; the misrecognition of the reflection as female and exotic; and the abrupt realization that this seductive image is, in fact, a reflection of a male source. As I shall show, all these motifs may be discerned in Antony and Cleopatra. Like Edwards's poem, that play stages an orientalist discourse of the
Other which blatantly problematizes itself in the process of elaboration, revealing its "exotic" object of "heterosexual" desire to be a chimera conjured up and misrecognized by the narcissistic male gaze. Just as Edwards's Narcissus discovers that "this Orient Sunne" has an occidental origin, so do the Romans who kiss "this orient pearl" (1.5.41)—one of the play's many metonymies for Cleopatra's erotic power—find themselves desiring something far closer to home.

### III

Roman desire is characterized by contradiction in a number of ways. In terms of the opposition between Egypt and Rome, desire is more obviously an attribute of the former: it is to be expected of Egypt and its voluptuous citizens, who "trade in love" (2.5.2), but not of Lenten Rome and its "cold and still conversation" (2.6.120), exemplified by Octavia. Yet when it comes to Cleopatra, Roman desire is seemingly uncontainable. She is the object of a lingering fascination that has ensnared Julius Caesar, Gnaeus Pompey, and Mark Antony alike. What are we to make of this history of desire? Is it enough to assert, as numerous critics have done over the centuries, that Cleopatra's desirability is simply so transcendentally enormous that Rome's normally sober rulers cannot help but be bowled over by her "infinite variety"? Or does the play suggest that there is something in the very structure of Roman desire itself which produces Cleopatra as desirable?

Near the beginning of the play, Octavius Caesar accounts for the rebellious Sextus Pompey's immense popular support with the following speech:

> It hath been taught us from the primal state,  
> That he which is was wish'd until he were;  
> And the ebb'd man, ne'er loved till ne'er worth love,  
> Comes dear'd by being lack'd.

(1.4.41-44)

The sense of this rather difficult passage becomes clear in the last line. It is part of received Roman wisdom that desire is linked to the object's absence: Romans want only what they do not or cannot have. Sextus Pompey, precisely because he lacks power, has become desirable as an alternative to the present Roman leadership. The speech Antony makes after hearing of his hated wife Fulvia's death expresses precisely this law of Roman desire:

> There's a great spirit gone! Thus did I desire it:  
> What our contempts doth often hurl from us,  
> We wish it ours again; the present pleasure,  
> By revolution lowering, does become  
> The opposite of itself: she's good, being gone:  
> The hand could pluck her back that shov'd her on.

(1.2.119-24)

As with the Roman plebeians' desire for Pompey, Antony's attraction to Fulvia is triggered by her absence—by the fact that he does not, cannot, have her: "she's good, being gone." He suffers the same mood swing upon receiving the (inaccurate) news that Cleopatra has died: a mere twenty lines after denouncing her as a "vile lady" who has "robb'd" him of his sword (4.14.22-23), he contemplates suicide in order to "o'ertake . . . Cleopatra, and / Weep for . . . pardon" (11. 44-45); he even fantasizes "couch[ing]" with her in the Elysian fields (1. 51). If Roman desire emerges in response to an absence it attempts to fill or repudiate, it can be seen to parallel the Renaissance axiom "Nature abhors a Vacuum," alluded to in Enobarbus's account of Antony's first meeting with Cleopatra, when Cleopatra was so desirable that even the air "but for vacancy, / Had gone
to gaze on Cleopatra too, / And madē a gap in nature" (2.2.216-18). This fantastic "gap in nature" provides an enabling figure for the intolerable vacuum into which Roman desire imperially projects itself. But what do Romans see when they project their desire into such gaps?

The answer to which the play repeatedly gestures is that the desiring Roman gaze fixes on a reflection, or projection, of itself. Like Narcissus, the spectator misrecognizes himself (or his image) as Other. Maecenas, noting the grief that Antony's death paradoxically prompts in Caesar, exclaims, "When such a spacious mirror's set before him, / He must needs see himself (5.1.34-35; emphasis added); within the space created by Antony's absence, in other words, Caesar supplies his own image and, seemingly mourning Antony, grieves for himself. Caesar here conforms to the law of Roman desire, wanting what he cannot have, in at least two ways. Like Antony grieving for the much-despised Fulvia upon her death, Caesar's hand would pluck him back that shoved him on. But Maecenas's observation about the "spacious mirror" into which Caesar gazes suggests that, like Narcissus, Caesar also wants the paradigmatic instance of what he cannot have—his reflection, mis-recognized as an ontologically discrete entity.

A comparable if comic misrecognition of the projected self as Other within the "spacious mirror" of absence is Lepidus's drunken perception of the Egyptian crocodile:

LEPIDUS What manner o' thing is your crocodile?
ANTONY It is shap'd, sir, like itself; and it is as broad as it hath breadth: it is just so high as it is, and moves with its own organs: it lives by that which nouriseth it; and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates.
LEPIDUS What colour is it of?
ANTONY Of its own colour too.
LEPIDUS 'Tis a strange serpent.
ANTONY 'Tis so. And the tears of it are wet.

(2.7.40-48)

What does Lepidus see? Antony's litany of tautologies creates a "gap in nature" where the crocodile should be and Lepidus's "'Tis a strange serpent" suggests that he fills the space with his mind's eye. Lepidus's apprehension of the crocodile may serve as a comic diversion, but it is also far more than that: the manner in which he sees the "strange serpent" is how Rome "sees" Cleopatra. This is no mere analogy. Cleopatra is very much implicated in the exchange between Antony and Lepidus. Indeed, for all his tautologous nonsense, Antony could well be describing Cleopatra: not simply because Lepidus's remark recalls Antony's familiar name for "my serpent of the old Nile" (1.5.25); nor because the reference to the crocodile's tears may suggest Cleopatra's willingness to pretend a sadness she does not feel (see 1.3.3-5); but primarily because it is the crocodile's very vacancy that associates it with Cleopatra or, at least, with the way in which Roman desire takes her as its object.

This assertion may seem paradoxical given that Cleopatra is traditionally praised for being the most vivid, alive, and present of Shakespeare's female creations. The play indisputably invites us to regard Cleopatra as an authentic character, tragically misunderstood by her Roman suitors: "Not know me yet?" she asks Antony after he has subjected her to a torrent of perhaps undeserved recrimination (3.13.158). Her question provides a salutary reminder of the gulf that separates Roman (mis)characterizations of her and the "real" Cleopatra presented to us in, for example, her exchanges with Mardian, Charmian, and Iras. Moreover, this "real" Cleopatra possesses a vitality that is in large part the effect of the constant reminders the playtext gives us of that irreducible residue of presence, her body. Whether it is the carnal tang of her remarks ("Now I feed myself/ With most delicious poison" [1.5.26-27]; "Ram thou thy fruitful tidings in mine ears" [2.5.24]) or the abundance of stage directions the text gives her ("embracing" Antony [1.1.37]; "striking" or "haling up and down" the messenger [2.5.61, 62, 64]), her insistent, melodramatic physicality lends her a seemingly
undeniable presence. More than any other of the play's characters, Cleopatra is "in thy face," possessed of a corporeality that seems to cry out for recognition.

But such reminders of her physicality are supplemented by a counter-narrative in which her very vividness is shown to be the effect of a Roman desire for her presence, prompted by the gaps and absences that repeatedly afflict the play's attempts to represent her. A. C. Bradley once expressed a wish to "hear her [Cleopatra's] own remarks" about his analysis.35 His wistful desire to obtain an "authentic" Cleopatra replicates a desire that the play itself repeatedly expresses and frustrates. For all of Cleopatra's undeniable corporeality, her body has an odd habit of disappearing altogether at precisely those moments when it seems most overwhelmingly present.

Think, for example, of Enobarbus's account of Cleopatra on the river Cydnus, which is often cited as proof of Cleopatra's intoxicating desirability.36 Enobarbus paints a portrait of a world in which subjection to imperial power is subjection to erotic desire: Cleopatra's pages are Cupids, and even the winds that follow her are lovesick. In a manner that recalls Elizabethan notions of the power exerted by the sovereign's displayed body, Cleopatra's power appears to be predicated on the visibility of her eroticized body to her subjects, who abandon all activity to gaze on her.37 But what do her subjects see? Because Enobarbus is known for the plainness of his speech (Pompey commends it at 2.6.78), it is easy to neglect the way in which his rhetoric actively and ingeniously produces Cleopatra as desirable only according to the Roman logic of desire: that is, she exerts a seductive power by virtue of her paradoxical absence within Enobarbus's depiction of her.

Enobarbus presents a wealth of detail in the opening lines of his account. He describes the deck, the sails, even the river water that, "amorous" of the oarsmen's strokes (2.2.197), caresses Cleopatra's barge. The detail is profoundly synaesthetic; the purple sails are "perfumed" (1. 193), and the procession is accompanied by the "tune of flutes" (1. 195). But when Enobarbus comes to describe Cleopatra herself, he is remarkably vague:

For her own person,
It beggar'd all description: she did lie
In her pavilion—cloth of gold, of tissue—
O'er-picturing that Venus where we see
The fancy outwork nature.

(11. 197-201)

Here is little or no detail of "her own person." Unlike the objects around her, Cleopatra "beggar[s] all description." Enobarbus's reference to the portrait of Venus only underlines Cleopatra's "O'er-picturing" unrepresentability: her "cloth of gold" thus encloses what is effectively a "gap in nature." The speech serves as a rhetorical counterpart of a rococo mirror, its extraordinarily ornate and copious frame enclosing a subtly camouflaged glass in which Enobarbus's Roman listeners glimpse whatever they want to see. Just as Antony's nondescription of the crocodile provides Lepidus with the "spacious mirror" in which he glimpses a "strange serpent," so does Enobarbus's nondescription of Cleopatra allow Agrippa to imagine a "rare Egyptian!" (1. 218). Agrippa thus conforms to the law of Roman desire, filling a "gap in nature" with a phantom that compensates for and repudiates Cleopatra's absence. Little wonder that "she makes hungry, / Where most she satisfies." If she is an "Egyptian dish," as Enobarbus calls her (2.7.122-29), she is a food that curiously vanishes at the moment she appears to be most vividly apprehended by her Roman gazers; in effect, she is the "vacancy" that Antony fills with "his voluptuousness" (1.4.26).

IV

The Romans play Narcissus not only when looking on Cleopatra.39 The narcissistic component of their desire is also hinted at in Octavius's description of his namesake and sister as one "whom no brother / Did ever love so dearly" (2.2.150-51) and as "a great part of myself (3.2.24). He uses much the same language in eulogizing
Antony: gazing into the "spacious mirror" of Antony's absence, Caesar grieves for "my brother, my competitor, / In top of all design; my mate in empire, / Friend and companion in the front of war, / The arm of mine own body" (5.1.42-45). Antony's revealing transformation by Caesar from "brother" to "mate" and, finally, "arm of mine own body" shows that the desire initiated in Antony and Cleopatra by the narcissistic reflection need not only be heterosexual.

Caesar's eulogy for Antony provides a point of departure for a consideration of both the play's depiction of male homosocial and homoerotic desire and also the extent to which the two may overlap. As Bruce Smith has remarked, Shakespeare portrays in Antony and Cleopatra "a dramatic universe in which the male protagonists find their identities, not in romantic love or in philosophical ideals, but in their relationships with each other."40 Such relationships in the play often conform straightforwardly to the triangular structure of homosociality described by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: women mediate between (Roman) men as exchangeable commodities, and in a fashion that intensifies the bonds of friendship or rivalry between the men. As female commodities of exchange, Cleopatra and Octavia—for all their differences—find an unlikely common ground. Octavia's position in the homosocial triangle is transparent: for Octavius Caesar and Antony, she is a token of exchange whose primary purpose is to "knit [their] hearts / With an unslipping knot" (2.2.126-28). Cleopatra serves a comparable function as she is exchanged among Rome's rulers as a "morsel for a monarch" (1.5.31); despite the strength she appears to wield within such transactions, that strength is called into question by the play's final emphasis on Octavius Caesar, for whom she is primarily a spoil of war whose acquisition and public display would attest to his victory over Antony.

Sedgwick claims that in modern Western culture the continuum between male homosocial and homosexual desire is "criss-crossed with deep discontinuities."41 But it seems to me that relations between Roman men in Antony and Cleopatra repeatedly open up the possibility of slippage from the homosocial to the homosexual. This is especially true in the play's depiction of the Roman triumvirate, a version of the homosocial triangle in which Lepidus plays the part normally reserved for the mediating woman: "[H]earts, tongues, figures, scribes, bards, poets cannot / Think, speak, cast, write, sing, number, hoo! / His [Lepidus's] love to Antony. But as for Caesar, / Kneel down, kneel down, and wonder." To Enobarbus's mocking words, Agrippa replies, "Both he loves." Enobarbus goes on to describe Lepidus's function in the triumvirate with a richly suggestive image: he claims that Antony and Caesar are Lepidus's "shards, and he their beetle" (3.2.16-20)—that is, they are the wings that carry the beetle aloft. Like Octavia, Lepidus holds together the feuding rivals. In the process, he is feminized: Enobarbus describes him as suffering from "green-sickness," or love-anemia (3.2.6)—the conventional ailment of virginal maidens—pining, as does Octavia, for both of the men. Act 3, scene 2, provides an illuminating instance of Antony and Cleopatra's treatment of homosocial rivalry and its homoerotic underbelly. While it may be countered that Enobarbus's mocking of Lepidus marks an attempt to assert a discontinuity between legitimately "masculine" homosocial bonding/rivalry and comically "feminine" homosexual love-anemia, it is important to note that the homoerotic impulses attributed derisively to Lepidus are not confined to him, as Caesar's remarkable eulogy for Antony, with its transition from "brother" to "mate," indicates. In erotic triangles where men mediate between men, homosocial and homosexual desires become endearingly substitutable; the difference asserted by Enobarbus between the "beetle" and the "shards," the slowly insect and the soaring wings that elevate it, surely points to a difference of power rather than desire. Both Caesar and Lepidus love Antony; in doing so, both are characterized as desiring a part of their own bodies (be it "shard" or "arm"); both thus participate within the same economy of narcissistic desire glimpsed in Caesar's loving tribute to his sister as "a great part of myself."

The homoerotic dynamic that informs the bonds between the members of the Roman triumvirate provides, I would argue, a template for all Roman desire in Antony and Cleopatra—even desire that is putatively "heterosexual." It is here that Thomas Edwards's "Narcissus" comes in handy as a device for decoding the origins of Roman desire. As I have suggested above, Edward's poem offers three motifs through which the homoerotic origins of Narcissus's "heterosexual" desire are articulated: the projection and/or displacement of his attributes onto the reflective surface of the spring; the misrecognition of this reflection as female; and,
finally, the recognition that his object of adoration is the reflection of a male source, is a "woman turned from a boy." All three motifs find suggestive counterparts in Shakespeare's representations of the ways in which Roman desire takes Cleopatra as its object.

The first motif—the projection and/or displacement of the desiring subject's attributes onto the object of desire—is evident in Cleopatra's accounts of her lovemaking with Antony and Gnaeus Pompey. If Cleopatra is associated by Enobarbus with the hunger-inducing insubstantiality of the narcissistic reflection, she herself confirms the suggestion that Romans play Narcissus when gazing at her. She recalls how, after a night of Bacchanalian revelry with Antony, she "drank him to his bed; / Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst / I wore his sword Phillipan" (2.5.21-23). This cheerfully kinky episode involves far more than an instance of the carnivalesque gender inversion customarily identified with Shakespeare's Egypt. The effeminated Antony, Cleopatra implies, is aroused by his own Phillipan-packing reflection—an autoerotic adventure that in its exquisite narcissism surely demands to be seen as less typically Egyptian than Roman.

An equally revealing insight into the origin and object of Roman desire is afforded by Cleopatra's description of Gnaeus Pompey. As I have already noted, she styles him as a Narcissus staring at and erotically aroused by his own misrecognized reflection:

. . great Pompey
    Would stand and make his eyes grow in my brow,
    There would he anchor his aspect, and die
    With looking on his life.

(1.4.31-34)

What is remarkable about Cleopatra's description of Gnaeus Pompey is its deployment and transformation of standard Ovidian motifs. We find here not only an arresting image of narcissistic self-contemplation but also an eroticized version of the paradoxical "inopem me copia fecit" tag: Pompey's apprehension of his "life" is the occasion for his erotic "death." Most evident in her description, however, is the projection of Pompey's own attributes onto Cleopatra. The more he looks at her, the more he manifests himself in her face, as is implied by the perverse suggestion that his eyes grow in her forehead. As a result of this specular encounter, Cleopatra indeed has "Narcissus in [her] face."42

The transformation of Cleopatra wrought by Antony's and Pompey's narcissistic desire brings to mind Slavoj Žižek's gloss on Lacan's infamous claim that woman is a symptom of man: "so, if woman does not exist, man is perhaps simply a woman who thinks she does exist." 43 Žižek's proposal is perfectly illustrated by Edwards's Narcissus, who becomes "a woman turned from a boy," believing his object of desire to be female. The same is true, of course, for Antony, who simultaneously displaces his own attributes onto Cleopatra and is effeminated. It is here that the second motif from Edwards's "Narcissus"—the desiring subject's conviction that his (misrecognized) reflection is female—may be discerned. The Romans' narcissistic perceptions of Cleopatra prompt a critical reevaluation of those very qualities that audiences and readers have not only attributed to her but also believed to be representative of an "Eternal Femininity." Her allegedly "female" attributes demand in many instances to be understood as displaced or misrecognized Roman characteristics. A particularly good example is Cleopatra's much-noted "infinite variety." The impression of her "variety" is in part created by the panoply of subject-positions she is accorded by the alternately desiring and disgusted Antony: "enchanting queen" (1.2.125); "my chuck" (4.4.2); "my nightingale" (4.8.18); "Triple-turn'd whore," "grave charm," "right gipsy" (4.12.13, 25, 28). Cleopatra's "variety" provides the specular image—is, in many respects, the very effect—of Antony's own. His displacement onto her of his own vacillations exemplifies Catherine Belsey's observation that Tudor and Stuart patriarchal ideology denied women "any single place from which to speak for themselves"; in the process, women acquired "a discontinuity of being, an 'inconstancy' which [was] seen as characteristically feminine."44
The process of narcissistic displacement which informs the Roman construction of Cleopatra's contradictory "feminine" identity may be discerned in a number of other plays from the Jacobean stage. Perhaps the best example is provided by John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, a play whose deployment of motifs from the Narcissus myth is hinted at in the Cardinal's weary lament at the play's conclusion: "When I look in the fishponds, / Methinks I see a thing arm'd with a rake / That seems to strike at me" (5.3.3-5).

This speech provides the paradigmatic instance of the way in which the play's powerful characters apprehend and/or misrecognize their own reflections as evil forces distinct from them. In particular, Ferdinand, the tyrannical duke of Calabria, attacks his own shadow at the climax of his lycanthropic madness (5.2.38), and he repeatedly displaces his own attributes onto the Duchess, his twin sister, misconstruing them as her distinctively "feminine" vices. She acquires for him the deceptive and salacious qualities that he is incapable of recognizing in himself: he warns her that "they whose faces do belie their hearts / Are witches . . . and give the devil suck," an inadvertent self-description that the Duchess acknowledges with her wry response, "This is terrible good counsel" (1.2.230-32). Ferdinand's projection of his vices onto his sister is most manifest, perhaps, when he accuses her of possessing a heart "Fill'd with unquenchable wild fire" (3.2.117) a mere two scenes after he has insanely fantasized raping her to "quench [his] wild-fire" (2.5.48). When read alongside the narcissistic projections of *Antony and Cleopatra*, these instances offer a remarkable disclosure of the unacknowledged masculine sources of "female" identity in Jacobean patriarchal ideology.

But where *The Duchess of Malfi* appears to offer its audiences and readers a genuine "flesh, and blood" protagonist (1.2.369) who counters her brother's narcissistic projections, *Antony and Cleopatra* in at least one way defers indefinitely any apprehension of an authentic Cleopatra. We are, to some extent, invited to distinguish between the Cleopatra that is a Roman projection and the "real" Cleopatra who stands in seeming contrast to male images of her. By encouraging this distinction, Shakespeare would appear to be reworking a theme found in his earlier comedies: the conflict between female characters as they are perceived by their male counterparts and as they present themselves to their audiences. Consider, for example, the much-scornced Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, transfigured by Demetrius's love-potioned gaze into "goddess, nymph, perfect, divine!" (3.2.137); or the homely Luciana in *The Comedy of Errors*, mistaken by her "brother-in-law" Antipholus of Syracuse as a "sweet mermaid" and "siren" (3.2.45, 47). What distinguishes *Antony and Cleopatra* from these earlier plays is the way in which it places a question mark next to the "reality" of the Cleopatra whom we are encouraged to dissociate from the projections of her Roman suitors.

Crucially, it is not only Mark Antony or Gnaeus Pompey who mistakenly believe themselves to see the "real" Cleopatra when "looking on" their own lives. In the last act the relationship between Cleopatra and her spectators is reworked in a way that, like the dénouement of Thomas Edwards's "Narcissus," serves to complicate the status of the seemingly exotic, apparently female object of desire on display to the audience. Cleopatra expresses revulsion at the prospect of being transformed in one of Caesar's Roman triumphs into a degraded object of spectacle. But she goes even further—she claims to abhor above all the notion of being represented on the stage: "The quick comedians / Extemporally will stage us . . . and I shall see / Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / I' the posture of a whore" (5.2.215-20). On the Jacobean stage the boy-actor playing Cleopatra was here called upon to express disgust at the prospect of seeing a boy-actor playing Cleopatra. Such self-reflexivity cannot help but achieve an effect similar to that created by Enobarbus in his description of Cleopatra on the river Cydnus: in each instance "she" becomes curiously disembodied, an effect generated by her absence. Unlike Enobarbus's accomplished rhetorical sleight of hand, Cleopatra's reference to the "squeaking Cleopatra boy" blatantly discloses the artifice of the "authentic" queen.

Indeed, the above speech may at first glance strike the reader as one instance of an "alienation effect" all too common on the Shakespearean stage. Attempting to guess a Jacobean audience's response (if there ever is such a thing as a unified response) to the speech is, of course, a treacherous task. But I think it fair to assume that this moment of theatrical self-reflexivity—at least in its early performances—differs from others largely because of its capacity to interrogate an audience and its desires. If alienation effects frequently empower spectators by comforting them with the reminder that what they are watching is simply a play, *Antony and Cleopatra*
Cleopatra's moment of self-reflection could have had an altogether more challenging effect on its Jacobean audience. With this episode the third motif from Thomas Edwards's poem—Narcissus's realization that the origin and object of his desire is a "woman turned from a boy"—finds a powerful parallel. Like Edwards's Narcissus, who abruptly realizes that the woman he sees in the spring is his own reflection, the play's earliest audiences were confronted with an unavoidable reminder of how the surpassingly seductive Egyptian Queen on whom they had been gazing was, like many of them, English and male.

V

Cleopatra, the "serpent of the Nile," is coded in terms that make her legible as a threatening Other to both Roman and Jacobean body politics. But the play also unleashes a series of potentially subversive images of Cleopatra as the same. "Hush, here comes Antony," Enobarbus announces early in the play—only to have his vocalized stage direction flatly contradicted by the apparition of Cleopatra: "Not he, the queen," Charmian retorts (1.2.76). Enobarbus's misrecognition is symptomatic. Here and at other crucial moments, Cleopatra not only lacks the absolute gender and racial alterity that her audiences and readers, as well as her Roman suitors, have ascribed to her; like the radiant reflection that Edwards's Narcissus beholds, she is shown to be no "Orient sunne" herself but literally an image of another male sun: "Think on me," Cleopatra declaims, "That am with Phoebus' amorous pinches black / And wrinkled deep in time" (1.5.27-29). Cleopatra here provides a telling figure for how she is fashioned by (and out of) the animating "sunshine" of her European male lovers, fashioned ultimately—as her speech about the boy Cleopatra reveals—from the same matter as her theatrical spectators. Poor old Lepidus may, after all, have hit the nail on the head when he drunkenly tells Antony: "your serpent of Egypt is bred now of your mud by the operation of your sun. So is your crocodile" (2.7.26-27; emphasis added). In his unwitting but suggestive adaptation of the Neoplatonic figure of the sun as origin, together with his use of the colloquial indefinite your, Lepidus inadvertently provides yet another reminder of the way in which Antony and Cleopatra offers a compelling and sustained critique of the origin of male heterosexual eros. Like Edwards's "Narcissus," Lepidus's speech deviates from conventional Neoplatonic accounts of desire in hinting that the play's primary "feminine" object and origin of desire, the "serpent of the Nile," is no Ur-Woman but the specular image of a sun that is yours—a term that, in its second-person inclusivity, may be taken as addressing not only the male "suns" of Gnaeus Pompey, Julius Caesar, and Antony but also the "infinite variety" of those Narcissuses—spectators, readers, and critics—who have found themselves in thrall to their own seductive images of "Cleopatra."

Notes

A version of this essay was prepared for the 1994 Northeast MLA conference panel "Shakespeare's Erotic Economies." I am grateful to the panel chair, Heather Findlay, and Alan Sinfield, Michael Neill, and Charles Mahoney for their comments and critiques over the course of this essay's long gestation.


3 Both old and new criticisms have abided by this basic opposition. For an instance of the former, see George Brandes, William Shakespeare: A Critical Study, trans. William Archer, Mary Morison, and Diana White (London, 1902): "Just as Antony's ruin results from his connection with Cleopatra, so does the fall of the
Roman Republic result from the contact of the simple hardihood of the West with the luxury of the East. Antony is Rome. Cleopatra is the Orient" (475). Modern feminist readings of the play informed by psychoanalytic perspectives have critically reevaluated the topographical opposition—and the gender opposition with which it has often been complicit—without necessarily disturbing it. Janet Adelman, for example, construes the opposition between Rome and Egypt as a struggle between "male scarcity and female bounty" in _Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays_, Hamlet to The Tempest (New York, 1992), 177; see also her earlier study, _The Common Liar: An Essay on Antony and Cleopatra_ (New Haven, CT, 1973). Edward Said's critique of European orientalism has enabled powerful analyses of the opposition's complicity with early modern colonialist discourse; see, for example, Ania Loomba, _Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama_ (Manchester, UK, 1989): "in colonialist discourse, the conquered land is often explicitly endowed with feminine characteristics in contrast to the masculine attributes of the coloniser. . . . All Egyptians, represented and symbolised by their queen, are associated with feminine and primitive attributes—they are irrational, sensuous, lazy and superstitious" (78-79).

4 Brandes, 462. The tendency of critics in the first half of the twentieth century to view Cleopatra and Antony's relationship as an agon that has mythic analogues in the tales of Venus and Mars or Omphale and Hercules has doubtless contributed to the critical willingness to view both characters as archetypes of their sexes. For a summary of such archetypal readings of _Antony and Cleopatra_, see Spevack, ed., 655-60. Feminist criticism of the play has questioned Cleopatra's archetypal "femininity": Janet Adelman, for instance, argues that Cleopatra is not simply Omphale subduing the Herculean Antony but also the androgynous figure of _Venus armata_ (The Common Liar, 92). For other discussions of the way in which Cleopatra problematizes rather than embodies "femininity," see Clare Kinney, "The Queen's Two Bodies and the Divided Emperor: Some Problems of Identity in _Antony and Cleopatra_" in _The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print: Counterbalancing the Canon_, Anne M. Haselkorn and Betty S. Travitsky, eds. (Amherst, MA, 1990), 177-86; and Jyotsna Singh, "Renaissance Antitheatricality, Antifeminism, and Shakespeare's _Antony and Cleopatra_" _Renaissance Drama_ N.S. 20 (1990): 99-121. All quotations of _Antony and Cleopatra_ follow the Arden Shakespeare, ed. M. R. Ridley (London, 1954). Quotations of all other Shakespeare plays follow the _Riverside Shakespeare_, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston, 1974).

5 G. Wilson Knight, _The Imperial Theme: Further Interpretations of Shakespeare's Tragedies_ (London, 1950), 297 and 304.

6 For a useful summary of the assumptions that have dominated discussions of Cleopatra, see L. T. Fitz, "Egyptian Queens and Male Reviewers: Sexist Attitudes in _Antony and Cleopatra_ Criticism," _Shakespeare Quarterly_ 28 (1977): 297-316. See also Malcolm Evans, _Signifying Nothing: Truth's True Contents in Shakespeare's Text_ (Brighton, UK, 1986), in which he attempts to retrieve Cleopatra's "infinite variety" from those who would morally reconstrue it as a representative "feminine" inconstancy. Assessing the conventional interpretations of Cleopatra's variety, Evans concludes that "the hint here of another discourse, one which may disturb the 'truth' of the patriarchal order, is, however, recuperated for that order by the firm attributions that trail behind this figure—the 'woman's wiles,' 'female enchantment,' etc." (165).

7 There have been a number of notable exceptions. Critics who have challenged the gender binaries of the play, albeit from very different standpoints, include Constance Brown Kuriyama, "The Mother of the World: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Shakespeare's _Antony and Cleopatra_," _English Literary Renaissance_ 7 (1977): 324-51; Murray M. Schwartz, "Shakespeare through Contemporary Psychoanalysis" in _Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays_, Murray M. Schwartz and Coppélia Kahn, eds. (Baltimore, MD, 1980), 21-32; Madelon Gohlke, "I wooed thee with my sword: Shakespeare's Tragic Paradigms" in Schwartz and Kahn, eds., 170-87; Peter Erickson, _Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare's Drama_ (Berkeley, CA, 1985), esp. 131-33; Jonathan Dollimore, "Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism, Feminism and Marxist Humanism," _New Literary History_ 21 (1990): 471-93; Singh, esp. 99-100, 114-16; Theodora A. Jankowski, _Women in Power in the Early Modern Drama_ (Urbana, IL, 1992), esp. 156-60; and Valerie Traub, _Desire and

8 Adelman, Suffocating Mothers, 177.


10 In foregrounding the specularity of the play's female Egyptian and male Roman characters, my argument owes a substantial debt to Luce Irigaray's analysis of male constructions of the feminine Other as the selfsame; see her Speculum of the Other Woman, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY, 1985), especially "Any Theory of the 'Subject' Has Always Been Appropriated by the 'Masculine,'" 133-46.

11 Shakespeare hints at Roman rulers' capacity for self-knowledge through specular encounter also in Julius Caesar, when Cassius tells Brutus that "since you know you cannot see yourself / So well as by reflection, I, your glass, / Will modestly discover to yourself / That of yourself which you yet know not of (1.2.66-69).

12 Anna Jameson, Shakespeare's Heroines: Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical, and Historical, 2d ed. (London, 1833), 256 and 271.


15 Arguably, such a reading of Cleopatra's narcissistic pride acquires weight from the play's insistent identification of her with "crocodiles" and "serpents" of the Nile, creatures associated not only with deception and temptation but also with pride. One may recall the third verse of Spenser's "Visions of the Worlds Vanitie": "Beside the fruitfull shore of muddie Nile, / Vpon a sunnie banke outstretched lay / In monstrous length, a mightie Crocodile, / That . . . Thought all thinges lesse than his disdainful pride" (The Works of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition, ed. E. Greenlaw et al., 9 vols. [Baltimore, MD, 1932-49], 8:175).

16 The Metamorphoses of Ovid, trans. Mary M. Innes (Harmondsworth, UK, 1955), 86. Interestingly, Frances Quarles appended Ovid's tag to a portrait depicting an infected breast, his emblem of postlapsarian corruption; see Emblems, Divine and Moral, ed. Augustus Toplady and John Ryland (London, 1839), 44. This demonstrates how the motif of plenty making poor, or of satiety prompting hunger, lent itself to numerous interpretations. Quarles's identification of Narcissus's complaint with a contaminating femininity responsible for the Fall potentially reinforces readings of Cleopatra as an Egyptian Eve; I would argue, instead, that Antony and Cleopatra's preoccupation with mirrors and reflections makes it difficult to avoid pursuing a reading of Enobarbus's remark based on the more literal narcissistic resonances of Ovid's tag. Janet Adelman discusses Quarles's emblem in Suffocating Mothers, 5-6.

17 Spenser, 8:209.

18 Henry Reynolds, Mythornystes: Wherein a Short Survy is Taken of the Nature and Value of True Poesy and Depth of the Ancients above our Moderne Poets (London, 1630[?]), sig. N4v.


Past generations of critics agree with the Romans about Cleopatra's "transcendental" desirability. See, for example, Arthur Symons: 'Antony and Cleopatra is the most wonderful, I think, of all Shakespeare's plays, and it is so mainly because the figure of Cleopatra is the most wonderful of Shakespeare's women. And not of Shakespeare's women only, but perhaps the most wonderful of women" (Studies in the Elizabethan Drama [New York, 1919], 1).

This notion was, of course, proverbial; see M. P. Tilley, A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (Ann Arbor, MI, 1950), W924. The idea is expressed elsewhere in Shakespeare's plays; see, for example, All's Well That Ends Well, 5.3.61-63, or Much Ado About Nothing, 4.1.217-22. But the insistence with which the notion is articulated in Antony and Cleopatra to explain specifically Roman behavior serves to deprive it (at least in this play) of its conventionally universal application.


Critics from Margaret Cavendish in the Restoration to Derek Traversi in the twentieth century have paid homage to Cleopatra's vividness and vitality. Traversi's assessment is in some ways typical: "Cleopatra, though the creature of the world which surrounds her, can at times emerge from it, impose upon her surroundings a vitality which is not the less astonishing for retaining to the last its connection with the environment it transcends" (An Approach to Shakespeare, 3rd ed., 2 vols. [Garden City, NY, 1969], 2:223-24).

Bradley, 298.

For example, Harley Granville-Barker asks: "What is the best evidence we have (so to speak) of Cleopatra's physical charms? A description of them by Enobarbus" (Prefaces to Shakespeare [Princeton, NJ, 1947], 435).

Discussions of the power exerted by the displayed monarch's body in early modern Europe include Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1979); and Ernst
Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Theology* (Princeton, NJ, 1955). Studies that specifically examine the iconography of Queen Elizabeth's displayed body include Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London, 1977); and Leonard Tennenhouse, *Power on Display*. Tennenhouse makes the intriguing observation that *Antony and Cleopatra* is "Shakespeare's elegy for the signs and symbols which legitimized Elizabethan power. Of these, the single most important figure was that of the desiring and desired woman, her body valued for its ornamental surface, her feet rooted deep in a kingdom" (146). In its depiction of an erotically ornamental, pageantlike display of royal female power, Enobarbus's account of Cleopatra's procession at Cydnus would in many ways appear to confirm Tennenhouse's assertion; however, as I go on to argue, the curious lack of physical detail offered by Enobarbus about Cleopatra's displayed body suggests that her power subsists in her very invisibility, her publicly paraded absence—the "*inopem me copia fecit*" of the narcissistic reflection.

38 Phyllis Rackin's response to Enobarbus's speech is notable for its conjunction of traditional homage to Shakespeare's imaginative poetic power with suggestive insight into the "defect" that paradoxically underwrites the panegyric's effect of "perfection": Enobarbus "suddenly abandons his characteristic ironic prose for the soaring poetry that creates for his listeners a Cleopatra who transcends anything they could see with the sensual eye or measure with the calculating and rational principle of the soul. . . . It is a commonplace of the older criticism that Shakespeare had to rely upon his poetry and his audience's imagination to evoke Cleopatra's greatness because he knew the boy actor could not depict it convincingly. But he transformed this limitation into an asset, used the technique his stage demanded to demonstrate the unique powers of the very medium that seemed to limit him. Like Cleopatra's own art, the economy of the poet's art works paradoxically, to make defect perfection" ("Shakespeare's Boy Cleopatra, the Decorum of Nature, and the Golden World of Poetry," *PMLA* 87 [1972]: 201-12, esp. 204).

39 Other early Stuart playwrights attribute narcissistic traits to Roman desire. In a tantalizingly suggestive passage, Elizabeth Cary invokes Narcissus's *"inopem me copia fecit"* to describe how Antony would have reacted to Maryam, Queen of the Jews, if he had only succeeded in disentangling himself from Cleopatra: "Too much delight did bare him from delight, / For either's love the other's did confound" (*The Tragedy of Maryam, The Fair Queen of Jewry*, ed. Barry Weiler and Margaret W. Ferguson [Berkeley, CA, 1994], 1.2.185-86).


42 Cleopatra's speech offers an intriguing counterpart to Ovid's account of Narcissus: like Echo, Cleopatra is excluded from a circuit of desire whose origin and terminus is male. Perhaps this exclusion can help explain a puzzling reference that seems to lurk in Cleopatra's description. Pompey's eyes, she claims, "grow" in her "brow": the phrasing here invokes the inescapable image of the cuckold's budding horns. Is Cleopatra half-comically suggesting that she has been cuckolded by a Pompey who "betrays" her by making love, albeit unwittingly, to himself?


44 Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London, 1985), 149. For a reading similar to my own of the patriarchal construction of a contradictory "feminine" identity, see Loomba, 75-79 and 125-30.

To this short list there could be profitably added a number of Shakespeare's other plays. The examples most pertinent to an analysis of *Antony and Cleopatra*, perhaps, are *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, and *The Winter's Tale*. All three plays subject to critical scrutiny the derogatory assumptions men make about women—Benedick's hyperbolic conviction that Beatrice is a "harpy" who "speaks poniards" (2.1.271, 247), Claudio's denigration of Hero as a "rotten orange" (4.1.32), Iago's unsubstantiated belief that Emilia has cuckolded him, Othello's mischaracterization of Desdemona as a "strumpet" and "cunning whore of Venice" (4.2.82, 89), or Leontes's jealous invectives against the irreproachable Hermione as an "adult'ress," "traitor," and "bed-swerver" (2.1.88, 89, and 93).


Further Reading

Argues that Antony, Cleopatra, and Octavius Caesar, as well as minor characters in the play, have something in common despite their obvious differences—they all agree "that there are grim limits to the joys one can take in earthly achievements."


Examines the rhetorical modes available to Cleopatra in the play, and contends that Cleopatra is one of the few characters in Shakespeare's plays to overcome the representation of the female as inferior and "[d]eprived of a voice."


Explores the relationship between the competing masculine and feminine constructions within the play, as well as the play's reception—among the audience and actors—as a text written for an exclusively male cast.

Studies the implications of the remark made in IV.iii that the god Hercules "whom Antony lov'd, / Now leaves him" (11.15-16), suggesting that the comment is significant, but not in the sense that it refers to any supernatural event.


Maintains that Antony's characterization relies to some degree on the traditions associated with Saint Antony of Egypt, and that by analyzing this relationship, the play's main issues—as well as Antony's apparently comic portrayal—are clarified.


States that the concept of transaction is a primary element of carnival and that it, along with other carnivalesque elements, pervade *Antony and Cleopatra*.


Pursues a Renaissance reading of the play through an "iconographic" approach, that is, by studying the contemporary, conventional meanings attached to the images and symbols Shakespeare refers to in the play.


Discusses Shakespeare's source material for the play as well as its language, characterization, and thematic issues.


Argues that the play is a romance that primarily evokes the myths of Mars and Venus and their cosmological affair, rather than the myths of Hercules and Isis.


Suggests that the love story in the play, whether viewed in redemptive or condemning terms, has been overemphasized, and that Antony and Cleopatra should be studied as political rulers, not just lovers.


Contends that while the worlds of Rome and Egypt and the values they represent are often pitted against one another by critics, the two realms are alike in that "the only permanent fixture of either is change, the necessary adjunct of time."
Antony and Cleopatra (Vol. 58)

Introduction

Antony and Cleopatra

For further information on the critical and stage history of Antony and Cleopatra, see SC, Volumes 6, 17, 27, and 47.

Most likely written between 1606 and 1607, Antony and Cleopatra relates the struggles of love, passion, and power endured by the two titular characters and is considered by many to be among Shakespeare's finest achievements. Interpretation of the tragedy is often cast in terms of the polar oppositions dramatized in the play, perhaps most notably the conflict between Rome and Egypt, and war and love. What critics and audiences often find so engaging about Antony and Cleopatra is that these polarities remain in opposition throughout, without any one winning primacy by the play's end. Modern critics explore the way these polarities inform political, linguistic, and structural analyses of the play. Another critical approach focuses on Antony and Cleopatra's relation to traditional Renaissance emblems and iconography. The characterization of Antony and Cleopatra continues to be a source of scholarly discussion and debate as well.

While the play's unresolved oppositions contribute to its interest and appeal, such ambiguity makes Antony and Cleopatra difficult to interpret. Maynard Mack (1993) surveys these polarities, identifying some of the conflicts as: Rome versus Egypt; war versus love; nature versus art; austerity versus indulgence; loyalty versus self-interest; and sincerity versus affectation. Paul Yachnin (1991) focuses on Antony and Cleopatra's Rome/Egypt opposition, comparing the play's shift from Egyptian past to Roman future to the transition from an Elizabethan to a Jacobean style of rule that was taking place at the time the play was composed. Taking another approach, Michael Payne (1973) studies the way in which the play's theme of opposition informs the structure of the play. This theme is introduced in Act I by way of the comparison between the Roman desire to set boundaries and the Egyptian cultivation of freedom and ecstasy. Payne goes on to explore the way this opposition is examined in sexual terms and further developed through the remaining acts of the play. In summary, Payne states that the play's structure, like its thematic polarities, is both tragic and comic. Krystyna Kujawinska-Courtney (1993) finds a dramaturgical analogue to the play's theme of polarity in the relationship between diegesis (narration lacking explanation or judgment) and mimesis (direct imitation or representation). The critic concludes that Egyptian mimesis is victorious over Roman diegesis by the play's end.

Other critics are interested in the influence that Renaissance emblem tradition and iconography had on the play. Christopher Wortham (1995) studies this emblem tradition and its relation to Shakespeare's use of classical mythology, as well as biblical imagery, in order to suggest how Shakespeare's audiences may have responded to Antony and Cleopatra. For example, Antony is repeatedly associated with Mars, the god of war. Mars, Wortham explains, received a negative portrayal from emblem writers, whose values included peaceability, a trait in line with the thinking of the monarch, King James. Similarly, Peggy Muñoz Simonds (1994) employs the iconographic approach in analyzing Shakespeare's language and stage imagery in order to offer a Renaissance reading of the play.

The characters of Antony and especially Cleopatra are the focus of many critical analyses of the play. J. Leeds Barroll (1984) argues that Shakespeare's portrayal of Antony is based on Shakespeare's examination of desire, a feature of the play that cannot be reduced to dualistic terms. Cynthia Lewis (1997) maintains that the Christian traditions surrounding Saint Antony of Egypt fueled Shakespeare's presentation of Antony. Understanding this analogue, stresses Lewis, helps to clarify the play's central issues and illuminates the perceptions of other characters in the play. Lewis concludes that like his namesake, Antony appears to trade earthly "glory" for the purity of love, and for his "pardon." A Christian parallel has also been found to correspond with Cleopatra. Laura Severt King (1992) identifies the prostitute-saints of the Middle Ages as

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similar to Cleopatra's character, in that like the prostitute-saint, Cleopatra personifies the linking of sexual incontinence and supernatural power. Richard A. Levin (1997) is primarily concerned with discovering when Cleopatra resolves to commit suicide. Levin examines three unresolved problems of the text that highlight the struggle between Caesar and Cleopatra, which help to inform his understanding of Cleopatra's decision to kill herself. Mary Floyd-Wilson (1999) offers a different approach to analyzing Cleopatra. Floyd-Wilson begins by examining the direct correspondence between geography and gender (in which Egypt is associated with femininity and Rome with masculinity). The critic then introduces another layer to this type of examination by studying the way Renaissance climate theory—the notion that climate determines one's complexion, coloration, and temperament—informs the understanding of Cleopatra's character. Emphasizing that the play is largely concerned with regional differences as well as the shifting nature of gender roles, Floyd-Wilson illustrates that Cleopatra's "racial" status, determined by her climate, challenges the traditional, northern ideas about gender: as a woman, she should possess a "soft and impressionable" complexion, yet as an Egyptian, Cleopatra is mysterious and resists interpretation.

Criticism: Character Studies
J. Leeds Barroll (essay date 1984)

[In the following essay, Barroll examines the way in which desire and its "strangeness" inform the characterization of Antony.]

I

Mark Antony is one of Shakespeare's most complexly imagined tragic heroes. For this we thank, of course, Shakespeare's human empathy and genius. But the compelling quality of Antony's humanity owes as much to strategy as to genius. And if, in the end, these are perhaps the same thing, then the strategy by which genius brings Antony to life, makes him a tragic "character," is Shakespeare's emphasis on desire. For this in us is a complicated and deeply implicated phenomenon whose entangled state is much more specifically human than is grief, anger, or fear. These responses animals share with us. But our humanity is delineated by the kaleidoscopic focusings and terrible steadiness of our wishing.

That the strangeness of desire is Shakespeare's basic framework for "talking about" the character of Mark Antony is apparent at the outset. We are immediately confronted with a life being torn between "Egypt" and "Rome." But Rome and Egypt, in turn, are mere geographical or political expressions that, in the end, oversimplify everything. Indeed, if we allow the idea of Egypt and the concept of Rome to act as allegorical stations we lose the point. West tugging with East over Antony's fallible but attractive Renaissance soul; psychomachia pitting Duty vs. Lust, Love vs. Greed, or Imagination vs. Reason—these are all attractive dualities. But Shakespeare's drama is a tragedy about an imagined human being, not an Essay on the Good Life in which Antony is to be significantly manipulated from pillar of Roman virtue to post of Egyptian inebriation. Ancient Rome and ancient Egypt in Shakespeare's drama are suggestions about confusion, not the panels of a medieval painting. Desire is not a simple duality: that is why it is complex.

Enobarbus, that careful (but often careless) observer of Antony, says about him, "Antony will use his affection where it is." And, in the long run, Enobarbus cannot help but mislead us too. For in Shakespeare's time, as today, "affection" was a multiplex word for a difficult envisioning, more complicated than what Enobarbus seems to intend by his words. After Antony follows Cleopatra's prematurely panicking battleship, thus fatally confusing his fleet and losing the empire of the world, the lamentations and shock are succeeded by a quiet scene in which Cleopatra reflects about what has happened.
Whose fault is all this? she asks Enobarbus and again he talks about “affection.” The battle, he says, was lost by

Antony only, that would make his will
Lord of his reason. What though you fled
From that great face of war, whose several ranges
Frighted each other? Why should he follow?
The itch of his affection should not then
Have nick'd his captainship, at such a point,
When half to half the world oppos'd, he being
The meered question.

(3.13.2-10)

“Affection,” we are to understand, then, is that thing in Antony which draws him from his true Roman interests to Cleopatra and the Egyptian life.

Symmetrical enough—at least for Enobarbus—but for Antony himself the choices do not seem quite so cut and dried. “I'th'East my pleasure lies” was indeed the frank statement of one kind of allegiance, but other statements, other allegiances render and blend “affection” into something complexly hued beyond dualities.
What happened at Actium denied any neatly distributed, defined, and scaled hierarchies of value in Antony. For there, fighting not simply against something, but for something—for his relationship with Cleopatra—and with everything to gain from victory, he nevertheless allowed himself to lose.

And having lost, why could he not have been content with Cleopatra, the world well lost for love? Indeed, his passion, his anger, his regrets force us to seek Antony somewhere within the complex of these contradictions, beyond the pale of Enobarbus’s adages. Our quest begins at Actium in these Antonian writhings.

Hark, the land bids me tread no more upon't,
It is asham'd to bear me.

(3.11.1-2)

And, to Cleopatra here.

O, whither has thou led me, Egypt? See
How I convey my shame out of thine eyes
By looking back what I have left behind
'Stroy'd in dishonor.

(3.11.51-54)

There is much in this play of Antony and shame. Very early on, Caesar talks about it. Antony's “shames” should from luxurious Egypt “quickly drive him to Rome.” But in this case Antony is not so affected. Free from a sense of guilt despite the spate of moralisms which have surrounded him (and us) since the play began, Antony in Rome responds to the Caesarean lecture as if he came from another planet. Antony, we gather, cannot be held responsible for the activities of relatives or of wives fomenting civil wars. Nor, for that matter, can he be expected to inconvenience himself for messengers who come too early in the morning from Caesar, especially when one might have a hangover. Caesar urges that Antony broke his oath—but Antony will not stand for this either.

I'll play the penitent to you; but mine honesty
Shall not make poor my greatness, nor my power
Work without it.

(2.2.91-94)

And it is presumably with the same aplomb that Antony will later alternate infidelities. Barely speaking four lines, he will agree to marry Caesar’s sister to establish stronger political ties with him. Barely speaking two lines, he will desert Octavia for Egypt, and for war with Caesar, whom he sought to reassure by marrying Octavia in the first place.

No, Antony is not ashamed to have been truant—in fact, so little is he affected on this Roman score that one wonders why he left Egypt at all. For indeed the play began with this awakening. But the drama began too by making it clear that Antony departs from the East for reasons which do not wholly embrace ideas of Roman imperium. Otherwise, why, on his way to Rome, did he send back a pearl to Cleopatra with the message that he would “piece her opulent throne with kingdoms?”

When it comes to shame, Antony will know his own personal cue.

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I have liv'd in such dishonor that the gods
Detest my baseness. I, that with my sword
Quarter'd the world, and o'er green Neptune's back
With ships made cities, condemn myself to lack
The courage of a woman—less noble mind
Than she which by her death our Caesar tells,
"I am conqueror of myself."
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(4.14.55-62)

Honor and nobility—to Antony these mean one thing: bravery, physical courage. As when Eros, having put a sword through himself before his master did, elicits this:

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Thrice-nobler than myself!

Thou teachest me, O valiant Eros, what
I should, and thou couldst not. My queen and Eros
Have by their brave instruction got upon me
A nobleness in record.
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(4.14.95-99)

In the wreckage of Actium, that central point in tragedy, this, for Antony is the only, the real, issue. For the very notion of seeming to flee, of seeming to act the coward by following Cleopatra’s retiring ship arouses in Antony a sense of self-destroying more profound than he ever experienced leaving Rome for revels in Egypt. At Actium, one has “instructed cowards” and thus one has left oneself. He has lost his way forever and he is most profoundly ashamed. “I follow’d that I blush to look upon.” “For indeed,” as he dismisses his friends, “I have lost command.” Yet, in our sense, how could he have been a coward? He followed Cleopatra’s ship when she herself fled. True. That following broke up the order of the fleet and of course brought disaster is true too. So Antony worried about the queen and became a tactical imbecile. Yet he thinks “coward,” not “imbecile.”

Contrast this with a future mood, the élan of the second, strategically futile battle before Alexandria. “You that will fight,” he calls to his soldiers, “follow me close. I’ll bring you to’t.” And from this fight—the only one we ever see him win—we watch him come and note his high celebration. But not as a general—he has won nothing. As a successful gladiator.
Through Alexandria make a jolly march,
Bear our hack'd targets like the men that owe them.(1)

(4.8.30-31)

Euphoria overwhelms as he paints his magnificent hyperbole.

Had our great palace the capacity
To camp this host, we all would sup together,
And drink carouses to the next day's fate,
Which promises royal peril. Trumpeters,
With brazen din blast you the city's ear,
Make mingle with our rattling tamborines
That heaven and earth may strike their sounds together,
Applauding our approach. Exeunt.

(4.8.32-39)

This is a tragedy about love, as critics all must tell us, but love is not a single, simple thing. In the dawn before his battle, when Antony meets a soldier armed and ready, he says:

Thou look'st like him that knows a warlike charge.
To business that we love, we rise betime,
And go to't with delight.

(4.4.19-21)

Antony, as his queen noted, is up early himself. Strange then that Actium should be such a terrible failure.

But what is not so strange by these lights is how the play itself begins; this soldier sense in Antony makes his “awakening” clear. Our earliest cue for him in this play has always seemed to be Cleopatra's when she tells us that Antony was inclined to mirth, but now “a Roman thought hath struck him.” Yet the only “Roman” thoughts available up to now have been the opening remarks of those two shadowy figures, Demetrius and Philo. (But if these two had actually hailed each other by name, they would have struck their seventeenth-century auditors not as Roman, but as Greek.) It is they who tell us, anyhow, that Antony, the once-great leader, has now become “the bellows and the fan to cool a gypsy’s lust.” Sometimes, too, we gather, “when he is not Antony, he comes too short of that great property which still should go with Antony.”

Thus emerges the first Antonian “self” molded from the sensitivities of Roman (?) soldiers (?). But when Antony himself comes to prove Cleopatra's accuracy about Roman thoughts—to show some second “self”—he has not become a Roman. Hearing that Labienus and his Parthian forces are on the move against him, Antony urges his faltering messenger:

Speak to me home, mince not the general tongue;
Name Cleopatra as she is call'd in Rome.
Rail thou in Fulvia's phrase, and taunt my faults
With such full license as both truth and malice
Have power to utter. O then we bring forth weeds
When our quick winds lie still, and our ills told us
Is as our earring.(2)

(1.2.105-11)

“These strong Egyptian fetters I must break,” he mutters, “or lose myself in dotage.” Perhaps there is here
some Roman “shame,” but it is an oddly aphoristic and mannered guilt, contrasting with the passions to come at Actium. Here all this weed-growing seems small stimulus.

The news of his wife's death prompts proper regret and muted encomium—“there's a great spirit gone”—and even some properly moral words about Cleopatra:

I must from this enchanting queen break off;
Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know,
My idleness doth hatch.

(1.2.128-30)

But, as the messengers succeed one another to inundate him with news to which he now responds—if not attends—it becomes quite clear that government affairs are not the issue. The challenge is Pompey.

Antony speaks to Enobarbus about him at length, and then to Cleopatra too. Caesar also speaks of Pompey, far away in Rome, but when Caesar talks about him and the danger he poses, the Roman leader tends to comment in Tudor words appropriate to Shakespeare's Henry IV: giddy rebelling Roman multitudes surging behind some Roman Jack Cade. Antony dutifully moves in the fringes of these ideas too, but the thrust of his meaning is elsewhere.

[Hath] given the dare to Caesar, and commands
The empire of the sea. Our slippery people,
Whose love is never link'd to the deserver
Till his deserts are past, begin to throw
Pompey the Great and all his dignities
Upon his son, who, high in name and power,
Higher than both in blood and life, stands up
For the main soldier.

(1.2.183-91)

This is the concept that engages Antony. Some one else is acting the “main soldier.” And Antony describes Sextus to Cleopatra—he speaks to her about him too—as “the condemn'd Pompey, rich in his father's honor.” The “main soldier” is merely riding on the military reputation of Pompeius Magnus whom the tribunes lamented at the beginning of Julius Caesar.

In Rome, Antony turns to the subject with Caesar. His words here are not the quintessence of realpolitik. They are almost chivalric, redolent of tournament.

I did not think to draw my sword 'gainst Pompey,
For he hath laid strange courtesies and great
Of late upon me. I must thank him only,
Lest my remembrance suffer ill report;
At heel of that, defy him.

(2.2.153-57)

The news, however, is bad.

Ant.
What is his strength by land?
Caes.
Great and increasing; but by sea
He is an absolute master.
Ant.
So is the fame.
Would we had spoke together!

(2.2.161-64)

“Speaking together” means “joining battle.” 5

The triumvirate meet with Pompey, who begins the proceedings with a passionate speech of defiance. Caesar responds in his usual matter-of-fact, take-it-or-leave-it tone. What we hear from Antony is something else.

Thou cans't not fear us, Pompey, with thy sails;
We'll speak with thee at sea. At land, thou know'st
How much we do o'er-count thee.

(2.6.24-26)

Caesar has already mentioned the hopelessness of trying to match the pirate-leader on the water, but Antony must, it seems, respond. And if there is more emotion than reason in Antony here, it produces that cautious compliment of a later exchange. Pompey (significantly) shakes hands with Antony before he does with the others, saying

I did not think, sir, to have met you here.
Ant.
The beds i'th'East are soft, and thanks to you,
That call'd me timelier than my purpose hither;
For I have gain'd by't.

(2.6.48-52)

We must attend this Antony, for although it is not all of him, it is part of his sense of himself, and that is all of him. “O love,” he says to Cleopatra before that victorious, futile battle toward the end of the tragedy.

That thou couldst see my wars to-day, and knew'st
The royal occupation, thou shouldst see
A workman in't.

(4.4.15-18)

“I'll leave thee now like a man of steel.” And even after the final disaster his language figures forth his vision of the warrior supreme. “Brais'd pieces go, you have been nobly borne.” Later, in rage, this supremacy is of almost Herculean transcendence.

Teach me,
Alcides, thou mine ancestor, thy rage.
Let me lodge Lichas on the horns o'th'moon,
And with those hands, that grasp'd the heaviest club,
Subdue my worthiest self.

(4.12.43-47)

Antony's private feeling of self lives away from all those judging notions of his duties which others of the play are always so ready to envisage for him. From these judges we hear many versions of what Antony “is” and
what he should be—from Pompey, Lepidus, Enobarbus, Caesar, and Cleopatra—but it is interesting that, in the end, not one of these judging or supposedly knowing characters can avoid being surprised, startled, or disappointed. For in Antony's world, honor, baseness, duty, nobility achieve their definition not in conventional terms, but, perhaps, in a context illuminated by Antony's own metaphor when he breaks in upon the tearful farewell between his bride, Octavia, and her brother to whom she clings for a moment. Antony takes Caesar's hand in farewell.

I'll wrastle with you in my strength of love.
Look, here I have you, thus I let you go,
And give you to the gods.

(3.2.61-64)

The wrestling is figurative, but Antony is the victor. The moment, light and fleeting enough to die under the hand of analysis, tells in the silent language of drama of one of Antony's worlds, more real than Egypt or Rome.

II

If Antony were wedded to physical courage—to some naïve concept of "manliness"—he would have anticipated the Hemingway ideal by three hundred or so years. But Shakespeare endowed his tragic hero more complexly, beyond the dimensions of Ajax, whose solution to most problems, in *Troilus and Cressida*, was "pashing" some one. Antony seems related to a general pattern of behavior in what Shakespeare's contemporaries would have termed "pleasure," that conglomeration of yearnings for sensual stimuli of all kinds, as well as an attraction to physically induced and totally enjoyed euphoria to which the dramatist Thomas Lodge and his contemporaries interestingly gave the name of "sloth." ⁶ Such moral terms need not overconcern us—they concern Caesar and his fellow Romans too much already, ever anxious as they all are to wrap up the hero squirming into the amber of a morality drama in which he can forever play sinner to Caesar's redeemed man. But we must all the same—and without Caesar's eager help—take note of Antony's propensities.

There is, for example, love—not a simple thing in Mark Antony's universe.

Now for the love of Love, and her soft hours,
Let's not confound the time with conference harsh;
There's not a minute of our lives should stretch
Without some pleasure now. What sport to-night?

(1.1.44-47)

Here is Antony, the much-discussed voluptuary, fond of physical beauty. At Cleopatra's first banquet he "for his ordinary pays his heart for what his eyes eat only," as Enobarbus put it. And even to Octavia, Antony is not totally indifferent. These are his words about his new wife as she talks weepingly to her brother, Caesar, the hero making his remarks beyond their hearing:

Her tongue will not obey her heart, nor can
Her heart inform her tongue—the swan's down feather,
That stands upon the swell at the full of tide,
And neither way inclines.

(3.2.47-50)
Enobarbus speaks of “our courteous Antony whom ne’er the word of ‘No’ woman heard speak” and it is obvious that women indeed do something for Antony. It is as if they help his imagination. When he prepares for the Battle of Actium he takes Cleopatra with him, much to Enobarbus’s consternation as he argues this out with the queen. But “we'll to our ship,” Antony announces in grand exit with the Egyptian queen:

Away, my Thetis!

This was the sea-nymph of the silver feet who danced on the dark waves with her sisters in the moonlight before the secret and astounded eyes of Peleus who bravely entwined with her Protean and savage forms to win her and engender in her Achilles.

But let us not rush to implicate Cleopatra as the only begetter of Antony’s sensualities and thus to make his woes a tale of her fashioning. It is important that we allow the queen to stand apart. Voluptuousness is Antony’s own leaning, as is emphasized by the Roman banquet which presents the only revels we observe in the drama. This celebration is a triumvirate affair and Caesar predictably complains of unseemly levity and of washing the brain with wine, which makes it dirtier. But it is our Antony who urges things on. “Be a child o’th’time,” he tells Caesar, and Antony and Pompey, their host, respond with alacrity as Enobarbus celebrates:

Shall we dance now the Egyptian bacchanals
And celebrate our drink?
Pom.
Let’s ha’st, good soldier.
Ant.
Come, let’s all take hands,
Till that the conquering wine hath steep’d our sense
In soft and delicate Lethe.

(2.7.103-8)

So they dance, and shout the refrain: “Cup us till the world go round!” If we search for Cleopatra in this entertainment, we will find that she is far away, in Egypt. For we are now in Italy.

Where Shakespeare makes Antony especially interesting is in the fact that the hero is proud of this voluptuary mode in himself. In truth, the pleasures of the flesh and of combat and of the idea of women are his personal way to a sense of exaltation which he sees as the gates to a kind of transcendence. The ambition of his soul achieves its natural mode of expression in these domains. To be preeminent in existence is the core of ambition, and if “existence” resides especially in life’s physical feelings and beauties, then preeminence must be there too—somehow.

Thus self-admiration is everywhere in his physical life. The queen quotes him:

Then was the time for words; no going then;
Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
Bliss in our brows' bent; none our parts so poor
But was a race of heaven.

(1.3.33-37)

It is a state that can even extend beyond death.

Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,
And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze.
Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops,
And all the haunt be ours.

(4.14.51-54)

So Antony's opening statement is wholly appropriate to him.

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space,
Kingdoms are clay; our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man; the nobleness of life
Is to do thus ... when such a mutual pair
And such a twain can do't, in which I bind,
[On] pain of punishment, the world to weet
We stand up peerless.(7)

(1.1.33-40)

So, what of it? To love these things and to think this way—to live with feasting, battle, women—is not necessarily to court disaster. Indeed, Philo speaks of a “great property” in Antony. Pompey says of the hero's soldiership that it is indeed “twice the other twain.” Antony is not deluding himself about his military reputation. For these opinions about him are reinforced further with the words of Eros. In Plutarch's Life of Antonius, Shakespeare's primary source for events in this play, Antonius lost badly to the Parthians, but in Shakespeare, when Eros refuses to help Antony kill himself, he mitigates this Parthian disaster:

Shall I do that which all the Parthian darts,
Though enemy, lost aim and could not?(8)

(4.14.70-71)

Antony's soldiership also receives the praise of the scarred soldier, Scarus, after the land-battle at Alexandria, when he corroborates Agrippa's surprise at the military reversal of Caesarian momentum.

Oh my brave Emperor, this is fought indeed!
Had we done so at first, we had droven them home
With clouts about their heads.

(4.7.4-6)

Yet there is an irony in Scarus's words, just as it lurks in Caesar's magnificent description of that Antony to whom even he must yield respect.

Was beaten from Modena, where thou slew'st
Hirtius and Pansa, consuls, at thy heel
Did famine follow, whom thou fought'st against
(Though daintily brought up) with patience more
Than savages could suffer. Thou didst drink
The stale of horses and the gilded puddle
Which beasts would cough at; thy palate then did deign
The roughest berry on the rudest hedge;
Yea, like the stag, when snow the pasture sheets,
The barks of trees thou brows'd. On the Alps
It is reported thou didst eat strange flesh,
Which some did die to look on; and all this
.....Was borne so like a soldier, that thy cheek
(1.4.56-71)

For despite all this, there are the facts. Antony lost at Modena, he lost in Parthia, he loses at Actium, and he will lose the last battle. When he triumphs in the fighting celebrated by Scarus, Antony gains little but the desertions which collapse the last battle around him. And when there is a victory in Parthia, it is won by Antony’s general, Ventidius, who tells his lieutenant that

Caesar and Antony have ever won
More in their officer than person.

(3.1.16-17)

For Caesar this is not important—he has no personal military aspirations. For Antony, it is crucial. Is it true?

“Now Antonius was made so subject to a woman's will that though he was a great deal stronger by land, yet for Cleopatra's sake, he would needs have this battle tried by sea,” writes Plutarch. Cleopatra again emerges as the destructive femme fatale. But in one of the most significant deviations from this source in the whole play, the line Shakespeare adopts is not this at all. The hero speaks to his general Canidius.

Ant.
Canidius, we
Will fight with him by sea.
Cleo.
By sea, what else?
Can.
Why will my lord do so?
Ant.
For that he dares us to't.
Enob.
So hath my lord dar'd him to single fight.
Can.
Ay, and to wage this battle at Pharsalia,
Where Caesar fought with Pompey. But these offers,
Which serve not for his vantage, he shakes off,
And so should you.

(3.7.27-34)

It is of the utmost importance to note that Shakespeare's version of why Antony chose a naval battle has little to do with what Cleopatra does or does not want, no matter how much her subsequent flight may obscure this. The point is even reemphasized by the scene before the final battle wherein Caesar, having lost the land-battle at Alexandria, apparently has less concern for his own “honor.”

Ant.
Their preparation is to-day by sea,
We please them not by land.
Scar.
For both, my lord.
Ant.
I would they'ld fight i'th'fire or i'th'air;
We'ld fight there too. But this it is: our foot
Upon the hills adjoining to the city
Shall stay with us—order for sea is given,
They have put forth the haven.(9)
Again this is not Plutarch; this is Shakespeare's Antony and his response to what he sees as a “dare.”

It is not possible to restrain Antony in these things, any more than it is possible for the soothsayer to reveal the unpleasant fact of Caesar's dominance. “Speak this no more.” Antony always rejects the idea that his subjectivity may not be all-sufficient, and this adamantine streak in his geniality is always there. Ventidius was afraid to follow up his victory against the Parthians.

I could do more to do Antonius good,
But, 'twould offend him; and in his offense
Should my performance perish.

This is what must be done to avoid irritating Antony:

I'll humbly signify what in his name,
That magical word of war, we have effected;
How with his banners, and his well-paid ranks,
The ne'er-yet-beaten horse of Parthia
We have jaded out o'th' field.

Before Actium, in his effort to persuade Antony to avoid that seabattle, Enobarbus alters his own characteristically blunt way of speaking to adopt the same “magical-word-of-war” line. “By sea, by sea,” Antony persists, and Enobarbus:

Most worthy sir, you therein throw away
The absolute soldiership you have by land,
Distract your army, which doth most consist
Of war-mark'd footmen, leave unexecuted
Your own renowned knowledge.

The fact, however, is that Shakespeare's Mark Antony tends to view military problems with the moods of a swordsman rather than with the detachment of a general. And though his performance in the battle line itself is always formidable, in concepts of strategy his predispositions render him indifferent or inept. Before Actium, speaking of Caesar's deployment, he sounds naïve.

Is it not strange, Canidius,
That from Tarentum and Brundusium
He could so quickly cut the Ionian Sea,
And take in Toryne?

More news of Caesar. He has indeed taken Toryne.

Can he be there in person? 'Tis impossible
Strange that his power should be.
In all justice, Canidius, and the other soldiers too, share this wonder.

Can.
This speed of Caesar's
Carries beyond belief.
Sold.
While he was yet in Rome,
His power went out in such distractions as
Beguil'd all spies.

This justifies Antony's own amazement, but it does impose certain important limitations on Pompey's dictum about Antony's soldiership as "twice the other twain." Apparently, one of the "other twain" is an astounding master of the art of troop movement. Whether this counts for "soldiership" depends on the viewpoint, but it is clear that for Antony such matters do not induce the boredom of familiarity.

There are debates on the strategic issues before the battle of Actium. Shakespeare allows Enobarbus to expand on details which have little actual relevance to the battle we experience—we will only need to be told that the hero followed Cleopatra's flight. But Enobarbus's "details" are important for us simply because Shakespeare shows Antony ignoring them. Why should Antony not fight at sea? Well, Enobarbus says,

Your ships are not well mann'd,
Your mariners are [muleters], reapers, people
Ingross'd by swift impress. In Caesar's fleet
Are those that often have 'gainst Pompey fought;
Their ships are yare, yours heavy. No disgrace
Shall fall you for refusing him at sea,
Being prepar'd for land.

It would, in one way, be a relief if Cleopatra were at the bottom of all this, for then we could simply say that Antony acts as a man infatuated. But she is only agreeing with Antony and he, reacting to Caesar's dare, ignores all else, even though the soldier Scarus, showing his wounds, hints at the mood of an infantry nervous at the prospect of fighting on unstable ships against a fleet of experienced pirates. But Antony only remarks "Well, well. Away," and exits.

Antony's attitudes and needs are continually at odds with the reality he must comprehend to survive a war, and the time after Actium emphasizes this. Muttering to himself in his shame, reminiscing about Philippi, he says of Caesar that

Dealt on lieutenancy, and no practice had
In the brave squares of war; yet now—No matter.

Sharing with Iago that contempt for the theoreticians, for those who delegate authority, who ignore prowess as the crucial stuff of war, Antony's remark is no casual one, penned by Shakespeare unthinkingly. The motif has been developed through the play until its eloquent articulation in Antony's response, after Actium, to the messenger from Caesar. Caesar sends a refusal to grant Antony's highly interesting request to be allowed to
live “a private man in Athens.” “To him again!” says Antony.

Of youth upon him; from which the world should note
Something particular. His coin, ships, legions,
May be a coward's, whose ministers would prevail
Under the service of a child as soon
As i'th command of Caesar. I dare him therefore
To lay his gay comparisons apart,
And answer me declin'd, sword against sword,
Ourselves alone. I'll write it. Follow me.

(3.13.20-28).

“Coward,” “child,” “dare.” The whole complicated mechanism of war which under Caesar's guidance has swept over Antony at such a speed as even to astound the generals is, here, relegated to the realm of the superficial. Toy baubles fit for a child, these forces are unreal, cloudlike wisps which trivially obscure that ultimate and profound moment, the determination of manhood: “sword against sword, ourselves alone.”

It is not strange that Antony should look at war like this, for he cannot even look at life in any other way. This would be to deny himself. And often when he cannot deny himself, he harms himself the most. It is true that military daring can be decisive too, no matter the dictates of theory, and it is true that Antony was holding his own quite well at Actium before Cleopatra's flight—vantage like “a pair of twins” appeared. But Antony cannot put daring into a larger perspective. For in defeat, he responds with rage and rationalization. It is as if victory were not determined by victory, but by bravery. Perhaps Caesar “cheated” but he won and the answer he sends Antony's duel-challenge points the difference between them. For this answer precipitates a moment of stunning naïveté as Antony tries to comprehend a challenge that, unlike Sossius's generalship in Africa, the hero has no power to waive from existence.

Ant.
He will not fight with me, Domitius?
Eno.
No.
Ant.
Why should he not?

(4.2.1-2)

“Antonius being thus inclined,” runs Shakespeare's source, “the last and extremest mischief of all other (to wit, the love of Cleopatra) lighted on him.” Although Plutarch's slant is misleading for the play, his attribution of the love affair to other than strictly sexual penchants in Antony is suggestive. For in Shakespeare's play, Antony's relationship with Cleopatra simply reinforces and illustrates elements that we see in his personality when romance is not his immediate concern.

I would you had her spirit in such another;
The third o' th'world is yours, which with a snaffle
You may pace easy, but not such a wife.

(2.2.61-64)

“There's a great spirit gone,” he said at the beginning of the play when he heard of her death, and it is clear—especially by contrast with his attitude toward the meek Octavia—that Antony admires Fulvia for the kind of qualities he finds in himself. Cleopatra has caught this to use it for her own purpose. She not only
flatters Antony's self-portrait but replicates it when accusing him of infidelity early in the play. She recalls to him his words in this manner:

But was a race of heaven. They are so still,
Or thou, the greatest soldier of the world,
Art turn'd the greatest liar.
Ant.
How now, lady?
Cleo.
I would I had thy inches, thou shouldst know
There were a heart in Egypt.

(1.3.36-41)

She plays the “great spirit,” acts masculine. She gives the astonished Antony the lie and wishes she were big enough to back up her insult (or big enough to compete with him in other suggestive ways).

And Antony does admire Cleopatra as a mirror of himself. When she taunts his surprise before Actium at Caesar's speed of maneuver, he is happy to be impressed.

A good rebuke,
Which might have well becom'd the best of men,
To taunt at slackness.

(3.7.25-27)

But she is something more than mirror. This is clear enough early in the play as he leaves Egypt. He says to her:

Quarrel no more, but be prepar'd to know
The purposes I bear; which are, or cease,
As you shall give th'advice. By the fire
That quickens Nilus' slime, I go from hence
Thy soldier, servant, making peace or war
As thou affects.

(1.3.66-71)

This when leaving for Rome.

But perhaps what we see is merely his indifference to politics. War is what he treasures to himself. What then are we to make of an episode the queen relates to Charmian?

Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed;
Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst
I wore his sword Philippan.

(2.5.20-23)

What principles in Antony's life are most important? He leaves her, and Egypt, marries Octavia, yet he follows her in flight at Actium. And though Antony forgives Cleopatra after Actium when he considers himself unmanned, he will be ready to kill her when he thinks she has betrayed him. How does she fit in?
There is Antony's answer to her after Actium when she says she hadn't thought he would follow after her fleeing ship.

You did know
How much you were my conqueror, and that
My sword, made weak by my affection, would
Obey it on all cause.

(3.11.65-68)

It is Enobarbus's use of "affection." But if Antony here wishes to blame Cleopatra by constructing an allegory that reminds us of the revels described earlier by Cleopatra, what he said a moment before was naked of moral attitudinizing.

[Thy] full supremacy thou knew'st, and that
Thy beck might from the bidding of the gods
Command me.

(3.11.58-61)

This is not totally true. There are other tugs at him, else Antony would not be so disconsolate now. But he seems to be saying that she is almost as important to him as his soldier "self." As he leaves Egypt, the psychology of interchange, despite its manifest Platonism, is complex.

Our separation so abides and flies,
That thou residing here, goes yet with me;
And I hence fleeting, here remain with thee.
Away!

(1.3.101-5)

It is as if in some important way, Cleopatra actually expressed the soldier principle for Antony. For if he were merely "her soldier" as protector, he would not necessarily react as he does when he hears of her death. At that time we see an impressive piece of behavior, accompanied by appropriate imagery and activity emphatically visible to the audience. Brooding about the betrayal of his fleet, he speaks dispiritedly and despairingly. But when he hears the queen is dead, he immediately begins to take off his armor.

All length is torture; since the torch is out,
Lie down and stray no farther. Now all labour
Mars what it does; yea, very force entangles
Itself with strength.

(4.14.46-49)

Strength has lost its meaning, as if the queen had, in Antony's life, been the ideal in terms of which his existence was to be organized. A force usually exerted by a philosophy, a creed, or a god—this was the "grave charm"

Whose eye beck'd forth my wars and call'd them home,
Whose bosom was my crownet, my chief end.

(4.12.26-27)
This is something more than drunken companionship with the flesh-pots of Egypt. At the same time, ideals are not essentially products of altruism. They tend to be defined in accordance with those traits loved in the self, and if Antony holds Cleopatra more important than politics, it is not only understandable but inevitable. “The nobleness of life is to do thus, when such a mutual pair and such a twain can do’t,” and “nobleness” is defined as that which Antony thinks good. He sees himself preeminently suited to enact this end, and Cleopatra is part of the enactment.

What would happen then, if the queen flouted this great Idea (whatever it is)? We see when she lets Caesar's messenger, Thidias, kiss her hand. Antony, on fire, rages:

Since she was Cleopatra?

Cleopatra is not “herself” anymore if she does not share Antony's opinion of the grandeur isolating him, with her, from the rest of the world. So instead of being grief-stricken and faithfully continuing to love Cleopatra as if he were her slave, Antony thrusts her from the crucial circle of his self-esteem into the “Roman” context, the Caesarean mode.

(3.13.105-22)

We need not see this speech as any kind of orthodox repentance of the error of his ways: Antony, by “temperance,” simply means that Cleopatra should only be intemperate with him. His true attitude emerges from another figure.

(3.13.153-55)
Cleopatra seems to be the “objective correlative” of his own being when she acts appropriately. But when she does not enhance his self-esteem she is no longer “himself.” And when this living symbol of his own identity, as he sees it, is gone, what is to become of him? She is his conception of himself made flesh.

III

For the most part the Antony of the first half of the tragedy has been mild-mannered, but then events come to change things. In the scenes following Antony’s perplexing and paradoxical defeat at Actium, he begins to be oppressed by a sense of dualism, an inconsistency which he sees between those qualities which he thinks should gain triumph in war and those which have actually beaten him. After he has forgiven Cleopatra his thoughts deal only with Caesar.

Caesar is the “young man.” One must go to him now and “dodge and palter in shifts of lowness.” But the edge is physical.

Yes, my lord, yes; he at Philippi kept
His sword e'en like a dancer, while I strook
The lean and wrinkled Cassius, and 'twas I
That the mad Brutus ended.(16) He alone
Dealt on lieutenantry, and no practice had
In the brave squares of war; yet now—No matter.

(3.11.35-40)

The light and graceful slimness of the “dancer” and the wrinkled leanness of a Cassius. Between the two, better than both—a golden mean—stands Antony, the victor of Philippi. It is a way to think well of oneself. One is at neither extreme and also—neither extremely old nor laughably young.

My very hairs do mutiny; for the white
Reprove the brown for rashness, and they them
For fear and doting.

(3.11.13-15)

It is important for Antony to think this way. He must be the physical supreme. But whether this “golden mean” is really the blossoming point of the purely physical life, that “rose” which Antony says Caesar wears upon him—this is something the hero has not yet worked out.

He feels his loss repaid by Cleopatra’s repentant tears: her strong reverence for his own concept of himself. But inevitably, once this sadness has somewhat fretfully been laid to rest, he turns to other comforts.

Love, I am full of lead.

(3.11.72-74)

Despite the pseudo-Stoicism, however, this matter of military prowess is not fully settled. In fact, it has just begun to raise its ugly head.

We learn that the hero has sent his schoolmaster, the only available ambassador he has, to ask something of Caesar.
Lord of his fortunes he salutes thee, and
Requires to live in Egypt, which not granted,
He lessons his requests, and to thee sues
To let him breathe between the heavens and earth,
A private man in Athens.(17)

(3.12.11-15)

Since Shakespeare's Athens was not distinguished for sobriety or temperance of life, Antony's plea is hardly a wish to study philosophy. It is as if his sense of unworthiness has led him to try to settle for what remains. Lear would wish to be with his Cordelia like “birds in a cage”; Antony wishes to retire with Cleopatra among the sensual descendants of Troy's opponents. For that, presumably, is what remains when the military life is gone.

But Antony's request is evasion, and Antony, as tragic hero, will not be allowed to evade. Events will more closely probe him.

(3.13.13-16)

The hero's response is complex. He says to Cleopatra:

To the boy Caesar send this grizzled head,
And he will fill thy wishes to the brim
With principalities.

(3.13.17-19)

It is as if he challenges her to weigh things as he himself weighed them when he said kingdoms were clay. Are they “clay” to her too? And he adds pathos: the queen may either yield to a “boy” or stay faithful to the “grizzled” one. Youth and age still people his thoughts as he responds:

To him again, tell him he wears the rose
Of youth upon him; from which the world should note
Something particular. His coin, ships, legions,
May be a coward's, whose ministers would prevail
Under the service of a child as soon
As i'th'command of Caesar. I dare him therefore
To lay his gay comparisons apart,
And answer me declin'd, sword against sword,
Ourselves alone.

(3.13.20-28)

Now this is a struggle for survival and Antony simply must lash out—but characteristically, always characteristically. For in addition to the “unfairness” that lies in the “mere” paraphernalia of power—coins,
ships, legions—there is the subtler taunt of Caesar's very youth, which Antony so exaggerates. It is the "child" Caesar with the rose of youth upon him that he wants to get at. It is Antony alone who stands as the virile epitome. Actium was a "gay comparison." The true test is elsewhere. Sword against sword, ourselves, alone. Of course. He will even do the writing of the message himself. This is too intimate an affair for go-betweens.

But when he leaves, Thidias comes. Caesar has spoken to him about the "eloquence," "inventions," and "promises" he is to produce to win the queen, and a description in Plutarch suggests what Shakespeare might have made visually available to his audience. Caesar, according to Plutarch, sent Thyreus (Thidias) "one of his men unto her, a very wise and discreet man, who bringing letters of credit from a young lord unto a noble lady, and that besides greatly liked her beauty, might easily by his eloquence have persuaded her." Plutarch's sexual hint seems realized in Caesar's directions. He told Thidias to "win" Cleopatra from Antony. Caesar's messenger may therefore be quite the elegant young man.

Plutarch further narrates that Thyreus "was longer in talk with her than any man else was, insomuch as he made Antonius jealous of him. Whereupon Antonius caused him to be taken and well-favoredly whipped, and so sent him unto Caesar." Shakespeare's changes are significant. His Thidias is not quite so "very wise and discreet" as is Plutarch's. Thidias patronizes Enobarbus and is suggestive to Cleopatra. This makes Enobarbus run to get Antony who, when he arrives, finds Thidias kissing the queen's hand.

Favors? By Jove that thunders!

What art thou, fellow?
Thid.
One that but performs
The bidding of the fullest man, and worthiest
To have command obey'd.

(3.13.85-88)

One fervently hopes that Thidias refers simply to his being there, not to his current performance with Cleopatra, but as Antony snaps, this ambiguity is lost in the threats of disintegration multiplying around him. He shouts for his attendants.

Approach there!—Ah, you kite!—

But nobody comes.

Now, gods and devils!
Authority melts from me. Of late, when I cried "Ho!"
Like boys unto a muss, kings would start forth
And cry "Your will?"

Under this triple assault—the sexual threat, the insolence, and the tardiness of mere servants who seem to bear Thidias out—the hero struggles for very existence. And moving from paralyzed despair to a frenetic activity, he attains a loud but shadowy rebirth.

Have you no ears?—I am Antony yet!

When one servant finally answers, distressing in his singleness, Antony's order is simple.

Take hence this Jack and whip him. (18)
Jacks are young men (with overtones of social-climbing, overelegant worthlessness) trying to presume upon their betters.\textsuperscript{19} Such a one needs to be put in his place—and in a specific way.

\begin{quote}
Till like a boy you see him cringe his face,
And whine aloud for mercy.\textsuperscript{(20)} Take him hence.
Thid.
Mark Antony—
Ant.
Tug him away. Being whipt,
Bring him again; the Jack of Caesar's shall
Bear us an arran't [errand], to him.
\end{quote}

When Thidias is returned, we see what it was that Antony had in mind.

\begin{quote}
Is he whipt?
Serv.
Soundly, my lord.
Ant.
Cried he? and begg'd a pardon?
Serv.
He did ask favor.
Ant.
If that thy father live, let him repent
Thou wast not made his daughter, and be thou sorry
To follow Caesar in his triumph, since
Thou hast been whipt for following him. Henceforth
The white hand of a lady fever thee,
Shake thou to look on't.
\end{quote}

Thidias has been forced to receive one of the worst punishments that Antony thinks he could possibly have inflicted: to turn a man girlish. The aggressive challenge to Antony's masculinity must be revealed for what it is: a merely contemptible presumption that masks unmanliness—the anti-Antonian principle. For it is Antony who drank the stale of horses: and when he did so, “his cheek lank'd not.”

\begin{quote}
Tell him thy entertainment. Look thou say
He makes me angry with him; for he seems
Proud and disdainful, harping on what I am,
Not what he knew I was. He makes me angry,
And at this time most easy 'tis to do':
When my good stars, that were my former guides,
Have empty left their orbs, and shot their fires
Into th'abysm of hell.
\end{quote}

(3.13.89-147)

He is “Antony yet,” a presence unchanged by mere ill fortune. He can, after all, still make men cry like girls.

Despite Cleopatra's subsequent reassurances, however, this Thidias episode shakes something in Antony: he needs to nail things down again. He has shambled in shame through the last few scenes. And if to be ashamed is yet to feel basically worthy, Thidias challenged even this by seeking for himself a Cleopatra who was the reward and symbol of Antony’s own essential manliness. So if Antony should now, under this pressure, begin moving, it is because he needs to make himself worthy again. But “worthy,” it seems, has something to do not with Caesarean behavior, but with the bravery of the twelfth-century chevalier. The queen vows love, he says “I am satisfied,” and then:
Caesar sets down in Alexandria, where
I will oppose his fate. Our force by land
Hath nobly held; our sever'd navy too
Have knit again, and fleet, threat'ning most sea-like.
Where hast thou been, my heart? Dost thou hear, lady?
If from the field I shall return once more
To kiss these lips, I will appear in blood;
I and my sword will earn our chronicle.
There's hope in't yet.
Cleo.
That's my brave lord!

(3.13.168-76)

In this huge talk of navies and armies, in the midst of these “gay comparisons,” the queen herself fondles him almost maternally with her words while he pursues the delirium of his great need. There must be one final, vital gesture, a pulling out of all the physical stops to outface the real ghost, the specter of unmanliness which all Antony's frenetic rhetoric has not laid.

I will be treble-sinew'd, hearted, breath'd
And fight maliciously; for when mine hours
Were nice and lucky, men did ransom lives
Of me for jests; but now I'll set my teeth
And send to darkness all that stop me. Come,
Let's have one other gaudy night. Call to me
All my sad captains, fill our bowls once more;
Let's mock the midnight bell.

(4.1.177-84)

He is still worth love, even though the trials of physical strength belong to youth. Never mind. He will be that youth, no matter the impossibility.

There's sap in't yet. The next time I do fight,
I'll make death love me; for I will contend
Even with his pestilent scythe.

(3.13.190-93)

But reminders crowd. Shakespeare shows Caesar's cynical rejection of the duel challenge we had almost forgotten about, and then we observe Antony's own plaintive and naïve wonderment that Caesar will not take up the challenge. Why? he asks Enobarbus, who answers that Caesar doesn't need to bother. But Antony cannot stand the idea that because Caesar is “twenty times of better fortune, he is twenty men to one.” “Tomorrow, soldier,” he answers Enobarbus,

By sea and land I'll fight; or I will live,
Or bathe my dying honor in the blood
Shall make it live again.

(4.2.4-7)

Yet hard on this baptismal image do come thoughts of a new kind, ideas which events have now shot into his periphery.
“Woo't thou fight well?” he asks Enobarbus suddenly. This question reflects his sense that he has not yet redeemed himself on the battlefield. And so he feels he owes his men something, just as, after his flight at Actium, he was ashamed enough to tell all his followers to leave him. He has to make it up to them now.

Enter three or four Servitors.

Give me thy hand,
Thou hast been rightly honest—So hast thou—
Thou—and thou—and thou. You have serv'd me well,
And kings have been your fellows.

Enobarbus calls this one of those odd tricks which sorrow shoots out of the mind. It is more than this.

I wish I could be made so many men,
And all of you clapp'd up together in
An Antony, that I might do you service
So good as you have done.

Make as much of me, he tells them, as when my empire was “your fellow”—at least for a little while, waiting on him at their meal. After that,

I turn you not away, but like a master
Married to your good service, stay till death.
Tend me to-night two hours, I ask no more,
And the gods yield you for't!

(4.2.10-33)

This appeal is an extremely personal sort of encounter going beyond the mercenary relationships that have informed the desertions of this play. “There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd,” he said to Cleopatra, and it is clear that for such a one as he, service is much more than a contract. It is a mutual love. Pretend I am what I was on the battlefield, he seems to say here, and in exchange I promise to redeem myself tomorrow. Thus your service will not have been misdirected after all. Help me to become “me” again and I'll be someone worth your being a servant to—even if it kills me.

The weeping that this causes is good. It reassures Antony's men and allows him to console them with other visions of himself. When Enobarbus reproves Antony for making the men (and himself) tearful, Antony can almost luxuriate in the effort not to cheer himself but others in this hopeless cause. After all, it is he who has everything, because they love him, his “hearty” friends.

Now the witch take me, if I meant it thus!
Grace grow where those drops fall, my hearty friends!
You take me in too dolorous a sense,
For I spake to you for your comfort, did desire you
To burn this night with torches. Know, my hearts,
I hope well of to-morrow, and will lead you
Where rather I'll expect victorious life
Than death and honor.

(4.2.36-44)

But Shakespeare reminds us that the depression is hard to shake off. Back to more immediate and external comforts. “Let's to supper, come, and drown consideration.”
We next see Antony (4.4) in the morning. His gaiety and optimism, even his playfulness, show him in the happiest mood that Shakespeare ever allows him in the tragedy. He is up early and becomes involved in the comedy of Cleopatra's posture as squire and armorer. References to morning multiply as his men come to join him.

'Tis well blown, lads.

This morning, like the spirit of a youth
That means to be of note, begins betimes.

(4.4.25-27)

But as he gaily puts on his armor his boasting too reminds us of the continuing intensity of his personal crisis.

O love,

That thou couldst see my wars to-day, and knew'st
The royal occupation, thou shouldst see
A workman in't.

His parting from Cleopatra is of a piece with this.

Fare thee well, dame, what e'er becomes of me.
This is a soldier's kiss; rebukable
And worthy shameful check it were, to stand
On more mechanic compliment. I'll leave thee
Now like a man of steel. You that will fight,
Follow me close, I'll bring you to't. Adieu.

(4.4.15-34)

Remember me as a soldier. The nobleness of life is to do thus. Especially a soldier's kiss (rather than the mechanic compliments of such a one as Thidias who ties Caesar's "points").

All this may be so, but reality returns with Scarus, whom he meets on the way.

Scar.
The gods make this a happy day to Antony!
Ant.
Would thou and those thy scars had once prevail'd
To make me fight at land!
Scar.
Hadst thou done so,
The kings that have revolted, and the soldier
That has this morning left thee, would have still
Followed thy heels.

(4.5.1-6)

Antony had rejected that advice indeed because he was lured by a dare. The soldier's dry rejoinder shows what "daring" does. For Antony was urged by all his professional soldiers to fight by land, not because it was the brave thing to do, but because it was the smart thing to do. But now, before his second battle, when Antony belatedly follows this advice for his own reasons, Scarus undercuts the bluff soldierly comradeship to point the irony. Antony may think he is once more reconciled to his troops, but the news about Enobarbus shows the opposite. It is precisely because of the land-battle that that soldier deserted. Now, fighting by land is not the smart thing to do, even if it is "brave." The hero's sense of union with the scarred soldier is illusory.
Antonian principles of war are not those of a Scarus, a Ventidius, or an Enobarbus. He is, in the end, not their kind of “soldier.”

So too Antony's reaction to Enobarbus's departure is characteristically obtuse.

Corrupted honest men!

But Antony's fortune was one element that Enobarbus specifically rejected as grounds for desertion. He lingered on because of something other than fortune; “I'll yet follow the wounded chance of Antony,” he said after Actium, “though my reason sits in the wind against me.” What ultimately alienates Enobarbus is the fatuity of Antony’s emotional stance.

A diminution in our captain's brain
Restores his heart. When valour [preys on] reason,
It eats the sword it fights with. I will seek
Some way to leave him.

(3.13.196-200)

Antony must have the land-battle, the minor victory, the profuse thanks to his men, and the sentimental picture of their friends and wives weeping for joy over the noble tokens of their valor. So Antony has proved himself (as when he left Egypt to refute Pompey)—something to be made clear to someone whose hand dawdled under the lips of a “jack” like Thidias,

And let the Queen know of our [gests].

(4.8.1-2)

To this “great fairy,” Antony tells Scarus, the scarred soldier, “I'll commend thy acts, make her thanks bless thee.” For Cleopatra is the transcendent principle. And she may now, must now, accept his claim. That “self,” the self for which she has been symbol and avatar, he has reunited with. He has recaptured himself and her. This is the grand conceit he uses as he greets the one he calls his “day o'th' world.”

Chain mine arm'd neck, leap thou, attire and all,
Through proof of harness to my heart, and there
Ride on the pants triumphing!

(4.8.14-16)

The heart she commands also rules his exertions as the saddle rules the horse. His heart is the saddle on the panting endurance of his physical virility—the “horse”—which carries Cleopatra in triumph. His very physical effort he sees as her real tribute. But if Cleopatra is glorified by riding this particular “horse,” it is nevertheless a horse of Antony's own making, at a time in English culture when reason was customarily compared to the rider, bestriding the beast of blind forces.23

Less abstractly, however, there is a vital point Antony must make.

We have beat them to their beds. What, girl, though grey
Do something mingle with our younger brown, yet ha'we
A brain that nourishes our nerves, and can
Get goal for goal of youth.

(4.8.18-22)

No longer is his head grizzled, and no longer is his younger brown simply a token of rashness, as after Actium. He is young again, a mature, distinguished, aging … youth.

We end where we began. The poet departs from source especially here as scarred Scarus receives a blessing.

Commend unto his lips thy [favoring] hand.
Kiss it, my warrior; he hath fought to-day
As if a god, in hate of mankind, had
Destroyed in such a shape.

Antony's “playfellow” can be familiar with the lips of another, if need be, but not with those of the jack of some boy who kept his sword like a dancer at Philippi. Scarus is the kind of fellow you want for this sort of hand-kissing thing.

Antony leads the processional exit with Cleopatra in a march, her hand held by the conqueror. The queen is his again: his bravery has reclaimed his rights here. He is Antony again, as he was when he held the hands of Caesar and Pompey leaving Pompey's ship. And here he ends the victor scene.

With brazen din blast you the city's ear,
Make mingle with our rattling tambourines,
That heaven and earth may strike their sounds together,
Applauding our approach. Exeunt.

(4.8.22-39)

IV

“Their preparation is today by sea,” observes Antony to Scarus in their next appearance. But the young man's army is also prepared for a land-battle. Even so, it would seem that Antony's euphoria and sense of the dare are at their height again.

I would they'ld fight i'th'fire or i'th'air;
We'ld fight there too.

(4.10.3-4)

Caesar has repeated the Actium ploy and because Antony has again accepted the gambit of the sea-battle, we know he has not changed. So do others. For when it comes, the reversal is quick. Antony himself announces it to us.

This foul Egyptian hath betrayed me.
My fleet hath yielded to the foe, and yonder
They cast their caps up and carouse together
Like friends long lost. Triple-turn'd whore!
'tis thou
Hast sold me to this novice, and my heart
Makes only wars on thee. Bid them all fly;
For when I am reveng'd upon my charm,
I have done all. Bid them all fly, be gone

(4.12.9-17)

The strands wrapped up at the end of the second battle come loose once again, but it is vital for us to understand just what happened—Antony’s reports of what he has seen versus his judgments about them. His fleet has yielded and there is much exuberant friendliness between the now-mingled armies. That is the report. But why is this? Did Cleopatra betray Antony, or was this the doings of the troops themselves? Plutarch’s account is a checkpoint.

When by force of rowing they were come neere unto them, they [Antonius's men] first saluted Caesars men, and then Caesars men resaluted them also, and of two armies made but one, and then did all together row toward the citie. When Antonius saw that his men did forsake him, and yeelded unto Caesar, and that his footemen were broken and overthrown: he then fled into the citie, crying out that Cleopatra had betrayed him unto them.

(6:78-79)

In Shakespeare's tragedy, what Antony sees is happy soldiers, and it is this joy which breaks things up for Antony. His judgment? Cleopatra, of course, has betrayed him.

He had no rage after Actium, or even after the desertion of Enobarbus, but here things are far different. How can he now merit desertion? Was he not preeminently brave and “military” again, worthy again of love and service? What is happening is therefore clearly impossible, and impossibly painful.

O sun, thy uprise shall I see no more,  
Fortune and Antony part here, even here  
Do we shake hands. All come to this? The hearts  
That [spannell'd] me at heels, to whom I gave  
Their wishes, do discandy, melt their sweets  
On blossoming Caesar; and this pine is bark'd,  
That overtopp'd them all.

(4.12.18-24)

He is talking, we see, not about power but about alienation of affections, even though he is not now thinking of the queen. If his men desert him when he is worthy … this is to court annihilation. So then there is the lurch to the easier alternative. There has to be some other cause. He thinks of it.

O this false soul of Egypt! this grave charm,  
Whose eye beck'd forth my wars and call'd them home,  
Whose bosom was my crownet, my chief end,  
Like a right gypsy, hath at fast and loose  
Beguil'd me to the very heart of loss.  
What, Eros, Eros!

Enter Cleopatra

(4.12.24-30)

Vanish, he tells her, “or I shall give thee thy deserving.” His fear drives him beyond all restraint of love as he envisions desertion and defeat almost as a loss in virility at the hands of the “young Roman boy.” And his groping for her as a reason for his failure is a blind gesture to “drown consideration” again, to thrust out
violently and killingly at himself.

If it be well to live; but better 'twere
Thou fell'st into my fury, for one death
Might have prevented many. Eros, ho!
The shirt of Nessus is upon me; teach me,
Alcides, thou mine ancestor, thy rage.
Let me lodge Lichas on the horns o'th'moon,
And with those hands, that grasp'd the heaviest club,
Subdue my worthiest self. The witch shall die.
To the young Roman boy she hath sold me, and I fall
Under this plot. She dies for't. Eros, ho! Exit.

(4.12.39-49)

His speech of Nessus tells us much. It recalls Othello's final duality of “ideal” against “fallen” self. Here Hercules is Antony's idealization of the physical strength and power within himself. The club-wielding hands are the means of suicide and also of killing, but we do not know whether the hands themselves belong to Hercules or Antony. Indeed, what is it to speak of suicide and to go off seeking to kill Cleopatra? Her own ambiguous role in the Hercules metaphor emphasizes Antony's confusion. Is Cleopatra a Lichas, the innocent tool who brought Hercules the poisoned robe from his wife, or is she Antony's “worthiest self?” Is she the “witch” that anointed the poisoned robe, Deianeira, Hercules' wife? Whatever a literal dissection of the logic would allow, we are left with the feeling that Antony's aggressive thrust to the killing of Cleopatra is roughly compared to the suicide of Hercules—to avoid … pain.

There is irony too in his metaphor. Cleopatra is likened to the innocent Lichas, and indeed she is no more than Lichas where responsibility for Antony's situation is concerned: Lichas was merely the messenger. But messengers do not fare too well in this tragedy. So Cleopatra's own metaphor in response has a melancholy appropriateness too. She speaks of the mad Ajax. Unable to win the Achillean armor he so dearly wished, Ajax insanely took out his rage on the sheep which he fell to slaughtering. “He is more mad,” she says, “than Telamon for his shield.”

The calm beginning of scene 14 subtly recapitulates the Antonian motives for self-extinction. Images of himself and Cleopatra interweave their colors.

Ant.
Eros, thou yet behold'st me?
Eros.
Ay, noble lord.
Ant.
Sometimes we see a cloud that's dragonish,
A vapor sometime like a bear or lion,
A [tower'd] citadel, a pendant rock,
A forked mountain, or blue promontory
With trees upon't that nod unto the world,
And mock our eyes with air. Thou hast seen these signs,
They are black vesper's pageants.
Eros.
Ay, my lord.
Ant.
That which is now a horse, even with a thought
The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct
As water is in water.
Eros.
It does, my lord.
Ant.
My good knave Eros, now thy captain is
Even such a body. Here I am Antony;
Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave.
I made these wars for Egypt, and the Queen
Whose heart I thought I had, for she had mine—
Which, whilst it was mine had annex'd unto't
A million moe (now lost)—she, Eros, has
Pack'd cards with Caesar's and false-play'd my glory
Unto an enemy's triumph.
Nay, weep not, gentle Eros, there is left us
Ourselves to end ourselves.

(4.14.1-22)

The paradox bemuses him. How can his “self” betray his self? The queen has been inconsistent with the ideology and, what is more, has even deprived him of the “million” other hearts which he thought he compositely was. “O thy vile lady,” he says to the entering Mardian, “she has robb'd me of my sword.” It is as if she had violated the trust of mutual identity, deprived Antony of the profound means of self-definition which the sword embodies but which she herself ultimately expresses. What then, indeed, the hero seems to ask, is a self?

Mardian comes and his story is well told. Cleopatra's last act and her very last words are the ultimate tribute and motion of recompense. She said: “Antony! Most noble Antony!”

Then in the midst a tearing groan did break
The name of Antony; it was divided
Between her heart and lips. She rend'red life,
Thy name so buried in her.

(4.14.31-34)

This action is more valuable than her tears at Actium. But it shatters him. So much so that, contrary to what he said at the beginning of the play about forebearance to messengers with bad news, he tells Mardian: “That thou depart'st hence safe does pay thy labor richly. Go.” For this is not mere bad news; it is annihilation.

There follows the visible stage business. “Unarm me, Eros. The long day's task is done and we must sleep.”

The sevenfold shield of Ajax cannot keep
The battery from my heart. O, cleave, my sides!
Heart, once be stronger than they continent,
Crack thy frail case! Apace, Eros, apace.
No more a soldier. Bruised pieces, go,
You have been nobly borne.

This sense of a real end, of the tangled pointlessness of living, this sure motion, like that of the repentant Ajax toward suicide, defines Antony's real allegiance and the focus of his identity. For if Cleopatra's “treachery” robbed him of his sword, her death robs him of his soldiership. In Antony's one specific sense, there is now no reason to “be” any more.

All length is torture; since the torch is out,
Lie down and stray no farther. Now all labour
Mars what it does; yea, very force entangles
Itself with strength.
Strength and force were indeed in Antony's universe, but they are nothing if not illuminated by the “torch” which was the idealizing light. There can be no meaningful pilgrimage toward a meaningful heaven through meaningful striving. There is only the continuing complicated effort at self-coherence.

I have liv'd in such dishonor that the gods
Detest my baseness. I, that with my sword
Quarter'd the world and o'er green Neptune's back
With ships made cities, condemn myself to lack
The courage of a woman.

Now her death has restored his concept of their meaning together, and Antony is prepared to move his illusions to the Elysian Fields. But getting there is difficult, even now. To assault one's own flesh: this goes against everything Antony values in life. Eros can slay himself without much comment, but Antony must speak of bravery and he lingers in his beloved soldier's and lover's flesh. Emulating the dead Eros, his servant, he tries to be “a bridegroom” in his death, to “run into it as to a lover's bed.” Even so, he cannot but help go astray. This is an awful sort of combat for which his psyche is just not prepared.

The pattern seems complete. The pride in and love of flesh which were Antony's have made this task almost impossible, this cutting act which, in the end, must be a despising and repudiating of oneself as flesh. That Antony, with his visions of his “sprightly port” in the Elysian Fields, is not prepared to turn himself into that “mangled shadow” which he had previously described to his sad captains is the real issue here. Whether his plea now derives from physical weakness or from the end of courage is something that only the original production could clarify. The source suggests the physical weakness, but it does not offer what Shakespeare added to Antony's words:

I have done my work ill.(26)

He has run on the sword, all the same, and the action is a victory not so much over Caesar as for himself. Yet in the horrible twilight life which Antony has to endure for yet a little while, Shakespeare turns the screw once more, as if to show the torture that Antony's own beliefs and desires can inflict upon him.

Antony's silence throughout the remainder of this scene is the apex of Shakespeare's work, the culmination and tour de force of the characterization which has been so well established that, coasting on its own momentum, it guides the empathic sensitivity of an audience to the concept of Antony's probable anguish,
even though he, for a long time will not utter a single word. His guards have left him, despite the plea in the name of love, lying silent and alone with a sword protruding from him. Alone, except for the body of the bravely dead Eros, and except for Decretas, one of the guards, who now stands above him. Will he perform the act of love?

Thy death and fortunes bid thy followers fly.  
This sword but shown to Caesar, with this tidings,  
Shall enter me with him.

Thus is Antony robbed of his sword in a most profound sense. This instrument and metaphor of death and love is torn from his body to become the tool for one of his own private bodyguards to enter himself as a sycophant to the young boy who keeps his own sword like a dancer. What could Antony possibly say to this? The eloquence of silence follows Decretas hastening to his embarrassed exit past the arriving Diomedes.

Diomedes' news is one of those impossible moments in drama, and Antony's reticence crowns it.

(4.14.117-19)

And who knows how long Antony remains silent, as he lies there, before he says simply,

Where is she?

And, at this point, as if there could be no further depths, things begin to move upward for Antony. Never does he achieve self-knowledge, but Shakespeare gives him something. It may fog the intellectual issues, sparing Antony, but it reminds us of how he is, profoundly. Diomedes tells his story, concluding, “and I am come, I dread, too late.”

Then, significantly: Enter four or five of the Guard of Antony. Is there again the slowness shown by the servants during the Thidias episode? If so, it does not matter. They come. Antony asks them to carry him to Cleopatra. It is, he says, the last service he will command them. A guard responds:

Woe, woe are we, sir, you may not live to wear  
All your true followers out.  
All.  
Most heavy day!

This is the greatest comfort the deserted Antony could have been offered, and it makes him gracious and loving again: he has his soldiers back.

Delusion does not leave him in his final moments. He is carried to his queen and hauled up to her in the
monument, where his visions lead him to die in a dream, comforting Cleopatra, whose sorrow lends him final identity. He reasserts it in terms of all the old dilemmas that his life was ever about. “Not Caesar's valor hath o'erthrown Antony, but Antony's hath triumph'd on itself.” The paradox enables him to lie there supreme, even though, a moment later:

The miserable change now at my end
Lament nor sorrow at; but please your thoughts
In feeding them with those my former fortunes
Wherein I liv'd, the greatest prince o'th'world,
The noblest; and do now not basely die,
Not cowardly put off my helmet to
My countryman—a Roman by a Roman
Valiantly vanquish'd.

(4.15.51-58)

It would be good to believe all this of Antony, but since we have lived with him over the expanse of the play and noted the sordid falsification which was the immediate cause of his death, must we not see this speech as describing what Antony would infinitely wish to have been? The “greatest” because the bravest, most “noble” because most virile, and forever aspiring to his queen who is to him his double, his self.

V

Just before his death, Antony gave Cleopatra some advice. It was puzzlingly wrong enough to make us wonder.

Ant.
One word, sweet queen:
Of Caesar seek your honor, with your safety. O!
Cleo.
They do not go together.
Ant.
Gentle, hear me.
None about Caesar trust but Proculeius.
Cleo.
My resolution and my hands I'll trust,
None about Caesar.

(4.15.45-50)

Because Antony's advice is also to be found in Plutarch, along with its inaccuracy, it has been dismissed by critics either as a slip of the Shakespearean pen or, strangely, as not significant to the play.27 But we cannot dismiss events in Shakespearean plays merely because they come to him from Plutarch, for Shakespeare never wrote merely to prove that he had followed his source. And if the dramatic tension of Antony's death and Cleopatra's moving lament follow so closely upon the hero's advice about Proculeius as to obscure it, a later sequence is suggestive. For after Antony's death, when Caesar has heard Cleopatra's message of submission (5.1), he singles some one out.

Come hither, Proculeius. Go and say
We purpose her no shame. Give her what comforts
The quality of her passion shall require,
Lest, in her greatness, by some mortal stroke
She do defeat us; for her life in Rome
Would be eternal in our triumph. Go,
And with your speediest bring us what she says,
And how you find of her.
Pro.
Caesar, I shall. Exit Proculeius.
Caes.
Gallus, go you along. [Exit Gallus]
Where's Dolabella,
To second Proculeius?

(5.1.61-70)

In the next scene, after Cleopatra has given her initial speech:

Pro.
Caesar sends greetings to the Queen of Egypt,
And bids thee study on what fair demands
Thou mean'st to have him grant thee.
Cleo.
What's thy name?
Pro.
My name is Proculeius.

And, in case we have forgotten:

Cleo.
Antony
Did tell me of you, bade me trust you, but
I do not greatly care to be deceiv'd
That have no use for trusting.

(5.2.9-15)

Proculeius engineers the queen's capture, proving the hero wrong. What are we to make of this? Was Antony revengeful, desiring to trick Cleopatra into the fate she was so manifestly anxious to avoid? If so, then when he prefaced his remark by saying “Of Caesar seek your honour, with your safety,” he meant that Caesar would offer the queen both honor and safety. But this meaning implies a use of “with” statistically unusual for the play, (“with” as “by means of” occurs in at least thirty of the thirty-three times the word appears). 28 So Antony most probably was saying: “Of Caesar seek your honour by means of your safety.” He sincerely wanted to protect her.

Given Antony's good will, he therefore trusted Proculeius, and so we may want to think that Proculeius is not actually responsible for the queen's capture. “Gallus,” it is sometimes suggested, comes up the back of Cleopatra's monument without Proculeius's knowledge, captures Cleopatra, and thus leaves Antony's Proculeius with no choice but to play along. But Caesar himself assigned Proculeius the leading role in the projected deceit, and when he comes to Cleopatra in 5.2, he shows us that he is following instructions to the letter. Cleopatra should “fear nothing,” he tells her, and even after she has been captured, Proculeius counters Cleopatra's fear of being led in triumph with these reassurances:

These thoughts of horror further than you shall
Find cause in Caesar.

(5.2.62-64)

But we know this is a lie, for Caesar has already told Proculeius that he wants to have Cleopatra in his triumph. He sent Proculeius to keep Cleopatra alive for this purpose.
Then comes Dolabella to the captured Cleopatra and says:

What thou hast done thy master Caesar knows,
And he hath sent for thee. For the Queen,
I'll take her to my guard.

Doubting the sincerity of Proculeius's allegiance to Caesar, editors have often reassigned one of Proculeius's speeches. The text of the First Folio of 1623, the only authoritative edition of this play, is as follows:

Pro. This Ile report (deere Lady)
Haue comfort, for I know your plight is pittied
Of him that caus'd it.
Pro. You see how easily she may be surpriz'd:
Guard her till Caesar come.
Iras. Royall Queene.
Char. Oh Cleopatra, thou art taken Queene.
Cleo. Quicke, quicke, good hands.
Pro. Hold worthy Lady, hold:
Doe not your selfe such wrong, who are in this
Releeu'd but not betraid.
Cleo. What of death too that rids our dogs of languish.

The second “Pro.” speech above most editors give to “Gallus,” the effect of the “emendation” being to remove from Proculeius the relatively contemptuous comment upon Cleopatra. And thus a contrast: the sympathetic Proculeius vs. the unsympathetic Gallus.

What about Gallus? We first encounter him when Caesar has given Proculeius his directions. I quote from the First Folio again.

Caes. Gallus, go you along: where's Dolabella, to second Proculeius?
All. Dolabella.

Editors generally assume that Gallus leaves with Proculeius—although the form “exit” (as opposed to “exeunt”) does not help this concept. Gallus is not in the First-Folio version of the capture scene at all: Proculeius enters alone. Gallus will enter only with Caesar, Maecenas, Proculeius “and others of his Train,” after the queen has been captured. Even then, he is mute, saying nothing while on stage.

How then do editors make “Gallus” relevant to Proculeius's activity? They arrange a series of suggested stage directions according to which either Proculeius or Gallus ascends the monument by a ladder while Proculeius (or Gallus) either is or is not talking to distract Cleopatra. But, most editors to the contrary notwithstanding, there is no “monument” to climb. It is true that Cleopatra enters “aloft” for the dying of Antony, so that she can have him raised to her, but for 5.2, the last scene of the play, the situation is different. “Enter Cleopatra, Charmain, Iras, and Mardian” reads the stage direction, and the actors enter (understandably) to use the whole stage through Cleopatra's death-scene, Cleopatra never leaving the stage until she is borne off dead at
the end. To “surprise” Cleopatra, therefore, soldiers do not need to climb at all. They need only to enter. 29

At the same time the repetition of Proculeius's name-tag during the previously quoted sequence does not require us to substitute some other character, Gallus, to make the contemptuous remark. For in Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatic texts, it was common to repeat a speaker's name-tag if his speech had been interrupted by stage business.30

Finally, we cannot assume that “Gallus” would tell Proculeius to “guard her till Caesar come.” Gallus was supposed to “second” Proculeius. And since it is Proculeius who asks Cleopatra to give him some message for Caesar, it is clear that it is Proculeius who intends to leave, not to stay. And it is Proculeius who is designated to give the order in the Folio text.

Pro.
You see how easily she may be surpriz'd:
Guard her till Caesar come.

The onus of deceit can only be laid on the shoulders of a “Gallus” with some straining. It lies more plausibly on the only figure to receive characterization at all in the pair that exited from Caesar—on Proculeius, whom Antony said that Cleopatra should trust.

But if Proculeius does not bear out Antony's prediction, should he not be more obviously “untrustworthy”? Here lies the point of the whole thing, I think. Trustworthiness is a relative concept, especially in this play. If Proculeius goes against Antony's particular expectations, this need not indicate that he is excessively guileful. For while it is true that Proculeius has the Thidias-like function of plying Cleopatra with flattery, Thidias himself forfeited audience sympathy through the patronizing tone he adopted toward both Enobarbus and Antony. But Proculeius is never portrayed as a “jack.” Even if he does come near losing the audience's favor as he continues to reassure the captured queen about his master Caesar's “bounty,” he does indicate other sensitivities. Here is his response to Dolabella.

Dol.
Proculeius,
What thou hast done thy master Caesar knows,
And he hath sent for thee. For the Queen,
I'll take her to my guard.
Pro.
So, Dolabella,
It shall content me best. Be gentle to her.
To Caesar I shall speak what you shall please,
If you'll employ me to him.

(5.2.64-70)

Proculeius does, it is true, have a certain amount of slickness, but apparently he is not quite slick enough to be given a delicate mission all by himself. Rather, it is Dolabella who seems generally in charge. And he, when talking to Proculeius, speaks of Caesar as Proculeius's “master”—“What thou hast done, thy master Caesar knows.” Body- and table-servants, guards, and soldiers of undetermined rank such as Enobarbus have “masters,” but Proculeius is obviously no table-servant. Putting Cleopatra in a situation in which she is, he says, easily ‘surpris’d’ and then effortlessly prevented from killing herself, he then supervises the guard until relieved by Dolabella.31 Obviously he is some sort of professional soldier with the social status of an Enobarbus and with a talent for smooth talk. With an ability to improvise on orders which he has not the faintest idea of disobeying, but with limited authority. Capable not only of a professional contempt for Cleopatra's “fortified” position, but also of an impulse of sympathy for a beautiful and tragic queen, he is one with Scarus and Enobarbus.
Thus Proculeius has an important bearing on Antony's last advice to Cleopatra. Antony assumed that someone around Caesar would not act in Caesar's own best interests, but would help Cleopatra. For this task it is obvious that the elegant Dolabella, in the hero's books, would not do at all. Recalling why Antony allowed the soldier Scarus to kiss the queen's hand, we may assume that he would trust no one but a "true soldier," like Proculeius. But it does not necessarily follow that, to Proculeius, "soldiership" will mean the same thing it does to Antony.

Indeed, his very violation of Antony's expectations is the final Shakespearean comment on Antony. For though Proculeius may indeed prove himself a "man" through his flash of pity for the queen, he is one with all the other soldiers of the play. They are all quite politically clear-eyed. For better or for worse, to be a soldier in this play is to respect not only force and bravery, but also "policie." And it is in this context that Antony makes his last misjudgment, reemphasizing the ideological assumptions which define him and isolate him and his grand design from those around him. Because he admires Proculeius as a soldier he expects Proculeius, like him, to be Cleopatra's soldier.

It is Cleopatra who, in the end, shows the other side of this Antonian matter. She rejects the hero's advice, and it is she who turns out to be right. The way in which she is right, too, puts Antony's own viewpoint in another and final perspective. For another brush-stroke in Antony's characterization is the milky Dolabella.

Described in the source as "a young gentleman," Dolabella is one who introduces himself to Cleopatra in this ludicrous fashion.

Dol.
Most noble Empress, you have heard of me?

Cleo.
I cannot tell.

Dol.
Assuredly you know me.

(5.2.71-72)

It is he who later speaks of Cleopatra's "command, which my love makes religion to obey," and informs the queen twice of Caesar's intentions. Putting Cleopatra before his political duty, he violates the high trust implicit in Caesar's commands to him at the very end of the play, performing a betrayal of which Enobarbus, Demetrius, Philo, and Scarrus would strongly disapprove. For women, we recall from Enobarbus, are to be esteemed as nothing in comparison with "a great cause." And Proculeius is certainly true to this soldierly view.

But if the ideals of Dolabella are not close to those of a Proculeius, they are close to those of Antony. Indeed, is not Dolabella the one who acts in the spirit of the hero's wishes? The two of them united in their own way by this bond, Dolabella himself stands as an indirect clarification of that "soldiership" which Antony has pursued to his dying breath. As the group assembles there on the stage, with the rest of Caesar's train entering to them, the audience knows who, among all that stand there, is ironically, for the hero, Antony's true spiritual heir.

And if Proculeius is indeed the obvious, tough soldier, then the physical contrast between his and the delicate Dolabella's simultaneous presence on the stage cannot but suggest to the audience a wider vista of more profound contrasts, polarities which include the tragic shapelessness of Antony's identity. For he is neither Dolabella nor Proculeius, but perhaps, on a more expansive scale, a little, or too much, of both.

Notes
1. The naïveté of worshipping masculine strength and physical bravery as “manliness” was a familiar subject. Jonson's *Alchemist* gives us Kastrill, while the “roaring boys” were ubiquitous. Castiglione tells us of “true manlinesse” in *The Courtier*, trans. Sir Thomas Hoby (London, 1577), sig. T. The pieties of G.B. in *The Narrow Way* (London, 1607), sig. G, instruct us about what “manhood and fortitude” really are. Earlier in the sixteenth century Medwall's *Nature* (STC 17779) presents Sensuality who dismisses Innocency, calling him “boy” and urging every one to “play the man” by indulging in various vices.

2. “Earing” is a pun. R. H. Case in his Arden edition of the play calls attention to the ploughing context and we may look forward to the remarks about Pompey and the pirates: “the sea … which they ear and wound.”

3. Shakespeare's First Folio, the authoritative and only text for this play, should be followed more closely than it has been when this portion of the drama is reprinted. For the various editings of J. Dover Wilson, Kittredge, and Evans obscure the fact that the F stage directions put three messengers on stage at the same time. Editors change one or two of them to “attendants” presumably because Antony enters with one messenger, sends him off, receives a second messenger who enters, speaks with a third messenger who seems to be on stage, and receives still a fourth messenger. Editing to tidy up traffic is useful, but the purpose of all these messengers seems obvious.

4. The motif is not in Plutarch. “But by good fortune, his wife Fulvia going to meete with Antonius, sickened by the way, and dyed in the city of Sicyone: and therefore Octavius Caesar, and he were the easelier made frendes together. For when Antonius landed in Italie,” etc. (6:30).

5. Cf. Cor. 1.4.4. Antony will later threaten Pompey: “We'll speak with thee at sea.”


7. This early and important statement needs clarification. The Variorum takes “mutual pair” as tautology, but contemporary usage does not bear this out. See *Tit.* 5.3.71: “Knit again / This scattered corn into one mutual sheaf” as opposed to *Lr.* 3.1.19ff.: “There is division, / Although as yet the face of it be cover'd / With mutual cunning.” Cf. also L. Vives, *Introduction to Wisdom*, ed. M. L. Tobriner (New York: Teachers College Press, 1905), p. 132. “the mutual bond of love between man and man.” Antony's “mutual” operates as a synonym for something like “tightly integrated” or even “made into one.” Antony's words thus suggest something like “the nobleness of life is to do thus when a pair such as we, in our unity and in our duality too, can do it. And in all this I command the world to note that this combining is peerless.”

8. Cf. Plutarch (6:38-55) where, in Parthia, Antonius lost eight thousand men from exposure because he forced them through unseasonable marches in his haste to rejoin Cleopatra at the end of the campaign. This was one more sorry episode in what was a disastrous military campaign.

9. The change from Plutarch emphasizes the intent here. Plutarch (6:78-79) sees the last battle as a combined operation exhibiting the weakness of Antonius's defensive position. He gathers his few footmen around him and waits to see what his soldiers in the galleys can do first. Caesar's troops overthrow these footmen. Shakespeare's Antony dismisses his land-troops in personal and desperate exasperation.

10. Two other Antonies suggest by contrast what Shakespeare had in mind for the present characterization. In *JC*, when Octavius shows alarm at the advance of the republican forces down the hill at them, Antony there comments: “Tut, I am in their bosoms,” and then diagnoses with accuracy the basis of the strategy we watched Brutus and Cassius debating earlier. The second Antony is Plutarch's. His Antonius, prior to Actium, engages in a series of naval maneuvers that culminate in a series of subtle moves adroitly cutting Octavius off from his water supply (6:65). In *AC*, Shakespeare is depriving his Antony of those strategic abilities with which Plutarch endowed him and to which the dramatist himself earlier subscribed.
11. “Well, well” was a kind of Elizabethan negation whose flavor can be partially reconstructed. In MM 1.2.59 ff., Mistress Overdone interrupts the bawdy conversation between Lucio and the First Gentleman: “Well, well! There’s one yonder arrested and carried to prison was worth five thousand of you all.” Compare King James’s reluctant remark as Buckingham and Prince Charles took leave of him for their dubious Spanish adventure. To make the journey secret they all cooperated in the following reported conversation. “The King told them, ‘See that you be with me upon Friday night.’ Then Buckingham replied, Sir, if we should stay a day or two longer, I hope your majesty would pardon us!”—“Well, well,’ quoth the King; and so they parted.” See G. P. V. Akrigg, Jacobean Pageant (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 346.


13. In the study of the drama of a vanished age, retrieving the meanings of the interjections common to speech, but not necessarily to essay or poem, is important. Written forms of these interjections now tend to be conventional to modern times and thus misleading. In Antony’s case here, his use of “ha!” (F:Ha? [where ? conventionally stands for !]) is not, for example, like Falstaff’s, who, when he thinks both ladies have come to him in the woods, is pleased with the success of his plan and disguise. Thus, in the spelling of F: “Am I a Woodman, ha? Speake I like Herne / the Hunter?” (see The First Folio of Shakespeare, ed. Charlton Hinman (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1968), p. 77. Antony’s exclamation is closer to what may be implied by the accusing speech of Leontes in WT who says that if the “guilty” Hermione is praised for virtue, then there will immediately be (F): “The Shrug, the Hum, or Ha, (these Petty-brands / That Calumnie doth use)” (p. 300). The virtuosity of “ha” can be noted merely within AC when Cleopatra, in her boredom, says (F): “Ha, ha, give me to drinke Mandragoru.”

14. The reading of these lines is greatly facilitated if we read “droop” for “drop.” For similarities and confusions, cf. the one auspicious and one “dropping” eye of Claudius in Hamlet and cf. OED: Drop, sb. for drop-droop affinities. “Droop” was also used transittively (OED, droop, v. 6.: “A withered Vine, That droupes his sappe-lesse Branches to the ground” and “He droopes his eye”). E. J. Dobson, English Pronunciation, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 2:687 can find no conclusive distinction in pronunciation between “drop” and “droop.” In H5, finally, the compositor (A?) of Folio Henry V sets “drooping” (V.ii.47) which, in F2-F4, is emended to “drooping.” See Charlton Hinman, The Printing and Proof-reading of the First Folio, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 2:515, for compositor identity here.


16. Cf. Bertram complaining (AWW 2.1.30-33) that if he is detained in court and kept from the wars, he will be delayed “till honor be bought up, and no sword worn / But one to dance with.” Cf. Tit. 2.1.38-42.

17. Although Plutarch details this Athenian request, with Antonius likening himself to Timon of Athens, our skepticism about Antony's inclinations in these philosophical respects may be justified by recalling the traditional view of Athens as a center for sensual self-indulgence. This is the Athens of Shakespeare's Timon where its savior, Alcibiades, has his courtesans. This is also an Athens suggested by the term “Merrygreek” so often punned upon in Shakespeare's Troilus. See also William Goddard, A Satyrical Dialogue (Dort? 1616?: STC 11930) where one of the operating assumptions is that Athenian women are whores (sig. A4, for example).

18. Whipping was a standard and specific punishment for a “rogue” (i.e., a “valiant, strong, or sturdy beggar and vagabond”) a term embracing all tricksters, from one pretending to be an “Egyptian” or gipsy to any wandering unlicensed loiterer. See William Lambard, Eirenarcha or the Office of the

19. As with all slang, it is difficult to reconstitute the nuances of “jack,” but I suggest (1) social climber, (2) a young and impertinent late adolescent and thus, (3) a term which might be used by an older man to describe a youthful competitor. For (1) there is the ubiquity of the phrase “Jack will be a Gentleman” to be found as a gloss on the social complaints of Palingenius, The Zodiake of Life, trans. B. Googe (London, 1576), sig. F5v. H. W. Janson, Apes and Ape-Lore (London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1952), traces the association of “jack” with “ape,” and hence “jack” as an imitation of a “real man.” (2) is illustrated by the comment of Simonides in Middleton’s The Old Law (London, 1656), sig. F3v: “Ah sirrah my young boys, I shall be for you, / … You shall find / An alteration, Jack-boys, I have a spirit yet.” Cf. George Wilkins, The Miseries of Enforced Marriage (London, 1607), sigs. B3-B3v; Beaumont and Fletcher, The Knight of the Burning Pestle, Induction, 1:21; Thomas Dekker, The Shoemaker’s Holiday, 3.3.29-32, where the father calls his “peevish girl” an “ape.” See also 2 Return from Parnassus in The Three Parnassus Plays, ed. J. B. Leishman (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1949), ll. 9 and esp. 923. Shakespeare’s usage is various, but an important point is ignored in the Henry IV plays if we do not note the nuance of “Jack Falstaff.” Jack Cade is also suggestive. In MWW 3.1.85, Caius pulls motifs together as he threatens Evans to duel: “By gar, you are de coward, de Jack dog, John ape!” Sonnet 128 puns extensively on the meaning of “jack” as harpsichord key and this may parallel Antony’s way. “I envy those jacks that nimble leap / To kiss the tender inward of thy hand” and “Since saucy jacks so happy are in this, / Give them thy fingers, me thy lips to kiss.”

20. Cf. Aufidius’s use of “boy” to precipitate Coriolanus’s rage at the end of the play: “Name not the god [Mars], thou boy of tears.” Whipping may “boy” one in another sense. As Lawrence Stone observes: “Those of gentle birth were flogged like the rest so long as they were children, and between 1500 and 1660 they were also flogged as adolescents … It was only when a young gentleman went down from the university that he left his adolescence behind him. As a man of birth and breeding he could be assured that from now on he was immune from corporal punishment, an indignity reserved for those of lower social status.” Crisis of the Aristocracy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) p. 35.

21. Case, Arden ed., (4.4.25n.) summarizes arguments about the meaning of “well blown.” There is the flourishing of trumpets, the “blossoming” of the morning, and also, we find in OED, blow v. 13, as “proclaim,” and blown, ppl. a. 11.a4 as “breathed out,” as in Othello’s “exsufflicate and blown surmises.” Perhaps Antony’s way of saying “That’s the way to talk, lads!”


24. Antony’s speech is based on the well-known concept of the kiss as uniting lovers’ souls. Antony’s version is not without its ironies since the result is that bodies, not souls, must meet. Volpone wanders in the same area when, trying to seduce Celia, he speaks of the amorous shapes in which they can disguise themselves (Europa and the bull, etc.). He concludes: “I will meet thee, in as many shapes: / Where we may so transfuse our wandering souls, / Out at our lips, and score up sums of pleasures” (3.7.233-35). The term “nightingale” is unfortunate, for despite OED’s silence, one notes Francischina, the whore, who sings in Marston’s Dutch Courtesan (London, 1605), sig. B2v: “The dark is my delight, / So tis the nightingale’s. / My music’s in the night, / So is the nightingale’s. / My body is but little, / So is the nightingale’s. / I love to sleep ’gainst prickle, / So doth the nightingale.”

25. Case (Arden ed.) refers us to LLL 1.2.162 and 3.1.104, for “fast and loose,” where the context is suggested by the latter reference: “To sell a bargain well is as cunning as fast and loose.”
Nevertheless all this talk of gypsies, charms, and spells need not be taken as seriously as it often is, for such remarks in the tragedy derive from admirers of Cleopatra, such as Antony and Pompey. And parlance in other Jacobean plays employs “witchcraft” as a slang term for the usual female wiles. “I could be coy, as many women be,” says Jane in Shoemaker’s Holiday: “Feede you with sunne-shine smiles, and wanton looks / But I detest witchcraft.” See Thomas Dekker, Dramatic Works ed. F. T. Bowers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 3.4.65 ff. Cf. Ben Jonson’s Poetaster (4.9.97 ff.). What may have been intended as elements in some pattern of imagery is, of course, a different consideration, and for general witch terminology see David Kaula, “Othello Possessed,” Shakespeare Studies 2 (1966): 112-32.


27. For comments on the sequence itself, see David S. Berkeley, “Antony, Cleopatra, and Proculeius,” Notes and Queries 195 (1950): 534-35, whose brief note sees Antony’s advice as indeed a crux, and Cynthia Grill, “Antony, Cleopatra, and Proculeius,” Notes and Queries 205 (1960): 191. Grill states that Antony is utterly incapable of base treachery” and that “his erroneous advice” is “the price he has paid for making his will lord of his reason.” On the other hand, Bertrand Evans argues that Antony intentionally betrayed Cleopatra because “it is inconceivable” that he should not have known Proculeius was untrustworthy: see Shakespeare’s Tragic Practice (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 265-68.

28. Examples of additive “with”: 1.2.117; 2.10.3; 3.13.164 (“together with”). Causative “with” appears in 1.1.45; 1.2.5, 23, 105; 1.4.26, 47, 50; 1.5.46; 2.1.25; 2.2.24, 63, 127, 141, 178, 210; 2.5.65, 71; 2.6.21, 24; 2.7.43; 3.6.20; 3.10.7; 3.11.44, etc., etc.


30. See ibid., esp. p. 70. Regarding the lack of stage direction for an entrance of help for Proculeius, Hosley quotes Hinman (2:508) on the problem of the casting off of copy for this page producing the omission of an s.d., but the half-line “Of him that caus’d it” leaves room for a brief entrance-designation, as Hosley observes. There is room, but the s.d. is not there.

31. See, for instance, Barnabe Barnes, Four Books of Offices (London, 1606), sig. 2A, on the subject of the Romans and “surprisal.” Cf. 1H4, 1.1.93; Mac., 4.2.204, and Tit., passim.

Laura Severt King (essay date 1992)

[In the following essay, King suggests that Shakespeare portrays competing images of the “penitent prostitute” in the characterization of Cleopatra, who resembles prostitute-saints of the Middle Ages. Like these women, Cleopatra is associated with both sexual incontinence and supernatural power.]

All eroticism has a sacramental character.

—Georges Bataille, Erotism

Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much.
Among the extraordinary claims Enobarbus makes for Cleopatra in the second act of *Antony and Cleopatra* is that “the holy priests / Bless her, when she is riggish” (2.2.239-40). Concluding one of Shakespeare's most paradoxical passages, this final paradox alienates Cleopatra utterly from ecclesiastically sanctioned sexual values of early seventeenth-century England, at the same time linking her to the sacred eroticism of ancient Near Eastern cultures. But this seeming sexual exoticism participates in an indigenous devotional and theatrical tradition as well—one effaced, but not eradicated, by Continental and English reformers. As do the prostitute-saints of late antiquity and the Middle Ages, Cleopatra embodies a theologically problematic connection between sexual incontinence and supernatural power. In this essay, I will suggest that in *Antony and Cleopatra* Shakespeare dramatizes competing visions of the penitent prostitute: one that celebrates a sexual profligacy *transformed* by conversion and one that insists on a sexual profligacy *eliminated* by conversion. I will argue that Cleopatra's death is not triumphant but tragic, in part because she repudiates her supernaturally potent eroticism, trading the iconography of Isis for that of the Virgin Mary. To make this case, I will examine the theatrical and devotional tradition of the penitent prostitute at length, then turn to Shakespeare and his sources.

During the Middle Ages, the figure of the prostitute-saint attracted a disproportionate share of popular devotion, learned commentary, and theatrical attention. As early as the tenth century, the vexed relationship between unruly sexuality and supernatural power emerged in dramatic form in two plays by Hrotsvit of Gandersheim. In the first of these, *The Fall and Repentance of Mary*, the relationship is conventionally antagonistic. Mary, an anchoress and niece of the hermit Abraham, runs away from her cell and turns to prostitution when she loses her virginity to a lascivious monk. After a friend's two-year search locates her, Abraham seeks out his niece in the guise of a client. Inside the brothel where she works, he reveals his identity and persuades her to resume the ascetic life she has abandoned. Wearing a hair shirt and fasting, she proves a pious example to those she previously corrupted. Abraham tells his friend that it is a sign of God's redemptive power that a sinner can be so restored. Mary thus embodies the paradox of the great sinner become a great saint, but not the problematic erotic continuity found in other *vitae*.

It is Hrotsvit's second play about a prostitute-saint, *The Conversion of the Harlot Thais*, that hints at a meaningful connection between eroticism and spiritual force. While Mary is passively redeemed in spite of her wantonness and ends up equal to her deliverer in God's sight, Thais virtually reforms herself in a way consistent with her wantonness and ends up surpassing both her deliverer and his fellow desert fathers. The reputation of Thais, a beautiful and widely desired prostitute, comes to the attention of the learned hermit Pafnutius, who resolves to approach her as Abraham did Mary. When he gains access to her chambers, he threatens her with the wrath of God, thereby ostensibly persuading her to renounce her lucrative profession and retire to a sealed anchoress's cell. After leaving Thais in the cell for three years, Pafnutius seeks to know whether her penance has propitiated God, so he inquires of a fellow hermit, Antonius, who sets his disciples the task of praying for an answer. One disciple shortly has a dream of a celestial bed, which he assumes is meant for his master. A heavenly voice corrects him, however, saying that the bed is “Thaidi meretrici” (for Thais, the whore). Pafnutius returns to Thais and informs her that in fifteen days she will ascend to heaven. Finding her humble and godly, the hermit prays with her at her death.

The initial impression left by the play is that Pafnutius radically changes Thais, as Abraham has changed Mary. But throughout the work, Hrotsvit—often departing significantly from her source—questions Pafnutius's importance to Thais's conversion and even the conversion itself. The prologue begins this questioning. Without reinstating the critical contempt for the prologue that recent scholarship has sought to dispel, I suggest that the earlier critics were not entirely wrong: that a species of contempt is exactly what Hrotsvit is trying to elicit in this long and abstract discussion—not contempt for her dramaturgy, of course, but for Pafnutius's pedantry. As even the prologue's staunchest defenders have pointed out, it is structurally unrelated to the rest of the play. I suggest that if the prologue is detached, then it is deliberately so—that Pafnutius's
lengthy philosophical speech is somehow extraneous to the real movement of the play.

The prologue also contains a Biblical quotation that generates skepticism of Pafnutius's role. After the hermit's dissertation on music, which has clearly wearied the disciples, they thank him and say: “Sed terremur sententia Apostoli dicentis, ‘Nam stulta mundi elegit Deus, ut confundaret sophistica.’” (“But we fear the words of the Apostle, who says, “God has chosen the foolish to confound the wise.”) 8 The whole verse, 1 Corinthians 1:27, reads in the Vulgate: “Sed quae stulta sunt mundi elegit Deus / ut confundat sapientes / et infirma mundi elegit Deus / ut confundant fortia.” (“But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God has chosen the weak of the world to confound the strong.”) This quotation has too much resonance in Hrotsvit's dramatic cycle to be carelessly placed. It could, in fact, be the motto of most of her plays, those in which Hrotsvit's weak virgins overcome their strong oppressors and would-be seducers. But if we accept Pafnutius at face value as the wise deliverer of a wretched sinner, it cannot be the motto of this play. By reminding us here that God has chosen the foolish to confound the wise, Hrotsvit achieves several ends: she deflates Pafnutius's learning, she prepares us to view Thais as spiritually superior to Pafnutius, and she forges a subtle link between Thais and her other, ostensibly more virtuous, heroines.

The undercutting of Pafnutius continues throughout the play, and it is particularly evident against the background of The Fall and Repentance of Mary. When Pafnutius arrives at Thais's house, he finds therein a sanctuary and finds also that she already accepts the tenets of the Christian faith. Mary, who before her seduction had the benefit of twenty years' religious teaching, hasn't given her religion a thought during her tenure in the brothel. A little later, Thais instinctively does the right thing in publicly burning the spoils of her career and denouncing her past. Mary, on the other hand, has to be told what to do with her earnings. For the entirety of Thais's penance, Pafnutius is absent; he therefore has no influence on the quality of her atonement. Abraham remains with Mary to oversee her penance. Pafnutius's importance in Thais's conversion is diminished by the knowledge she already has when he enters her life and by the spiritual autonomy she immediately develops. The diminution of Pafnutius's role locates the paradox of the sinner-saint in Thais's character, rather than in her circumstances, as was the case with Mary. And her final achievement, the heavenly bed, asserts a meaningful erotic continuity between Thais's life before her conversion and afterward.

By the early seventeenth century, this paradoxical erotic continuity was overt, at least in Catholic writing. A long narrative poem on the life of Mary of Egypt illustrates some major themes in early modern vitae of prostitute-saints, as well as some developmental trends. Known in Europe throughout the Middle Ages by means of countless Latin and vernacular versions of her story (including one possibly by Aelfric), Mary became a saintly superstar in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Whereas earlier versions of her legend featured her interlocutor, Zozimus, as the central character, high medieval redactions deemphasized the desert father in favor of Mary.10 The saint not only gained literary and cultic importance but also furnished material to other, kindred figures, most prominently Mary Magdalene. Thus, interestingly, there is continuity both within and between the lives of late medieval prostitute-saints.

A paradoxical continuity within the early modern vita of Mary of Egypt is evident in the opening lines, as the poet pronounces the legendary figure “Great in hir loosenesse, greater in restraint, / A wondrous sinner, a more wondrous saint.” 11 Linking her lascivious and her ascetic periods rhetorically as well as logically, the poet hints at the origin of Mary's sanctity in her unrestrained sexuality. She is both the most incontinent woman in the world and, ultimately, God's favorite creature: “Yet no one soule could fixe with more delight / Th'almighty eye, then that poore naked wight. / … / O powerful charme: the very name could mouse / Both the effects of pardon, and of loue.” 12

Mary's story is relatively uncomplicated. Born in the Nile delta to old but loving parents, she inexplicably leaves home at puberty, headed for Alexandria and a life of pleasure. In the city, she attempts to gratify prodigious sexual appetites but remains “stil vnsatisfied, and neuer tyrd.” 13 Interestingly enough, lust is for Mary an avocation, rather than a vocation; she takes in sewing and begs in order to support her sexual activity.
One day, she joins a group of pilgrims travelling to see the true cross in the Holy Land. Having seduced countless pilgrims converging on the site, she attempts to continue her solicitations inside the church housing the cross, but is magically prevented from entering the tabernacle. After several thwarted attempts, she flings herself beneath a statue of the Virgin Mary, comprehends the enormity of her sins, and prays for aid. Immediately, she is granted a beatitude and entry to the church. Having revered the cross, she heads for the desert (stopping at a nearby church for another beatitude) to live out her mortal existence as an ascetic.

Zozimus meets Mary as an old woman blackened by the sun and covered with hair. She has spent the first seventeen years of her desert existence alternately tormented by desire and uplifted by bliss, although, since the age of forty-seven, she has enjoyed undisturbed bliss. Zozimus's response to her is surprisingly passionate. He thinks about her continually in quite romantic terms. Shortly after he brings the host to her in the desert, she dies, to be buried by him (with a little help from a lion) nearly a year later.

Both the paradox and the continuity that inhere in Mary appear in the language of the conversion scene, as is evident in her description, to Zozimus, of her experience at the foot of the cross:

Here feare and horrour, springing from the tyde
Of ouer-flowing ioye, my soule deuide,
Guilty of its owne sins: a flood of teares,
Badges of inward sorrow, drowne my feares
In seas of true content: no ioye hath life
Compared to this sad ioye, this ioye-ful griefe:
Hence springs true hatred of my former sins,
Hence heauenly loue with better hopes begins
To spread pure flames, and my best part inspires,
O that a streame of tears should rayse such fyres!
The marbled flooer groueling I embrac't,
And cleans'd the checkerd flags with kisses chast.(14)

More than simply oxymoronic, Mary's response demonstrates a genuine simultaneity of two radically different emotional and ontological states. Furthermore, her devotional reflex—burning, kissing, and embracing—is utterly consistent with her ostensibly repudiated past; it is similarly sexual and similarly unrestrained.

Intemperance and pleasure are important themes elsewhere, both before and long after Mary's conversion. As she joins the pilgrim youths bound for the holy land, Mary reports that she was “Hoping, if euer, in such choice to find / Pleasure, as ample as my boundlesse mind.” 15 Later, as Mary experiences a beatitude so profound as to still the motion of the spheres, she “feedes / On pleasure, which all words, al thought exceedes.” 16 Caroline Bynum points out that medieval women's lives tend to be marked more by continuity than by radical change. 17 Here we see that even lives that should admit of almost no continuity (that of the wealthy courtesan who moves to an excrement-filled anchorage or the urban sensualist who adopts a desert habitat) show quite astonishing continuities between the periods before and after conversion.

In Mary's case, these continuities are both internal and environmental; that is, the universe continues to respond to her erotically after her conversion. As Mary walks away from their first meeting, Zozimus reports:

The ayre receaues her on glad wings, the grasse
Prest lightly with her foot steps, as they passe
Forceth to rise again (you'd say) to meet
Its happinesse and kisse her sacred feet:
The woods haste to incounter their lou'd ghest,
The leafes to whispering winde thes icys exprest.(18)
Alone in the desert for several decades, Mary nonetheless generates identifiable sexual excitement in the natural world. This environmental response becomes most intense at a key point in the poem: the moment at which Mary performs her most resonant miracle. As Mary crosses the River Jordan without recourse to a bridge, Zozimus observes:

The waues the while more smooth and softly sleet
Playing soft musike to her naked feet,
Which (forc't by vpper streames to part) they kisse
And murmure, as rob'd of their greatest blisse.(19)

As Mary recapitulates Christ's action in walking upon water, as she explicitly appears “like to himself [God] in greatnesse,” the language of the poem becomes undeniably erotic. This not only recalls her earlier sexuality but also links it to something very like an apotheosis. In other words, the female saint's great power lies not so much in repudiating her sexuality as in transforming it and extending it into the natural and supernatural worlds.

In general, the Middle Ages greatly admired prostitute-saints, although it produced few. None was more admired—or finally more embattled—than Mary Magdalene, and the accretion and dismantling of her myth hints at a fascinating tension between Protestant and Catholic sexual politics, a tension played out, quite often, on the stage. At the core of the Magdalen myth is the biblical Mary Magdalene, mentioned by name only as one of the women who witnessed the crucifixion and as the woman to whom the risen Christ first appeared. The only biblical suggestion of her incontinences is in Luke's and Mark's observation that Christ had earlier exercised her of seven devils. From this core, the Magdalene gathered to herself other biblical stories, a process aided by the fact that most of the women named in the canonical Gospels are called Mary. Late antique Christians began identifying the Magdalene with the anonymous sinner in Luke 7:37-50 who washes Christ's feet with her tears, dries them with her hair, anoints them and kisses them. This is the woman of whom Christ says, “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much” (Luke 7:47), Christ's comment originating (and ultimately valorizing) her career as a prostitute. The Magdalene also assimilated other gospel figures: the woman who, prodigally in Judas's eyes, anoints Christ at the house of Simon the Leper; the sister of Martha, who sits at Christ's feet while Martha prepares dinner; and the sister of Lazarus, whose tears provoke the only tears of Christ and incite him to raise her brother from the dead. Thus, as Marjorie Malvern points out, “she absorbs the identity of almost every feminine figure pictured in any kind of intimacy with the Christ.”

The Magdalene also encompassed important Old Testament identities. Early Christians saw her as a second Eve, whose encounter with the resurrected Christ (the tree of life) remedied the first Eve's separation from the tree. An identification also emerged between the Magdalene and the Shulamite of the Song of Songs. Just as the singer searches for and finds her lover, so does the Magdalene search for and find the risen Christ in the Gospel of John. The following lines (Song of Songs 3:1-4, here quoted from the Revised Standard Version) were among those devoted to her and sung on her feast day:

“I will rise now,” I said, “and go about the city; in the streets and in the squares I will seek the one I love.” I sought him, but I did not find him.

The watchmen who go about the city found me, to whom I said, “Have you seen the one I love?”

Scarcely had I passed by them, when I found the one I love. I held him and would not let him go, until I had brought him to the house of my mother, and into the chamber of her who conceived me.
I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the does of the field, do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases.

In Mary Magdalene's mouth, Solomon's heavily allegorized (but never fully occluded) celebration of erotic love hints at a divine marriage between the Magdalene and Christ. Such a relationship is described in the Gnostic *Gospel of Phillip*, which figures the cosmic reunification of male and female in the liaison.²⁵ The idea is also visible in less occult texts, for example in the e Museo play *Christ's Burial and Resurrection*, in which the Magdalene importunes Christ: “O myn harte! wher hast thou bee? / Com hom agayn, & leve with mee!” ²⁶ But more fundamentally, the attribution of the song to Mary Magdalene links powerful, female eroticism and direct access to the divine.

Not surprisingly, the Magdalene herself begins acting in a quasi-divine manner between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries. In Jacobus de Varagine's *Legenda Aurea*, she acquires a childhood (wealthy and privileged), a foreign ministry (the conversion of Marseilles), and a full roster of miracles (a restoration of sight, a raising from the dead, a thirty-year fast, and seven-times-daily ascensions to heaven, among others). As Malvern points out, a distinctly pagan aroma clings to some of Jacobus's additions, particularly the many miracles involving conception, childbirth, and agricultural fertility: “Jacobus, despite his didactic intent, … pictures the Magdalene both as a goddess of life and as Christ's feminine counterpart.” ²⁷

Late medieval drama picks up and elaborates most of the attributes assigned to the Magdalene over the preceding millennium. From the moment she steps away from the chorus of women at Christ's tomb, she proves an unequalled vehicle for paradox—not only the ontological paradox of the sinner-saint, but also a series of emotional paradoxes. A twelfth-century Latin play, for example, follows scripture in juxtaposing the scene of Mary's rejoicing at the angelic announcement of Christ's resurrection with her subsequent lament over his missing corpse. According to O. B. Hardison, this fidelity to the biblical source produces flawed theater: “Mary has to be at the same time joyful and sad, believing and skeptical.” ²⁸ Hardison goes on to qualify his harsh judgment, however, claiming that later dramatic treatments of the material derive “a certain richness” and “a suggestion of … mystery” from the Magdalene's emotional inconsistency.²⁹ I would argue that such juxtapositions do not so much suggest as insist upon mystery, placing paradox at the heart of the Magdalene's character.

A corresponding—often more pronounced—continuity is visible in the dramatic figure. Occasionally reversing the conventional chronological sequence, the Magdalene's sexuality anticipates her spirituality. In the twelfth-century Passion Play from Benediktbeuren, she solicits clients with the following admonition: “Minnet tugentliche man, / minnekliche vrawen. / Minne tuot eu hoech gemut / unde lat euch in hochen eren schauven.” (Dashing young men ought / To love attractive women. / Love lifts up your spirits / And gives you a vision of sublime glory.)³⁰ More commonly, she uses erotic language to express later spiritual themes, such as her grief over the disappearance of Christ's body in the e Museo *Christ's Burial and Resurrection*:

Filie Jerusalem, Wheros ye goo,
Nunciate dilecto meo,
Quia amore languleo!
Of Jerusalem, ye virgyns clere,
Schew my best loue that I was here,
Tell hym, os he may prove,
That I am dedly seke,
And all is for his loue.(31)

The erotic familiarity with Christ and the verbal resemblance to the Song of Songs mentioned before are both very pronounced in this text.
In the Digby manuscript is a play devoted exclusively to Mary Magdalene. As several critics have emphasized, the title character is nothing if not eclectic: “In the Digby play, Magdalene takes on the host of roles that tradition defined for her. The beautiful daughter of Cyrus and sister of Martha and Lazarus, she is both whore and saint, the lover of men and the lover of Christ, the penitent anointer and the preacher of the Christian faith, the model for all sinners and the counterpart of the virgin Mary.” Following the Legenda Aurea, the Digby playwright emphasizes the Magdalene as Christ’s lover and as a near-goddess in her own right. In addition to the many miracles described by Jacobus, the Magdalene is credited with one power usually reserved for Christ (or, solely by virtue of her maternal agency, his mother): “Sertenly, serys I yow telle / Yf she in vertu stylle may dwelle / She xal byn abyll to destroye helle.” Even in the midst of her carnal pleasures, she is remarkably Christlike, telling one lover “I wol … dye for your sake.” Mary’s power to grant miraculous fecundity and to raise the dead are prominent in this play, as are references to her as Christ’s lover and “partenyr of [his] blysse.” These last two features and their pagan aroma prompt Malvern to assert that the Digby Magdalene is “an Isis.” Whether or not Malvern’s claim is historically justified, the Magdalene is clearly appropriating divine power, both by assuming the functions of the Christian deity and by manifesting qualities of pagan goddesses such as Aphrodite, Demeter, and Isis. The Magdalene’s encroachment upon this sacred and mythic territory would eventually embattle her in controversy.

The first attack on the mythic figure, however, originated in a humanist’s impulse to read scripture critically. In 1518, Lefèvre d’Etaples published De Maria Magdalena, which argues that the prostitute who anoints Christ’s feet, the Mary Magdalene who encounters the risen Christ, and the sister of Martha and Lazarus were historically three different women. It is difficult to exaggerate the passion with which Lefèvre’s assertion was attacked and defended in the following decade. Among those responding were no less than Erasmus and John Fisher, chancellor of Cambridge University, the latter with three tracts in six months. In his book, Lefèvre attacks not only the lack of exegetical rigor evident in the conflation of the three Marys but also the force and consistency of the eroticism she manifested: “The legend was being preached to the people in such sentimental terms that the emotions of the woman who loved much could be interchanged with the transports of the contemplative.” By breaking the mythical Magdalene into three and shearing her of legendary accretions, Lefèvre hoped to lessen the affective excesses of her cult and encourage a more intellectual model for devotion.

His antagonists, most prominently Fisher, argued primarily about hermeneutic principles, but, according to Anselm Hufstader, their real objections were mystical: “Fisher’s purpose in maintaining the identification of the three women was not simply to avoid multiplying incidents in the gospel or even to continue tradition. The very point, or mystery, of the Magdalene story depended on this identification.” The problem, for Fisher, was that Lefèvre’s book eliminates the paradox, the erotic continuity verging on causality, and the quasi-divinity that the Magdalene had evolved. In short, it pulls the prostitute and the saint apart and eliminates the goddess altogether.

It was a very different Magdalene that mounted the English stage after the Reformation. Although the mythic prostitute-saint thrived in Catholic literature (as witnessed by the poem on Mary of Egypt), her Protestant counterpart was usually a truncated figure. Lewis Wager’s 1566 morality play, The Life and Repentaunce of Marie Magdalene, acknowledges both sides of Lefèvre’s argument, but leans toward the radical position. Wager favors Lefèvre in treating only one biblical incident (the conversion of the prostitute), although he opposes Lefèvre in calling its subject Mary Magdalene. Wager also travesties the goddesslike qualities of the Digby Magdalene, making them part of her temptation and fall. The vice Infidelity tells Mary:

To be a goddesse your selue truely you must beleue,
And that you may be so, your mind therto you must geue.
All other gods beside your selue you must despise,
And set at nought their Scripture in any wise. (40)
Later in the play, Jesus Christ explicitly denounces the Magdalene's extrascriptural mythology:

Yea, truly, if this faith do from God's word decline,
It is no faith, but a certayn incredulitie,
Which causeth the mynd to wander in strange doctrine,
And so fall at length into impietie. (41)

Wager's most radical change, however, is his discrediting of Mary's love. Even among the humanist opponents of the Magdalene myth, there was no dispute that Christ favored the anonymous prostitute because she “loved much.” Wager, however, strips the Magdalene's love of its originating power. The loquacious Justification explains to Mary:

It were a great error for any man to beleue
That your loue dyd deserue that Christ shold forgue
Your synnes or trespasses, or any synne at all:
For so to beleue is an errour fanaticall.
.....But loue folweth forguienesse of Synnes euermore,
As a fruict of faith, and goth not before. (42)

It is difficult to miss the voice of John Calvin in this passage, and in fact, as Paul White demonstrates, Wager's play borrows directly and heavily from the Institutes. Wager's Calvinist Magdalene is as far removed from the Digby character as she can be—passive, fragmented, unparadoxical, and bereft of erotic power.

This is not to say that the earlier Magdalene disappears in England. The figure is still partially visible, although embattled, in Shakespeare's time. An anonymous 1604 poem, Mary Magdalens Lamentations, describes the saint's grief over Christ's missing corpse in highly erotic language. Throughout the work, however, there are signs of doctrinal strife. A preface to the author claims that the poem is so excellent “that no precisian can diffame, / Or blot the honor of this blessed Saint.” A full assault on English Calvinists lies in the lengthy explanation of why Christ's body is missing. The Magdalene laments:

O had I watched, as I waile him now,
None would have taken him without mee too.
But beeing too precize to keepe the Law,
The lawes sweet Maker I haue thereby lost.
.....The Sabaoth day (so strict solemnized)
The standing by his Corse had not prophained.
.....But vvhen I should haue staid, I went away,
And when it was too late I came again. (45)

Mary's observation of the sabbath, “reinvented” by the followers of Calvin as “a specific mark of visible holiness,” is here depicted as negligence of a higher and more intimate responsibility to the corporeal Christ.

The poem insists on the conflation of the biblical accounts that Lefèvre and his followers would separate, and this insistence is located in Christ's saying “Mary” as his first utterance after rising from the dead.

Mary I was, when sinne possesst me whole,
Mary I am being now in state of grace,
Mary did worke the ill that damn'd her soule,
Mary did good in givng euill place,
And now I showe both what I was and am
This word alone displaies my ioy and shame. (47)

In this passage, the poet reclaims both the paradox and the continuity of the earlier, mythic figure, using a pseudoetymological strategy common to her medieval biographers. Jacobus, for example, also situates both
paradox and continuity in Mary's name:

Magdalene is interpreted closed or shytte or not to be ouercomen or full of magnificence by whiche is shewed what she was tofore her conuersyon and what in her conuersyon and what after her conuersyon.48

But the Lamentations poet claims more than descriptive power for Mary's name; he claims generative power. Mary tells Jesus:

For when I heard thee call in wonted sort,  
And with thy vsuall voyce my only name,  
Issuing from that, thy heauenly mouths report,  
So strange an alteration did it frame,  
As if I had beene wholly made anew,  
Being only nam'd by thee, whose voyce I knew.(49)

That Mary's name is capable of generating a new identity—as well as of revitalizing identities that proliferated in the past—restores, transfigured, the fecundity embodied by the mythic Magdalene but limits its efficacy to her own person.

The struggle over the identity and features of the Magdalene reveals a recognition and fear of female erotic potency, as exemplified in (or magnified by) the vitae of late medieval prostitute-saints. If female sexual profligacy has the potential to compel divine favor—or to confer something resembling divinity—then it is potentially outside the control of any individual or institution. It is also potentially outside divine control. This potency is darkly acknowledged by misogynists such as Swetnam, who, after enumerating the sexual conquests of biblical, historical, and legendary harlots, asks “What is it that a woman cannot doe, which knowes her power?”50 Furthermore, if, as Michel Foucault points out, it is only in Catholic spirituality that western European culture has anything approaching an ars erotica, where “truth is drawn from pleasure itself,”51 then it is only in the lives of these saints that this ars is encountered other than figuratively. Where there is a physical correlative to a metaphysical process, there exists the potential for magical, or coercive, action. To prevent this, then, it is necessary to sever the physical and the metaphysical eroticism, the whore and the saint. In the wake of Lefèvre and Wager, Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra investigates this severance and assesses its costs.

Between Shakespeare's play and the prostitute-saint literature, there are verbal, as well as thematic, resemblances.52 Whereas Wager's Mary Magdalene is “a morsell for princes and noble kynges,”53 Cleopatra is “a morsel for a monarch” (1.5.31). The Shulamite of the Song of Songs is “dark, because the sun has tanned me,”54 Mary of Egypt “black and old,”55 Cleopatra “with Phoebus' amorous pinches black, / And wrinkled deep in time” (1.5.28). Three things are important about these brief allusions. First, they are part of Cleopatra's initial self-description; in other words, she places herself in the context of the literature, rather than being placed there by another character. Later, she will, tragically, extricate herself. Second, the allusions accompany her parasuicidal gesture in taking mandragora, a general anesthetic: “Now I feed myself / With most delicious poison” (1.5.227). From this link we may infer that the issues raised by the allusions will also inform her suicide. Third, as we have seen, there is great tension between a Magdalene who quotes the Song of Songs and Wager's saint. Alluding to both locates this tension in Cleopatra as well, though the allusions refer to different periods of her life. The description that recalls Wager's enervated Magdalene (“morsel”) refers to Cleopatra's youth; that shared with the fuller saints (“black,” “wrinkled”) refers to her maturity. The stripped-down Magdalene, the whore, informs Cleopatra's girlhood, while the erotic paradox, which includes and absorbs the whore, underlies her womanhood. The absorption is not complete, however; Cleopatra remains vulnerable to fragmentation. She can, and will, become a morsel again.
As is the case with the prostitute-saints, enormous supernatural power resides in Cleopatra's sexuality. Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra on the River Cydnus, in fact, is quite reminiscent of Mary of Egypt's stroll on the Jordan, at least in the response of nature to her presence:

The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne  
Burn'd on the water: the poop was beaten gold;  
Purple the sails, and so perfumed that  
The winds were love-sick with them; the oars were silver,  
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made  
The water which they beat to follow faster,  
As amorous of their strokes.

(2.2.191-97)

Underlining the correspondence between the sexual and the spiritual, Cleopatra uses theological language to recall for Antony a period of erotic contentment:

Eternity was in our lips, and eyes,  
Bliss in our brows' bent; none our parts so poor,  
But was a race of heaven.

(1.3.35-37)

It is little wonder that the priests “bless her, when she is riggish,” for her sexuality, like Mary Magdalene's, is capable of profound exaltation.

Cleopatra is also comparably paradoxical, able to “make defect perfection” (2.2.231). She embodies a mystery and multiplicity that are not self-cancelling but endlessly proliferating, as is evident in Antony's indulgent rebuke:

Whom every thing becomes, to chide, to laugh,  
To weep: how every passion fully strives  
To make itself, in thee, fair and admired!

(1.1.48-51)

Shakespeare suggests a philosophical dimension to this mystery by linking Cleopatra closely with Isis, as portrayed in Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* (*The Golden Ass*) and, more importantly, in Philemon Holland's 1603 translation of Plutarch's *Moralia*. Cleopatra, “whom every thing becomes,” assumes both the garb and the persona of Isis, who “becommeth all manner of things.” 57 Plutarch's Isis, like Pico's and Milton's, is the gatherer of scattered truths, “capable of all.” 58 As I have mentioned, Marjorie Malvern notices striking resemblances between Mary Magdalene and Isis; these are, if anything, accentuated when one considers Plutarch's portrait of Isis. Both are carnally and spiritually erotic; both have the power to confer fecundity and raise the dead. Each has a divine consort whose body she seeks after he is executed by enemies. Each exhibits conflicting but balanced emotional and ontological states. And both further complicate Cleopatra's essential paradox.

Encroaching upon Cleopatra's mystery is the Roman impulse to sever the sacred from the sexual. In Rome, women are whores or saints, not both. Octavia appears repeatedly as the latter; her first words in the play promise that, when Antony is parted from her, “before the gods my knee shall bow my prayers / To them for you” (2.3.3-4). According to Enobarbus she is “of a holy, cold, and still conversation” (2.7.119-20). Cleopatra, of course, belongs in the other category. When Antony challenges a messenger to “name Cleopatra...
as she is called in Rome” (1.2.103), he has one-word appellations in mind: strumpet, harlot, whore, trull. The result of this division is that both fragments are debased and enervated. Of Octavia, a messenger reports:

Her motion and her station are as one;  
She shows a body, rather than a life,  
A statue, than a breather.

(3.3.18-21)

Antony vacillates between celebrating Cleopatra's paradox and severing it. According to Plutarch, these conflicting impulses are embodied by Bacchus and Hercules, both associated with Antony in the play. “Plumpy Bacchus with pink eyne” (2.7.111) impresses Plutarch as “generative and nutritive.” In fact, Bacchus is another name for Osiris, the god-consort of Isis. Hercules, on the other hand, “striketh and divideth,” and, nearly every time his name comes up in the play, a parting or partition is imminent. In one case, the opposite is true, but only because Hercules is perceived to be departing, at least temporarily. The odd little scene in which this occurs is quite puzzling, unless one understands Hercules as Plutarch does. The night before Antony's only military victory in the play—a night of debauchery for most of the army—a group of soldiers hears disembodied music, about which they can agree only that it is strange. One soldier ventures an explanation: “Tis the god Hercules, whom Antony lov'd / Now leaves him” (4.4.15-16). Given a conventional understanding of Hercules, this departure should bode ill for Antony militarily, but, the next day, he beats “to their beds” (4.8.18) an opposing force swollen with defectors from his own. It is a day of triumphant reconciliations of impulses and personae that have clashed throughout the play, often playfully telegraphed in incidental phrases. Antony's first words in the morning, “Eros! mine armour, Eros!” (4.4.1), comfortably juxtapose sexual love and military prowess, as Antony will do for the first and only time that day. By the end of the day, Antony can command more music, “that heaven and earth may strike their sounds together, / Applauding our approach” (4.8.38-39). Hercules's departure has allowed a moment of nearly cosmic concord.

The demigod is back by the end of the act, however, and division returns as Antony implores, “Teach me, / Alcides [Hercules], thou mine ancestor, thy rage” (4.12.43-44). Throughout the scene, Antony names Cleopatra “as she is called in Rome” and sketches for her the ill-disguised “carting” she would endure at Caesar's hands:

And hoist thee up to the shouting plebeians,  
Follow his chariot, like the greatest spot  
Of all thy sex.

(4.12.33-36)

As Hercules, Antony perceives only the whore in Cleopatra. That his is a dividing, rather than just a debasing, impulse is evident in Antony's language earlier in the play. The first time Cleopatra enrages Antony, he partitions her verbally:

I found you as a morsel, cold upon  
Dead Caesar's trencher: nay you were a fragment  
Of Gnaeus Pompey's.

(3.8.116-18)

Picking up Cleopatra's earlier “morsel” and adding the equally partial “fragment,” Antony attacks Cleopatra by violently isolating her sexual incontinence from the context that makes it powerful and paradoxical.
Opposed to Antony's Hercules is the figure of Isis, subtly but surprisingly powerful in the play. In the erotic banter that follows the play's opening scene, she emerges playfully as a deity governing sexuality and fecundity: “O let him marry a woman that cannot go, sweet Isis” (1.2.60-61). She also has a ferocious side, as is visible in Cleopatra's rebuke to Charmian, “By Isis, I will give thee bloody teeth, / If thou with Caesar paragon again / My man of men” (1.5.70-72). These extremes accord not only with Plutarch's assertion of Isis's multiplicity but with Apuleius's designations of her many personae, including the amorous Venus, the fecund Ceres, and the warlike Bellona. When Cleopatra appears in the marketplace “in the habiliments of the goddess Isis” (3.6.17), she signals iconographically her kinship (considered quite literal by the Ptolemys) with the most polymorphous of deities, the “manifestation of all the gods and goddesses.”

It is in Antony and Cleopatra's peculiar moon that Isis manifests her supernatural power. As Plutarch claims, “Isis is nothing else but the Moone,” and he valorizes the moon's conventional inconstancy as multiplicity. Enobarbus's address to the “blessed moon” (4.9.7) on the night following his defection is, as the second watch reports, “a prayer” (4.9.26) to Isis:

O sovereign mistress of true melancholy,
The poisonous damp of night dispense upon me,
That life, a very rebel to my will,
May hang no longer on me.

(4.9.12-15)

Isis evidently grants his prayer. A sentry reveals that “the hand of death hath raught him” (4.9.29), but no agency is visible. Thus, Isis not only represents paradox; she also indicates the existential power of that paradox.

The association of Cleopatra with the powerful and paradoxical moon—and, through it, Isis, Mary Magdalene, and other sacred whores—is one of the things that makes the play's ending tragic, rather than transcendentally affirmative. Cleopatra, in a disturbing realization of Antony's earlier misapprehension, “Caesar tells, / 'I am conqueror of myself’” (4.14.62-63). In other words, she internalizes the divisive impulse that she has heretofore resisted, fragmenting herself. This process begins with a repudiation of multiplicity and an embrace of partial values:

Now from head to foot
I am marble-constant: now the fleeting moon
No planet is of mine.

(5.2.236-39)

Being “marble-constant” means rejecting the infinite variety for which she was earlier celebrated and assuming the statue-like quality of Octavia. Repudiating the moon splits her from Isis—a split that prefigures and necessitates further fragmentation. Finally, she acknowledges and enacts the fundamental split between saint and harlot that the Romans have insisted upon since the first words of the play. To escape carting and to avoid seeing herself parodied “i'the posture of a whore” (5.2.219), Cleopatra strikes the pose of the quintessential woman saint untainted by sexuality: the Virgin Mary. To Plutarch, snakes are divine, and when Cleopatra had intimations of divinity herself, she was a “serpent of old Nile” (1.5.25). Now she makes herself a nursemaid to divinity, justifying the Clown's assertion that “a woman is a dish for the gods” (5.2.273). The tableau she presents is seductive and chilling:

Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep?
Suckling a creature that is divine but deadly, she simultaneously travesties the Madonna and child and acknowledges their ascendancy as models. Charmian's response, “O, break! O, break!” (5.2.309), seems an appropriate comment on the process involved in Cleopatra's enactment. The triumph of Cleopatra's escape from humiliation in Rome is undermined by her final collaboration with Rome's divisive program. And the loss to the world is enormous. Whereas, after Antony's death, there was “nothing left remarkable / Beneath the visiting moon” (4.15.67-68), now even the moon is gone.

Notes

4. I am following Katharina Wilson, The Dramas of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim (Saskatoon: Peregrina, 1985) in spelling the playwright's name without the final a and in giving the original titles of her plays, even though Paul Pascal's text, from which I quote, adds the a and uses the canonical titles (which, except for Sapientia, are all the names of the male protagonists).
5. Although these plays were consecutively written, there was a long “Schaffenspause” between them, after which the playwright returned to her composition emboldened by praise from the Ottonian court and confident of her vision. See Peter Dronke, Women Writers of the Middle Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 55-83.
9. This shift of narrative attention is also visible in the case of Thais, whose vita in the Acta Sanctorum, for example, is to be found under Pafnutius's name.
12. Ibid., 3-4.
13. Ibid., 21.
15. Ibid., 23.
16. Ibid., 53.
18. S. Marie of Ægipt, 44.
19. Ibid., 52.
20. Ibid.
24. Ibid., 58.
29. Ibid.
34. Ibid., 42.
35. Ibid., 47.
36. Malvern, *Venus in Sackcloth*, 125. This is a useful but potentially misleading statement. Throughout *Venus in Sackcloth*, Malvern mars a careful study of the Magdalene's pagan characteristics with excessive eagerness to establish her as an ancient goddess in Christian drag. That seventeenth-century poets saw the Magdalene as a “Venus in sackcloth” does not confirm pagan survival, only resemblance (which, it seems to me, is quite powerful enough).
38. Ibid., 60.
39. Ibid., 55.
41. Ibid., 60.
42. Ibid., 82.
44. *Mary Magdalene's Lamentations for the losse of her Maister Jesus* (London: Thomas Clark, 1604), ii.
45. Ibid., fol. 4r.
47. *Mary Magdalene's Lamentations*, fol. 20r.
52. For a discussion of comparable resonances between Mary Magdalene and Ophelia, see Cherrell Guilfoyle, “‘Ower Swete Sokor’: The Role of Ophelia in *Hamlet*,” *Comparative Drama* 14 (1980): 3-17.
54. Song of Songs 1:6.
Near the end of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, the Egyptian queen apostrophizes the deadly asp which she takes to her bosom: “O, couldst thou speak, / That I might hear thee call great Caesar ass / Unpolicied!” (5.2.300-02).1 Were Cleopatra only claiming that her suicide affirms a love for Antony nobler than any value in Caesar's world of cold political calculation, we would endorse her assertion. But her claim is disingenuous to the extent that until this moment she spoke of suicide yet sought favorable terms of surrender. That Cleopatra suppresses her efforts to survive most critics would agree, while arguing among themselves about when she fully commits herself to death. Another claim implied in her boast, one she herself probably believes and which is endorsed by almost all critics, is that she makes her decision to die possessing correct information about Caesar's secret plans for her in captivity.2 To establish when Cleopatra irrevocably settles on suicide, and whether at this moment Caesar's “policy” prevails or fails, are our specific goals in this essay.

We set these goals because the attempt to reach them leads to the examination of an important issue affecting the shape of the closing action of the play. From the time that Cleopatra's (and Antony's) military situation begins to decline, Caesar and Cleopatra negotiate the terms of her possible surrender, yet at every stage of the negotiation their tactics and purposes are opaque. As a result we may fail to understand both the nature of his conquest and of her defeat, and also the momentous conclusion of the play, when Caesar stands peerless in the Roman world.

The negotiations of Caesar and Cleopatra include three well-recognized conundrums. In his dying words, Antony had besought Cleopatra to “seek [her] honour, with [her] safety” by putting her “trust” in Proculeius alone among Caesar's subordinates (4.15.48-50). If Proculeius nevertheless betrays her, as he appears to, offering false assurance about Caesar's intentions, then we must conclude either that Antony knowingly misled her or that he erred disastrously, two seemingly unacceptable alternatives. How, then, to interpret Proculeius's interview with Cleopatra is one conundrum. A second emerges from the interaction between another of Caesar's subordinates, Dolabella, and the Egyptian queen. As he has Caesar's complete trust it seems odd that he should, without advantage to himself, disclose his master's plan to humiliate her, and thereby enable Cleopatra (as it seems) to foil Caesar by taking her life. A third puzzle involves Cleopatra and

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1. The text acknowledges two specific lines from the Shakespearean play and references a number of critical and historical sources.

2. This reference is part of the essay's citation and indicates the page number from which the quote is taken.
still another subordinate, this one her own, Seleucus, a treasurer. When she presents an unsolicited inventory of her wealth to Caesar, her motive is unclear, as it remains when Seleucus, possibly speaking on her cue but possibly betraying her, exposes her inventory as fraudulently incomplete. She berates Seleucus's treachery when we are not sure he is treacherous. These conundrums, associated with the names of Proculeius, Dolabella, and Seleucus, are often pushed to the margins of critical discourse, as if they were either loose threads the dramatist failed to tidy up or inconsequential complications. It is much better to understand these conundrums as challenges to an audience, posed so that it will enter a political thicket and trace, as best it can, a duel of wits between Caesar and Cleopatra. As success depends on correct detection of a series of intricate moves, for heuristic purposes this essay will say little of Caesar and Cleopatra as complex characters with motives, some conscious, some unconscious, often at variance with the strategies they adopt in dealing with one another.

Antony and Cleopatra opens while Caesar shares power as part of a triumvirate, whose power is itself limited by the challenge of Sextus Pompey at sea. Once Pompey, made an ally, serves the triumvirate's purposes, Caesar moves against him, then against Lepidus, the weaker of Caesar's co-rulers, and finally against Antony. Were such a conqueror “unpolicied” by Cleopatra it would be the more remarkable in that he is a politician in the Renaissance sense of the word, a Machiavel, one who is both cunning and ruthless in the pursuit of ambition. Caesar's strength is not as a soldier but as a strategist; keenly observant and aided by spies, he knows and exploits the weaknesses of others. One example is worth considering, for it may anticipate Caesar's indirection with Cleopatra. When the triumvirs meet together, he has a hidden goal—to effect a marriage between his sister Octavia and Antony. Caesar keeps Antony on the defensive about his relationship with Cleopatra. Therefore, when Caesar's underling proposes the marriage, Antony quickly accepts it. Caesar's trap is sprung and Antony is caught.3

When Antony describes Cleopatra as “cunning past man's thought” (1.2.141), he does not mean she is a politician in the Renaissance mold, for she depends upon the power of the Romans whom she seduces—Pompey (either the brother or the father of the Pompey of the play, Shakespeare seems uncertain) and Julius Caesar before the play opens, then Antony. She boasts to her gentlewomen, Charmian and Iras, of her capacity to “hook” Antony as a fisherman hooks a fish (2.5.11-15) and to control his moods by adopting contrasting moods; she remembers laughing him “out of patience,” then “into patience” and then into an exchange of attire that leaves her wearing his sword Philippan (2.5.19-23).

Early hints suggest that matched against Caesar, Cleopatra might not fare well. Caesar keeps well-informed about Cleopatra's wiles, and he impugns Antony's unmanly submission to her, presenting himself as “mature in knowledge” and unlike those “boys” who “pawn their experience to their present pleasure” (1.4.31-32). The abuse Caesar hurls on a sexuality that fascinates him suggests he guards against his own repressed desires; he is far likelier to revile a woman than to succumb to her. Finally, Caesar is aware that Cleopatra's influence over Antony diminishes Rome's sway. Caesar makes early note that Antony has given her a kingdom (1.4.18). Later, poised for battle in the east, Caesar scrutinizes the expansion of Cleopatra's dynasty. Antony has not only confirmed her rule of Egypt; he has “made her / Of lower Syria, Cyprus, Lydia, / Absolute queen” (3.6.9-11). Caesar further notes that Antony has made various sons of Cleopatra “kings of kings”; to one son, Alexander, he gave “Great Media, Parthia, and Armenia” (3.6.16). Caesar eyes territories under Cleopatra's control.

The initial diplomatic exchange between Caesar and Cleopatra takes place when Antony and Cleopatra, following their defeat at sea near Actium, send an emissary to Caesar. Antony petitioning to live the life of a private citizen, Cleopatra asking to keep “the circle of the Ptolemies for her heirs” (3.12.18). Caesar sends the emissary back to report that while Caesar has “no ears” (3.12.20) for Antony's request, Cleopatra will not “sue unheard” (3.12.24) if she either kills Antony or yields him up. Since to “sue unheard” is not necessarily to sue successfully, Caesar's promise is equivocal. More treachery lurks in Caesar's next move, which is to open a covert channel of communication between himself and Cleopatra. While authorizing Thidias to tempt
her with the promise of gifts, Caesar insinuates that Thidias might best bait Cleopatra with hints of Caesar's sexual interest. “Try thy eloquence,” Caesar tells Thidias, suggesting he act the courtier. Then Caesar ruminates: “Women are not / In their best fortunes strong, but want will perjure / The ne'ertouched vestal” (3.12.29-31). Thidias is to infer that if a vestal virgin will break her virgin vow, Cleopatra's vows will not withstand temptation. “Try thy cunning,” Caesar concludes, confident that Cleopatra can be trapped into hoping for influence with him.

Thidias insinuates Caesar's interest by telling Cleopatra that Caesar, recognizing that she “embrace[s]” Antony out of “fear” and not love, “pit[ies]” the “scars upon [her] honor” and regards them as “constrainèd blemishes” (3.13.57-60). Pity signals a courtly lover's readiness to grant favor to a beseecher; it would “warm [Caesar's] spirits” if Cleopatra would leave Antony and place herself in Caesar's protection (3.13.70-73).

Cleopatra knows as well as Thidias that his offer is not what it seems to be, for Caesar, through his other diplomatic channel, has asked her to yield nothing less than Antony's “head” (3.13.17). When she asks Thidias to tell Caesar, “I kiss his conqu'ring hand” (3.13.76), either she is merely acknowledging again that she must sue for terms, or she is giving tacit encouragement to Caesar's sexual overture. Thidias, choosing to assume the latter, implies his master's readiness by asking that he himself be allowed to kiss her hand. She proffers it, remarking: “Your Caesar's father oft, / When he hath mused of taking kingdoms in, / Bestowed his lips on that unworthy place, / As it rained kisses” (3.13.84-87). Julius Caesar (great uncle and adoptive father of Octavius Caesar) paid Cleopatra homage not by giving up his territorial ambitions but by deflecting them away from her. Cleopatra's motive must again be guessed. Either she is asking whether Caesar would make a like sacrifice for her, or she is sardonically noting a contrast between Julius Caesar and Octavius, the former choosing to love her and the latter choosing to intimidate her.

Where Thidias and Cleopatra are headed cannot be known, for Antony suddenly enters and jealously rages at Cleopatra, who, he assumes, is signaling Caesar her availability. Antony recalls her prior moves from Roman conqueror to Roman conqueror. He himself had “found [her] as a morsel could upon / Dead Caesar's trencher” (3.13.119-20). Before that time, this Caesar took her as a “fragment,” a leftover, at her lover Pompey's death. Though Antony's fit ends as abruptly as it began and is followed by renewed affection for Cleopatra and fresh alacrity for battle, he repeats his accusation when her ships surrender to Caesar's at the climactic battle near Alexandria; she is, he says, a “triple-turn'd whore” (4.12.13)—the third turn the anticipated one from Antony to Octavius Caesar. The difficulty we ourselves face trying to decide whether Cleopatra would make such a move in Antony's lifetime is beyond the scope of this essay; we do need to recognize that already, well before Antony's death, Cleopatra knows, or thinks she knows, of a possible way to recoup her worldly position. Also pertinent is evidence that Cleopatra makes moves to protect herself. In the face of Antony's anger over the surrender of her ships, she withdraws to a monument. From there she sends Antony first news of her death, then of her survival. When he mortally wounds himself believing her dead, she declines to leave the monument, expressing fear that Caesar might capture her, so that Antony must wait for her to raise him by a mechanical contrivance.

Told by her dying lover to “trust” Proculeius, Cleopatra says “My resolution and my hands I'll trust, / None about Caesar” (4.15.51-52). After Antony dies, she movingly eulogizes him and seems to ready herself and her ladies-in-waiting for death. Yet some in the audience, and not necessarily those unfavorably inclined towards her, may detect inner indecision and outward deception. Of most interest is the possibility that the death she speaks of is not death at all but a metaphor for sexual orgasm. Orgasm as death is a familiar Elizabethan figure and an iterative image in the play. Cleopatra has already used it repeatedly in this scene; Enobarbus employed it earlier in the play when he taunted Antony with the suggestion that Cleopatra would use her wiles to prevent his return to Rome: “Cleopatra, catching but the least noise of this, dies instantly; I have seen her die twenty times upon far poorer moment. I do think there is mettle in death, which commits some loving act upon her, she hath such a celerity in dying” (1.2.136-40).
That Cleopatra will try to survive in Caesar's world is made clear in the next scene. Her emissary arrives at Caesar's court and announces:

Confined in all she has, her monument,  
Of thy intents desires instruction,  
That she preparedly may frame herself  
To th'way she's forced to.

(5.1.52-56)

If Cleopatra's words are taken metaphorically, she is asking as a defeated leader for instructions from the victor; if literally, she is asking how she should physically position herself so as to be ready to accede to what "she's forced to." The sexual subtext extends to her "monument," which is bawdy term for the vagina, especially a widow's.⁷ Cleopatra, having retreated to the confines of her body, tests whether Caesar will let her negotiate what he might take by force.

Though Cleopatra has responded to Caesar's enticement, he has become unsure how to proceed. Moments earlier, Dercetus had arrived with a bloody sword, which he identified as the sword with which Antony took his life (5.1.19-26).⁸ News of his death puts before Caesar, as in a "spacious mirror" (5.1.34), Antony's "rarer spirit." Caesar is shaken enough to confess that he pursued Antony's death. Yet Caesar is also relieved by Antony's death, because it occasions no momentous upheaval in the order of things (5.1.14-19). Moreover, Caesar no longer has need of Cleopatra to eliminate Antony, and her death would complete Caesar's conquest of the east. He has only to muster the brutality and to mask his motives.

After sending Cleopatra's messenger back with the assurance that "Caesar cannot live / To be ungentle" (5.1.59-60), Caesar instructs Proculeius:

We purpose her no shame. Give her what comforts  
The quality of her passion shall require,  
Lest, in her greatness, by some mortal stroke  
She do defeat us; for her life in Rome  
Would be eternal in our triumph.

(5.1.61-66)

Caesar is generally understood as desiring Cleopatra's survival so he can march her in his triumph. Yet Caesar's phrasing—his fear of "some mortal stroke"—suggests that he realizes that death is only one of several ways by which Cleopatra could seek to mar his triumph. Caesar's failure to respond to Cleopatra's sexual enticement suggests that he wishes to appear implacable to her and thereby prompt her suicide.

By the time Caesar sends Proculeius off, he is no longer the man Caesar wants for the mission. Caesar calls for Dolabella who is absent, then mysteriously remarks of him that "he shall in time be ready" (5.1.72). Confident now of his plan, Caesar discloses it neither to his subordinates nor to us.

The next scene begins with Cleopatra again thinking about suicide:

My desolation does begin to make  
A better life. 'Tis paltry to be Caesar;  
Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave,  
A minister of her will. And it is great  
To do that thing that ends all other deeds,  
Which shackles accident and bolts up change,
Which sleeps, and never palates more the dung,  
The beggar's nurse and Caesar's.

(5.2.1-8)

Cleopatra does not go so far as to say that her “desolation” makes her ready for the “better life” of death; rather, she asserts only that her “desolation does begin” to make her ready. Since she is not yet fully resolved on death, it may be inferred that she is still trying to decide whether to be or not to be. When Cleopatra says it is “paltry to be Caesar,” she may mean that it is paltry to be alive even in the best of circumstances, or she may mean that it is paltry to be alive and at the top of fortune's wheel, for from the top one can only move downward. When Cleopatra goes on to describe death as that which “shackles accidents and bolts up change,” she identifies not only the glory but the tragedy of death, its finality.

Proculeius enters and addresses Cleopatra: “Caesar sends greeting to the Queen of Egypt, / And bids thee study on what fair demands / Thou mean'st to have him grant thee” (5.2.9-11). Proculeius superficially conforms to Caesar's instructions, yet he goes beyond them in inviting Cleopatra to draw up a wish list of “demands.” If Proculeius does intend to help her, he is likely to do so in just such a cautious manner, avoiding open defiance of Caesar. The interview between Proculeius and Cleopatra is further complicated by the possibility that Cleopatra also chooses to be indirect. That she may have a motive to be so emerges at once, for before conversing she asks for and learns Proculeius's name. Then she says that Antony “did tell me of you, bade me trust you, but / I do not greatly care to be deceived / That have no use for trusting” (5.2.13-15). Cleopatra may be indifferent to her fate (and therefore indifferent to deception) or she may affect indifference as a caution before soliciting Proculeius's help.

Cleopatra returns to the same objective she advanced earlier:

Would have a queen his beggar, you must tell him  
That majesty, to keep decorum, must  
No less beg than a kingdom. If he please  
To give me conquered Egypt for my son,  
He gives me so much of mine own as I  
Will kneel to him with thanks.

(5.2.15-21)

Cleopatra's sarcasm veils what she wants: retention of her kingdom. Cleopatra also hints a path to her goal by alluding to the now lost but once familiar ballad, “King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid,” in which a beggar woman marries a king who falls in love with her. Cleopatra is hoping for the opportunity to work her charms on Caesar.

Proculeius's recommendation for Cleopatra carries hints that he is concerned for her and no naive believer in Caesar's good intentions. Proculeius starts by rallying Cleopatra's spirits (as a caution, in case they need rallying), and then hints Caesar's untrustworthiness by exaggerating his trustworthiness (excessive repetition of initial “f” reinforces the effect): “You're fall'n into a princely hand. Fear nothing. / Make your full reference freely to my lord, / Who is so full of grace that it flows over / On all that need” (5.22-25). Caesar must be manipulated, Proculeius implies, and suggests that she kneel in submission before making her requests of Caesar. When she accepts his suggestion and suddenly remarks of Caesar that she “would gladly / Look him i'th'face” (5.2.31-32), Proculeius quickly agrees to “report” this key request to his master.

Proculeius suddenly helps Roman soldiers covertly enter the monument and take Cleopatra captive. It might seem that he has betrayed Cleopatra, yet if she really inclines to suicide she is safer as his prisoner. When she
responds to capture by taking out a concealed knife to attempt suicide, Proculeius wrests the weapon from her, saying that he has “relieved, but not betrayed” her (5.2.40). With Roman soldiers now present, he needs to be especially cautious in what he says.

In all likelihood, Cleopatra's effort at suicide is earnest, for she is shocked by her capture. With her path to death blocked, she sets about to determine whether her fears are justified; her strategy is to express these fears in a manner that will move Proculeius to sympathy. She speaks loathingly of captivity at Caesar's court—“Shall they hoist me up / And show me to the shouting varletry / Of censuring Rome?” (5.2.54-56)—and describes three terrible hypothetical deaths, each of which, she says, she would prefer to captivity. These deaths she lists in three parallel clauses, each beginning with “rather” and one describing death in a manner that warrants our attention: “Rather on Nilus' mud / Lay me stark nak'd and let the water-flies / Blow me into abhorring!” (5.2.57-59). Cleopatra's imagery “takes on an erotic suggestion, one that couples sexuality and death” (5.2.59n). Cleopatra's overt claim is that she would prefer a tormented death to humiliation. Her implied claim is that she would prefer a pleasurable death to a tormented one. Before Dolabella's entry interrupts Proculeius, he tries to quiet her fear: “You do extend / These thoughts of horror further than you shall / Find cause in Caesar” (5.2.61-63). Since not a word in the play supports the notion that Caesar intends ignominy for Cleopatra on the scale she imagines, Proculeius speaks the truth.

Dolabella dismisses Proculeius: “What thou hast done thy master Caesar knows, / And he hath sent for thee” (5.2.64-65). “What” Proculeius has “done,” how Caesar has learned of it, and why it is cause of Proculeius's dismissal are deliberately left unclear, but surely Dolabella has Caesar's trust and Proculeius does not. Moreover, even as he departs, Proculeius is ready to help Cleopatra. He urges Dolabella, “Be gentle to her” (5.2.67) and asks her if she wishes him to carry a message to Caesar. The code Cleopatra employs, as well as the substance of her reply, is consistent with her earlier remarks to Proculeius: “Say I would die” (5.2.69). Cleopatra would die to avoid humiliation but given the choice of physical or sexual death, she would choose the latter.

Dolabella is Thidias's true successor; both men make “cunning” use of “eloquence” in efforts to betray Cleopatra. Dolabella, now Cleopatra's principal guard, ingratiates himself: “Most noble empress, you have heard of me?” (5.2.70). To Cleopatra's “I cannot tell,” he blandly insists, “Assuredly you know me.” Dolabella presents himself as if his way had already been paved by Antony's endorsement; Dolabella acts, indeed, as if Antony had mistaken Proculeius for himself. Dolabella's name means “fine trick” (Smith 208)—Cleopatra asks him whether it is his “trick” (5.2.74) to laugh at the dreams of boys and women. But he is her only remaining lifeline and so she tries to win his sympathy. That she chooses so unusual a way to appeal to him as to pay moving homage to Antony suggests Cleopatra draws on a depth of feeling; yet Thidias rightly sees where she is leading him when he replies: “Would I might never / O'ertake pursued success but I do feel, / By the rebound of yours, a grief that smites / My very heart at root” (5.2.101-04). Cleopatra takes the bait and inquires whether Caesar intends to “lead [her] in triumph” (5.2.108). “He will, I know't,” Dolabella confirms. Dolabella's forthrightness, so unlike Proculeius's caution, may express fearless devotion or it may be a trap, if (as we can't yet tell) Caesar wants Cleopatra to take her own life.

Caesar enters and with the antagonists face-to-face fires the opening salvo, appearing not to recognize Cleopatra: “Which is the Queen of Egypt?” (5.2.111). His intention is to show both his entourage and Cleopatra that he is immune to her charms. Cleopatra, unable to counter Caesar's move, adopts Proculeius's suggestion: she kneels to Caesar. Caesar graciously tells her to rise, then says he is prepared to ignore “the record of what injuries you did us, / Though written in our flesh” (5.2.117-18). Cleopatra interrupts him, for by establishing her record of bloodshed, Caesar leaves open the possibility that he will hold her accountable for it. Cleopatra sees, moreover, that Caesar has addressed her neither as a man nor a woman but as the leader of a defeated army. She therefore shifts attention from her military improprieties to her improprieties as a sexual being and a female, “confess[ing]” that she has been “laden with like frailties which before / Have often shamed our sex” (121-23).
Caesar ignores Cleopatra's flirtation and adds a sudden twist to his statement. Not only would he revoke his offer of clemency if Cleopatra committed suicide; he would deal mercilessly with her children, putting them “to that destruction” which, he says, he will “guard them from” if she chooses life (5.2.127-32). It is possible that Caesar threatens Cleopatra to discourage her from committing suicide but more likely that he threatens in order to lay a moral foundation for the possible seizure of her dynasty. If, however, Cleopatra does not commit suicide, then, if he keeps his word, he will be seen as a kindly conqueror, and if breaks his word, he will have captive Cleopatra to grace his triumph. Whether Caesar hopes that Cleopatra will live or die cannot be known for sure, yet only her suicide will provide him territorial advantage, and Dolabella has prompted her to choose death over humiliation.

When Caesar tries to close the interview, Cleopatra desperately extends it; to his intended exit line, “I'll take my leave,” she adds: “And may through all the world! 'Tis yours, and we, / Your scutcheons and your signs of conquest, shall / Hang in what place you please” (5.2.133-35). As David Bevington notes, “Cleopatra plays on Caesar's [phrase], conventionally said on the point of intended departure, in a punning sense: 'You may take your leave, have your will, anywhere in the world'” (5.2.133n). Caesar, then, may do as he pleases, may place Cleopatra where he pleases. “Hang,” “place,” and “please” are suggestive terms which Cleopatra uses to renew her offer of sexual submission. She is ready to begin a seduction as imaginative as her seductions, recalled at earlier points in the play, of Julius Caesar and Mark Antony. After her lover Pompey died, Cleopatra initiated her next affair by having an accomplice deliver her in a mattress to Julius Caesar. While alluding only briefly to this incident (2.6.70-72), the play elaborately recalls her conquest of Antony. After Caesar's death, Cleopatra, with the collaboration of her court ladies, presented herself on the river Cydnus to Antony's viewing. “For what his eyes ate,” we are told, he “pays his heart” (2.2.235-36).

Cleopatra suddenly hands Caesar an inventory of her wealth:

Cleopatra.
This is the brief of money, plate and jewels
I am possessed of. 'Tis exactly valued,
Not petty things admitted. Where's Seleucus?
Seleucus.
Here, madam.
Cleopatra.
This is my treasurer. Let him speak, my lord,
Upon his peril, that I have reserved
To myself nothing. Speak the truth, Seleucus.
Seleucus.
Madam, I had rather seal my lips
Than to my peril speak that which is not.
Cleopatra
What have I kept back?
Seleucus.
Enough to purchase what you have made known.

(5.2.137-47)

Why does Cleopatra submit this list to Caesar? Plutarch's “Life of Marcus Antonius,” Shakespeare's main source, explains that she wishes to lull Caesar into thinking that she desires to live (Bullough 5:314). In Samuel Daniel's The Tragedie of Cleopatra (Bullough 5:406-49), a probable minor source, the same motive is ascribed to her when her interview with Caesar is anticipated, but at the interview itself Cleopatra speaks seductively, then with the simplest of conjunctions, “and,” proceeds to hand Caesar her inventory. Shakespeare appears to have taken his cue from Daniel. Cleopatra says that her inventory is complete “not petty things admitted” (5.2.139). Had she said “not petty things omitted” emphasis would fall on the inclusiveness of the list rather than on what it has excluded, “petty things.” These are possibly sexual “things,” “jewels” with non-monetary value and recalling those “signs of conquest” Caesar may place.
where he pleases. Cleopatra asks Seleucus to testify to the “truth,” that she has reserved to herself “nothing,” a common vulgarism for the vagina. Seleucus, seeming to speak on cue, says that he fears to lie, to speak “that which is not” (5.2.145). Since “that which is not” is nothing, Seleucus hints at Cleopatra's concealed possession, which he then blazons by saying that she has retained “enough to purchase what [Cleopatra has] made known” (5.2.147). Cleopatra now confesses that she has withheld both “some lady trifles” (5.2.164)—ambiguously trifles meant for ladies and trifles unique to women—and also “some nobler token … kept apart.” Cleopatra claims to have withheld the latter so that she can give it as a gift to induce Caesar's wife and sister to intercede for her; yet a “token” was often a love token, love tokens were often rings, and rings, well, we know about rings.

A lady-trifle displayed well is no trifle in the eye of the beholder. Cleopatra, having drawn attention to her trifle, is ready to hint its attractiveness. She creates a drama casting Seleucus and Caesar in the role of her former and prospective lover respectively. She is her own chorus when she explains “I shall show the cinders of my spirits / Through th'ashes of my chance” (5.2.172-73). She is taking the “chance” of the moment to show her smoldering passion. Towards Seleucus, it takes the form of vengeful anger, for he, though a “servant” of love, has proven of “no more trust / Than love that's hired” (5.2.153-54). His “ingratitude” makes her “wild” (5.2.152, 153). Yet she describes herself as “meek” towards Caesar (161), and beckons him even while taunting Seleucus. “Wert thou a man,” she says to Seleucus, “Thou wouldst have mercy on me” (5.2.173-74). The implication is not, as some have thought, that Seleucus is a eunuch; Cleopatra unmans him as a way of inviting Caesar to be manly.

Caesar waits out Cleopatra's performance with a few kindly words; when it ends, he is at his most magnanimous, if appearances are to be believed:

Not what you have reserved nor what acknowledged
Put we i'th'roll of conquest. Still be't yours;
Bestow it at your pleasure, and believe
Caesar's no merchant, to make prize with you
Of things that merchants sold.

(5.2.179-83)

Below the surface Caesar delivers a calculated insult. He will not claim as his conquest what Cleopatra has “reserved,” her vagina. This courtesy of his he initially portrays as extended to a woman who “reserves” herself sexually; rather than forcing her, he will let her yield her favors when and to whom she will: “still be't yours, / Bestow it at your pleasure.” “It” in its full and contracted form refers to Cleopatra's vagina, and tacitly communicates Caesar's awareness of the offer she has made. Caesar then delivers a devastating blow. Under the guise of saying he is too much the gentleman to take merchant-like advantage of his opportunity, he rejects Cleopatra as damaged goods, already bought and “sold” (5.2.183) too many times. In his farewell he offers her his “pity” as a “friend,” but as he has already excluded the erotic associations of these terms, his real message is rejection.

When Caesar leaves, Cleopatra puts into motion her plan for suicide with only a brief and puzzling explanation: “He words me, girls, he words me, that I should not / Be noble to myself” (5.2.190-91). Critics understand Cleopatra to be reaffirming her commitment to suicide in the light of what she sees as Caesar's hypocrisy. I believe, on the other hand, that only now does Cleopatra make her decision to die, and that she makes it not because she sees Caesar as attempting to deceive her, but because she believes he has undeceived her. It is probable that she has fallen prey to his strategy, which was to create and then destroy the expectation that she could awaken his sexual interest. A remoter possibility is that she is aware of his trap but, in the face of his power and malice, sees no tolerable alternative to suicide.
Before Cleopatra can advance her plot further, Dolabella reenters, unctuously claims that his “religion” of more “love” (5.2.198) makes him Cleopatra's “servant,” and portentously delivers her news of Caesar's intentions: “Through Syria / [He] intends his journey, and within three days / You with your children will he send before” (5.2.199-201). Dolabella departs with “I must attend on Caesar” (5.2.205), a hint to us of where his real allegiance lies. Through Dolabella, Caesar tries to make doubly sure that Cleopatra will take the path of suicide. If we think she detects his ruse, then we have her thank Dolabella in an ironic voice, aware that Proculeius, not Dolabella, has been her true servant.21

In both Antony and Cleopatra and Plutarch's “Life of Antonius,” Caesar's guard blocks access to Cleopatra, so that poisonous asps must be smuggled to her in a basket of figs. In Plutarch, soldiers search the basket of a rustic but fail to detect the asps; in Shakespeare a guard conducts the rustic into Cleopatra's presence, and makes no search of the basket before leaving at her command. The “simple countryman” (5.2.333) is a wise and well-meaning fool, for he warns her that she has an enemy by pointing to an asp and saying: “I would not be the party that should desire you to touch him” (5.2.244-45).

When Dolabella returns to the monument to find Cleopatra and Iras dead and Charmian dying, he comments while awaiting his master: “Caesar, thy thoughts / Touch their effects in this” (5.2.323-24). His observation is as close as the play comes to acknowledging that Caesar sought Cleopatra's suicide, and it is therefore not surprising that Dolabella promptly partially unsays what he has said, describing Cleopatra's death as “the dreaded act which thou [Caesar] / So sought'st to hinder” (5.2.325-26). The infinitive construction—“to hinder”—cancels the admission that Caesar “sought” the death. Yet Dolabella shows not the least sign of apprehension that Caesar will be angered, and in the event, Caesar isn't. He instead takes clinical interest in determining how Cleopatra died, while noting that he knew from her physicians that she had been studying manifold ways to die (5.2.347-50). Caesar's reflections on Cleopatra's life are brief and purposeful: “She looks like sleep,” he says, “as she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace” (5.2.340-42). She might catch another Antony, but never Caesar. He ends the play distributing “pity” to Antony and Cleopatra and “glory” to himself, ordering Dolabella to make funeral arrangements, and announcing his plan to go to Rome (not to Syria, as Dolabella led Cleopatra to believe). Caesar never says whether he will fulfill his threat to destroy her children and seize her throne.22

Caesar moves into position for the final battle with “speed” that “carries beyond belief” (3.7.74-75). He prophesies that what lies ahead is “the last of many battles” he will fight. (4.1.12). His plan of action is successful: Antony is lured into sea battle, where he is weak. Though Caesar prosecutes this last phase of the action with special vigor, he has been characterized throughout the play as one who feels himself a man of “destiny” (3.6.83), and of course we watch the play knowing that he is more right than he can know, for the Roman Republic is in its death-throes and the world's most extensive empire is soon to be born. Caesar, who brings this empire into being, may be expected to employ machiavellian arts. Yet we have been willing to minimize his overt scheming and to ignore the possibility of his covert scheming. We must not let Caesar overmatch us as he overmatches Cleopatra and Antony.

Caesar's pursuit of political objectives shows up the limitations of politics. To politics he sacrifices friendship, love, the bonds of kinship. His repressions might be expected to cripple him, though within the space of the play, they don't. He is the diminished “mirror” that shows the amplitude of Antony and Cleopatra. Antony's greatness—a Shakespearean greatness, with virtues and flaws intermixed—is beyond our scope, but a word can be said of Cleopatra's. Her claim to have unpolicied Caesar is resonant because during her duel with him she pursues not only a political objective, her “safety,” but also (in sometimes uneasy balance) her “honor,” celebrating Antony and calling to him as her “husband” as she dies a magnificent death.

The play closes with Caesar's opportunistic eulogy. In giving him his lines, however, the dramatist plays a trick on Caesar, forcing him to pay tribute to Cleopatra and (more briefly) to Antony. The play has told their story, not Caesar's, and in their story Caesar has not “earn'd” a noble “place”—such a place as Enobarbus had
hoped to attain in Antony's story (3.13.46). Caesar may imply that it is to his credit not to be caught in Cleopatra's "strong toil of grace," but the audience may wonder whether to snare as Cleopatra has snared and to be snared as Antony has been are evidence of a greatness reclaimed by the play from the ashes of history.

Notes

2. Only William L. Godshalk's "Dolabella as Agent Provocateur" has proposed, rightly I will argue, that Dolabella serves Caesar by deceiving Cleopatra. I am also indebted to Godshalk's unpublished "Theobald's Emendations of *Antony and Cleopatra*," and to his advice on a draft of the present essay.
3. Maecenas proposes the marriage directly after Caesar expresses the wish that he could find a "hoop" (2.2.115) which would bind him and Antony together. A hoop is not merely a "circular band or ring of metal" that binds together a casket. A "hoop" is also a ring that symbolically binds a couple together; "a hoop of gold, a paltry ring," becomes the subject of contention between Portia and Bassanio (*The Merchant of Venice*, 5.1.147).
4. Cleopatra's lover is "great Pompey"—presumably Pompey the Great—at 1.5.32 but "Cneius Pompey"—elder brother of the play's Sextus Pompey—at 3.13.121.
5. If two questions asked by Cleopatra are not merely rhetorical, then they give evidence of her hesitation about suicide. As Antony lies dying, Cleopatra asks: "Shall I abide / In this dull world, which in thy absence is / No better than a sty?" (4.15.62-64). After his death and speaking to Charmian and Iras, Cleopatra says: "Is it sin / To rush into the secret house of death / Ere death dare come to us?" (4.15.85-87).
6. For Cleopatra's puns on death as she hoists Antony into the monument and as he dies, see Traci 302.
7. Henke defines "monument" as a "tomb or crypt, with innuendo of an old, cold vagina." In *All's Well That Ends Well*, Bertram tries to seduce Diana by saying: "In your fine frame hath love no quality? / If the quick fire of youth light not your mind, / You are no maiden, but a monument" (4.2.4-6). Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's "Life of Marcus Antonius," Shakespeare's principal source for *Antony and Cleopatra*, identifies the structure to which Cleopatra withdraws as a "monument" (Bullough 5:309); possibly to create a bawdy subtext, Shakespeare repeats "To th'monument" three times in a ten-line scene (4.13.3,6,10).
8. The Folio spells the name both Dercetus and Decretas. When Antony mortally wounds himself—but before he dies—Dercetus takes up Antony's sword, hoping to win preferment from Caesar (4.14.116-17). As the entry of Dercetus to Caesar is followed by the entry of Cleopatra's messenger, we wonder whether Cleopatra, like Dercetus, is ready to "pack cards with Caesar" (4.14.19).
9. Edgar observes in *King Lear* that "the lamentable change is from the best, / The worst returns to laughter" (4.1.5-6).
10. The play's editors note the allusion. That the ballad was once well-known is suggested by Shakespeare's several allusions to it, some, as this one, highly elliptical; see *Richard II*, 5.3.79-80, and *All's Well That Ends Well*, Epilogue 1.
11. A number of textual and staging problems associated with the entrance of the guard are discussed by editors but are not relevant to the present argument. Note also that the assertion below that Cleopatra draws a knife is based on inference only. Cleopatra says "Quick, quick, good hands," and Proculeius, intervening, says: "Hold, worthy lady, hold!" (5.2.38-39).
13. Possibly the audience has watched Dolabella overhear parts of the prior conversation between Cleopatra and Proculeius. His spying could explain both his present remark and also his attempt, which I mention in my text below, to confuse Cleopatra about whom in Caesar's entourage she can trust. As the staging of the period has characters enter well before they begin speaking (and depart well after they stop), it is often difficult to decide whether they should be portrayed as overhearing or
as possibly overhearing the conversation of others. Proculeius's fears that Cleopatra may commit suicide might well be activated, for example, if, when she mentions “beg[ging]” a kingdom (5.2.18), he has already heard her speak contemptuously of the earth as both “the beggar's nurse and Caesar's” (5.2.8). For the general problem of “early” entrances and overhearing, see Dessen 65-77.

14. For an interesting effort to sort out class distinctions among Caesar's subordinates dealing with Cleopatra, see Barroll 120-24.

15. For “frailty” as sexual weakness and as a weakness to which women are especially liable, see Isabella in Measure for Measure: “Call us ten times frail, / For we are soft as our complexions are, / And credulous to false prints” (2.2.128-30; cf. 121 & 124 and also the proverb “Women are frail” [Dent W700.1]).

16. For “please,” see the entries “please oneself upon” and “pleasure” in Partridge. See also the entries for “hang” and “place” in Rubinstein.

17. Daniel makes pretty clear that Cleopatra begins by hinting to Caesar that he can succeed Antony in her bed: “Looke what I have beene to Antony, / Think thou the same I might have beene to thee. / And here I do present thee with a note / Of all the treasure …” (1599 edition, lines 665-68, in Bullough 5:424. The fullest review of the Seleucus episode in the light of its sources is Stirling's.

18. “Jewel,” according to Partridge, is used by Shakespeare allusively “for chastity incarnate in the maidenhead”; the word may also refer to the female sexual organ, whether a maid's or not (e.g. Shakespeare sonnet 131.4). With regard to “nothing,” discussed in the text below, a notoriously bawdy Shakespearean instance follows Ophelia's refusal to let Hamlet “lie in [her] lap.” He asks, “Do you think I meant country matters?” and she replies, “I think nothing, my lord” (Hamlet 3.2.116-17). For further discussion of “nothing,” see Green 74-78.

19. The same juxtaposition of “wild” and “tame” occurs in Wyatt's “They flee from me.” The speaker complains of lovers who have turned against him: “I have seen them gentle, tame and meek, / That now are wild.”

20. See the entry under “it” in Partridge. For a bawdy use of “it” in a contraction, see Antony and Cleopatra 2.2.188. Shakespeare's most extensive punning on “it” in its full and contracted forms is in All's Well That Ends Well, 1.1.130-64.

21. Cleopatra's sharp disillusionment with Seleucus may possibly be understood as her anticipation that Caesar himself is about to fail her.

22. Plutarch reports that Caesar murdered Caesarion, Cleopatra's son by Julius Caesar; the other children “were verie honorable kept” (Bullough 5:312). For another account of Caesar as politically purposeful at the close of the play, see Charmes 144-46.

Works Cited


From the moment that Antony believes Cleopatra to have given him cause to kill himself—her suspected treachery in 4.12—Antony is repeatedly subjected to the ridicule normally reserved for the most foolish of Shakespeare's fools. For example, in 4.14 he is provoked to commit suicide by the mere show of Cleopatra's death, a manipulation so transparent through familiarity that Enobarbus punctures it long before this moment (1.3.133-44). Next, calling upon his trusted servant Eros to fulfill his duty, Antony is disgraced when Eros, "[t]hrice-nobler" than his master, kills himself instead (81-84, 95, 94). Then Antony, having failed to dispatch himself with a degree of his servant's elegance, pitifully calls out to his guards to finish the deed: "Let him that loves me strike me dead" (108). Three guards refuse to comply, hinting that they, like Eros, love him too much to end his pain (108-10), whereupon Decretas cruelly increases that pain by removing the sword for purposes of self-advancement (111-13). Diomedes then enters, not to put Antony out of his misery, as Antony again requests, but to inform him that Cleopatra has had second thoughts about her bungled ruse (113-27). Diomedes is, ironically, "too late" (127). The grim humor of 4.14, arising mostly from Antony's inability to complete his own demise, peaks when Antony's guards, again protesting love for him, inadvertently crack the first of several jokes to come about Antony's dead weight: asked to bear him "where Cleopatra bides" (131), they quibble on the notion that Antony "may not live to wear" his "true followers out" and exclaim together, "Most heavy day!" (133-34).

Cleopatra reprises that jest in the next scene, 4.15, when she unthinkingly refers to the burden of hoisting Antony to the monument—"How heavy weighs my lord!"—and then recovers her fumble with a pun.
converting his physical weight to her sorrow: “Our strength is all gone to heaviness, / That makes the weight” (32-34). But the company of onlookers reinforce the physical gag of lifting Antony aloft with another reference to his weight: “A heavy sight” (40). In this scene, as in the preceding one, the characters' concern for Antony contains a component of ridicule—sometimes verging on terror—apparently unintended by the speakers and yet unavoidable to their auditors. Hence, for instance, when Cleopatra refuses to come down to Antony from the monument (21-29), she escapes capture (which would further dishonor Antony) even as she snubs Antony and makes necessary the visually awkward and embarrassing “sport” of lifting him (32). Similarly, in her very attempt to comfort and ennoble him as he dies, Cleopatra comically subverts his efforts to muster dignity. She interrupts him when he asks “to speak a little” so that she can “rail,” and she conceives of his passing in terms of her own loss: “Hast thou no care of me?” (a line, by the way, that glances back to her tactic in 1.3.90-91 for making Antony feel guilty about returning to Rome—“O, my oblivion is a very Antony, / And I am all forgotten”) (42-43, 60). She twice refuses his advice to trust Caesar and Proculeius (45-50). Never mind that she is right. Her insistence to the suffering Antony that she is right robs his death scene of grandeur, replacing tragic respectability with what Jonathan Dollimore calls “bathos.”

I am not the first reader of Antony and Cleopatra to sense a troublesome mixture of tone in the play's conclusion. W. B. Worthen, for example, notices that the audacious hoisting of Antony in the monument scene “threaten[s] a slapstick catastrophe, as Antony plummets to the stage” and speaks of the scene's “possibly distracting humor.” Brian Cheadle believes the episode to be “ludicrous” as is because of Antony's “pitifully bungle[d] suicide attempt,” his “being winched laboriously aloft … by Cleopatra and her handmaidens,” and his “utter lack of judgment” in urging the queen to trust Proculeius. Robert Ornstein, remarking on the way that Cleopatra's interchange with the clown complicates the tone of the ending, is joined by Martha Tuck Rozett, who also sees touches of the “absurd” in the final treatment of the dual protagonists. Ornstein and Rozett look forward to the commentary of Barbara C. Vincent, who studies the relationship between tragic and comic forms throughout the work. Focusing solely on the monument scene, Leslie Thomson grounds an entire reading of the play on the stage picture of Antony's cumbersome ascent to Cleopatra: “In the political world Caesar rises as Antony falls. But countering this, and complicating our response, is that as Antony falls in that context, he is raised, both literally and figuratively in another: the world of love.”

Yet, with virtually no exceptions, critics seem largely uncomfortable with the dark humor in the play's closing scenes, particularly with Antony's buffoonery, which I have opened this discussion by cataloging in order to press home its abundance. Some readers altogether ignore the ridicule directed at Antony. Far more reduce it to inconsequentiality. Such readings minimize the amount of mockery in the last scenes, however, as well as the effect it has on both the tragic elevation of Antony and Cleopatra and the audience's sympathetic identification with them. Fairly representative of these critics is Rosalie Colie, who, while acknowledging the proclivity of Antony's suicide and death toward foolish “excesses,” argues that what we finally remember about the protagonists is their “beauty of character” and “that in such excess, life itself can reside.”

Even critics who assert, as I would, that a production of the play should preserve the ridiculous next to the high-minded strive for interpretations that ultimately dilute the comedy. Inevitably, these readings insist in some form on the protagonists' triumph over impediments to their love: Caesar's imperialism, other values of this world, their own character flaws. In short, critics are loath to accept and deal with the full measure of irony aimed at the tragic conclusion—a conclusion that also, admittedly, invokes inspiring romanticism. But when that romanticism is permitted, in either production or reading, to suppress the irony, Antony's characterization becomes lopsided; his seemingly total surrender to his love for Cleopatra is being forced at the last to make him appear above derision.
My purpose in returning to the problem of tone, especially as it involves Antony, is to place in perspective the play's competing views of his and other characters' self-sacrificial love. Recognizing the debt of Antony's characterization to the traditions linked with Saint Anthony of Egypt clarifies the work's central issues and sharpens perceptions of Antony, Cleopatra, Caesar, and others. What's more, it opens up further discussion of how Shakespeare used many other Christian analogues in Antony and Cleopatra, some of them veiled to modern audiences. Both the saint and the conqueror, for instance, are tempted by the flesh, and both face their trials in Egypt. Indeed, in Antony and Cleopatra, where a name like Eros or a gesture like crowning likely points beyond itself to added meaning, the conflicts in Antony's character, recalling those of Saint Anthony, launch anew the exploration of charity in this world. Surrounded by other characters who amplify and extend qualities of his own love—mainly Enobarbus, Cleopatra, and Octavia—Antony offers Shakespeare's most complex, if least accessible, study of folly.

The framing in 1.1 of Antony and Cleopatra's mutual devotion by Demetrius and Philo's negative judgment does more than establish an immediate opposition between Roman and Egyptian values. It also instantly identifies the audience with Demetrius, who remains silent until the scene's end, and it insists, through Philo's repeated imperatives, that audiences formulate their own opinions about what they, along with Demetrius, are witnessing:

Look where they come!

Although Philo can count on Demetrius's affirmation of what he beholds and sees, the nature of this dramatic situation encourages the audience to look beyond the viewpoints of either the critical Romans or the spotlighted lovers. While Philo and Demetrius deplore Antony's inattention to duty and devalue his passion for Cleopatra, the audience can appreciate the lovers' extravagance from the lovers' point of view while also detecting the limitations of the entire dichotomy at hand. In the context of Renaissance tradition, Mark Antony's very name outlines the twin poles of his character: war (Mars) and love (Saint Anthony). But the love for which he dismisses the concerns of war is as worldly in its own way as is Caesarian empire. In some real sense, Antony is a “strumpet's fool” (13), much as Cleopatra is also the true “fool” she fears becoming in this opening scene (42). They are prisoners of their lust and egotism. Yet, as Antony finds himself jostled between the equally worldly alternatives of Rome and Egypt, war and love, Caesar and Cleopatra, his ambivalence develops in the context of yet another dichotomy, that between the worldly and the spiritual. As his characterization unfolds, in fact, his choice becomes less and less a horizontal one between the exclusively worldly values of Rome and Egypt and more a vertical one between foolish folly—attachment to this world—and wise folly—renunciation of the worldly.

The inadequacy of this world to provide spiritual fulfillment is continually recapitulated in paradigms that echo Antony's impossible choice between the options embodied in Caesar and in Cleopatra. For instance, Antony understands from his grief over Fulvia's passing that human desire feeds on what it lacks:

What our contempts doth often hurl from us,
We wish it ours again. The present pleasure,
By revolution low'ring, does become
The opposite of itself. She's good, being gone;
The hand could pluck her back that shov'd her on.
The “revolution” that Antony describes here could as easily apply to the opposition he feels between his attraction to both Rome and Egypt, as could Caesar's description to Lepidus of how popular allegiance has shifted to Pompey:

It hath been taught us from the primal state  
That he which is was wish'd, until he were;  
And the ebb'd man, ne'er lov'd till ne'er worth love,  
Comes dear'd by being lack'd.

Pompey himself mentions the fleetingness of desire and its objects when he complains to Menas of his delayed gratification from the triumvirate: “Whiles we are suitors to their throne, decays / The thing we sue for” (2.1.4-5). The passions of this life fade.

So widespread is this pattern of one affection giving way to another that it is parodied when Agrippa and Enobarbus mock Lepidus's vacillation between extolling first Antony, then Caesar:

Eno.  
Caesar? Why he's the Jupiter of men.  
Agr.  
What's Antony? The god of Jupiter.  
Eno.  
Spake you of Caesar? How, the nonpareil!  
Agr.  
O Antony! O thou Arabian bird!  
Eno.  
Would you praise Caesar, say “Caesar,” go no further.  
Agr.  
Indeed he plied them both with excellent praises.  
Eno.  
But he loves Caesar best, yet he loves Antony.  
......Agr.  
Both he loves.  
Eno.  
They are his shards, and he their beetle, so.

If at this point we remember Pompey's claim about Lepidus's loyalties—that he “flatters both, / Of both is flatter'd; but … neither loves” (2.1.14-15)—this rendition of Lepidus's hyperbole conjures more cynicism than humor. And the image of the encasing and potentially suffocating beetle's shards pointedly looks forward to the “pair of chaps” that devour Pompey, Lepidus, and the civilized world until they “grind th' one the other” (3.5.13-15). Such images, in other words, suggest the peril, well known to Antony by his life's end, of taking sides, although to be in the world makes doing so unavoidable. Nowhere is that peril more clearly represented than at the celebration on Pompey's galley, whose very rocking, together with the swaying brought on by drunkenness, imitates the instability of politics—portrayed, for instance, in the ease with which Menas proposes to turn on the triumvirate and the hair's breadth that prevents Pompey from capitulating, leading Menas to desert him (2.7.61-84). Enobarbus's warning to Antony as he descends into the boat is almost too blatant a reminder of his impending doom: “Take heed you fall not” (2.7.129).

Octavia, too, first frozen between her “heart” and her “tongue” in parting with Octavius (3.2.47-50), eventually finds herself embattled by irreconcilable loyalties to both her husband and her brother:
A more unhappy lady,
If this division chance, ne'er stood between,
Praying for both parts.
The good gods will mock me presently,
When I shall pray, "O, bless my lord and husband!"
Undo that prayer, by crying out as loud,
"O, bless my brother!" Husband win, win brother,
Prays, and destroys the prayer, no midway
'Twixt these extremes at all.

(3.4.12-20)

In this world, even the augurs “[s]ay they know not, they cannot tell, look grimly, / And dare not speak their knowledge,” so befuddled are they as to who will prevail at Actium (4.12.5-6).  

Octavia’s private lament also portrays the larger tragic vision of Antony and Cleopatra, whose characters, principally Antony, waver between choices because both guarantee tragedy. Although the Soothsayer can “read” but “a little” of the future’s secrets (1.2.10-11), he can tell Antony that Caesar will always defeat him at worldly “game” (2.3.25-29), making a life with Cleopatra, even one of “dotage” (1.2.117), less repugnant than losing all to his adversary. Antony, like Octavia, has good reason for feeling paralyzed by indecision.

Yet, as Antony reminds Octavia, she will have to choose between himself and Caesar: “Let your best love draw to that point which seeks / Best to preserve it” (3.4.21-22). So must Antony choose between Rome and Egypt. From an earthly perspective, his tragedy lies in the stifling absence of comic possibility. He can only fall, though he is free to choose his route.

For Antony, then, the only way out is up. That is to say, the play’s dichotomy between this world and the next emerges in response to the bankruptcy of material gain and physical pleasure, Antony’s earthly options. Does Antony’s death, then, represent a change in his love for Cleopatra and thus a severing of his foolish attachment to the world? Does he elect to join Cleopatra out of pure love? So Antony would make us believe when he reacts to the rumor of her suicide: “I will o’ertake thee, Cleopatra, and / Weep for my pardon” (4.14.44-45). That his death-wish stems from love of her rather than from self-love seems confirmed by myriad details from this point on—especially by his concern for her welfare once he is gone and she is in Caesar’s custody (4.15.45-48). At the same time, Antony’s final motives also smack of escapism. In this he recalls the behavior of Antonio in The Merchant of Venice, who would bypass the hardships of this life. Antony’s announcement to Eros, for instance, that “there is left us / Ourselves to end ourselves” arises not from disenchantment with worldly gain but from shame that a woman could cheat him of his “glory” (4.14.21-22, 19). Here, Antony is not repudant in his defeat of mutability, as a romantic reading would stress. Nor does his sense of having failed to achieve glory for himself square completely with the Roman ideal of honor. Rather, Antony appears self-involved at best and vindictive at worst, as when he hopes that Caesar will “hoist” Cleopatra up “to the shouting plebeians” in Rome (4.12.33-34). Ironically, he wishes on her the very humiliation that he in fact receives when he is “hoist” two scenes later.

I am suggesting, first, that the ridicule to which Antony is subject, particularly at the play’s end, has two possible sources. Either he becomes a wise fool who gives up even lust for love’s sake, in which case his ineptitude at such political matters as guiding Cleopatra to a Roman she can trust signals his positive spiritual removal from the world. Or his foolishness derives from his ineptitude at leaving earthly matters far behind. Or both. In the pagan Mark Antony, who forfeited one third of the world all for Cleopatra, Shakespeare’s original audience would also have recognized a typological association with Christ, whose spiritual kingdom and love were about to displace the triumvirate’s empire and self-interest. Caesar’s famed pronouncement in 4.6—“The time of universal peace is near” (4)—looks in two directions, one toward the Augustan peace and the other toward Christ’s birth, so as to involve the play’s action in both. I also want to suggest, then, that the intertwining of traditions in Antony’s very history renders him an especially plastic version of the Antonio
Shakespeare's two earlier Antonios operate exclusively within clear Christian tradition: the first, in *The Merchant of Venice*, falls short of the Christian charity he professes, and the second, in *Twelfth Night*, practices an authentic Christian charity that, as the play ends, seems indefinitely divided from the world that needs it. But Mark Antony is prevented from attaining literal Christian charity by his cultural heritage. He cannot enact what he historically predates. Still, Antony's link with Christ in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries puts in perspective his frequent tendency toward saintly behavior. That behavior implies, at the least, a prefiguration or analogue of Christ's idea of love. But it also sketches, within a pagan context, the ultimately Christian problem of reconciling the flesh and the spirit. Antony's particular wavering between self-love and selfless love preserves the distinction between earthly and spiritual empire without discrediting the claims of the former on Christian grounds. In this Antonio, Shakespeare returns to the matter that pervades *The Merchant of Venice* and marks the conclusion of *Twelfth Night*: whether worldly and otherworldly values can be married. Through the twin protagonists of Antony and Cleopatra, he also extends the question to whether they should be.

II

The opposing impulses in Antony—to respond to either his own needs or to those of others—form a method of characterization. Examples of his self-centeredness pepper the play, mixed in with those of his generosity. His initial reason for returning to Egypt is not love of Cleopatra but knowledge that he cannot win against Caesar and so may as well indulge in “pleasure” (2.3.14-15, 41). Yet later, having succumbed to Caesar at Actium, he will generously insist that Cleopatra be informed of the chance to exchange Antony for Caesar's “courtesy” toward her (3.13.13-19). Ventidius expounds on Antony's pride for an entire scene (3.1), though he might have been spared the trouble, since Antony's ego speaks for itself. When he squanders victory at Actium to fight by sea, for instance, he does so, he says, because Caesar “dares” him to (3.7.29). The same Antony, however, will retreat at sea purely for love of Cleopatra (3.11.56-61), risking Caesar's and his soldiers' ridicule. Craving good opinion of himself, he is consumed by insecurity when Caesar has “[s]poke scantily” of him: “If I lose mine honor, / I lose myself” (3.4.6, 22-23). Even so, he has a penchant for learning the painful truth about himself, and to hear it he will urge on a messenger (1.2.97-111), tolerate Enobarbus's venting (for example, 1.2), and encourage Octavius to pinpoint his grievance when the two confer about Antony's “broken … oath” (2.2.81-111). Such frank confrontations contrast tellingly with those in which Cleopatra beats a messenger for honesty, bullying him into later flattering her (2.5, 3.3).

They also bear resemblance to the many instances in which other characters attempt to bait Antony but discover that he is too temperate to be ruffled. Caesar and Pompey both needle him about his weaknesses for things Egyptian (2.2.120-22, 2.6.62-70, 2.7.96); each time, Antony responds with equanimity. His similar forbearance with Cleopatra, whose efforts to control his emotions are at one point compared to the sport of fishing for and catching him (2.5.12-15), suggests the bounteous spirit for which Plutarch had once praised him.

Not that Cleopatra cannot incite Antony—she does so whenever he suspects her loyalty (3.11, 4.12). But the point is that the same man who coolly endures repeated taunting from her and others is also, in other cases, nervously dependent upon external validation of his worthiness. When his fragile ego is crushed at the sight of Thidias's lips on Cleopatra's hand, he pathetically scrambles to reestablish his identity by having Thidias whipped (3.13.85-152); when he temporarily beats back Caesar, he relishes his prowess and, in symmetry with the earlier episode, offers Cleopatra's hand to Scarus (4.8.11-13). Taken together, all of these examples conflict, portraying, by turns, one Antony who is insecure, vindictive, and enmeshed in worldly affairs but another who is self-assured, forgiving, and free of the world's fetters.

A few of Antony's scenes so conflate these two perspectives on him as to render his actions and motives thoroughly ambiguous. Yet the ambiguity is so subtly crafted that the audience may be unaware of what it does not fully understand without the benefit of reflection, which a production, fleeting as it is, cannot afford. Read closely, however, the text can account for the confusion, however subliminal it may be. In one key scene, 3.11, Antony accepts military defeat and gives up his fortune with a grace reminiscent of Saint
Anthony himself:

Friends, come hither:

I am so lated in the world, that I
Have lost my way for ever. I have a ship
Laden with gold, take that, divide it; fly,
And make your peace with Caesar.

(2-6)

But the language of liberality, pure as it sounds, may issue less from Antony's humility than from his humiliation, the “shame” that, Iras says, has him so “unqualified” (44). His revulsion toward Cleopatra, whose flight at sea he holds responsible for his situation, would seem to confirm that his loss of dignity, not his magnanimity, causes him to surrender his earthly possessions (25-68). Still, his quickness to pardon Cleopatra at the scene's end reestablishes his largess.

Such comingling of perspectives on Antony's character is later recalled and yet further complicated when Antony again bids farewell, this time to “three or four Servitors” in Cleopatra's palace (4.2.10, s.d.). As Fichter has pointed out, 4.2 alludes to the Last Supper, Antony's triple plea that his followers attend him at one more “bounteous … meal” linking him to Christ (4.2.10). Shakespeare so qualifies the link, however, that the scene might be taken as a parodic inversion of its Christian counterpart. That Cleopatra twice asks Enobarbus the meaning of Antony's behavior underscores the obscurity of his intent. Enobarbus, by now jaded toward Antony's emotional displays, reads this one as a conscious manipulation of his servants' feelings (24), a charge that, once Enobarbus voices it, Antony strenuously denies: “Ho, ho, ho! / Now the witch take me, if I meant it thus!” (36-37). Antony's next lines emphasize the charity he is claiming for himself: “Grace grow where those drops fall, my hearty friends! / You take me in too dolorous a sense, / For I spake to you for your comfort” (38-40). The difficulty of reading Antony's nature here epitomizes the same difficulty until the play's end, the precise problem, for purposes of establishing tone, being that of how to take Antony's apparent self-denial.

Enobarbus, of course, offers his own final answer to the question, and it is a persuasive one. For all of his earlier skepticism toward Antony's judgment, his former master's decision to reward his betrayal with riches defines his dying admiration for Antony's willingness to turn the other cheek (4.6, 9). His route to that conclusion is nevertheless winding, and the variables in Enobarbus's character can elucidate those in Antony's.

As exemplified in Enobarbus's skirmish with Lepidus before Caesar and Antony begin to negotiate (2.2.1-14), his chief concern is a version of Antony's: he is continually torn between meeting his own needs and fulfilling his duty to others, between self and self-sacrifice. To Lepidus he defends the practice of “private stomaching” and proceeds in 2.2 to speak his mind, dispensing with the decorum reserved for the more “courteous Antony” (8-10, 222). Lepidus correctly identifies Enobarbus's “passion” as the “plainness” that Pompey later implies is famous (2.2.12, 2.6.78). Far from acting solely as the voice of reason in reaction to Antony's irrationality, Enobarbus has his own passion, a counterpart of sorts to Antony's Cleopatra: it is truth to himself at all costs. Without this indulgence of his own, he would be unprepared to sympathize with Antony's, as he does in the celebrated “barge” speech (2.2.190-239).

That sympathy notwithstanding, he must inevitably choose between the “honesty” he reveres and a “loyalty” that may spell disaster for him personally:

Mine honesty and I begin to square.
The loyalty well held to fools does make
Our faith mere folly; yet he that can endure
To follow with allegiance a fall'n lord
Does conquer him that did his master conquer,
And earns a place i’ th’ story.

(3.13.41-46)

The distinctly pagan sentiments behind Enobarbus's dilemma here should not fully obscure the Pauline terms that associate it with Antony's struggle between earthly and spiritual values. His anxiety over becoming a “fool” for “faith” in Antony, together with his ambition for worldly fame, is of a piece with that one trait of Enobarbus that, more than any other, portrays him as a foolish fool—that is, his fear of love.

For all his bluster about speaking as he feels, Enobarbus repeatedly shrinks from feeling itself, using his supposed plainness—and often his sarcasm—as protection against a dreaded loss of self-control. Not surprisingly in a play brimming with misogyny, Enobarbus conceives of that loss in both himself and Antony as one of manliness. He pronounces his fear most openly late in the play, in reaction to Antony's emotional valediction to his servants: “Look, they weep, / And I, an ass, an onion-ey'd. For shame, / Transform us not to women” (4.2.34-36). Already aware of his intent to leave Antony, Enobarbus may be especially unresponsive here to his master's emotional claims on him. But such explicit resistance to acknowledging his own feeling prompts the audience to reconsider such earlier instances as his unwillingness to recognize Antony's grief for Fulvia or his derision of Cleopatra's grief over Antony's imminent departure (1.2). Not until he embraces and returns Antony's love for him is he truly honest with himself or anyone.

In fact, Enobarbus's great triumph is his foolish—indeed lethal—endorsement of Antony's unconditional love:

Thou mine of bounty, how wouldst thou have paid
My better service, when my turpitude
Thou dost so crown with gold!

(4.6.30-33)

To accept that love is to expose his former preoccupation with truthfulness as a mere pretension and to discover real passion in rejecting self-interest. Among the many desertions in this play—including those of Menas, Hercules, Decretas, and Antony—Enobarbus's stands out for illustrating the final poverty of worldly gain. Beginning with his realization that, ironically, Caesar's idea of “universal peace” does not extend to trusting renegades from Antony's camp, Enobarbus's abandonment lends him an appreciation of Antony's steadfastness (4.6.4, 11-19). He even dies remarkably like Elizabethan accounts of the despairing Judas—repulsed by lucre (4.6.23), bursting from heartbreak, and falling down in a field (4.9.12-23)—thus furthering the association between Antony's loyalty to him and Christ-like love.

To understand Enobarbus's reversal as the last comment upon Antony's character, however, would be simplistic. For one thing, Antony's altruism toward Enobarbus forms, as we have seen, only part of his characterization, and, for another, as we have also seen, selfless behavior in this play often comes under its own fire. True enough, the play's world proves hostile to self-interest like Enobarbus's, also consuming Pompey, whose preoccupation with his own private concerns remains unsurpassed by any other character's egotism. Pompey directs his political negotiations with the triumvirate away from empire and toward his anxiety over Antony's acquisition of his family's home and Antony's failure to thank him for giving his mother sanctuary (2.6.26-29, 39-46); these are personal grudges that, to Menas's dismay, mean more to him than obtaining lands: “Thy father, Pompey, would ne'er have made this treaty” (2.6.82-83). Yet, if the minute attention to trivialities of personal honor, virtually caricatured in Pompey, leads to personal loss, so does utter inattention to the world and one's own place in it.

Such terms describe Octavia, in whom Shakespeare exaggerates selfless loyalty much as he does its opposite in Pompey. She has every opportunity to break faith with either Caesar or Antony and yet, much like
Enobarbus, instead suffers a broken heart, hers “parted betwixt two friends / That does afflict each other!” (3.6.77-78). Likewise, Shakespeare has every opportunity to reveal just one advantage to Octavia of her unwavering commitment. But our last impression of her lies far afield of spiritual fulfillment. As Caesar and Maecenas disabuse her of her blind trust in Antony, who has betrayed her, she passively responds, “Is it so, sir?” (3.6.96), the reaction perhaps not of a woman maintaining her belief in her husband at any cost but of one slightly shaken by suddenly confronting her ignorance and trying to maintain her poise. Caesar knows how to thrive in the world that has made Octavia its victim. Her folly, spawning no strength of conviction or transcendent vision, seems awkwardly out of touch, and her discomfort in Caesar's world, although not a source of ridicule, resembles Antony’s awkwardness during his protracted death.

Ridicule toward Antony persists even after he has died. In 5.1, Caesar, Maecenas, and Agrippa join the ranks of other characters, like Enobarbus, Pompey, and Octavia, whose degree of charity or self-love implicitly comments upon Antony's characterization. Under the guise of mourning Antony and commending his virtues, the three Romans actually damn him with faint praise. On hearing Decretas's news of Antony's demise, Caesar sets the tone: “The breaking of so great a thing should make / A greater crack” (14-15). Literally saying that Decretas has understated the significance of Antony's passing, he implies that Antony's influence on the world has so dwindled by the time of his death that it lacks power enough to “make / A greater crack.” Agrippa and Maecenas sustain the theme of Antony's ineffectuality:

Agr.
strange it is
That nature must compel us to lament
Our most persisted deeds.
Maec.
His traits and honors
Wag'd equal with him.
Agr.
A rarer spirit never
Did steer humanity; but you gods will give us
Some faults to make us men.

(28-33)

Caesar, ostensibly “touch'd” (33), concludes by belittling Antony into a “[d]isease” that he was compelled to “launch” (36-37). 23 Granted, the Romans' backbiting says at least as much about them as about Antony, yet, significantly, it also threatens to lower our esteem for Antony as a hero, demeaning him for his worldly failures.

The last major insight into Antony's characterization may also be the most important. It looks back to and implicitly comments upon all preceding—and conflicting—references to Antony's folly. It is his revisitation of Cleopatra in act 5 in the form of the Clown.

A production of the play in 1993 by the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express doubled the actor who played Antony in the role of the Clown, a choice that, I have come to believe, faithfully mirrors Jacobean practice. 24 If so, the doubling enriched immeasurably the original audience's association of Antony with the tradition of wise folly. The role makes literal the identification of Antony as a fool, and Cleopatra's paradoxical statement about the Clown could be applied to any of Shakespeare's wise fools, particularly Lear's natural: “What poor an instrument / May do a noble deed!” (236-37). By “noble deed” Cleopatra refers to the delivery of the asp, her means to end her life. But what truly makes the Clown “noble” takes a kinder form, which she is too single-minded to appreciate fully. Despite Cleopatra's instructing him three times to leave her (259, 261, 264), he lingers until the fourth (278). The content of his speeches in response to her repeated farewells is, overwhelmingly, concern for her well-being. Simple as he is, he knows why she has ordered him to leave the snake, and, though he cannot help boasting about his expertise on the “worm,” his chief purpose is to warn
her, as Antony has warned her about trusting “none … but Proculeius,” from tempting the asp further than she intends (4.15.48):

> You must think this, look you, that the worm will do its kind. … Look you, the worm is not to be trusted but in the keeping of wise people; for indeed, there is no goodness in the worm. … Give it nothing, I pray you, for it is not worth the feeding.

(262-70)

Cleopatra's rejoinder to this last direction—“Will it eat me?” (271)—combines an appreciation of the Clown's bawdry, a last pinch of the fear that the Clown hopes to elicit, and a plea for assurance that her plan will work. At this point, even he can see that she is not to be dissuaded: “I wish you joy o' th' worm” (279).

The Clown, then, reincarnates all the essential elements of Antony's character. To his lustiness he adds strict attention to Cleopatra's welfare, limited understanding of her own designs, and, above all, a gift for botching practical endeavors, shown particularly in his language: “I would not be the party that should desire you to touch [the worm], for his biting is immortal; those that do die of it do seldom or never recover” (245-48). But even such blunders signify a capacity for higher understanding, meaning, and gesture than has as yet been attained in this life: as so many critics have remarked, the Clown's “immortal” is a malapropism that speaks more wisely than he knows and that Cleopatra returns to in earnest when she cites her “immortal longings” (5.2.281). Like Antony's suicide, a misfired shot at what Seneca calls a “becoming exit” from the world, the Clown's verbal bungling briefly figures forth, in a complementary context, a fundamental discord between practical competence and charitable practice. Likewise, Antony, seeking to free himself from the constraints of this life, seems to become ever more mired in them.

As C. W. R. D. Moseley has demonstrated by studying the play's emblems of wisdom, Hercules traditionally proves wise at the crossroads when he chooses Virtue over Pleasure. Hercules' desertion of Antony (4.3), in this light, can perhaps be seen as Antony's loss of prudence, a certain kind of wisdom. But the Colossus to which Cleopatra compares Antony after death is, as Moseley has also shown, another Renaissance emblem for wisdom (5.2.82-92), demonstrated in examples from the work of George Wither. Sometimes it is a wisdom so potent that it can subdue the unruly world under its sway, sometimes a wisdom that actually transcends the earth, like Saint Paul's “wisdom of this world,” which is “foolishnesse with God.” This transition in emblems for Antony's wisdom tempts the audience to infer a progression in his history: the practical prudence of Hercules, witnessed in Antony's youthful worldly success, gives way to a higher, transcendent wisdom, found in his only apparently foolish surrender to love.

Though such an outline may bear some truth, it is an all too facile account of Antony's final inability to escape what Cleopatra playfully calls “the world's great snare” (4.8.18). Even if he dies for love, it may be love of himself. Even if he dies for love of another, his dignity as a martyr is significantly undermined. As we have observed, he is not alone. Even Eros, acting out his name in self-sacrifice for Antony, expresses mixed motives: “Thus I do escape the sorrow / Of Antony's death” (4.14.93-94). This is self-sacrifice of the most dubious order. Whether because Antony's martyrdom is diluted by escapism, or because his half-failed suicide represents an only half-hearted willingness to die for love, or because he is unlucky, life will not let him go without an awkward struggle. And death insists on humiliating him. Something there is in Antony and Cleopatra that doesn't love saintliness—or, at the least, Antony's approach to it as a fool for love. Cleopatra's enterprise is to find it out.

III

Over the course of the play's last scene, Cleopatra sees to it that Caesar is made every bit the foolish fool that Antony has just seemed in his final hour. Caesar covets the chance to humiliate her publicly. Instead, she
humiliates him privately by controlling her own destiny. Her objective—to play fortune to Caesar's luck, thus making him her fool—is clear from her first lines in 5.2: “‘Tis paltry to be Caesar; / Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave, / A minister of her will” (2-4).

Her success at her goal is stressed repeatedly at the point of her death, first by her lines to the asp: “O, couldst thou speak, / That I might hear thee call great Caesar ass / Unpolicied!” (306-8). After her passing, Shakespeare relies on the dramatic irony of Dolabella's lines to underline Caesar's defeat. Once the guard has announced that “Caesar's beguiled” (323), Dolabella, having secretly betrayed Caesar's trust, makes sure the audience appreciates how ridiculous the emperor appears:

Touch their effects in this: thyself art coming
To see perform'd the dreaded act which thou
So sought'st to hinder.

(329-32)

and

O, sir, you are too sure an augurer;
That you did fear is done.

(334-35)

That Caesar remains ignorant of Dolabella's role in thwarting his plans intensifies our sense of his folly: at least Antony recognizes when he has been demeaned. And because the audience knows how Cleopatra accomplished her death, Caesar's deliberate investigation of the premises—the women's bodies and the aspic's “slime” (345-48, 351-53)—appears slow and dull-witted. His embarrassing ignorance of being duped lasts until the play's closing lines, where Caesar is still commanding Dolabella, this time to accord Antony and Cleopatra the “glory” for which, unbeknownst to Caesar, Dolabella has made way (362, 365-66). Charnes writes of this moment that Caesar “swiftly translates [the lovers] from rebellious figures who escaped his control and punishment into legendary lovers” so as to minimize their political power, yet his efforts are just as swiftly undermined and implicitly derided by the audience's awareness of Cleopatra's sway, which is greater than Caesar's, over Dolabella. Through Cleopatra's agency, then, Antony has accomplished vicariously what the Soothsayer declared he never would himself (2.3): he wins against Caesar in a contest for worldly control. The wheel has come full circle. Caesar is now the “strumpet's fool” (1.1.13). 31

Nor is Cleopatra's project a simple one. Caesar plays to win. Laura Quinney has remarked on his politically deft use of messengers (who swarm around him) for purposes of both “self-dissemination” and gathering information. 32 Indeed, in his first scene, his knowledge of state affairs, kept current by a stream of messengers, clearly surpasses Lepidus's (1.4.81-83). He later indicates that he has spies on Antony (3.6.1-31), and at Actium a soldier marvels at the “speed” of his approach, which “[c]arries beyond belief” (3.7.74-75). In the last scene, when Dolabella relieves Proculeius from attending Cleopatra, he attributes to Caesar an Orwellian omniscience: “Proculeius, / What thou hast done thy master Caesar knows” (5.2.64-65). The end of Caesar's game is nothing less than total control over himself and the world—control that Cleopatra “bolts up” despite Caesar's prowess (5.2.6). 33

At the very least, then, Cleopatra's victory over Caesar discloses a political focus and cunning that may come as a surprise after her initial characterization. Until the middle of act 3, her very reason for being seems to be her gift for oblivion, for losing herself in pleasure and luring Antony along with her. She bids him ignore Caesar in the first scene, wallows in self-pity when he determines to rejoin Caesar (1.3), and longs to “sleep out this great gap of time / My Antony is away,” fantasizing that, while gone, he will “[t]hink on” her, as did
Caesar and then Pompey, for whom she was “his life” (1.5.27-34). Outdoing the younger Pompey in self-indulgence, she draws the world in to her and refashions it in her own image. From this inwardness ensue inversions of the natural: her professed love for Antony (or Caesar or Pompey) seems narcissistic, and her “repent[ance]” for having terrorized the messenger, once he has spoken her wishes (3.3.39), appears an ironic foreshadowing of Enobarbus's authentic change of heart, brought about by his discovery of the truth.

Perhaps Shakespeare is counting on his audience to understand that Cleopatra's ostensible retreat from the practical demands of political life is a mere façade, that her frequent threats to dissolve Egypt and Egyptians rather than see her most trivial desire unmet cloak a keen awareness of her political ambitions and of her options for achieving them. After all, when Antony first arrived in Egypt, her experience at protecting her regime from the clutches of foreign empire was extensive. Her method was also based on sexual seduction, if not love, and could therefore belie her political acumen. Her impressive capacity for self-preservation to date suggests that, in the play's early scenes, she has yet to avail the audience of her full characterization. Nor would her skill at throwing off Caesar likely spring up out of nowhere.

In any case, an apparent transition in Cleopatra's character begins occurring in 3.7, where she is inclined less to abandon and more to focusing on such outward matters as military strategy and royal responsibility. Here, she struggles between supporting Antony's bad decision to fight Caesar at sea and expressing her dissatisfaction with other of Antony's poor judgments. Her line, “Celerity is never more admir'd / Than by the negligent,” not only “rebuke[s]” Antony (24-25) but also looks back to Enobarbus's rebuke of her own “celerity in dying” (1.2.144). This Cleopatra almost seems beyond such nonsense. While she quizzes Enobarbus honestly about the way he has “forspoke” her presence at Actium (3)—as she will later question him again when she seeks to understand Antony's behavior (4.2)—her demeanor is less that of vamp than of pupil. She appears both motivated and quick to learn more about military and political science, as though the necessity of guarding her own interests has snapped her to attention.

Indeed, this same juncture—where Caesar's bid for control becomes ever more blatant and unavoidable, and where Cleopatra becomes more attuned to political exigencies—is also where the difficulty of penetrating the reasons for Cleopatra's conduct becomes increasingly pronounced. For a time this difficulty parallels that of discerning what prompts Antony's behavior. The challenge of sifting through the action of 3.13 epitomizes the problem of reading Cleopatra's motives, which resurfaces in the closing scene.

Any production of Antony and Cleopatra will present a viewpoint on Cleopatra's intentions toward Thidias in 3.13, and any viewpoint will seem slanted. If, throughout this scene, Cleopatra clearly means to remain faithful to Antony and is only toying with Caesar by playing up to Thidias, then the audience faces the vexed question of why it can detect Cleopatra's irony toward Thidias and Enobarbus cannot. Maybe Enobarbus's powers of perception are imperfect—he of course fails to comprehend his own feelings toward his master—but the unwavering trait of his comments on and to Cleopatra is an incisiveness furnished by objectivity. Witness his earlier discrimination in interpreting Cleopatra's behavior, particularly in the “barge” speech, where he pinpoints her attractiveness to Antony and to all men (2.1.190-239). How, then, if Cleopatra is only having at Thidias, can we account for Enobarbus's impression that Cleopatra is betraying Antony?: “Sir, sir, thou art so leaky / That we must leave thee to thy sinking, for / Thy dearest quit thee” (63-65). To argue that Enobarbus is looking for a last reason to desert Antony or is so jealous of Cleopatra's hold over Antony that he hears what he wants to in Cleopatra's language is unconvincing. So is the explanation that Enobarbus is pulling strings in order to see Thidias punished, even though he taunts him in an aside: “You will be whipt” (88).

Yet, if Cleopatra plays the scene without irony—so that she is aggressively campaigning for Caesar's good graces—it becomes equally skewed. Enobarbus's judgment may be vindicated; Cleopatra's is not. As Ornstein comments: “How foolish of this cunning woman to plan a betrayal of Antony in the presence of Enobarbus!” In this reading, the audience is left disenchanted, halfway through the play, with an overtly obtuse, treacherous Cleopatra and with an Antony too credulous to be believed himself when he forgives.
Cleopatra's duplicity. Surely the audience is not meant at this point to feel as sour toward these protagonists as does Enobarbus (3.13.194-200). Otherwise, Enobarbus's reversal in act 4 will not work theatrically.

The very purpose of a scene like this one is, seemingly, to raise questions about what is driving Cleopatra. How can an actor playing Cleopatra claim any assurance about the tone of her response to Thidias's first gamble for her allegiance?:

Thid.
  He [Caesar] knows that you embrace not Antony
As you did love, but as you fear'd him.
Cleo.
  O!

(56-57)

Evidence of her tone is no more lucid in her longer speeches to Caesar's man:

Most kind messenger,
Say to great Caesar this in deputation:
I kiss his conqu'ring hand. Tell him, I am prompt
To lay my crown at 's feet, and there to kneel.
Tell him, from his all-obeying breath I hear
The doom of Egypt.

(73-78)

What could only be construed as sarcasm in most other characters' mouths is here perfectly matched with Cleopatra's usual hyperbole. Once Antony has erupted over the sight of Thidias's lips on Cleopatra's hand, ambiguity continues to surround her intent toward Thidias. Although she insists that Antony has failed to apprehend her true meaning and even identity—"Not know me yet?" (157)—what incentive she could possibly have for teasing Thidias remains unstated. (Is she just having fun? Does she mean to buy time and flexibility with Caesar through persuading Thidias that she will switch loyalties? Is she hoping that Enobarbus will retrieve Antony so that the vision of her tête-à-tête will provoke him to positive action?) Furthermore, the pivot by which she turns Antony around from his anger is dubious at best: is Cleopatra's vow to sacrifice her children if she is guilty a mode of finessing him or a legitimate defense of her innocence (158-67)? How naive is Antony's response to her vow: "I am satisfied" (167)?

On paper such cruces would appear insoluble. And although in performance some stance on them would no doubt prove inescapable, something of their indeterminacy needs to be preserved in a production calculated to tap into the play's rounded portrayal of Egypt's queen. The shading of Cleopatra's plausible motives into each other—the one narrow and self-serving and the other serving Antony and Egypt's larger political cause—involves her in the play's wider inquiry into wise and foolish folly. The cryptic quality of her inner life—the mystery about what, exactly, she is up to—both resembles the uncertainty about Antony's motives and yet suggests greater self-control, more self-knowledge, and a facility exceeding Antony's at managing her worldly enterprises in tandem with her spiritual needs.

In the last analysis, Cleopatra may not fully reconcile earthly and transcendent values. But she succeeds at both toppling Caesar's designs on her and rejoining Antony in death. The intertwining of her self-preservation and her self-sacrifice continually results in further ambiguity about her objectives—when she takes on Caesar, for instance, is she satisfying herself or trying to champion Antony? Her indistinguishable motives also illuminate how she fulfills her apparently antithetical desires and energies relatively unscathed by the ridicule that dogs Antony and Caesar. Neither confining herself to Caesar's political game nor retreating from the “world's great snare,” she embraces this life without deceiving herself about the limits of its rewards. Unlike
any other character in the play, Cleopatra, aided by the generosity of her two attendants, accepts her own humanity and thereby (paradoxically) moves toward surpassing it. Refusing to act as a saint—insisting in fact on experiencing her suicide as the consummation of her marriage (5.2.287-313)—she nearly approaches saintliness.

IV

Cleopatra's penultimate act—her pretended suicide—matches in recklessness Antony's final deeds. Her last act, however, rejects such uncalculated behavior in favor of careful orchestration, made possible in part by what Harry Levin calls the “purest Stoicism” of her approach to real suicide. 39 Cleopatra's highly controlled leaving of this world, while necessitating an emotional removal from it, also leads her to immerse herself, characteristically, in earthly affairs. In Cleopatra, then, merge motives self-interested and otherworldly, such that we are hard-pressed to know one from the other. In Cleopatra emerges a harmony between the claims of this world and the next that would seem opposed to the conflict between those values in Antony. In Cleopatra intermingle attachment to and detachment from Caesar's game, such that her most basically human gestures may connote divinity.

Her handling of Dolabella illuminates this paradox. Caesar's intent to use Dolabella as a player in a meticulously staged drama is made increasingly clear once Caesar whisks Decretas offstage at the close of 5.1 with blatant self-promotion:

Go with me to my tent, where you shall see
How hardly I was drawn into this war,
How calm and gentle I proceeded still
In all my writings. Go with me, and see
What I can show in this.

(73-77)

Decretas, twice prompted to “go with” Caesar and “see” as Caesar would have him see, is an audience to the emperor's “show”—propaganda that Caesar has painstakingly crafted by saving his “writings” to document his innocence and generosity toward Antony.40 That his staff has already been briefed on his program, which is also meant to subdue Cleopatra through a display of his apparent magnanimity, becomes evident moments later, when Proculeius reiterates Caesar's self-description to Decretas in his instructions to Dolabella: “Be gentle to her” (5.1.75, 5.2.68; emphasis added). Dolabella's role is that of prop, a surrogate for Caesar whose mission, as Caesar conceives of it, is to fulfill his master's will.

Cleopatra conquers Dolabella—and through him Caesar—by awakening his own will, which quickly supplants Caesar's in his sense of allegiance. He, of course, invites her manipulation of him with his overture to her—“Most noble Empress, you have heard of me?” (5.2.71)—by which he strays from Caesar's rigid agenda to fond thoughts of himself.41 Given the opportunity, Cleopatra sets immediately to degrading his lack of imagination and insisting that he indulge her in her vision of the colossal Antony (5.2.73-100). Within minutes, Dolabella is divulging Caesar's secret ambition to “lead” her back to Rome “in triumph” (5.2.109-10). For someone like Dolabella, Cleopatra's alchemy must partly consist in the flattery toward him that she implies in her praise of Antony: if she immortalizes Antony so extravagantly, Dolabella must be thinking, how might she remember the man who rescues her from Caesar?

But more significant is Cleopatra's appeal to Dolabella's feeling. Even if he never fully subscribes to her glorification of Antony (5.2.93-95), she has touched his capacity for sympathy:

Hear me, good madam:
Your loss is as yourself, great: and you bear it

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As answering to the weight. Would I might never
O'ertake pursu'd success, but I do feel,
By the rebound of yours, a grief that smites
My very heart at root.

(5.2.100-105)

Caesar's mere "show" of concern is supplanted by Cleopatra's genuine "grief," and the old joke about Antony's heaviness (recalled all the more by the internal rhyme on great and weight) is transformed into an article of true sorrow. Again paradoxically, Cleopatra profits from the good deed of converting Dolabella, who, because she helps him "feel," hastens to sacrifice his own aspirations in her service. When he reenters in 5.2, confirming Caesar's plans to abuse her, his reference to his "love" for Cleopatra as "religion" portrays him as more than a courtly lover (199): through pursuing her own ends, Cleopatra (whom even the priests bless when she is riggish) has transported Dolabella to an authentic self that he then becomes willing to abnegate in her behalf.

Such interwoven motives are for Cleopatra but a scion of those she seems to harbor for her suicide. By now, the futility of ascribing that act to either her devotion to Antony or her yen to undo Caesar is critical commonplace. Indeed, here again, through subverting Caesar and protecting her own interests she simultaneously demonstrates her love for Antony, who can defeat Caesar in no other way than by imping his wing on hers. And here again, the final difference between Antony's and Cleopatra's dying choices is that, for whatever reason, he at least seems to renounce the world on which she relies. Her success at realizing any and all of her hopes—to defeat Caesar, to save her earthly reputation, to join Antony in perfect love—depends entirely upon her openness to the potentially corrupting experiences of human life that Antony would apparently just as soon reject. In the case of her suicide, in order to bequeath her earthlier elements to "baser life" (5.2.289-90), she must come to terms with those elements, whether by testing Caesar's vulnerability to her flirtations (5.2.111-90), manipulating Charmian and Iras with threats of public degradation (5.2.207-26), or dressing herself in her finest clothes to end her life (5.2.280-81). She is determined not to be "hoist" as Antony has been (5.2.55-57). Never completely escaping the claims of "baser life" on her image, she nevertheless transfigures the baser images of that life into something more than earthly through a stunning imposition of will.

Such transfiguration occurs nowhere more stunningly than in the complex iconography of Cleopatra's death scene, the last eighty lines or so of the play. In particular, the images of the serpent and the crown—common emblems in early seventeenth-century England—cut at least two ways. The serpent, which for a Christian audience cannot possibly elude association with the Fall, is, in this play, largely representative of fecundity. But Moseley has pointed out the additional, well-substantiated connection between the serpent and wisdom:

Snakes, whatever their other less attractive characteristics, have always been associated with subtlety, wisdom, and knowledge—Hermes' caduceus and Our Lord's "Be ye wise as serpents" [Matthew 10:16] both draw on a common and very ancient association. (According to Alciati, the frequency of whose editions shows how much he was regarded in the XVIth Century and later, the serpent was an Egyptian symbol of royalty. Shakespeare could well have been alluding to this too.)

Moseley goes on to catalog several Renaissance pictorial illustrations in which great rulers, including the allegorical queen Prudence and Elizabeth I of England, are shown with serpents, symbolizing "wisdom with self-rule and political rule" (127-28). He conjectures that, finally, Cleopatra's triumph over Caesar, an "ass Unpolicied" at her "metaphorical feet," suggests the transformation of her "(apparent) conventional unwisdom" into true wisdom, facilitated by the serpent at her breast (128).
Moseley's reading of Cleopatra indicates a link between the last stage picture we have of her and the Pauline tradition of wise folly. In fact, although Moseley never mentions that tradition outright, he concludes that Antony and Cleopatra's love, seemingly immoral from a Roman perspective, may constitute “a paradoxical wisdom that is no plant which grows on mortal soil.” In other words, he sees Cleopatra's ostensibly unwise love as a higher, transcendent wisdom.

I believe, however, that we can pursue the iconography of Cleopatra's death scene more specifically. When Cleopatra, crowned, enthroned, and flanked by her two votaries, describes the asp, a familiar emblem of wisdom, as a baby who “sucks the nurse asleep” (5.2.309-10), she unavoidably alludes to scores of icons, from the mid-thirteenth to well into the early seventeenth century, of Maria lactans—the nursing mother of Christ. These images, ranging in provenance from Italy, to the Netherlands, to England, are known to date as far back as Early Christian times in Egypt, where, according to Gertrud Schiller, they “are connected with early Egyptian representations of Isis.” In the West, they began taking root in the late fourth century. By the time they enjoyed popularity during the fourteenth century and throughout the Renaissance, they had remained predominantly Northern in number and character.

Gail McMurray Gibson, writing about the “complex and omnipresent … Marian devotion” in fifteenth-century East Anglia, discusses at length one approach to the meaning of Maria lactans. Gibson's example is Our Lady of Walsingham chapel, site of “miraculous healings, especially after returning crusaders presented to the shrine a phial said to contain drops of milk from the Virgin's breasts” (140). Pilgrims to the shrine—a favorite of Henry VIII, who ensured its prosperity until the Dissolution—could glimpse the phial “[i]n return for a suitable offering” (140-42). This relic is emblematic of Mary's maternity, the essence of which, says Gibson, is the “principle, both incarnational and linguistic, of saving fecundity” (139).

The relationship between the nursing mother Mary and her salvific nurturance is longstanding. According to Millard Meiss,

> The representation of the Madonna suckling her Child had a special significance in late medieval art and thought. Since it showed that situation in which the Virgin was most concretely and intimately the mother of Christ, it set forth that character and power which arose from her motherhood, i.e. her role as Maria mediatrix, compassionate intercessor for humanity before the impartial justice of Christ or God the Father. … [T]he act of nursing signified moral qualities, such as benevolence and mercifulness. … In the Middle Ages the Virgin was believed to be the mother and nurse not only of Christ but of all mankind.

Theresa Coletti concurs: “The Virgin's milk serves as an analogue to the salvific nourishment of Christ's blood, and consequently images of Maria lactans inevitably evoke association with the redemptive promise.” Nor must the nursing image involve Mary specifically to represent divine charity, though most do. For instance, the figure of Ecclesia, sculpted by Giovanni Pisano for the Duomo in Pisa (1302-10), envisions the Church as nursing her congregation and thus recalls Paul's metaphor for the Church's teachings: “I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready, for you are still of the flesh” (1 Cor. 3:2-3).

The implicit comparison between Cleopatra and the Virgin is far from thorough or allegorical. To assert otherwise would be patently absurd. Instead, I would argue that the comparison is selective and precise and that, furthermore, its incompleteness is essential to how it works. In Cleopatra, the worldliness of her roles as illicit lover and as ruler and as mother are never denied or forgotten. Still, by virtue of her final appearance, as well as her verbal self-characterization as a nursing mother, she connects herself with the wise folly of redemptive love, or charity. Her characterization, in the fullest sense of that word, interrelates, fuses even, the secular and the holy. Renaissance audiences were well-versed in how to tide the gap between such disparate traditions; as Gibson points out, Elizabethans had already long practiced the “transference of the cult of the
Virgin to the political cult of the Virgin Queen.”

One especially telling example involves the Puritan preacher Andrew Willett, who in the late sixteenth century published a book of double acrostic emblem poems whose shaped verses (what Moseley calls “figured forms”) replace the visual images that normally accompany the poetry. His first poem, in praise of the dedication to Queen Elizabeth, Willett himself glosses thus:

The Queen our Prince is a great succour to all; … this famous maiden denies not milk to her peoples—to them, immediately [they need it], she their sweet nurse has already sent help by her own hand.

Willett’s choice of metaphors—a mother’s milk—evinces the post-Reformation ease with reappropriated religious iconography, in this case applied to secular (though God-fearing) politics. In short, the nursing metaphor was portable, applicable in various contexts. The well-known association between Elizabeth I and the Virgin Mary no doubt also cooperated with that between Cleopatra and Elizabeth I to further the third one between Cleopatra and the Virgin.

Shakespeare's Cleopatra, then, arrives at the emblem of nurse through several doors—by virtue of her association with divinity, with royalty, and with motherhood. But the particular transference of Mary's salvific love onto Cleopatra is advanced by other details—for example, her earlier appearance in the image of the pietà, the dying Antony draped across her lap (4.15.38-91). In this instance, too, she is a gaudy Egyptian queen, grieving the loss of a foolish soldier, yet so visionary in her eulogizing this “crown o’ the earth” as to redeem his image quite. The figure of the crown, moreover, recalls vividly Antony's un tarnished love for Enobarbus, whose “turpitude” the betrayed master “crown[s] with gold” (4.6.32-33). It also looks forward to Cleopatra's appearance as she prepares “again for Cydnus / To meet Mark Antony” (5.2.228-29). That particular crown symbolizes her royalty but also the “bounty,” like Antony's toward Enobarbus (4.6.31), about her suicide for Antony's sake. What's more, it further relates our last impression of Cleopatra to popular representations of the Virgin.

As Meiss explains, the attribution of the heavenly crown to Mary, whose “nursing … signifies her mercy,” stems, paradoxically, from her reign as queen of humility. Through refusing grace to none, she descended to the level of meanest human sin, often demonstrating her lowliness by sitting on the earth, rather than in a throne, in fourteenth-century portrayals. Her humility, however, released her to become enskied and sainted, as her identity began to combine with, as Meiss puts it, “the awesome Woman described in the twelfth chapter of the Apocalypse: ‘And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars’” (153). This amalgam is exemplified, down to the crown of exactly twelve stars, by Albrecht Dürer's woodcut entitled “The Virgin on the Crescent.” The poem that accompanies the figure preserves Mary’s identity as intercessor in behalf of humanity, using her power to save her supplicants from the shifting fortunes of earthly life.

Not that Cleopatra's crown confines her to an association either with the virtue of humility or with the Apocalypse, nor that the crown itself is limited only to symbolism that is religious at base. In early seventeenth-century Europe, the crown emblem proliferated, ranging in meaning from worldly vanity, as in Wither's effigy of a naked soul rising above earth-bound fame, to political security, the theme of an emblem by Henry Peacham: two prudent serpents guard the realm (the “Soveraignes crowne”), while the poem warns would-be usurpers (like Caesar?) that their ill-considered “abuse” of “tha'noitined Diadem” will be “reuenged.” Still, the majority of crowns in Renaissance emblem books connote something akin to the heavenly crown—for example, the “Vertue” of lasting love over Wanton affection in Wither's emblem of the fickle woman. Thus, the image of Cleopatra's crown points in several directions, some of them opposed to features of the humble Madonna, and some not: in a final example of this blending, the queen's momentary lure of Caesar himself with her “strong toil of grace” speaks to the universal appeal of her physical loveliness, as well as her abundant love. Caesar, perhaps in spite of himself, commemorates both in burying
her next to Antony (5.2.358).

But the most suggestive detail about Cleopatra's crown is that, in the course of the strong toil that is her death, it shifts “awry” (5.2.318), faintly burlesquing those hundreds of pictures in which the Virgin's perfection remains inviolate, eternal. Every inch an earthly queen, Cleopatra must contrive to idealize her outward looks through artificial means, as by avoiding the unsightly “swelling” induced by poisons (5.2.345-46). For this vanity, she is herself lightly mocked, her crown embarrassingly, if only briefly, askew. Charmian's last act of adoration, to “mend” the crown's angle (5.2.319), portends her self-sacrifice through suicide—both gestures in which exemplary devotion mixes with a lower form of folly, bred of fleeting efforts to control human destiny. Doomed as may finally be the attempts of these women to manipulate Caesar and their reputations after death, their pains meet with some success.

Cleopatra never transcends this world, whatever protests she may make about discarding her earthlier “elements” (5.2.289-90). Her frank engagement in Caesar's game leads her, in some true sense, to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's.64 So doing, she embraces her humanity. Though her characterization is riddled with instances of her pride, her struggle to take down Caesar while also eluding him establishes, paradoxically, her humility; she is not above playing by Caesar's rules, turning his tactics against him, or risking loss at his hands. Also paradoxically, her openness to worldly folly seems inseparable from—the very grounds for—her apotheosis of Antony and Shakespeare's of her.65

Shakespeare's Mark Antony reflects the saint whose name he shares by at least appearing to exchange earthly “glory” for pure love and his “pardon” (4.14.19, 45). But Shakespeare's Cleopatra recalls, in her peculiar way, Caxton's story of Saint Anthony and the bowman, in which the monk makes no apology for worldly game, which has its holy purpose. … In the broadest sense, Saint Anthony's wise folly traditionally includes a worldly playfulness that he is also, finally, willing to put at risk and, if need be, sacrifice. For Cleopatra, the wisdom of this world is divine foolishness in something of this uncanny sense. It is foolishness with this world in all its splendor and inadequacy—what Caesar calls “noble weakness” (5.2.344). Because her defeat of Caesar and her ennobling of Antony are forever tainted by her commitment to the goals, standards, and passions of this life, audiences will be forever tempted to take the part for the whole and respond only negatively, only to her familiarity with the mutable, corrupt world. Or they will minimize her worldliness and protest that her love for Antony cancels it or rises above it. To do either, however, is to derange the careful balance of a play that, insofar as it concerns the problems of living in and leaving this world, remains deeply suspicious of endeavors to avoid it. As Antony grows increasingly uncomfortable on earth, so does Caesar, who, recoiling from bodily pleasures (for example, 2.7.98-125), takes refuge in conquest and pride in self-control. If Cleopatra evades a good share of the folly that visits these two soldiers, it is not for lack of loving this life.

Notes

2. I am indebted for some items on this list to the 1993 production of Antony and Cleopatra by the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, which was especially sensitive to the humor implicit at the end of act 4. The director of that production, Ralph A. Cohen, later published an essay in which he lists his own set of jokes aimed at Antony (“Staging Comic Divinity: The Collision of High and Low in Antony and Cleopatra,” Shakespeare Bulletin 13.3 [Summer 1995], 5-8). Not surprisingly, our lists overlap somewhat. Cohen's perceptions of the humor and the uses to which it is put, however, differ widely from mine. For instance, to his mind the tone of the joking is lighter than I am describing it. For elaboration on the contrast between his interpretation and mine, see n. 64, below.

4. Margaret Lamb's appendix on staging the monument scene in her history of Antony and Cleopatra on the English stage mentions no humor at all (“‘Antony and Cleopatra’ on the English Stage [Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980]). In a different key, Lucy Hughes-Hallett sees the double suicide as utterly somber, lending “significance and purpose to [the characters'] lives” but also “condemn[ing]” them to death brought on by a “sterile” passion (*Cleopatra: Histories, Dreams, and Distortions* [New York: Harper & Row, 1990], 149). In her view, then, Antony is not so much derided as rejected for his immorality.


Most critics who sense the distancing humor at the play's end hasten to deny its persistence. Examples would include Ornstein, who believes that the play finally upholds the “honesty of the imagination” over the “facts of imperial conquest” working against Antony and Cleopatra (“Ethic of the Imagination,” 84), and Bernard Beckerman, who, entertaining the opportunities for awkwardness about Antony's being lifted to Cleopatra's monument, concludes: “Despite the obstacles, ... Antony was raised in a manner which, we must suppose, was not ludicrous” (*Shakespeare at the Globe, 1599-1609* [New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1962], 231).

6. Examples here would include Janet Adelman, for whom Antony becomes the embodiment of the play's most positive valuation of love (*The Common Liar: An Essay on Antony and Cleopatra* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973], 139) and Evelyn Gajowski, who believes Antony gradually matures in his ability to love (*The Art of Loving: Female Subjectivity and Male Discursive Traditions in Shakespeare's Tragedies* [Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992], chap. 4). Anne Barton sees not Antony's suicide, but Cleopatra's, as the act that “redeems” Antony's “bungl[ing]” and that settles the conflict in the play's tone between “the sublime and the ridiculous, the tragic and comic” (“‘Nature's Piece 'Gainst Fancy': The Divided Catastrophe in Antony and Cleopatra,” in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Antony and Cleopatra,* ed. Harold Bloom [New York: Chelsea House, 1988], 53, 51). Significant exceptions to the critical trend of overapologizing for Antony present themselves in such authors as Thomson, for whom Antony's love, though great, remains ever flawed (“Act 4 scene 16,” 90); J. Leeds Barroll, who locates Antony's tragedy in the final failure of his love to endure the ravages of Caesar's world (*Shakespearean Tragedy: Genre, Tradition, and Change in Antony and Cleopatra* [Washington: Folger Books, 1984], 269, 272); and Jonathan Dollimore, who views the play without a shred of romanticism and Antony as a true fool, because his self-centered infatuation for Cleopatra leads him to “kiss away kingdoms” and thus “also the lives of thousands” (“Virtus under Erasure,” 215).


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8. Several critics have lately challenged the apparent binaries in the play. Jonathan Gil Harris takes a political-sexual approach, arguing that the alleged differences between things Roman and Egyptian are really just a false front for Roman narcissism (“‘Narcissus in thy face’: Roman Desire and the Difference it Fakes in Antony and Cleopatra,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 45 [1994]: 408-25, passim). Linda Charnes finds the superficial distinction between public politics and private love a mere mask for Antony's entrapment by both: “Although the play encourages us to misrecognize Antony's love for Cleopatra as an alternative to the identity and project he bears for Rome, we see that in his role as Cleopatra's Antony he is put to similar use” (*Notorious Identity: Materializing the Subject in Shakespeare* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993], 141-42, passim).


10. Although M. R. Ridley, editor of the New Arden *Antony and Cleopatra* (New York: Methuen, 1981), believes that this line is meant for Menas, his reasoning seems stretched. The printing of the folio makes somewhat unclear Enobarbus's addressee, but the sequence and sense of the speeches makes Antony the logical choice.


12. In a psychoanalytic study of Antony's melancholy and audiences' responses to it, Cynthia Marshall writes of how Antony is affected by a virtual crisis of identity: “He feels himself to be coming apart” (“Man of Steel Done Got the Blues: Melancholic Subversion of Presence in Antony and Cleopatra,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 44 [1993]: 392). In Marshall's analysis, as in Charnes's, Antony's identity is the “terrain” on which the “real battle” of the play—that between Caesar and Cleopatra—is waged (Charnes, *Notorious Identity*, 112).

13. Susan Snyder expresses the same idea thus: “Antony can bring together incompatible modes of life only when he has no more life to live” (“Patterns of Motion in Antony and Cleopatra,” *Shakespeare Survey* 33 [1980]: 120).

14. This, of course, is a difficult statement to support in few words. Suffice it to say that English Renaissance society generally thought of Roman moral values in a way that reflects the ancient Romans' conceptions of themselves: that is, as founders of government whose individual talents and energies were to be directed toward that public good. Indeed, according to Charles Wells: “[In the Roman tradition], softer feelings had no place in public affairs of any kind” (*The Wide Arch: Roman Values in Shakespeare* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992], 159). John Ferguson points out that, although these Roman “public” virtues “were not easily compatible with the gentler virtues of humility and compassion,” eventually peace within the empire “[saw] other qualities thrusting themselves to the fore, generosity, and forethought, and clemency” (*Moral Values in the Ancient World* [London: Methuen, 1958], 178). In addition, some writers whom Shakespeare knew, principally Virgil, sought to reconcile imperial “single-mindedness” with “compassionate feeling”
That the problem in the *Aeneid* of reconciling public duty with private desire is on Shakespeare's mind in *Antony and Cleopatra* appears clear from Antony's reference to Aeneas and Dido in 4.14.51-54. But the point about the issue at hand—Antony's motivation for suicide—is that, even judged against imperial Roman values, it may appear somehow craven. See also Beverly Taylor on the medieval view of Antony's suicide as motivated by selfish desires, not real martyrdom (“The Medieval Cleopatra: The Classical and Medieval Tradition of Chaucer's *Legend of Cleopatra,*” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 7 [1977]: 261, 263).

For a fuller discussion of Erasmus's identification of Mark Antony with wise Christian folly, see chap. 1 [in *Particular Saints: Shakespeare's Four Antonios, Their Contexts, and Their Plays,* University of Delaware Press, 1997]. Although Christopher Wortham argues that, since Antony is an antitype of Hercules and Hercules is a type for Christ, Antony is, by extension, a virtual antitype of Christ, Wortham has not considered Antony's associations with Christ through the figure of Saint Anthony (“Temperance and the End of Time: Emblematic *Antony and Cleopatra,*” *Comparative Drama* 29 [1995]: 20).

The notion is partly that, because Christian tenets are natural, they predated Christianity in pagan form. This belief was popular among Christian humanists like Thomas More and Erasmus. See, for example, Raphael Hythloday's description of “Religions” in book 2 of More's *Utopia.* The Utopians received Christianity so quickly because they had already arrived at its tenets independently (i.e., naturally) (124).

While I agree with Fichter that Antony and Cleopatra are unaware of the religious significance of the many Christian references and allusions surrounding them, I think that the relationship between the two perspectives he identifies—that of pagan-secular/Christian-religious—implies more than that the pagan is about to give way to the Christian in thirty years or so; it also shows that the characters' worldliest acts can appear holier than their apparently saintlier behavior (“Time of Universal Peace,” 99-101, passim).


As Heinemann points out, this view of Antony (as well as of Octavius and Lepidus) as “self-seeking heirs of Julius Caesar” with an “insatiable ambition for power” derives ultimately from the republican view of Roman history that characterized Plutarch (“Order and Disorder.” 175).


20. Enobarbus is often viewed as the voice of temperance against Antony's intemperance. See, e.g., Adelman: “Enobarbus is a figure of moderation who attempts to live in a world of excess” (*Common Liar,* 131). I believe he has his own excesses, which reflect Antony's. Allyson Newton approaches such excesses in an intriguing way by observing that Enobarbus's “emphatic denials almost always wind up making powerful claims for belief … that strain against the resolve of his seemingly pragmatic skepticism” (“At the Very Heart of Loss*: Shakespeare's Enobarbus and the Rhetoric of Remembering,” *Renaissance Papers* 1995: 89).

21. Gajowski shares this view, albeit in a different context, when, having remarked on Enobarbus's fear of losing his manhood (*Art of Loving*, 99), she comments on his change: “In the end, Enobarbus embodies the value of honor in love, not war. … He epitomizes Roman control of emotions, yet he dies out of love for Antony. … Enobarbus dies heartbroken, speaking with the same density of feeling as the lovers” (110). I cannot agree with Ornstein that Enobarbus's desertion is itself an “act of love” (because he cannot endure watching Antony's fall (“Ethic of the Imagination,” 93-94)); rather, it is a part of a process toward love.

23. Caesar's “tears” here (41), suggesting genuine sympathy, are problematic in light of an earlier reference to his expression of sorrow in 3.2.50-59. Enobarbus and Agrippa imply between themselves that both Caesar's and Antony's public displays of grief are mere self-conscious extensions of their political personae. Enobarbus's word rheum to describe Antony's weeping over Julius Caesar and Brutus mockingly suggests crocodile tears (for similar uses of the word, see, e.g., Much Ado about Nothing 5.2.83, King John 4.3.108, Richard II 1.4.8, Coriolanus 5.6.45, and Othello 3.4.51).

24. Doubling is necessitated in this company's productions by its historically accurate size of twelve players. This particular example contradicts Stephen Booth's alluring theory that, originally, Antony was doubled with Dolabella (“Speculations on Doubling in Shakespeare's Plays,” in Shakespeare: The Theatrical Dimension, ed. Philip C. McGuire and David A. Samuelson [New York: AMS Press, 1979]). Even if Antony and Dolabella were doubled, that fact would not entirely eliminate the possibility that the same actor also played the Clown. I do think, however, that Dolabella's appearance at the opening of 5.1, a split second after Antony's corpse has been borne off stage, raises serious suspicion about the possible doubling of Antony and Dolabella.


27. Although Moseley uses the words prudence and wisdom interchangeably, I wonder if, even in his own examples, they are always the same. The one seems to connote practical ability (“careful management,” The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 3rd ed. [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992]); the other, often, “understanding” (American Heritage). Obviously, I think Shakespeare sometimes distinguishes between the two ideas.


The Soule of Man is nobler then the Spheres;
And, if it gaine the Place which may be had,
Not here alone on Earth, the Rule it beares,
But, is the Lord, of all that God hath made.

Be wise in him; and, if just cause there bee,
The Sunne and Moone, shall stand and wayt on thee.

See also Barbara J. Bono on the ambiguity of the Hercules/Antony analogy (Literary Transvaluation: From Vergilian Epic to Shakespearean Tragicomedy [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984], 154).

29. Historically, Caesar renamed himself Augustus because his triumph over Cleopatra occurred in August, so important to him was that conquest (Hughes-Hallett, Cleopatra, 32). Furthermore, the historical Caesar may have deliberately manipulated Cleopatra into committing suicide through making her believe that he would treat her badly if she remained alive; he could thus easily eliminate the difficult problem of what to do with her (Hughes-Hallett, Cleopatra, 31-32). Although I am not suggesting that Shakespeare knew or made use of this precise theory, its mere existence speaks to the intensity with which Caesar pursued Cleopatra, on which Shakespeare capitalizes.


31. Of all the criticism I have perused, only Gajowski's seems to me to acknowledge the irony with which “[n]early every character on stage ... accentuates Cleopatra's victory and Octavius's defeat in this final battle of wills and wits” (Art of Loving, 116-17). Barroll, however, does comment on the “absurd post-mortem” and the irony of Caesar's continued trust in Dolabella (Shakespearean Tragedy, 222).
Also of interest here may be the information that, according to Taylor, in medieval lore Octavius was seen as both “perfect earthly ruler” and as “partial prefiguration of Christ,” not as foolish fool (“Medieval Cleopatra,” 267).


33. Barroll offers a rich discussion of Caesar's obsession with control, down to his abstinence from drink (2.7) and his icy exploitation of Octavia's feelings to trap Antony (3.6) (Shakespearean Tragedy, chap. 5).

34. Thomson sees Cleopatra's ability to draw Antony and others to her as a “key organizing principle” of the play (“Act 4 scene 16,” 78).

35. Although Plutarch assigns purely selfish motives to Cleopatra for encouraging Antony to fight by sea (Marcus Antonius, 250-54), I can only agree with those critics who point out that Shakespeare handles the matter differently, neither giving Cleopatra any clear motivation to indulge Antony's choice, nor showing Cleopatra to push Antony in that direction. See, e.g., Ornstein (“Ethic of the Imagination,” 94-95) and Ronald Macdonald (“Playing Till Doomsday: Interpreting Antony and Cleopatra,” English Literary Renaissance 15 [1985]: 89).

36. Apologists for Cleopatra are prone to this ironic reading of Cleopatra’s tone in 3.13. See, e.g., Gajowski's certainty that Cleopatra's lines to Thidias are “rich” in “sarcasm” and that Enobarbus “readily misinterprets the exchange” (Art of Loving, 104). But such is the rule, not the exception, among all critics who write about this scene; nearly all make assumptions about Cleopatra’s tone that would be extremely difficult to prove.

37. Ornstein argues that Enobarbus uses this occasion to exact his “jealous revenge” on Cleopatra, but does not explain how Enobarbus has suddenly become so gullible as to mistake Cleopatra's irony (“Ethic of the Imagination,” 94-95). She could, of course, be insincere without adopting a clearly ironic tone, but in that case the audience would be unable to follow what was happening.

38. Ibid., 94.


40. See, e.g., 3.6.30-37.

41. Levin aptly refers to Dolabella’s “naive vanity” (“Monumental Death Scenes,” 158).

42. The debate over Cleopatra's motives for suicide has been approached from many angles besides the obvious contrast between Shakespeare's ambiguity and Plutarch's relative clarity. For example, Mary Ann Bushman argues that Cleopatra's inscrutability, especially in her speeches, “invite[s] the audience to complete” her unfinished characterization (“Representing Cleopatra,” in In Another Country: Feminist Perspectives on Renaissance Drama, ed. Dorothea Kehler and Susan Baker [Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1991], 40). Jyotsna Singh sees Cleopatra as a natural improviser, changing her mind as she progresses (and thus threatening male audience members) (“Renaissance Antitheatricality, Antifeminism, and Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra,” Renaissance Drama 20 [1989]: 99-121). Wolf, among others, simply acknowledges that her motives are mixed (“Escape from Mutability,” 334). I particularly favor Charnes's emphasis on the provisionality of Cleopatra's motives: “The play posits two versions of love: … love that is ‘to die for’ and love that is to die for if nothing else can be worked out” (Notorious Identity, 144).

43. Adelman elaborates on negative correspondences between the serpent and women (see especially Common Liar, 64). Rozetz notices that, as the asp “sucks the nurse asleep” in 5.2.310, it “is metamorphosed from an instrument of death to a symbol of new life” (“Comic Structures,” 162).


45. Here again, that association may be somewhat obscured by Moseley's easy interchange of the terms wisdom and prudence, which, though synonymous in the early seventeenth century (as per the Oxford English Dictionary), no longer share quite the identical meaning.

47. To show the striking resemblance between the last stage picture of Cleopatra and these icons, I have reproduced but a few of the many pertinent images. Not all of them picture Mary flanked, crowned, and enthroned; a subcategory of the nursing Mary image is, in fact, the so-called “Madonna of humility,” who is humble by virtue of sitting on the ground rather than on a throne. Yet not all the elements of flanking, crown, and throne need be present for Cleopatra, asp applied to her breast, to mirror Maria lactans.

Also important to note is the post-Reformation plainness of Willem Basse's etching in particular (1628-48). Although the prevalence of the nursing Mary image declined in the North after the early sixteenth century, it continued to thrive on the Continent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Northern examples include Peter Paul Rubens's *Holy Family with Saints Elizabeth and John the Baptist* (c. 1615), and a later Italian instance is Francesco de Mura's *Charity* (1743-44) (both in the Art Institute of Chicago). Like so many icons in Protestants' hands, the nursing Mary was sometimes refashioned by Northern artists to appear nearly secular, thus furthering the viewer's identification with, not idolatry of, the portrait's subject. In fact, Basse's portraits of the nursing Virgin tend to be indistinguishable from his portraits where the subjects are common nursing mothers. See n. 59, below, for more discussion of the image's post-Reformation history, and see chap. 1 (sec. 2) [in *Particular Saints: Shakespeare's Four Antonios, Their Contexts, and Their Plays*, University of Delaware Press, 1997] for an outline of the similar history that images of Saint Anthony underwent.


Hughes-Hallett discusses the assimilation of Egyptian and early Christian theology into Roman culture as one in which the overlapping of deities, a common phenomenon, included the identification of Isis with the Virgin Mary. So, by extension, did Cleopatra, who often appeared publicly as Isis the mother, historically come to be associated with Mary (*Cleopatra*, 80-84). Hughes-Hallett elaborates:

The idea that Cleopatra, known to us, as she was to her Roman contemporaries, as the profligate libertine, could have any link with the Virgin Mary seems almost laughable. … Yet to her subjects she must have embodied just those qualities of self-denying love, fidelity and compassion which the Virgin Mary shares with Isis. Isis the Great Mother was her favourite role model.

(83)

Laura Severt King has also written about the correspondence between the Cleopatra of act 5 and the Virgin Mary, yet in a context and with a thrust very different from mine. King sees Cleopatra, in the end, “trading the iconography of Isis for that of the Virgin Mary” (“Blessed when they were righgish: Shakespeare's Cleopatra and Christianity's Penitent Prostitutes,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 22 [1992]: 429). The exchange, she reasons, results from a split in Cleopatra's two natures—the profane and the holy—and results in Cleopatra's tragic fall, such that the last “tableau” of her with the asp “simultaneously travesties the Madonna and child and acknowledges their ascendancy as models” (449). I also perceive this ascendancy, but not at odds with or at the cost of Cleopatra's worldliness. In addition, the reference specifically to the nursing Mary, as will become clear in my text, is of most crucial importance to my reading.

50. Ibid., 4:2:180.
53. Theresa Coletti, “Devotional Iconography in the N-Town Marian Plays,” *Comparative Drama* 11 (1977): 37. The association between Mary's milk and saving grace, as Coletti states, seems to derive from another association between Christ's open wound, out of which pours redemptive blood, and Mary's freely offered breast. The two images are often paired in medieval and Renaissance art. For a fascinating discussion of the parallels between Christ's wound and Mary's breast, see Caroline Walker Bynum (*Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* [New York: Zone Books, 1991], 93-211).

54. Further evidence of the lack of contradiction between Cleopatra's worldly and spiritual aspects lies in an emblem by Cesare Ripa, from *Iconologia* (1611), that I discovered in Jeanne Addison Roberts's *The Shakespearean Wild: Geography, Genus, and Gender* ([Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991], 11). Entitled *Natura*, the emblem represents Nature herself as a lactating mother, thereby illustrating that the image applies to physical, as well as spiritual, nurturance. Indeed, Cleopatra's reference to nursing the snake does not ally her with virginity but with the Virgin's maternal sustenance.

55. The doubleness I am describing here comes very close to Adelman's perception of Cleopatra as the "potential site of both generation and regeneration"—of the mortal and the redemptive (*Suffocating Mothers*, 183). Furthermore, Cleopatra's transformative power over Antony (and, as I have argued, over Dolabella) is, in Adelman's psychoanalytic analysis, related to the female act of "remembering" the "dismembered" male (as when Cleopatra reinfuses the figuratively emasculated Antony with new masculinity in the dream she recounts to Dolabella) (183-85). Through this power, Adelman contends, the capacity for spiritual/psychological healing is "transferred from the divine to the human plane in Cleopatra" (185).


58. Ibid., 111.

59. The importation of religious images of lactation into secular and quasi-secular contexts was common in the English Renaissance. Willett's own case may have been influenced (at least subconsciously) by the image of his Cantabrigian Alma Mater lactating knowledge, as pictured in the device of the Cambridge University Press, which came into use at the turn of the seventeenth century. (Although the earliest known example of the device dates to 1600 and thus postdates Willett's emblem book in question, another of Willett's books, published in 1605, bears the lactating Alma Mater Cantabrigia. Moreover, the image may have existed at Cambridge long before it was adopted by the press. For the image itself, see Ronald McKerrow, *Printers' and Publishers' Devices in England and Scotland, 1485-1640* [London: Cheswick (Bibliographical Society), 1913], nos. 325-27, 329.) Spenser and others (some, much earlier) also appropriated the icon to the figure of Charity (*Faerie Queene*, bk. 1), an association that comes, I think, especially close to Shakespeare's application of it to Cleopatra.

60. For a recent discussion of the first association, see Hackett (*Virgin Maiden*), and for studies of the second parallel, see, e.g., Helen Morris (“Queen Elizabeth I 'Shadowed' in Cleopatra,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 32 [1969]: 271-78), Keith Rinehart (“Shakespeare's Cleopatra and England's Elizabeth,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 23 [1972]: 81-86), and, more recently, Theodora A. Jankowski, “‘As I am Egypt's Queen’: Cleopatra, Elizabeth I, and the Female Body Politic” (*Assays* V [1989]: 91-110).

61. In criticism to date, I can find only one acknowledgment—Gajowski's—that the icon at play here is the pietà. She writes: “The emblem of Cleopatra embracing the dying Antony conflates the grief of the pietà and the nurturance of the Madonna” (*Art of Loving*, 112). As Fichter has shown, Charmian's reference to Cleopatra as "eastern star" also involves her in the notion of holy nativity (“Time of Universal Peace,” 109). From a psychoanalytic perspective, Cleopatra's identity easily "elides," in Marshall's words, "with that of the mother" (“Man of Steel,” 395). See also Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers* (passim).

62. These crowns appearing later in the play stand separate from ones mentioned earlier in 2.5.40 and 2.7.116.

64. In discussion, Ralph A. Cohen has used this biblical verse to describe the action of *Antony and Cleopatra*, but differently from me (Discussion at Workshop, “From Critic to Director: Teachers Staging Shakespeare,” Folger Shakespeare Library, 19-20 March 1993). While he sees Antony and Cleopatra jointly surrendering the things of this world to achieve spiritual union together, I see just one of them, Cleopatra, as fulfilling herself spiritually through behaving most humanly. Commentators in Renaissance Bibles, especially the Geneva version, take pains not so much to oppose the political and the heavenly kingdoms that are mentioned in this verse as to stress their interdependency. And although those commentators' context is far afield of Shakespeare's (in that they envision the magistrate as God's appointed servant on earth who must, therefore, be obeyed), the spirit in which they interpret Christ's words to the Pharisees approaches the play's acknowledgement, as I see it, of the place of humanity on earth (see, e.g., gloss of Geneva Bible to 1 Peter 2:17-20).

65. Several critics of late have stressed the inclusiveness of the play's values by the end, the openness of the work to multiple viewpoints, and the lack of friction among Cleopatra's many aspects. See, e.g., Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, 191-92; Marshall, “Man of Steel,” 408 (“Cleopatra models an exuberant, indeed almost comic, delight in plural subjectivity.”); and, in another key, Heinemann, “Order and Disorder,” 177-79. Of an entirely different mind is Peggy Muñoz Simonds, whose rich study of emblems in the play is brought to the narrow conclusion that Antony and Cleopatra are exclusively of this world and, in failing to transcend it, must be purged from it before the Christian era (and any true spirituality) can begin (“‘To the Very Heart of Loss’: Renaissance Iconography in *Antony and Cleopatra*,” *Shakespeare Studies* 22 [1994]: 220-76, passim).

Mary Floyd-Wilson (essay date 1999)


*In the following essay, Floyd-Wilson observes the correspondence between geography and gender that is often examined in the play (for example, the association of Egypt with femininity and Rome with masculinity), and explores the way in which Renaissance climate theory adds another dimension to these relationships. Specifically, the critic demonstrates how Cleopatra's association with gypsies suggests that she possesses an “indecipherable” quality that may migrate over time and space.*

Much of the critical commentary on Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* sees a parallel between the perceived “masculinity” and “femininity” of its title characters and the dialectical opposition of Rome and Egypt.1 While an earlier generation of criticism has suggested that Cleopatra and Antony embody universal gender roles, adumbrating a world-stage polarity of a feminine East versus a masculine West, feminist and postcolonial critics have argued that the play presents the instability of gender binaries and the West's construction of itself and the “Orient.” 2 Regardless of the theoretical perspective, it is widely accepted that there are direct correspondences between geography and gender in *Antony and Cleopatra*; Cleopatra, in particular, is perceived to be “one with her feminized kingdom as though it were her body.” 3 In a subtle reading of Antony's dissolution and Cleopatra's regenerative powers, Janet Adelman cites the play's “affiliation of ‘masculine’ Rome with the solid and bounded, ‘feminine’ Egypt with the fluid”; according to “the Roman point of view, the melting of the boundaries of the self is necessarily its effeminization, its pull back toward that matrix.” 4 Gail Kern Paster has expanded our understanding of early modern gender distinctions by locating the “boundaries of the self” within the historicized specificities of humoral discourse and the hierarchy of Mikhail Bakhtin's bodily canons. For the most part, woman is conceived to be “naturally grotesque—which is to say, open, permeable, effluent, leaky. Man is naturally whole, closed, opaque, self-contained”; moreover, within this paradigm the “male body ... can assume the shameful attributes of the incontinent female body.” 5 In obvious ways, Paster's work provides further support for reading Cleopatra as quintessentially female and “as abundant, leaky, and changeable as the Nile.” 6
However, early seventeenth-century natural philosophy also suggests that varying degrees of a body's internal liquidity and temperature determine what modern readers would classify as “racial” characteristics. Renaissance climate theory avers that a region's atmospheric temperature, moisture level, soil, and topography help fix an inhabitant's humoral complexion, coloration, and temperament. Consider, for example, Titus Andronicus, which associates Aaron the Moor's complexion and “fleece of woolly hair” with his native climate and “cloudy melancholy” (2.3.34, 33). Popular accounts of climate theory establish that parallel physiological processes take place in northern, southern, and temperate regions; the heat of the sun not only darkens the skin of the Egyptians but also dries the body's humors; conversely, cold northern air seals up the body's moisture, producing white skin and “gross,” thick humors. Further complicating these distinctions in early modern texts is an inherited contradiction within classical climatic discourse itself. The Aristotelian tradition holds that external temperature has a counteractive effect on the body. Hot climates draw out internal heat, producing cold complexions, while the inverse takes place in the north. The Hippocratic theory maintains a correspondent relation between external temperatures and the body; cold climates, for example, produce cold complexions. What remains stable throughout the discourse is the distribution of moisture: hot regions dry the body's humors, while cold climates preserve internal moisture. Since it is derived from Mediterranean sources, classical humoral discourse presupposes a temperate climate, and climate theory explicitly locates temperance in the middle regions. Yet even within temperate regions, certain “differences of style of life, climate and diet” produce puzzling questions about the body, such as whether the “hottest female is colder than the coldest male.” Once translated to less temperate regions, conflicts in the discourse are exacerbated. Just as distinctions in rank intersect with and confound the body's boundaries (the lower orders proving “leakier” than chaste ladies, for example), extreme climates further disrupt gender categories.

In fact, climate theory draws on and complicates the schematic opposition between the spirit and the flesh implicit in the antithesis of the classical male body and the grotesque female body. Since extreme cold and heat produce disparate effects, it is widely held in early modern climatic discourse that the “body and the mind are swayed in opposite directions,” so that “southerners excel in intellect, [and northerners] in body.” Northerners “have a greater abundance of blood and humor [and] with more difficulty separate themselves from these earthly dregs,” while the southerners' relatively dry complexion gives them an unearthly “power of contemplation, … meditation,” and wisdom. Moreover, the gendered connotations of these differences are commingled. The powerful spirit of the south proves masculine in its strength, yet feminine in its subtlety, while the northern flesh is feminine in its excess, yet masculine in its strength. In general terms, only the middle regions readily produce temperate men, balanced in mind and body, while the extreme northern and southern climates generate intemperance, which translates easily to effeminacy.

Not only does most early modern climate theory assume a tripartite structure, it also identifies England as a septentrional nation. And not surprisingly, there is some anxiety regarding climate theory in the discourse itself, stemming in part from an inability to reconcile regional determinations of a body's solidity and fluidity with accepted gender distinctions. On a local level, Englishmen are distinguished from Englishwomen as the dryer and more self-contained sex, with the supposition that “men have marble, [and] women waxen minds,” but on the world stage the English find themselves characterized as soft-fleshed, inconstant, and permeable as the result of a northern climate which produces excessively moist complexions. As northern and southern regions, marginalized from the temperate zone, England and Egypt actually share a certain peripheral status. While Antony and Cleopatra's construction of Egyptian and Roman identities and values depends explicitly on an East/West binary, it has been taken for granted that Jacobean England would “see Cleopatra [and Egypt] through Western eyes.” Certainly early modern Britain's perspective on Cleopatra entails a complex identification with western, masculine Rome. And Jacobean nationalism is informed by Britain's invocation of mythological Roman origins, which subsumed the paradigm of a westward movement of empire. Implicitly underscoring the East/West binary, Leonard Tennenhouse has argued that Cleopatra “embodies everything that is not English according to … British nationalism,” but I would contend that England's opposition to Egypt could disrupt as well as secure its western, masculine perspective. In fact, as a northern nation, England's latitudinal relationship to southern Egypt and temperate Rome upsets the
purportedly archetypal binaries of East/West, Female/Male.

It is not coincidental that *Antony and Cleopatra* focuses consistently on regional differences and the instability of gender roles. Antony's melting effeminacy is attributable not only to his lovesick “dotage” but also to the influence of the Egyptian climate on his relatively “northern” body. Contrasted sharply with Antony's leaky vulnerability and unguarded passions is the opaque surface of Cleopatra's body. Although both characters possess passionate temperaments, we can easily discern Antony's vacillating allegiances; yet we are never certain of the sincerity or depth of Cleopatra's affections. In significant ways, Cleopatra's climatically determined “racial” status challenges the northern construction of gender differences; as a woman, her complexion should be soft and impressionable, but as an Egyptian she proves elusive and resistant to interpretation. The paradox of Cleopatra's ambiguous allure is not only that she represents the threatening excesses of Egyptian effeminacy, particularly exemplified by her seeming deceptions, but that those same qualities, if appropriated, would help remedy northern deficiencies.

Both Antony and Cleopatra derive their greatness (and their ruin) from their particular excesses; while the “vilest things / Become themselves” in Cleopatra (2.2.239-40), Antony's “faults, in him, seem as the spots of heaven” (1.4.12). However, their excesses move in opposing directions; to a certain extent Cleopatra's strengths are represented as transcending the body, while Antony's best qualities remain rooted in his corporeality. Explicitly identified as “hereditary / Rather than purchased,” Antony's natural complexion inclines him toward a kind of fleshly bounty or surfeit, a virtue or vice, depending on one's perspective (1.4.13-14). Arguably, Antony is more “northern” than Roman in his constitution; in fact, Jean Bodin cites Marc Antony's reputed fleshiness as analogous to the northerner's “heavy” body, and certainly his demise in Shakespeare's play recalls the commonplace notion that northern bodies are predisposed to melt in southern climates. Paradoxically, Antony's greatest weakness also marks him as exceptional; in Cleopatra's vision, his internal bounty raises him above the elements in which he lives. By rejecting Roman restraint in favor of Antony's liberal excesses, the play seems to rewrite “heroic masculinity” in northern terms.

Rather than equating Cleopatra's body with the Nile, we need to consider how the invocation of climate theory establishes a more complex relationship between the queen's complexion and Egypt. In climatic-humoral terms, Cleopatra's blackness and elusiveness are the natural effects of her environment: “Think on me, / That am with Phoebus' amorous pinches black” (1.5.27-28). And in various ways, these qualities make her motives inaccessible both to Shakespeare's Romans and Jacobean England. Yet the play's sly metadrama and anachronistic references to gypsies may have reminded Shakespeare's audience that Egypt is a world that is irrevocably lost. And while the mysteries of Egypt remain impenetrable, Cleopatra's characteristic subtlety, whether “infinite variety” or “cunning,” becomes a quality that can “transmigrate” over time and place. Cleopatra's mystery can never be unraveled, yet the play suggests that it can be appropriated and represented through artifice and performance. While northern virtues prove inherent and inimitable, the southerner's natural gifts metamorphose into qualities that can be acquired and enacted.

In ascribing particular characteristics to the peoples of various climates, Renaissance authors drew on a long history of classical geography which contrasted wise Egyptians with barbaric Scythians in the descriptions of remote borders beyond the ideal temperate zone. Furthermore, as Karl Dannenfeldt suggests, the “revival of Platonism and Neoplatonism in the Renaissance enhanced the role of Egypt as the original land of theologians and philosophers.” Egypt's warm climate plays a crucial, yet rarely acknowledged, role in its history as a land associated with the origins of wisdom. The Hermetic texts, which Marsilio Ficino translated and which helped form the basis of his Neoplatonist philosophy, explain that “Egyptians are particularly favored. … In *Stobaeus* XXIV, II, Horus asks his mother Isis, ‘By what cause, Mother, do men who live outside our most holy place lack our quickness of apprehension?’” Indeed, *Stobaeus* establishes that as a result of planetary aspects and a favorable climate, Egyptians are “exceptionally intelligent and wise.”
While modern scholars readily concede that Renaissance authors traced the origins of sagacity to Egypt, few have explored the corresponding links they made between black bile, black skin, and wisdom. Yet the interrelatedness of climate theory and humoralism makes these links quite apparent. Bodin not only assigns the origins of “blackness” to the concoction of humors by environmental heat but also notes that “the southern people, through continued zeal for contemplation, befitting black bile, have been promoters and leaders of the highest learning.”

Juan Huarte, in *The Examination of Men's Wits* (1594), sees direct correspondences between the Egyptian climate, coloration, and wit: the “Aegyptians … haue not forlorne that their delicacie of wit and promptnesse, nor yet that roston colour which their auncestors brought with them from Aegypt.” In the early modern period, their characteristically dry complexion links the southerners' blackness to wisdom. According to Huarte, “in this region [Egypt], the sunne yeeldeth a feruent heat: and therefore the inhabitants have their brain dried, and choler adust, … the much heat of the country rosteth the substance of these members and wreith them, as it draweth together a peece of leather set by the fire; and for the same cause, their haire curleth, and themselves also are wily.” Hence, the Egyptian climate not only darkens the skin but also produces a natural wisdom or cunning. Given the ambiguous status of Cleopatra’s coloration in the classical sources, it seems likely that the conspicuous blackness of Shakespeare’s queen is intended to invoke both the myth of Egypt and the climatic-humoral discourse that underscores that myth.

Traditionally set in opposition to the ancient Egyptians are the northern Scythians, whose hearty bodies, inactive minds, and pale skin are attributed to their cold environment. In “Air, Waters, and Places,” the earliest Greek tract to establish a connection between region and humoral physiology, Hippocrates sees a direct correspondence between the Scythians' fleshy bodies and sluggish temperaments, and their climatic conditions. This northern race has “ruddy complexions on account of the cold, for the sun does not burn fiercely there. But the cold causes their fair skins to be burnt and reddened.” In addition, “The body cannot become hardened where there are such small variations in climate; the mind, too, becomes sluggish … their bodies are heavy and fleshy, … they are watery and relaxed. The cavities of their bodies are extremely moist, … under such climatic conditions, the bowels cannot be dry.” Significantly, the softness of their flesh blurs physical distinctions between Scythian men and women: “All the men are fat and hairless and likewise all the women, and the two sexes resemble one another.” Hippocrates concludes that as a result of their excessively moist complexion, these northerners are the “most effeminate race of all mankind.” As “Scythian” becomes shorthand for “northern” in the early modern period, the English find themselves commonly bracketed with the Scythians in continental texts.

As modern scholars have noted, Renaissance physiology readily links soft complexions, mental sluggishness, and effeminacy. Huarte, for example, draws on Aristotle, Hippocrates, and others to argue that while the supposedly tender flesh of women denotes excess moisture, those men whose predominant humors are phlegm and blood also possess tender flesh and prove “simple & dullards.” Huarte applies this same rubric of humoral differences geographically, associating closed, dry bodies with southern regions while characterizing northerners as fleshy, moist, and slow: “the Flemmish, Dutch, English, and French, … their wits are like those of drunkards: … & this is occasioned by the much moisture, wherewith their brain is replenished, and the other parts of the bodie: the which is known by the whitenesse of the face … and aboue this they are generally great, and of tall stature, through the much moisture, which breedeth encrease of flesh.”

For a positive portrait of northern attributes, early modern writers turn to Tacitus, who describes the Saxons as morally superior to the degenerate Romans. Citing the influence of a cold climate, Tacitus observes the ancient Germans' penchant for drinking and carousing: “[n]o nation indulges more freely in feasting and entertaining than the German.” The Germans' excesses, however, serve to fortify their virtues— they are generous and bounteous to others, counting it “a sin to turn any man away from [their] door.” Moreover, their liberal-hearted natures make Germans incapable of cunning or political craft, for they are barely “sophisticated enough to refrain from blunting out their inmost thoughts … every man's soul is laid completely bare”; their hearts are “open to sincere feelings or … quick to warm to noble sentiments.” In the late sixteenth century, Fynes Moryson insists that “the Nature of the English is very singular aboue other Nations.
in liberality and bounty … if it be not rather prodigality or folly.45 It is during the early seventeenth century that English writers begin to push the “question of a common ancestry” with the Germans, striving to see themselves in Tacitus’s laudatory commentary.46

Despite the positive slant which Tacitus provides, the early modern English continue to struggle with the perceived disadvantages of their northern complexion. A treatise published in England in 1591 urges northerners to purge the “grosse humour ingendred in them, by reason of the grossnes, and coldnes of the aier wherein they live.”47 And as late as 1649 John Milton expresses anxiety concerning the “natural political deficiencies” that the English climate produces, and urges his countrymen to temper their northern excesses by “import[ing] civil virtues from the ‘best ages’ and those situated in more favorable climates.” 48 Thomas Wright’s The Passions of the Mind in General (1604) directly addresses the presumed correspondence between regional complexion and political acumen.49 Of particular interest to Wright is how a “certain natural complexion and constitution of the body, … inclineth and bendeth them of hotter Countries more unto craftiness and warinesse than of them of colder Climates” (84). Conceding that “these Northerne Climates are accounted” to produce “simple and unwise” citizens, he notes that Englishmen in particular tend to “reveal and disclose themselves very familiarly and easily” (82, 84). To remedy this weakness, Wright encourages his English readers to learn how to discover other men’s passions, as well as how to govern their own. For Wright, skin color in particular signifies and promotes a person’s simplicity or subtlety: “The very blushing also of [English] people showeth a better ground whereupon Virtue may build than certain brazen faces, who never change themselves, although they commit, yea, and be deprehended in enormous crimes” (82). Despite this defense of his countrymen’s northern complexion, Wright concludes that the English are exceedingly open and vulnerable to foreign interpretation. Urging his nation to “be directed” in presenting a “prudent carriage,” he suggests that they adopt a temperate measure of southern wariness (85). As Wright anxiously reveals, Englishmen in the early seventeenth century fear that their natural complexion may predispose them to a passive and effeminate role on the world stage, especially in the play of politics.50

Throughout the seventeenth and well into the eighteenth century, climate theory remains a popular and viable explanation for differences in coloration and national disposition. However, as England’s involvement in the Atlantic slave trade escalates, natural philosophy begins to shift its focus away from diversity in complexions toward what is increasingly seen as the peculiarity of blackness. One example of this trend in the mid-seventeenth century is a posited link between the origins of blackness and artifice. In Pseudodoxia Epidemica, Sir Thomas Browne describes certain “Artificial Negroes, or Gypsies [who] acquire their complexion by anointing their bodies with Bacon and fat substances, and so exposing them to the Sun”; moreover, he suggests that this counterfeit practice might plausibly be the source of all seemingly “natural” black complexions.51 In Anthropometamorphosis (1650) John Bulwer contends that man may have become “black by an advenient and artificial way of denigration, which at first was a meer affectation arising from some conceit they might have of the beauty of blacknesse, and an Apish desire which might move them to change the complexion of their bodies into a new and more fashionable hue. … And so from this artifice the Moores might possibly become Negroes, receiving atramentitious impression by the power and efficacy of imagination … which were continued by Climes, whose constitution advantaged the artificial into a natural impression.” 52

It is significant that both Browne and Bulwer continue to invoke the efficacy of “climes” to maintain color, yet insist on the artificial origins of that color.53 This deviation in natural philosophy strives to collapse the tripartite framework, which embraces a spectrum of complexions, into a binary of normative white and aberrant black, effectively erasing the association between blackness and natural wisdom.

Well before these natural philosophers traced the origins of blackness to “Apish desire[s],” however, seventeenth-century Englishmen saw the natural vulnerabilities of their complexion inversely reflected in the southerner’s darker countenance. In its consideration of geography and complexion, Antony and Cleopatra not only typifies the traditional associations of early modern climatic-humoral discourse but also anticipates
England's impulse to link southern origins with artifice. Although Cleopatra's complexion is attributed to Egypt's clime, her mystery is recast as theatricality. The play sustains Cleopatra's “infinite variety” by obscuring her “true” motives with endless playing: however, the play's allusion to a non-Egyptian boy actor as the agent of Cleopatra's playing reworks the north's relationship to the south. In this metadramatic moment, the southerner's cunning becomes effeminate artifice, while the northern male is stabilized, slyly revealing his own subtlety.

... Antony and Cleopatra's opening scene establishes that from a Roman perspective it is Antony who resembles the Nile, “[o]’erflow[ing] the measure” (1.1.2), a comparison which points up the effect of the Egyptian environment on his body. Traditionally, critics have argued that Cleopatra's presence, Egypt's luxury, and love-sick dotage effeminize the Roman, but it is also true that Antony's relatively northern constitution is especially vulnerable to the southern climate and its excesses. After losing battles and loyal followers, Antony's loss of control is further represented as watery dissolution. Eventually his thoughts grow “indistinct / As water is in water,” and the boundaries of his identity seem to melt until he “cannot hold this visible shape” (4.14.10-11, 14).

We soon discover that while Caesar condemns Antony's indulgent ways in Egypt, he readily praises Antony's previous success as a soldier who endured severe environmental conditions. Although Egypt weakens Antony, a more northern climate seems to enhance his natural strengths. In his nostalgic recollection of Antony's mettle, Caesar describes Antony as a soldier, fighting famine

(Though daintily brought up) with patience more
Than savages could suffer. Thou didst drink
The stale of horses and the gilded puddle
Which beasts would cough at. Thy palate then did deign
The roughest berry on the rudest hedge.
Yea, like the stag when snow the pasture sheets,
The barks of trees thou browsed. On the Alps
It is reported thou didst eat strange flesh,
Which some did die to look on. And all this
.....Was borne so like a soldier that thy cheek
So much as lanked not.

(1.4.60-71)

It is no accident that Octavius's memory locates Antony-as-ideal-soldier in a northern environment—a cold region, barren of natural resources apart from the “roughest berry,” the “barks of trees,” and the presence of strange flesh. According to commonplace Renaissance notions of military science, northern climates produce the fiercest soldiers: they are men who bear cold patiently and wage war easily in the winter. In his commentary on the military prowess of northern nations, Bodin notes that “when hunger comes upon the Scythians, they cut the veins of horses under the ears, suck the blood, and feast on the flesh, as tradition reports about the army of Tamerlane.” While Octavius concedes that Antony's Roman background is contrastively “dainty,” Antony proves himself to be as hearty and robust as the “savages” apparently acclimated to such conditions. Octavius praises the command Antony wields over his body in the face of such a harsh environment, yet Antony behaves as if he were a native, his bodily strength and military powers seemingly enhanced by the brutal circumstances. Arguably, Antony's fleshiness helps him to survive this harsh environment so well that his “cheek … / lanked not.” However, when a northerner moves southward, his military strength is challenged: “bring a Scithian from his native habitation to the South,” writes Bodin, “and you shall find him presently to droop, and fall away with sweat and faintnesse,” for “the armies that come out of the North, grow weake and languish, the more they goe towards the South … [the more they become] molten with sweat, and languished with heat.” Moreover, hot climates will exacerbate the northerner's
natural inclination to feasting and drinking.\textsuperscript{60}

The abstemious Caesar censures Antony's present voluptuousness, characterizing him as the “abstract of all faults” (1.4.9). Despite Caesar's sweeping criticism, it is clear that Antony's faults are not the sum of all vices, but particularly carnal ones; he possesses an appetite for mirth, drinking, and sport (1.4.4-7, 16-21). As Lepidus notes, Antony's temperament predisposes him to these weaknesses, his faults being “what he cannot change,” rather “[t]han what he chooses” (1.4.14-15). While Caesar scoffs at Antony's “composure,” which “must be rare indeed / Whom these things cannot blemish,” it is the same “rare” composure that earned Caesar's respect in the Alps (22-23). Although the Romans mock Antony's intemperance in Egypt, there is some recognition that a heart that “burst[s] / The buckles on his breast” in the “scuffles of great fights” necessarily “reneges all temper” (1.1.6-8). Antony's excesses mark him as conspicuously un-Roman, yet they also “seem as the spots of heaven” (1.4.12).

Peter Erickson contends that Cleopatra's final dream “endows [Antony] with the quality of ‘bounty,’” and that the “image of … unending profusion replaces Octavius's preferred version of his [Antony's] heroic deprivation.”\textsuperscript{61} While it is true that Cleopatra and Caesar recollect Antony differently, Antony's natural characteristics remain constant in both visions; it is his body's interaction with the environment that varies. While Antony's internal plenitude easily counters Caesar's landscape of deprivation, it inevitably surfeits in Cleopatra's fertile Egypt. To attribute Antony's liberality solely to Cleopatra's imagination underestimates the import of Enobarbus's acknowledgment of his master's bounty. As a Roman, Enobarbus feels compelled to leave a master who proves “so leaky” (3.13.63). But when Antony answers this desertion with the return of Enobarbus's treasure, together with his own “bounty overplus” (4.6.22-23), Enobarbus's heart begins to break in the face of such splendid generosity:

\begin{verbatim}
Thou mine of bounty, how wouldst thou have paid
My better service, when my turpitude
Thou dost so crown with gold!
\end{verbatim}

(4.6.31-34)

Although Enobarbus recognizes that by overflowing the measure Antony displays a lack of policy, he concedes that this excess shows a nobility that outstrips more temperate actions.

Rather than simply endowing Antony with bounty, Cleopatra's vision celebrates the possibility of a world defined by Antony's generous rule:

\begin{verbatim}
For his bounty,
There was no winter in't, an Anthony it was
That grew the more by reaping: his delights
Were dolphin-like, they showed his back above
The element they lived in.
\end{verbatim}

(5.2.86-90)\textsuperscript{62}

In contrast to Caesar's place-specific recollection, Cleopatra's fancy first locates Antony everywhere and then in water, insisting that his best attributes rise above the “element they lived in.” While Caesar imagines that Antony fills a “vacancy with his voluptuousness” (1.4.26), Cleopatra suggests that Antony's bounty flows from his natural constitution and that his defining quality is infinite renewal. Cleopatra's vision of Antony prizes the same attributes that northerners claim as virtues.

While the south's exceptional climate and fertile luxury exaggerate Antony's innate qualities, Cleopatra's
complexion is engendered by Egypt. And in contrast to the play's representation of Antony's melting boundaries, the Egyptians' associations with melting and overflow are much more equivocal. Cleopatra most often invokes melting imagery as a curse or threat of destruction, as if willing the Nile to rise at her command. In declaring her devotion to Antony, she swears that if she proves disloyal, her own body will overturn the drying effects of Egypt's climate. Her hypothetical scenario of disaster is predicated on her possessing a cold heart:

If I be [cold-hearted],
From my cold heart let heaven engender hail,
And poison it in the source, and the first stone
Drop in my neck: as it determines, so
Dissolve my life!

(3.13.158-62)

As the storm “discandies,” all of Cleopatra's progeny and all Egyptians will lie dead and graveless from the melting ice. The discandying that Cleopatra envisions appears to mirror Antony's own dissolving state, with the exception that her melting is an imagined punishment for betrayal, couched in an invocation that preserves her authority. Antony, in contrast, when his followers desert him, associates “discandying” with the ultimate surrender of one's self to another, lamenting that

That spanied me at heels, to whom I gave
Their wishes, do discandy, melt their sweets
On blossoming Caesar.

(4.12.20-23)

Cleopatra's repeated ties to the serpent of the Nile further define her relationship to the environment. As with the crocodile's impenetrability, Cleopatra's temperament, complexion, and, arguably, her “cunning” are created by the “operation of [the] sun” (2.7.27). In the early modern period, the crocodile is noted for its dry, impervious skin; if Egypt is submerged in water, the opaque boundaries of the scaled serpent's body would certainly remain intact. In response to Lepidus's questioning, Antony describes the crocodile as a creature that is bred by its environment; however, in a mysterious metamorphosis, it seems to transcend that which produces it: “It is shaped, sir, like itself, and it is as broad as it hath breadth; it is just so high as it is, and moves with its own organs. It lives by that which nourisheth it, and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates” (2.7.41-44). The most specific detail Antony offers about the crocodile is that “the tears of it are wet” (2.7.48). Certainly, Antony plays on the proverbial sense that a crocodile's tears signify craft; however, it is not until the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that this idea gains proverbial status. Antony's equivocal statement conveys a less definitive response, suggesting that Roman knowledge proves impotent in the face of natural Egyptian mysteries.

Antony's jesting tone with Lepidus recalls Enobarbus's teasing of him on the interpretation of Cleopatra's tears. As with the crocodile's ambiguous yet patently “wet” teardrops, the mystery of Cleopatra's passions captures a transition in early modern distinctions between the natural and the artificial. While Antony contends that Cleopatra is “cunning past man's thought” (1.2.142), Enobarbus counters him with a playful inversion of the correspondences between microcosm and macrocosm: “her passions are made of nothing but the finest part of pure love. We cannot call her winds and waters sighs and tears: they are greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report. This cannot be cunning in her; if it be, she makes a shower of rain as well as Jove” (1.2.143-48). On one hand, Enobarbus suggests that Antony should simply appreciate the “performance” of Cleopatra's passions. But despite Enobarbus's apparent cynicism, the slipperiness of his statement indicates that we cannot ultimately know whether Cleopatra's affections are dissimulation.
Intriguingly enough, contemporary mutations of the word “cunning” duplicate the period’s changing perception of southerners. In its original sense, “cunning” denotes a natural ability or capacity for learning and wisdom, as in a predisposition determined by one’s natural complexion; according to the OED it is not until 1583 that the word comes to mean craft, deceit, or a disposition to artifice. Although Antony observes that “every passion fully strives / To make itself, in [Cleopatra], fair and admired” (1.1.50-51), we remain unsure as to whether Cleopatra filters her emotions through an awareness of audience, or whether her “passions” possess an agency that defies Roman notions of true and false expression.

Although Enobarbus conveys some ambivalence in his response to Cleopatra’s sighs and tears, he customarily views weeping as policy or effeminacy. When Agrippa remarks that Antony purportedly wept at Julius Caesar’s and Brutus’s slayings, Enobarbus intervenes with his version of events: “That year indeed he was troubled with a rheum. / What willingly he did confound, he wailed. / Believe’t, till I weep too” (3.2.57-59). Enobarbus does not simply cast doubt on the rumor that Antony wept; he undercuts any possible emotional tenor that those alleged tears may convey. For Enobarbus, weeping is a loss of manhood (“Transform us not into women” [4.2.36]), and artifice itself (“I am onion-eyed” [35]). In conspicuous contrast to Enobarbus’s Roman thoughts, Antony sees a regenerative bounty in weeping: “Grace grow where those drops fall” (4.2.38). Antony’s sentiments anticipate a Christian view of transformation, and, advantageously for the north, they imply that those who are prone to melt with heartfelt tears are especially open to grace. From a Roman perspective, Antony’s bounty and overflow of tears mark him as effeminate, yet a revisionist, northern view would recast these qualities as masculine virtues.

As the boundaries of Antony’s body melt, the play suggests that Cleopatra’s complexion has changed over time. In her “salad days” she was both “green in judgment, [and] cold in blood” (1.5.73-74), but as she has aged, she seems to have grown dryer and hotter. As a description of the young Cleopatra’s humoral complexion, this verdant imagery connotes a typically effeminate impressionability. While she was colder and moister, Cleopatra, it seems, played a more passive role in her liaisons: with Caesar, she was “a morsel for a monarch,” while Pompey could “make his eyes grow in [her] brow; / … anchor[ing] his aspect” there (1.5.31-33). If we believe her claim that she has changed, then it would appear that Cleopatra has grown less impressionable, in humoral terms, and, according to northern constructions, less “feminine.”

Jonathan Harris observes that “[f]or all of Cleopatra’s undeniable corporeality, her body has an odd habit of disappearing altogether at precisely those moments when it seems most overwhelmingly present.” The incorporeal aspect of Cleopatra’s allure is connected to her “racial alterity” and to the complex interaction between her body and the elements. When Cleopatra describes her body plainly in climatological terms—“Think on me, / That am with Phoebus’s amorous pinches black / And wrinkled deep in time” (1.5.27-29)—she alludes to the drying effect of the sun’s heat on the body’s humors. Commenting on the paradox of Cleopatra’s age, Adelman notes that she is associated “with an antiquity outside the range of time altogether, certainly outside the range of Caesar's time.” Cleopatra's ageless antiquity has its basis in contemporary climatic discourse, which classifies southerners as descendants of the oldest civilizations and correlates their natural qualities with those of the elderly. Within the framework of climatic discourse, northerners resemble fleshy youths, and middle climates produce temperate men at their fittest, while southerners are analogous with the old—their bodies are weak and dry, but their minds possess sublime wisdom. At the same time, dry complexions prove less vulnerable to decay or physical change. In The Masque of Blackness, Ben Jonson contends that neither “cares, [nor] age can change” the Ethiopians’ complexion—“Death her self … / Can never alter their most faithful hue.” In a similar vein, Enobarbus captures the timeless quality of Cleopatra’s appearance: “Age cannot wither her” (2.2.236). Cleopatra’s complexion represents the antiquity of Egypt and its impenetrable mysteries.

Not only is Cleopatra’s “corporeality” quite ambiguous; she also seems to resist the customary correlations made between the female and flesh. Her curious appeal is often presented in vaporous terms; she does not “cloy” or surfeit the appetite like “other women” (2.2.237, 238). Indeed, the material connotation of
“cloying” suggests a weighing-down of the flesh typically associated with the grotesque body; contemporary usage of the term indicates that a soul may be cloyed by the “heavy bondage of the flesh” (OED). Instead Cleopatra seems to lack a real substance, “mak[ing] hungry / Where most she satisfies” (2.2.238-39). Agrippa’s exclamation of “Rare Egyptian!” (219) in response to Enobarbus’s famed report of the queen whose “own person, / … beggared all description” (2.2.198-99) catches her exceptional status, while also implying that she may be as subtle as the air that “[h]ad gone to gaze” on her (218). (“Rare” can imply the subtlety of one’s temperament or constitution, as in Caesar’s ironic use of the word in reference to Antony’s indulgent ways.)

In the play’s closing scenes Cleopatra repeatedly rejects any ties to gross corporeality. To be commanded by “poor passion” is equivalent in her mind to being “the maid that milks / And does the meanest chares” (4.15.77-78); in its associations with a loss of control, maternity, fluidity, and the lower orders, this image of the milkmaid represents the grotesque body that Cleopatra renounces. Traditionally critics have stressed Cleopatra’s identification with the milkmaid, a reading corroborated by the standard emendation to this line: it is established practice for editors of the play to substitute “No more but e’en a woman, and commanded / By such poor passion as the maid that milks” for the Folio’s “No more but in a woman.” The change may appear inconsequential, yet if considered precisely, the Folio implies Cleopatra’s critical detachment from the blubbering milkmaid. In the moment following Antony’s death, Cleopatra acknowledges her grief only by critiquing it. She condemns “poor passion” and in the next breath seeks resolution. When expressing her dread of being staged in Rome, she seems most repulsed by the coarse physicality of the Roman people:

With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers shall
Uplift us to the view. In their thick breaths,
Rank of gross diet, shall we be enclouded,
And forced to drink their vapor.

(5.2.209-13)

As she prepares for her suicide, she separates herself further from “earthly dregs” while relegating the Romans to the mundane. The circularity of physical life and the materiality of the feminine are equated in Cleopatra’s picture of Caesar, who, like the lowest beggar, is nursed by “dung” (5.2.7-8). Whether one interprets the text as “dug” or “dung,” either sense preserves Cleopatra’s renunciation of physicality, while likening Caesar to the body kept captive by fleshly needs. Embracing death, she claims to “have nothing / Of woman in [her]”; she is “marble-constant” (5.2.238-40). As with the crocodile, Cleopatra’s regional identity predisposes her to this transformation: she becomes “fire, and air,” giving her “other elements … / to baser life” (5.2.288-89).

Although often interpreted as evidence of her leaky body, Cleopatra’s death is an ironic reversal of maternal imagery; she does place herself in the role of the nurse, and the asp becomes the “baby at [her] breast” (5.2.308), but rather than nourishing this baby, she is feeding herself “[w]ith most delicious poison” (1.5.27). Cleopatra’s death is the direct antithesis of Antony’s messy demise. Antony literally grows heavier while he is dying, and at the moment of his death Cleopatra laments, the “crown o’ th’ earth doth melt” (4.15.63). In contrast, Cleopatra’s corpse shows neither “external swelling” nor blood; as Caesar observes, “she looks like sleep, / As she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace” (5.2.344-46). Even in death her body maintains its opacity.

Neither the Romans nor the play’s audience ascertain the truth of Cleopatra’s loyalties. Although we have certain evidence of her manipulations and endless playing, we never gain absolute proof of betrayal. When politic Caesar attempts to read the queen, it is Cleopatra who triumphs, leaving “great Caesar [an] ass / Unpolicied” (5.2.306-7). When Caesar and Cleopatra finally confront one another, their scene is notable for its insistent focus on the prospect of unfolding Cleopatra’s motives, without ever making them clear. Caesar
discovers that Cleopatra has reserved portions of her property, and praising her for the “wisdom in [her] deede” (5.2.150), he entreats her not to blush. Whether she is blushing or she soon will blush, her thoughts remain concealed. She explains away her withheld property as “some lady trifles” intended to induce the “mediation” of Livia and Octavia once she lives among the Romans (5.2.165-70); however, as Adelman notes, this explication may be a “cunningly staged device to convince Octavius that she has no desire to die.” Railing against her betrayer, Seleucus, Cleopatra suggests that her passions are nearly transparent, and that soon she may “show the cinders of [her] spirits / Through th' ashes of [her] chance” (5.2.173-74). In the early eighteenth-century editions of the play “chance” was glossed as “cheeks,” augmenting the physiological reference in these lines and indicating that Cleopatra threatens to display heated spirits through her burnt cheeks; yet, even without this emendation, the lines suggest that what is produced as a result of external heat is accidental, and naturally obscures whatever burns within.

Antony and Cleopatra repeatedly teases its audience with the possibility that Cleopatra's “true” mind and affections will be revealed, while it fosters the Egyptian paradox that her unreadability is natural. Roman accusations of betrayal and cunning presume that a familiar fixed self lurks beneath Cleopatra's playing. Since Egypt's climate produces her ineffable subtlety, drawing out her baser elements, Cleopatra's mysterious essence defies Roman definitions of truth and artifice. However, while the play sustains Cleopatra's ancient mystery, it also forecasts the disintegration of Egyptian culture and the loss of southern greatness.

Egypt's ruin is neatly captured by the Romans' anachronistic references to Cleopatra as “gypsy.” The gypsy figure, as represented in a wide range of early modern texts, conflates England's rapidly shifting responses to blackness and natural Egyptian wisdom and anticipates the issues raised in the writings of Browne and Bulwer. In 1547, Andrew Borde described Egyptians as displaced nomads, identified by their “swarte” skin and an inherent falseness, for unlike other nations they “go disgisyd in theyr apparel. … [and] Ther be few or none of the Egipcions that doth dwel in Egipt.” Later texts not only associate gypsy figures with craftiness and lost origins, but also emphasize the artifice of their complexion. In Lanthorne and Candle-Light (1609), Thomas Dekker finds it particularly disturbing that one might perceive the gypsy's complexion to be “natural”: “A man that sees them would sweare they had all the yellow Iawndis, or that they were Tawny Moores bastardes, for no Red-oaker man caries a face of a more filthy complexion; yet are they not borne so, neither has the Sunne burnt them so, but they are painted so.” Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, English law makes frequent mention of these troubling vagabonds; more significantly, it insists that “gypsies” are not southerners darkened by a foreign climate but Englishmen or “counterfeit” Egyptians wearing “black-face.”

When these vagabonds are portrayed in later works such as Jonson's masque Gypsies Metamorphosed (1621) and the plays The Spanish Gipsy (Middleton and Rowley, 1623), More Dissemblers Besides Women (Middleton, 1623), and The Lost Lady (William Berkeley, 1637), their presence seems to necessitate an unmasking scene. Quite simply, the gypsy's unmasking reworks the cultural associations of ancient Egyptian blackness derived from climatic-humoral theory. Rather than portraying blackness as powerfully unreadable, the dramatization of the gypsy-washed-white neatly equates blackness with artifice and establishes the revealed whiteness as the true and “natural” complexion. Unmasking the false gypsy both denies the mysterious agency attributed to blackness in climatic-humoral discourse and precipitates the erasure of a Renaissance reverence for southern civilizations.

Shakespeare's play anticipates these unmasking scenes most specifically in Cleopatra's metadramatic reference to the “quick comedians” who will stage her “Alexandrian revels”:

Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I' th' posture of a whore.
At first glance, Cleopatra's allusion to the boy actor simply validates the “reality” of a male English body beneath the costuming of the Egyptian queen. At the same time, the play's privileging of climatological associations has established Cleopatra's seemingly performative qualities as natural and resistant to imitation. Cleopatra insists that in representation, her greatness will be “boyed” or reduced to the mere “posture” of a woman defined by carnality; in other words, the spirit of Cleopatra's greatness, which encompasses her unreadability and “infinite variety,” will necessarily be lost in the translation of Egyptian culture.

Yet the reductive representation of Cleopatra's powers proves to be a cultural victory for the north, encapsulating the triumph of youthful barbarism over an ancient civilization. Since ancient Egypt is gone, representations of Cleopatra inevitably reinvent her power as performativity. Paralleling the movement in English natural philosophy, the scene's metadrama dissociates Cleopatra's southern characteristics from her natural body, diminishing the status of her Egyptian “greatness”; at the same time, by equating Egyptian “greatness” with artifice, the English gain access to its mysterious agency by mere imitation. While *Antony and Cleopatra* suggests that Cleopatra's agency originates with her southern complexion and challenges northern constructions of the gendered body, the play's metadramatic reference to the boy player stages Cleopatra's power as northern artifice—as a performance which succeeds in armoring and reifying the white male body.

As with her emblematic creature, the crocodile, the ancient Egyptian queen is naturally opaque and unreadable. However, by linking her mystery to the conscious and definitive artifice of gypsies and players, Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* suggests that Cleopatra's indecipherable quality can transmigrate over time and place, to be appropriated by the impolitic northerner. While ancient Egypt threatens the fixity of western distinctions (masculine/feminine; truth/artifice) the wandering, painted gypsies of the early modern period effeminize blackness as ornament and stabilize the northern male complexion as naturally virtuous. From a seventeenth-century English perspective, Egypt has degenerated, Rome has fallen, and Cleopatra's vision of Antony's natural bounty looks toward the northern horizon.

**Notes**

4. Ibid., 187.
6. Harris, “‘Narcissus in Thy Face,’” 409.
7. It is beyond the scope of this essay to trace the role of early modern natural philosophy in the eventual construction of “race.” As an explanation of blackness, climate theory comes under scrutiny in the seventeenth century; however, it remains the dominant explanation of color difference and continues, in various forms, well into the eighteenth century. For a history of environmental theory, see Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967). For a recent consideration of the role natural philosophy plays in English characterizations of
American Indians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Joyce Chaplin, “Natural Philosophy and an Early Racial Idiom in North America: Comparing English and Indian Bodies,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 54 (1997): 229-52. As England's involvement in the Atlantic slave trade grows, English authors increasingly cite the Hametic curse to estrange and “explain” blackness, but in the early seventeenth century the curse of Ham is “denied more often than affirmed” (see Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968], 19). We should recognize that the escalating prominence of the legend of Ham during the seventeenth century works in tandem with ideological erasures taking place in the discourse of natural philosophy. Changing socioeconomic factors shift the focus in early European “science” from theories of human diversity, drawn from ancient physiology, to the “mystery” of blackness—and religious discourse responds with a scriptural explanation of that mystery.


9. All quotations from Shakespeare are from *The Pelican Shakespeare*, ed. Alfred Harbage (New York: Viking Press, 1977). The nurse in *Titus* invokes climate theory when she contrasts Aaron's black child with “the fair-faced breeders of our clime” (4.2.68).

10. Early modern references to climate theory appear in a variety of sources, cited throughout this essay, including historiography (Jean Bodin, William Harrison), medical texts (Thomas Walkington), and treatises on education (Juan Huarte) and psychology (Thomas Wright). Within this discourse, latitudinal divisions prove arbitrary, shifting with the author's regional perspective, but for the most part regions classified themselves and others according to a tripartite scheme of northern, middle, and southern regions well into the late seventeenth century.


19. In her discussion of Cleopatra's racial identity, Joyce Green MacDonald writes: “To speak meaningfully about Cleopatra's race is to include in one's use of the term an account of the ideological work race did (and does), work which was often enabled by and proceeded in tandem with the writing of other kinds of difference from a subject who is conceived of in this case as not only white, but also Roman (or English), not only male but also a heterosexual dominant male” (“Sex, Race, and Empire in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*,” *Literature and History* 5, no. 1 [1996]: 60-77). As MacDonald indicates, the issue of Cleopatra's race may give rise to the conflation of Roman and


24. Bodin, *Method*, 99. Bodin also notes that Antony's fleshiness marks him as trustworthy, in contrast to lean Cassius, who resembles a southerner. In *Julius Caesar*, Caesar also notes the differences between them, swearing he would trust Cassius more if he were fatter (1.2.198).


33. Ibid., 188. “Choler adust” is a form of melancholy (see Babb, *Elizabethan Malady*, 33-34).
35. Ibid., 164.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., 166.
38. See Bodin, Method; see also Jacques Ferrand, A Treatise on Lovesickness (1623), ed. Donald A. Beecher and Massimo Ciavolella (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 246, who refers to the English, “the Scythians, the Muscovites, and the Poles” as similar types.
39. Huarte, Examination of Men's Wits, 80.
40. Ibid., 116.
43. Ibid., 119.
44. Ibid., 120. It is a commonplace in climatic discourse to identify northerners as heavy drinkers and great feasters, and the southerners' dry complexion as easily sated by a few delicacies. See Charron, Of Wisdome, 164; and Bodin, Method, 128.
46. MacDougall, Racial Myth in English History, 44, 46-47.
48. Ibid., 76.
49. Thomas Wright, The Passions of the Mind in General, ed. William Webster Newbold (New York: Garland, 1986); all subsequent references are to this edition.
50. Although Wright insists that the “readability” of his countrymen's complexion actually affirms their virtue, he later identifies this quality as effeminate, attributing the “tenderness of [a woman's] complexion” to her “lack of heat, and … native shamefastness,” and citing her readability, slow wit, and inconstancy as typically feminine qualities (ibid., 119, 110).
53. For another perspective on the issue of race and cosmetics, see Hall, Things of Darkness, 86-92.
54. I am not suggesting that Cleopatra has “true” motives to discover, but that her mystery depends on the promise and denial of revelation.
57. Bodin, Method, 128. See Gillies's discussion of this passage as an exemplification of Stoicism (Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference, 118).
58. See Adelman's reading of this landscape as constructing a defensive masculinity defined by “male scarcity” and a “denial of … the female” (Suffocating Mothers, 176).
59. Bodin, Six Bookes of a Commonweale, 551, 549.
Henry Peacham, in *The Complete Gentleman* (1622), for example, notes that “there is not any nation in the world more subject unto surfeits than our English” when they have traveled to “hotter climates” (ed. Virgil B. Heltzel [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962], 161-62).

60. Erickson, *Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare’s Drama*, 141-42.

61. I have adopted the Folio reading of “Anthony it was” rather than “autumn 'twas,” which is an eighteenth-century emendation; the Folio text supports the impression that Antony's bounty is constant (not seasonal) and inherent. See Spevack on the editorial history of this line (*New Variorum Edition*, 315-16).

62. For a survey of Renaissance notions about the crocodile, see Robert Ralston Cawley, *The Voyagers and Elizabethan Drama* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 52-63; in particular, Cawley notes that writers marveled at the creature’s “impervious” skin and apparent invulnerability (56-57).

63. See Gillies's discussion of this description as “essentially untranslatable into the Roman code and hence unknowable” (*Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference*, 121); Cleopatra, not unlike the crocodile, is “unsearchable in her difference. She is ancient, black, sun-burned, reptilian” (122).

64. Cawley finds that “[c]ontrary to common belief, the Ancients knew nothing” of the notion of a weeping crocodile (*Voyagers and Elizabethan Drama*, 53); however, sixteenth-century texts abound with references to it. Although Cawley claims that the medieval treatise of Bartholomaeus Anglicus contains the earliest reference to a weeping crocodile, he refers us to the sixteenth-century English translation *Batman uppon Bartholome*: Batman's translation has incorporated Leo Africanus's *A Geographical Historie of Africa*, a text that was not available until the sixteenth century. The OED cites Mandeville as the earliest mention of the crocodile's deceitful tears; however, Mandeville merely notes that crocodiles “slay and eat men weeping” (*Mandeville's Travels* [London: Hakluyt Society, 1953], 1:202).

65. I have incorporated the Folio text's “weep” instead of “wept.”

66. Aging is expected to affect an individual's humoral complexion; however, English humoral discourse indicates that it causes one to grow colder and dryer (see Ruth Leila Anderson, *Elizabethan Psychology and Shakespeare's Plays* [New York: Russell and Russell, 1966], 55).

67. Cleopatra's younger impressionability accommodates Pompey, much in the way that Isabella in *Measure for Measure* implicates women: “For we are soft as our complexions are, / And credulous to false prints” (2.4.129-30). For the argument that Cleopatra reflects what the Romans project see Harris, “‘Narcissus in Thy Face.’”


72. See Paster for a provocative reading of Cleopatra's “antinursing” (*Body Embarrassed*, 239-44).


74. Citing Paster's commentary on blood as a “trope of gender,” Marshall notes that “[w]ounded, bleeding, and lacking agency, Antony takes on a typically feminine position” in death (“Man of Steel Done Got the Blues,” 403).
79. This is posed as a question in Adelman, *Common Liar*, 15; see also Adelman's discussion of the various interpretations of this scene (191-92, n. 8, and 202, n. 17).
81. In act 1, scene 1 Philo claims that Antony's heart “is become the bellows and the fan / To cool a gypsy's lust” (9-10); Antony refers to Cleopatra as a gypsy in act 4, scene 12: “Like a right gypsy hath at fast and loose / Beguiled me to the very heart of loss” (28-29). For background on the English gypsy, see Dale B. J. Randall, *Jonson's Gypsies Unmasked: Background and Theme of “The Gypsies Metamorphos'd”* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1975).
84. In *The Lost Lady* the character is actually a lady disguised as an “Egyptian” rather than a gypsy; John Webster's *The Devil's Law-Case* (1617-21) and Richard Brome's *The English Moor* (1637) also stage unmasking scenes, but the characters are identified as Moors rather than gypsies.
85. Cleopatra's reference to a “boy” impersonating her greatness recalls the play's earlier references to Octavius as the “young Roman boy” (4.12.48) as well as the “greatness he has got” from Cleopatra (5.2.30).

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Antony and Cleopatra (Vol. 70)

Introduction
Antony and Cleopatra

For further information on the critical and stage history of Antony and Cleopatra, see SC, Volumes 6, 17, 27, 47, and 58.

Regarded as one of Shakespeare's most compelling love stories, Antony and Cleopatra is often seen as an anomaly among critics because, despite its apparently tragic ending, the play ends on a triumphant note. Although Antony and Cleopatra both die at the play's end, they deny Octavius Caesar victory and achieve immortality as lovers. The tragedy of the play is also undercut by the comic elements that appear throughout the course of the drama. The play's genre, which encompasses the comic, heroic, tragic, and romantic, comprises one area of intense critical analysis. Critics are also concerned with the language used in Antony and Cleopatra, and examine the rhetorical styles of the characters as well as Shakespeare's use of metaphor and imagery. Investigations of the characters in the play are concerned to some degree with the Elizabethan understanding of the characters as fictional entities and as historical personages. In modern stage productions of Antony and Cleopatra, the dynamic relationship between the two lovers is typically of most interest to spectators as well as reviewers.

Antony, Cleopatra, and Caesar are the most heavily scrutinized characters in Antony and Cleopatra. Some critics focus their character analyses on the way in which these characters might have been received by Elizabethan audiences. Robert P. Kalmey (1978) argues that the Elizabethan conception of Octavius Caesar was two-pronged. According to Kalmey, Elizabethans praised Caesar as an ideal prince only after he was crowned emperor. Prior to this event, Kalmey maintains, Caesar was condemned by Elizabethans who saw him as a tyrant who fueled the fires of civil war to further his own ambitions. Like Kalmey, Theodora A. Jankowski (1989) is interested in the Elizabethan take on Shakespeare's characters, specifically Cleopatra and her resemblance to Queen Elizabeth. Jankowski notes that although both women used their bodies for political purposes, Cleopatra should not be taken as an allegorical representation of Elizabeth. Jankowski states that the similarities between the women suggest Shakespeare's awareness of the fact that a successful female sovereign was an anomaly in a patriarchal society, and of the particular problems Elizabeth faced in ruling England. Taking a similar approach to the issue of Cleopatra's characterization, Imtiaz Habib (2000) also finds a connection between Cleopatra and Elizabeth. Habib, however, suggests that Cleopatra's blackness and seductive nature, in conjunction with the indolence of Egypt as a nation, is contrasted with the nobility of England, and the white and virginal Queen Elizabeth. Habib also comments on the black woman of Shakespeare's Sonnets and her relationship to Cleopatra. Additionally, Habib maintains that the critical connection between Cleopatra's political impotency and her sexual power is her race, which Habib demonstrates was understood to be black and ethnic in the eyes of historians and of Shakespeare. Coppélia Kahn (see Further Reading) centers her study on the rivalry between Octavius Caesar and Antony. Kahn contends that Caesar campaigns against Antony not only to demonize Cleopatra and paint her as Rome's archenemy, but to completely discredit Antony as a rival. Kahn goes on to examine the relationship between Caesar and Antony from Antony's point of view, commenting on what Antony hoped to accomplish through his suicide, and also discussing how his death would have been interpreted according to Renaissance ideas regarding suicide.

The sense of triumph at the play's end is an important element of modern stage productions of Antony and Cleopatra. In her review of the 1999 production of the play staged at the Southmark Globe Theatre in London and directed by Giles Block, Lois Potter (1999) comments that the director's vision of the play emphasized the victory of “a gloriously human couple.” Potter additionally singles out members of this all-male cast for praise; she finds that Mark Rylance's Cleopatra offered new insights into the character and the play as a
whole, and that John McEnery's performance as Enobarbus was exceptional as well. Patrick Carnegy (1999) and Russell Jackson (2000) review another recent production of *Antony and Cleopatra*, staged by the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford-upon-Avon and directed by Steven Pimlott. Although Carnegy criticizes Alan Bates, as Antony, for stumbling over many of his lines, he gives high praise to Frances de la Tour's performance as Cleopatra, and to the production as a whole. Likewise, Jackson is equally taken with de la Tour's Cleopatra and finds Bates's Antony to be likeable and energetic, but decidedly unheroic.

Many aspects of the language, style, and generic structure of *Antony and Cleopatra* fascinate modern critics. Robert D. Hume (1973) offers a detailed examination of the ways in which language, rhythm, and rhetorical habit are used for the purposes of character differentiation and development. For example, Hume observes that Antony's language reflects his vacillation between the worlds of Rome and Egypt, and that Cleopatra's imaginative language and varied rhythms are contrasted with Caesar's straightforward and regular verse. In another comparison between the language of Caesar and Cleopatra, Hume comments that the melodiousness arising from Cleopatra's use of assonance is set against the cacophony generated by Caesar's alliteration. Like Hume, Rosalie L. Colie (1974) explores the styles of speech used in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Colie focuses on the contrast between the Attic and Asiatic styles of speech and how these styles were understood in the Renaissance as encompassing not just rhetorical patterns, but moral and cultural differences as well. Colie explains that Atticism, the style preferred by Caesar, is characterized by plain, direct speech, while Asianism, which is more sensuous, self-indulgent, and imaginative, is the style used by both Cleopatra and Antony. Furthermore, Colie examines the language Antony and Cleopatra use with each other, commenting that their love transcends conventional hyperbole; in their creation of new forms of overstatement, the lovers employ a language reflective of the instability of their love. Donald C. Freeman (1999) uses the theory of cognitive metaphor to evaluate the figurative language found in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Freeman identifies the major image schemes used in the play and demonstrates the way these inform our understanding of the play's treatment of Antony, Cleopatra, and Rome. In terms of genre, *Antony and Cleopatra* encompasses elements of the comic, heroic, tragic, and romantic. J. L. Simmons (1969) demonstrates the ways in which the structure of the play follows the pattern of other Shakespearean comedies. Simmons finds that the contrast between Rome and Egypt is mirrored by the contrasts between court and tavern in the *Henry IV* plays, between Venice and Belmont in *The Merchant of Venice*, and between court and forest in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It*. Taking another approach to the debate over the play's genre, R. J. Dorius (see Further Reading) discusses the interaction between the tragic, heroic, and romantic elements of the play, arguing that Shakespeare's treatment of love and of Cleopatra is at the center of the controversy regarding the relationship between tragedy and romance in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Criticism: Overviews And General Studies

*In the following essay, Turner examines Shakespeare's treatment of Rome in Antony and Cleopatra, suggesting that his view of the empire was fueled by an imaginative return to the “honour culture” of late medieval aristocrats. Turner also comments on the major relationships within the play, and on the love poetry of Antony and Cleopatra.*

The stage upon which *The Tragedie of Anthonie, and Cleopatra* is enacted is a site upon which competitors meet. …

I am using the word ‘competitor’ in that precise but ambiguous sense which it enjoys throughout the play, and which, according to the *OED*, it enjoyed for the century between 1579 and 1681: a sense fluctuating between ‘rival’ and ‘associate’, and implying both the competition and collaboration that today—though we still speak of ‘fellow-competitors’ in a race—are usually thought to be mutually incompatible.
It is no accident that the period of the word's ambiguity coincides so closely with the period of the greatest efflorescence of court society in Britain, as succeeding monarchs sought to 'gentle' their aristocracy and disarm their code of honour by drawing them to court, where their behaviour might be overseen and their energies directed towards an honours system managed by the crown. Here was a society alive and anxious with 'the ebb and flow of friendships and rivalries, alliances and ruptures, loyalties and betrayals' as courtiers vied incessantly for prestige, now competing with and now competing against one another. The slipperiness of the word, that is, precisely mirrored the slipperiness of court society: what Wyatt at the start of our period called 'the slipper top / Of court's estate', and what Marvell at its end called 'giddy favour's slippery hill'.

Yet although the structural ambiguity of the term 'competition' belongs to the contemporary world of court society, aristocratic life had previously been characterised by an even greater sense of political instability. The Tragedie of Anthonie, and Cleopatra, in its attempt to imagine the Rome of the triumvirate, returns to the honour culture of the late mediaeval aristocracy, before it had yielded to the power and ideology of a centralised monarchy with a providentialist view of history. It returns to an honour culture haunted by the belief 'that Fate, irrational, incomprehensible and uncontrollable, rules over human history'. To the man of honour, all the critical moments of his life had seemed 'hag-ridden by Fate'; and it is no accident that the chief focus of Shakespeare's play, in describing the competitiveness of the life of honour, should fall upon the instability of its alliances, the unpredictability of its military encounters and, more generally, upon the mutability of all earthly fortunes. It is not that Shakespeare 'was using the Roman Empire as a symbol for the sublunar world' unsustained by divine order and love. His point, I think, was political rather than theological: he was depicting the endemic instability of a dying culture and the determined efforts of Caesar to bring about a new order, centralised and stabilised under his own imperial power.

There is something of the play's sense of mutability in North's Plutarch, where we find that Anthony had 'oftentimes proved both the one and the other fortune' and that he was 'thoroughly acquainted with the divers chaunge and fortunes of battells'. But as the poems of Wyatt and Marvell intensify Seneca's sense of the slipperiness of court society, so too does Shakespeare's play intensify Plutarch's picture of the fickleness of Fortune. Its swirling sequences of short scenes, with their peripateias, their multiple perspectives, their giddy rangings across the globe and their collapsing of a decade's history into a three-hour entertainment, all enhance this effect—especially in the Folio text before us, where the absence of division into acts and scenes casts us adrift from our familiar bearings. Throughout the play we witness the human attempts to make meaning, and to win an honourable place in history, under the threat of constant erasure from the fluxes and refluxes of fortune. The power that makes is the power that mars: in Anthony's own words, 'That which is now a Horse, even with a thought / the Racke dislimes, and makes it indistinct / As water is in water'. It is this power of fortune that Caesar sets out to master.

When the claims of Rome and Egypt compete for Anthony's attention and loyalty at the start of the play, he replies as follows, in a passage justly famous for its poetic beauty:

Let Rome in Tyber melt, and the wide Arch  
Of the raing'd Empire fall: Heere is my space,  
Kingdomes are clay:

'Heere is my space': it is indeed a question of space. If these words are taken naturalistically, they refer to the space allotted by the drama to Egypt, and in particular to Cleopatra's court; and in their passionate rejection of Rome, they suggest that the most important competition in the play will prove to be that between Anthony and Caesar. If we consider the words metadramatically, however, as Raymond Williams has pointed out, we shall see that the space towards which Anthony gestures is also the theatrical space around him: the actor, in competition with the rest of the cast, is indicating the arena which he hopes to fill with his own particular speaking voice and, beyond that, the city with whose attractions the play is competing in its search
for an audience. I want to explore each of these two points in turn, before returning to my opening claim that the First Folio text too is a space which we must understand as a site of competition. In each case, we shall find that what is at stake is the peculiar nature of the poetry that Shakespeare wrote for this play, and his growing awareness as a dramatist of the equivocal status of human beings as poets, story-tellers, spinners of narrative, in a world where—the conflictual and multivocal nature of the dramatic form itself drives home the point—the competition for power, and thus for hegemonic control over the narratives of others, was felt to alienate and denature the individual self.

Anthony's claim that his space is here—in Egypt, in Cleopatra's court, even perhaps in Cleopatra's arms—is a characteristically indirect admission of his harassed sense of Caesar's inescapable presence, even in his absence. It is not paradoxical, I think, but true to say that the competition between Anthony and Caesar is the most important human relationship in the play; and the evidence of this is to be found in the scene with the Soothsayer.

His Cocks do winne the Battaile, still of mine,
When it is all to naught: and his Quailes ever
Beate mine (inhoopt) at odd's. I will to Egypte:
And though I make this marriage for my peace,
I'th'East my pleasure lies.

It is Caesar's cocks and quails that drive Anthony back to Egypt; his love for Cleopatra, his pleasure in the East, seem here no more than rationalisations of his primary superstitious dread of Caesar. It is a question, it seems, of 'Naturall lueke'; and however much we seek to translate these words into a discourse more familiar to us today—discussing the sexual competition between the rising young man and the declining man in his mid-life crisis, for example, or contrasting the focused self-possession of the new man with the reckless magnanimity of the old—Anthony himself is bound by the language of the fortune-teller. ‘Whose Fortunes shall rise higher / Cesars or mine?’: the man of honour, dependent upon his own resolve to win prestige, is haunted by the sense of his own impotence, fearful that the world lies fatefully beyond his control and that his will is doomed to be overthrown by the fellow-contrary power of Fortune.

The centrality of Caesar to the play means that the love between Anthony and Cleopatra—powerful and real though it is—must be understood in relation to the Rome that has produced it. ‘Let Rome in Tyber melt’: their love is a dissolution, a melting, an overflowing of all the measures of time and place upon which Rome depends, and its very existence depends upon having those measures to transgress. There is, in other words, no self-authenticating language of pleasure in the play. From the licentiousness of Charmian's talk at the start to the malapropisms of the Clown at the end, the discourses of pleasure subvert the moral and linguistic grammar whose purpose is to order them; but they cannot create a coherent world of their own. The opening tableau of the play makes the point perfectly for us. With eternity upon their lips but with Roman soldiers and messengers by their sides, the two lovers dream of a ‘new Heaven, new Earth’; and yet these new worlds of which they dream are no more than the resorts of fantasy to dissolve the intolerable tensions of the old. Love can only realise itself in opposition to duty, Egypt in opposition to Rome. But it is not enough to talk of antithesis here: whether we speak of Rome and Egypt, of duty and love, of Caesar and Cleopatra or of Apollo and Dionysus,10 we must remember Jonathan Dollimore's insistence, quoting Derrida, that ‘binary oppositions are “a violent hierarchy” where one of the two terms forcefully governs the other’. 11 The hierarchy here serves Rome and is held in place by a culture of demonisation that sees Cleopatra as a ‘great Faiery’ or a ‘Witch’, dependent upon whether she is in or out of favour with Anthony; it is a world in which love is linguistically structured as a spell, a charm, a magical fascination.

Hence, of course, the danger in describing the play as a ‘love-tragedy’; for the label, through its very familiarity, may blind us to precisely those connections that we are being invited to make—the connections between love and history, both personal and political. Anthony and Cleopatra themselves, at certain moments of their lives—though, importantly, not at others—speak of their love as absolute, magical, transcendental; they
identify one another with mythical figures, especially with Venus and Mars; and they strive to make their love
the stuff of legend, so that they might become what Caesar finally calls them: ‘a payre so famous’ that no
glave can hold their like. Moved we may be; but we should not be taken in. For there is no such thing as love;
there are endless varieties of experience that are called love, and we need to understand them in their variety.
The interesting questions are always the particular ones: what is understood by ‘love’ in each case? why do
people fall in love with certain people and not with others? why, in so doing, do they sometimes speak of
Love rather than of love? The purpose of these questions is to return the seemingly overwhelming experience
of love back to the totality of its material history in order to understand it fully; and here the play can help us.

For it helps to deconstruct those aristocratic—and, later, bourgeois—reifications which have seen Love as a
kind of Fate, a transcendental power which was impossible to resist. The Venus and the Cupid of the
aristocratic culture of the late sixteenth century—like the Eros of the bourgeois culture of the late nineteenth
century—ensnared their victims in a passionate game whose fascination obscured the political realities of the
society in which it was played out. The young aristocrat who went to court to enjoy the pleasures of love
unwittingly submitted to the royal power of surveillance as he did so; excelling in the field of love, he lay
down his arms in the field of war, and thus confirmed the power of his sovereign. Here in The Tragedie of
Anthonie, and Cleopatra, it is this same connection between love and politics that is laid bare. It is the
distraction of love that we see, in both senses of the word: a passionate excitement that, in engulfing the
reason, seduces the military man from the noble pursuit of honour amongst his fellow-competitors.

It is perhaps a question of punctuation in the narratives we tell, of whether ‘love’ should be the last word in
the sentences we spin; and here too the Folio can help us. For how should we punctuate the title of the play? It
is an important question, to which the Folio has two answers. In the heading of the play—the version that I
have preferred here, for its capacity to surprise—there is a comma after Anthonie; but on the running title at the
head of each page, the comma is gone. There is no single answer; the play has two titles, each with different
implications—and each might be said to epitomise something really present within the text. If we omit the
comma, we are encouraged to think of Anthony and Cleopatra as constituting in some sense a single unit of
thought—as though their tragedy is the consequence of their love, enabling the two of them together to
constitute a reality greater than they do apart. But if the comma is inserted, it divides their destinies, opens up
their different experiences of love for separate scrutiny in their different political contexts, and draws our
attention to those distinctions which their poetry labours to dissolve.

For the love-poetry of Anthony and Cleopatra is a poetry of dissolution. There are, of course, many other
kinds of poetry in the play; but it is the love-poetry that has attracted most attention—and understandably so,
because of its great beauty. Yet beauty, like love, is always of a particular kind, and must be not only admired
but characterised. ‘Kingdomes are clay’: the plangency of such verse derives from its curious blend of
transgressive defiance and regressive yearning, and exists from the start in a curiously paradoxical
relationship with time and place. For its aristocratic recklessness, its fine prodigality of word and emotion, is
also a wilful neglect of the real world where aristocratic honour must be won. This is Aristotelian liberality
run to excess. Kingdoms are not clay; but the energy of the poetry springs from the insatiable need to say that
they are. The lovers are driven to dematerialise the material; to transform the untransformable; to build out of
words a home that can never be built out of bricks. The beauty of their verse, in other words, for all its defiant
aspiration, is also a function of its commitment to illusion; it is plangent because it overlooks (in both senses
of the word) the facts of daily life which usually provide imagination with its materials to work upon. But the
imagination here is driven into counter-creation; it must evolve a counter-narrative to efface the history that
Caesar is engaged in writing.

The crowning achievement of such counter-narrative, of course, occurs at the end of the play, when Cleopatra
in defeat draws herself up in the full pomp of her regalia and rhetoric.

Give me my Robe, put on my Crowne, I have
Immortal longings in me. Now no more
The juice of Egypt's Grape shall moist this lip.
Yare, yare, good Iras; quicke: Me thinkes I heare
Anthony call: I see him rowse himselfe
To praise my Noble Act. I heare him mock
The lucke of Cæsar, which the Gods give men
To excuse their after wrath. Husband, I come ...

The verse is beautiful, spell-binding; but its theological beliefs are illusion. Cleopatra's declaration of the supremacy of love in the next life only serves to disclose the supremacy of Caesar's power in this. The queen who will shortly see the asp that is killing her as a baby sucking her to sleep is compelled to transform the world in verse because she has failed to transform it in fact. This dissociation between imagination and reality is Caesar's real victory. Cleopatra dismisses his triumph as 'lucke', as she later dismisses Caesar himself as 'Asse, unpolicied'. But she is wrong; it is not a question of luck but of successful policy. He could not stall with Anthony, he says, in the whole world, and so he prepared himself for the moment when their uneasy collaboration would break down into a deadly rivalry. Here is a man determined to owe nothing to luck and fortune. An old world at the last gives way to a new; and an older kind of competition gives way to a kind that we should recognise today.

'Heere is my space': the actor saying these words may also gesture towards the theatrical arena around him, and in so doing spark off a series of reflections about the relationship between theatre and 'real life' that might naturally culminate in contemplating the theatricality of Cleopatra's death.

In one sense, of course, in Jacobean London as today, theatre was very much a part of that 'real life'. It was a flourishing commercial enterprise in competition with other businesses to attract audiences; and the actor who declared the theatre to be his space was also declaring the source of his income, in a world where everyone was busy making a living. But in another sense, theatre was—and still is—a place apart. In Jacobean London, the marginality of the theatre was inscribed in its geographical exclusion outside the city walls. It was a place dangerous to the physical and the moral health of its audience, a place where crowds could gather, where actors could impersonate their betters, and where the pretensions of power and the self-interest of ideology could be exposed simply by the productions and reproductions of the new dramatic form. Right from the start, that is, capitalism generated space for its own critique.

Yet neither money nor satire could wholly satisfy the new dramatists, who also needed to feel the social and political centrality of their own practice; and here, I think, they were often disappointed. There is an excess in their satirical railing that suggests a consciousness of their own marginality; and the sense of theatre as illusion, which is so pervasive in the later works of Shakespeare, suggests a similar awareness. No doubt this sense was also in part a reaction to the conditions of working in the theatre, with its devotion to make-believe and its rapid turnover of material. In the theatre it is art that is short-lived, life that is long; and the form that Sidney thought capable of embodying eternal verities appeared hauntingly ephemeral to Shakespeare. Cleopatra's death, in its theatricality, embodies perfectly his sense of the paradoxical status of dramatic art; for the beauty of her verse, even as she speaks it, discloses its most powerful effects as illusion. Art, it seems, is denatured by the same market-place that prompts it.

Yeats once speculated that 'there is some one myth for every man, which, if we but knew it, would make us understand all he did and thought'. Shakespeare's myth, he went on, referring to Hamlet and the second tetralogy of History Plays as his examples, 'describes a wise man who was blind from very wisdom, and an empty man who thrust him from his place, and saw all that could be seen from very emptiness'. If there is perhaps one single myth informing Shakespeare's work, I should say that it depicts the displacement of the corrupt poetry of a vestigial aristocratic code of honour by the mean-spirited prose of an emergent machiavellianism; and that this myth—which with various modifications informs plays like Hamlet, the second tetralogy, the Tragedies and, of course, the play before us now, The Tragedie of Anthonie, and Cleopatra—has
its roots in Shakespeare's sense of the history of his own lifetime, as the flawed glamour of Essex and his friends, including Shakespeare's own patrons, had been thrust from places of influence at court by the pragmatism of Cecil and his supporters.¹³

The competition between Caesar and Anthony, in other words, is not simply the history of two incompatible personalities; it is also the history of the cultural clash between two incompatible ways of seeing the world, each of which is grounded in a different material reality. It was a history found in Plutarch but shaped in sixteenth-century London, with the events of the two historical periods assimilated into a single myth that offers to interpret them both. Caesar's triumph at the end of the play creates for its audience a picture of the prehistory of its own present; Augustan Rome becomes the cradle of the modern world—a world from which the poetry of honour and love has disappeared, along with their material base in aristocratic power and the early court societies of the Renaissance. All that remains is Caesar, whom Jonathan Dollimore has likened to Machiavelli's Prince: 'inscrutable and possessed of an identity which becomes less fixed, less identifiable as his power increases'.¹⁴ Ben Jonson had already in The Poetaster (1601) introduced Augustus Caesar to the English stage,¹⁵ portraying him as an idealised ruler whose sense of the importance of moral temperance, social hierarchy and literary patronage was perhaps intended as coercive flattery of Elizabeth herself. But Shakespeare's Octavius—still to proclaim himself the Emperor Augustus—is no such ideal figure; he is a model of prudence and watchfulness, a puritan whose denatured realpolitik seems to epitomise Shakespeare's own sense of the political life that succeeded the disarming of the aristocracy.

What is missing from this picture of Caesar, however, is the poetry that honour, beauty and love evoke from him at two critical moments in the play: on his first appearance he celebrates the heroism of Anthony's soldiership in the Alps, and on his last he celebrates Cleopatra's 'strong toyle of Grace' and the fame that she and 'her Anthony' will enjoy as lovers. It is true that in each case his tribute is expedient; and yet it also seems true that each is profoundly felt. His poetry is moving. In other words, the dissociation between imagination and realpolitik that Caesar is irresistibly imposing upon the world is replicated within his own subjectivity. He is, of course, too canny to succumb to its tragic potential; it is Enobarbus' role in the play to do this, and the fact that Shakespeare has made the character who played so small a role in Plutarch so central to his own play is proof of his interest in the dissociation that Caesar has brought about.

For the true heir of Caesar is the dramatist himself, together with his play and the playhouse in which it is enacted. Here in the marginal place of the playhouse, in the marginal time of the play, the dramatist too recalls the flawed poetry of honour, beauty and love that have gone from the world. He recalls them critically, without nostalgia, in a critique of the meanness of the world that survives; and yet his play is implicated in that world by its existence as a commodity in the market-place. This paradoxical relationship of conformity and unconformity between the new work of dramatic art and the new world emerging around it constitutes the subtext to the closing words of the play:

No lesse in pitty, then his Glory which
Brought them to be lamented. Our Army shall
In solmne shew, attend this Funerall,
And then to Rome. Come Dolabella, see
High Order, in this great Solemnity.

One story is brought to its ritual conclusion, but another goes on; once Anthony and Cleopatra are buried in Egypt, Caesar will return to Rome. Yet despite Caesar's wish to have the last word, to be master of the narrative he tells and the funeral he stages, the competition between himself and Anthony still continues. It continues, as we have seen, within his individual sensibility; and it continues too within the sensibility of the dramatist and his audience, as the 'solemne shew' of his tragedy is produced and reproduced again and again in performance. The competition between Caesar and Anthony is thus constantly regenerated as part of the paradox of an art which both collaborates with the economic activities of its society and criticises them in the
name of a greater richness and vitality—a richness and vitality which, though flawed in all their manifestations hitherto, nevertheless persist in making their lack felt through an imaginative hunger which Caesar, for all his wealth, cannot feed.

The text of *The Tragedie of Anthonie, and Cleopatra* too, as it is produced and reproduced in print and in performance, has become a site of competition, though in a different way, befitting the new ambiguities structured into bourgeois scholarship; it has become a site where generations of editors, from the First Folio on, have collaborated and vied with one another in the attempt to establish and to annotate a text which is both authentic and comprehensible.

What is striking about this long history of editorial work is that, until the last ten years or so, it has tended to produce texts that are more suitable for the armchair than the theatre: texts that have the completeness, self-consistency and grammatical correctness of a novel, together with long and learned notes to satisfy the scholar, the lexicographer and the cultural historian. What is missing—interesting and valuable though such editions are—is twofold: a recognition of the theatrical potential of Shakespeare's texts, and a recognition of their original (and continuing) status as what Jonathan Bate calls ‘vital, mutable theatrical scripts’. To be shaped differently according to the requirements of different theatrical performances. For there is, in other words, no authentic script of any Shakespearean play; nor could the sudden discovery of an original manuscript provide one. It is true that the First Folio texts which we are reproducing in this series have misprints, errors, mispunctuations and enigmas in them, and that it remains the duty of an editor to try to find sense in nonsense. Yet their incompletenesses, inconsistencies and incorrectnesses are useful in reminding us of the status in the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre of the playscripts that we are dealing with; and, of course, they also enable us to inspect the processes of emendation that they no doubt began and that have been going on ever since.

It is once again a question of narrative and of how we punctuate that narrative. Each added stage-direction, each emendation and each gloss involves us in the construction of a narrative; and each narrative involves competition with our fellow-editors, as our narrative converges upon—or diverges from—theirs. *The Tragedie of Anthonie, and Cleopatra* does not raise the same kind of fundamental editorial problems that bedevil plays like *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, where there are different texts in existence with rival claims to be authoritative; the First Folio of *The Tragedie of Anthonie, and Cleopatra* is the only text that we have. The questions it raises are thus always local and particular; and yet they are interesting, as the following three examples may show.

First, at the end of the play, when Cleopatra has secured herself in her monument and is negotiating with Proculeius, the Folio suddenly assigns him two speeches together, the second one of which begins: ‘You see how easily she may be surpriz'd’. The intended stage-business is clear: troops have been smuggled into the monument, and Cleopatra finds herself under arrest. Precisely how the operation is carried out is not stated in the Folio; but some editions, including the Arden, on the authority of Plutarch, assign the operation—and the second of Proculeius' two speeches—to Gallus, whom Caesar was preparing to use in some unspecified task in the previous scene. The Arden editor, in developing this narrative, is able to praise Proculeius' honesty and corroborate Anthony's dying judgment of him: ‘None about Caesar trust, but Proculeius’. He is also able to clear Shakespeare from the charge of ‘bad craftsmanship’—that is, of introducing an expectation and not fulfilling it—by suggesting a compositorial error that transferred the name of Proculeius from the text to the speech-heading that should have read ‘Gallus’. Charlton Hinman too suspects that compositorial error made it necessary, for reasons of space, to drop material from the original manuscript here. Yet why should we assume that Shakespeare's manuscript was complete in this way? Such an idea of a finished work of Art is not necessarily appropriate to a play-script which, as Hinman himself goes on to say, can be 'finished only in performance', when the details of entrances, exits and other stage-business can finally be thrashed out. There is enough in the Folio text from which to fashion a production; and it may be a strength and not a weakness that the whole of this final scene should be so open. It leaves a great deal to the technical and
imaginative resources of the playhouse; and in so doing, it underlines the inscrutability of Caesar's character and behaviour, and emphasises finally the disastrous unreliability of Anthony as a judge of character. It all depends what narrative we want to tell; but I can see no good reason to add new stage-directions to the printed text.

Second, a few lines later in the play, there is a famous moment when Cleopatra, in conversation with Dolabella, praises Anthony's unrivalled generosity of spirit:

There was no winter in't: an autumn 'twas
That grew the more by reaping:

Or so she usually says. But in the Folio she says: ‘An Anthony it was, / That grew the more by reaping’. Although acknowledging its orthographical unlikelihood, the Arden editor calls the emendation from ‘autumn’ to ‘Anthony’ brilliant, and adds that it gives ‘admirable sense, and that the turn of imagination is thoroughly Shakespearean, whereas Anthony gives no sense at all’. 20 What is at issue here is an ideal of poetic decorum quite at odds with the spirit of hyperbole driving Cleopatra. Her metaphor overflows the measure because she can find no words other than the name of the man himself to express the qualities she thinks he had. As once she had said that ‘my Oblivion is a very Anthony’, so now her speechlessness is vindicated in the ineffableness of Anthony's virtue. Words and metaphors are at breaking-point, and to tidy them up is to go against the grain of the whole passage. Once again, of course, it depends upon what narrative we want to tell. But the key test of the lines should surely be whether or not they make sense in the theatre, not whether they reach the standard of some idealised Shakespeare with whose imaginative workings we feel ourselves to be intimate. This example may stand for a number of emendations in modern editions that aim to tidy up the syntax or the imagery of people who are in a state of excitement; and in these cases I think we should be especially reluctant to emend the Folio text.

Third, when Caesar is saying farewell to Octavia before she leaves with Anthony, he urges her:

As my thoughts make thee, and as my farthest Band
Shall passe on thy approofe:

The last clause here is condensed and its meaning difficult to tease out. The New Cambridge edition quotes approvingly the gloss of Dr Johnson: ‘as I will venture the greatest pledge of security on the trial of thy conduct’. 21 According to this explanation, Caesar will only let his honour stand surety for his sister's virtue if her conduct merits it; he may refuse if he so pleases, and she of course may misbehave if she so pleases. Now it is true that Octavia may misbehave, and that he may refuse to stand surety for her; but the drive of the honour code is to occlude both the woman's freedom to act as she wishes and the man's freedom to dissociate himself from his family and friends. Caesar feels—or he talks as though he does—that his honour is already, of necessity, pledged on behalf of his sister's conduct, and that he will only be able to circulate freely amongst men of honour as long as his word passes for currency amongst them. ‘What is a man but his promise?’: 22 therefore, in the chiastic structuring of his sentence, he works hard to bind Octavia's freedom so that she will prove herself only in such a way as to be approved within the circles of honourable men. Hence my own interpretation of his final clause: ‘so as even my uttermost pledge as to your merits shall be vindicated and found acceptable when other people come to inspect and approve them’. It is this emphasis upon the policing of the honour code that is lacking from Dr Johnson's explanation. Perhaps he thought more naturally in terms of the individual protestant ethic rather than in terms of the essentially social nature of the honour code. But for whatever reason, the difference at issue shows how even the smallest gloss involves editors in the construction of rival narratives in a competition to see which shall command the most assent.
These are indeed only small examples of the processes involved in every emendation and gloss; the endnotes are full of countless others, and every editor of course could tell a similar story. It is perhaps no coincidence, however, that each example discussed here should date back to the eighteenth century—to Theobald twice and once to Dr Johnson—when modern methods of editing Shakespeare were laid down, when drama was often excluded from the categories of respectable literature, and when art was something to be consumed in the pleasurable solitude of the drawing-room rather than created in the vulgar public arena of the theatre. It is against that tradition that this edition of the First Folio is launched. ‘Heere is my space’: it is perhaps a new space for most performers and readers alike, and one which may help them to remember the true status of Shakespearean texts as play-scripts; to keep alive a sense of their theatrical openness which is also a kind of danger; and to do so particularly here, in the case of a play written to commemorate the flawed but overflowing vitality of a disorderly world which had all but vanished before the new order of the heirs of Caesar—the little o'th'earth’, Cleopatra calls them (though only in the Folio text), whose only glory comes from the light cast by Anthony. For this is the abiding power of *The Tragedie of Anthonie, and Cleopatra*: that it continues to articulate a dissociation characteristic of our culture. No matter whether we consider it in its history or in our own present, it still reproduces its fundamental antithesis, which still remains a ‘violent hierarchy’ and a potential source of tragedy: the tragedy of the dissociation between romantic images of beauty, vitality and freedom and our disillusioned experiences of competition in the everyday worlds of home, work and political power.

**Notes**

1. See Rosalie Colie, ‘Reason and Need: *King Lear* and the “Crisis of the Aristocracy”’, in Rosalie L. Colie and F. T. Flahiff (eds), *Some Facets of ‘King Lear’: Essays in Prismatic Criticism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), for an interesting account of the way that the Tudor state had set out ‘to gentle the armigerous aristocracy’ (p. 186).
3. Sir Thomas Wyatt's poem ‘Stand, whoso list, upon the slipper top’ is a translation of the same passage from Seneca as Andrew Marvell's ‘The Second Chorus from Seneca's Tragedy "Thyesetes"’.
7. It is worth remembering Charlton Hinman's caution about the conventional act-scene divisions found in editions of Shakespeare: ‘they tend to foster mistaken notions both of the principles by which Shakespeare constructed his plays and of the manner in which they were meant to be staged’; in *The Norton Facsimile: The First Folio of Shakespeare* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968), p. xxiv.
10. There is a good discussion of the play in Nietzschean terms during the last chapter of Michael Long's *The Unnatural Scene: A Study in Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Methuen, 1976), pp. 220-59.
13. A connection between Essex and Mark Antony had already been drawn by friends of Fulke Greville, urging him to destroy his own tragedy about the story of Antony and Cleopatra. See Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, pp. 216-17.
19. Ibid., p. xiii.
22. These words, epitomising the honour code of the aristocracy, were spoken by Lord Darcy in 1536 to justify military confederacy against the crown. They are quoted in Mervyn James, ‘English Politics and the Concept of Honour, 1485-1642’, p. 29.

Criticism: Character Studies
Robert P. Kalmey (essay date 1978)

[In the following essay, Kalmey examines the Elizabethan conception of Octavius Caesar, and finds that Elizabethans praised Caesar as an ideal prince only after he was crowned emperor. Prior to this event, Kalmey maintains, Caesar was condemned by Elizabethans who saw him as a tyrant who fueled the fires of civil war to further his own ambitions.]

Few readers of Antony and Cleopatra have overlooked the contempt with which Cleopatra condemns as mere hollow words the paltry machinations of Octavius Caesar to take her captive. “He words me, girls, he words me, that I should not / Be noble to myself” (V.ii.190-191: Arden Shakespeare, ed. M. R. Ridley). Nor have readers neglected the irony Cleopatra articulates that Octavius, who has conquered Brutus, Sextus Pompey, Lepidus, Lucius Antonius, and Marc Antony, should so easily and deftly be humiliated by the personal will of a defeated queen. Speaking to the asp at her breast, Cleopatra defines her final contemptuous image of Octavius: “O, couldst thou speak, that I might hear thee call great Caesar ass, / Unpolicied!” (V.ii.305-307).

In spite of Cleopatra's final scathing assessment of the character of Octavius, it is a persistent commonplace in modern criticism to place Octavius in the role of an ideal prince who stands as the moral superior of the dissolute Antony, and who therefore deserves to accede to the governance of Rome because of his political rectitude and moral superiority. J. E. Phillips was the first of the modern critics to emphasize an honorific character for Octavius in his study of the state and the governor in the Roman plays.¹ More recently, Maurice Charney and J. Leeds Barroll, apparently accepting and following Phillips' assertions, perpetuate the critical assessment of Octavius as the ideal prince. Charney claims “that in Elizabethan histories and comparable works, the reputation of Octavius was very high; he was seen as the ideal Roman emperor. …”² The commonplace of the character of Octavius as ideal prince persists into contemporary criticism as Julian Markels in his study of the theme of order in Antony and Cleopatra, The Pillar of the World, observes that
“Octavius is no villain but, like King Henry V, whom he so resembles in character, the agent of political order renewing itself.” It is easier for critics to think of Octavius, who plots bloody civil war in *Julius Caesar* and betrayal in *Antony and Cleopatra*, as “no villain” in politics if they may find resonance for this value judgment from other critics who value Octavius' moral rectitude highly. Roy Battenhouse, for instance, finds Octavius morally temperate and prudent—a man of Roman virtue whose “achievement” Shakespeare respects, however limited to pragmatic values Octavius may be. According to this view, Octavius governs himself with rectitude and asceticism in order to achieve his goal of Emperorsip. Battenhouse then contrasts the temperate Octavius to the intemperate Antony and Cleopatra. According to Battenhouse, in a critical view highly popular with many readers of otherwise diverse critical persuasions, conscientious Octavius wins the world from dissolute Antony and distracted Cleopatra, who win a merely “ironic” bliss of eroticism. Although A. P. Riemer finds that Octavius “does not have the play's full endorsement” and that Octavius is “ambivalent,” he does affirm Octavius as “magnanimous … noble, well-intentioned, and generally just.” Riemer, like Battenhouse, finds any sense of transcendence of the world for Antony and Cleopatra ambiguous and contradicted by their sheer worldly lust. Even Honor Matthews, who does not share Phillips', Battenhouse's, and Riemer's reservations about the absolute transcendent value of Antony and Cleopatra's love, asserts that Octavius' “place in history was … a peculiarly honourable one, to the Elizabethan imagination.”

But if we accept the above assessments of Octavius' character in the play, we find ourselves holding up as an avowed Elizabethan ideal prince and moral man one whose final and definitive character is fixed in the play as “ass, / Unpolicied!” Furthermore, with whom do our sympathies reside in *Antony and Cleopatra*? Surely not with the cold and passive virtue of Octavia or with the equally cold, though active, calculations and betrayals of her aggressive brother, Octavius. For this reason, an alternative critical nexus has won more adherents than the co-existing one described above. Many modern critics have identified Octavius not as a temperate and moral apogee in *Antony and Cleopatra*, but as its moral perigee. He is seen in this view as the evil and impelling force of the material and base world against the increasingly transcendent love of Antony and Cleopatra. The clearest assessment of Octavius' character as it functions in opposition to the drama of transcendence in the play may be found in the criticism of Maynard Mack, Thomas McFarland, Sigurd Burckhardt, and Matthew Proser, where we find, amid some inevitable variation not important here, a valuational dialectic between, on the one hand, the world of plotting Octavius in which fortunes rise and fall in mutability and death, and on the other hand, the world of “immortal longings” (V.ii.280) from which Antony calls and to which Cleopatra, responding, aspires. The valuational dialectic leads to an ontological distinction that these critics recognize: the world of Octavius is the repository for Cleopatra's “baser” elements, water and earth (V.ii.288-289); her refined elements of “fire, and air” transcend Octavius' world, and have their being in immortality and eternity.

My purpose now is not to explore in detail these two main strands of criticism on *Antony and Cleopatra*; rather, I hope to suggest that each of the two recurrent but different kinds of assessment of *Antony and Cleopatra* builds support upon mutually exclusive judgments of the character and function of Octavius. I seek instead to offer evidence of a pervasive Elizabethan concept of Octavius that has two distinct parts to it: the distinction made in the Elizabethan histories of Rome, to be analyzed below, holds that Octavius is to be honored as positive example of the ideal prince only after he is crowned Emperor in Rome after the defeat of Antony; before this precise occasion, the same Elizabethan histories of Rome characterize Octavius as a vicious tyrant who foments bloody civil war and a reign of terror solely for his personal gain. In their condemnation of rebellious, unbridled ambition which breeds civil war, the Elizabethan historians of Rome follow the main stream of Tudor historiography so thoroughly documented by E. M. W. Tillyard, Lily Campbell, and Irving Ribner.

The distinction made by Elizabethan historians of Rome between the early ambitious tyrant Octavius and the later Emperor Augustus is entirely consistent with Shakespeare's dramatization of Octavius in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and in *Julius Caesar* as well, strictly and wholly within the time prior to his becoming Emperor of
Rome. This precise limitation within the two plays, and within *Antony and Cleopatra* in particular, suggests a clear circumference of definition about the character of Octavius contained within the historical pattern when he functions as immoral tyrant—not in any sense an honorific character in contrast with which pejorative judgments may be delivered against the love of Antony and Cleopatra. If we can become aware of the common distinction between early tyrant and later Emperor in Octavius' life repeatedly made for literate Elizabethans by their contemporary historians of ancient Rome, we may find that the precise historical place Octavius held in “the Elizabethan imagination” serves to support those critics who assess *Antony and Cleopatra* as a drama of transcendent love and being over a world subjugated to the bloody lust of ambition and power.

As a triumvir, then, Octavius is revealed in Elizabethan histories of Rome as a pernicious demagogue; as a crowned emperor, he is presented as an ideal prince—like the reigning Tudor monarch. In both cases the Elizabethan historians emphasize moral lessons to be observed by their readers: early in his rise to power, Octavius exemplifies the horrors attendant on the demagogic subversion of the commonweal; later, as emperor, Octavius exemplifies the great Tudor image of the ideal prince, an analogue of Queen Elizabeth. In both *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Julius Caesar*, Octavius appears only as a triumvir in the process of accumulating power; he has not yet become emperor even at the end of *Antony and Cleopatra*. It is an unnecessary hypothesis to posit that Shakespeare deliberately followed the distinction between the demagogue Octavius and the emperor Octavius Caesar Augustus. It is enough to observe that his plays dramatize only the demagogue Octavius, and to be familiar ourselves as critics with the distinction in the Elizabethan histories of Rome merely as a precedent, nothing more, for the distinction between immoral triumvir and ideal prince in the Elizabethan understanding of the character of Octavius.

When the Elizabethan historians of Rome judged an historical character, they examined him within a framework of moral instruction advocated for an individual who would conduct himself properly, as the historians so often exhort, within the commonweal. Octavius Caesar Augustus was one of the more significant figures upon whom the Elizabethan historians of Rome directed moral judgment.

Specifically, in his analysis of *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, J. E. Phillips places great importance on a concept of Elizabethan political theorists and propagandists that establishes Octavius as “a great ruler.” Phillips places Shakespeare within the tradition of those influenced by the “great ruler” concept of Octavius. Phillips cites three prime authorities for his concept of Octavius as “great ruler”: George More, Chelidonius, and Thomas Elyot. He quotes from the latter, who cites Suetonius in support of the “great ruler” concept of Octavius. Although much in Suetonius' life of Octavius Caesar Augustus illustrates the rule of a great monarch whose dominions included most of the civilized world, much also in Suetonius characterizes Octavius as a vicious tyrant determined to satisfy his own lust for power regardless of the cost for others. Phillips neglects to mention that the tyrant Octavius appears not only in Suetonius, but in literally hundreds of pages of Elizabethan Roman history as well. We turn now to the Elizabethan histories of Rome to document the widespread characterization of Octavius Caesar as an ambitious and overreaching tyrant.

When we consider the great praise traditionally accorded to Octavius, as Augustus Caesar, for his fruitful rule as emperor, at first it appears strange that some final judgments of him should be so reserved. In *Augustus*, H. Seile completes his essay with an enigmatic opinion: “It had beene an ineffable benefit to the Commonwealth of Rome, if eyther he had never dyed, or never beene borne.” The empire of Augustus was established at great cost to the Roman commonweal. Writing of the murder of Julius Caesar, William Fulbecke judges that Rome could have returned to the most peaceful and fruitful years of the Republic except for the personal ambition of Caesar's heir, Octavius: “the common-weale did seeme to have rolled herselfe into the state of her pristinate libertie, and it had returned unto the same, if either Pompey had not left sonnes, or Caesar had not made an heire.” Seile also develops a similar conclusion: “the Commonwealth might have recovered Liberty, if … Caesar had left no heire.” Fulbecke questions the right of Octavius to “succeed” to the imperial position of Julius Caesar, because the privilege and honours were given to Caesar alone, not to his
lineage. The hasty crime of Brutus and Cassius permitted Octavius to fashion a just cause for aspiring to Caesar's position of power: “But if Caesar's death had bene attended, till naturall dissolution, or just proceeding had caused it, his nephews entrie into the monarchie might well have bene barred and intercepted: because these honors were annexed and appropriated to Caesars person. And if patience might have managed their wisdomes, though there had bene a Caesar, yet should there never have bene an Augustus.”

What were the sources of the reluctance and regret which permeate the adverse opinions of Octavius? It was popular among the Elizabethan historians of Rome (probably following Suetonius) to credit Octavius with creating most of the discords with Antony. Octavius sought only to satisfy his personal ambition. Rome had been the victim of several civil wars, and never could benefit from more. Sir Thomas North recounts Octavius' plottings: after Antony had repulsed his attempts to become consul, he began to work the Senate against Antony and to subvert the commonweal to his own gain. He delivered speeches against Antony; he spread throughout the city rumor and dissension. His most treacherous and irresponsible plot is revealed by Suetonius: “by the advice and persuasion of some he set certaine persons privily in hand to murder Antonius.” Although the murder plot was discovered before effected, Octavius was successful in his campaign to blacken the image of Antony. Cicero assisted Octavius by helping to turn the Senate against Antony, and, according to North, civil war followed as a direct result.

Even after a peace had been devised between Antony and Octavius, the young Caesar used his rival's absence from Rome as an opportunity for sowing more civil dissension. In this situation, Octavius willfully destroyed a peace established specifically to avoid the upheavals caused by his earlier dissensions. Octavius' unscrupulous scheming aroused the disapproval of the Senate on one notable occasion. Suetonius writes that in assembly with the Senate Octavius read Antony's will, “the better to prove and make good that he had degenerated.” Appian, too, describes the incident and the Senate reaction: “So he [Octavius] went, and tooke it [the will] away, and first by himselfe rede it, and noted what might be sayde agaynst it. Then he called the Senate, and rede it openly, whereat many were grieved, thinking it not reasonable that a mans minde for his death, shoulde bee scanned whylest he was alive.”

Octavius' willingness to sacrifice the well-being of others in order to achieve his personal goals extended to his own sister, Octavia. In Mexia, Octavius advises her to join Antony so that she might have “occasion to fall out with him (as Plutarch recounteth in the life of Antony) if she were not well entertained.” In Seile's *Augustus*, Octavius is seen to be still more devious, for he outwardly affects concern for Octavia's welfare as he hopes her noble demeanor in the face of Antony's scorn will move the Romans to despise Antony. Appian, too, clearly indicates Octavius' sacrifice of his sister's welfare to his own political ambitions. Octavius thus used his sister as bait to lead Rome into civil war with Antony. After Octavia's rejection at the hands of Antony, Octavius takes advantage of the disrespect which his rival incurs: “Octavian began openly to complains of Marcus Antonius, and to shew himselfe his enemie.” In these ways, Octavius deliberately drew Rome closer to civil war.

Fulbecke defines with characteristic Tudor dread the macrocosmic upheavals involved in the tempest of a state at civil war: “And, as in the yearely conversion of the heavens, it commeth to passe, that the starres jogged together do murmure and threaten tempest, so with the alteration of the Romane state, before Octavius founded his Monarchie, the whole globe of the earth with civill and forraine warre, with fight on sea and land was terribly shaken.” The young Caesar exploits the world in order to establish his power firmly and exclusively. Suetonius lists five major civil wars Octavius engaged in: Mutina, Philippi, Perusium, Sicily, and Actium. Appian's whole history is concerned with the Roman civil wars previous to Octavius' monarchy—*An Auncient Historie and Exquisite Chronicle of the Romanes Warres* (1578). The wars of Octavius occupy over two hundred pages alone. He and Antony march on Rome to demand favors by the force of arms, creating a panic in the city. Octavius extorts the consulship from Rome, and proceeds to incite another civil war. Mexia, too, records the originator of the struggle with Pompey: “Octavian remaining in Rome, grew mightie, and in great estimation; so likewise he became covetous: and as the companie and neighborhood of Sextus
Pompeius in Sicilia was displeasing unto him, so would he have been glad to have any occasion to warre against him: and so hee determined, and prepared a great fleete for the purpose.”  

The battles between Octavius and Pompey were many, but the final one “without doubt was one of the most cruell in the world.”

In order to explain why Octavius brought such catastrophe to Rome, the Elizabethan historians of Rome often explored his motives for the several plots and civil wars. Fulbecke exposes the speciousness of Octavius’ role as avenger for the murder of Julius Caesar: “no common-weale can be without men of aspiring humours, and when such a murder is wrought they find present occasion to tumultuate, knowing that Anarchie breedeth confusion, & that it is best fishing in a troubled streame: making a glorius pretece to revenge the death of a Prince, though in heart & in truth, they beare greater affection to the monarchie remaining, then to the Monarcke who is taken away.” Octavius seeks to stir Rome into a great civil tumult out of which he may emerge supreme in power.

The early dispute with Antony offers a significant example of Octavius' ability to create discord, and to use the subsequent upheaval to further his ambition to become sole ruler of Rome. Octavius maneuvers the Senate into opposition with Antony and his army. The Senate has no army to oppose him, but Octavius does. The Senate therefore must grant Octavius great military and civil powers in order to protect itself from Antony's army. Thus Octavius gains power by stabilizing the discord he created. In Seile's Augustus, Octavius schemes to have the army that will challenge Antony led by Hirtius and Pansa, the ruling consuls, so that he will stand to gain most with least risk to himself. Octavius, then, ensures his own succession to power by killing personally the two consuls.

Later, when Octavius and Antony make war as allies, North testifies to their rapacity: “when they had driven all the natural Italians out of Italy, they gave their soldiers their lands and towns, to which they had no right: and moreover the only mark they shot at in all this war they made, was but to overcome and reign.” They did nothing to avoid the misery brought to all Italy by their wars. In a similar manner, Mexia accounts for their neglect of the commonweal: “But the truth is, they both desired to bee Lords of the whole, and in my opinion, vainglorie, ambition, covetousnes, and envie, moved them thereto, each of them putting his determination in effect, calling and levying forces and aides; so as the whole world in a manner, either of the one side or other, was moved and troubled therewith.” Mexia cites “principally Octavian,” whose greed and ambition overwhelms all other motives in the quest for world domination.

The offences of Octavius against the commonweal were many, but none so corrupt, none so destructive, nor none so cruel as the proscription by the Triumvirate. Upon the announcement of proscription, Appian recounts, the city suffered violent and unnatural omens that reflect the cruelty of Octavius. The Triumvirate, supposedly conceived to preserve the peace, became an instrument by which to fulfill personal ambition. Octavius, Antony, and Lepidus, according to North, “could hardly agree whom they would put to death: for every one of them would kill their enemies, and save their kinsmen and friends. Yet at length, giving place to their greedy desire to be revenged of their enemies, they spurned all reverence of blood and holiness of friendship at their feet.” Mexia, also, stresses the perverted standards of friendship displayed by the Triumvirs: “In this proscription and league which they made … they concluded also each of them to kill his enemies, and the one delivering them into the others hands, having more respect and care to be revenged of an enemie, then to the saving of a friend: and so was made the most cruell and most inhumane proscription and butcherie that ever was seene or heard of, giving and exchaunging friends and kinsmen, for enemies and adversaries.” Appian, too, notes that not only the commonweal was sacrificed in order to achieve personal power, but friends readily were murdered. Among the dead were 300 Senators and 2000 noble Romans, “so great power had ambition and hatred in the hearts of these three men.” The irony of the Triumvirate's action compared with the purpose of its existence is clear in Appian: “It seemed wonderful to them to consider, that other Cities being undone by sedition, have bin preserved againe by agreement. This Cittie, the devision of the rulers hadde consumed, and their agreement, broughte it to desolation.” Octavius' rule is compared to the
sacking of a city, and his care of the commonweal likened to sedition. Octavius is clearly condemned as a
tyrant in Seile's Augustus: "The poor Romans had not changed the Tyranny [of Julius Caesar], but the
Tyrants. Yea they had three for one into the bargain." 51

The time of the proscriptions was, Seile assures us, "a lamentable and ruthless time, good and bad, rich and
poore, being alike subject to the slaughter." 52 Mexia dramatizes the discord and sorrow which seized Rome
and Italy under the rule of the Triumvirs: "And presently those which by them were condemned and proscript,
were by their commandement put to death, being sought out in al parts & places, ransacking their houses,
and confisking their goods: In the execution whereof there was so great confusion, sorrow and heaviness in the
citie of Rome, and almost in al Italie, as the like was never seene nor heard of therein by man." 53 So neglected
was morality, Appian observes, that murder was rewarded by the Triumvirs: "there was greate suddayne
slaughter, and diverse kyndes of murders, and cuttings off of heads to be shewed for rewardes sake. … The
condemned persons heads were brought before the seats in the common place, that they that had brought
them, might receive their goods." 54 Values were inverted by the proscriptions so that the trust people had for
one another was destroyed. Because this trust formed the basis for social order, the loss of it meant social
chaos. So extensive was the destruction of society that families were torn apart by murders and betrayals. 55

Even Eutropius, who sees Octavius as the great monarch, admits that his paragon of princes did willfully
"detayne the weale publique, by force of armes." 56 North allows that Octavius at first opposed the idea of
proscription, but he admits that "when the sword was once drawn, he was no less cruel than the other two." 57
Suetonius attributes to him the same initial reluctance followed by an excess of vigorous cruelty, 58 and affirms
that his motive in carrying out the proscription was to gain personal power: Octavius "professed openly, That
hee had determined no other end of the saide proscription, but that hee might have liberty still to proceede
in all things as he would." 59 Octavius, according to Mexia's figurative emphasis, "plotting the Triumvirat … shed
so much bloud and such execution, that there was not any streete in Rome, but was stained with civill
bloud." 60

North's final word on the proscriptions presents a fit conclusion to the abundant catalogue of historical
opinion damning Octavius: "In my opinion there was never a more horrible, unnatural, and crueler change
than this was. For thus changing murther for murther, they did as well kill those whom they did forsake and
leave unto others, as those also which others left unto them to kill: but so much more was their wickedness
and cruelty great unto their friends, for that they put them to death being innocents, and having no cause to
hate them." 61

In other events under his direction, Octavius appears barbarous and savage. Suetonius, for example, mentions
his cruelty to the prisoners at Philippi, 62 his mass execution at Perusia, 63 and his plucking out of Gallius'
eyes. 64

The significance of the common indictment against Octavius' tyranny by the several historians is that nearly
all the acts condemned were committed before Octavius became emperor. Most of the historians damn Octavius' neglect of the commonweal while he strove to attain absolute power; most praise him for his care
after he had obtained it. He is both the ambitious and ruthless tyrant, and the benevolent monarch. Mexia
comprehends the complexity of Octavius: "he happened wisely and uprightly to governe that, which by force
and cunning he had gotten." 65 As the ambitious and cruel triumvir, Octavius violates constituted civil order
(always an evil act in Tudor histories) in his desire to accumulate all power to himself.

Awareness of the sharp distinction maintained by so many Elizabethan historians between Octavius the
ambitious tyrant and Octavius the great ruler may lead us, in turn by analogy, to be more sharply aware that
Shakespeare has presented only a calculating and cruel tyrant Octavius in Julius Caesar and Antony and
Cleopatra. He has not yet become emperor at the end of Antony and Cleopatra, and Cleopatra, like the
Elizabethan historians of Rome, holds his bloody civil war victories in abhorrent contempt.
Notes

10. Proser, p. 229. The drama of transcendence is not missed by all those critics who find high values in the character of Octavius: see Markels, p. 150, for “transformation” and “apotheosis” in death; and Matthews, pp. 206-207, for transcendence of the material world (cf. n. 8, above).
15. Augustus, p. 27.
16. Fulbecke, p. 171.
18. Augustus, pp. 31-32.
23. Augustus, p. 52. See also Mexia, p. 42.
27. Mexia, p. 41. See also North, p. 199.
30. Mexia, p. 41.
33. See Books 3 and 4.
34. Appian, p. 189. See also Mexia, p. 30.
35. Mexia, p. 36.
37. Fulbecke, p. 172.
41. North, pp. 145-146.
42. Appian, pp. 311-312.
43. Mexia, p. 42.
44. Mexia, p. 41.
In his 1558 pamphlet, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, John Knox argued that no woman could be a sovereign ruler because

the immutable decree of God … hath subiected her to one membre of the congregation, that is to her husband. … So that woman by the law of God … is utterly forbidden to occupie the place of God in the offices aforesaid, which he hath assigned to man, whom he hath appointed and ordeined his lieutenant in earth.¹

That dour Protestant directed these words primarily against the two reigning Catholic monarchs, Mary Tudor of England and Mary Stuart of Scotland. The pamphlet, however, appeared after the Protestant Elizabeth Tudor replaced her sister Mary on the throne of England. Yet despite the irony of Knox’s “blasting” the monarch who would come to be known as a champion of the Protestant cause, his negative reactions to a female sovereign notably echoed those of many of his fellow subjects.

The extreme patriarchalism of Renaissance society made it virtually impossible for a woman to attain power in any sphere, especially politics.² Renaissance works of political theory nearly always focused on how a male
ruler could secure, enjoy, or extend his power within a society that was most definitely patriarchal and, therefore, used to being ruled by a man. Even if heredity decreed that a woman should rule, society provided her with no patterns of behavior to follow. Male monarchs, in contrast, were products of a society whose major components—civil, ecclesiastical, familial—consisted of a ruling father figure who groomed chosen “sons” to take over his role. Even the formula for proclaiming a new ruler—“the king is dead, long live the king”—reinforces, as Jean Wilson reminds us, the Renaissance assumption that all rulers were male.

Elizabeth I was aware of her anomalousness from the beginning of her reign but, unlike her sister, Mary, used it to insure her position on the throne. One particular strategy she used was to play on the notion of the monarch’s two bodies, a notion which for her had to have a somewhat different meaning than for male monarchs. This notion was devised to deal with the paradox that kings died but the crown endured. Marie Axton very clearly defines the concept in terms of Elizabeth:

For the purposes of law it was found necessary by 1561 to endow the Queen with two bodies: a body natural and a body politic. … The body politic was supposed to be contained within the natural body of the Queen. When lawyers spoke of this body politic they referred to a specific quality: the essence of corporate perpetuity. The Queen’s natural body was subject to infancy, infirmity, error and old age; her body politic, created out of a combination of faith, ingenuity and practical expediency, was held to be immortal.

Given this concept of dualities, Elizabeth’s anomalousness could be glossed over. Her body natural may have been female, but her subjects could easily accept, as she did herself in her Tilbury speech (1588), her body politic as male.

But the mere existence of the queen’s two bodies did not resolve the sometimes rival claims of these bodies. Elizabeth had to make some very definite choices regarding these two bodies to insure the success of her reign. What she did was to make her body natural serve her body politic. She opted to remain a virgin and to forgo the roles of wife and mother. She made this decision part of her political theory by claiming either that she was married to England or her subjects, or that the English people were her children. This decision had two very specific positive results: first, her position as virgin queen harked back to the Mariolatry of medieval England and implied that Elizabeth as virgin was essentially a deity; second, her decision to remain a virgin eliminated the possibility (and fear) that a consort could usurp her power over the throne of England.

Recently, critics have been exploring some of the various strategies the queen used for dealing with the complexity of her gender position within a patriarchal society. Leah Marcus has argued that Elizabeth developed a political rhetoric which successfully supported the legal fiction of herself as “king.” While she often used “queen,” Elizabeth habitually referred to herself as “prince,” a term which in the sixteenth century clearly referred to a male ruler. Gradually she adopted more sexually ambiguous formulas: “the Queen’s majesty,” “the Queen’s most excellent majesty in her princely nature considering,” or “Monarch and prince sovereign.” As Marcus rightly observes, “subtly, perhaps not always consciously, [the queen] constructed a vocabulary of rule which was predominantly male.”

These legal and rhetorical ploys became the underpinnings of the political fictions Elizabeth used to contain her threatening anomaly. It is important to remember, as Louis Adrian Montrose cogently argues, that the reign of a woman sovereign was threatening to the strictly patriarchal society she ruled, for: “as the female ruler of what was, at least in theory, a patriarchal society, Elizabeth incarnated a contradiction at the very center of the Elizabethan sex gender system. … [She] was a cultural anomaly: and this anomalousness—at once divine and monstrous—made her powerful and dangerous.” Elizabeth’s royal fictions, then, were of necessity paradoxical. They had to present her as a powerful sovereign who was capable of successfully ruling England, yet, at the same time, they had to assure her populace that her reign posed them no threat. She managed to accomplish this dual purpose, as Jonathan Goldberg indicates, by offering her subjects a “show of love.”
successful was she that her “loving behaviour preconceived in the People's heads upon these considerations
was then thoroughly confirmed, and indeede emplanted a wonderfull hope in them touchyng her woorthy
Governement in the reste of her Reyne.” In offering these shows of love, the queen was essentially wooing
her people to her. She was aware that a woman was not thought of as a ruler and so could not assume the
loyalty of her subjects. She had to win it.

In contrast, the entrance of Elizabeth's successor, James I, into London reinforced the innate power any male
monarch could draw upon in a patriarchal society. Goldberg maintains that “sexual domination is implied in
James's ravishing entrance” to the city, for the king arrived “like a bridegroom entering the bride” (p. 31). Since James could rely upon the existing metaphors and formulas of a patriarchal society, his fictions
were not essential for establishing his power. Elizabeth had no such social tropes to draw upon. She was
forced to become a consummate fiction-maker creating an elaborate political icon partially out of whole cloth,
partially out of a symbolic list of strong women who were not necessarily rulers.

Louis Montrose's recent work examines the ways in which Elizabeth secures her position on the throne
through the uses of consciously iconographic fictions. He quotes Elizabeth as telling Leicester: “I will have
defined here but one Mistress and no Master” (“Shaping,” 78). Montrose's statement—“to be her own mistress, her
own master, the Queen had to be everyone's mistress and no one's” (78)—ties in very closely with both the
concept of the queen's two bodies and the most powerful of Elizabeth's fictions, the virgin queen. The queen
who adopted a virgin existence for political reasons could be—and often was—the “mistress” of everyone. She
was the “mistress” of all her people as well as those courtiers and foreign princes she favored. Yet, given the
social attitudes of the time, the queen could only support her political status as “multimistress” by being, in
effect, actually a virgin. Thus, Elizabeth, to be successful in the fictions she created, had to make her body
natural subordinate to her body politic by agreeing to give up a life of female sexuality in her body natural.
Only two sexual options were open to her as a Renaissance woman: actual mistress to all men, or whore;
“mistress” to only one, or wife. The former option would have violated accepted patriarchal religious and
social custom, thus causing the queen to lose credibility as a monarch. The latter, while allowing her to retain
credibility, would have effectively reduced her power by making her a wife, by definition in the Renaissance,
a creature subservient to a husband/consort.

Once Elizabeth had made the decision to fuse her political and natural bodies into the image of the perpetual
virgin, a strategy for successful rule presented itself. By becoming an official virgin, Elizabeth effectively
removed herself from being seen as a “normal” woman—a powerless creature in the Renaissance political
scheme. By redefining herself as a virgin—a woman who is “different” in very fundamental ways from other
women, namely in her non-dependence on men to define her existence—Elizabeth defined herself as a
powerful creature in Renaissance terms and assumed the power usually reserved exclusively for Renaissance
men.

As the virginal “mistress of all,” Elizabeth was able to use the Petrarchan conventions of courtship to suit her
own purposes. Traditionally, the male lover courted the often distant beloved. Elizabeth turned the convention
around so that she became the Petrarchan lover who courted not a mistress, but a consort. Her skill in such
courtship is obvious in her negotiations for a French husband. Elizabeth initially entered into marriage
negotiations with the French in 1570 for two reasons. First, an heir of her body would insure and solidify her
dynasty—thus blunting Mary Stuart's claims to the throne of England—as well as rendering assassination of the
English sovereign an ineffectual political ploy. Second, the end of the third civil war in France meant that
country would be free once again to annoy England. Thus, a marriage between Elizabeth and a French prince
could eliminate both the fear of Elizabeth dying childless and the fear of French intervention in English
affairs. Various difficulties intervened to prevent the marriage, but in April of 1572 the queen signed the
Treaty of Blois with France against Spain. As Elizabeth's biographer, J. E. Neale, indicates, the queen's
alliance with France “against the ruler of the Netherlands … ended her dangerous isolation and paralysed
French interference in her dealings with Mary and Scotland” without requiring her to marry. In fact, she
managed to gain all of the political advantages a marriage with a French prince would have provided without having to sacrifice any of her sovereignty at home.

By 1578, a changed political situation made it again necessary to consider strengthening the English alliance with France. But popular opposition to a French Catholic husband caused Elizabeth to slow down negotiations until 1580 when a Spanish-papal alliance made it even more necessary for Elizabeth to ally with France. When the Duc d'Alençon finally arrived in England in October of 1581, he signed not a marriage contract, but an agreement for Elizabeth to finance his campaign in the Netherlands. But this agreement also bound Alençon to support the anti-Guise faction in France, a move which effectually prevented his brother, Henry III, from siding with Elizabeth's Guise enemies. With this agreement, Elizabeth achieved a mighty diplomatic victory: "She had outwitted Henry III and Catherine de'Medici, got the substance of an alliance with France—and was still unmarried." Elizabeth continued to make promises to marry Alençon—promises that strengthened his credit on the money markets—but by February of 1582 he was out of England. The courtship, according to Neale, "had served her purpose, for she had succeeded in keeping out of the Netherlands, and had frightened Philip with the prospect of an Anglo-French alliance" (p. 259). These incidents show to what extent Elizabeth used courtship—and the consequent promise of marriage—as a political strategy. Her courtships were not designed to be physically consummated in marriage, for that would have violated her position as virgin queen, but to be politically consummated in treaty or formal agreement. By thus retaining control of her sexuality, Elizabeth retained her power on the throne and redefined the concept of the female body politic. It became—through her uniting of her natural and political bodies—a powerful political tool.

In his queen of Egypt, Shakespeare created a female character who also used her body as a political tool. However, in direct contrast to Queen Elizabeth, Cleopatra is represented as uniting her body natural and her body politic by literally "using" her blatant sexuality to insure her power on the throne. Shakespeare is definitely aware of the anomalousness of the female sovereign's position and his creation of Cleopatra can be seen as a reflection upon the problems Elizabeth faced in trying to rule successfully in patriarchal Renaissance England. By displacing the situation of Antony and Cleopatra to Egypt, Shakespeare was able to explore these questions of the nature of female rule free from the possibility of court censure. For, although Shakespeare clearly does not use Cleopatra as an allegory for Queen Elizabeth, he does endow her with Elizabeth's talent for using fictions in order to reinforce her power on the throne. As we have seen, Elizabeth's major fiction of virgin queen united her body natural and body politic to serve her political ends, which were to insure her place on the throne and prevent her marriage to a consort who could potentially wrest power from her. Like Elizabeth, Shakespeare's Cleopatra is shown to have developed a successful strategy for rule that is based on uniting her body natural and her body politic. Unlike Elizabeth, she does this by making her political adversaries—the representatives of Rome—her lovers and binding them to her by bearing them children. In the Egypt Shakespeare has devised—an Egypt where "the holy priests / Bless [Cleopatra], when she is riggish”—the granting of sexual favors becomes his character's main tool for obtaining and securing power. Shakespeare has demonstrated that Cleopatra has been using this technique long before she encountered Mark Antony. Pompey, in Act II, scene vi, calls to mind the story of Cleopatra's earlier connection with Julius Caesar. Caesar supported Cleopatra's claims to the throne of Egypt after she had appeared to him as a hoyden rolled up in a mattress (II, vi, 70). As Caesar's lover and the mother of his child, Cleopatra was able to secure her power on the throne. That she may have used the same technique to secure her power over Gnaeus Pompey may be deduced from Antony's calling attention to this previous liason (III, xiii, 117).

Cleopatra is similarly shown to use her sexuality to serve her political ends when she appears to Antony as Venus on the Cydnus (II, ii). In this scene, described by Enobarbus, we are presented with her most well-known fiction for securing power. This elaborate fiction of herself as a love/fertility goddess seems designed solely to seduce Antony to her table and her bed. But the seduction is not simply sexual. Before Cleopatra's arrival, Antony had been "Enthron'd i' the market-place” (II, ii, 215). But once she does arrive, he suddenly finds himself “alone, / Whistling to the air” (215-16) for all the inhabitants of the city find
themselves drawn to Cleopatra. Would it not cause a defect in nature, we are told, the air itself would have left Antony to gaze upon the queen of Egypt. The authority of Antony's rulership—symbolized by his enthronement—seems quite dubious given Cleopatra's power to call the people to her even while Antony is holding court. Given this context, we can see Antony's submission to Cleopatra as political as well as sexual. This dual submission is reinforced by Agrippa's recalling her similar effect on Julius Caesar: “Royal wench! / She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed; / He plough'd her, and she cropp'd” (226-28). The reference to both Antony and Caesar in such a few lines reinforces the similarity of the representation of Cleopatra's conquest of them. Her appealing to them both on a purely sexual level and bearing them children results in their “laying their swords to bed.” This image is, of course, sexual, but it is also symbolic of both men giving up their masculine power of rulership—symbolized by the sword—wholly to Cleopatra. That Mark Antony follows a pattern Caesar has established is further reinforced in act II, scene v, line 23, where Cleopatra reminds her waiting women that she has worn Antony's sword. Thus we can clearly see that Cleopatra is represented as using her sexual power to first conquer the sexual and then the political power of both Caesar and Antony. The swords can, of course, be seen as phallic images of male sexual and gender power, but they are also symbols of military and political power. Only defeated kings and generals take off or give up their swords to their conquerors.

Although Cleopatra has been ruling Egypt successfully, she is shown as finding herself in the odd position of having to validate—or to seem to have Rome validate—her position on the throne. As with all her major “policy statements,” Cleopatra is represented as making this one with a regal presentation of herself, her consort, and her heirs:

I' the market-place, on a tribunal silver'd,  
Cleopatra and himself in chairs of gold  
Were publicly enthron'ed: at the feet sat  
Caesarion, whom they call my father's son,  
And all the unlawful issue that their lust  
Since then hath made between them. Unto her  
He gave the establishment of Egypt, made her  
Of lower Syria, Cyprus, Lydia,  
Absolute queen.  

(III, vi, 3-11)

Clearly this scene is problematical. It is described by Octavius “as 'tis reported” (19) and we have no evidence as to the trustworthiness or the point of view of the reporter. As a result, the character Octavius perceives Antony, his antagonist, to be the creator of it. He cannot conceive that a mere female ruler could mount such a celebration of power. Antony is the representative of the only real power Octavius acknowledges—Roman power—so he must be the instigator of the scene, the bestower of power. Yet Shakespeare has shown us that while Antony has no talent for regal spectacles, Cleopatra stages and uses them constantly—on the Cydnus (II, ii), for example, and in her Pyramid (V, ii). The queen of Egypt also appears here “In the habiliments of the goddess Isis” (17) with no indication that Antony appears in similar regal or divine garb. He is merely seated in a golden chair. Also, as I have indicated in my discussion of act II, scene ii, the fact that Antony may set himself up in a marketplace does not necessarily mean that the Egyptian people—or Cleopatra—accept him as a ruler. It is clear to me, therefore, that this enthronement is simply the visual representation of Cleopatra's conquering Antony and her setting him up as her consort. The fact that both Caesar's and Antony's children are part of this presentation indicates that the scene is, indeed, Cleopatra's. Further, Cleopatra's only reference to Antony as “Emperor” occurs in act V, scene ii, line 76 when he is dead and no longer a threat to her political sovereignty.

Unconsciously or not, Shakespeare has created a female figure within whose seemingly gratuitous voluptuousness lies a clever strategy for successful rule. Uniting her body natural and her body politic has
allowed Cleopatra to use her body natural's sexuality as a means by which she can gain power in her body politic. She is represented as having ruled successfully in Egypt for many years by coopting the power of those sent to conquer her by “conquering” them sexually and making them her lovers. She has also secured the continuance of her dynasty through the production of various heirs who are destined to succeed her, and not their Roman fathers.

One way to understand the significance of Cleopatra's strategy of rule is to see that she makes of her body a different “text” than Renaissance patriarchal constructions of woman allowed. Typically, the male body was represented as an integrated, complete, male body in which the reason of the “head” controls the emotion/will of the “body” itself. Reason—that quality that separates man from the beasts—should control emotion to such a degree, in fact, that man should attain the Aristotelian “mean.” The hierarchical arrangement of head over body is reinforced by the hierarchical positioning of man as the rational “head” over woman as the emotion-bound “body.” This idea of the socially accepted complete and integrated male body in opposition to the socially unacceptable female body is present in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Octavius Caesar, the representative of Rome and, therefore, the character who determines Roman values in the play, is just such a complete and integrated male figure. In terms of the play, Octavius can only be defined by his position as Roman ruler. His complete devotion to the mean—as well as to an integrated, unitary selfhood—causes him to be seen as somewhat two-dimensional when compared to Antony. In fact, Octavius's refusal to take part in the celebrations on Pompey's galley reinforces his desire to retain a singular and immutable selfhood:

ANTONY.

Be a child o' the time.

OCTAVIUS.

Possess it, I'll make answer:

But I had rather fast from all, four days,

Than drink so much in one.

(II, vii, 98-101)

This belief that the body should be one (male) thing representing that patriarchal society it belongs to is one of the major reasons why the character Octavius cannot accept the changes Antony has undergone in Egypt. For most readers of the play, Antony can be seen as general and soldier, lover and politician, triumvir and emperor. His fullness is both his nature and his strength. For Octavius, however, Antony's fullness is his weakness. For Octavius, Antony should be only the man whose retreat from Modena “Was borne so like a soldier, that [his] cheek / So much as lank'd not” (I, iv, 70-71). The soldier's body is a strong and important image in the Roman empire. As the man who gallantly survived the disastrous retreat from Modena with no ill effects, Antony becomes the image of an accepted male role in Roman society. Antony's soldier's reason managed to keep his body so under control that he maintained his “mean” and did not seem to suffer the excess that one would expect of someone on a starvation march. Thus, what Octavius, and Rome in the person of Enobarbus, admire about Antony is his ability to have a body which can be seen as a “text” for one specific ideal of Roman behavior. So strongly is Antony identified with his “soldier's body” that he is denigrated by Romans of all classes—from Octavius to Scarus—when he seems to act in any way that appears contrary to this sense of himself. Enobarbus, in fact, so completely accepts this singular view of Antony that he deserts him when he feels that his general has ceased to be a soldier.
Octavius is shown to turn against Antony once the soldier's body has changed, has become something else, has become something perhaps created by Cleopatra or tainted by her sexuality. Like Enobarbus and Scarus, Octavius can identify with the soldier who retreated from Modena. He fears the man who returns from Egypt to negotiate with him because that man has ceased to be the symbol of inflexible, immutable, male selfhood with whom Octavius can identify. No longer simply a Roman soldier, Antony has learned some of the values of the fluid and mutable Egyptian life. Later, once he finally returns to Egypt, he scorns the “boy Caesar” (III, xiii, 17), and is not completely unwilling to call attention to the “grizzled head” (17) he bears as both Cleopatra's lover and her general. Even though his Roman suicide shows how Antony is represented as retaining much of his Roman attitude toward his body, his speech to the clouds (IV, xiv, 2-14) shows how far he has moved from that rigid Roman selfhood to a willingness to accept the variability of life that Cleopatra and her realm promise him.

Octavius's fear of Cleopatra is based on the fact that he is the representative of a society that has very clearly defined gender roles which are based on how the body is perceived. This society, like that of Renaissance England, has created as its norm an image of an integrated male body ruled by the “head.” In contrast, it has created an image of a female body that is the opposite of the male body and is controlled by emotion rather than reason. In order to deal with the essential cultural fear of woman and woman's sexual power over man, this society has attempted to control female power by strategies that involve dismemberment and/or silence.

Francis Barker indicates that the effect of patriarchal power “in one of its more spectacular forms” can be seen in “the delight to be had in dismembering a woman's body” (p. 86). The ultimate aim of this symbolic dismemberment is to grant power to a man through destruction of an adversary/woman. Barker analyzes this theory in terms of Andrew Marvell's poem, “To His Coy Mistress,” in which the poet never speaks to or of his mistress as a “complete” woman, but rather as a collection of discrete pieces: “Thine Eyes,” “thy Forehead,” “each Breast,” “every part,” “the rest.” The ultimate effect of this dismemberment of the female body—“uttered within a syntax more reminiscent of taxonomy than of the expectations of love poetry” (p. 89)—is its silence. As her body is torn apart, the mistress's ability to speak is also dismembered and in place of lover and mistress are two very different people: “the inexorable male voice which utters the poem” and “an empty place” (p. 91).

Nancy J. Vickers also speaks of the strategy of dismemberment as a way of silencing women. She examines the male fear of women in the context of the Diana-Actaeon myth as it appears in certain of Petrarch's poems. Petrarch's Actaeon-like speaker attempts to prevent his Diana from dismembering him by focusing only upon individual aspects of her body—her hair, hand, foot, and eyes—rather than upon the whole woman. Vickers thus shows a clear connection between the male fear of female power and the Renaissance insistence upon female silence. Speech becomes power; to deny a woman speech is to effectively deny her power. 21

The effects of this “dismembered” view of women can be seen in Antony and Cleopatra in the characters of Octavia and Fulvia, two women who use more traditional means to try to gain power or exist within the patriarchal power structure of Rome. Octavia is shown as accepting the traditional woman's position as subservient to her brother Octavius for she is, as Caesar says, “a great part of myself” (III, ii, 24). She is virtually his object to use as he will and allows herself to become a political wife to Antony as a result of “The power of Caesar, and / His power unto Octavia” (II, ii, 143-44). 22 Octavia has the potential to be an ideal wife since she “is of a holy, cold, and still conversation” (II, vi, 119-20). She is shown to deny herself so readily, in fact, that she effectively loses the power of public speech, communicating almost exclusively in whispers to Octavius (III, ii). In this she becomes as voiceless as Marvell's mistress or Petrarch's Diana, as described by Barker and Vickers. In direct contrast to the “statue” Octavia (III, iii, 21), Cleopatra never loses her power of speech. With her speech she controls Octavia, like Caesar, by devising an entirely new “creature” to suit her own view of what she feels Octavia should be (II, iii). As Catherine Belsey indicates, speech is symbolic of power in patriarchal society: “To speak is to possess meaning, to have access to the language which defines, delimits and locates power. To speak is to become a subject. But for women to speak...
is to threaten the system of differences which gives meaning to patriarchy.” 23 This is so for Cleopatra. Like the women of the romances, she remains “in command,” as Inga-Stina Ewbank points out, because she maintains control of her rhetoric, of the resources of language.24 Abandoned by Antony, Octavia's only place is as a silent shadow behind her brother in Rome. “Chaste, silent, and obedient”—to use Suzanne Hull’s phrase—Octavia represents the ideal Renaissance woman25

If Octavia can be seen as accepting the ideal silent, dismembered female body of the patriarchy, Fulvia can be seen as refusing this identification. By contrast, she is shown as trying to assume the role—and by extension the “body”—of a man and gain power by leading her armies against Rome.26 This is a dangerous stance. Fulvia does not realize that her Amazonian role—essentially a direct usurpation of male military means to power—allows her to be viewed as a direct threat to male authority. Her death underlines her unsuccessful attempts to use specifically male means to power. Cleopatra is represented as adopting neither the “morally correct” behavior of Octavia, nor the military power of Fulvia.

In direct contrast to these women characters, Cleopatra is never shown as silenced or dismembered and is thus like a male body, though committed to mutability in a way very different from the marble-constant Romans. Cleopatra is shown neither as a part of anyone, like Octavia, nor as a part of herself—eyes, mouth, genitals, etc. She is always presented as a complete body, but not one that is rigid and immutable. Her body is highly eroticized and desirable, yet at the same time it is the body of a goddess (II, ii; III, vi; V, ii) or a mother (V, ii). It becomes “wrinkled deep in time” (I, v, 24) as she passes from her “salad days” (I, v, 73) to her current age and it can be burnt by the sun (I, v, 28) or blown to abhorring by water flies (V, ii, 59-60). In its ability to be complete and mutable, therefore, it is quite different both from the accepted female body that is silent, dismembered, or a male plaything, and from the accepted male body that is fixed and immutable. Thus, Shakespeare has represented Cleopatra's body as being something vitally different from existing Renaissance stereotypes of male and female bodies.

Given the change Shakespeare makes in the nature of Cleopatra's body, he still has to have her deal—as Queen Elizabeth dealt—with the male fear of female power as well as the seemingly paradoxical patriarchal belief that “female power” is a contradiction in terms. One strategy Elizabeth used to deal with the male fear of female power was to present herself as androgynous. She often used male rhetoric—as Leah Marcus has indicated—to refer to herself in official documents or pronouncements, such as her speech at Tilbury where she affirmed that the heart and stomach that resided in her weak and feeble female body was, indeed, kingly, that is, male. Elizabeth consciously tried to deal with the Renaissance perception of the inadequacy of female power by implying that her androgynous power was greater than the sum of its male and female parts. Although willing to appear in armor as defender of her realm, the queen deliberately shunned comparison with Amazons who were perceived as threats to male social systems.27 Elizabeth's androgyny allowed her to avoid the destructive extremes of both male and female power and locate a middle ground where she could positively unite the qualities of each sort of power.

Cleopatra's androgyyn is implied in act II, scene v, lines 22-23, where she puts her “tires and mantles” upon Antony and wears “his sword Philippan.” However, unlike Elizabeth at Tilbury, this vision of the verbally adept Cleopatra complete with Antony's surrogate penis comes dangerously close to the type of destructive female as outlined by Vickers28 and dangerously close to the Renaissance image of the Amazon as female destructive power set up in opposition to patriarchal society. But by claiming power through a symbolic dismemberment and its accompanying marginalization, Cleopatra uses the very techniques Barker and Vickers describe male poets as using to marginalize women. The men Cleopatra is shown to marginalize are her political opponents. Though she does not dismember Octavius, she marginalizes him by referring to him as a child—“scarce-bearded Caesar” (I, i, 21). Antony is reduced to a surrogate penis. While he is alive, Cleopatra takes his sword to wear leaving him the symbolic trappings of a marginalized femininity, as Octavius indicates: [Antony] is not more manlike / Than Cleopatra; nor the queen of Ptolemy / More womanly than he” (I, iv, 5-7), Antony's death is lamented in the phallic line “The soldier's pole is fall'n” (IV,
xv, 65). But, unlike Petrarch's Laura, Cleopatra is never punished for a behavior that is consciously threatening to male beliefs. While I agree that her wearing Antony's sword is an attempt to show her taking control of a power that can only be called male, Shakespeare rewards her for her audacity by allowing her to become a powerful and successful ruler. Shakespeare manages to accomplish this by showing that Cleopatra's power is different from that of the Amazon who simply mimics the destructive power of patriarchy. Shakespeare shows us that Cleopatra uses power in a more creative and generative way, as indicated by Peter Erickson:

The play invites us to reconsider the traditional definition of masculinity as an identity founded on military success. … Antony and Cleopatra engage in a gender-role exchange that enlarges but does not erase the original and primary sexual identity of each. … Instead, what is involved is a crossing back and forth over a boundary no longer seen as a rigid barrier dividing the two sexes into two absolutely separate groups.29

Erickson sees act II, scene v as an attempt by Antony and Cleopatra to share—rather than simply to exchange—power in a sort of “heterosexual androgyny” (p. 133). Yet Cleopatra is not depicted as making androgyny as important a part of her political strategy as Elizabeth did, and so uses it rarely. Nevertheless, Cleopatra can be seen as revolutionary not only because she is a woman who holds regal power, but because she creates a new and much broader kind of female power out of existing, if limiting, strategies of male power.

Although Shakespeare has shown Cleopatra throughout the play to be as successful a ruler in Egypt as Elizabeth is in England, at the end she seems to abandon her own theory of rule. While she bargains as well as she can with Proculeius (V, ii), there is a sense that her dealings with him are merely superficial. What is even more curious is that she does not attempt to use her sexuality to control Octavius. In her one brief encounter with him Cleopatra does not act the temptress, or indeed any of her other favored roles. Instead, she treats Octavius as her conqueror:

Sir, the gods
Will have it thus, my master and my lord
I must obey. …

Sole sir o'the wor…

… … … …

… … … …

I have
Been laden with like frailties, which before
Have often sham'd our sex.

My Master, and my lord!

(V, ii, 114-16; 119; 121-23; 189)

Although Cleopatra is fully aware of Caesar's plot against her—“He words me, girls, he words me, that I should not / Be noble to myself” (V, ii, 190-91)—she never tries to bring him under her sway. That she creates an elaborate final image of herself as dead queen of Egypt and eternal Isis to counter Octavius's plan to parade her in triumph through Rome does not eliminate the fact that this is not her traditional way of dealing with a political adversary. Octavius has not been turned into a lover, as Julius Caesar and Antony had been; Cleopatra has merely allowed him to witness her last role.

I see Cleopatra as being forced to abandon her previously successful strategies for rule because of her relationship to Antony. Cleopatra's political tactics are based on sexual use of her body natural to serve her political purposes. Her love for Antony and her devotion to him—“Husband, I come” (V, ii, 286)—cause her to refrain from using her body natural in a political manner. Since she has given her heart to Antony, she has,
essentially, given away her body natural and removed it from service to her body politic. Thus, she is at a
disadvantage when meeting Octavius, for she is without the major component of her political bargaining
strategy. She has to rely on her wits alone, without her sexuality, to subdue Octavius. This partial power is not
sufficient. Cleopatra is forced to destroy both her bodies in a final fiction that manages to satisfy them both.
Her magnificent death scene convinces Octavius that Cleopatra died as a queen: “Bravest at the last, / She
levell'd at our purposes, and being royal / Took her own way” (V, ii, 333-35), yet also as a lover: “but she
looks like sleep, / As she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace” (V, ii, 344-46). Cleopatra
may be defeated, but a paradoxical sense of triumph surrounds her at her end so that we wonder whether she
has really won or lost.

Ultimately, it is difficult not to see Cleopatra's triumph as that of a woman ruler who manages to rule
successfully despite overwhelming social pressures. Like Elizabeth I—whom Shakespeare seems to have had
in mind when he created her—Cleopatra is shown to work against existing patriarchal stereotypes to create a
strategy for rule that works within the conditions of her society. She is represented as actively using her body
natural's sexuality to support her body politic's place on the throne. Also like Elizabeth, Cleopatra manages to
counter the threats caused by the fear of female power by creating a more positive, more androgynous kind of
power. Shakespeare even manages to go beyond this examination of women in positions of power to consider
the dilemma of those women in patriarchal society—as represented by Octavia and Fulvia—who are not able
to create successful strategies for dealing with the restrictive social conditions and social fears that control their
existence.

By reading Cleopatra through the text of Queen Elizabeth I's strategies for rule, a figure somewhat different
from the “traditional” one appears. This reading is a direct result of my persistent exasperation with what can
be called the “traditional” reading of Cleopatra's character, namely that which sees her as the whore who
ruined a great triumvir but, at the end, was conquered by love and took her life in remorse. What annoys me
most about this reading is its proponents' willingness to be blinded by Dryden's “all for love” romanticism
and their unwillingness to examine the political space in which Cleopatra's character is figured. My own
reading of Antony and Cleopatra is informed by the new work in historicist criticism and the feminist
readings it has produced. Historicist criticism, as Louis Montrose sees it, is a critical practice which strives
to resituate canonical literary texts among the multiple forms of writing, and in relation to the
non-discursive practices and institutions, of the social formation in which those texts have
been produced—while, at the same time, recognizing that this project of historical resituation
is necessarily the textual construction of critics who are themselves historical subjects.

(p. 6)

Thus, in an attempt to examine just how Shakespeare explores questions of female rule in his creation of
Cleopatra, I have examined the strategies Queen Elizabeth I used to both create and employ a specific kind of
female power in a world which was hostile to the thought of female power in any form. My historicist method
of analysis—a method that uses literary and nonliterary materials to examine how the question of female
political power is represented and managed in the Renaissance—is somewhat at odds with feminist criticism
which has not traditionally concerned itself with an examination of female political power. However, my
reading is clearly feminist in intent. Therefore, I term my particular reading of Cleopatra
“historicist-feminist.”

As a female ruler who took power and controlled the various aspects of her rule, Elizabeth challenged and
subverted in an essential way the established Renaissance ideology of patriarchal rule. Yet to subvert this
major ideology in such an essential way was highly dangerous. There was no telling how long Elizabeth could
survive as queen—given her society's views of ruling women as expressed by John Knox—if she consistently
subverted the major ideology to such a degree. So she contained her subversion within the accepted female
paradigm of a contained female sexuality—virginity. Her genius lay in maintaining the tension between the power of her subversion and the fiction of her submission within her containment, thus enabling her to retain her power on the throne while reducing the threat of her female sexuality.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, one can examine just this question of the subversion of ideology through the character Cleopatra. The difference between Cleopatra and Elizabeth is that Shakespeare has allowed Cleopatra to subvert the ruling Roman (English) ideology to an even greater degree than Elizabeth by living as a sexually fulfilled woman. Elizabeth sacrificed her sexuality to contain her subversion; Shakespeare allows Cleopatra literally to use her sexuality to gain her power and to create the subversive ideology of her reign. In this way, her power is enormous and shown to be a major threat to the established patriarchal ideology of Rome. Cleopatra is not shown to take steps, as Elizabeth had done, to contain her power. Shakespeare takes these steps. His depiction of Cleopatra's refusal to use her sexuality to dominate Octavius and his representation of her acceptance of death become the means by which her subversion is contained.

Instead of the simple tale of the great general ruined, *Antony and Cleopatra* becomes an important examination of the nature of power, the differences between various types of powers, and the means by which dominant ideologies are displayed and subverted. Further, Shakespeare's representation of Cleopatra becomes an examination of the means by which a female monarch can secure regal power even within a society whose basic tenets have denied her, as a woman, virtually all power. *Antony and Cleopatra*, then, becomes a text of female political theory which owes its creation, I maintain, to the earlier text written by Queen Elizabeth I herself.

*Notes*

7. Montrose, “‘Shaping Fantasies,’” 77, 78.
12. Ibid., p. 257.
14. Helen Morris, “Queen Elizabeth I ‘Shadowed’ in Cleopatra,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 32 (1969), 271-78, and Keith Rinehart, “Shakespeare’s Cleopatra and England’s Elizabeth,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 23 (1972), 81-86. Morris maintains that the Cleopatra in North's Plutarch “must” have reminded Shakespeare of Queen Elizabeth and “this resemblance was at the back of his mind while he was writing the play.” Rinehart indicates that parallels exist between Elizabeth and Cleopatra because “both were queens regnant, both used courtship as a mainstay of their statecraft, and both attained apotheosis of a sort as female deities.” Janet Adelman, *The Common Liar: An Essay on Antony and Cleopatra* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973), points out that Antony's reference to Cleopatra as “this great fairy” (IV, viii, 12) can be read as a reference to Elizabeth I as Gloriana, the Faerie Queene (p. 65).
16. “Agrippa associates Cleopatra's sexuality with the fecundity of nature [in II, ii, 227-28]. … The wordplay makes the point very tidily: the sword is unmistakably both a sexual and a military weapon; and the military must be put aside (or laid to bed) before the sexual can be literally laid to bed, or put to use. In the image, the sword has been beaten into a plowshare: there are suggestions of that great generative sympathy in nature which occurs only when Mars succumbs to Venus and lays his sword to bed” (Adelman, *The Common Liar*, p. 95). Barbara J. Bono, *Literary Transvaluation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), argues that Cleopatra uses Antony “to advance her political schemes for the resurgence of Alexander's empire” (p. 159).
17. Janet Adelman, in *The Common Liar*, points out many times that “in Antony and Cleopatra, information of all kinds is unreliable” and “we frequently find that we can make no judgment at all” regarding the reliability of any evidence that is reported, Roman or Egyptian (pp. 34, 29).
18. Richard S. Ide, *Possessed with Greatness: The Heroic Tragedies of Chapman and Shakespeare* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1980) believes that, in this scene, “Cleopatra … herself has been bewitched by the new political stature Antony has given her” (p. 112). Barbara J. Bono, *Literary Transvaluation*, indicates that “Cleopatra is politically astute and wins from Antony a promise to ‘piece / Her opulent throne with kingdoms’ (I, v, 45-46). This local Egyptian naturalistic interpretation culminates in their ritual coronation at Alexandria, where Cleopatra ‘In the habiliments of the goddess Isis' watches Antony proclaim her and their children rulers of the East (III, vi, 17). But this coronation of the earthly Isis and her Bacchic consort provokes full-scale Roman opposition” (p. 207). Bono forgets that Julius Caesar's child figures in this enthronement as well as Antony's children and that Shakespeare did not tell us that Antony appeared in the guise of Bacchus.
partnership with authoritative males in and through the bodies of females” (p. 38).


28. Indeed, Adelman, *The Common Liar*, observes that a clothing exchange “inevitably suggests a disastrous exchange of sexual authority and consequently a violation of the proper hierarchical relation between man and woman. This disturbance in sexual hierarchy can be seen morally as a violation of the proper hierarchical relation between reason and will” (p. 91).

29. Peter Erickson, *Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare's Drama* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 131, 133. Miola speaks of the “vision of sexual passion as emasculating and antithetical to the male business of war” (p. 139). He also suggests that Egypt is “a reign of transshifting shapes and forms where men behave like women, women behave like men, and both act like gods” (p. 129).


Imtiaz Habib (essay date 2000)


[In the following essay, Habib suggests that in Antony and Cleopatra, Shakespeare contrasted noble England and the white, virginal Queen Elizabeth with the torpor of Egypt and its black and wanton ruler, Cleopatra.]

Think on me
That am with Phoebus's amorous pinches black
And wrinkled deep in time?

Antony and Cleopatra 1.5.27-29

I

If Titus Andronicus was a failure to construct empire, Antony and Cleopatra may be a renewed attempt using this time as the object of subjugation a black female monarch of an alternative empire. It is a renewed effort also to reify through the idea of a fabulously re-imagined Rome the idea of empire, to vindicate it by writing it on whatever lies beyond it—in this case the East and Egypt. What is revisited is the archetypal European colony in Africa on the eve of its colonization, Egypt at the moment of its becoming a Roman province. Concomitantly, it is also an attempt to vindicate noble Rome-England and the memory of a white virgin Elizabeth against an indolent Egypt and a black seductive Cleopatra. This is a national instinct whose strength is reflected for example in a work like Anne Bradstreet's poem, “In Honor of that High and Mighty Princess Queen Elizabeth of Happy Memory,” in which Elizabeth is as glorious as Cleopatra is ignoble and shameful (Works 11:86-89; cited in Nyquist 86). As Kim Hall puts it, “Rome is England's imagined forefather in Empire, and Antony and Cleopatra provides an object lesson in imperial history” (Things of Darkness 160).

Also, if Othello is a revision of the black male subject of Titus Andronicus as has been argued earlier, Antony and Cleopatra is a revision of the black female subject of the Sonnets (Ericson, Patriarchal Structures 125-27; Estrin 178-79, Ronald Macdonald 87). If Othello was an emancipatory myth of the black man in power, Antony and Cleopatra is an emancipatory myth of the black woman in power, both being singular cases in early modern English drama and in Shakespeare respectively. At the same time, Cleopatra's apprehension of being written by Rome “I' th' posture of a whore” (5.2.221) recalls and parallels the dark prostitute of the Sonnets that the black female subaltern has already become.

The tropic proximity, for analytical purposes, between the resistant black woman of the Sonnets and the defiant non-European queen in Antony and Cleopatra has to be the starting point for a postcolonial inquiry into the discursive politics implicit in the representation of Cleopatra. This proximity is a part of what John Gillies has said is the compelling sense in which in Shakespeare “exoticism in general controls ethnicity in particular.” But this produces “a … relation” as well as instead of “rather than a kind of character” as Gillies has evasively put it (99 emphasis added), for it is the former that guides the textual design of the latter. As the relations that bind the Sonnets to Antony and Cleopatra are a product of early English colonialism's continual re-thematization of itself so the character that is revisited is the female ethnic alien. That such a dramatic personification is now conceived not as an invasive or intrusive presence in colonialism's own “geographic or moral center” as was the black woman in the Sonnets but as something encountered in “an outward … adventure beyond [those] geographical and moral” confines (Gillies 112), is indicative of the early colonial English imagination's developing struggle with its knowledge of its ethnic and sexual other. The female ethnic subject is by a symbolic act of distancing and expulsion now re-imagined in a legendary historical landscape in which the act of subjugation can be rehearsed afresh. The powerful female ethnic subject may have left its traces in other conflicted Shakespearean mimetic explorations of powerful “dangerous … fully sexual and threatening” women such as Gertrude, Goneril and Regan, Lady Macbeth and Volumina that are approximately coterminal with Cleopatra as some have argued (Ericson, Patriarchal Structures 124; Adelman, Suffocating Mothers 177), but to posit particularly its reappearance in Antony and Cleopatra is to recover the cogency of its inevitable intertextual effect in later Shakespeare.

The revival of the black female subject in the play, which has been the object of some critical notice only in the last decade, is, however, a contestatory phenomena played out between the colonial poet, the male protagonist and Cleopatra herself. The similarities between Cleopatra and the Sonnets' black woman, and between the former's play and the latter's poems noted by Peter Ericson (Patriarchal Structures 125-28) are persuasive. But to suggest that Cleopatra is Shakespeare's reclamation of the “dark woman” of the Sonnets
(125) is to assume a simplistic relationship between discourse, author and work. As Barbara Estrin has instead argued, in the language of sexual loss and the struggle for recompense that is common to both the play and poem (129) it is the “female character, who aware of the possibility of loss, embraces it as a means of expressing her nature” (178). But if the limitations of a certain kind of white feminist critical practice ⁵ confine that “nature” in Estrin's analysis to be by silent assumption white and to deny all cognizance of Cleopatra's color, it does point to the recusant politics of desire and memory that are re-played through the colonial-patriarchal imagination. Janet Adelman's discussion of fantasies of maternal origin in Shakespeare (Suffocating Mothers 174-88) is useful for making it possible for Cleopatra to be seen as the resistant reconfigured focus of Shakespeare's recovery of the lost masculinity of the Sonnets. This struggle between a revisionist collective and personal memory working through the playwright and the unpredictable re-play of the discursive subject of the black woman that is Cleopatra constitutes the field of intervention for a postcolonial critical poetics in the play.

II

Shakespeare is forced to return to the repressed black female subject in Antony and Cleopatra in his thoughts of empire, since as Robert Young has said the subliminal heart of the colonial/imperial instinct may be the dream of sexual dominion over a resistant black woman (earlier cited Chapter 1). As Lucy Hughes-Hallett aptly puts it,

The image of an Eastern country as a woman and of a Western male—whether military aggressor, mystic, scholar or tourist—as her heterosexual lover is one so commonplace as to pervade all Western thinking about the East … In it an erotic code is used to represent a political reality: the pornographic image of a woman bound and helpless becomes the metaphor for a conquered country.

Whether for Asia or for Africa, the Western “rhetoric of imperialism and heterosexuality are inextricably intertwined” (207). ⁶ This is an unconscious Anglo-European collective urge that is startlingly caught for instance in the graphic portrait of the rape of a black woman by three white men that was painted by the Dutch painter Christian van Couwenbergh in 1632 (Scobie, “African Women in Early Europe” 149-52). ⁷ It is also implicit in exotic, supposedly eye witness Elizabethan descriptions of Egypt, such as the anonymous one recorded in Hakluyt, that Lucy Hughes-Hallett has cited:

There are innumerable barks rowing to and fro laden with gallant girls and beautiful dames, which with singing, eating, drinking and feasting take their solace. The women of this country are most beautiful and go in rich attire bedecked with gold, precious stones, and jewels of great value, but chiefly perfumed with odours, and are very libidinous, and the men likewise.

(209)

The same popular thinking fuels the more symptomatic scenarios of Robert Burton shortly afterwards describing the mentality of the Orient as “the savouring of animal existence; the pleasant languor, the dreamy tranquillity … which in Asia stand in lieu of the vigorous, intensive, passionate life of the West” (Hughes-Hallett 216). As Ania Loomba has pointed out, these are the stereotypical qualities that commonly attach to both Cleopatra and her people in the sixteenth century popular English imagination (Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama 79).

To cite Hughes-Hallett again, on the political thematics of such urges,

The other is not only the adversary. She/he/it is also the promised consummation of all unconsummatale desire.
The other might be a geographical space; it might equally well be a woman, for women like foreigners, were strange to Western men and the realms of the East, like women, invited penetration and possession (206).

And place and woman are not only metaphors for each other (sexual intercourse equals annexation, conquest equals rape), they are also symbolic of something else—of the “ill-defined rapture” of that which is otherwise denied (223). 8

To this can be added the reminder of Loomba, who says “In colonialist discourse, the conquered land is often explicitly endowed with feminine characteristics in contrast to the masculine attributes of the colonizer” (Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama 78).

What triggers Shakespeare's return to the black woman is the relatively more formalized imperialism of James's court compared to Elizabeth's. The difference between Elizabeth's court and James's, as Kim Hall has demonstrated, is a difference between a cautious insularity and an eager internationalism (with unfortunately accelerated colonial consequences), and that is neatly caught in the thematic distance between Elizabeth's personal motto semper eadem (always one) and James's rex pacificus (royal peacemaker). If the colonial instinct in the Elizabethan reign was a surreptitious discovery, in the subsequent one it is a formal declaration, the chastity of the earlier monarch serving, as Kim Hall aptly puts it, as a figure for the “closing off of England from foreign powers,” as compared to the marriage of the latter one which could be seen as nationally embodying “the creation of bonds with outsiders” (126-27). The colonialist projects that are busily institutionalized from the beginning of the seventeenth century, in the formal incorporation of trading companies such as the Virginia, the Guinea, and the East India companies, are paralleled by James's well-known adoption of Great Britain as England's official title, and which is an extension of the solitary and unofficial invocation of England as “an empire” in the reign of his predecessor. 9 The renewed metropolitanism of Jacobean cultural agenda is spelled out by James's encouragement of lavish civic spectacles, particularly the opulent pageants such as those for which Inigo Jones was commissioned to construct decorative public architecture, as well as the elaborate masques that were a staple of early seventeenth century London's courtly entertainment. These declare an internationalist ambition with its attendant nascent multiculturalism that is the quintessential underpinning of the imperial-colonial dream. Not inappropriately, James is routinely regarded by contemporary critical commentators of Antony and Cleopatra and its seventeenth century English political background as a re-born Augustus (Hunt 120, Nyquist 96, Whitney 85).

Domesticated black aliens, both live ones as in James's own marriage as well as impersonated representations as in Jonson's Masque of Blackness, embody a growing English need to display/demonstrate (particularly to already visibly internationalist-colonialist countries such as Spain and Portugal) a self image of political-cultural self mastery through dominion over others. 10 One of the most palpable manifestations of this urge, and which has startling resonances with Antony and Cleopatra is a famous Jacobean incident that is not, however, usually associated with this play. The marriage in 1614 of one of the members of the first English colonial settlers in Virginia, John Rolfe, to the Indian princess Pocahontas, the daughter of Powhatan, is usually connected to The Tempest because of the supposed ethnological proximity of Pocahontas to Caliban and because of the way the incident's direct English colonial history suggests the background of that later play. But if the difference between the Western Indian and the African and the Asiatic is for the moment ignored as it in fact always was in the early colonial English racial imagination, the incident has compelling affiliations with the imperial colonial discourse that writes Antony and Cleopatra seven years earlier and that in fact predicts it. As Paul Brown, one of the most effective discussants of the incident in the light of The Tempest, has himself put it, Rolfe's letter to the Governor seeking permission for the match “confirms Rolfe in the position of colonizer and Pocahontas in the position of the savage other,” and Rolfe's encounter with
Pocahontas “serves to confirm the civil subject in that self-knowledge which ensures self-mastery.” Literally echoing the situation of the *Antony and Cleopatra*, Rolfe is the European colonizer who like Antony in the process of subduing the margins joins it (in marriage) and threatens the integrity of the center which he is supposed to uphold. James's initial anger at Rolfe's “treachery” duplicates Caesar's ire at Antony's affiliation with Egypt. The eventual approval of Pocahontas, as “Lady Rebecca,” and her admission to English civil society is however the completion of her colonization, implicit in her death in England soon afterwards (Paul Brown 49-50). The greater and more useful political-cultural metonymies of this incident with *Antony and Cleopatra* as opposed to *The Tempest* lie in the gender parallelism of Pocahontas and Cleopatra and in the power struggle of which both are formally a focus. To cite Paul Brown's words again,

> The discourse of sexuality in fact offers the critical nexus for the various domains of coloniser discourse …

(51)

What lurks in Rolfe's “secret bosom” is a desire for a savage female (49), [and] Rolfe's letter reorients potentially truant sexual desire within the confines of a duly ordered and supervised civil relationship.

(51)

Played out in popular drama, such an instinct appears in the spate of seventeenth century plays that describe the successful physical subjugation of or moral victory over African or African-based kingdoms and potentates by European/Roman ruling orders such as in Thomas Dekker's *Lust's Dominion* (1600), John Marston's *Sophonisba* (1606), Philip Massinger's *The Bondmen* (1623) and Thomas Heywood's *2 The Fair Maid of the West* (1630). Specifically, such an instinct is also evident in the numerous court representations of Cleopatra and other conquered foreign queens in the Stuart court, such as in *The Masque of Queens* in 1609 in which James's wife herself took part (Russ McDonald 305). If such dramatizations also include black females, that phenomenon can be contextualized by a possible Stuart courtly memory of the captive African women in the Scottish courts of James's ancestors cited earlier, and generally by the expedience of using the subjugation of dangerously empowered black women to write the text for a compliant white womanhood that is the collective cultural instinct of the early modern English nationalist project. The subduing of the powerful black woman that is Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra* in 1606 derives considerable charge from the energy of these overlapping cultural discourses.

The blackness/ethnic origin of the historical, and in consequence, of the fictional Shakespearean, Cleopatra, can be established along the lines of four kinds of inquiries/interrogations of conventional opinion. *First*, the common assertion that the Ptolemies were notoriously eugenic, being very careful of preserving their blood in marriage even to the extent of familial inter-breeding (Holland 56, Hughes-Hallett 14, 15), needs to be mediated by Alexander's and Caesar's documented prescriptive practices of inter-racial unions (the former pointed out by Gillies 113, and the latter by Hughes-Hallett herself 37). Although the strong possibility of Cleopatra's mixed blood and of her consequently being colored is still contested by most scholars who believe that even for their mistresses the Ptolemies, following the Pharaonic practice of preserving blood line by marrying their own kin, chose “upper-class Greeks” (Holland 57), it should be remembered that the Pharaohs themselves were not immune to conducting exogamic unions, as did Amenhotep III when he married the Nubian commoner Tiye in 1428 b.c. (Simon 57). If the Ptolemies could be said to follow the other Pharaonic practice, they could arguably be said to also draw precedence from this.

*Second*, Cleopatra's location in most modern scholarly sources exclusively within the Ptolemaic dynasty as Ptolemy XII's daughter ignores the double possibility of one of her grandparents as well as of her mother being Egyptian. As is the consensus of established scholarship, Cleopatra's father was the illegitimate
offspring of Ptolemy IX (Soter II) (“Ptolemy XII Auletes,” Britannica; “The Ptolemies” Cambridge Ancient History 9:788 [genealogical map]). The illegitimacy of Ptolemy XII, which was the reason for his difficulty in getting Rome's support for his rulership (“Ptolemy XII Auletes,” Britannica), effectively precludes any Ptolemaic immaculateness in his daughter's blood. Royal illegitimacy for the Ptolemies, and apparently for the Romans too in their understanding of Ptolemaic succession practices, meant a birth that was not the product of Ptolemaic inbreeding. It did not mean more generally the product of an unlegalized sexual union as it means today, and even if it could be stretched to fit the modern meaning the chances are that such unions remained unauthorized because they did not fit the Ptolemaic eugenic prescription for royal marriages because one of the partners was not of Ptolemaic blood. Among the few modern scholars who point to the inevitable gradual mixing of Macedonian-Ptolemaic and native Egyptian blood from the time of Ptolemy IV Philopator is the British classicist Sir Paul Harvey, who believes that because of Philopator's recruitment of native troops in his victorious battle against Antiochus III in 217 b.c. Egyptian influence in and penetration of Ptolemaic political and civic life increased to the point that “A mixed Graeco-Egyptian race was gradually formed” (353).

Who Cleopatra's mother was is also unknown, and hence the possibility of her ethnic matrilineal descent cannot be simply dismissed. That, like her father, Cleopatra's own maternal origins are obscured (whether or not she was the daughter of the woman that Ptolemy XII married, Cleopatra V Tryphaena, is unclear, being unspecified in most sources), suggests an interesting reason for her name, “Thea Philopater” which meant “Goddess Loving Her Father” (“Cleopatra VII Thea Philopator,” Britannica). Some scholars believe that Cleopatra's mother was “a Nubian woman,” an assertion supportable in terms of the evidence of Pharaonic unions with Nubians cited earlier. Although no portraits of her exist, the depiction of her in both of the two coins that were minted by her orders in her youth and later arguably exhibit mixed African-Egyptian and European features. … Her recognition of her mixed lineage may have been what prompted Cleopatra, an otherwise accomplished linguist by all accounts, to be the first of the Ptolemies to bother to learn Egyptian (“Cleopatra VII Thea Philopator,” Britannica). As one of her most respected modern biographers Hans Volkmann pointed out, like her father she had little popularity with the “upper stratum of the Alexandrian population” (62). Although most scholarly opinions steadfastly refuse to consider Cleopatra as anything but Macedonian Greek they consistently admit that she was, to a degree unprecedented in her ancestors, close to and deeply involved in native Pharaonic Egyptian cultural life, that her “thoughts and feelings … were certainly far closer to the Egyptian world than we have so far assumed” (Volkmann 207), and that she was “primarily an Egyptian Queen” (Cambridge Ancient History 9:321). If in all historical narratives—Greek and Roman—Cleopatra consciously identifies with, and fights (against Rome) for her Egyptian kingdom, and foregrounds her national/political and social/cultural difference in doing so, it is hard to understand how she can be considered exclusively European. A mixed color and lineage for Cleopatra is thus highly likely, exactly what would be signified by the word “tawny” that Cleopatra uses to refer to herself in Shakespeare's play.

Third, it is not what she was ethnically (whether or not that is knowable), but what she was in early modern English popular imagination that has more to say about her ethnicity in Shakespeare. In Elizabethan thinking she is both European, such as in Daniel (Nyquist), and non-European, in more than the three instances that Janet Adelman pointed out (Common Liar 185-86). These include Robert Greene in his Ciceronis amor 1589 who said that Cleopatra was “a black Egyptian” and that to Antony her “blackest ebon was brighter than whitest ivory” (quoted by Hughes-Hallett 201), George Gascoigne in his “In Praise of a gentlewoman who though she were not very faire, yet was she as hard fauoured as might be” who marginally notes that Cleopatra was “Egyptian.” (186) and Samuel Brandon in his The Virtuous Octavia who wondered how Cleopatra's “sun-burnt beauty” could please “[Antony's] sight” (186; also quoted by Hughes-Hallett 202). In addition to these, Kim Hall further cites Aemilia Lanyer as referring to Cleopatra in her Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum as “a blacke Egyptian” and Elizabeth Cary in her Tragedy of Mariam describing Cleopatra as “a brown Egyptian” (Things of Darkness 183-5). Even as late as the eighteenth century Colley Cibber has Cleopatra describe herself as an “Egyptian … born too near the glowing sun” (Hughes-Hallett 202).
Shakespeare twice explicitly paints her as colored—once in the “tawny front” reference in Act 1, and later in the “Phoebus” reference as black. Adelman's warnings about not taking literally every Elizabethan/Shakespearean use of the word black to mean skin color (Common Liar 184-85), which are fueled more by a contemporary postmodern nervousness in talking about race than any great danger of misunderstanding Shakespeare, need to be mediated by the reverse reminder very usefully articulated by Kim Hall that all uses of the word in Shakespeare should not automatically be construed to be metaphorical either (Things of Darkness 70). The character's contextual history (see note 11 above), which Adelman herself points out in the pages immediately following her warning, make the phenotypical denotations of the references unavoidable. As Linda Charnes has insisted, it is particularly crucial not to ignore Cleopatra's identity as a black woman in view of the fact that she is the only one in the play who describes herself and that self description is black (127). Conversely, there are no specific signals of her “whiteness” in the play. That is, as Kim Hall has put it, “Shakespeare is at pains to make us see a black Cleopatra” (Things of Darkness 154). It is difficult to fathom the ideological assumptions that would make it compelling to ignore these deliberate indications, as the play's conventional exegesis has done.

Furthermore, the play, as Linda Charnes has acutely explained it, is not about transcendent love but about the politics of empire (137-41) that underwrites that thematic. This can be seen in the way that the eugenic forsaking of the colored woman as the necessity of Western empire construction functions as the European cultural paratext for the Antony Cleopatra story. As Hughes-Hallett citing classical Roman sources has brilliantly reminded us, conceived within a few years of Cleopatra's death Virgil's original Augustus-inspired plan for the ultimate epic that would demonstrate the triumph of Roman-European nobility and imperial fortitude over the temptations of the world was not Aeneas's affair with the Carthaginian African queen Dido but Antony's with Cleopatra (60-61). What necessitated the change from this plan to what became the substance of the Aeneid was a didactic improvement over history: the mythic demonstration of the ability of a European ruler (Aeneas) tempted by a seductive African female potentate (Dido) to uphold and return dutifully to his own world and lineage, over and against the historical record of precisely such an inability in a Roman conqueror (Antony) who charmed by his non-European/colored Egyptian queen (Cleopatra) actually could not and did not. To slightly paraphrase Maynard Mack, Antony's desertion of Rome for an African queen was to be reversed by Aeneas's disavowal of an African queen for Roman greatness (cited by Ronald Macdonald 97n9). With the political damage controlled, the event could begin its historical journey as the legend of a passionate though regrettable extra-marital affair, but not an extra-ethnic one. In the subsequent transmission of the Antony and Cleopatra story a century later the elements of a narrative of passion already coexist within the history of a political struggle, as for instance in Plutarch who in connecting Cleopatra to his own Greek background sees Antony's relationship with her more as adulterous than miscegenic (Gillies 115). If in Chaucer the pair are characters of love, in the works of Dante, Boccaccio and Spenser they are sensual profligates.

The containment and diffusion of the subversive political potential of the non-European queen who defied Rome is effected, in other words, through the simultaneous transformation of her as an avatar of love and the denigration of her in terms of her sensual excess and in terms of the erotic passion that she both comes to stands for and ignites in Antony. It is not therefore surprising that while for Shakespeare's contemporaries the narrative's political interest/content is sometimes more foregrounded and sometimes less, it is never absent. Thus, in Marlowe's Dido, Fulke Greville's self suppressed play (Bullough 5:216; Hughes-Hallett 139), Elizabeth Cary's The Tragedy of Mariam, Aemilia Lanyer's Salve Deux Judaeorum (Kim Hall, Things of Darkness 183-85) as well as in Robert Anton's (Wilders 11) and Richard Reynolde's (Charnes 137) allusive comments about Cleopatra's “horrible crimes” and “murthers” respectively, the moral-aesthetic marking down of Cleopatra is the vehicle of a visible English national-political self pointing. In contrast, in the Countess of Pembroke's adaptation of Robert Garnier's Marc Antoine, Daniel's Senecan drama and Gascoigne's and Greene's poems cited earlier, the elementalism of the lovers' passions is more a human tragedy than a national-imperial danger to be guarded against. This variable but ubiquitous political interest/content is what shapes the supposed love themes of the Antony Cleopatra legend in popular
representations such as Shakespeare's play. As Charnes describes it, the “production of legendary love, can be one of the most effective ways to deflect, defuse and contain perceptions of irreconcilable political differences” (138).

The play's politics can be seen also in the way that an implicitly Orientalist-racist cultural agenda masquerades as the thematics of love in its critical and theatrical history starting from Charles Sedley and John Dryden, albeit less overtly in the former than in the latter. In both not only are Antony and Cleopatra “kind, heroic and faithful lovers” (Ridley xxxviii), but as Charnes observes, Cleopatra is painted as “explicitly white” (203n48), which is a telling demonstration of the hidden political instincts of the love theme. In eighteenth century productions such as those of David Garrick in Drury Lane in 1759 “the emphasis of the play was significantly altered” and “[i]t became essentially a tragedy of love played out within a sketchy political context” (Wilders 15). If nineteenth century romantic critics such as Schlegel, Coleridge, Swinburne, and Victor Hugo collectively propagated “the intensity and imaginative force of love” in the play (Spevack, Variorum Antony and Cleopatra 641-47), Victorian productions so radically re-shaped the play that “mostly the political and military” scenes were cut out (Wilders 18). This tradition fed the mid twentieth century's more influential critical judgments of the play, as for instance those of Wilson Knight, Dover Wilson and Reuben Brower that saw the play as articulating the poetics of an impossible transcendent love (Spevack 642). As the calm pronouncement of the editor of one of the most recent scholarly editions of the play has it, “The play is a dramatization of a tragic and celebrated love affair” (Wilders 1). Wilder's opinion echoes that of his predecessor's, M. R. Ridley's magisterial declaration in his 9th Arden Shakespeare edition of the play in 1954 that “In the first place it is a love tragedy” (“Introduction” xliii).

In Ridley's view of the play, which is as implicitly racist as his now-infamous view of Othello's blackness (7th Arden Shakespeare Othello “Introduction”), we are offered “a thrill, a quickening of the pulses, a brief experience in a region where there is an unimagined vividness of life” (xlvi). What Ridley does not admit is the extent to which this view is predicated on the exotic black female subject, the way in which the “thrill,” “the quickening pulses,” are all fueled by white European colonial patriarchy's secret fascination of that which it has forbidden for itself because it is threateningly different but that which it also cannot forget and about which it can fantasize only in some imaginary place removed from the norm. This is the mythic East that is Ridley's unspecified but nonetheless revealing “region” of “unimagined vividness.” The comment exemplifies Hughes-Hallett's description of the European colonialist sexual fantasy of the black/colored woman as the Other as a subliminal drive for sexual fulfillment of that which is desired but unattainable and which because of that is all the more desired, and of how non-Europe (Asia or Africa) functions as the only symbolic space in which such fantasies can be materialized (206; 222-24). These interestingly orientalist scholarly re-castings of the play between the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries, in fabulist scenarios of erotic passion, thus implicitly trace an archetypally colonial European fantasy of sex and power in a symbolic political landscape. Such a fantasy is the discursive agenda of the play's thematics of love, and it is one which its critical and theatrical histories both reflect and transmit. From a postcolonial standpoint the “love” thematization of Antony and Cleopatra is also the subjugation, through the whitening, of the politically powerful black woman.

III

The spatial and ideological binaries that in traditional criticism hold Shakespeare's Rome and Egypt apart also enact a textual program of reclaiming the imperial (Roman) state through the exclusion of both gender and race. The construction of the white masculinity of the European state, signalled through the play's early dismissal of the ineffective and docile Fulvia and the relegation to the narrative background of a dutiful Octavia rendered irrelevant in the play of Caesarist global politics (both of whom while being positive comparative makers against Cleopatra are unsatisfactory surrogates of woman compared to her), is aimed not just at the female abundance that is Cleopatra that Janet Adelman has pointed to but also at the imagined place of the racial other that is Egypt. The alien-ness of the female-sexual wild which is also the foreign-ness of the
racial-cultural wild is the expelled ground of difference on which the imperial national imaginary is to be nourished.

The colonial author-function's mimetic encasement of the black female subject, in simultaneously incorporating an indictment of race and a containment of gender, sexualizes race and racializes sexuality, because the colonial-patriarchal notion of imperial nationhood is predicated on a selective appropriation of bodies for the continuance of a male ethnically exclusionist political order. The double mimetic track of the mutually interactive racial-sexual marking of Cleopatra achieves the obliteration of the black female subject by blurring her reality and making her visibility fictional. Her fictionalized reality, together with the illusion of her power, serves only to validate the actuality of a white western world order, just as the myth of Othello's generalship had done earlier. She is the site of subjugation, in Kim Hall's terms "the imperial text" (Things of Darkness 159), on which the political life of colonial patriarchy is to be semiotically exercised. These suppressive instincts that rule the play's colonial-patriarchal representative agenda thus both confirm and extend the metropolitan construction that has been the Shakespearean colonial author function's ongoing discursive enterprise.

The mimetic incarceration of the reinvoked black female subject through the sexualization of race and the racialization of sexuality in Cleopatra is implicit in the play's selected moment of narrative entry. Not only are the play's famous opening lines an announcement of deliberate specular painting and pointing, the creation of a political frieze with a specific political lesson, the vehicular logic of its teaching turns on a discreet ascription of moral failure to an inferiority that is both racial and sexual. As Philo's multiple, expostulatory verbal emphases, “Those,” “Look where they come! / Take but good note, and you shall see …” “Behold and see,” sharply locate “the goodly eyes … [and] … the captain's heart” of the formerly global triumvirate “pillar of the world” that was Antony as the “strumpet's fool”, their urgently reductive rhetoric combines “tawny front” with “gipsy” to naturalize the “lust” that is Cleopatra (1.1.1-13). The moral defectiveness, and hence unnatural-ness, of Antony is based on the unspokenly axiomatic naturalness of the affinity of tawny-gipsy with lustful, in which lustful-female-strumpet means tawny-gipsy and vice-versa, a natural semantic association that Antony either has not remembered or is ignoring. The particular pressure of Philo's construction is to encourage a questioning of Antony's behavior but not of the debilitating sexuality of the black woman the synonymous negativity of whose skin color and sexuality is thus silently preserved. This prescriptive cultural campaign, which is all the more effective because of its demotic location in the sidelines of the high ground of Antony and Cleopatra's playing space, scripts Cleopatra's degeneracy as neither and both woman and black throughout the play.

The same esthetic stereophonically played from different speaking positions in the play constitutes Cleopatra as the site of a difference that is to be marked in a public space concertedly between her ethnicity and gender. “[C]ommodifiable material” for the social performance of male others, her simultaneous denigration and exoticization (Charnes 119) is a function of the variable, interdependent, use her race and her sex have for Roman self construction. Simultaneously “Royal wench” (to Agrippa 2.2.227) and “Egypt's widow” (to Pompey 2.1.37), her sexuality is non-specific, being both sweet and stale, and extends to a universal archetype of sexuality that is her “sall[y]” lustfulness (Pompey 2.1.21), even as what lends particular salaciousness to that sexuality is that it is Egyptian (as also in Agrippa's “Rare Egyptian” 2.2.218). This is the exotic item of public consumption that is Enobarbus's diagnostic identification of her as “Egyptian dish” (2.6.126), a left-over Caesarist “morsel” that can on occasion be cold even for Antony's eating (3.13.116). The generally voyeuristic political-civic space of these constructions, occasioned by the political consultancy of Roman triumvirs re-mapping their imperial domain or by the speculative gossip of subordinates interpreting the high events of their superiors or even by the displeasure of her Roman lover, objectify Cleopatra as the common property of popular Roman patriarchal social opinion feasting on the foreign in both the female and the alien. The relative ethnic spareness of these constructions do not constitute the play's marginal interest in race as Nyquist (96), as well as the editor of the most recent Oxford Shakespeare text of the play believe (Neill, Tempest 87), but a sign of racial marking's imbrication in the denigration of gender in the colonial agenda of
The play’s text.

The mutually supportive deployment of racial insculpture and sexual blackening in the negative construction of the black female subject in Cleopatra is also visible in the myth of her politically empowered status in the play. As has been noted (Loomba, *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* 75-76, 127-29, Nyquist 94-95), Cleopatra's queenship/rulership is a trivial textual decoration devoid of any real political power. Instead of the subtle multi-lingual diplomat and nationalist politician that is the historical figure, the Shakespearean Cleopatra is an indolent despot with no visible political life whose sole activities are partying, amusing herself and waiting for Antony, as for instance in 1.5. when drunk with lethargy she wants to sleep time itself away, and in 2.5 when she wants to drown herself in music. Her queenliness is written as a nugatory womanliness merely, her rulership is visibly located more in the pursuit of personal desire rather than in the exercise of public responsibility and concern for community and kingdom. As Adelman has put it, “Her queenship is … implicit, her subjects invisible” (*Suffocating Mothers* 191). She is presented always in the object position never in the subject, so that in the play's beginning moment as well as later when Antony has come to her she is merely reactive, waiting for him to decide to stay or to go. When Octavius attacks Egypt with his forces she follows Antony's plans of battle despite being Queen of Egypt with considerable forces of her own. Her political actions to defend Egypt are presented not like those of a capable political leader in a mutually beneficial alliance with a foreign power but like those of a vulnerable wife who unable to cope with the world by herself can only help her husband. That she even manages to be present in a war that has officially been declared against her and not Antony (“Is't not denounced against us?” 3.7.5), is only due to the miraculous success of her insistence against all contrary opinion (“Why should we not be there in person?” 3.7.5-6, and “A charge we bear in'th war / And as the president of my kingdom, will / Appear there for a man. Speak not against it” 3.7.16-18). Her political power allows only the operation of her private desires, enabling her to “unpeople Egypt” in fury if she ever loses Antony (1.5.78). That power is the source only of the plenitude of her leisure, spent endlessly with her waiting women in personal fantasies of pleasure.

Accordingly, when Enobarbus has to explain to Maecenas and Agrippa her political impact he has to describe her sexually as both the personification and the cause of carnal appetite: “Other women cloy the appetites they feed, / She makes hungry where most she satisfies.” In this archetypal European patriarchal dream of women as the object of endless sexual feeding, as a passive timeless sex organ waiting to ceaselessly satisfy man, the “infinite variety” that “age cannot wither” (2.2.233-37), the wondrousness of the portrait depends discreetly on an essential coquettishness in Cleopatra that is its object to establish. A composite of many imaginable surfaces but not of any revealing depths, her textual space in short is that of the one dimensional immemoriality of stereotype, interdependently typifying despotlic potentate and lascivious woman. The clear logic of this portraiture, as both Loomba, (*Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* 127) and Nyquist (95) have pointed out, is the separation of womankind from any significant political power by trivializing the former's use of the latter. At the same time, Cleopatra has the potential to be a serious sexual-political danger for the estate of man. What makes her political position dangerous is her gender, which could make her personify the female's subjugation of colonial-patriarchal man. Conversely, what makes her sexuality dangerous is that it is given added potency by her political position as queen.

What needs to be stressed here, however, is that the connecting link in the inverse relationship between Cleopatra's political impotence and her sexual potency is her racialization. In the play's imperial-colonial European gaze, what codes the mimetic values of her inept politics and her powerful sexuality is her racial identity, which is thus the middle term as it were in the triadic paradigm of empire-race-sexuality. For the imperial-racial European male the tautological antithesis of Cleopatra's political status and her sexual identity acquires a particular necessity in terms of the unsuitability of an ethnic woman in power, since if white womankind in power is dangerous the empowered colored woman must be doubly so. Thus, while the danger of womankind in power is reflected in Tudor tracts such as John Knox's *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regimen of Women* in 1558, such discourses out of local as well ideological necessity make their point through the examples of foreign women, which can be Scottish women such as Mary Queen of
Scots or European women such as Margaret of Parma of Mary of Lorraine (Shepherd 22), or the non-European woman as the mythic Amazon figure of Tudor-Stuart travel literature that by its difference is subliminally such a primordial threat to Anglo-European civic life (Shepherd 13-17; Laura Brown 130-32). An example of the latter is the poem by Anne Bradstreet cited at the beginning of this chapter, in which as Nyquist explains, even if “Eliza” is a white “Amazon” (referring to the “manly” Queen at Tilbury) her “amazonomachy” demonstrates patently the superiority of her rulership over that of Asiatic Amazon figures such as Tomris, Semiramis and Cleopatra (85-86). So, obscured by these overlapping interactions between the denigration of the alien female ruler's gender and the trivialization of her political ability, Cleopatra's racial marking remains for the most part blocked from direct analytical sight, alternately being stood in by femininity's lassitude and by the corruption of its rule, with, in the process, her blackness passing unspokenly for white in the play's critical afterlife.

A function of Cleopatra's textual colonization is to position her in an indeterminate space outside of kinship ties, in which her race and her gender help to cloak each other. Not only is she disconnected from a particular social imaginary, she is shorn of a visible family history, having neither parents nor children. If the former occurs in the guise of historical irrelevance, the latter happens as the result of a deliberate mimetic agenda that constructs her outside of the human continuity of generative time. The sterilization/isolation of the black female subject is necessarily the exposition of her uniqueness, the projection of the singleness of her being in distinction from the carefully nursed multiplicitousness of white European colonial patriarchy's family life. As the seductive other woman who steals Antony from the patient wifedom first of Fulvia and then of Octavia, Cleopatra is also the denatured entity whose sexuality overrides her maternal potential and whose blocked maternal urges impede the play of her sexual life. The former is implicit in the suppression of her children in the text's entire depiction of her liaison with Antony, and in the surfacing of her maternal concern only after she and Antony have been defeated by Caesar and she sues to have her children assigned “The circle of the Ptolemies for her heirs” (3.12.18). The confused maternal instinct is also resurgent in Cleopatra when, after Antony's death, in applying the asp to herself to commit suicide she refers to it as “my baby at my breast / That sucks the nurse asleep” (5.2.309-10). Correspondingly, her blocked maternity's impediment of her sexual life is implicit in Charmian's comment to the soothsayer, in response to his prophecy of a future ill-fortune for her, about the possible bastardy of any children she might have, “Then belike my children shall have no names” (1.2.35-36). Since the scene as a whole is a key example of the festive home life of Cleopatra's female court as Charles Whitney has seminally shown (“Charmian's Laughter”), Charmian's words are a reference to Cleopatra's children as well. Overall, what the scene delineates is a vibrant sexuality that is interrupted by longings for a maternal domesticity that is also unavailable.

What ultimately mandates the denial of either wifehood or motherhood to Cleopatra is the whoredom of her race, in the representative colonial gaze of her authoring the eugenic finality of her unsuitability to breed. She is situated in other words in a primal locale discovered by European man, a creature bereft of the dense network of genetic obligation/familial associations that comprise the history of personal life. Unsurprisingly, denied any soliloquies she has no interiority, no privateness, and is shown always in company even if in exclusive ones, in the idle inner circle of her waiting women. This is to say that as Cleopatra's maternity and sexuality are mutually blocked, the impact of her gender is diffused. As her gender is rendered intangible (which is its mythologization) so is her ethnicity (which is its erasure), ethnicity and gender being the twin foundational markers of identity in the colonial economy of cultural difference. The more Cleopatra's sexuality is played up the more mythic it becomes, and since in the colonial view her sexuality is a token of her race (the foreign/colored woman as always lascivious), the more mythic is her sexuality correspondingly the more fictional is her race.

Thus, if at one level both her political inefficiency and her puissant sexuality, as well as her racial sexuality and her sexual race, each have an inverse relationship within themselves in European construction, at another level her gender and her ethnicity have a direct relationship. What this means is that her race and her sexuality are played against each other as well as with each other. This is a symptom of what a contemporary
postcolonial/black British feminist, has described as “the division between (as well as) within structures of identification,” and of the fact that “the nature of identification” is both “antagonistic” as well as “divisive” (Sara Ahmed 158). The inverse linkage between Cleopatra's ethnicity and her gender is a function of her being a negative marker simultaneously to Fulvia and Octavia and to a Romanized Stuart rulership in the play's first half, whereas the direct relationship is a necessity of the undermining of her individual emotional-psychic being in the play's second half. If the racial-sexual inversion is an instinct of early colonial English national self construction, the racial-sexual synchronicity is the reflex of an exclusionist social imaginary defining itself through prescriptive notions of compliant white womanhood. Together, the play's twin mimetic processes of invertedly and directly connecting Cleopatra's ethnicity and gender serve to complete the circuit of her discursive incarceration.

Enabling/Empowering the complex bind of these dual representative processes in the play is the colonial author-function's memory of the subject of the black woman in the Sonnets. If the specificity of that personal authorial narrative is what underwrites the intertextual thematics obtaining generally between the Sonnets and Antony and Cleopatra as noted by Ericson (Patriarchal Structures) and Estrin and others, it is also what tropically connects Africa to Egypt, with the former re-fashioning the latter in the colonial text's geographic-cultural imagination. If the black female subject of the Sonnets was the domesticated subaltern in the metropolis, she reappears in Antony and Cleopatra, by a symbolic act of expulsion and regression as it were, as the again-as-yet unsubjugated black female at the margins of European empire, in which Cleopatra's royal stature is a metaphoric reconstruction of the unconquered self agency of the black woman in the wild. The two paradigms, of the colonized black women in the metropolis and the yet-to be-vanquished African-Egyptian queen, connect to form a closed system of intertextual relations within which the sexualization of race and the racialization of sexuality can endlessly repeat and renew themselves.

As the text's external/surface mythos is a collective early colonial English revisionist history of a male political order resisted by a colored female ruling order, so its internal/subliminal thematics is the Shakespearean author function's corrective re-enactment of the memory of the renitent discursive subject of the black woman of the Sonnets, the former being the cultural cue for the resurgence of the latter's poetic existence. In both cases the enterprise of recovery is in the service of a lost white idealized masculinity (Adelman 177-78), an unfulfilled eugenic homesocial imaginary, that struggles to establish itself over an unsubdued black desire. A mnemonic battleground, between the colonial poet's reparative memory of desire and the suppressed black female subject's awakened desire of memory, the play is thus the site of contestation between on the one hand an imperialist-colonialist national-social as well as a personal memory that strives to re-make experience and on the other hand an elided black female subject that re-writes itself into that memory making. If this critical framework is the point of departure for a postcolonial inquiry into the racial politics of Shakespeare's black/African queen, the specific target of its intervention is the unpredictable re-play of the poetic subject of the black woman that is Cleopatra in the resistance of its colonial inscription, the reflux of its seizure of the drama's narrative discourse.

IV

Located within overlapping mimetic regimes that deploy racial marking and sexual denigration concurrently against each other at multiple levels, the textual reflex of the incarcerated discursive subject of the black woman that is Cleopatra is the performative unpredictability of the racialized female in the compliance of its colonized cultural destiny. As both the substance and the play of her self life, unpredictability recusantly re-performs the elided memory of the black woman in her scripting as Cleopatra. In other words, unpredictability is the modality of the discursive subject of the colonized black woman's de-scribing/re-writing of her construction as a consumable commodity of the colonial-patriarchal social imagination, passed around in the Sonnets between the poet, his fair friend and the salaciousness of a boyish public opinion, and in Antony and Cleopatra between Antony, Octavius, Caesar and the ignominy of snickering male Roman report. In the face of a homesocial memory of desire, thus, unpredictability is the
colonized black female's assertion of a racial-gendered desire of remembrance, her own invocation of the same two mimetic agendas that have historically incarcerated her being not a defeatist contradiction but the necessary ambivalence of the colonized gendered “subject's migratory and hybrid passage into being” (Sara Ahmed 165). The discursive effect of the black woman's tactical trope of unpredictability on the level of textual design, as will be evident later, is the generic confusion for which Antony and Cleopatra has been conventionally noted.

If in colonial time-space, culture, and history, memory is a structuration of experience, an imposition of form on formlessness, a shaping of meaning out of the pre-meaning of anterior forms of consciousness (Sara Ahmed 162), unpredictability is the alterity of this phenomenon. So, unpredictability is an anti-memory memory, a phenomenology that is the obverse of expectation and of the script of causality. Furthermore, unpredictability is the indeterminacy of language, the breakage of cultural writing through the disruption of anomalous local speech, an excess that makes talking a frenzy of self affirmation (what Michel de Certeau calls an “ecstasy”) and a contestation of the historical/political assumptions that write the psychology of both the individual and the social body. Concurrently, unpredictability is the recalcitrance of sight, the deliberate self-effacement with which the colonized black female subject invokes the claim of her visibility by denying the conditions of her historical presentation. Cumulatively therefore, if memory, language, sight aim at knowing, unpredictability aims at the unknowingness of knowing, at exposing the hegemonic agenda of the legibility that is knowledge.

Most central to an interventionist postcolonial critical practice, however, is the predictive foundation of the notion of unpredictability in Gayatri Spivak's formulation in her essay “The Rani of Sirmur,” in “the absence of a text that can ‘answer back’”, in the “dubious place of the free will of the sexed subject as female” (268). This is the formulation that Benita Parry has subsequently identified as Spivak's key locale of recuperating resistance in the colonial encounter (Parry 41). In the essay, in the process of her archival examination of the nineteenth century colonial British appropriation of the lands and administration of the terminally ill (and hence deposed) Raja of Sirmur in the Simla Hills of Northeastern India through their attempt to manipulate the Rani to rule by proxy in the name of her under-age son and the Rani's counter resolve to instead immolate herself on her husband's funeral pyre in the Indian tradition of Sati, Spivak finds the Rani “caught … between imperialism and patriarchy” (268). On the one hand, if in traditional Brahminical patriarchy the practice of widow self-immolation was a “manipulation of female subject-formation” to accept suicide as the “good woman's desire,” for the widow within that patriarchal tradition to embrace Sati was to seize the “signifier of woman as exception.” On the other hand, to be dissuaded by the British “after a decision, was … a mark of real free choice, a choice of freedom.” It is between these “two contending versions of freedom,”—that of “[Indian/colonized] patriarchal subject-formation and imperialist [British/colonial] object-constitution”—that Spivak finds “the dubious place of the free will of the sexed subject as female,” even though in this instance Spivak suggests that it was “successfully effaced” and “thoroughly undermined” (268-69), since the British archival records, typically needing the figure of the Rani only for “the territorial/commercial interests of the East India Company” (263), are silent about the rest of the Rani's story. The Rani's ultimate decision, even if it was archivally recoverable, cannot be read simply as an acceptance of the one or the other of the two choices she faces but as a contravention of both.

Spivak's analysis of this material, which is more prognostic than enunciative, is useful nevertheless for the theoretical possibilities they open up for recomposing the will of the “gendered subaltern” in comparable historical situations and cultural texts. The parallels between the Rani's historical situation and Cleopatra's are striking. Both are inscribed by the exchange between local power and colonial disenfranchisement, and between female agency and patriarchal control. The unreadable track of the Rani's will that Spivak is pointing to, as it negotiates precariously between and against the two discourses that bear down on her and that together describe the double colonization of the female subaltern subject, cyphers the semantic codes of the history that will write that subject. This is the thematic indeterminacy that supplements the archival unavailability, both of the end of the Rani's story as well as of the alternative Egyptian substance of
Cleopatra's life in Roman imperial record and in the early colonial popular English text. The “dubiety” of the free will of the female sexed subject is precisely its unpredictable potency, and in that comprises a pertinent interpretative analog to the unpredictability that is the modality of the black gendered colonized subject’s reclamation of her self life as Cleopatra. To appropriate Spivak’s paradigmatic formulation about a nineteenth century colonized Indian historical woman and apply it backwards to an analysis of a seventeenth century popular English dramatic representation of a historical figure from antiquity is not the stretched anachronism that it might seem but rather a radical reverse tracing of the critical process that the intellectual historian Dominick La Capra described as the “repetition-displacement of the past into the present as it necessarily bears on the future” (Spivak 250). Such reverse application of the “repetition-displacement” procedure is, in other words, symptomatically for postcolonial studies, the use of the pressures of the present to restore the elisions of the past. Specifically, to do so in Cleopatra's case is to reconstruct the elided subjectivity of the colonized black female within her objectification in the popular early modern English imagination.

The unpredictable self play of the textual subject of the black woman that is Shakespeare's Cleopatra is the dis-membering of the demotic mythic memoriality that is her discursive constitution in the play, and which in turn is her subversion of the colonial author-function's personal memory of her. As the subject of representation the black woman's memorialization has happened twice already, in the Anglo-European mythic paratext that has staged her as Cleopatra in the seventeenth century English cultural consciousness, and in the poet's private narrative of the black woman in the Sonnets. It is against the play's opening act as Antony prepares officiously to leave her for Roman duty, rupturing the enactment of his departure is her reminder to him of how when he had first arrived in Egypt he had “sued staying:”

Then was the time for words; no going then,  
Eternity was in our lips and eyes,  
Bliss in our brows' bent; none our parts so poor  
But was a race of heaven. They are so still,  
Or thou, the greatest soldier of the world,  
Art turn'd the greatest liar.  

(1.3.33-39)

The obtrusive reminder reclaims the sovereignty of action from an Antony who leaves and a Cleopatra who sues to hold him back, to a Cleopatra who had agreed to an Antony's original plea to stay, thereby reestablishing however momentarily a Cleopatra who can just as equivocally let him now be gone: “Nay, pray you seek no color for your going, / But bid farewell and go” (1.3.33-34). The slipped alternative memory evident here is also corroborated later by Enobarbus's account of their first meeting in which within the glamour of the description of Cleopatra's arrival at Cydnus the discreet detail of the Egyptian queen's will prevailing over the Roman conqueror's survives: “Upon her landing, Antony sent to her; / Invited her to supper. She replied / It should be better he became her guest” (2.2.219-21).

Thus also in the play's opening movement, fissuring the script of her constructed remembrance, “Sir, you and I must part, but that's not it; / Sir, you and I have loved, but that's not it; / That you know well,” is a “Something it is I would—,” that is the nominal catachresis that exceeds the articulation of memory. This is the naming of “my oblivion” that is the antithesis of remembering itself, the anti-memory over which memory presides: “And I am all forgotten” (1.3.87-91). Antony's departure, otherwise the imperial Roman's brusque leaving of his Eastern conquest, is achieved through the “kill[ing]” of Cleopatra's “becomings” and her “unpitied folly,” a clumsy leave-taking that his brave show of rapport, “Come / Our separation so abides and flies / That thou, residing here, goes yet with me” (1.3.102-4), cannot hide. This is to say that unpredictability interrupts the normalizing mandate of official memory—the Roman Antony must come, love
the Egyptian Cleopatra, and leave for Rome—with the compulsions of an unremembered self that is beyond
the reach of such a mandate and that while unable to reverse the teleology of such a narrative robs it of its
ideological charge.

To put it in another way, unpredictability as anti-memory is the uncontained subjectivity of the individual
colonized consciousness as opposed to the regulated objectivity of colonial public thought, and its object is
the undermining of the efficacy of the latter's functioning. Quintessentially, unpredictability's anti-memory is
also the gendered subaltern's counter-memory of race, as it were the thought without a name within the
smooth nominal hierarchy of imperial account. So, after Antony has left for Rome and Cleopatra
self-teasingly wonders why Antony should think of her, “Think on me / That am with Phoebus' amorous
pinches black, / And wrinkled deep in time?” (1.5.27-29), the interrogative enunciation masks the desire for
its precise opposite: to be thought of. The contrariety of the sudden reflection of her skin color, the signal
importance of which is indicated by its being otherwise the sole instance in the play, lies in its daring
phenotypical self-problematization, in its positing of the seeming difficulty of a white Antony in a popular
etiolatory imperial Roman consciousness remembering a black Cleopatra as the precise reason for the
desirability of his doing so. The challenge of the reflection is also thus the reclamation of her self value
beneath her performance of the very myth that obliterates it. As this is the unthinking that challenges the
colonial thought that mythically constructs her, it is “the delicious poison” with which she “feeds” herself
(1.5.26-29). As Joyce Green MacDonald has put it, “Her dark skin, in terms of the well-known proverb from
the period, is a literal emblem of the impossibility—or at least extreme difficulty—of the task that the Romans
have set themselves in conquering Egypt” (“Sex, Race, and Empire” 69). In sum, Cleopatra's textually
unprepared and unique color conscious self recollection is what contemporary black British feminist
theoretical analysis would describe as the refutation of “the racialist logic that demands the purification of
colour” by the renegade “reminder of an-Other that refuses to inhabit these terms and returns … only as a
threat” (Sara Ahmed 159).

Her anti-memory has the power to make and unmake the reality of her fiction, so that the memory of her love
for Antony as well as the love she had for Caesar before him are both authenticated expeditiously by her, as
Charmian reminds her in the same scene, “I sing [of Caesar] but after you” (1.5.73), and as she herself
demonstrates when on hearing of Antony's marriage to Octavia she begins to think again of Caesar: “In
praising Antony I have disprais'd Caesar” (2.5.108). The expediency of her momentarily resurgent alternative
memory is the unavoidable imbrication of the colonized black woman's “love” of her colonial European lover
in the politics of her historical survival. The unpredictability of her anti-memory is in other words the
protection of the sovereignty of her self, her intervention in the retrospective colonial organization of
experience in which she is included. Thus, within the colonially designed script of her dalliance with Antony,
in her swearing loyalty to him as a way of seeking his forgiveness for having betrayed him in the first sea
fight against Caesar, her unforewarned remembrance of her maternity is her anti-memory's furtive seizure of
that part of her life which that script has disallowed even as she cooperates with that disallowance:

ANT.

Cold-hearted toward me?

CLEO.

Ah, dear, if I be so, …

Till by degrees the memory of my womb,
Together with my brave Egyptians all …
Lie graveless. ...

(3.13.158-66)

Similarly, after Antony's death, the unsubdued residue of her female consciousness is what feeds Cleopatra's momentary contra-memory of herself as “No more but e'en a woman, and commanded / By such poor passion as the maid that milks and does the meanest chares” (4.15.73-75). The unexpected bucolic self-cameo, with its invocation of youthfulness and sexual innocence in deliberate contradiction of the earlier self pointing to age and sexual experience, is the gendered subaltern subject's discursive repossession of the freedom of her imaginary life beyond the ends of her colonial narrative, otherwise one clear example of the Spivakian “dubious place of the free will of the female sexed subject.”

If by play's end it is Cleopatra more than Caesar who writes the memory of Antony, she does so in a manner that contains its absurd alterity, coding the mythos of imperial recollection with the incongruity of its antitype:

I dreamt there was an emperor Antony ...
His legs bestrid the ocean; his reared arm
Crested the world ...
His delights
Were dolphin-like; they showed his back above
The element they lived in ...

(5.2.76-90)

As Linda Charnes has shown, the illogicality of an Antony straddling the ocean and at the same time swimming in it like a dolphin, represents “a panegyric at once contradictory and true” (143), pointing to the perforation of a public mnemonic ritual by the anti-mnemonism of the very subjective consciousness that is made to validate it and that by that very act instead steals attention for itself. Furthermore, to the extent that Antony is the play’s “primary absent object of desire,” the “idealized masculinity” which Adelman says is part of the play’s project of recovery (Suffocating Mothers 177, 180-81), that is, the focus of the text's recuperative homosocial imaginary, the rhetorical uncertainty of Cleopatra's chosen remembrance of him destabilizes the possibility of that recuperation by inscribing in effect the inherent instability of the male posturing that is the patriarchal enterprise. Conversely, this implicit anti-memory of the male positions her on the ideological high ground of the play's politics of gender, re-establishing her in what was going to be the drama of her negation.34 Encompassing, then, the triple coordinates of race, sex and empire, that is to say the worlds of the social, the psychic and the imperial, unpredictability's anti-memory is the colonized black female subject's re-tabulation of the public memoir of herself, the mechanism of her spectral counter-life against the record of her colonial history.

Unpredictability as the discursive subject of the black woman's oppositional self performance within the mimetic codes of her colonial text is also the indeterminacy of her language, the verbal inexplicability through which Cleopatra preserves the mastery of her fictional life. With Antony, her unpredictability as linguistic indeterminacy takes the form of a talking performance that blocks the visibility of her speaking position, shields her rhetorical intention and hence guards the legibility of her sovereign self. In the play’s opening scene, in the triple solipsistic contestation of Antony's gratuitous desires that she performs, Cleopatra's own verbal intentions are left unexposed, and with them is left intact the independence of her own options of action. Her challenge of his professions of love, “If it be love indeed, tell me how much,” not only debars his deferral of the semantic trap she leads him into, “There's beggary in love that can be reckoned,” but also effectively imposes her authority over their emotional transaction: “I'll set a bourne how far to be belov'd.” Turning to the matter of his supposed disinterest in his wife's feelings or his claimed indifference to Caesarist and Roman political directive the news of either or both of which may be in the messenger's brief that Antony does not want to hear, she dares him to prove himself:
Nay hear them …
Thou blushest Antony, and that blood of thine
Is Caesar's homager; else so thy cheek pays shame
When shrill-tongu'd Fulvia scolds.

But Antony's compliance, by affirmatively kissing her on the spot, “the nobleness of life / Is to do thus [embracing],” is merely grounds for her to return to her original inquiry about the sincerity of his feelings for her: “Excellent falsehood! Why did he marry Fulvia and not love her?” (1.1.14-41). The shifting track of this inquisition of Antony's ethical and political mettle, which is repeated in part in 1.3., not only puts Antony in the object position but also secures the unintelligibility of Cleopatra's choices for anyone but herself. Within her historical moment as the conquered Egyptian queen as well as in her discursive/fictional location as the colonized black woman, the inscrutability of Cleopatra's verbal practice transforms the colonial lover's attempted emotional-psychological bonding of the gendered subaltern into her reverse hold over him.

If language is a “tacit” agreement of social order and a guarantee of the continuance of its structural performance as Ronald Macdonald observed in his discussion of the play (87), between the two principal domains of its operation, writing and speech, is manifested two versions of its power: language as control which is the documentativeness, enforced uniformity and conformity of writing, and language as speech which is the immediacy, the contextual specificity and the radical independence of talking. If the former with its ability to seize and carry away meaning from phenomena and incarcerate it in the elsewhere of written record is the tool and space of colonial control, the latter with its grounding in its particular location and hence its ability to resist intellectual transportation (Certeau, Writing of History 215-16) is the medium and arena of anti-colonial resistance. Linguistic indeterminacy in speech is therefore also Cleopatra's unpredictable disruption of the colonial social order that surrounds her, another function of the colonized black female's tactical unpredictability as the means of her self survival. If Cleopatra's alien-ness in her early colonial English mimesis is her linguistic excess as Ania Loomba suggests, that excess is not merely because she talks more than any other woman in Shakespeare (“Shakespeare and Cultural Difference” 175), but because her use of language violates the political order that sanctions it, unmaking the social reality that it is entrusted to build. Expectedly more evident in her interaction with the innumerable messengers that are the ventriloquist voice of the Roman center's imperial authority, the tactical transgression that is her linguistic indeterminacy in speech underlies in particular the episode of her treatment of the messenger who brings her news of Antony's marriage to Octavia in 2.5.

The cruelty of Cleopatra's treatment of the messenger is the violence of the discursive subject of the colonized black woman's rejection of the colonial conventions of expressive signification and of her defense of her right in her colonized domain to the social politics of meaning construction in words. The suddenness of her response, which is the mark of the unpredictable self play of the gendered subaltern's protective self suzerainty, turns on the truth-effects of the messenger's news and on the resultant situation they try to impose on her: “He's bound unto Octavia … For the best turn i’th bed … Madam, he's married to Octavia” (2.5. 58-60). The “truth” of the messenger's news is the “lie” of Cleopatra's value and Egypt's in the esteem of Antony and Rome: Antony's marriage to the proper Octavia is the trivialization of Cleopatra's civic worth (as unfit for the social contract of marriage) and in consequence the dismissal of Egypt's social and sexual civility by the high culture of Europe, particularly since she herself as monarch is the symbol and determinant of the civilization of her kingdom. The seeming calmness of the messenger, “I that do bring that news made not the match” (68) and his insistence on the exclusive validity of his verbal representation, “I have made no fault” (74), is what fuels the particular ferocity of her retaliation, “The most infectious pestilence upon thee! Strikes him down … Hence, horrible villain, or I'll spurn thine eyes / Like balls before me; I'll unhair thy head. She hales him up and down … Rogue, thou hast lived too long. Draws a knife”” (61-64). If as Queen of her country, colonized or not, she cannot be only the hearer of news but also the maker of it (Ronald Macdonald 87), she cannot also be merely the recipient of “truth” but also the creator of it. This is to say that as language is the register of her political and social reality, it is that she will re-make to defend the historical existence of
herself. This is her psychological parole to the imperial langue of Rome, her reclamation of the legality of her narrative currency as opposed to the authority of Roman meaning.

She tries therefore to roll back the linguistic reality of this development by forcing the messenger to unsay what he says, and belie the truth of his words, and in that expose the lie of the social order that he represents in validation of the truth of hers. Her specific instruction to him, “Say tis not so,” as well as her repeated questions “He is married? … He is married?” counteracts the messenger's iterative emphasis of the substance of his message, “He's married, madam” (92) “He's married to Octavia,” (101), which he thus performs four times in the scene, and it is thematically contextualized by her explanation that

Though it be honest it is never good
To bring bad news. Give to a gracious message
An host of tongues, but let ill tidings tell
Themselves when they be felt.
(84-88)

This is the thematic of her linguistic indeterminacy, of the sovereignty of her local speech over the language of global-colonial history, that is, of the right of the receiving situation in the periphery to determine the semantics of linguistic representation over the interested hermeneutics of the sending center. To “let ill tidings / Tell themselves when they be felt” is to oppose the predetermination of imperial account with the phenomenological exigencies of its local application, as it were to make history that has already happened re-perform itself if it can but on a more level terrain. It is these retrograde interpretative instincts that undergird her pointed reply to the messenger's exasperated question, “Should I lie, madam?”: “Oh, I would thou didst” (94-95).

As it so happens, the “lie” of the messenger's Roman “truth,” which is conversely the “truth” of Cleopatra's “lie” that the messenger is here balking from, is grounded in the fact of Octavia's marriage being meaningless and in name only, and has already been vindicated by Antony himself, when in confirmation of the soothsayer's prognosis that his prosperity does not lie in Rome he says: “And though I make this marriage for my peace / I'th East my pleasure lies” (2.3.38-39). That it is the mandate of her contestatory “truthful” lies that prevails over Rome's “lying” truths is implicit in the messenger's carefully negative description of Octavia later in deference to the “truth” of Cleopatra's beauty: “[S]he [Octavia] is low-voiced … She creeps … She shows a body rather than a life” (3.3.13-19). If in these scenes the operation of the linguistic indeterminacy of Cleopatra's speech through the mandate of her “truthful” lying, is humorous, that humor is the deliberate subversion of the solemnity of her imperial history and her mechanism for undermining the “lies” of her colonial record. This is the excess of her talking that makes it simultaneously a frenzied self location and a critique of the colonial historical/cultural imaginary that imprints the body and the socius. As she demonstrates that Roman “truths” do not apply in Egypt, so she establishes that the social conventions of “truth” and “meaning” that are used to bind that community cannot be used to bind this.

The linguistic indeterminacy of Cleopatra's speech as the play of expediently chosen meaning as her tactical prerogative in her colonized situation is also evident in the scenes of her negotiation with Thidias in 3.13 and subsequently with Caesar in 5.2. Her determination not to mean what she says is her franchise to protect the sanctity of her social order and of her ethical standing as its guarantor against the incursions of the colonial one that seeks to replace it. The hidden semantics of her special speech is in fact her matching of Rome's articulation of its particular agenda in the guise of a seeming objectivity, of using, in other words, its duplicitous language to out-talk it. If Thidias's official Roman re-presentation of her story with Antony as one in which she “He [Caesar] knows that you embrac[ed] not Antony / As you did love, but as you feared him,” aims at displacing the grammar of her free will in her relationship with Antony with the bonded accents of a fearful and conquered potentate who will now be safe-housed in supposedly beneficial Caesarist custody, her
agreement with him, “He [Caesar] … knows / What is most right. Mine honour was not yielded / But conquer’d merely” (3.13.56-62), is merely her paying back the coin of Rome's meaningless verbal currency in kind, of blocking dictional duplicity with itself. If Thidias and Caesar's language offer her false knowledge while “knowing” her, she replies in kind, offering them false knowledge of herself while instead “knowing” them. If knowledge given (Caesar means to be her benefactor) is an imposition (Cleopatra should accept his patronage), she resists that imposition by giving back to them a false knowledge of herself (she accepts his patronage), thereby checking that incursion and subverting that power exchange.

Her interview with Caesar in the fifth act is a compound rendition of the same linguistic politics, in which what she lies about is the truth that will redeem her from total Roman effacement. In it what she makes Seleucus do is to not just reveal the “lie” of her honest account of her assets but through it to do something else: make Caesar believe through the apparently accidental third-party exposure of the secret hoarding of her valuables that she intends to live. The complete obscuring of her use of words here, doubly insulated by the vehemence of her attacks on Seleucus, is precisely what guarantees the success of the suicide with which she will ultimately defeat the Roman seizure of herself and of her kingdom. This will be her out-wording of Caesar's “word[ing]” of her to prevent her from “be[ing] noble to [herself]” (5.2.190-91). So, she will live, but not in the manner the Romans understand it: she lives in the moral triumph of having killed herself rather than fall into their hands. In both instances, the function of her words is to invite their own deconstruction in their audience, within which the integrity of her codes of meaning and the freedom of her own intentionality remain undisturbed. All together, Cleopatra's linguistic indeterminacy, in its verbal inscrutability, its deliberate excess, and its seizure of the conventions of meaning construction to rupture the colonizer's political power and disrupt his social order, is the vocal register of her unpredictability, the tongue through which the resistant subalternity of the colonized black woman speaks herself.

Unpredictability is also the recusancy of sight, the contrary self-seeing that is also the secret self-knowing and which together are the beginnings of historical identity. Lost in the overlap between two counteractive avenues of self identification Cleopatra is made visible by neither. Connected to an European-Greek Ptolemaic line which because of its transplantational history is not fully available to her, and to an Egyptian-African one the full purity of which she will always lack, she has only the uncertain luminescence of a Bakhtinian *exotopia* by which to know and show herself, the liminal identarian consciousness of a simultaneous insider/outsider-ship through which to build an understanding and a projection of herself in time and history.36 Her self sight is therefore her rejection of the conditions of her historical visibility, which neither reveal nor conceal her psychic being. Her struggle for satisfactory ocular presence is consequently manifest not so much in any gestures of pronounced self painting as in her effacement of the elements of her mis-presentation. The moments in which she does try to visualize herself, as for instance in the “phoebus,” “womb,” or “maid” references cited earlier, have the panoptic clarity of hindsight and memory and are significant for the self pictures they etch. The continuum of an ontological self awareness that is necessarily indefinable and works through visual postponement is however another equally significant aspect of her struggle to be seen. Its contradictory insistence on see-able presence through its cancellation of that seeability constitutes the tactical reluctance of sight that is one more dimension of the unpredictability of the discursive subject of the black woman in Cleopatra.

At the beginning, if a happy Antony wants to see a happy Cleopatra she shows him a sad one, if a healthy Antony wants to see a healthy Cleopatra she shows him a sick one and vice-versa: “If you find him sad / Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report / That I am sudden sick” (1.3.3-5). This can work in literal or parodic excess with the same effect. In the fourth act if an angry Antony wants to see a repentant Cleopatra heartstruck with anguish for having betrayed him, she shows him a Cleopatra so tormented as to have killed herself: “to th' monument … go tell him I have slain myself. / Say the last I spoke was ‘Antony’” (4.13.7-10). At the play's end if a triumphant Caesar wishes to see a subdued Cleopatra she shows him an excessively subdued one that is a cover for the defiance underneath. Her posture of submission here, “My master and my lord / I must obey” (5.2.116-17), is as she explains later, “the way / To fool their preparation, and to conquer / Their most
absurd intents” (5.2.225-26). In all of these instances, she retains control over her visual presence by negating the effect people want to see. When she dies, she shows herself not in the languishment Rome might expect (in Plutarch having at least once seen her thus) but in the robes of an unvanquished majesty: “Show me … like a queen” (5.2.227). It is this constantly removed sight of herself that is responsible for the curious, perpetual deferral of herself that Catherine Belsey has described as the secret of Cleopatra's textual-thematic seduction (“Cleopatra's Seduction” 42-46).

If the colonial portrait of Cleopatra as the possessed black female potentate is that of a spectacle, of the sort that Enobarbus says would have diminished Antony's reputation as a “traveller” had he not seen her (1.2.153-55), the visual strategy of the gendered-colored subaltern is, as Linda Charnes has observed, to return that spectacle to the spectator without showing anything of herself in it (128-29). She manipulates the staging of the appearance of herself to subvert the spectacular values of that staging. If the colonial imagination expects her to arrange her demise in the European accents of a royal death, she designs hers deliberately in the style of an Asiatic Egyptian one, in the death by snake bite that not only declines the preferred European self killing by sword or dagger that is Antony's method but that also clearly identifies her with the Egyptian mythology of the Isis goddess with whom she wishes to be seen in history. The contrary visual self representation is also the discursive response of the subject of the colonized black woman to the antitheatricality and antifeminism of popular early modern English drama that Jyotsna Singh, among others, has noted (“Renaissance Antitheatricality, Antifeminism”). Her negative visualism corresponds as well to the necessary theatricality of discursive subjectivity that Linda Charnes has insisted on (127, 158-59), but deployed here particularly in the instance of a gendered raciality that shows itself in a performance of seeing that destroys the false sight of itself. The discursive subject of the black woman's unpredictable anti-visualism is, in sum, the modality of race's self-viewing through the opposition of colonialism's viewship of it, that is through the invisibility that emerges through its dismissal of the visibility that colonialism gives it. This is the lacuna within which race can construct the expedient sameness of its difference in a postcolonial domain.

In the processive combination of its anti-memory, linguistic indeterminacy and anti-visualism, the unpredictability of the discursive subject of the black woman in Cleopatra aims inevitably at the unknowability that is at once its colonial destiny and its anti-colonial desire. This involves the same reversible play of power implicit in the politics of knowledge that was operative in Othello's subaltern life. To reinvoke that argument here, knowledge is not only the primary condition of the operation of power and the optimal requirement of its occurrence, but also within the colonial moment the tactical high ground in the struggle for control between colonizer and colonized. So, if in Edward Said's terms to know is to possess (Orientalism 32, 36-37), then that which is unknown is also that which is unpossessed. Thus, if what constitutes the alien-ness of the alien is its unknowability, then that which marks the alien's path of self enfranchisement is its refusal to be known. Within a political esthetic it is not that to be unknown is to be free but that to be known as unknowable is to enjoy a certain measure of existential self agency. This is the subjective reclusion of the colonized self that is resistant to the penetration and inscriptions of the colonizer's global imperatives. In this sense a persistent unknowability is the strategic disposition of the colonized subject, and with respect to the life of its race and gender the basic means of its destruction of the epistemology that has enabled its disenfranchisement. On the level of language, sight, and the collective memory that is resurrected as social convention, it becomes a counter to the naturalization of the colonizing process. Cleopatra's unknowability as the constant endpoint of the black gendered subaltern's multifarious unpredictability, otherwise the “infinite variety” that is her colonial cultural blazon, is her signal interactive objective throughout her mimetic performance in her colonial text.

The effect of Cleopatra's indefinability that Antony reflects in act one is in the very complaint with which he prefaces his words:

Fie, wrangling queen,

Whom everything becomes—to chide, to laugh,
To weep; whose every passion fully strives
To make itself (in thee) fair and admir'd!

(1.1.48-51)

What unspokenly prompts this indulgent protest of Cleopatra's many-sided contrariness is her denial through it of the privilege of familiarity, which is the privilege that knowing brings and which will be the facilitator of Antony's way with her on the psychic as well as the political planes. That “way” is patriarchy's manipulative power in the heterosexual exchange and colonialism's surreptitious assumption of rulership in the locales of its emergence. As Antony's repeated exclamations of incomprehension later in the same act reveal, “What's the matter?” (1.3.18), “How now, lady?” (1.3.39), the subjugated black woman's refusal to yield to her colonial lover-conqueror a uniform legibility confuses his self mastery and thereby retains as merely contingent the political reality that has allowed him to approach her. Even in that initial approach, in Enobarbus's famous account of their first meeting, whereas Antony waits to meet her on land, she arrives by water, and as noted earlier as he invites her to supper she invites him instead to join her. The purpose of this constant “cross[ing]” of him as Charmian at one point fearfully puts it (1.3.9), is to keep elusive the idea of her political disenfranchisement and to create the illusion instead of her power over him. As Enobarbus describes it, she draws the crowds, not him, and he is left alone with neither public attendance nor political recognition, in a posture of near-vacuous imbecility: “And Antony / Enthron'd i'th' market place, did sit alone, / Whistling to th' air” (2.2.214-16). If her unknowability therefore suggests a possibility of role reversal in their colonial relationship, a substitution of her disempowerment and passivity by his empowered active self sovereignty and vice-versa, and that will be a defacement of the achievements of colonial-patriarchal power, that is reflected in the cross dressing with which she blurs the limits of her historical confinement: “Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed / Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst / I wore the sword Philippan” (2.5.21-23). This playful exchange of her “tires and mantles” for his “sword Philippan,” that is, of her Egyptian womanliness for his male Roman conquerorship, is nevertheless a semiotic of her dissolution of the fixity of her political and sexual location, and hence a destruction of the ability of either to essentially read her.

Two of the strongest instances of the unknowability that is the ultimate practice of the unpredictability of the discursive subject of the black woman are however Cleopatra's bizarre naval conduct and the difficult mimesis of her suicide. The inexplicability of her flight at both of the two sea battles that finally seal Antony's defeat by Octavius, which is unexplained as well in all of the ancient historical accounts of her, connects to the semiotic of changeability that she advertises in her deliberate association with water (as in her decision to appear initially before Antony on the river, and in her support of him later to fight Octavius by sea), in life and in her discursive after-life in the popular early colonial English cultural master text. As the nineteenth century Egyptian nationalist dramatist Ahmed Shawqui surmised, the political rationale of her sudden abandonment of the fight is the ensuring of her own survival by making the two competing colonial figures destroy themselves (Hughes-Hallett 297). This is not to entirely negate her relationship with Antony but to ground that relationship in the fundamental political choices within which she is bound, that is, to unavoidably balance the instincts of her psychic life with the particular pressures of her historical moment. If her ships at Actium carry her wealth (a detail that the colonial text leaves out [Volkmann 185], but the impress of which surfaces nonetheless in that text to underwrite her unexpected action in it), they are what will finance her fortunes, with Antony or without him. The advantage of the tactical flexibility that her unknowable action here affords is implicit as a matter of fact in Antony's ability later in Taenarum, to which he flees following Cleopatra, to use that same wealth to both equip his remaining commanders for their own flights to safety (3.11.9-24) and to facilitate his and Cleopatra's return to Egypt to reorganize themselves. If the unknowability of her behavior in this episode appears to invite its misinterpretation as her treachery, that is of little consequence as the brevity of Antony's accusations of her and his quick reconciliation with her within a mere twenty-four lines shows (3.11.51-75). More importantly, that misinterpretation allows her the opportunity to choose the time, the venue and the terms of her moral self vindication without in the meanwhile conceding the material position
that will enable that recovery. Overall, what the deliberate obscurity of her naval action at Actium does is to preserve a separation of her own political fortunes from those of her embattled colonial lover, not necessarily in support of his vengeful imperial rival and political superior but in favor of herself. This is the black gendered subaltern's inevitable and instinctive choice of expedience as the political ethic of her self survival, the impalpable esthetics of contingency with which she must combat the oppressions of her colonial experience and the means by which she can temporize the material finality of her historical fate. This is also linked to the tactic of shifting-ness, to her ability to change the locale of her self performance at will, that Charnes has discussed (110-111, 135).

In the second and final sea-fight at Alexandria (4.12.), the unknowability of her behavior lies not in any of her own actions per se, but in her culpability in the actions of others that might be attributable to her: the defection of her entire fleet to Octavius in the very opening moments of the final engagement. In the physical separation of herself and her fleet (she is obviously not on her ships when they defect), is the equivocal distance between her motivation and its physical manifestation. Buried in the uncertainty of whether or not she authorizes that defection, is the rupture of the identity of action that can externally write her, and thereby the incidence of the ethical-psychological illegibility that protects the play of her self agency. The real ambiguity of her intention, caught in the convincing surprise with which she meets Antony's anger after the episode, “Why is my lord enraged against his love?” (31), consists in the episode's concurrent projection of her power and her powerlessness, of her ability to command her forces and her inability to control them. Paradoxically, she can be in the defection as well as in her resistant location with Antony, that is, on two psychological planes at once. This is nothing other than the simultaneity of the victimization and recusant self-will with which the colonized subject performs its colonial narrative. The complex unknowability of her intentional location in this episode makes possible the critical postulate that the black gendered subaltern's historical self being is more than the sum of her visible actions and that she cannot be known through any unitary hermeneutics of her mimetic behavior. If the fight for signs is the fight for life, and if one's actions are the exposed signatures of one's being, then the discursive subject of the colonized black woman in Cleopatra fights for her right not to be written/known only through the signs of her observable representative existence.

As an elusive unknowability is the particular sign under which the discursive subject of the black woman in Cleopatra textually lives, so the ultimate demonstration of that unknowability is its rendering of Cleopatra's death in mimetic terms that radically contradict what they project. Her extinction may be her historical destiny but her staging of it refuses that extinction by making her suicide the vehicle of her triumphing over the inscriptive control of the colonial forces that vanquish her. The text of that future scripting, both in the early colonial English text's received cultural history of her as well as in its eager imagination of the actual physical conditions of its own re-play of that script, is stated four times in the last two acts: in Antony's angry rebuke of her in 4.12.33-34, in Cleopatra's own fearful evocation of it in 5.2.53-56, in Dolabella's confirmation of it in 5.2.199-201, and finally in Cleopatra's own famous iteration of it before she prepares to die: “I shall see / Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / I'th posture of a whore” (5.2.219-21). The particular valencies of this quadruple repetition, of this textual drumbeat as it were, is the advertisement of her material fate that is the colonizer's prerogative. This is the colonizer's ideological justification of his military-economic conquest, the reflexive benefit of his self glorification through his denigration of the colonized. In preferring to die rather than be the object of this Roman scurrility, Cleopatra, like Othello, terminates the cultural game of imperial patriarchy's writing of its other by writing out herself. The manner of that dying, however, both performs the exoticization of her that is the imperative of her colonial discourse and contests it, which is to say she Egyptianizes her Roman death. In doing so she prevents her death from essentializing her memory even while establishing it.

That suicide is the Roman way of dealing with dishonor and defeat Cleopatra knows from the examples of Brutus and Cassius in the Caesarist civil war. She also knows it from the precedent of her colonial-lover's death. But her particular execution of that ritual of dying is something that Rome cannot know, and because of
that her suicide performs instead her own inimitability rather than any transparent Roman values. As Antony's
was a male version of that ritual self killing, hers is going to be a female one, manifested as earlier noted in
her pronounced association with the exotic Egyptian female mother-goddess Isis and with her symbol of the
asp or uraeus, which in pharaonic “hieroglyphic writing was the determinative sign for the word ‘goddess’”
(Volkmann 207). The obfuscatory semiotic of this association is also perfectly congruent with the
“multiplicit[ousness]” and “portmanteau nature” of the Isis myth (Hughes-Hallett 80) itself. Furthermore,
that Isis was to Romans the goddess of foreigners (Hughes-Hallett 80) translates the Roman familiarity of the
ritual of her suicide into the unfamiliarity of an alien practice, thereby inserting the ethnic-gendered
foreign-ness of her self into the transparency of the colonial-patriarchal knowing of her. Concurrently, as
Antony's self killing was marked by a blundering ineptitude, this is going to be distinguished by an elegant
efficiency that will reify the social standing of the subjugated black female over the imperial-colonial male
even in death. In these backcrossed racial-sexual features her suicide thus uses the very
racialization-sexualization of herself that is her colonial burden to confuse any homogenous clarity in the
notion of herself that might be the gateway to her cultural incarceration in the future history of the colonizer's
community.

Still further, if in substance the act of suicide is a gesture of self cancellation as in Brutus's, Cassius's and
Antony's case, Cleopatra's deliberate staging of it is a statement of self assertion in the face of extinction. This
is signalled in the elaborateness of her final dressing routine, which begins with the imperious order of “Go,
fetch my best attires” in 5.2.227 and continues over fifty two lines to the conscious flourish of “Give me my
robes. Put on my crown / I have immortal longings in me” in 5.2.279. The same opacity is achieved in the
choice of her method of death by a snake's bite, which displays her dying but not immediately the cause of it,
so that in Octavius's wondering, “The manner of their deaths? / I do not see them bleed” (5.2.337-38) her
demise refuses to offer the thematic closure that it otherwise could have been colonially expected to yield. Her
death therefore presents the memorial claim of her life not by its self explanatory but by its traces of
lingering mystery. It is precisely her death's stylistic thwarting of a thematic finality that prompts her colonial
conqueror's quick compensatory propagandist authorization of her story as one of love, “She shall be buried
by her Antony / No grave upon the earth shall clip in it / A pair so famous” (5.2.358-60), that critical
commentary has noted in her colonial text (Charnes 138), and that historical and investigative journalistic
analyses has traditionally identified in the cultural paratext that produced that text (Hughes-Hallett 38-42).

In doing all these things simultaneously Cleopatra's suicide retains the integrity of her being by projecting its
indecipherability, and which is a quintessential manifestation of the necessary dubiety of the Spivak-ian “free
will of the female sexed subject” in its colonial location.

In general, unpredictability's location in the “dubious place of the free will of the female-sexed subject” is
helped considerably by, and profitably shades into, the potent notion of Irigaray-an jouissance and the vital
post-feminist heuristic of Haraway-ian cyborgism, both in turn being derivatives of Lacanian revisionist
post-Freudian psychoanalysis. If for Luce Irigaray “No singular form(s) … can complete the becomings of the
desire of a woman,” so that “what comes to pass in the jouissance of woman is in excess of it[womanhood]”
(Irigaray Reader 55), and “female jouissance is a dimension that is never complete and never reversible”
(Irigaray Reader 190), for Donna Haraway “The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and
reality,” an idea that “takes pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and … responsibility in their construction …
an ultimate self united at last from all dependency” (598). To these can be added the relatedness of
unpredictability to the “subversive repetition” that Judith Butler has said interrupts the processing of colonial
identity and the spatial design of the social text (Gender Trouble 140-43; Ang-Lygate 182). This is not
dissimilar to Gayatri Spivak's own notion of “interruption,” as “a place of the reinscription of the dialectic
into deconstruction,” and as a necessity “which allows something to function” (Postcolonial Critic 110).
These multiple paradigms all contribute pertinent interpretative methodologies for tracking the operation of
anti-memory, linguistic indeterminacy, recusant self-sight, and unknowability in the play of Cleopatra's
strategically unpredictable textual behavior. Within the “dubious place of the free will of the female sexed
subject,” the additional critical imperatives of jouissance, cyborgism, and subversive repetition or necessary
interruption, help to make Cleopatra's unpredictability a psychic natural condition of historical response that
dissolves the binary prophylactics of racial and sexual othering upon which colonialism historically depends.

The discernible effect of the unpredictability of the discursive subject of the black woman in Cleopatra can be
seen if the analytical Jamesonian symbolic design of her textual landscape is clearly understood. In that
symbolic design, Antony is the Shakespearean colonial author function, Caesar and his Rome the homosocial
imaginary that is writing him, and Cleopatra the discursive subject of the black woman the surviving authorial
memory of whose desire is the occasion for the colonial text of Anthony and Cleopatra. In this representative
discursive scenario the success of Cleopatra's unpredictability in subverting Caesarist-Roman patriarchal
social and psychic self constructions such as its national-imperial dutifulness and the resolute nobility of its
manhood, is also the discursive subject of the black woman's obstruction of the recovery of the lost
homosocial order of the Sonnets that is the Shakespearean author-function's subliminal cue for its memory of
her in the play. The retained integrity of Cleopatra's fecund Egyptian-feminine principle against the sterile
white masculinity of the Roman order is then the vindication of the black woman's ethnic and gendered being
over the white patriarchal world of her early modern English authoring. Additionally, if the history of the
Roman naming of August, to commemorate the final subjugation of the East by the West in Octavius's
ultimate sacking of Egyptian power on the month of Cleopatra's death in August 10, 30 b.c., also contains
within it the memory of the Eastern colored monarch's defiance of European hegemony and sustains through
that her foundational impact on world history (Volkmann 213), that has an analogous resonance with the date
of Antony and Cleopatra's actual first performance. Since the scholarly consensus for that date, “late 1606”
(Bevington A18, Riverside 1343, Wilders 1), locates the play in the second half of that year, the proximity of
that calendric location to August temptingly marks the play's performance as a double survival, of the memory
of the black woman in the Sonnets through the memory of the historical black figure of Cleopatra in the
received Stuart history of the naming of the month of the latter's theatrical reappearance.

The specific achievements of the unpredictability of the subject of the black woman in Cleopatra, which is
basically the failure of the popular colonial text's attempt to negatively manipulate the discourses of race and
gender against each other, can also be seen ultimately in the resultant hybridity of its textual architecture. This
is the conflation of the instincts of tragedy, history, comedy, and romance in the play text that has traditionally
comprised the problem of its generic confusion in postmodern critical commentary (Spevack 621-34). If in
Aristotelian patriarchal formalism tragedy is male, appropriating thematic markers such as morality,
responsibility, duty, culture, and state, and comedy and romance are female, deploying tropes of love,
marriage, festivity, nature, and social relations, the play's teleology is synchronously tragic and comic and not
diachronously so. Because of Cleopatra's textual contrariety, the play succeeds in celebrating neither state nor
marriage, neither Rome or Antony nor Cleopatra or Egypt. The generic hybridization that her unpredictability
effects is also thereby her seizure of the discursive control of her colonial narration. The fact that most of the
instances of the unpredictability of the black woman in Cleopatra discussed in this section appear in
Shakespeare from her cultural history (in Plutarch for instance), is merely proof of the intrinsic recursivity of
the subject of the black woman in all her discursive re-performances, and that is a part of the larger
recalcitrance of the racial subaltern in all the renditions of its cultural history that has been the basic insistence
of this book.

V

The abstract speculativeness of the tracing that this chapter has attempted of the black woman's resistant
struggle, from her subliminal presence in the Sonnets to her surfacing in the black classical Egyptian queen's
foundational discursive contestation of the re-play of her story in Antony and Cleopatra, merely describes the
critical difficulties attendant upon such a project. The convolutions of such an interventionist exercise threaten
the very clarity of its results. For instance, the foregoing explanation of Cleopatra's unpredictability must
perforce itself be false, not only because of the expedient expository selectiveness of its apparata and
evidentiality, nor only because of the inevitable gender appropriation that is the critical space of its male
authoring (see note 33), but because unpredictability must logically be inexplicable. The failure of unpredictability's discursive transparency can therefore be the ultimate proof of its success in its colonial text, and in its imbrication in the black woman's recalcitrant shadow life in Cleopatra, but the guarantee of her discursive survival conversely lies only in the obscurity of such an interpretative space.

These difficulties define the deep structures of the black woman's incarceration in her colonial author's ongoing cultural imagination and warn against any simplistic notions of her recoverability. They suggest at best the ethical necessity of reading her colonial narrative against its cultural grain, of dismantling the semantic codes of its imperial syntax, in the hope not of resurrecting her but of making evident the programs of her elision. That Antony and Cleopatra marks the terminus quo of the black woman's contrary discursive after-life in Shakespeare, being replaced for the last time by early English colonialism's self educative master myth of the black man in the wild in The Tempest, means that the black woman can live only in the agendas of critical practices that continue to question her absence in Shakespeare's canonic formations.

Notes

1. The strength of this urge can be seen in the fact that Bradstreet was an immigrant to the American colony in 1630, and the poem was written there.
2. On this, also see Gillies who, notwithstanding his overall interest in seeing Othello's connections with The Merchant of Venice rather than with Titus, says nevertheless that “All Shakespearean moors inherit Aaron's paradox” (112).
3. In Ericson's view Cleopatra also combines “aspects of the youthful, sacrificial, beneficent, redemptive type” of Shakespearean female characters such as Ophelia, Desdemona, Cordelia as well as Marina, Perdita and Miranda (Patriarchal Structures 124), but he does not explain, and it is difficult to see, the logic of this grouping.
4. The relative paucity of re-assessments of Antony and Cleopatra along the lines of race discourse compared to the volume of such work on Shakespearean texts such as Othello or The Tempest that has emerged in the last decade, has been described by some as “a conspiracy of silence” (Nyquist 87). Following Adelman's work, the few race based revaluations of the play within the last decade include the studies of Adelman, Loomba (Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama), Kim Hall (Things of Darkness), Charnes, Ericson (Patriarchal Structures), Nyquist and Joyce MacDonald (“Sex, Race, and Empire in Antony and Cleopatra.”).
5. The problematic phenomenon of woman being tacitly white, noted by Barbara Nyquist for instance with regard to Cleopatra (87), has been seen by both Anne McClintock (183-84) and Judith Butler (Bodies that Matter 181) as the result of postmodern European feminism's prioritization of sexual difference over racial difference (cited by Sara Ahmed 157-58).
6. Despite its journalistic pedigree, Hughes-Hallett's deservedly much-cited book is so thoroughly researched as to be a minefield of information, and though not self consciously theoretical is rich in theoretical and critical insights. My reliance on this work here is for this reason.
7. The comments of the Swiss historian Hans Werner DeBrunner on this painting that Scobie cites are telling:

   … in a dramatic way, the painter accuses Europeans of brutal abuse of Africans … The African woman belongs to the dream world of primal psychological conceptions … All these representations and descriptions of African women show a common tendency: to imagine in the African woman a being sometimes dangerous, sometimes amusing, always different and possibly even doomed to perdition.

   (152)
The painting may recall at least one real life incident, the rape of a black woman and her abandonment on a remote island by the crew of Francis Drake's crew on his third trip round the world (Kim Hall, Things of Darkness 152).

8. Jack D'Amico's remark about Antony and Cleopatra itself is similar:

… through Enobarbus, Shakespeare reveals the deeper appeal of a world that attracts the Western foreigner not only because it allows him a vacation from the rules of his homeland but also because it takes him into the more seductive realm of transformation where none of the old rules applies.

(154).

9. Richard Helgerson, in his essay, “Language Lessons,” citing two recent studies, credits the Tudor Cambridge mathematician and astrologer, John Dee, for being the first early modern English source of this associative phrase (292).

10. Even though James's marriage took place in Scotland when he was the Scottish James IV the details of the entertainment that he arranged for the ceremony—having four naked Africans run in the snow before the marriage party's carriage—are a part of what I am describing as the more deliberately imperialist ambitions of his government and politics. As is now well known that infamous episode involved the death of one of the Africans from exposure to the extreme cold (Kim Hall, Things of Darkness 128).

11. This is not the only instance. As the same map shows, and as The Cambridge Ancient History points out, Ptolemy Apion was also the product of the union of Ptolemy VII Euergetes II with a concubine (316). Clearly, Ptolemaic blood was less “pure” than a certain kind of interested historical scholarship would fondly like to believe.

12. Earlier in his otherwise helpful article, Harvey confuses Ptolemy IX with Ptolemy XI and Ptolemy XII himself with his son Ptolemy XIII (352). It is possibly this same error that is replicated by both Clarke and Rogers, cited below.

13. John Henrik Clarke, citing Pierre Loupous (126). However, Clarke, as well as J. A. Rogers whom he cites, both confuse Ptolemy IX with Ptolemy XI (the former was Soter II, the latter was Alexander II).

14. The gradual Egyptianization of the Ptolemies from the time of Philopator up to Cleopatra, would seem to corroborate Martin Bernal's otherwise contested thesis (in Black Athena) about the reverse cultural colonialism of the Greeks by the ancient Egyptians.

15. It is revealing that after herself laying the grounds for a racial analysis of the play in her first book (Common Liar) Adelman proceeds to ignore the implications of Cleopatra's color in her second, otherwise acutely argued book, Suffocating Mothers. Another example of the recalcitrance to talk about race in current criticism is Charles Whitney's essay, “Charmian's Laughter;” which despite its very helpful analysis of the connections between Shakespeare's Egyptian Cleopatra and her court and early modern English gypsies, confines itself to a capable class analysis (that focuses attention on Charmian rather than Cleopatra) while remaining disinterested in any exploration of the racial construction of the play. He bypasses any racial question with merely a cursory acknowledgment of the subject with the word “oriental” at two points in his essay. This, presumably, is the phenomenon that Nyquist has aggressively described as “a conspiracy of silence” (earlier cited in note 3).

16. Although Adelman's belief in the blackness of Shakespeare's Cleopatra is cautiously expressed, she herself cites no less than five cogent reasons for the probability of Shakespeare's audience to regard Cleopatra as an “African queen”, among which two of the more compelling ones are that Cleopatra, in the “to blanch an Ethiop” reference in lines 223-25, “uses current [Elizabethan] theory to explain her color suggests that Shakespeare imagined her as the proverbial Elizabethan Ethiopean,” and that given the Tudor assumptions about the sexual profligacy of Africans if Cleopatra was meant to be lascivious she had to be thought of as African (Common Liar 187-88). For the direct connection in Virgil between Cleopatra and Dido also see John Wilders's “Introduction” in his recent Arden Shakespeare edition of the play (66).
17. See also Wilders 66, and Pelling 17, whom Wilders cites.
18. This is probably the origin of the notion of both the historical and the fictional Cleopatra's "whiteness" in popular and scholarly thinking from medieval through modern times. Plutarch's Europeanizing of Cleopatra completes the classical rewriting of the political effects of the pair's relationship. If the strategy of the Virgilian move was not only to roll back the subversive power of the black queen by making the lover abandon her but also to remove her altogether from direct visibility by making Dido stand in for her, Plutarch's treatment extends this process of Cleopatra's effacement by making her unequivocally white.
19. Hughes-Hallett, who citing Geoffrey Bullough points this out, infers the play's content was political on the grounds that Fulke Greville suppressed it for fear of offending the Queen at a time when she was sensitive to criticism:

Sir Fulke Greville, Shakespeare's contemporary, wrote a tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra, but burnt the manuscript in fear that its chief characters, 'having some childish wantonness,' might be identified with Elizabeth I and her rejected favorite, the Earl of Essex. Essex was in disgrace, and the Queen was sensitive to any criticism; it was no time, Greville judged, to publish a play censuring a ruler for 'forsaking empire to follow sensuality.'

(139)
20. This is to say that love and politics are not separate but inextricably connected, that desire and passion have origins and consequences in the political life of the world. It is this caveat that, in my discussions of the play later in this chapter, silently conflates Antony's and Caesar's positions. His situation apparently between the Western imperial-colonial patriarchy of Rome on the one hand and the counter-politics of Cleopatra's Eastern Egypt and of his lover-ship of Cleopatra on the other, that has been noted in most commentary (by Charnes, for instance, 112-15), does not in the long view of Cleopatra's racial-colonized politics of survival afford him a significantly different discursive location than Caesar's. He is for her merely the focus of a different kind of strategy than Caesar, and without suggesting that her involvement with him is simply duplicitous my assumption is that involvement is predicated on the tactical advantage he represents for her historically. For a similar explanation of the complexity of Cleopatra's "love" see Charnes's explanation of love "as poetic construct" and as "realpolitik" (*Notorious Identity* 144).
21. Nyquist feels that the political agenda of Sedley's play is a kind of revivalist republicanism whereas Dryden's is a direct challenge to that (100).
22. It is therefore not surprising that, as Martin Bernal has argued, the "whitening" of ancient Egypt occurred in the nineteenth century, until which time and going back to antiquity Egypt was always regarded as African and black (iv, 2, 243). In early modern England, Bernal points out, "the fact that the name Gypsy (or Egyptian) was given to people from North-West India shows that in the 15th century the Egyptians were seen as archetypally dark people" (242).
23. My focusing on the negative racial-sexual discursive intermixture in Shakespeare's Cleopatra is paralleled by Jenny Sharpe's formulation of "the sexed subject of Victorian England [as] also a racial identity", and my critical intention behind this focusing, as will be evident shortly, is also echoed by her emphasis on the "need [for] a critical model that can accommodate, on the one hand, female power and desire, and, on the other hand, gender restrictions and sexual subordination" (11).
24. As that formidable eighteenth century Shakespearean editor, Samuel Johnson, glibly put it, "Gypsy is used here, both in the original meaning for an Egyptian, and in its accidental sense, for a bad woman" (Spevack 7). Likewise, a recent editor of the play in glossing the "tawny front" and "gipsy" reference has explained, "Gipsies began to appear in England in the early sixteenth century and were thought to have come from Egypt. ‘Gipsy’ was a contemptuous term for a promiscuous woman. Hence Cleopatra is here described as a gipsy, an Egyptian and a whore" (Wilders 91). For an extended eye-opening discussion of what the "gipsy" reference could have meant to Jacobean
audiences aware of English gypsies and of their illegitimate status, see Charles Whitney's essay, “Charmian's Laughter.”

25. For Cleopatra's visibly active role in Antony's war preparation against Caesar, see Volkmann 154-55.

26. Enobarbus may be responding to the awe-struck Agrippa's essentialist question about what Cleopatra is like, but the cue of the conversation is squarely political: the speakers are part of the administrative staff of competing Roman political and military personalities who have met to negotiate a difficult but necessary alliance between themselves. The specific context of Enobarbus's portrait of Cleopatra is also political: he is describing how Cleopatra first met Antony and overcame him with her dazzling physical presence. Noticeably, in Enobarbus's description, that conquest has no political qualities.

27. What Knoxe said was that,

To promote a woman to beare rule, superioritie, dominion or empire above any realm, nation. or citie, is repugnant to nature, contumelie to God, a thing most contrarious to his reveled will and approved ordinance, and finallie it is the subversion of good order, of all equitie and justice.

(Shepherd 23)

Coinciding with Elizabeth's accession to the throne, and with the fact of her necessary and generally admirable reign, however, Knoxe's statement was quickly qualified by John Calvin (“that there were occasionally women so endow'd … that they were raised up by divine authority … to condemn the inactivity of men” Knoxe 17, Shepherd 24) and Edmund Spenser (“Unless the heavens them lift to lawful soveraintie,” Faerie Queene 5.5.25), not only to clearly position Elizabeth as the exception to this view, but also to make such exceptional women a vehicle of God's admonishment to a community of inactive or incapable men. The misogyny of such attacks, as Shepherd points out, is partly contextualized by the instances of Catholic female rulers (Shepherd 24), but their larger serviceability remains bound within the performance of a racialized gender discourse. For a discussion of the early modern Anglo-European provenance of “Amazonomachy” see, in addition to Shepherd and Brown, Stephen Orgel's essay “Jonson and the Amazons.”

28. For effective recent studies of the connections between Cleopatra and Elizabeth in Elizabethan cultural practice see the essays by Rhinehart and Jankowski.

29. The deliberateness of the suppression of Cleopatra's children in Shakespeare is evident in the fact that other Elizabethan texts do mention them. For instance, Charles Whitney has pointed out that in the Countess of Pembroke's translation of Garnier's Antonie, Charmian elaborately mentions Cleopatra's children as a strong reason for the latter not to commit suicide (72), a reference that in Shakespeare appears only obliquely in the soothsayer scene cited above.

30. The other supposed maternal markings of Cleopatra that Adelman has discussed, such as the “womb” reference in 3.5.163 (Suffocating Mothers 186), do not so much show her located in and attached to maternity as detached and separated from it. Insofar as the “womb” reference is a “memory” it is a part not of her mimetic presentation but of her response to it, a function of her anti-memory as will be evident later in this chapter.

31. The only visible moment of uninterrupted reflection she has is her quiet speech in 5.2.1-8 when after Antony's death she begins to think of suicide. But even then her maids are with her.

32. This important essay written in her mid-to-late career is symptomatic of Spivak's increasing focus later on what she has subsequently termed as her central critical interest:

the one most consistently exiled from episteme ... the disenfranchised woman, the figure I have

(Postcolonical Critic 102-3)

I find now that my work is coalescing around strange single figures like the Rani of Sirmur,
Spivak goes on in the essay to correct La Capra's “psychoanalytical metaphor for transformative disciplinary practice” as an inevitable “catachresis,” in which the reconstruction of the past is also “a genealogy of the historian” (251), in direct candid proof of which she says “My Indian example could thus be seen as a nostalgic investigation of the lost roots of my own identity” (252). My own acquiescence to this confessional prerequisite is simply the admission of my interest in the racial and sexual minority histories not only over and through which popular canonical European cultural mastertexts such as Shakespeare's are constructed but against which they are transmitted in contemporary discourse. While not thereby indulging in the kind of “congratulatory self marginalization” that Spivak has warned against (quoted in Bahri 4), as a Bangladeshi male scholar teaching a canonical Anglo-European author and period in the U.S. my connection to “minority discourses” is, I would assume, obvious. The fact of my gender, and of my particular national origins on the periphery of the power hub of the Indian sub-continent, give me a compoundedly self counteractive critical identity (as a Bangladeshi I am as disempowered in the U.S. as I am in the Indian sub-continent, while as a male I am privileged in both locations) that is both my advantage and my difficulty.

While Adelman also sees clearly the value of Cleopatra's speech about Antony in terms of its appropriative memorial reconstruction, she finds the speech restorative of Cleopatra's position (and of the bountiful maternity of the female against the sterility of the Octavian-Roman male regime) only through her recovery of an ideal memory of the male in Antony (Suffocating Mothers 183-84).

The distinction I am suggesting here is obviously indebted to the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's notion of the difference between *langue* and *parole* in which “Language is a social phenomenon, whereas speech is an individual one,” and particularly to the socio- and ethno- logic validation of that distinction in post-Saussurian linguistics (Ducrot and Todorov 118), and my appropriation of Certeau's ideas about the power of speech has resonances with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia* (earlier cited Chapter 3 note 19).

For an explanation of Mikhail Bakhtin's coinage of the term see Chapter 3.

This is only to claim in a postcolonial pedagogy a particular significance for what might otherwise also be a generally valid idea.

This is reflected neatly in the historical Octavius's insistence to the Roman senate at the outset of his campaign that his wars with Antony not be represented as a civil war but as a war against Egypt and its Queen as “a righteous and holy war, a “"bellum iustum pium"” (Volkmann 170), despite the lack of any direct or exclusive interaction between Egyptian and Roman forces.

In proclaiming her “sad love story” Octavius is actually establishing his own “nobility” in the eyes of his own imperial constituency, thereby transforming his deliberate Roman colonial conquest of her and of Egypt into a “human tragedy.”

Works Cited


Antony and Cleopatra (Vol. 81)

Introduction

Antony and Cleopatra

See also Antony and Cleopatra Criticism (Volume 58).

Likely written and first performed between 1606 and 1607, Antony and Cleopatra is generally considered one of Shakespeare's finest tragic dramas. Focused on the passionate love of the Roman general Mark Antony and the Egyptian queen Cleopatra, the play spans an approximately ten-year period of historical conflict between the Mediterranean powers of Egypt and Rome in the first century b.c. and culminates in the deaths by suicide of its eponymous figures. John Wilders (1995) surveys the structure, characters, themes, and language of Antony and Cleopatra and highlights Shakespeare's dramatic juxtaposition of Egypt and Rome, which has long been considered the major structural element in the play. Critics, including Wilders, have remarked that Shakespeare's Rome is a masculine, pragmatic, martial, and public culture that eagerly strives to fulfill its virtues of military conquest and peaceful, ordered rule. His Alexandrian Egypt, in contrast, is feminine, domestic, decadent, and individualistic, linked with pleasure—specifically Antony's dalliance with the beautiful Cleopatra. Scholars are also interested in the drama's extraordinary characters, including the historical personages Mark Antony, Cleopatra, and Octavius Caesar, whose stories Shakespeare culled from various sources in order to make them his own. Usually regarded as unstable, mutable, or inconsistent, these figures have proved notoriously resistant to categorization. Although it is one of Shakespeare's more difficult dramas to successfully stage, Antony and Cleopatra has been widely performed since the second half of the nineteenth century and remains popular with audiences, in large part due to the allure of Shakespeare's Cleopatra.

Contemporary critical interest in Cleopatra, especially among feminist scholars, attests to the continued status of this enigmatic historical queen as one of the most fascinating female characters in the Shakespearean canon. L. J. Mills (1960) regards Cleopatra as the central focus of the play. Analyzing Cleopatra's renowned contradictory manner and behavior, egocentrism, extravagance, and her essential mystery, Mills suggests that by winning control of Antony without care or recognition of his character, military virtue, or complete devotion to her, Cleopatra precipitates her own tragedy and prompts Antony's despair and self-destruction. Clare Kinney (1990) links Cleopatra's fundamental strength to her mutable identity. For Kinney, Cleopatra is a human embodiment of Egypt to such a degree that she subsumes its multiplicity and vast internal differences. Unlike the Roman figures with whom she is contrasted—individuals like Antony or Octavius Caesar, both associated with masculine virtues and a competitive drive to dominate—Cleopatra represents an all-inclusive potentiality that embraces the feminine and the masculine, refusing to be subsumed by one or the other. Feminist critic Mary Ann Bushman (1991) analyzes Cleopatra's status as the “tragic hero” of the play. Unlike Kinney and other critics who have viewed Cleopatra as a mingling of feminine and masculine principles, Bushman argues that Shakespeare's Cleopatra is neither masculine nor feminine, but instead defines herself through theatrical spectacle, and locates her shifting identity within the mutable realm of staged performance. Susan Muaddi Darraj (2001) concentrates on Shakespeare's efforts to fashion Cleopatra into a believable “violent and intimidating” character in an age when women had little political power. According to Darraj, Shakespeare made Cleopatra a convincing villain to Jacobean theatergoers by locating her in a foreign realm, inverting her gender role with that of her masculine lover Antony, obliterating her maternal nature, and allowing her to be redeemed only through death.

Antony and Cleopatra is considered to be one of the more difficult Shakespearean dramas to successfully stage. An extremely long piece with numerous abrupt changes in locale—from Egypt to Rome to Misenum to Athens—Antony and Cleopatra presents considerable challenges to directors, actors, and audiences. Reviewing a 1999 all-male production of the play directed by Giles Block and performed at the open-air Globe Theatre in
London, Kristin E. Gandrow (2000) praises Mark Rylance's campy but nuanced portrayal of Cleopatra. Gandrow notes that Block's eccentric staging and Rylance's camp-inspired performance were a proper tribute to the spirit of William Shakespeare's original play. Reviewing the same 1999 production, critic Sheridan Morley finds its comic turn, including Rylance's near drag queen interpretation of Cleopatra, appropriate to the open-air environment and touristy nature of the Globe. Alvin Klein reviews the 2000 staging of Antony and Cleopatra directed by Bonnie J. Monte for the New Jersey Shakespeare Festival. Klein notes the difficulties in staging this “most unplayable play,” which crosses the boundaries between tragedy, comedy, and history, but finds the essential failure of this production was the lack of passion between Robert Cuccioli's subdued Mark Antony and Tamara Tunie's modernized Cleopatra. Critics were not much more favorably disposed to director Michael Attenborough's 2002 Royal Shakespeare Company production of the drama at Stratford-upon-Avon. Juliet Fleming notes several flaws in this production, including bungled verse that often degenerated into shouting and the lackluster male cast; however, she lauds several performances by women, principally Sinead Cusack's Cleopatra. Rex Gibson (2002) remarks on Attenborough's extensive cuts to the text of Antony and Cleopatra, and finds that the cuts highlighted two of the play's themes: “the contrast of Rome and Egypt, and the destructive effects of love.” Lisa Hopkins (2002) contends that Attenborough's production was both “unfocused” and “alarmingly short” and criticizes the textual cuts, simple set, and bad casting. While she praises several key members of its supporting cast—in the roles of Charmian, Enobarbus, and Octavius Caesar—Hopkins finds their work unable to redeem the unconvincing Egyptian queen and her theatrically constrained Roman lover.

Critics continue to examine the thematic oppositions in Antony and Cleopatra. Joan Lord Hall (see Further Reading) surveys a selection of dualistic conflicts and themes in Antony and Cleopatra, including the play's representation of love in opposition to military leadership, the antagonism between artistic imagination and nature (a favorite subject of Renaissance criticism), the futility of action in the face of capricious fortune, the essential mutability of the sublunar world, and the enormous power of theatricality and role-playing to destabilize perception and reality. William D. Wolf (1982) maintains that Antony and Cleopatra contrasts radically with Shakespeare's other tragic dramas, noting that the play's essential ambiguity is one of its defining characteristics. While acknowledging a pivotal dichotomy between the opposing cultural values associated with Egypt and Rome, Wolf claims its central symbolic conflict involves the tension between change and permanence—a tension that prompts Antony and Cleopatra to escape from this mutable world. J. Robert Baker studies the gender reversals in Antony and Cleopatra, contending that “Shakespeare figures movement out of one's own gender as a necessary and desirable, if painful, educational process a character must undergo in order to inhabit a world not bound by life or death, tragedy or comedy.” Paul Yachnin (1993) views Antony and Cleopatra as a critique of absolutist loyalty to the divinely appointed sovereign. Yachnin also investigates the dynamic of master and servant relations and the tensions between “command and response” that pervade the drama, as well as their political implications in the Jacobean and Elizabethan periods. Arthur Lindley (1996) adapts Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque to his discussion of Antony and Cleopatra, noting the play's comic subversion of the tragic and Egypt's status as a carnival-like parody of Roman culture. Lastly, Alf Sjöberg (2002) concentrates on the theme of transformation in Antony and Cleopatra as a force born from the drama's “world of ruinous oppositions.” In Sjöberg's broad-ranging study, the play privileges change as the only constant in a reality defined by struggle, and as an ameliorative to the human impulse toward degeneration, loss of identity, and self-annihilation.

Criticism: Overviews And General Studies

[In the following excerpt, Wilders surveys the structure, characters, themes, and language of Antony and Cleopatra.]

THE QUESTION OF STRUCTURE
SHIFTS OF LOCATION

The dramatic construction of Antony and Cleopatra, with its constant shifts of location, is one which Shakespeare had already used in the two parts of Henry IV with their oscillations between the court, the tavern and the battlefield and their excursions into Wales and Gloucestershire. This in turn grew out of the mode he had used in the comedies, where one location is set off against another: the house of Baptista against that of Petuchio in The Taming of the Shrew, the city and the wood in A Midsummer Night's Dream, Venice and Belmont in The Merchant of Venice. It had, in fact, been Shakespeare's way of working from the very beginning. As Emrys Jones points out,

A striking feature of a play like 1 Henry IV is the constant comparativeness of its method: we are never allowed to become identified with the point of view of any one of its characters. Although Talbot is a famous soldier-hero, he is only one of several main figures. The play's vision of reality is never less than complex: all viewpoints are partial. Hence the endless oscillation from one group, one individual, to another.

(Jones, Origins, 13-14)

By the time he wrote the two Henry IV plays, this kind of construction was a means whereby he presented the audience with a number of different assumptions, attitudes and ways of life. The civil war, for example, which to King Henry is a source of continual anxiety, to Falstaff is an opportunity to line his own pockets, and the interview between the King and the Prince, which in the court takes place in earnest, is the subject of a charade in the tavern. The audience is offered several different and conflicting attitudes to the same experience, and is invited to weigh the public responsibilities of war and politics against the personal desire for pleasure, comradeship and self-satisfaction. During the greater part of the two plays the conflicting attitudes are kept equally in view, chiefly in the figure of the Prince, who manages to encompass both, but towards the end of each play he is compelled to make a choice, first when he pledges himself to defeat Hotspur in Part 1, and again when he casts off Falstaff in Part 2. On the second occasion, however, the impression is created that in dismissing Falstaff he repudiates a part of himself. There is no wholly 'correct' choice. England's gain is Falstaff's loss and, though we do not feel that his decision is wholly laudable, the alternative—to embrace Falstaff—would have been far worse.

In Antony and Cleopatra Shakespeare created a similar kind of structure but used it with greater complexity and carried its implications further. Throughout the play, Roman attitudes and principles, expressed mainly by Octavius Caesar, are placed in opposition to the Egyptian, represented chiefly by Cleopatra. Antony is in a similar position to Prince Hal, equally at home in either world but compelled eventually to choose between them, and the critics, as we shall see, have continued to argue whether or not he chose correctly. As Maurice Charney says, Rome and Egypt 'represent crucial moral choices and they function as symbolic locales in a manner not unlike Henry James's Europe and America' (Charney, 93).

EGYPT AND ROME

Rome is represented by a predominantly male society in which the only woman, Octavia, is regarded as a “cement” to promote and consolidate male relations’ (Erickson, 128). For the Romans the ideal is measured in masculine, political, pragmatic, military terms, the subservience of the individual to the common good of the state, of personal pleasure to public duty, of private, domestic loyalties to the demands of empire. Alexandria, on the other hand, is a predominantly female society for which the ideal is measured in terms of the intensity of emotion, of physical sensation, the subservience of social responsibility to the demands of feeling. Hence Cleopatra must send to Antony every day a several greeting or she'll unpeople Egypt, and, at Actium, Antony deserts his own men and takes flight with Cleopatra because his heart is tied to her rudder. Adelman points out the extreme contrast between the two eulogies of Antony, the first delivered by Caesar in
praise of the hardened soldier he once was (1.4.56-72), the second by Cleopatra in celebration of the Antony who has died (5.2.78-91). Since both are retrospective and neither corresponds with the man we are actually shown, both are idealizations, but, in describing the ideal, both speakers reveal the values they espouse. Whereas Caesar, says Adelman, ‘locates Antony in the Timonesque landscape of absolute deprivation’, a winter landscape in which he survives by exercising the manly virtues of fortitude and endurance, Cleopatra places him in a setting of ‘immense abundance’ with ‘no winter in it’: ‘The contest between Caesar and Cleopatra, Rome and Egypt, is in part a contest between male scarcity and female bounty as the defining site of Antony's heroic masculinity’ (Adelman, Mothers, 176-7). For Caesar, as for Coriolanus, manliness entails the repression of all that is female, but for Cleopatra Antony is visualized as like herself, ‘feeding and renewing the appetite in an endless cycle of gratification and desire, making hungry where most she satisfies’ (ibid., 190). Caesar regards his ‘great competitor’ as a man who has betrayed his own ideals (as, indeed, does Antony from time to time) but Cleopatra sees him as a man who has become at one with herself. As Erickson puts it, ‘Octavius finds in Antony a heightened image of his own abstemiousness, Cleopatra's celebration of the bountiful Antony projects a model in which she discovers her own bounty’ (Erickson, 142). As so often in Shakespeare, every gain is a different kind of loss and every asset a different kind of liability. ‘We are left at the end with a painfully divided response, for which there is no resolution’ (ibid., 145).

SHIFTS WITHIN SCENES

These contrasts and contradictions form the basis on which the play is constructed and also determine the shape of individual scenes. In the opening scene the ‘flourish’ or fanfare of trumpets leads us to expect the formal entry of some distinguished leader but it is followed by the arrival of Antony and Cleopatra with her maids, ‘with eunuchs fanning her’. The ‘triple pillar of the world’ is exhibited to us as what the Roman Philo calls ‘a strumpet's fool’. Again, the formal reconciliation between Antony and Caesar (2.2.18-180) is immediately followed by a private conversation between Maecenas and Enobarbus about the excesses of Alexandrian social life (2.2.185-99), and the former's belief that Antony must now leave Cleopatra is followed by the latter's assurance that he will not. The official feast which is held to celebrate the success of the peace conference (2.7) is preceded by the chatter among the servants about the drunkenness of the guests. The poignancy of Caesar's farewell to his sister (3.2) is undermined by the cynical observations of Agrippa and Enobarbus which introduce it, and their sarcastic asides during the course of the scene prevent us from taking it wholly seriously. This counterpointing of the poignant, the solemn and the tragic against the ironical, the sceptical and the absurd is most apparent in Shakespeare's treatment of Antony's suicide. Believing that he has suffered his ultimate defeat and that Cleopatra has killed herself, he realizes that the two ideals to which he has devoted his life have been destroyed and he therefore resolves to die in the Roman, stoical manner by falling on his sword. His ineffectual attempt to do so, however, is both painful and ridiculous: his servant Eros, instead of assisting his master, falls on his own sword; when Antony tries to kill himself he fails; the guards, refusing to complete the job, walk away, and it is now when he is at his most abject that he learns that Cleopatra is still alive. Nevertheless he insists on giving her the heroic version of the story:

[I] do now not basely die,
Not cowardly put off my helmet to
My countryman; a Roman by a Roman
Valiantly vanquished.

(4.15.57-60)

This is—and is not—a faithful account of the scene we have witnessed. Even the most transcendentally moving moment in the play, the suicide of Cleopatra towards which the whole of the final scene has been moving, is interrupted by the entry of the Clown with his basket of figs. His garrulous chatter and his reluctance to leave (perhaps, as Bowers suggests, he's hoping for a tip) delay Cleopatra's death and thereby create suspense but they also modify our impression of her final speeches during which, as Mack remarks, ‘we also hear echoing
between the lines the gritty accents of the opposing voice’ (Mack, 23).

**INSTABILITY OF CHARACTERS**

Such radically differing attitudes are expressed not only by different individuals but by the same person, depending on the mood and circumstances in which characters find themselves. To Antony, Cleopatra is at one moment ‘this enchanting queen’ and at another a ‘triple-turned whore’, and to Cleopatra the messenger from Rome is at first a ‘horrible villain’ and later ‘a fellow of good judgement’, ‘a proper man’. These conflicting ways of interpreting experience had long preoccupied Shakespeare but in this play they are also a preoccupation of the characters. On hearing of Fulvia’s death, Antony reflects, as though it were axiomatic.

*By revolution lowering, does become*  
The opposite of itself  

(1.2.131-3)

and Caesar, contemplating the growing support for Pompey, states it as a law of nature that

*he which is was wished until he were,*  
*And the ebbed man, ne'er loved till ne'er worth love,*  
*Comes deared by being lacked.*

(1.4.42-4)

It is when he himself hears of Antony's death that his contempt for the ‘old ruffian’ turns into grief and he weeps for the loss of his ‘brother’, his ‘mate in empire’ and the heart which kindled his own thoughts (5.1.40-8). Nowhere else in Shakespeare do we meet

characters given to such persistent oscillation of feelings, such violent veering between emotional extremes. In the case of Cleopatra it is at times deliberately practised, part of her technique of exhibiting her infinite variety in order to keep monotony at bay, her method of tantalising Antony by providing moods that are emotional foils to his own.

(Schanzer, *Problem Plays*, 143)

The actress who by all accounts conveyed this quality most faithfully was Dorothy Green, who played the role in three major productions between 1912 and 1930. Of the second of these, the *Times* critic wrote (25 April 1921):

*She realises, as few players of the part in recent years have done, the ‘infinite variety’ of the Queen's moods. Stately, sinuous, arrogant, seductive, pleading, passionate—Miss Green is everything in turn, but she rises to her greatest height in the scene of sheer fury when she learns from the Messenger of Antony's marriage to Octavia, and all but strangles him in her madness.*

Judging from the photographs, she was also sinister, *a femme fatale* like Swinburne's Dolores or Wilde's Salomé, and the reviewers sensed this: ‘What evil there is in the woman, gathered scene by scene as one might gather flowers, and what superb and dreadful tenderness when the asp is at her breast’ (*The Times*, 25 November 1930). She was very much the actress, fascinating, temperamental, and dangerous, as was also the great nineteenth-century Cleopatra, Isabella Glyn, though she was a good deal more majestic:
Gorgeous in person, in costume, and in her style of action, she moved, the Egyptian Venus, Minerva, Juno—now pleased, now angry, now eloquent, now silent—capricious and resolved, according to the situation and sentiment to be rendered. Withal she was classical, and her poses severely statuesque. Her death was sublime. ... Altogether Miss Glyn’s performance of Cleopatra is the most superb thing ever witnessed on the modern stage.

(Illustrated London News, 27 October 1849)

A contemporary illustration shows her in one of her poses offering her hand to Thidias.

IMAGES OF INSTABILITY

The sense of the inconstant, shifting nature of our impressions that is expressed by the structure of the play and the preoccupations of the characters extends also to its distinctive images, which, as Charney points out, are of ‘melting, fading, dissolving, discandying, disponging and losing of form’: ‘Shakespeare seems to be creating his own vocabulary to establish the feeling of disintegration in the Roman world’ (Charney, 140). Indeed the whole play portrays the gradual process of Antony's disintegration to the point when ‘The crown o' the earth doth melt’ (4.15.65). Shakespeare's playhouse was probably better able than ours to convey this impression to an audience. What was in front of them was, of course, an empty platform with the tiring-house wall at the back, but Shakespeare could transform it into wherever he chose, as when in A Midsummer Night's Dream (another play much preoccupied with the fluid nature of reality) Theseus' court melts into a forest. Similarly in Antony and Cleopatra Alexandria melts into Rome and the battlefield becomes Cleopatra's monument. This effect is well described by Granville-Barker, who says that the Elizabethan dramatist, having made use of a location, ‘would neglect and obliterate it without further consideration. The consciousness of it in the audience's imagination might be compared to a mirage, suddenly appearing, imperceptibly fading’ (Granville-Barker, ‘Note’, 64). On a realistic, nineteenth-century stage with its solid sets and frequent scene changes this was no longer possible. The actor in Chatterton's production, James Anderson, describes the effect of such scene changes on an actor:

I must ... acknowledge my own inability to make a serious impression on the audience; I could do nothing, being stunned and cowed by the furious noise of preparation for 'heavy sets' behind the scenes that destroyed all power of acting in front.

(J. Anderson, 316-17)

The fullest expression of the melting, dissolving nature of perception is given by Antony in one of those insights which Shakespeare's tragic heroes experience shortly before their deaths. As a great soldier who knows he has undergone his final defeat, he contemplates the shifting patterns of the clouds and feels that he, too, is no longer ‘himself':

That which is now a horse, even with a thought
The rack dislimns and makes it indistinct
As water is in water.

My good knave Eros, now thy captain is
Even such a body. Here I am Antony,
Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave.

(4.14.9-11, 12-14)

THE PHILOSOPHY OF INSTABILITY
This idea was not unique to Shakespeare but also preoccupied some of his contemporaries. Bacon was certainly aware of each individual's tendency to interpret the world subjectively, ‘owing either to his own proper and peculiar nature’ or ‘to the differences of impression, accordingly as they take place in a mind preoccupied and predisposed or in a mind indifferent and settled’. ‘The spirit of man’, he concludes, ‘is in fact a thing variable and full of perturbation’ (Bacon, 54). The writer who most immediately comes to mind is, however, Montaigne, with whose Essays Shakespeare was certainly acquainted by the time he came to write The Tempest and who contemplated with a melancholy curiosity the transience both of the world and of mankind:

There is no constant existence, neither of our being, nor of the objects. And we and our judgement, and all mortall things else do uncessantly rowle, turne and passe away. Thus can be nothing certainly established, nor of the one, nor of the other; both the judgeing and the judged being in continuall alteration and motion. … Thus, seeing all things are subject to passe from one change to another; reason, which therein seeketh a reall subsistence, findes her selfe deceived as unable to apprehend any thing subsistent and permanent; forsomuch as each thing either commeth to a being, and is not yet altogethers: or beginneth to dy before it be borne.

(Montaigne, 323)

Both Bacon and Montaigne express the renewed influence of philosophical scepticism which appeared in Europe towards the end of the seventeenth century, but transformation is also the central theme of Ovid's Metamorphoses, perhaps the most lasting influence on all Shakespeare's work and which he must have read as a schoolboy. The Roman poet's prolonged meditation in the last book of the Metamorphoses on the ceaseless flux of creation probably lies behind this distinctive element of the play.

THE DESIRE FOR STABILITY

Against such an irresistible force, Shakespeare's characters attempt to create some sort of defence which will keep them stable and upon which they can rely. Caesar, foreseeing that his own and Antony's temperaments are so incompatible that their friendship is unlikely to last, longs for a ‘hoop’ which will hold them ‘staunch’ or watertight (2.2.121-3); Antony, ashamed of his lost reputation and his pitifully botched suicide, hopes that his fame as ‘the greatest prince o'th' world’ will remain intact (4.15.53-7), and Enobarbus recognizes that a servant willing to remain loyal to a ‘fallen lord’ will ‘[earn] a place i'th' story’ (3.13.44-7) as, by his death, he does. Similarly the poet of the Sonnets hopes that the beauty of the fair youth will be eternalized in his verse when all other things have changed or been forgotten. Finally, Cleopatra becomes ‘marble-constant’ in her resolve to leave ‘the varying shore o'th' world’ and find eternal stability with Antony in an existence beyond change. Whether or not she does so we have no means of knowing. We know only that she is convinced that she will, and that by her suicide she has earned a place in the story which Plutarch and Shakespeare and others have repeatedly told.

THE QUESTION OF MORAL JUDGEMENT

In the principal source of Antony and Cleopatra, the ‘Life of Antony’, Plutarch displays a disinterested attitude towards the two major figures. He acknowledges their strengths and virtues—Antony's courage and magnanimity, Cleopatra's vitality, her magnetism—yet this responsive sympathy does not prevent him from judging them. Even in his youth, says Plutarch, Antony was lured into ‘great follies and vain expences upon women, in rioting and banketing’ (North, 255) and he lays the blame for Antony's decline squarely on Cleopatra (North, 273).

Shakespeare's judgement of his characters is less easy to discern. This is partly because, whereas Plutarch tells his story as a narrative on which he comments from time to time in his own person, Shakespeare transformed
it into a play in which each character expresses him or her self and no character speaks with the voice of the dramatist. There are characters such as Philo, Pompey, Enobarbus and especially Caesar who unhesitatingly criticize Antony:

His vacancy with his voluptuousness,  
Full surfeits and the dryness of his bones  
Call on him for't. But to confound such time  
That drums him from his sport, and speaks as loud  
As his own state and ours, 'tis to be child  
As we rate boys who, being mature in knowledge,  
Pawn their experience to their present pleasure  
And so rebel to judgement.

(1.4.25-33)

Against such passages, however, Shakespeare places Cleopatra's adoration of ‘my man of men’:

To vie strange forms with fancy; yet t'imagine  
An Antony were nature's piece 'gainst fancy,  
Condemning shadows quite.

(5.2.96-9)

To complicate matters, these same characters change their opinions of one another. Although Enobarbus acts as a commentator on the characters and action of the play, his opinions are complex and he, too, changes his mind.

Clearly with a play as paradoxical and self-contradictory as this, any attempt to determine the opinion of the author is necessarily difficult if not impossible. The only account which does justice to its complexity is the play itself and, though criticism may (and often does) illuminate, in the face of this particular work it is almost bound to simplify. Nevertheless some critics, while admitting the play's intricacy, have attempted to locate and define Shakespeare's attitude towards his material. None has been more simple and reductive than Dryden, who approved ‘the excellency of the moral’ which he believed the story illustrated, ‘for the chief persons represented were famous patterns of unlawful love; and their end accordingly was unfortunate’ (Dryden, Love, 10). Dowden acknowledges that ‘the passion and the pleasure of the Egyptian queen, and of her paramour, toil after the infinite’, but concludes that, finally, what Shakespeare ‘would seem to say to us … is that this sensuous infinite is but a dream, a deceit, a snare. … The severity of Shakespeare, in his own dramatic fashion, is as absolute as that of Milton’ (Dowden, 311-13).

More recent critics have, after considerable hesitation, come to a similar conclusion. Franklin M. Dickey attempts to reach towards Shakespeare's judgement by examining Antony and Cleopatra in the context of earlier treatments of the same subject from Virgil's and Chaucer's onwards. He decides that, although, unlike his predecessors, the dramatist has little to say about the power of Fortune and the insecurity of princes, nevertheless, like them, he says a great deal about ‘the dire consequences of indecorum on the part of princes and the terrible end of excessive passion’ (Dickey, 76). For him, Antony and Cleopatra are examples of rulers who threw away a kingdom for lust, ‘and this is how, despite the pity and terror that Shakespeare makes us feel, they appear in the play’ (ibid., 179).

Such an interpretation was in part a protest against the opposite, romantic view, ‘the elevation claimed by those critics who insist[ed] on seeing Cleopatra as a seventeenth-century precursor of Wagner's Isolde’ (Riemer, 101). After all, Swinburne had called Cleopatra ‘the perfect and everlasting woman’ (Swinburne,
Shakespeare, 76) and Antony and Cleopatra 'the greatest love-poem of all time' (Swinburne, Study, 191). Wilson Knight sometimes repeats what Swinburne has said, though at more length and with considerably more evidence. For him, Cleopatra is 'love absolute and incarnate' (Knight, 318), at once 'Rosalind, Beatrice, Ophelia, Gertrude, Cressida, Desdemona, Cordelia and Lady Macbeth' (ibid., 290). He arrives at his transcendental view of the tragedy by consciously discarding any attention to character and action, preferring to invoke 'certain symbolic images' which, for him, are 'the only elements in Shakespeare which will lead us from multiplicity and chaos towards unity, simplicity and coherence' (ibid., 19). He by no means overlooks the images of sensuality, eroticism and the physical but, largely by emphasizing Enobarbus' eulogy of Cleopatra on the Cydnus and Cleopatra's idealizing vision of Antony after his death, comes to the conclusion that, in Shakespeare's treatment of them, the lovers are finally transfigured and thereby vindicated:

We see the protagonists, in love and war and sport, in death or life or that mystery containing both, transfigured in a transfigured universe, themselves that universe and more, outpacing the wheeling orbs of earth and heaven. … So Cleopatra and Antony find not death but life.

(Knight, 262)

Knight was certainly justified in calling our attention to the language and images of the play which the moralizing critics had tended generally to overlook, but in so doing he took little or no account of the characters who express themselves in these images and the context in which they occur. Enobarbus' 'barge' speech is placed immediately after Antony's agreement to marry Octavia, and the effect of this placing is to make us realize that Antony will ultimately desert her for Cleopatra and thereby give Caesar a pretext to turn against him. The magnetism of Cleopatra is shown to be disastrous politically. Again, Cleopatra's final vision of Antony, magnificent in itself, is also subjective (as is everyone's opinion in this play). As Janet Adelman pertinently asks, 'Is this the vision of the play or her own peculiar brand of delusion?' (Adelman, Essay, 7). The Antony she celebrates does not correspond with the one we have seen, nor is her view of him shared by any other character. Her final insight may be her ultimate delusion. Shakespeare's critics, like his characters, tend to interpret this play in accordance with the predispositions they bring to it. They can find ample support for their arguments in whatever evidence they care to select from the text.

Are all attempts to reach some final understanding simply otiose, an inevitable simplification of a challengingly complex work? This may be so, but the desire to respond to the challenge is nevertheless irresistible. ‘The whole play’, as Adelman says, ‘can be seen as a series of attempts on the part of the characters to understand and judge each other and themselves’ (Adelman, Essay, 20). It is scarcely surprising, then, that we should be compelled to judge them ourselves—or, at any rate, to discover how Shakespeare judged them.

Ultimately the difficulty arises out of Shakespeare's uniquely copious powers of empathy, his capacity not simply to understand people unlike himself but in his imagination to become them, as Hazlitt observed:

He was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself; but he was all that others were, or that they could become. He not only had in himself the germs of every faculty and feeling, but he could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all their conceivable ramifications, through every change of fortune or conflict of passion, or turn of thought. … He had only to think of any thing in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it.

(Hazlitt, 47-8)

Shakespeare could also identify himself with every kind of ideal, especially the Roman, with which he must have become familiar from his schooldays onwards. The two principles on which the play is built are
irreconcilable, and to ask which of them Shakespeare favoured (which is what, essentially, some of the critics are doing) is not a question that should be asked.

A few critics, however, have done justice to the irreconcilable nature of the opposites with which Shakespeare presents us. Schanzer, for example, recognizes that, as a consequence of the structure of the play, ‘we are confronted with these opposed evaluations, and in such a way as to exclude … a simple or consistent response’ (Schanzer, Problem Plays, 146), and Bullough agrees that ‘the breadth and intensity of Shakespeare's vision are such as to make us accept both moral judgements against and passionate approval of Antony and Cleopatra’ (Bullough, 252). Adelman, who has explored the play more fully and subtly than anyone, concludes that ‘this is the final contrariety that the play demands of us: that the extreme of skepticism must be balanced by an extreme of assent’ (Adelman, Essay, 110).

THE QUESTION OF THE TRAGIC

In certain obvious and general ways Antony and Cleopatra resembles Shakespeare's other tragedies. Like Richard II, Julius Caesar and Coriolanus it is both a tragedy and a history play, a work of the imagination based largely on historical accounts and portraying people who once lived in situations in which they actually found themselves. Together with Romeo and Juliet it is a double tragedy, but, whereas in the earlier work the two principal characters die swiftly one after the other and for much the same reasons (a combination of self-sacrificial love and bad luck), in the later tragedy each of them undergoes a prolonged final suffering on which Shakespeare lingers. Each of their suicides constitutes a separate episode; their motives for suicide differ and produce different effects on an audience.

In some ways Antony resembles Shakespeare's other tragic heroes, exceptional men in that their fate, as Bradley says, ‘affects the welfare of a whole nation or empire’ (Bradley, Tragedy, 10). Both he and Cleopatra are exceptional too in their capacity for extreme and spontaneous feeling which manifests itself most powerfully when they are responding, whether in fury or delight, to each other. For this reason Octavius, though he becomes the supreme ruler of the Roman empire, seems a lesser person. Antony, like Brutus, Macbeth and Coriolanus, finds himself in a position in which he must make a choice which has far-reaching consequences both for himself and his country. His choice occurs fairly early in the play at the point when (2.3.37) he resolves to return from Rome to Egypt. Although his decision seems sudden, it is not, to the audience, unexpected in view of the hold which we know Cleopatra has over him, and especially because it occurs less than a hundred lines after Enobarbus' testimony to her magnetism (2.2.201-28). Unlike the other tragic heroes, however, he undergoes no apparent struggle, never defines or articulates the nature of his choice (which is, again, perfectly clear to the audience) or seems to foresee its consequences. Like Coriolanus, Shakespeare's other great Roman soldier, he never intellectualizes, has practically no soliloquies and acts always upon impulse. His decline is prolonged but follows no steady, descending line—his catastrophic flight at Actium is followed by a spectacular victory—and his insights into his predicament come to him spasmodically, in flashes:

O, whither hast thou led me, Egypt? See
How I convey my shame out of thine eyes
By looking back what I have left behind
'Stroyed in dishonour.

(3.11.51-4)

Within moments he casts such painful thoughts out of his mind. He buries them and prefers to think of what he has gained:

Fall not a tear, I say; one of them rates
All that is won and lost. Give me a kiss.
It is only after his final defeat and what he believes to be Cleopatra's betrayal that he is forced to confront the truth of his situation and then he acts on it by committing suicide.

In his inability (or refusal) to recognize the momentous nature of his choice or to face up to and learn from its consequences, Antony is unlike Shakespeare's other tragic heroes. Macbeth, by contrast, is entirely aware of the significance of Duncan's murder even before he commits it. Antony is shown to be limited intellectually and even imaginatively, and for this reason it was not difficult for the moralizing critics to see him as a great warrior who was blinded by the charms of a woman. These are, moreover, by no means his only limitations. He is often shown in situations in which he is overshadowed or worsted by sharper intellects such as Caesar's and especially by Cleopatra's. Whereas Plutarch depicted him as a sociable entertaining man, Shakespeare's Antony, as Honigmann points out, is in the early scenes not so self-assured:

"It is Cleopatra who rails and mocks, and Antony is always at the receiving end, and not amused. She laughs, he glooms. … Long before Actium … Antony impresses us in scene after scene as a loser; Herculean, but still a loser; and his defeats in conversation, added by Shakespeare, distinguish him equally from Plutarch's Antonius and from the other tragic heroes."

(Honigmann, 150, 153)

He is most miserably degraded, of course, in his failure to perform the decorous suicide which he attempts and which, in retrospect, he likes to think he has accomplished. One has only to recall the death of Brutus to see the difference.

Superficially Cleopatra appears to be possessed of that 'fatal tendency to identify the whole being with one interest, object, passion or habit of mind' which for Bradley distinguished Shakespeare's tragic figures (Bradley, Tragedy, 20-1). Certainly her attention in the first three scenes is fixed on Antony and on the means—any means—to discourage him from leaving her, and during his absence in Rome he is her exclusive preoccupation. His presence is necessary, however, in order to satisfy her political as well as her emotional needs. He is both her lover and the commander of her military forces, and when his fortunes decline she at least toys with the idea of settling on favourable terms with Caesar. Her possible shift of allegiance appears first in the interview with Thidias (3.13) and, although her subsequent protestations of loyalty to Antony seem to satisfy him (3.13.163-72), the audience may not be so easily assured. As Adelman says, "Is Cleopatra merely exercising her powers over Thidias for the sake of the game, or does she really hope to woo Octavius through him?" (Adelman, Essay, 15). Her uppermost thought may well be of self-preservation. This is undoubtedly her impulse when, terrified of Antony's rage against her, she flees to the monument and sends him the false news of her suicide (4.13), but whether or not it is self-preservation she has in mind after Antony's death is more difficult to determine. Certainly she begins to contemplate suicide immediately after he is gone:

"Then is it sin
To rush into the secret house of death
Ere death dare come to us?"

(4.15.84-6)

and at the beginning of the final scene she appears positively resolved to take this course (5.2.4-8). In the interview with Seleucus, however, her intentions are not so clear and Shakespeare here clouds the motives which in Plutarch's account were explicit. According to Plutarch, Cleopatra deliberately allowed Caesar to
discover that she had kept half her treasure in order to create the false impression that she planned to survive. In Shakespeare's version, however, it is uncertain whether she wishes to give this impression or genuinely hopes to come to terms with Caesar. In other words, her intention may be to kill herself out of devotion to Antony or to 'pack cards with Caesar' and enjoy a comfortable life in retirement. It is only when she discovers from Dolabella that the latter option is not open that she resolves finally on suicide. Honigmann sums up the situation admirably:

> Though Cleopatra's choice of death seems unconditional when Antony dies, she has time to think again, and her final decision affects us differently. She learns that Octavius will lead her in triumph, and that he can resist her charms, and again her vanity comes into play. Her actions, not necessarily all of a piece, suggest that she may still wish to live.

(Honigmann, 166)

A similar inconsistency surrounds the suicide itself. Both she and Antony like to imagine themselves dying 'after the high Roman fashion'. Neither of them achieves this ideal and, moreover, the two suicides are utterly unlike, 'his—unplanned, messy, a man alone; hers—a basket of figs prepared with an asp, supported by her women—thrillingly beautiful. The difference is brought home to us by Antony's unbearable physical pain, succeeded by her death "As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle"' (Honigmann, 166-7). She had, we learn later, 'pursued conclusions infinite / Of easy ways to die' (5.2.354-5; my italics). Her final act may be seen, as she wants us to see it, as a supreme and glorious sacrifice or as an extreme self-indulgence. As in his portrayal of Antony, Shakespeare does not allow us to respond in any simple way. We are at the same time drawn to and distanced from them both. Such uncertainties have been perceived only in the twentieth century, when criticism has concentrated on tensions, ambiguities, counter-cultures and self-contradiction. It was these uncertainties, however, which made the play unsatisfactory to the great interpreter of tragedy of an earlier generation, A. C. Bradley.

Bradley excluded *Antony and Cleopatra* from his study of Shakespearean tragedy, and in his *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* he stated categorically that 'to regard this tragedy as a rival of the famous four, is surely an error' (Bradley, Lectures, 282). He accounts for this conviction by saying that it is 'not painful', 'not as exciting dramatically' as the other four tragedies and has 'no scenes of action or passion which agitate the audience with alarm, horror, painful expectation, or absorbing sympathies and antipathies'. Eventually he identifies the quality in the play which causes his unease and, in so doing, glimpses the complex, paradoxical nature of its fabric:

> The first half of the play, though it forebodes tragedy, is not decisively tragic in tone. Certainly the Cleopatra scenes are not so. We read them, and we should witness them, in delighted wonder and even with amusement. The only scene that can vie with them, that of the revel on Pompey's ship, though full of menace, is in great part humorous. Enobarbus, in this part of the play, is always humorous. Even later, when the tragic tone is deepening, the whipping of Thyreus, in spite of Antony's rage, moves mirth.

(Bradley, Lectures, 284-5)

He concedes that such a play may well be as 'masterly' as the four great tragedies and 'more delightful', but 'it cannot possibly excite the same emotions'. There is, he says 'something half-hearted in Shakespeare's appeal here, something even ironical in his presentation of this conflict' (ibid., 290).

That Bradley identified the distinguishing element in *Antony and Cleopatra* there can be little doubt. He senses the lack of that consistently tragic high seriousness to which he responded in *Lear* and *Macbeth*, but accepts the fact that in this play Shakespeare attempted 'something different'. One cannot help feeling,
however, that by ‘something different’ Bradley really meant ‘something inferior’. As G. K. Hunter points out in an illuminating essay on Bradley (Hunter, 270-85), he thought of himself as a philosopher-critic. As the son of an evangelical clergyman, he reacted violently against the kind of faith in which he had been brought up and found that literature, and especially Shakespearean tragedy, could fill the void once occupied in his mind by religion. In so doing he fulfilled the prediction made almost thirty years earlier by Matthew Arnold that more and more ‘mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us’ (Arnold, 2). Bradley valued Shakespeare's tragedies for their capacity to interpret the world and man's place in it without recourse to Christian theology. ‘We remain confronted’, as he says at the end of his lecture on ‘The Substance of Tragedy’,

with the inexplicable fact, or the no less inexplicable appearance, of a world travailing for perfection, but bringing to birth, together with glorious good, an evil which it is able to overcome only by self-torture and self-waste. And this fact or appearance is tragedy.

(Bradley, Tragedy, 39)

Such a description may well apply to Othello and Macbeth, where good and evil are precisely located, but to Antony and Cleopatra, where the perfection for which the two principal characters strive is also shown to be a waste and a delusion, it seems irrelevant. Nothing purely good or evil can be found in the play and what seems admirable in one context is shown as ridiculous in another—or, rather, appears as both admirable and ridiculous at one and the same time. A tragedy founded on such assumptions could not satisfy Victorian readers who looked to it to console and sustain them. In the sceptical twentieth century it has been better appreciated.

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

THE ‘ASIATIC’ STYLE

The distinctive language and style in which Antony and Cleopatra express themselves may have been created by Shakespeare in response to a remark made by Plutarch in his ‘Life of Marcus Antonius’. As a young man, says Plutarch, Antony left Italy and went to Greece where he spent much of his time in ‘the studie of eloquence’. As a result of this early training he ‘used a manner of phrase in his speeche, called Asiatik, which caried the best grace and estimation of that time, and was much like to his manners and life: for it was full of ostentation, foolish braverie, and vaine ambition’ (North, 225). Plutarch, although a Greek, here speaks in the austerely disapproving tone of the Romans (whom he much admired) and, consistently with the rhetorical principles established by Aristotle, regards Antony's eloquence not simply as a verbal style but as a moral quality, an expression of his personality and way of life. Perhaps picking up this hint from Plutarch, Shakespeare fashioned for Antony and Cleopatra a way of speaking which he used in no other play and which contributes more than anything to the extreme contrast between Egypt and Rome discussed earlier (p. 28). As Rosalie Colie explains,

The Greeks had, naturally enough, characterized Persians and others to the East of Athens as ‘Asiatic’, meaning sensuous, sybaritic, self-indulgent, rich, materialist, decorated, soft. According to the paradigm, Asiatics lived a life of ease, delicacy, even of sloth, surrounded by ornate works of art and elaborate amusements for body and spirit. Gradually the moral disapproval leveled at their eastern neighbors came to be applied to a style of oratory conceived as ‘like’ Persian life, a style formally complex, ornate, decorated and elaborate.

(Colie, 171)
In *Antony and Cleopatra* Shakespeare reversed the process and created an ‘Asiatic’ style to reflect the Alexandrian way of life.

**HYPERBOLE**

The most distinctive feature of this style is its hyperbole, its exaggeration. Cleopatra expresses every possible emotion from rapturous joy and uncontrollable rage to suicidal despair, but seems incapable of moderation, the Roman ‘measure’ or golden mean, and she expresses this intensity of feeling, which she cultivates and pursues as though it were a moral absolute, in a correspondingly heightened language. Looking back on the love she has shared with Antony, she conceives of it in terms which are nothing less than transcendental:

*Eternity was in our lips and eyes,*  
*Bliss in our brows' bent; none our parts so poor*  
*But was a race of heaven.*

(1.3.36-8)

On hearing of Antony's marriage, she calls for the collapse of her empire into chaos:

*Melt Egypt into Nile, and kindly creatures*  
*Turn all to serpents!*  

(2.5.78-9)

After Antony's death, she does not say, simply, that she has lost all sense of purpose, but that creation itself has ceased to exist:

*Patience is sottish, and impatience does*  
*Become a dog that's mad.*  

(4.15.82-4)

It is, of course, her nature to change rapidly from one extreme of feeling to another but even when, in the final scene, she settles herself in her determination to die, she speaks of this newly-found stability in typically absolute terms:

*My resolution's placed, and I have nothing*  
*Of woman in me. Now from head to foot*  
*I am marble-constant.*  

(5.2.237-9)

This heightened form of speech appears at its most extreme and prolonged in her eulogy of the dead Antony with its series of hyperbolic metaphors: Antony's legs ‘bestrid the ocean; his reared arm / Crested the world’ and his voice was ‘as rattling thunder’ (5.2.81-5).

**WORLD IMAGERY**

This passage is also notable for what Charney calls its ‘words of cosmic reference’ (80), the ‘world imagery’ which ‘represents the most general pattern of imagery in the play’ (93). This occurs so frequently that it is impossible to illustrate it fully here (but see Charney, 80-93). In the opening speech of the play Antony is described as ‘The triple pillar of the world’; during the feast on Pompey's galley, Menas calls the
triumvirs ‘these three world-sharers’ (2.7.71), and before his final victory, Caesar prophesies that a ‘time of universal peace’ is coming in which ‘the three nooked world / Shall bear the olive freely’ (4.6.5-7). In the mouths of the Romans such references are not simply metaphorical, for in their eyes the Roman empire, which the triumvirs governed, extended throughout the known world. For Antony and Cleopatra, on the other hand, their relationship itself constitutes the world, an all-encompassing universe of feeling which they see as an alternative to the lesser Roman world of conquest and empire. Hence, for Antony, Cleopatra is the ‘day o’th’ world’ (4.8.13) and, for Cleopatra, Antony is ‘the crown o’th’ earth’ without which it is ‘no better than a sty’ (4.15.64-5). The impression that the play encompasses vast expanses of territory and that the conflict is one in which the politics of the world are at stake was one which the nineteenth-century actor-managers hoped to create by dramatic spectacle, but in fact such extravagant and cumbersome means were unnecessary. The impression is created more than sufficiently by Shakespeare’s language.

Antony’s kind of rhetoric, his ‘Asiatic’ style, is often as heightened as Cleopatra’s to the extent that Shakespeare seems to imply that he has acquired it from her as a mode of expressing feelings which she, and only she, has awakened in him. His way of speaking to Octavia is a great deal more sober and factual. His grandiose dismissal of Rome and its messengers (an example of what Plutarch calls his ‘foolish bravery’) prefigures Cleopatra’s injunction that Egypt should melt into the Nile:

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space!

(1.1.34-5)

The oneness which they occasionally achieve is suggested by their tendency to use similar words and figures of speech. Like her he expresses himself in extreme and heightened language (‘Kingdoms are clay’) and the fury with which he attacks Thidias, the messenger from Caesar, is as violent as hers towards the messenger from Rome (3.13.100-9; 2.5.62-72). Such extremes of emotion, diction and behaviour unite them to each other and distinguish them from the Romans. They are a quality which Cleopatra recognizes in Antony and admires in him:

The violence of either thee becomes,
So does it no man else.

(1.5.62-4)

EGYPTIAN AND ROMAN IMAGERY

The language of Cleopatra and her court is distinguished by a series of recurring images which make us constantly aware of the way they live. Egypt is associated with the Nile as Rome is with the Tiber, and the Nile is visualized as the source both of fruitfulness and of carrion-eating insects, harvest and deadly serpents. Cleopatra is herself the ‘serpent of old Nile’ (1.5.26) and the river reflects something of her paradoxical nature, both life-enhancing and fatally poisonous. Egypt is also a place of feeding and drinking to excess, where eight wild boars are roasted for a breakfast for twelve people (2.2.189-90) and Antony calls for wine both in defiance of his defeat (3.13.189-90) and in celebration of his victory (4.8.32-5). When Pompey thinks of Antony in Egypt, he imagines him sitting at a dinner prepared by ‘Epicurean cooks’ who sharpen his appetite with ‘cloyless sauce’ (2.1.24-5). Cleopatra is also repeatedly described in terms of food which, according to Enobarbus, is always enticing and never satisfying:

The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies.

(1.5.62-4)
That there are relatively few distinctive images associated with Rome is itself significant, for the Romans are characterized by their moderation, their temperance and ability to control their feelings. Temperance is a virtue which Caesar admired in Antony before he encountered Cleopatra. In his campaigns in northern Italy the young Antony was able to endure famine ‘with patience more / Than savages could suffer’ and could survive on wild berries and ‘the barks of trees’ (1.4.59-69). Caesar's own intemperance at the feast on Pompey's galley disgusts him and he confesses that rather than drink so much in a day he would prefer to fast for four (2.7.102-3). Whereas Egypt is associated with feeling and sensuality, as in the playful chatter among Cleopatra's servants (1.2.1-80) which is openly sexual, Rome is associated with action, especially military and political action. It is, says Charney, ‘a place of conference tables, armor, political decisions and hard material objects’ (102), and Caesar's speeches are much concerned with conveying information, devising strategy and issuing commands. The only woman to appear in the Roman scenes is Octavia who is of ‘a holy, cold and still conversation’ (2.6.124-5) whereas Cleopatra sees herself as black from the ‘amorous pinches’ of the sun god (1.5.29).

Although the two worlds of the play are thus differentiated by the kind of style and diction associated with them, the characters who inhabit them are at the same time individuals with their own distinctive forms of speech. Whereas Charmian, always loyal to her mistress, is frankly outspoken, Mardian is hesitant and deferential. Lepidus, the dupe among the triumvirs, scarcely says anything in the company of the other two and when he does it is in those balanced, antithetical clauses favoured by Brutus in Julius Caesar, which express thoughtfulness, rationality and moderation:

That which combined us was most great, and let not
A leaner action rend us. What’s amiss,
May it be gently heard. When we debate
Our trivial difference loud, we do commit
Murder in healing wounds. Then, noble partners,
The rather for I earnestly beseech,
Touch you the sourest points with sweetest terms,
Nor curstness grow to th’ matter.

The two men whose lives and loyalties are initially divided between Egypt and Rome, Antony and Enobarbus, instinctively shift from one mode to another depending on their circumstances and situation. Once Antony has heard the news from Rome, he reprimands Enobarbus for his sexual ‘Egyptian’ banter (‘No more light answers’) and embarks on a speech as factual and politically observant as any of Caesar's (1.2.183-203). Enobarbus, at any rate in the early scenes, tends to speak prose and as his first extensive interview with Antony begins, the dialogue changes abruptly from verse to prose, an appropriate medium for the knowing, pragmatic, experienced soldier (the kind of man which Iago, another tried campaigner, pretends to be), but once he recalls Cleopatra's spectacular arrival in her barge (2.2.201-28) he modulates into the heightened, figurative speech associated with Egypt. The divided personalities of the two men are reflected in the two distinct modes in which they speak. Shakespeare, like Aristotle and Plutarch, believed that style was an expression of character, conduct and morality. As Ben Jonson declared, ‘Language most shows a man: speak that I may see thee.’

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Interpretations of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* have emphasized, with varying degrees of stress, one or another of the three principal themes in the play, which are, as summarized by John Munro:

… first, the East represented by Egypt and lands beyond versus the West represented by Rome; secondly, the strife in the Triumvirate who divided and governed the world, and the reduction of the three, Octavius, Lepidus and Antony, to one, Octavius; and thirdly, the love and tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra. Of all these the last is dramatically dominant.\(^1\)

But among the commentators who regard the third theme as dominant there is much difference of opinion. Some write as if the play were entitled “The Tragedy of Antony”; for example, J. Middleton Murry:

… up to the death of Antony it is from him that the life of the play has been derived. She [Cleopatra] is what she is to the imagination, rather in virtue of the effects we see in Antony, than by virtue of herself. He is magnificent; therefore she must be. But when he dies, her poetic function is to maintain and prolong, to reflect and reverberate, that achieved royalty of Antony's.\(^2\)

Others give Cleopatra more significance but yet make Antony central, as does Peter Alexander, who allots to Cleopatra a somewhat more distinct, more nearly self-contained personality than does Murry:

Antony dies while the play has still an act to run, but without this act his story would be incomplete. For Cleopatra has to vindicate her right to his devotion.\(^3\)

Any interpreter, however, who concentrates on the tragedy of Antony is confronted with the difficulty pointed out by Robert Speaight:

… if you are thinking in terms of Antony's tragedy alone, and if you are trying to make his tragedy conform to a classical definition, then you may find it awkward to face a fifth act, in which only his heroic and fallen shadow is left to keep Cleopatra company.\(^4\)

Moreover, such an interpreter overlooks the title of the play as it appears in the Folio: “The Tragedie of Anthonie, and Cleopatra”, with the significant comma after “Anthonie.” The nature of the play *Antony and
Cleopatra, really in itself more than from the comma signal but given added emphasis by it, should be self-evident: the play presents the tragedy of Antony and then the tragedy of Cleopatra. Such recognition, however, does not obscure the fact that each tragedy gives significance to the other and increases its effect.

Judicially objective critics have granted Cleopatra more stature as a tragic figure in her own right than those who think of the play as Antony's tragedy. J. W. Mackail, for instance, though he does not point out that Cleopatra's tragedy differs from Antony's, says:

It is the tragedy not of the Roman world, but of Antony and Cleopatra: and of both of them equally. … Here, neither single name gives the central tone to the drama; Antony does not exist for the sake of Cleopatra (as one might put it), nor does Cleopatra exist for the sake of Antony: they are two immense and in a sense equivalent forces which never coalesce, and the interaction between them is the drama.5

And Virgil K. Whitaker, though insisting that "the tragic action of the play is centered upon Antony, who has so yielded himself to the passion of love that it has possessed his will and dethroned his judgment", gives Cleopatra stature as a tragic figure: "Cleopatra, although she is developed almost as fully as he is, remains the seductress, and only at the end does she become a participant in a tragedy of her own."6 "A tragedy of her own"—just what is it? "A question to be asked", and answered.7

It is trite to remark that an audience's first impression of a character is very important; it is not commonplace to call particular attention to Cleopatra's first word in the play: “If”. It is obvious—or should be—that in saying “If it be love indeed, tell me how much”, she is following up a previous declaration, on Antony's part, of great love for her by teasing and bantering him. She is playful, but within her brief demand may be discerned one of her chief devices, contradiction.8 Immediately, by the entrance of the messenger from Rome, her tone changes; the contradictions become blunt, the taunts amazingly bold and affrontive. Antony's submitting to them proves that Philo's term “dotage” is not an exaggeration. That Cleopatra's contradictory behavior (as in I.ii.89-91; iii. 1-5) is calculated is obvious from her rejoinder to Charmian's warning: “Thou teachest like a fool. The way to lose him!” (I.iii.10).9 Simultaneously Cleopatra's constant fear is revealed: that Antony will leave her.

When Antony, having determined to break off with Cleopatra and return to Rome, goes to her to announce his departure, she perceives that he is in a serious mood and, surmising his intention, gives him no chance to talk. Six times she interrupts him when he starts to speak. In her tirades she taunts him (1) by references to his wife Fulvia, charging him with falsity to her; (2) by the accusation that he has treacherously betrayed her (Cleopatra); and (3) by recounting his compliments to her when he was wooing, practically calling him a liar. And when eventually Antony commands her to listen to him and hear his reasons for leaving, ending with a reference to Fulvia's death, she then accuses him of lying, of expecting her, like a child, to believe fairy tales. When he offers proof, the letter he has received, she then charges him with insensitivity for not weeping over his wife's death and predicts that he would be equally unmoved by her death. And as he protests his love for her she begins one of her fainting spells but changes her mind; she is, she says, “quickly ill, and well”, as changeable as Antony is in his love. She mockingly urges him to produce some tears for Fulvia and pretend they are for her, ridicules him for not making a better show at weeping, and calls on Charmian to join her in laughing at Antony's rising anger.

Antony turns to walk away. Then Cleopatra brings him back by the one appeal that just then could do it, a quavering “Courteous lord”. It is the first time in the play that she has spoken to him in anything like a complimentary fashion. Then she pretends to have something serious to say, or that she was going to say and has now forgot. Antony recognizes that she is playing for time, and she perceives his recognition.10 She has drawn on her coquette's kit for a variety of tools, and they have failed her, even her appeal to pity (her most effective, much used tool); Antony is going despite all she can do. But perhaps, if she says something kind,
for once, it may eventually bring him back:

Your honour calls you hence;
Therefore be deaf to my unpitied folly,
And all the gods go with you! Upon your sword
Sit laurel victory, and smooth success
Be strew'd before your feet!

(I.iii.97-101)

Or something that may seem kind! Her reference to his honor is much belated; she makes another appeal to pity; and the sequence of s sounds and the concatenation of b's and f's and e's and t's in the last line may suggest, by the conceivable hissing and sneering, an unconscious extrusion of her essentially serpentine nature.

During Antony's absence Cleopatra's behavior is self-characterizing. She evinces no interest in the business he is engaged in; she is concerned as to what he may be thinking of her, is enveloped in thoughts physical and sensual, and reviews the list of her great lovers, “Broad-fronted Caesar”, “great Pompey”, “brave Mark Antony”. She revels in memories of her behavior to Antony—trickery in fishing, laughing him out of and into patience, dressing him in tires and mantles while she “wore his sword Philippan”, contrarieties all. She is aghast when the news comes that Antony has married Octavia and beats the messenger, but regains hope from the description he gives of her.

We do not see Antony and Cleopatra together again until just before the battle of Actium. Were it not for Enobarbus' description of her on the river Cydnus and his analysis of her charms (II.ii.195-245), there would be little about her in the first half of the play that to an objective reader is alluring. But even Enobarbus' account hints at Cleopatra's oppositeness, for he pictures Antony, “Enthron'd i' th' market place”, waiting for Cleopatra to appear before him, which she does not do, and accepting her refusal to dine with him and her counter-invitation “to come and suppe with her”. The description follows closely the reconciliation scene between Antony and Octavius in which Antony, then at his best, is shown as firm master of himself and thus provides the background to contrast with his sorry self when manipulated by Cleopatra. But there is no such admirable background for Cleopatra; it is apparent that her tragedy will have to be of a distinctly different sort from Antony's. It cannot be a “tragic fall”, for there is nothing for her to fall from.

After Actium, where Antony at her urging has fought at sea, she offers as her reason for leaving the scene of the battle that she was afraid. But that reason does not satisfy everyone. E. E. Stoll, for instance, lists among various unanswered questions in Shakespeare's plays the query “Why does Cleopatra flee from the battle and Antony?” Later he wonders whether in examining such a question as that, and about her later dealings with Thyreus and her responsibility in the second sea-fight, we may not be “then considering too curiously”. Certainly the question about her behavior at Actium exists and must be considered; but just as certainly it cannot be answered. Cleopatra's “I little thought / You would have followed” (III.xi.55-56), besides putting the blame on him, may reveal a more nearly true reason than her “fearful sails”: Is her leaving the battle at the critical point a test of Antony, to see whether the political leader or the lover is stronger in him? Does she fear that military success and political mastery would be a dangerous rival to her charms? And when Antony reproaches her with

How much you were my conqueror, and that
My sword, made weak by my affection, would
Obey it on all cause

(III.xi.65-68)
and she cries “Pardon, pardon!” is she really sorry? Her behavior to Thyreus soon after makes us wonder.

When Thyreus tells Cleopatra that

He [Caesar] knows that you embrace not Antony
As you did love, but as you fear’d him

(III.xiii.56-57)

she exclaims “O!” What does she mean by that? There are those who seem to know; e. g., G. L. Kittredge (note on l. 57):

Cleopatra’s exclamation is meant to convey to Thyreus not only eager acceptance of Caesar’s theory of her union with Antony, but also gratified surprise that Caesar should have shown so sympathetic an understanding of the case. All this she expresses in plain terms in her next speech: ‘He is a god,’ etc.

That interpretation implies that Cleopatra, suddenly perceiving a way out of the impasse, is deserting Antony and preparing to entangle Caesar in her “toils of grace”, through the pity for her that she hopes to inspire. But conceivably the “O!” may merely imply painful shock at the idea that anyone could even think she feared Antony and did not love him.15 If so, the idea of appealing to Caesar's pity may not occur at the moment but be suggested by Thyreus'

The scars upon your honour, therefore, he
Does pity, as constrained blemishes,
Not as deserv’d.

(ll.58-60)

It is doubtful whether one is justified in saying that “All this she expresses in plain terms in her next speech”, inasmuch as Thyreus' statement comes between her “O!” and “her next speech”. Or, perhaps, the previous lines should be taken into consideration; Thyreus says,

Not to consider in what case thou stand’st
Further than he is Caesar,

(ll.53-55)

which seems to promise noble treatment, with possible emphasis on the good will of Caesar the man. If the idea of attempting to entangle Caesar has already occurred to her, her enthusiastic “Go on. Right royal!” is flattery intended to be relayed to Caesar. But then Thyreus'

He knows that you embrace not Antony
As you did love, but as you fear’d him

is definitely cooling, and her “O!” may involuntarily escape her, indicating sudden awareness of Caesar's realization that she “embraced” Antony because of his power more than for love of the man himself and thus is on guard against any designs she might have on him now that he has conquered Antony. If that is the situation, then Thyreus’ speech suggesting Caesar's pity for the scars upon her honor “as constrained blemishes, / Not as deserv’d” arouses hope and prompts her flattering and pity-inviting

He is a god, and
What is most right. Mine honour was not yielded
But conquer'd merely,

(ll. 60-62)

a bare-faced lie, as Enobarbus recognizes.

Whatever the significance of the “O!” it is soon obvious that Cleopatra proceeds to cajole Thyreus, hoping thereby to make him a friend in court. But whether she is actually deserting Antony and staking all on a hope of ensnaring Caesar or is planning a deep deception of Caesar it is impossible to tell. Nor is her behavior to Antony clear when he enters unexpectedly and in fury orders punishment to Thyreus and condemns her. She attempts to defend herself with four questions: “O, is’t come to this?” “Wherefore is this?” “Have you done yet?” and, after a parenthetical “I must stay his time”, “Not know me yet?” What does she mean by the fourth question? She probably intends for Antony to understand that she was just temporizing, meeting Caesar’s suspected treachery with pretended submission. When Antony, still pained by what he is sure is betrayal of him, asks, “Cold-hearted toward me?” she breaks out in impassioned speech:

Ah, dear, if I be so,
From my cold heart let heaven engender hail,
And poison it in the source, and the first stone
Drop in my neck; as it determines, so
Dissolve my life! The next Caesarion smite!
Till by degrees the memory of my womb
Together with my brave Egyptians all,
By the discandying of this pelleted storm,
Lie graveless, till the flies and gnats of Nile
Have buried them for prey!

(III.xiii.158-167)

Actually her plea that, if her heart is cold, from it hail, poisoned in its source (her heart), should be “engendered” only to fall in her neck, melt, and in melting dissolve her life, is basically nonsense. For if there were enough poison in the source, her heart, to kill her when, incorporated into hail, it was carried to her neck and then caused her life to dissolve, she would have been dead long ago. To say nothing of the amount of poison it would take to dispose of Caesarion and “my brave Egyptians all”! She has created a barrage of words that by the excess of emotion and the deficiency of sense seem to denote complete devotion to Antony but which by the very excesses reveal the opposite. “The lady doth protest too much, methinks.” Her speech is not the bald lie that she tells Antony when later she sends him word that she has killed herself, but there is deception, masked by the barrage of words and the vehemence of her utterance.

What a narrow escape that was for her! She has convinced Antony (“I am satisfied”) but not Enobarbus; for him it is the last straw. He knows that Antony is now lost, for “When valour preys on reason, / It eats the sword it fights with” (ll. 199-200). Though Enobarbus speaks only of Antony, he reveals his interpretation of Cleopatra's behavior in the crisis.

Antony declares that he will fight Caesar again, gains Cleopatra's “That's my brave lord”, and joins with her in anticipation of her birthday festivities. The next morning she playfully helps Antony don his armor and kisses him as he departs for battle. She comments to Charmian, “He goes forth gallantly”, and expresses a wish

Determine this great war in single fight!
Then Antony—but now—
Since she apparently thinks Antony will be defeated, she is surprised at his victorious return:

O infinite virtue, com'st thou smiling from
The world's great snare(18) uncaught?

Though she thus compliments Antony in exaggerated terms and rewards Scarus extravagantly (“An armour all of gold”, l. 27), she hardly discloses her real thoughts. Nor is it certain that she did not betray Antony in the second sea-fight. Antony is sure: “This foul Egyptian hath betrayed me!” (IV.xii.10) and he is exceedingly bitter about the “triple-turn'd whore” that

Like a right gypsy hath at fast and loose
Beguil'd me to the very heart of loss!

He calls for Eros, but Cleopatra appears, having mistakenly thought, perhaps, that Antony was summoning her by calling on the deity of love (Eros), and is met by “Ah, thou spell! Avaunt!” In innocence or seeming innocence she asks, “Why is my lord enrag'd against his love?” Then at Antony's threats she leaves. Exclaiming that he is “more mad / Than Telamon for his shield” (xiii. 1-2), she sends Mardian to Antony:

Mardian, go tell him I have slain myself.
Say that the last I spoke was ‘Antony’
And word it, prithee, piteously. Hence, Mardian,
And bring me how he takes my death.

The lie, with the appeals for pity—“I have slain myself” (for love of Antony), “piteously”—is her final deception of Antony. Knowledge about how he takes her death may be intended to provide her with a clue as to possible appeasement of his wrath, but the lie is the climax of all her tricks, and ironically causes his death. Though it be argued that she did not betray Antony, his thinking she did is understandable, in the light of her behavior throughout the play up to the time of the second sea-fight.

What would be—to return to Cleopatra's entrance and exit for a moment—the impression on an audience of Cleopatra's behavior? Antony's brief but vivid description of the fleet's surrender and his repeated charge that Cleopatra has betrayed him, plus remembrance of what happened at Actium, may well make an audience suspicious of her when she appears. And her exit, following immediately upon Antony's detailed picture of her as the captive of Caesar and the victim of Octavia's wrath, may well give the definite impression that her self-interest has been and is the force that motivates her action. She does not even think of fainting or of attempting to kill herself in disproof of Antony's accusation. And her question “Why is my lord enrag'd against his love?” is colored by her accustomed plea for pity. Altogether, whether or not she betrayed Antony to Caesar is left an unanswered question, like the motives for her behavior at Actium.

There are some obvious facts. Cleopatra, to satisfy her ego, must have as her lovers the world's greatest. The outcome of the war between Antony and Octavius, since it is for world mastery, will determine which will emerge as the greater. Suppose Antony should win: he will certainly be immersed in state affairs and neglect her. Suppose Octavius should win: then there is the question as to whether she can ensnare him. Her equivocal behavior to Antony and her flirting with Caesar through Thyreus may reflect her uncertainty.
Yet there can be no doubt that Cleopatra has love, of a sort, for Antony, and when he, dying, is brought to her in the monument it is the realization of his personality as a man, her lover, and her belated recognition of the stalwart Roman qualities he represents (emphasized by the pride in them shown in his dying speech) that for the moment overshadow everything else. Even though self-pity is not completely absent—“Noblest of men, woo’t die? / Hast thou no care of me?” (IV.xv.59-60)—she is genuine in lamenting that “The crown o’ th’ earth doth melt”, and she is quite humbled:

No more but e'en a woman, and commanded
By such poor passion as the maid that milks
And does the meanest chares.”

(ll. 73-75)

Some appreciation of Antony's worth, now that he is no more, comes to her:

To throw my sceptre at the injurious gods,
To tell them that this world did equal theirs
Till they had stol'n our jewel.

(ll. 75-78)

But there is no admitting, apparently no perception, of the fact that she is responsible for his defeat and death. Her self-pity, her concentration on self, makes it impossible for her to see the situation objectively. If she could see it objectively, she would not be Cleopatra. It is her very Cleopatra-ness that is the basis for her ultimate tragedy. If she were a Juliet she would kill herself immediately for love of Antony, not merely talk about suicide. The fact that she does not act but talks precludes any interpretation of her tragedy as a love tragedy, even though there is pathos in her

Let’s do it after the high Roman fashion
And make death proud to take us.

(ll. 86-88)

She has learned something; she has gained unconsciously some insight into what virtue, Roman virtue as embodied in Antony, is. There is no sneering now at “a Roman thought” (I.ii.87). But though she knows no “friend / But resolution and the briefest end”, she is yet a long way from declaring “Husband, I come”; her tragedy is by no means yet manifest.

When we next see her (V.ii) some time has elapsed; she still talks of suicide, but not of “the briefest end”: “My desolation does begin to make / A better life.” Better than what? Since she immediately speaks of Caesar and his subjection to Fortune, she will show a “life” superior to his by doing that which ends all the influence of Fortune. Is it unconscious irony that she uses the word “life” in speaking of the ending of her life? Her whole speech (ll. 1-8) is of herself in relation to Caesar, and she does not attempt suicide until the Roman guardsmen make a move to capture her. Meanwhile she has parleyed with Proculeius and through him made a bid for pity from Caesar—“a queen his beggar”—and professes “A doctrine of obedience”. But she adds, significantly, “and would gladly / Look him i’ th’ face” (ll. 31-32).

When she is prevented from killing herself (not for love of Antony but to forestall capture) she moans,

Come hither, come! Come, come, and take a queen

Where art thou, death?
Worth many babes and beggars.

(ll. 46-48)

The real reason for her attempted suicide is made plain by her outburst after Proculeius' "O, temperance, lady!":

Sir, I will eat no meat; I'll not drink, sir;
If idle talk will once be necessary,
I'll not sleep neither. This mortal house I'll ruin,
Do Caesar what he can. Know, sir, that I
Will not wait pinion'd at your master's court
Nor once be chastis'd with the sober eye
Of dull Octavia. Shall they hoist me up
And show me to the shouting varlotry
Of censuring Rome? Rather a ditch in Egypt
Be gentle grave unto me! Rather on Nilus' mud
Lay me stark-nak'd and let the waterflies
Blow me into abhorring! Rather make
My country's high pyramides my gibber
And hang me up in chains!

(V.ii.49-62)

Proculeius had been commended to her by Antony (IV.xv.47-48), but he has proved untrustworthy. When Dolabella follows and attempts to gain her confidence by "Most noble Empress, you have heard of me?" (V.ii.71), she tests him: "You laugh when boys or women tell their dreams; / Is't not your trick?" He does not understand what she means, and is puzzled as she pours out an elaborate eulogy of Antony (ll. 79 ff.). She glorifies Antony's power and bounty and wins Dolabella's sympathy to the degree that he answers truthfully her question as to what Caesar intends to do with her: lead her in triumph in Rome. She has told Dolabella that she "dreamt there was an Emperor Antony" and asked whether "there was or might be such a man / As this I dreamt of". It appears that she was giving him an opportunity to assure her that Caesar, now Emperor, is such a man; since he did not respond affirmatively, she puts her direct question. Immediately after his answer, Caesar enters.

It is through the glorified Antony of her dream that the audience is made aware of the fact that Cleopatra now has gained some conception of the worth of Antony. But that is in retrospect; she indicated no such recognition while Antony was alive. The idealization of Antony in the dream contrasts with the unideal realism of her treatment of him while he lived. (Dramatically, the idealized Antony comes between the deceitful Proculeius and the cold, unmalleable Caesar. Cleopatra's acquired recognition of Antony's excellence cannot be left to the very end of the play but must be made evident, for it is vital to the formation of her tragedy.) But she is in many ways still the former Cleopatra; she schemes, and uses a new device to arouse pity for herself. There is no admission of responsibility for what has happened, no hint of a sense of guilt. And she obviously has not given up hope of a future if one can be contrived that is not shameful to her. That future depends on what she can gain from Caesar.

Since she is still alive and has not become penitent nor admitted—even realized—any responsibility for the dire situation she is now in, it is inevitable that she should carry on. Indeed the force of momentum, not checked by a change in character, leads the audience to anticipate an attempt to captivate Caesar: Julius Caesar, Pompey, Antony; and now Octavius is Caesar, the world's greatest. And it is to be expected that she will use the old tools, or rather the most effective one, the appeal to pity. When Caesar enters, she kneels to him:

Will have it thus. My master and my lord

Sir, the gods
I must obey;

(V.ii.115-117)

then

I cannot project mine own cause so well
To make it clear; but do confess I have
Been laden with like frailties which before
Have often sham'd our sex.

Caesar's response gives her little encouragement, ending as it does with a threat:

If you apply yourself to our intents,
Which towards you are most gentle, you shall find
A benefit in this change; but, if you seek
To lay on me a cruelty by taking
Antony's course, you shall bereave yourself
Of my good purposes, and put your children
To that destruction which I'll guard them from
If thereon you rely.

There follows the Seleucus incident. Whether she is providing for herself if she should have a future or, as some think, tries to convince Caesar by the planned exposure of her concealing half her wealth that she has no intention of following “Antony's course”, or has contrived the whole thing as a means of eliciting pity, she unquestionably utilizes it for the latter purpose:

O Caesar, what a wounding shame is this,
That thou vouchsafing here to visit me,
Doing the honour of thy lordliness
To one so meek, that mine own servant should
Parcel the sum of my disgraces by
Addition of his envy! Say, good Caesar,
That I some lady trifles have reserv'd,
Immoment toys, things of such dignity
As we greet modern friends withal; and say
Some nobler token I have kept apart
For Livia and Octavia—must I be unfolded
With one that I have bred? The gods! It smites me
Beneath the fall I have. ... Be it known that we, the greatest, are misthought
For things that others do; and, when we fall,
We answer others' merits in our name,
Are therefore to be pitied.

(V.ii.159-171; 176-179)

But her flattery, her profession of complete subjection to him, and her tearful appeals for pity have no effect on the astute Caesar, who answers her by the royal “we” and to her final, more quaveringly piteous “My master and my lord”, says bluntly, “Not so. Adieu.” She has done her best, but her practised methods, particularly the previously much-used pleas for pity, do not touch Caesar. And when he leaves she is vehement in her outburst—“He words me, girls, he words me”, and adds “that I should not / Be noble to myself!” 23 There is nothing left for her but to fall back on her resolution. The confirmation by Dolabella of what he had already told her about Caesar's intentions and his specification of a time limit,
Intends his journey, and within three days
You with your children will he send before,

(V.ii.200-202)

incites her to immediate action. She describes vividly to Iras the exhibition Caesar would make in Rome of
Iras and herself (she would no doubt include Charmian if she were then present) and applauds Iras' determination to pluck out her eyes rather than see it—

To fool their preparation, and to conquer
Their most absurd intents.

Caesar having proved to be untouched, she reverts to the scene of her conquest of Antony:

Show me, my women, like a queen. Go fetch
My best attires. I am again for Cydnus,
To meet Mark Antony.

(ll.227-229)

With an implied confession of dillydallying, she declares:

My resolution's plac'd, and I have nothing
Of woman in me. Now from head to foot
I am marble-constant. Now the fleeting moon
No planet is of mine.(24)

(ll.238-241)

In her final moments, as she carries out her resolution, Cleopatra has “immortal longings”, hears Antony call,
gloats over outwitting Caesar, addresses Antony as “husband”, shows jealousy in her fear that Iras may gain
the first otherworld kiss from Antony, sneers at Caesar again, speaks lovingly to the asp at her breast,25 and
dies with “Antony” on her lips and with a final fling of contempt for the world. But, it should be noted, she
does not “do it after the high Roman fashion”, nor with the singleness of motive that actuated Antony, whose
tragedy gains ironical poignancy because he thought Cleopatra—really the lying Cleopatra—had anticipated
him in nobility (IV.xiv.55-62).

Does she kill herself to be with Antony or to escape Caesar? It is the final question, to be placed along with
others. Would she have killed herself if she could have added Caesar to her string of “greats”? Why did she
leave the battle of Actium? Why did she urge Antony to fight at sea? Did she betray Antony in the second
sea-fight? What was the meaning of her “O”? Why did she behave in such a way as to lose her country instead of preserve it? Did she ever really love Antony or did she love herself for having captivated him? Why
did she tease, taunt, and cross Antony, very rarely saying anything kind to him? These questions, and others
that could be asked, show that it was not accidental that the first word she speaks in the play is “If”. The
appropriate symbol for her is a big interrogation point.

There is testimony, of course, by Antony and especially by Enobarbus, the clear-headed, cynical logician, as
to her infinite variety. Somehow she has enchanted the world’s greatest men, and she is beloved by her
attendants, even to the death. But in her behavior throughout the play, from the effrontery of her appearing on
the Cydnus to her wily proceedings with Octavius Caesar, there are repeated evidences that she is
unaccountable. It is certain that Antony never penetrates her real character; he may call her gypsy and witch,
but that is begging the question. How, in the face of and through his presentation of Cleopatra's behavior to
Antony, does Shakespeare make of her a force powerful enough to bring about the downfall of the great Antony? Does he not supply the answer, paradoxically, by depicting her as the world's great question mark, alluring and magnetic because of all the unanswerable questions about her? Does he not imply that the secret of her charm lies in the fact that neither Antony nor we (including Shakespeare himself) can identify the secret of her charm? Such an interpretation was suggested by Gamaliel Bradford many years ago but apparently disregarded by most commentators on the play:

I have said that Cleopatra was mysterious. Perhaps it is an element of the art of Shakespeare to puzzle us a little, to make us feel that we cannot interpret him always conclusively. It detracts nothing from the truth of his characters that we cannot always determine what their motives are as we can with that poor little creature of Dryden. … I, at least, do not feel clear as to her good faith to Antony. That she loves him there is no doubt at all, loves him as she is capable of loving. But it is more than doubtful whether she kills herself for love of him or in sheer desperation to avoid the scorn and vengeance of Caesar. I greatly fear that if she had been confident of Caesar's favor, confident of reigning in Rome as she had reigned in Alexandria, Antony's poor dust might have tossed forgotten in the burning winds of Egypt. And yet, I do not know—who can know? That is precisely what gives the character its charm.26

But whatever interpretation of Cleopatra's character may be given—and to survey all that has been said would demand a volume devoted to her—the final question remains: What is her tragedy? One can agree with Willard Farnham's statement (p. 174) that “It is part of her tragedy that with her subtlety she wins control of his [Antony's] force and by winning this control ruins him and herself”, but that is hardly the whole story. Nor is it satisfactory to become rhapsodic, to glorify Cleopatra beyond warrant, as J. Middleton Murry does:

Now [after Antony's death] in very deed, Cleopatra loves Antony: now she discerns his royalty, and loyalty surges up in her to meet it. Now we feel that her wrangling with Caesar and her Treasurer which follows is all external to her—as it were a part which she is still condemned to play 'in this vile world': a mere interruption, an alien interlude, while the travail of fusion between the order of imagination and love, and the order of existence and act is being accomplished: till the flame of perfect purpose breaks forth [V.ii.226-229 quoted]. No, not again for Cydnus: but now for the first time, indeed. For that old Cydnus, where the wonder pageant was, was but a symbol and preparation of this. That was an event in time; this is an event in eternity. And those royal robes were then only lovely garments of the body, now they are the integument of a soul. They must show her like a queen, now, because she is a queen, as she never was before.

(Pp. 375-376)

Much nearer to the text of the play and to all the evidence is E. E. Stoll:

… in [an] … audacious, sensuous key, for all her exaltation, she expresses herself on her deathbed. She is tenderer with her women, and stronger and more constant, than she has ever been; but her thoughts of Antony, though now an inviolable shade, are not celestial or Platonic. They are steeped in amorousness, and she is waiting, coiled on her couch. She loves him more than at the beginning; but neither now nor at his death is she, as Professor Schücking declares, “all tenderness, all passionate devotion and unselfish love”; nor does she quit life because it is not worth the living. On life she really never loosens her greedy grip. Her beauty she clutches to her dying bosom as the miser does his gold. Her robe and jewels are, even in death, assumed to heighten the impression of it upon Caesar—though only to show him what he has missed. She hears Antony mock him now, from over the bitter wave;
and at the beginning of the scene she cried,

My best attires; I am again for Cydnus—

as one who, to please both him and herself, and vex their rival, would fain die at her best, reviving all the glories of that triumph. To an ugly death she could scarcely have brought herself; ... the death which ... she is choosing and devising [is] ... an event, a scene, well-nigh an amour ... she thinks the stroke of death is as a lover's pinch, which hurts and is desired ... she is wrapped and folded up in sensuous imaginations to the end.\textsuperscript{27}

Indeed, to have Cleopatra glorified and transfigured is to forgive her treatment of Antony, to imply that it was well worth the destruction of the great Roman to bring about her regeneration. If the tragedy of Antony and the tragedy of Cleopatra are to interact to intensify each other, it is necessary \textit{not} to have a transfiguration of Cleopatra; the poignancy of Antony's tragedy is intensified by Cleopatra's unregeneracy, and it increases the pathos and tragedy of Cleopatra that she is never penitent, not even conscious of the debacle she has wrought. That she does change somewhat, that she does attain some realization of what Antony was, is to be recognized. That she did not realize it earlier, and to a much greater degree, is her tragedy: the too little and the too late. Thus the tragedy of Cleopatra is different in kind from that of Antony; the play contains the tragedy of Antony and then the tragedy of Cleopatra.

The “too little” involves a considerable pathetic element. Cleopatra, though appearing on the Cydnus as Venus, is really Isis in environment, interests, and obsessions. Of that the fertility connotations made obvious in the conversation of her companions Iras and Charmian with the Soothsayer (I.ii), the Nile imagery frequent in the play, and the trend of Cleopatra's own thoughts as revealed in her speeches give plentiful proof. Her basic interests show themselves in her imagination as she visualizes Antony in Rome (I.v.19 ff.). They permeate the glowing dream of Antony she describes to Dolabella, as she concentrates on Antony's power and his bounty (not on aspects of character and personal qualities). They suuffuse her final speeches; “... but even then what emerges is a state of trance, a vision of the divine lover Antony, filling Heaven and Earth, the kiss of the bridegroom, Love lifted to a higher plane among the Homeric gods, all an aspiration and a wild desire, the eagle and the dove.” \textsuperscript{28} This last characterization of her vision is over-etherealized; a more moderate statement is Willard Farnham's:

If we are to understand that the love of Cleopatra for Antony, like her character, continues to be deeply flawed to the end of her life, we are nevertheless to understand that, like her character, it has its measure of nobility. If Cleopatra never comes to have a love for Antony to match his love for her, she at least comes to have magnificent visions of what it would be like to achieve such a love, and her climactic vision leads her to call him husband as she dies.

(P. 202)

To that extent we may credit Cleopatra with some ennobling; but it is just enough to intensify and illuminate her tragedy. “She's good, being gone; / The hand could pluck her back that shov'd her on”, said Antony (I.ii.130-131), on hearing of Fulvia's death. Cleopatra only after Antony's death comes to some realization of what he was; he's good, being gone. Only after he is wounded or dead does she call him “noble”; only in a sort of funeral hymn does she recognize his power and bounty. But she never feels any sense of guilt such as Antony confesses; there is no \textit{peccavi}; there is no repentance, no consciousness even, of the need for remorse. She is no Othello; her tragedy can be only partial, not complete. The picture she imagines of rejoining Antony in another world could never become actual; she still would have considerable explaining to do.
Cleopatra's tragedy is inherent in her equivocality, in her utter self-interest, and in her complete ignorance of the existence of an unselfish love apart from the physical. She has had no comprehension of Roman virtues, no recognition of Antony's fundamental character, no appreciation of his courtesy and devotion to her. She gloried in his greatness as a soldier and as the most powerful of the triumvirs, not for his sake but for her own—and undermined both his military prowess and his power. She evinces, throughout the play, little concern about the country of which she is queen; she is woman, not queen, in her interests and behavior. She is as innocent of morality as Falstaff of honor. But she does learn something, through frustration and suffering, of what virtue—Roman virtue—means. It is pathetic and tragic that a beginning of anything other than sensual self-interest comes when there is neither the opportunity nor the time for growth to ensue. In that irony—in the too little and the too late—lies her tragedy. That is all the tragedy there is for her, but it is none the less profound, and gains poignancy through contrast to Antony's as his gains pathos through contrast to hers.

Notes

7. The answer is hardly to be found in the multitudinous pages that have been written about her. An excellent summary of the varying, antithetical interpretations of Cleopatra is given in Daniel Stempel's “The Transmigration of the Crocodile”, Shakespeare Quarterly, VII (1956), 59-62.
8. Not all critics recognize the teasing; for instance, J. Dover Wilson:

   … when the lovers enter ..., we learn from their lips that this same love is more spacious than ‘the wide arch of the ranged empire’, more precious than kingdoms or the whole ‘dungy earth’, and so boundless that it requires ‘new heaven, new earth’ to contain it.

   (Antony and Cleopatra, ed. Wilson, Cambridge, 1950, p. xviii);

and Robert Speaight:

   But when Antony and Cleopatra enter upon the stage, lost to everything but each other, their rapture is almost liturgical, and we remember the first meeting of Romeo and Juliet.

   (Pp. 127-128)

   It is surely inaccurate to give the speeches of Antony and Cleopatra equal import, to fail to discriminate between the tone of her two lines and that of his two (I.i.14-17).
9. Citations and quotations are based on the Kittredge edition of Antony and Cleopatra (Boston, 1941).
10. Some critics have interpreted the “Courteous lord” speech differently; e.g., H. N. Hillebrand:

   Until now Cleopatra has been desperately trying, with all the battery of her wit and sarcasm, to stave off the moment of parting. When at last she sees that Antony is inflexible, that he is in fact on the point of strategic flight, she suddenly breaks, abandons her attack, and becomes wholly the unhappy, loving woman.
But she does not “abandon her attack”; she merely changes tactics.

11. North's Plutarch. “Antonius … sent to command Cleopatra to appeare personally before him, when he came into CILICIA, to aunswere vnto such accusations as were laide against her, being this: that she had aided Cassius and Brutus in their warre against him. … Therefore when she was sent vnto by diuers letters, both from Antonius himselfe, and also from his friendes, she made so light of it and mocked Antonius so much, that she disdained to set forward otherwise, but to take her barge in the riuer of Cydnus,” etc.


14. Enobarbus, in saying to Cleopatra,

From that great face of war whose several ranges
Frighted each other?

(III.xiii.4-6)

is not concerned with arguing about her reason for leaving; he is condemning Antony for having followed her (ll. 6-12).

15. The Folio “Oh” followed by a period may suggest only a distressful moan; Thyreus goes on speaking as if he heard nothing. Maybe modern editors imply too much by inserting an exclamation point.

16. “And she gives Thyreus her hand to kiss. Perhaps she finds him rather good-looking; certainly she is musing on former, or on future, conquests” (Speaight, p. 142).

17. G. B. Harrison calls that speech “the first outburst of genuine emotion that she has yet shown”, and adds, “It is difficult to know at this point whether Cleopatra is loyal or false; probably she does not know herself” (Shakespeare's Tragedies, London, 1951, p. 218).

18. War, “all the snares the world can set” (M. R. Ridley, rev. ed. in the “Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare,” p. 171), or Caesar?

19. “Why, we may ask, should she be worried about what Caesar means to do with her if she has fully made up her mind to leave the dull world that no longer contains Antony?” (Willard Farnham, Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier: The World of His Final Tragedies, Berkeley, 1950, p. 198).

20. This Dolabella incident has been interpreted in various ways. For instance, G. S. Griffiths (“Antony and Cleopatra”, Essays and Studies … English Ass'n, XXXI (1946), 64): “Cleopatra turns this great engine of poetry on Dolabella, but it remains primarily an apology for suicide and a declaration of faith in a love, a person that has been and is no more in time.” And, more realistically, A. H. Tolman (“Act V of Antony and Cleopatra”, Falstaff and Other Shakespearean Topics, N. Y., 1925, pp. 166-167):

This high-sounding praise of her last lover is wholly genuine. … But Cleopatra is an infinite coquette … she has never been able to ‘see an ambassador, scarcely even a messenger, without desiring to bewitch him’; and only death can put an end to her instinctive longing to fascinate men … Cleopatra is eloquent both because she is praising her beloved Antony, and because she is captivating Dolabella. Her rapturous words are about Antony, but they are also directed at her new admirer. … Dolabella … returns to declare his love, to give the queen the fullest possible information, and to take a last farewell.

Most students of Shakespeare do not seem to realize the full force of this embryonic love-affair, acting itself out before us on the very brink of the grave.

22. The sequence of seeing, pitying, and loving is explicitly stated, though by a woman for a man in this instance, in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* II. iv. 7, 11, 14-15:

**DAUGHTER.**

First, I saw him;

... next I pitied him;

... then I loved him,

Extremely lov'd him, infinitely lov'd him.

Cleopatra's envisioning this possible sequence is suggested by her words to Proculeius, V. ii. 30-32; she wishes, of course, to be in Caesar's presence that he may see and pity her:

A doctrine of obedience, and would gladly
Look him i' th' face.

23. Apparently “a desire to save herself from the ignoble fate that Caesar plans for her” (Farnham, *Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier*, p. 199). But is that really all she means?


25. “The asp, wriggling its way from the basket to her breast, carries more than its mortal sting; it bears the salt and savour of all that natural life whose passionate child Cleopatra had been. The asp is very much more than a theatrical convenience; it is the symbol of nature reclaiming one part of its own” (Speaight, p. 139).


Ray L. Heffner, Jr. (essay date summer 1976)


*[In the following essay, Heffner examines Shakespeare’s extensive use of messengers in Antony and Cleopatra, contending that “the messenger is a bit of necessary stage machinery which Shakespeare seems almost miraculously to transform...into something rich and strange.”]*

In electing to present the story of Antony and Cleopatra not, as Dryden did, by compressing the action to a single climactic day in a single place but instead by shifting the scene rapidly over the known world and allowing ample time for almost innumerable turns, counterturns, and apparent vacillations by his protagonists, Shakespeare avoided some problems of dramatic construction and magnified others. In *The Tempest*, in which the unities are observed, a long and potentially tedious exposition by Prospero must be rather artificially introduced by assuming that, in all their years more or less alone together on the island, not until now has Prospero told Miranda one word about their past. But instead of suppressing this dramaturgic difficulty, Shakespeare boldly calls attention to it, as Prospero punctuates his narrative with commands to Miranda to pay attention. His concern lest she, along with the audience, fall asleep prematurely itself becomes a subject of dramatic interest and tension. And the playwright's artful effort to bring all parts of his plot to simultaneous
climax at Prospero’s cell is underlined and used in the play, as Prospero gets so engrossed in the love affair of Ferdinand and Miranda that he forgets about the homicidal plot of Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban, and as his necessary agent, Ariel, repeatedly threatens rebellion. In an amusing way, the playwright's difficulty in imposing a rigid form on recalcitrant material becomes a subject of the play, or one among several metaphors for its central action.

These same problems and opportunities do not exist in Antony and Cleopatra, but there also Shakespeare makes a virtue and a metaphor of a necessity of stagecraft. Scattering his characters around the Mediterranean but wishing to keep the dramatic conflicts among them before the audience, Shakespeare commits himself to a very heavy use of messengers. At the beginning of the play Antony, at his “lascivious wassails” in Egypt, cannot confront Caesar directly but must be informed of Fulvia's death and Pompey's threat to the triumvirate by messenger. The contrary pulls of Egyptian lust and luxury versus Roman politics and honor are for a time focused on the question, to hear or not to hear the messengers? And, when Antony and Caesar do meet, the question of how Antony treated Caesar's messengers is the first subject of their quarrel; Antony excuses himself gracefully if untruthfully by saying that the messengers came upon him at an inopportune time. Cleopatra, waiting impatiently in Egypt, must keep track of Antony's moods and learn of his politic marriage to Octavia through messengers. Even in the last act, though Antony is dead and Caesar is now in Egypt, the struggle between Caesar's power and Antony's spirit for the final allegiance of Cleopatra must be conducted largely through a series of intermediaries.

Shakespeare obviously takes great pains to diversify this host of necessary messengers and to build dramatic interest in the scenes in which they are interrogated or give their reports. Some are named (Thidias, Alexas, Mardian, Dolabella), though many are simply called “Messenger” or “Ambassador.” Some, even of the unnamed, have distinct or slightly sketched personalities. A detail from Plutarch, when Antony, who “had superfluous kings for messengers,” is reduced to sending his schoolmaster to Caesar in an ignominious plea that he be allowed to live a private life, takes on special significance as this incident is contrasted with the many other embassies of the play. So also does the irony of Antony's dying words—“None about Caesar trust but Proculeius” (IV.xv.48)—for it is Proculeius who tricks Cleopatra and captures her but Dolabella from whom she is able to charm the truth of Caesar's intentions. Proculeius is the “true” ambassador in his loyalty to his instructions from his master; but Dolabella, under the influence of emotional sympathy for Cleopatra and perhaps of her vision of the transcendent Antony, finds a higher truth to which to give his allegiance. Dolabella, though remaining nominally in the service of Caesar, becomes Cleopatra's messenger rather than his, as he spies on Caesar and brings Cleopatra final confirmation of her suspicions.

Among the scenes of greatest dramatic interest are those in which the principals are characterized by their use or abuse of messengers. When, in I.ii, Antony finally consents to hear the news from Rome, the messenger is understandably reluctant to give him all the bad news at once:

ANTONY:

Well, what worst?

MESSENGER:

The nature of bad news infects the teller.

ANTONY:

When it concerns the fool or coward. On.

Things that are past are done with me. 'Tis thus:
Who tells me true, though in his tale lie death,
I hear him as he flattered.

(90-95)

In I.iv and I.ii, we also see Caesar and Pompey receiving unwelcome political or military news, and each maintains a properly dignified bearing. This “correct” or Roman attitude towards the bearer of bad tidings is of course contrasted with Cleopatra's outrageous behavior in II.v, when she learns of Antony's marriage to Octavia. “Strikes him down”; “Strikes him”; “She hales him up and down”; “Draw a knife”: these are the stage directions in the Folio, to accompany Cleopatra's magnificent verbal pyrotechnics. Small wonder that, as this interrupted dialogue is resumed in III.iii, the Messenger is eager to tell Cleopatra exactly what she wants to hear to the disadvantage of Octavia, while Cleopatra is eager to give to anything he says a construction most supportive of her pride. The truth-telling function of a messenger is in these scenes completely subverted by passion and self-interest. All these scenes, of course, prepare for III.xiii, in which Antony demonstrates the deterioration in his reason and self-control as he orders Caesar's messenger, Thidias, to be whipped and then relishes the poor man's pain and degradation.

Two other aspects of the scenes in which Cleopatra learns about Octavia deserve comment. First, there are the surprising words with which she first greets the messenger:

Ram thou thy fruitful tidings in mine ears,
That long time have been barren.

(II.v.24-25)

The violent sexuality of the image is a shock, even in this court where all activity (billiards, fishing, fortune-telling) is overlaid with pornographic innuendo. But the metaphor of the conveying of good news as vigorous sexual intercourse, and the actual beating of the messenger which follows, are but extreme or “primitive” versions of a necessary device of stagecraft, by which the messenger is treated as an extension of the personality of the sender of the message, and various dramatic tensions and conflicts are duplicated in the interaction of the messenger and the recipient of the message.

A second noteworthy feature of this portion of the play is the use of time. Though four scenes intervene, the action of II.v and III.iii is clearly continuous; Cleopatra resumes an interrupted conversation, and the Messenger is still smarting from her blows. But in those intervening scenes, the peace of the world has been settled (temporarily) at Misenum, and Pompey's big chance to be “lord of all the world” has been presented and rejected. Moreover, Ventidius, whose expedition to Parthia was not initiated by Antony until after the wedding, has had time to travel almost the length of the empire, wage a campaign, defeat Pacorus, and decide for politic reasons that he will not “acquire too high a fame when him we serve's away.” Dramatic action which must take place in a few hours in Egypt is simultaneous with actions in the rest of the world which must require months. One effect of this striking combination of collapsed and expanded dramatic time on the love story is to make it credible that, as Julian Markels maintains in a recent book, Antony fulfills his promise to Octavia to “keep his square,” and that only after extreme provocation by Caesar and after Octavia's voluntary departure on an ill-conceived mission of reconciliation does Antony turn finally towards Egypt. But Markels also points out, as one among many “discontinuities” in the play, Antony's statements in soliloquy back in II.iii, just after the marriage and in the same scene in which he promises Octavia, “to come / Shall all be done by th' rule”:

And though I make this marriage for my peace,
I' th' East my pleasure lies.
It seems that Antony must be convicted either of vacillation or duplicity. Markels argues, however, that he is trying to enjoy Roman honor and Eastern pleasure simultaneously, that no real blame should attach to this attempt, and that indeed Antony’s ultimate triumph (as well as Cleopatra's) represents success in just such a reconciliation or engrossment of antitheticals. The ambiguous or paradoxical use of time in this section of the play seems to bear out the analysis of Markels. For Antony to fulfill the demands of his honorable commitment to Octavia requires that months elapse between Antony's promise in II.iii and their separation in III.iv. For Antony to fulfill the demands of his passionate, hyperbolic commitment to Cleopatra requires that no time elapse, that he be virtually on his way back to Egypt even as she interviews the messenger to learn of his marriage, and convinces herself by the second interview with the messenger that her attractive power remains unchallenged. Shakespeare seems to insist on having it both ways.

In terms of the “political” plot, interspersing the peace conference, the Ventidius episode, and the leave-taking of Antony and Octavia between Cleopatra's two scenes of continuous action with the messenger, has the effect of showing Antony almost simultaneously present, in person or by surrogate, in Athens, Rome, Parthia, and Egypt. And finally, the employment of Octavia as but one among so many messengers scurrying back and forth, even at her own urgent request, is for Octavius the ultimate insult to his narrow conception of family honor. The concept of carrying a message is, as Markels might say, being “platonized”: the idea of the messenger is abstracted for contemplation. Ventidius must be careful to remember that he is but an extension, an emissary of Antony and must not achieve too many victories lest he be thought a competitor. Menas transmits an urgent message to Pompey: if you would be “lord of all the world,” let me cut the cable and “fall to their throats.” He is berated by Pompey: “Ah, this thou shouldst have done, / And not have spoken on't. … Being done unknown, / I should have found it afterwards well done” (II.vii.72-78). It was a time for independent action, not for urgent messages, for doing what Ventidius, in the next scene, prudently refuses to do. It is no surprise that after this bit of casuistry by Pompey, Menas tells us he can no longer serve him.

In these last examples, we have perhaps moved beyond the role of the messenger strictly conceived to that of the loyal subordinate, though questions of loyalty are certainly intermixed with those of truthful communication in the cases of Proculeius and Dolabella. But let us return to a narrower consideration of messengers in two strikingly parallel scenes: I.iv and I.v. In this early part of the play, though not in the same way later, the dramatic action consists largely of a contest between Rome, epitomized in Caesar, and Egypt, epitomized in Cleopatra, for the allegiance of Antony. Every effort is made to contrast the two symbolic environments and their two main exemplars. And yet, as almost always in Shakespeare's dramatic economy, between two mighty opposites there are also important similarities. In this case, the similarities involve messengers. In I.v a messenger reports to Caesar:

Thy biddings have been done, and every hour,
Most noble Caesar, shalt thou have report
How 'tis abroad.

(34-36)

In the next scene, Cleopatra interviews Alexas, who brings the first news from Antony in Rome:

CLEOPATRA:

Met'st thou my posts?

ALEXAS:

Ay, madam, twenty several messengers.
Why do you send so thick?

CLEOPATRA: 

Who's born that day

When I forget to send to Antony

Shall die a beggar. Ink and paper, Charmian.

....

He shall have every day a several greeting,

Or I'll unpeople Egypt.

(I.v.61-65; 77-78)

Cleopatra's boast is in tune with the hyperbole which sounds through so much of the language of the lovers and through so many descriptions of them by others: “Let Rome in Tiber melt!”; “Melt Egypt into Nile! and kindly creatures / Turn all to serpents”; “We cannot call her winds and waters signs and tears: they are greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report”; “His legs bestrid the ocean: his reared arm / Crested the world.” But in this particular context, her excessive use of messengers is clearly being compared to Caesar's: his for efficient political and military intelligence, hers for her own strategic purpose of keeping her man, but still, as Enobarbus says, arising out of “the finest part of pure love.” ³

Caesar too is occasionally described in hyperbole, sometimes by his enemies. But Caesar's amazing qualities are assumed to be less mythic and metaphoric, more literal and naturalistic, even when they compel fear and wonder. In III.vii, shortly before the battle of Actium, a messenger brings Antony confirmation of news he has already heard of the remarkable swiftness of Caesar's approach:

ANTONY:

Is it not strange, Canidius,

That from Tarentum and Brundusium

He could so quickly cut the Ionian sea

And take in Toryne?—You have heard on't, sweet?

CLEOPATRA:

Celerity is never more admired

Than by the negligent.

ANTONY:

A good rebuke,

Which might have well become the best of men

To taunt a slackness.
Enter a Messenger.

ANTONY:
Thy business?

MESSENGER:
The news is true, my lord, he is descried;
Caesar has taken Toryne.

ANTONY:
Can he be there in person? 'Tis impossible;
Strange that his power should be.

As Antony, Cleopatra, and Enobarbus leave, Canidius and a soldier remain on stage, reviewing the argument about fighting on land or sea. But Canidius returns once more to the subject of Caesar's remarkable celerity: “This speed of Caesar's / Carries beyond belief” (74-75).

Mainly, in this scene, Cleopatra is asserting her unseemly and masculine pretense to generalship, while Antony is abetting her act, and demonstrating his own stubbornness in refusing to heed the advice of experienced soldiers. But also, in the heavy emphasis on Caesar's “impossible” speed (again, the detail is from Plutarch), there is a suggestion of that mysterious and irreversible turning of the tide which occurs in so many Shakespearean plays, a tilting of the powers that make miracles possible, towards Caesar. A confirmation of this movement comes a good deal later in IV.iii, just before another battle (which Antony paradoxically wins), when the eerie “music of the hautboys” signifies that “the god Hercules, whom Antony loved, / Now leaves him.” But I think one of the most important functions of this passage is as further preparation for a remarkable touch in the great final scene of Cleopatra's death and transfiguration.

Cleopatra is already dead; the loyal Charmian, a part of whose riddling fortune in I.ii had been, “You shall outlive the lady whom you serve,” now hesitates only a moment to adjust her mistress's crown before applying the asp to her own bosom:

CHARMIAN:

Your crown's awry;
I'll mend it, and then play—

Enter the Guard, rustling in.

FIRST Guardsman:
Where's the Queen?

CHARMIAN:
Speak softly, wake her not.

FIRST Guardsman:

Caesar hath sent—

CHARMIAN:

Too slow a messenger.

(V.ii.317-20)

Augustus Caesar, now "sole sir o' th' world"; that Caesar who displayed his military skill by receiving messengers "every hour"; who dared to vie with Cleopatra, his superfluous messengers against hers, for the soul of Antony; who, when the time was right for him to campaign in his own person, crossed seas with miraculous speed—now, in his final contest with Cleopatra's wiles and Antony's great heart, "hath sent too slow a messenger"!

In this case, there is no absolute necessity of stagecraft for the "rustling" guard, since Caesar himself and his train are hot on their heels and could have made the discovery. But delaying Caesar's entrance gives Charmian a well-earned chance to hold the center of the stage for her own last gibe against Caesar's power. In this scene, into which so much is packed of all that has gone before in this rich play, including the fulfillment of the soothsayer's prophecies from I.ii, and the actualization of the hyperboles and paradoxes which seem to roll so easily from the tongue in the early scenes, Cleopatra becomes in her final apotheosis just about All: her former self at Cydnus, Snake-Goddess, woman of the people, boy actor, Roman wife, nursing mother, even the cold statue ("Now from head to foot / I am marble constant") as which the pliant messenger described her rival, Octavia—"She shows a body rather than a life, / A statue than a breather" (III.iii.23-24). To this great coda, Shakespeare could not resist adding a final ironic and triumphant reminiscence of all those sweating, scurrying messengers who have so filled the stage, now all too slow to catch Cleopatra's soaring spirit.

Indeed, there is also a final reminiscence of that odd but dramatic figure of speech or of thought which treats the messenger as a physical extension of the one sending the message, which we saw in Cleopatra's metaphor, "Ram thou thy fruitful tidings in mine ears." Now she fears that Iras, who has died first (and that Cleopatra has "the aspic in her lips" even before she has herself been bitten shows that she has become the Snake-Goddess), will steal her kiss from Antony:

If she first meet the curled Antony,  
He'll make demand of her, and spend that kiss  
Which is my heaven to have.

(V.ii.299-302)

Iras is but her messenger, sent before with the glad tidings of the imminent arrival of the queen. But Antony is courteous; as she had rewarded messengers by giving them her hands to kiss, he will be so joyful at the news of Cleopatra's coming that he will reward Iras with a kiss. If Caesar has sent too slow a messenger, Cleopatra fears that her own messenger this time will be too swift, and she is determined to overtake her. In addition to all the other roles she encompasses in this scene, she will be her own messenger.

There are in the play many messengers which have not been mentioned, including the lying message of her own death sent by Cleopatra to Antony through the eunuch Mardian, which starts the chain of love-deaths (IV.xiii, xiv), and the message from Antony to Enobarbus, which breaks the apostate soldier's heart (IV.v, vi).
But I hope enough has been said to demonstrate that, like disguisings, stage fools and madmen, listeners behind the bush or the arras, and all the rest, the messenger is a bit of necessary stage machinery which Shakespeare seems almost miraculously to transform. In the history plays, in the other tragedies, and even in the comedies, messengers are treated with great subtlety, but no play approaches the infinite variety of Antony and Cleopatra in the uses of this convention, because here the dispersed locations, sweeping scope, and rapid turns of the action required a heavy use of reporters and intermediaries. What convention or the exigencies of stagecraft required of Shakespeare, he almost always changed into something rich and strange. His was not the art which concealed art but that which flaunted it, and turned the dramatic process itself into an evocative metaphor. 4

Notes

3. Hyperbole and paradox in the play are well summarized in Maynard Mack’s introduction to the Pelican edition, to which I am greatly indebted.
4. After this piece was written, I read the discussion of messengers in Janet Adelman’s excellent book The Common Liar: An Essay on “Antony and Cleopatra” (Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 34-39. Her approach is different from mine; she stresses the purpose of the messengers as “not so much to convey information as to convey the sense that all information is unreliable” (p. 35) and thus to involve the reader actively in the play.

Clare Kinney (essay date 1990)

[In the following essay, Kinney contends that Cleopatra is the human embodiment of Egypt and represents an all-inclusive potentiality that embraces the feminine and the masculine.]

Cleopatra, like Falstaff, is always being called names. Almost every scene in Antony and Cleopatra generates new identities for her; over the course of the play she acquires at least forty different cognomens. She is gypsy, whore, trull, vile lady, grave charm, morsel, boggler, salt Cleopatra; she is great fairy, nightingale, serpent of old Nile, Egyptian dish; she is, furthermore, most sovereign creature, great Egypt, day o’ th’ world, lass unparalleled. Constantly avoiding the numerous (and largely male) attempts to fix or subsume her being within a single convenient or conventional category (such as Witch or Strumpet), she transforms and re-verses whatever labels are attached to her. Consider, for example, what happens to Cleopatra the Comestible. The “Egyptian dish” (2.6.123) 1 has been tasted by Julius Caesar, the elder Pompey, and Antony: all Rome, it seems, has had a piece of the pie, and at the nadir of his fortunes, Antony accuses her of being a rather nasty leftover:

I found you as a morsel, cold upon
Dead Caesar’s trencher: nay, you were a fragment
Of Gnaeus Pompey’s. ...

(3.13.116-18)

But even as her last over, the “pretty worm of Nilus,” feeds upon her, the queen says to Charmian:

Dost thou not see my baby at my breast
That sucks the nurse asleep?
The tempting and dangerous “morsel for a monarch” (1.5.31) becomes at the last this gentle nurturer, figuratively giving life even as she is preyed upon.  

Yet Cleopatra's happy capacity for such transformations does not mean that the speeches of Antony and Enobarbus praising her infinitely becoming acts of “becoming,” her delicious variety (1.1.49-51; 2.2.235-40) constitute the last word on her. Inasmuch as her identity can be fixed it is located in the repeated metonymical epithet “Egypt.” Whenever the word occurs a kind of referential oscillation between the woman and the nation is triggered in the hearer's mind. The queen seems to be interchangeable with every aspect of her country and its denizens. She is its presiding goddess Isis (3.6.17), she is the “serpent of old Nile” (1.5.25), she is the Nile itself. Even as “Nilus' slime” (1.3.68-69) is quickened by the masculine sun (Phoebus, Horus), Cleopatra, “black” with “Phoebus' amorous pinches” (1.5.28), turns men's swords into ploughshares and brings forth a harvest: Caesar “ploughed her and she cropped” (2.2.228); she has borne children to Antony. Her Egyptian fecundity is indeed emphasized by Shakespeare's suppression of all mention of Antony's Roman offspring by Fulvia and Octavia. And when she calls for the general destruction of her land if she is cold and false to her lover, “Till by degrees the memory of my womb, / Together with my brave Egyptians all, … Lie graveless …” (3.13.163ff.), she instinctively couples her progeny and her people.

In fact, Cleopatra is coextensive with her subjects to such a degree that her last words can be completed quite naturally by her countrywoman Charmian. “What should I stay—” says the queen, and dies; her attendant immediately supplies, “In this wild world?” (5.2.312-13). This uninterrupted transference of discourse between one speaker and the other retrospectively undercuts Octavius's rather cheap shot as he faces the queen and her ladies for the first time and asks, “Which is the Queen of Egypt?” (5.2.111). Cleopatra is Egypt, but Egypt is also Cleopatra; her Egyptians can speak for their monarch. Charmian's response to the soldier's “Is this well done?”—“It is well done, and fitting for a princess / Descended of so many royal kings” (5.2.324-26)—would have come equally fittingly from Cleopatra's own lips.

The equation of the woman so completely with her state conlates the monarch's “two bodies” and breaks down, or rather denies, the barrier between her public and private selves. Even after her suicide — and despite her claim that death “shackles accidents and bolts up change” (5.2.6)—Cleopatra's identity is still oscillating between woman and queen, between the “lass unparalleled” and the “princess / Descended of so many royal kings” of Charmian's last encomia. She asserts, after Antony's death, that she is “No more but e'en a woman, and commanded / By such poor passion as the maid that milks / And does the meanest chares” (4.15.73-75), but a scene or two later she has not lost her “Immortal longings” as she dons her crown and royal robes to revisit Cydnus (5.2.279-80). Lear's belated discovery that he is “a very foolish, fond old man” is part of his tragic education; Cleopatra's beautiful insistence at the end of act 4 on her private, limited human identity does not constitute an admission of anything she did not already know.

Perhaps the fascination and the infuriation that Cleopatra ignites in Rome's autocrats derives in part from the fact that she can be Egypt in a way that neither Caesar nor Antony can ever embody Rome: they are merely Roman. For Rome demands of its rulers an obsessive privileging of the public over the private identity, and this is why it would be unthinkable for Caesar to accede to the defeated Antony's request that he might dwell “A private man in Athens” (3.12.15): as far as Octavius is concerned Antony doesn't have a private identity; indeed, on hearing of his enemy's death he declares Antony's “is not a single doom, in the name lay / A moiety of the world” (5.1.18-19). Roman manliness, the system of value that equates virtue with virtus, demands a kind of normative public behavior allowing infinitely less free play of identity than royal Egyptian femaleness. Philo's insistence, as the play opens, that “the triple pillar of the world” has become a “strumpet's fool” (1.1.12-13) emphatically asserts the noninclusive either/or nature of Roman values. One must enact a single, absolute condition or identity; one cannot supplement it or transform it into something else equally good or better, only relinquish it or perforce represent its (vilified) opposite.
Cleopatra's Egypt embraces multiplicity and difference, and for all its apparent “femininity” does not exclude maleness (the Greek suffix of the monarch's very name makes her father as well as mother to her country). Octavius snarls that “Antony is not more manlike / Than Cleopatra; nor the queen … / More womanly than he (1.4.5-7). But when she appropriates Antony's “sword Philippan” (2.5.23), Cleopatra is, as Janet Adelman suggests, not merely Omphale subduing Herculean Antony, or Venus disarming Mars, but also the vigorously androgynous figure of Venus armata (Adelman 92)—or at the very least an Omphale who doesn't just trap heroes in the female space of the bedroom but insists on invading the male space of the battleground. Of course, the fiasco of Actium is on one level attributable to Cleopatra's failure to “be a man”; certainly she does not meet the requirements of Roman virtus. But as even Enobarbus points out, Antony was not obliged to fly with her. Antony has defended Cleopatra's right, as “Egypt,” to “appear for a man” (3.7.18) and lead her troops to battle, but he never properly comes to terms with her augmented identity. He cannot think of her as a fellow soldier whose shortcomings should not affect his own performance, but only as a bewitching female to be pursued at all costs.

Antony’s sense that he is obliged to choose between virtus and Cleopatra at Actium, that he cannot be both soldier and lover, and that, having chosen to be the latter, he has “lost [his] way for ever” (3.11.4) and is Antony no more, is a by-product of Rome's characteristic attitude in this play toward gender relations and individual identity. It is not so much a case of “male” values predictably being privileged over “female” ones, as of a complete suppression of the female term within a potentially complementary pairing while the male one is doubled. This obliteration followed by reduplication is most clearly illustrated when Antony marries Octavia. Octavius permits his exemplary female counterpart and beloved sister to be sacrificed to and subsumed by his problematic relationship with Antony. She becomes the (inadequate) glue holding together their unhappy marriage. In the summit meeting of act 2, scene 2—at the end of which, as Carol Neely points out (143), the two men enact a parodic betrothal ceremony in Octavia's absence—Caesar yearns for a “hoop” to bind together himself and Antony (2.2.115). But Octavia is never really permitted to embrace both men; tellingly, the stage directions for her very first appearance specify “Enter Antony, Caesar, Octavia between them” (3.3), and, in Caesar's words, she is to be “the cement of our love” (3.2.29). Octavia, however, recasts this image when, sensing the renewed antagonism between husband and brother, she laments,

\[
\text{Wars 'twixt you twain would be} \\
\text{As if the world should cleave, and that slain men} \\
\text{Should solder up the rift.} \\
\text{(3.4.30-32)}
\]

The sealing agent, the “solder” between the “world shares,” is not one woman's body but many corpses. The image is further revised when Enobarbus, hearing of Lepidus's fall, foresees open conflict between Caesar and Antony and declares,

\[
\text{Then, world, thou hast a pair of chaps, no more,} \\
\text{And throw between them all the food thou hast,} \\
\text{They'll grind the one the other.} \\
\text{(3.5.13-15)}
\]

Nothing can heal or seal the breach between the two, nothing can separate them, and Octavia (like everyone else) will presumably be one more victim consumed by their rivalry—and, ironically, just as much a “morsel” therefore as the “Egyptian dish.”

The mediating female is gradually obliterated: Rome's central relationship is between male rivals, each of whom wants to be Rome. It is significant that the first epithet Octavius applies to Antony in the play is “great competitor” (1.4.3). The term is being invoked in its root sense of “associate or partner in the same enterprise
or quest,” but the inevitable double meaning underscores the generals’ real relations. Even at the height of
their apparent amity in act 3, Antony tells Octavius “I’ll wrestle with you in my strength of love” (3.2.62); all
loving-kindness is perforce expressed in terms of rivalry. In Egypt, the world that embraces male and female
possibilities, Antony celebrates the “peerless” alliance that makes Cleopatra and himself a glorious “mutual
pair” (1.1.33-40)—the semi-tautology of “mutual pair” emphasizes their bond. In Rome the significant
pair-bonding is always male (wives are abandoned or absent) and perpetually competitive, because one will
truly gain one's identity only by destroying a double or a parodic mirror image—not by representing one-half
of a complementary pair.

Waiting to have her fortune told by the Soothsayer, Charmian comically sketches a career for herself that
threatens to rival Cleopatra’s: “Let me be married to three kings in a forenoon and widow them all; let me
have a child at fifty to whom Herod of Jewry may do homage; find me to marry with Octavius Caesar …”
(1.2.25-29). But she climaxes her wish “and companion me with my mistress.” Such a desire could not,
would not be articulated in the language of Rome; even Antony's last loyal companion, Eros, turns into a
competitor when, killing himself instead of his lord, he beats him to a noble death. Competition, in the shape
of resented doubles, distorting mirrors, threats to individual male identity, is always present in this world.
Antony is angrily aware that other “great competitors,” Cneius Pompeius and Julius Caesar, have “always
already” enjoyed Cleopatra, and I think it not insignificant that the auditor or reader of this play is perpetually
in danger of confusing references to the dead Pompey and Caesar with their living namesakes. Furthermore,
the “sons”—Shakespeare, tellingly, blurs historical family relationships: Sextus Pompeius is actually Cneius
Pompeius' younger brother; Octavius is Julius Caesar's nephew—can never quite detach themselves from the
“fathers” (although, as the harshest critics in the play of Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great's Egyptian
mistress, Octavius and Sextus do their best.)

Doctor Johnson complained that in Antony and Cleopatra, the heroine apart, “no character is very strongly
discriminated.” While one might not choose to agree with the suggestion that Antony and Octavius are not
very clearly differentiated, it is true that both characters feel their discrete identities, their very selves, are put
into question by the behavior of the other. Due to their unwillingness to embrace difference, the possibility of
complementarity is sacrificed to the principle of mutual exclusivity (“I can't thrive while he's around”), but
because they are partners as well as rivals, slightly skewed doubles as well as opposites, whenever one seeks
to exclude or suppress the other he is always threatening to destroy himself.

After the battle of Actium, Canidius believes the fight would have gone well “Had our great general / Been
what he knew himself …” (3.10.26-27). There is a lot of talk in this play about what it is to “be” Antony—talk
that always seems to collapse into tautology, coming up with definitions that are at once circular and
restrictive. At the end of act 1, scene 1, Philo complains that

   sometimes, when he is not Antony,
He comes too short of that great property
Which still should go with Antony.

(1.1.57-59)

The suggestion here is that Antony is to blame for lacking the greatness that should always accompany
Antony even (paradoxically) when he “isn't himself.” His self is not his own; the “great property” that is
supposed to define him is in a sense “common property”; his very existence is dependent upon his
submission to Rome's code of values. An Antony who swerves from that value system is a “not-Antony” who
is suppressed within three lines. Antony certainly can't reconcile the partial “versions of Antony” reflected
back to him by Octavius or emanating from Rome with the competing sense of a transformed self generated
by his love for Cleopatra. And yet, to the last, he is terribly dependent upon the mirror provided by Rome. “If
I lose mine honour / I lose myself” he tells Octavia (3.4.22-23); “honour” is of course Roman virtus, and
when Octavius defeats him and denies him his Roman identity by “harping on what I am / Not what he knew
I was” (3.13.142-43)—refusing to reflect back to him that image by which Antony has constituted himself—the
general's sense of self begins to dissolve. Antony can celebrate Cleopatra's multiplicity, her becoming
“becomings,” but he cannot himself become anything other than the Antony approved by Rome without
confronting the prospect of mere formlessness and nonexistence. As the play opens, his “Let Rome in Tiber
melt” defies Rome's categories and definitions, but when he believes his Romanness is melting away he has
nothing to put in its place.⁹ (Cleopatra's parallel “Melt Egypt into Nile” [2.5.78] is far less self-subverting
because the Nile is also Egypt and she is both.)

Antony’s presuicide meditation on the inchoate cloud forms that shift in seconds dramatizes his sense of
self-loss. Like the disappearing cloud rack, “I am Antony, / Yet cannot hold this visible shape …”
(4.14.13-14). It is noticeable that in a few words he moves from subjectivity (“I am Antony”) to a sense of
self constituted by others' regard (“this visible shape”). If he is invisible to Rome, he doesn't exist—and he can
find nothing in the (as he thinks) treacherous flux of Egypt to give him new shape. Ironically, he can only
regain his identity, put Antony back together again, through willed self-destruction. Dying, he tells Cleopatra:

Not Caesar's valor hath o'erthrown Antony,
But Antony's hath triumphed on itself.

(4.15.14-15)

He displaces his rival's victory with his own, splits himself so that an Antony will survive as victor of his
dissolution. Despite the fact that, hauled up into Cleopatra's Alexandrian monument, he is finally
embraced by the womb/tomb of Egypt, this Antony will be a “Roman” Antony. At the last (and with the
familiar circularity that always seems to accompany Antonine self-definition) he is, in his own words, “A
Roman, by a Roman / Valiantly vanquish'd” (4.15.57-58).

When Octavius appears shaken by the news of Antony's death, Maecenas remarks upon the inescapable
interdependence of the two generals' identities: “When such a spacious mirror's set before him / He needs
must see himself” (5.1.34-35). If Romans are always lamenting the deaths of those they most wanted out of
the way (Antony himself has wept for Brutus at Philippi), it is perhaps because the departed foe inevitably
turns out to be much more a part of one's self than one had ever admitted. So it is not surprising that Octavius
eulogizes Antony as

… my brother, my competitor
… my mate in empire,
Friend and companion in the front of war,
The arm of mine own body, and the heart
Where mine his thoughts did kindle; ...

(5.1.42-46)

Caesar wins his empire, becomes “Rome,” through bereavement (the loss of a brother and friend), divorce
(from a “mate in empire”), and self-mutilation (the cutting off of an arm, the tearing out of a heart). It has
been suggested that in Antony and Cleopatra, although he does not lose himself, Octavius doesn't become
anything (Adelman 92). I myself would propose that he does undergo a metamorphosis: his “becoming,”
however, is predicated upon a subtraction, because his identity is so dependent upon Antony's.

Cleopatra's being encompassed Egypt, all possible versions of womankind, and the male principle too; the
Roman rulers can only “become” Rome in their absence, self-suppression, or self-diminishment. Antony is
named “Emperor” by his mistress for the first time in the play when she tells Dolabella “I dreamt there was
an Emperor Antony” (5.2.76); he has to die first. And, as we have seen, there is not much left of Octavius to
become Augustus Caesar.

But is it fair thus to privilege Egypt's multiplicity over the fragmented and limited selves of Rome when Cleopatra herself seems to submit to Rome's categories of value at the last? Even as she begins to play with the idea of thwarting Octavius's ambitions by killing herself, she says, “Let's do it after the high Roman fashion” (4.15.87). Is she reconstructing her identity according to the requirements of virtus? Awaiting the arrival of the asp, Cleopatra proclaims:

Of woman in me: now from head to foot
I am marble constant.

(5.2.237-39)

Her first words deny her femaleness and suggest a complete surrender to the Roman equation of virtue with virtus, manliness; her marble constancy, on the other hand, evokes a flickering reminder of the “holy, cold and still conversation” of that exemplary Roman matron Octavia (3.6.119-20). But to my mind, Cleopatra is not so much subordinating herself to Roman value systems as adding a couple of new “becomings” to her play of identity. In dying thus she not only escapes the actual bonds that Octavius would place upon her, but (in acting in a manner that assorts with his codes) prevents him from fixing her nature by reducing her to his “Egyptian puppet.” She does not, moreover, slavishly imitate the “high Roman fashion” of death but rather appropriates it and remakes it in her own image. In a distinctly Egyptian variation on the theme of opening one's own veins, Cleopatra, the “serpent of old Nile,” succumbs to another serpent of old Nile: Egypt is by Egypt valiantly vanquished. She lives on after death as Charmian's “lass unparalleled”; Octavius also lives on, but merely to be (in the queen's own words) an “ass / Unpolicied” (5.2.306-7). And Octavius, ordering her burial beside Antony in the Alexandrian monument, admits, perforce, that “No grave on earth shall clip in it / A pair so famous” (5.2.357-58): all-embracing Egypt finally wins out as the male/female union displaces the privileged pair-bond rivalry between the “great competitors.”

Notes

1. All references to Antony and Cleopatra are taken from the edition of M. R. Ridley in the Arden Shakespeare series (London: Methuen, 1971).
2. If Cleopatra becomes the nurturing mother at the last, she does so, it might be argued, at the expense of her real children, whom Octavius has threatened to slay if she escapes him. Cleopatra, however, is in a double bind here. She has already sworn to Antony that, should she break faith with him and ally herself with Octavius, her progeny and people will perish (3.13.158ff). Whichever way she acts now, they are doomed. Her final victory over Octavius in death, her confirmation of her union with Antony, can thus only reassert her maternity in these figurative terms.
3. We do see a comparable phenomenon in Henry IV Part I when Hal concludes Hotspur's dying “Percy thou art dust / And food for—” with “For worms, brave Percy.” But Hal's finishing off this speech seems more like a final “finishing off” of his rival and double.
4. The interplay between public and private identity achieved by Cleopatra throughout the play is particularly striking if we compare Shakespeare's Egyptian queen with John Webster's Duchess of Malfi, whose assertion of her private and sexual identity challenges the public self largely constructed for her by her brothers. For an interesting discussion of the implications of “embodiment” in Webster's play see Wells 65-66.
5. For a related discussion of Shakespeare's multiple and ambiguous representation of Cleopatra at her death see Belsey 184.
6. Richard P. Wheeler remarks, “Cleopatra has offered Antony a mode of relating in which his manhood is completed in his response to the feminine in Cleopatra, and which releases the mutual interchange
of masculine and feminine in both lovers” (158).
7. Of course competition is not entirely absent from the relations of the Egyptians; Cleopatra herself is anxious that Iras, having predeceased her, may steal a first postmortem embrace from Antony (5.2.300).

Works Cited


Belsey, Catherine. The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama. London: Methuen, 1985. Explores the constitution of the liberal humanist subject—and more specifically, women's exclusion from the role of speaking subject—by way of readings of the tragic drama of the English Renaissance from the later Morality plays to the Restoration.

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Wheeler, Richard P. “‘Since first we were dissever’d’: Trust and Autonomy in Shakespearean Tragedy and Romance.” In Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays, edited by Murray M. Schwartz and Coppelia Kahn, 150-69. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980. Traces the tensions in Shakespeare's tragedies and last plays between the male protagonist's need to create an autonomous and individuated self and his desire to embrace the mutuality on which he can ground that self; such a relationship of trust and partial self-surrender is perceived as at once attractive and threatening and in general involves a member of the opposite sex, whether lover, wife, daughter, or mother.

Mary Ann Bushman (essay date 1991)

[In the following essay, Bushman examines feminist readings of Cleopatra's character in Antony and Cleopatra and analyzes her status as the “tragic hero” of the play.]

To the discerning eye of feminist criticism, Shakespearean tragedy seems to treat women characters as reflections of the tragic hero. According to Linda Bamber, since the tragedies feature a masculine version of
Self, female characters differ from the male only because they mirror the external world, the Other, all that lies “outside the Self.” ¹Antony and Cleopatra, however, gives us glimpses of a kind of “self” that is not merely reflection or symbol of the Other. Through dialogue and certain forms of silence, the play text fashions a speaking position for Cleopatra that seems to imitate neither the masculine model of tragic heroes nor her feminine counterparts in comedy.² Although Shakespearean texts draw on the same rhetorical resources for representing male and female characters, the representation of Cleopatra's self-consciousness reassigns those resources, giving them different values and functions.

Watching or reading a play affords us no access to even a changing narrative stance as a location for a character's “self.” ³ Yet as Karen Newman argues so persuasively, Shakespearean characters “are marked by what we might call a residue beyond their function … as agents, beyond their relations to specific actions.”⁴ What creates this sense of residue, of excess beyond function? Newman locates it in specific rhetorical features of the soliloquy, features which can emerge elsewhere in the text but which are manifest in the soliloquy: 1) shifts in pronouns from first to second person, 2) rhetorical questions posing speaker and hearer, 3) logical oppositions which suggest association rather than logic as the structure of the speech.⁵ Of course, soliloquy isn't the only means by which character is made available to us. Imagery, diction, meter, dialogue also contribute to our sense of a character, but soliloquy demands a special privilege because it marks itself as interruption, as mirrored self-dialogue.

The rhetorical features of the soliloquy outlined by Newman resemble human experiences of self-consciousness. In their classic study, The Social Construction of Reality, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann point out that in shared reality, others with whom we share our massiveness of everyday reality are more real to us than ourselves.⁶ Subjectivity, our knowledge of ourselves, requires reflection, deliberation:

To make it available requires that I stop, arrest the continuous spontaneity of my experience, and deliberately turn my attention back upon my self. What is more, such reflection about myself is typically occasioned by the attitude toward me that the other exhibits. It is typically a “mirror” response to attitudes of the other.⁷

This description of subjectivity suggests an explanation of why the audience privileges soliloquy as a representation of consciousness; soliloquy, like reflection, we experience as an interruption, speech that stops the plot briefly. Similarly, the rhetorical features of soliloquy imitate the dialogue that occurs between self and other. Berger and Luckmann describe the process of self-consciousness as a series of positions. As the agent reflects about his action,

a part of the self is objectified as the performer of this action, with the whole self again becoming relatively disidentified from the performed action. It is not difficult to see that … an entire sector of self-consciousness is structured in terms of these objectifications.⁸

Consequently, the “whole self” is always receding, distancing itself from the announced first position. In reflection, when the self becomes segmented, “conversation” between segments can occur. The soliloquy, whether imitating self-consciousness (or perhaps providing the metaphoric model for self-consciousness), rehearses a conversation or a debate as the character moves from pronoun to pronoun, takes up positions and different speaker roles.

In Shakespeare's plays, the soliloquy (or its features) is common to both comedy and tragedy, since it originates in the generically unstable texts of deliberative rhetoric.⁹ However, it is not so common to female characters, particularly in the tragedies. Bamber summarizes their position: “No such umbrella speeches shelter the consciousness of the women characters in the tragedies. Nor do they soliloquize; and only rarely do we have glimpses of something behind-the-scenes in their personalities.”¹⁰ Even in comedy, female characters' speeches reveal little self-consciousness, having only a limited access to rhetorical representations.
of interiority. Recent critical discussions of Rosalind, for example, reveal the extent of the problem of trying to locate female consciousness. Newman suggests that transvestite disguise, irony, and role-playing give Rosalind “dimensions in excess of her function,” but she acknowledges that while the audience is “called upon to hold together, in the study or in performance, the multiple aspects of her character, … we never have the sense that she herself recognizes or struggles with that multiplicity.” 11 While we may grant Rosalind’s transvestite disguise a status similar to soliloquy, treating it as liberation or extension of self, it problemizes our reading the speech as a location for the speaker. In a recent article, Phyllis Rackin points out that the boy-heroine, as Rosalind, refuses to subordinate one role or identity to the other, declines to become “Rosalind-in-disguise” or “boy player playing Rosalind.” 12 Disguise blurs the relation between speech and speaker. We are left asking, “Who is speaking?”

In the absence of female soliloquy, critics have proposed not only disguise but also the mere presence of family as “co-ordinates” for the female self. In psychoanalytic criticism, the family is not simply another set of circumstances, another group, albeit an important one, that defines selfhood; the family relationship anchors the self, providing stability. It is precisely for this reason that this critical discourse is so attractive to readers of all schools. Lawrence Danson, for example, distinguishes between two kinds of self in Shakespeare's plays, the “psychological,” which is “grounded between potentially stable co-ordinates, the nurturing prior family and the mature generative family,” and the “sociological” self, the one defining itself in social roles. 13 Danson's understandable bias toward a coherent, stable, transcendent self leads him, of course, to see the former as preferable. While the mere allusion to family may “reassure” us, such a reading of selfhood reproduces a dichotomy between a “real” self (masculine, patriarchal, soliloquizing) and a “false” self, one produced by speaking in a role, hence speaking in another's voice. 14

But to a character like Cleopatra, none of these markers pertain. She has no soliloquies. She adopts no transvestite disguise to liberate or defend a self (although she has worn Antony's sword once). She reveals only strategy, not conflict, when she engages in dialogue with intimates. And her “family co-ordinates,” to say the least, are limited. Above all, she is an actor, a role-player, one whose “self” emerges from the gap between actor and role, between the psychological self and the sociological one. Although the play limits her modes of self-defining, Cleopatra stands squarely at the center of the play.

In this position, however, her character refracts the continuing debate over the play's genre. 15 Earlier feminist criticism, reacting to misogynistic readings of Cleopatra, attempts to retrieve her as a tragic heroine. L. T. Fitz argues that Cleopatra is just as much of a “tragic hero” as is Antony, while Barbara Estrin compares her to the Duchess of Malfi. 16 Still other critics assign her to the genre of comedy, a strategy that brackets her off from the rest of the play, despite the fact that she does not seem to fit the image of comic heroines. 17 Cleopatra, like the play, generates mixed genre readings and mixed impressions. Fitz sees Cleopatra as growing and changing, as a character who suffers and discovers a self; Bamber sees her as fixed, stable, unchanged. For the former she is a tragic heroine; for the latter, one-half of a dialogue. Perhaps this character is such a paradox because Shakespeare's tragedies are so dominated by masculine concerns, masculine issues. While women characters do indeed have crucial symbolic functions in the tragedies, only in Antony and Cleopatra and Romeo and Juliet do they receive top billing—one reason, perhaps, why feminist criticism is so extensive on the comedies and romances. Shakespeare's tragedies could hardly be accused of dwelling on women's falls, but in Antony and Cleopatra, the heroine's death receives enormous dramatic attention; at the very least, her body is the one occupying center stage at the end. Because the play foregrounds her, critics work hard to define the ethical and generic shape of her character. What seems to generate this conflict is Cleopatra's overt sense of acting style. 18 Continually dropping metadramatic references, Cleopatra not only plays roles but continually points out her style of playing them, the fact that she is playing them.

When critics read Cleopatra, however, they tend to split the character, separating the metadramatic voice from what they describe as a more authentic voice. Irene Dash, for example, develops different categories for interpreting Cleopatra's actions: they result either from “learned patterns of behavior” or from “native inner
resources.” 19 When Cleopatra and Charmian discuss the best ways to hold Antony (I.iii.), Cleopatra opting for the report about her condition that will have the most dramatic impact, Dash labels her coquetry “learned behavior.” Since Cleopatra is clearly not behaving like the ideal feminist here, Dash's argument forces her to subvert the authenticity of the action: it becomes learned, not natural. In such an interpretation, any self-consciousness about artifice is unauthentic, thus not part of the character's “real” sense of self. From Bamber's point of view, the metadramatic is important for understanding Cleopatra, but only because through it we see Cleopatra “use” her inner life (on which we have no window). 20 Once again, the metadramatic is transparent, something to look through to another, more authentic self (“the heart”). In these two feminist approaches, it is obvious that the model for female identity is borrowed from discussions of the male tragic hero.

Cleopatra's characterization, however, differs from Antony's, and even from that of other female characters in Shakespearean tragedy. 21 Cleopatra not only includes acting style as a part of her character but uses it to control her audience. When she does adopt a mode of speaking that might replace soliloquy, such as a dialogue with her intimates or an aside, her moments of revelation are marked by failed speech, by incompleteness. The text of Cleopatra, much like the text of Hamlet, creates in the audience a desire for soliloquy, for a moment of stasis that interrupts the continual role-playing and reflects on it. Yet this desire for soliloquy never gets fulfilled; instead her speeches invite the audience to complete her.

As Marjorie Morgan points out, self-consciousness about acting style is sewn into the play. 22 From the very beginning, the actors direct us to look for a disparity between character and performance, leading us to split the performing self from the “real” self. Philo opens by distancing us as audience from the inner stage: “Take but good note, and you shall see in him / The triple pillar of the world transform'd / Into a strumpet's fool: behold and see” (I.i.11-13). 23 Indeed Enobarbus's main function, in the first three acts, is to critique the characters' performance. When Antony tries to mourn for Fulvia, Enobarbus undercuts the display by alluding to the prop he would need to shed real tears: “this grief is crown'd with consolation, your old smock brings forth a new petticoat, and indeed the tears live in an onion, that should water this sorrow” (I.ii.165-68). Structurally, both scenes are typical of the way the play makes us conscious of acting style. By drawing on two characters, one who performs and one who critiques, these scenes create a kind of double vision in the audience, and, perhaps in the character occupying the performer's position. Cleopatra, however, usurps both roles and undercuts her own performance. In the first scene, the queen responds to Antony's great declaration of faithfulness with “Excellent falsehood! / Why did he marry Fulvia, and not love her? / I'll seem the fool I am not; Antony / Will be himself” (I.i.40-43). What is interesting here is not whether the passage “reveals” Cleopatra's doubts about Antony, but rather that it establishes her casual control over several roles. She critiques Antony's speech as “excellent falsehood” (what dramatic speeches are); she responds to the context of his speech, with an ironic awareness of his marriage; and finally she directs herself through the next piece of playing. Like many of her lines, these have the quality of an “aside”—and indeed usually appear as asides in a production. The offhanded quality reveals more than just the energy behind her performances, however; it unveils as well her supreme consciousness of all the tasks an actor carries out as she rehearses.

Like Hamlet, Shakespeare's tragic hero obsessed with the nature of acting, Cleopatra also seems to have developed an aesthetics of performance. While Hamlet pedantically instructs the players, expatiating on his rules for the proper delivery of a speech, Cleopatra judges and reacts to its style of delivery. Drawing our attention to Antony's histrionics, she judges his performances as “excellent falsehood” or “excellent dissembling” (I.iii.80). Frequently, she responds not to the content of the speech but to its delivery. When she asks Charmian whether she ever loved Caesar as she does Antony, Charmian teases her with “O that brave Caesar!” and “The valiant Caesar!” Cleopatra answers, “Be chok'd with such another emphasis, / Say the brave Antony” (I.v.67-69). “Emphasis” is a rhetorical term, and although Cleopatra does not use it exactly as the Renaissance rhetoricians would, we can see her awareness of style of delivery. 24 Like any good acting coach, Cleopatra has an eye for decorum too, for using a style of delivery appropriate to the message and effective with the audience, even if her control over her own style is not always as tight as we expect.
Although nearly all the characters seem aware of performance, particularly as they comment on Antony and Cleopatra, performance indexes two different notions of self. Antony is frequently described as if he were two characters, the Antony of Roman history and the Antony who appears on stage. Philo sets up this distinction early in the play: “Sir, sometimes, when he is not Antony, / He comes too short of that great property / Which still should go with Antony” (I.i.57-59). Antony's name itself denotes a fixed, known identity; it becomes an abstraction, something that has “properties,” in the logical sense, something that can subsume actions. Antony himself is aware of this split in his identity, as he tells his men, “I wish I could be made so many men, / And all of you clapp'd up together in / An Antony; that I might do you service” (Iv.ii.16-18). “An Antony” almost functions as a kind of measurement in the play. When Antony the character fails to live up to this abstract identity, he and the others see it as a failure in performance, rather than as a flaw in identity. This identity, furthermore, limits rather than expands his role-playing. He tells Caesar at their first conference, “as nearly as I may, / I'll play the penitent to you. But mine honesty / Shall not make poor my greatness” (II.ii.91-93). So although Antony is aware he plays other roles, his rhetoric insists on distinguishing his acting self from his “authentic” self, his other identity as an Antony, a tragic hero.

Cleopatra, however, is associated with a different concept of identity, and the characters who comment on her are sensitive to the difference. Although she is frequently called names, her name itself does not function as an abstraction. The other characters describe her much differently than they do Antony; they locate her identity in the way she performs her roles. Antony admires her for her expressions of passions: “Fie, wrangling queen! Whom everything becomes, to chide, to laugh, / To weep: how every passion fully strives / To make it self, in thee, fair and admired!” (I.i.48-51). Passions themselves lose their qualities and become persuasive, “fair,” when Cleopatra acts them out. Enobarbus also points to her ways of acting as the source of her uniqueness. In the famous description of her arrival at Cydnus, Enobarbus really only describes how she stages herself through props—the “seeming” mermaids, the oars, her perfume. Unlike Antony, Cleopatra experiences no limits to her role-playing. She can hop forty paces through a public street, strike a messenger, cry, laugh, plead, betray, be faithful. Even her death scene, in which she plays Antony's widow, she sees as full of stylistic and dramatic possibilities: she could play it as the “maid that milks,” as the queen of Egypt, “throw[ing her] scepter at the injurious gods,” or finally as a Fulvia and mourn in “the high Roman fashion” (IV.xv.72-87). The only real limit to her role-playing is the audience; if her “becomings” do not “eye” well, then she is “killed” by them (I.iii.96-97).

Marianne Novy, in an intriguing discussion of the actor as a dimension of Shakespearean characters, notes that “audiences … see in [characters] the otherness of the professional actor. The character as actor is strange, exotic, and therefore an object of both repulsion and attraction.” 25 Novy suggests that women and actors in Renaissance England were alike, and she traces a similarity in identity, in their use of their bodies, in the attitudes the community takes toward them.26 As Michael Goldman points out, while characters may “remind us” of actors, less frequently do characters disclose the actor as part of their being. 27 Male tragic heroes usually discover themselves acting—and reject it as unauthentic. Hamlet, after watching the players, realizes that he too is acting and immediately associates himself with whores. Macbeth discovers that he's only a “poor player.” And Coriolanus begins to lose “himself” the minute he takes up a new role. While the actor's “I” is clearly part of these characters, the recognition of their acting evokes in them antitheatrical prejudice, a sense that they are not themselves. Acting—or acting the wrong role—threatens identity, for the tragic hero. This recognition itself is frequently the anagnorisis; they recognize the Other in themselves and feel conflict. Cleopatra's sense of acting as a style of being, however, is neither something she discovers nor comes to recognize in the play. Rather, it becomes a strategy, a way to evade the attempts in the play to reduce her to an appurtenance of tragedy.

It seems that, for Cleopatra, external circumstances determine the roles that must be played. The world becomes a series of traps, of “snares” waiting to catch her and Antony. In such a world, the only way to maintain an identity is to define it as a style of performing rather than as a self-limiting role. Cleopatra eludes Caesar because she can never be identified with any one role, only with the way she performs it. Moreover,
this character's style is visible because she includes failure as part of it—that is, we can see the slips in her performances: the misuse of emphasis, her illogical advice to the messenger, the crown awry. Cleopatra's failures to perfect her role-playing are paralleled in the few speeches she has that intimate the presence of an internal mental process, the residue lying just beyond her speech. The rhetorical feature suggesting this interiority is frequently not speech, but failed or incomplete speech. In I.iii, Cleopatra continually critiques Antony's responses to Fulvia's death, foregrounding the dramatic nature of Antony's behavior. When she finally fully steps into Antony's role for her, no longer mediating Antony's actions, she begins formally,

Sir, you and I must part, but that's not it:  
Sir, you and I have lov'd, but there's not it:  
That you know well, something it is I would,—  
O, my oblivion is a very Antony,  
And I am all forgotten.  
(I.iii.87-91)

The subjunctive and the failure to complete it seem to suggest dimensions other or outside of the speech itself. The same features mark her speculation about the second battle between Antony and Caesar: “that he and Caesar might / Determine this great war in single fight! / Then Antony—; but now—Well, on.” (IV.iv.36-38). The incomplete conditional again hints that there is a failure to articulate something imagined. Like the failures in gesture and decorum, this incompleteness hints at disclosure without really disclosing.

In the one speech of the Queen's that seems to resemble a soliloquy (I.v.21-34), despite the fact that it is spoken, as always, in front of her attendants, Cleopatra claims autonomy not by self-examination but by imagining herself being examined, surveying herself under surveillance. As she summons up Antony in his absence, she proceeds to imagine how others have viewed her and seems to shift stances, to segment herself, just as a tragic hero might: “He's speaking now, / Or murmuring, ‘Where's my serpent of old Nile?’ / For so he calls me.” We can trace here what Newman describes as a change in voices. The latter end of the line is addressed to Charmian, to an audience, but the next line comments on herself as performing the imagining—“Now I feed myself / With most delicious poison.” Then the speech moves to command, addressed to Antony, perhaps, and from him to Caesar, and finally to Pompey: “Think on me, / That am with Phoebus' amorous pinches black / And wrinkled deep in time.” Unlike the soliloquy, however, this speech never articulates that authoritative position that most tragic soliloquies move toward, the orator's position that splits the self into different roles, one voice examining another. This speech substitutes instead the eyes of the imagined other, as if the character is constituted fully only in the presence of the gazing audience.

Cleopatra's awareness of the power of theatrical spectacle, disclosed as part of her character, becomes her political strategy as well. At issue by the end of the play is the question of whose play she will act in—Antony's, Caesar's, or her own. In her stagings of herself, she directs the action, coerces the spectators to contribute their gaze; if external circumstances, usually as defined by male characters, dictate her roles, she escapes those roles by pointing at them, by slipping her self between them. But once Antony dies, the possibilities of self-authorship close off: Caesar has another agenda for her role-playing.

Attentive to both Antony's and Cleopatra's modes of establishing self, Caesar embraces both theater and written narrative to produce an identity. While Antony, as one character praises him, dies by “that self hand / Which writ his honour in the acts it did” (V.i.21-22), Caesar wants to write himself into being, not figuratively, but literally. Throughout the last scenes, Caesar seems to speak to a recorder, a historian through whom he is writing himself into chronicles. Referring to himself as “Caesar,” he constantly calls for corroborating witnesses to the history that he is producing and that produces him, he hopes. He calls Dolabella in the last scene, to testify “How hardly I was drawn into this war / How calm and gentle I proceeded still / In all my writings” (V.i.74-76). Although Caesar privileges the written document, he also takes a lesson from Cleopatra: he knows that spectacle can serve as an argument for his political power. And indeed that is his
agenda for Cleopatra, whose “life in Rome / Would be eternal in our triumph” (V.i.65-66). Her life would be his theater, an adjunct to his larger self. She would be fragmented, made into his “scutcheons,” props serving his theater (V.ii.134). And she perceives this strategy the instant when he enters her stage, apparently not recognizing her, and asks, “Which is the Queen of Egypt?” (V.ii.111). That one simple question carries enormous political overtones.

For puzzling reasons, critics tend to read the end of this play, specifically Cleopatra's suicide, as an hermaphroditic transformation. For evidence, they point to her emptying herself of the feminine (“I have nothing / Of woman in me: now from head to foot / I am marble-constant”) (V.ii.237-39); to the dramatic roles she takes on (queen, mother, wife, nurse); and to Caesar's epitaph for her and Antony—“No grave upon the earth shall clip in it / A pair so famous” (V.ii.357-58). But in these very pieces of evidence a puzzling paradox emerges: Why does this character abjure the “qualities of woman” yet enact all the most characteristically feminine roles? What is the status of her gender identity at the end of this play?

Because the mixed genre of the play leads us to assign a positive value to these mixed signals, we tend to overlook their questionable argumentative status. This scene, like others in the play, once again directs us to look at the gap between the illusion and representation, rather than reading through the illusion. While we are asked to freeze Cleopatra into a gender position, the metatheatrical “slips” in performance compete with the rhetorical aim of the scene. Cleopatra's performance at the end is full of tentativeness—her crown is awry, and Charmian steps forth to perfect the defect; Cleopatra directs her attendants to “show me … like a queen” (V.ii.226), a verbal formula that resonates with the problems of analogy and comparison developed in Antony's description of a crocodile (II.vii.40-48). These slips, these suspensions of illusion, invite us to collaborate in creating Cleopatra as transcendent, even as they gesture toward the fictionality of the representation.

Rather than transforming the play into tragicomedy, as Barbara Bono so eloquently argues, Cleopatra's finale situates the play uneasily on the border between tragedy and tragicomedy. The comic resolution to the tragedy occurs not in the limits of this play, but in the imagination of another play, or at least another scene, but one which occurs only in the spectators' mimetic movement past the deaths of the two tragic figures. The play itself rehearses the role of the audience in responding to what it sees. When Caesar walks onto the death scene, he attends first to the illusion, to how Cleopatra managed to seem both alive and dead: “the manner of their deaths? / I do not see them bleed” (V.ii.335-36), he asks, neatly stepping around the argument of the illusion. He speculates further on her mechanics for dying.

If they had swallow'd poison, 'twould appear
By external swelling: but she looks like sleep,
As she would catch another Antony
In her strong toil of grace.

(V.ii.343-46)

The sheer power of Cleopatra's staging emerges through Caesar's growing involvement with the illusion—the subjunctive “as if,” implied in the “as” here, in fact reveals his collusion in her effort to expand the border of the play. At first investigating the mechanics of what he deems stage business, then caught by it, Caesar finishes Cleopatra's pageant by providing his own narrative, imagining the two lovers meeting and embracing in another world.

Ian Maclean remarks that the Renaissance inherits a notion of female biology that parallels Aristotle's general tendency to produce dualities in which one element is superior and the other inferior. The male principle in nature is associated with active, formative, and perfected
characteristics, while the female is passive, material, and deprived, desiring the male in order to become complete.\textsuperscript{29}

While other concepts about women's nature reformed at least the biology, most representations of the female retained the notion of their inferiority, expressed as incompleteness or imperfection. Deprived of a voice and objectified by the masculine gaze, the female character in tragedy recedes into the blanks of failed speech. Cleopatra seems one of the few characters in Shakespeare's plays to elude this silence. Using the actor as subject to authorize her control, she reveals a social model of selfhood that resists completion, that refuses to defer identity to a more “authentic” private self. Shakespeare's play text revises the rhetoric of representing self-consciousness and turns it to different functions for this female character.

Notes

2. For a remarkable discussion of the problematics of female subjectivity on and off stage in the Renaissance, see Catherine Belsey, \textit{The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama} (London: Methuen, 1985).
8. Berger and Luckmann, p. 73.
15. To cite just a few examples of the generic indefiniteness surrounding the play, J. Leeds Barroll, \textit{Shakespearean Tragedy: Genre, Tradition, and Change in “Antony and Cleopatra”} (Washington: Folger Books; London: Associated Univ. Presses, 1984); and Susan Snyder, “Patterns of Motion in \textit{Antony and Cleopatra},” \textit{Shakespeare Survey}, 33 (1980), 113-22, treat the play as tragedy. Howard


17. See, for example, Bamber’s discussion (p. 56).


21. Barroll discusses one aspect of this difference (p. 135), arguing that the “trivial” indicates Cleopatra's character.

22. Morgan, p. 128, argues that all the characters in the play exhibit the same kind of self-consciousness about role-playing.


28. See Bono, pp. 189-90, and Adelman, pp. 152-60. Catherine Belsey argues that the figure of Cleopatra at the ending is “an emblem which can be read as justifying either patriarchy on the one hand or an emergent feminism on the other, or perhaps as an icon of the contest between the two” (p. 184).


Susan Muaddi Darraj (essay date spring 2001)

SOURCE: Darraj, Susan Muaddi. “‘The Sword Phillipan’: Female Power, Maternity, and Genderbending in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*.” *Schuylkill: A Creative and Critical Review from Temple University* 4,
In the following essay, Darraj concentrates on Shakespeare's efforts to fashion Cleopatra into a believable, sympathetic character.

The 19th century essayist and literary critic William Hazlitt wrote of Cleopatra, “She is voluptuous, ostentatious, conscious, boastful of her charms, haughty, tyrannical, [and] fickle,” which are “great and unpardonable faults” (Hazlitt 2-3). Much of the criticism of Antony and Cleopatra has recycled this judgement, depicting Cleopatra as a villainess uses her eroticism and sexuality to motivate Antony to seek power. Cleopatra is memorable for her propensity for violence as well. While Antony and Cleopatra was written after the death of a violent English queen, Elizabeth I, Shakespeare may have been faced with a dramatic dilemma: how to make a woman seem believably violent and intimidating on the stage. Coppélia Kahn notes that Cleopatra was “Rome's most dangerous enemy” (111), but how does one make the Queen of the Nile seem like such a threat during a time when women had little social and political power. Shakespeare does several things to accomplish this task: 1) he locates Cleopatra's power in a foreign or supernatural realm; 2) he inverts her gender role with that of Antony; 3) he suppresses her maternal qualities; and 4) he allows her to be redeemed only in death. Indeed, it is the only way to handle a difficult woman on the Jacobean stage.

LOCATING CODES OF FEMALE POWER

In Antony and Cleopatra, the Roman values of honor and bravery embody masculinity, while Egypt and the Orient symbolize feminine weakness and fragility. Caesar and Agrippa are depicted as reasonable, logical, and practical, especially in matters of strategy and war. Cleopatra and her servants and eunuchs are consistently referred to in terms of laziness, lethargy, and a focus on bodily pleasure. Antony's emasculation is a result of his eventual submission to the latter. The binary oppositions of masculine and feminine are thus personified by Caesar and Cleopatra, not by Antony, whose men often regard him as the “pawn” of the deceptive queen and thus not a real man. On the contrary, Robert Miola says, “Caesar's sense of purpose and public responsibility directly opposes Cleopatra's love of idleness and luxury” (129), a conclusion supported by the fact that it is Caesar who, after the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra, provides some closure to the political chaos that has dominated the play.

Such an assertion—that the danger of Cleopatra's sexuality lies in her Egyptian surroundings—requires further detail here. The Orient represented a strange, but terrifyingly fascinating world to the Elizabethans. While it was decidedly inferior and politically weak, the Orient also held a dangerous mystique. As Lucy Hughes-Hallett attests, poets, playwrights, historians and artists have found the idea of Cleopatra's foreignness, or otherness, a suitable method by which to explain away her dangerous sexuality. In other words, the fact that Cleopatra effectively seduced and influenced two powerful Roman men baffled Western thinkers who could only explain it by attributing it to her foreignness or “otherness.” Not surprisingly, Shakespeare succumbs to a similar artistic temptation. In the first ten lines of the play, the surrender of Roman dignity to Egyptian passion is made clear. Philo regretfully tells Demetrius how

Those his goodly eyes,
That o'er the files and musters of war
Have glowed like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
The office and devotion of their view
Upon tawny front. His captain's heart,
... is become the bellows and the fan
To cool a gipsy's lust.

(I, i, 2-10)
Immediately, we understand that Cleopatra's sexuality is dangerous because it has the power to debilitate the “triple pillar of the world” and transform him into a “strumpet's fool” (I, i, 12-13). Her lust can destroy the empire of Rome (and the reason and logic that represents it) by handicapping one of its greatest leaders.

Shakespeare exploits this contrast between Rome and the Orient (Egypt) throughout the play. In Egypt, he creates, “a world which is the antithesis of all that Rome stands for” (Thomas 100). The presence of eunuchs on stage is significant because it emphasizes Cleopatra's increase in power and the parallel decrease in Antony's power. Antony says, “O thy vile lady, / She has robbed me of my sword!” (IV, xv, 22-23), a point emphasized by the fact that Mardian, the eunuch, has just entered on stage. To the Romans, Egypt was a woman's land; the Egyptian men we see on stage are mostly the Queen's eunuchs, as if to imply that no man can retain his masculinity in her presence. Elizabethans and Jacobeans were just as fascinated by eunuchs as they were by witches—both figures were freakish and strange, thus intriguing. Eunuchs emblematized just how dangerous female power could be—it could lead to emasculation, as it does for Antony, and to the downfall of nations, as it does for Egypt and Antony's half of the Roman Empire.

GENDERBLENDING

By locating Cleopatra's power in the foreign realm of the Orient, Shakespeare frees himself to illustrate the genderbending in which such female power can result. While Cleopatra is essentially “feminine” and embodies the “femininity” of the Orient, Shakespeare allows her to exhibit masculine—even Roman—qualities, such as intelligence and courage, throughout the play. It should be noted that Cleopatra is in a relationship that allows her to exercise her intelligence. There is no question that Antony admires his wife/lover and thrives in his egalitarian marriage. Antony, who is fierce and powerful on the battlefield, is unlike many “tragic heroes, not because he takes on a more feminine role than they do, but because he can accept more fully Cleopatra's sexuality, duplicity, and difference from him and find them compatible with his manhood” (Neely 11). At the beginning of the play, he defines their relationship as “a mutual pair” who “stand up peerless” (I, i, 39-42). He allows Cleopatra much freedom and admits shamelessly to her powers of persuasion. For example, she not only manages to elicit permission from Antony to command her own ship in the Battle at Actium, she has also convinced him that a battle at sea would fare better than one on land.

Although Coppélia Kahn believes that Shakespeare mitigates Cleopatra's responsibility for Antony's tragic decision to fight a sea battle, that Antony “isn't influenced by Cleopatra at all, but rather, impelled on his own to pursue the rivalry with Caesar” (117), I would argue that Cleopatra's influence over Antony is much like Lady Macbeth's over her own husband: the husband considers a momentous decision and his wife urges him “to screw your courage to the sticking-place” (I, vii, 60). When Cleopatra says, “By sea—what else?” she confirms and validates Antony's preference. Later, after Antony deserts his men to follow Cleopatra's “fearful sails” back to Alexandria, he articulates the extent of her influence: “My sword, made weak by my affection, would / Obey it on all cause” (III, xi, 67-68).

Antony's comment, that Cleopatra's love weakens his sword, indicates how the increase in power of Shakespeare's female characters necessitates a parallel decrease in power, or emasculation, of male characters. Coppélia Kahn writes convincingly of “the idea that the woman who holds or tries to hold political power will end by robbing the male of both political and sexual power” (118). Indeed, as Cleopatra becomes more masculine, Antony becomes more feminine. Cleopatra tells her attendants about her intimacies with Antony, which included cross-dressing:

“That time—O times!—
I laughed him out of patience, and that night
I laughed him into patience, and next morn,
Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed,
Then put my tires and mantles on him whilst
I wore his sword Phillipan.”
Conveniently enough, Shakespeare chooses, at that precise moment to script the entrance of the messenger who brings news of Antony's marriage to Octavia. Cleopatra projects her anger onto this unlucky servant, exercising her masculine traits: the stage directions call for the queen to strike the man twice, to drag him up and down the stage, and to finally draw a knife, recalling the “sword Phillipan.” A prime expression of Antony's emasculation occurs later, before the doomed battle at Actium when Antony's men groan that “Our leader's led, / And we are women's men” (III, vii, 69-70).

THE SUPPRESSION OF MOTHERHOOD

The genderbending that occurs in the plays obliterates the possibility of Cleopatra's believable portrayal as a mother. Because Cleopatra exhibits masculine qualities, Shakespeare decides not to stress the fact that she has children. His initiative is not surprising when one considers the image of the Virgin Mary that embodies the Euro-Christian hesitancy to link maternity and sexuality. Because power is a trope of Western literature, a mother cannot be believably violent. The Virgin Mary is primarily a mother; thus, she lacks an assertive spirit and a sexual nature. Without over-emphasizing the point, one could safely conclude that society allows mothers to have a pure and moral nature, believing that a childless woman is an unfulfilled one who will thus seek satisfaction in violent and illicit ways.

Shakespeare's suppression of Cleopatra's maternal qualities is complicated because she is marked by her foreign, pagan, and exotic otherness. Plutarch, Shakespeare's major source for the Roman plays, includes the fact that the Queen of the Nile, “being great with child by … [Julius Caesar], was shortly brought to bed of a son, whom the Alexandrians named Caesarion” (Plutarch 71). In addition, he informs us that she bore Marc Antony's children: “Cleopatra having brought him two twins, a son and a daughter, he named his son Alexander and his daughter Cleopatra, and gave them to their surnames, the Sun to the one and the Moon to the other” (222-223); history tells us that they also shared one other son. The sole recognition of Cleopatra's children comes from the lips of Caesar, who repeats a rumor of the existence of “Caesarion, whom they call my father's son, / And all the unlawful issue that their [Cleopatra and Antony's] lust / Since then hath made between them” (III, vi, 5-8).

Furthermore, the historical Cleopatra took great pains to depict herself as a mother. Plutarch tells us that, “for Cleopatra, she did not only wear at that time, but at all other times else when she came abroad, the apparel of the goddess Isis, and so gave audience unto all her subjects as a new Isis” (243). The goddess Isis was the Egyptian equivalent of the Roman goddess Venus and “counted among her devotees many Roman women of the highest class” (Hughes-Hallett 80). Isis herself is primarily a mother; legend has it that she loved her twin brother Osiris, who was killed and whose body was divided into fourteen pieces. Hughes-Hallett tells us:

Isis, consumed with sorrow, searches hither and thither until she has found all the parts but one, the phallus. She pieces them together and so bestows on Osiris eternal life. Magically making amends for the absence of Osiris' genitals, she contrives to conceive and gives birth to Horus, who is both Osiris's child and a reincarnation of Osiris himself.

(83)

It is easy to see how the historical Cleopatra used the Isis legend to the advantage of her son, Caesarion. Ancient coins depict her with Caesarion at her breast, just as Isis was often portrayed breastfeeding Horus. Thus, Cleopatra portrayed her son—the embodiment of Caesar's western world and her own eastern one—as a god and the heir to the Roman empire.
Cleopatra's decision to commit suicide is troublesome, especially when one reflects on her strong nature. There are some issues to consider in reaching a conclusion on this issue. Plutarch tells us that Cleopatra loved all her children so much that Octavian found himself able to use them as a weapon against her: he threatened to harm her children if she did not keep herself alive. Shakespeare includes Octavian's threat (V, ii, 124-129), but, in order to reduce its significance in terms of Cleopatra's motherhood, he sandwiches it between two important scenes: when Cleopatra learns of Caesar's intention to parade her and humiliate her in a Roman triumph and the betrayal of Seleucus. I would argue that Cleopatra resolves to commit suicide as soon as she realizes that humiliation awaits her in Rome. Thus, I would agree with critics Elizabeth Story Dunno and Horace Howard Furness that she designs the betrayal of Seleucus to convince Caesar that she wants to live, so that he will not suspect her plans to stage her magnificent suicide. Shakespeare's manipulation of the scenes renders Caesar's threat futile; the possibility of her children's murder cannot sway a queen who has already determined to follow her husband in “the high Roman fashion.” Furthermore, her last words before her death are “What [why] should I stay—” (V, ii, 303), implying that her children (again, she had at least four) are not sufficient reason to continue to live. The only things that matter are her personal honor and the loss of Antony.

REDEMPTION IN DEATH

It is only in her death that Cleopatra regains her femininity and is thus redeemed. Although she and her women alone haul up the dying Antony's body (“How heavy weighs my lord! / Our strength is all gone into heaviness, / That makes the weight” [IV, xvi, 33-35]), her masculine-like strength fades with Antony's last breath. She collapses, in a genuine faint. Charmian and Iras call her such names as “Royal Egypt, Empress” in an attempt to revive her, but she corrects her servants by declaring that she is

No more but e'en a woman, and commanded
By such poor passion as the maid that milks
And does the meanest chores. It were for me
To throw my sceptre at the injurious gods,
To tell them that this world did equal theirs
Till they had stolen our jewel.

(IV, xvi, 75-80)

Much like King Lear's speech on the heath, Cleopatra equates herself with the poorest people in society; perhaps the actor playing Cleopatra would have been pointing to the women in the audience at this point for emphasis. At any rate, Cleopatra's minimalization of her role as sovereign and her equalization of the nobility and the lower classes (“This world did equal theirs”) would have earned her both sympathy from and favor with the audience. She resolves, on the spot, to end her own life: to do “what's brave, what's noble, / … after the high Roman fashion” (IV, xvi, 88-89). Cleopatra wants to imitate a Roman model of behavior, which represents her reacquisition of feminine characteristics, especially those of a Roman wife and a mother. She continues to reject the idea that “dull Octavia” could ever be her superior, but she falls into the same role as Octavia—that of the infinitely-devoted wife.

She resolves to die and her death assumes the form of a marriage (“Husband, I come” [V, ii, 278]). She declares that she is “fire and air,” and that “my other elements, / I give to baser life”; while this has been interpreted to mean that she becomes more manly, having rejected the feminine elements of earth and water, I would argue that this is more of a rejection of the Orient and Egypt, which are so inextricably linked with the female (the feminine elements of water and earth are equated with the mud of the Nile). Likewise, Cleopatra assumes the Roman qualities of fire and air, more than the masculine qualities of such [“I am fire and air; my other elements / I give to baser life” (V, ii, 280-281)], and is transformed into a proper Roman wife. As she dies, she suffers from a hallucination in which she imagines “my baby at my breast, / That sucks the nurse asleep” (V, ii, 300-301)—the only indication of her maternal instincts in the entire play. Her last words are like
an exchange of wedding vows: “O Antony! I will take thee too” (V, ii, 302). 5 Caesar's final decision to bury her “by her Antony”—his reluctance to separate “a pair so famous”—confers upon her the rightful place as the Roman wife of Marc Antony.

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The portrayal of this domineering woman as a sympathetic or believable character may have been problematic for Shakespeare, who faced certain historical limitations and considerations: the recent death of a childless and often ruthless queen, the social permeation of the notion that women's prime function is to bear children, the domination of the image of the Virgin Mary as a symbol of ideal womanhood, and the newly-whetted curiosity of Europeans about the East. All these factors contributed to Shakespeare's systematic modification of Cleopatra, including her appropriation of masculine traits and the suppression of her motherhood in order to render her a believable character.

Notes

1. Kahn's *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds and Women* (1997) and Lucy Hughes-Hallett's *Cleopatra: Histories, Dreams and Distortions* (1990) discuss the canon of propaganda aimed at Cleopatra by Octavius Caesar. Hughes-Hallet especially details the stereotypes attributed to the Queen of Egypt throughout the past 2,000 years.
2. Her mean-spirited and violent behavior is recalled later Antony's orders to have Thidias thrashed and whipped.
3. Though Caesar pretends to respect her, Cleopatra penetrates through his false exterior—another indication of her superior intelligence. She understands that, should she live, she will be taken to Rome and will suffer the humiliation of seeing “some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / I' th' posture of a whore” (V, ii, 216-217).
4. In addition, Cleopatra has demonstrated her readiness in the past to ruin Egypt for Antony's sake. Without blinking, she considers “unpeopling” her country in order to send a new messenger to Antony in Rome every day. To mirror Antony's “Let Rome in Tiber sink,” Cleopatra says, “Let Egypt in Nile melt.”
5. Of course, her actions indicate that, as a Roman wife, her entire existence must center on Antony only, which means a rejection of anything else, including her earthly children (“What should I stay—”). The point is to emphasize her selfishness and her absolute focus on Antony, a constant of the queen's personality.

Works Cited


Antony and Cleopatra (Vol. 91)

Introduction

Antony and Cleopatra

For further information on the critical and stage history of Antony and Cleopatra, see SC, Volumes 6, 17, 27, 47, 58, 70, and 81.

Antony and Cleopatra (c. 1606) records some of the significant events that occurred from 40 to 30 B.C. as the Roman Republic came to an end and was replaced by an imperial monarchy. At the outset of the play, Rome is ruled by a triumvirate of leaders: Mark Antony, Octavius Caesar, and Aemilius Lepidus. By its close, the struggle for control of half the world ends with Octavius as the sole victor. The dramatic action shifts back and forth between Rome and Alexandria as Antony alternately pursues his duties as a military leader and his desire for Cleopatra, the Egyptian queen whose erotic appeal has seemingly captivated him. After his defeat by Octavius at the battle of Actium, Antony hears a false report of Cleopatra's death and attempts to kill himself. The dying Antony is brought to Cleopatra's stronghold. After his death, she arranges and carries out her own suicide, predicting that the two of them are destined to become the most famous lovers in history.

One of the academic challenges that Antony and Cleopatra presents is its mixture of history and tragedy, politics and passion. Recent commentary often emphasizes the play's political aspects, though some critics continue to highlight its love story. Other important critical questions addressed by scholars in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries include race and gender issues, and to what extent characters and events dramatized in the play reflect social, cultural, and political realities in early modern England.

In a wide-ranging essay, Ania Loomba (2002) addresses some of these concerns, such as the play's dichotomies between East and West, Egypt and Rome, and Cleopatra and Octavius in terms of early modern English culture. The critic finds many reflections in Antony and Cleopatra of the English fear of foreigners and outsiders—particularly those whose skin color is darker than theirs—and anxieties about the power of alien women to emasculate men or divert them from their commitment to political domination. Similarly, Francesca T. Royster (see Further Reading) contends that Antony and Cleopatra's depiction of the Egyptian queen as black-skinned reflects late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century English social and cultural anxieties about miscegenation. In particular, the critic calls attention to the discrepancy between early modern England's fear of miscegenation and its recognition that Egypt was a principal foundation of European culture. Other commentators have focused on the juxtaposition of Rome and Egypt in Antony and Cleopatra, including Arthur Little (see Further Reading), Arthur Lindley (2003), and Andrew Hiscock (see Further Reading).

Remarking on what he sees as the disparities between Rome and Egypt, Little maintains that it is precisely because Egypt is so different that Rome feels threatened by it. Lindley and Hiscock treat Cleopatra and Octavius as epitomes of these disparate cultures. Lindley compares Cleopatra's association with festivity and her perception that values are mutable to Octavius's single-minded determination to monopolize the world and reconfigure it on his own terms. Hiscock, too, contrasts Cleopatra's volatile—sometimes chaotic—creativity with Octavius's insistence on permanence and definition.

Linda Charnes (see Further Reading) argues that the battle between Octavius and Cleopatra “is staked out across the terrain of Antony's ‘identity.'” She contends that Antony is driven by a desire to weave together the two parts of himself, but that he finds it impossible to carry out this project. Cynthia Marshall (see Further Reading) focuses on what she, too, sees as Anthony's “imperiled identity”; like Charnes, she views Antony as a man who is unable to define himself and allows others to shape his image. Marshall also discusses Antony's repeated self-reproaches and the significance of his suicide. Jacqueline Vanhoutte (2000) devotes her essay on Antony to the complex issue of his attempt to kill himself. Vanhoutte views Antony as a man desperate to establish his own identity and his honor as a Roman hero, rather than permitting others to do this for him. The critic argues that the play neither praises nor condemns Antony's suicide but instead encourages audiences and
readers to suspend judgment about whether it is a noble act or a despairing one. In his study of Cleopatra, Frederick Turner (1999) emphasizes the Egyptian queen's association with the Nile: a recurring source of energy and new life. Writing from the perspectives of psychoanalytic theory and classical mythology, Lisa Starks (see Further Reading) describes Cleopatra as both "the male masochist ideal woman" and a "goddess-queen." Cristina León Alfar (2003) views Shakespeare's portrait of Cleopatra as one of his several "experiments with alternate forms of feminine power." In Alfar's judgment, the play explores how a woman faced with imperialist, masculinist aggression might use her femininity to contest that aggression. Little also remarks on Cleopatra as a sexually and racially polarizing figure. Little suggests that the ultimate goal of the queen's theatricality is to challenge Romans' attempts to define her in their own terms. Indeed, the critic maintains that the queen's suicide is an attempt to reframe herself, to present an image of "chastity in death."

In his introduction to the Riverside edition (1974) of the play, the eminent British critic Frank Kermode (see Further Reading) remarks that *Antony and Cleopatra* is now generally regarded to be one of "Shakespeare's supreme achievements." Yet the play continues to resist critically successful stagings. The play presents several challenges to directors and set designers, such as its thirty-two scene changes and the question of how to represent the play's middle-aged lovers. Indeed, many critics highlight the challenge of successfully representing the lovers when discussing the deficient sexual chemistry between Alan Rickman and Helen Mirren in Sean Mathias's 1998 production at the Royal National Theatre in London. Reviewers also contend that while Mirren gave a poignant and technically precise performance as the queen, Rickman's interpretation of Antony as a weary, listless general was a disaster. Commentators also disparage Steven Pimlott's 1999 Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) revival of the play, maintaining that the ensemble actors' solid performances were often overshadowed by Pimlott's contrived theatrical innovations. In particular, critics disdain the artificial symbolic device in which each character, upon dying, calmly stood up and walked off the stage while the dramatic action proceeded around them. By contrast, reviewers applaud Giles Block's production of *Antony and Cleopatra* that same year at London's Globe Theatre. Utilizing such Elizabethan theatrical conventions as period costumes, a simple platform stage, and an all-male cast, Block succeeded, according to many commentators, in emphasizing the imaginative and entertaining aspect of Shakespeare's study of politics and sexuality. Critics praise Mark Rylance's portrayal of Cleopatra, maintaining that not only did he transcend the gender barrier, but he also imbued the multi-faceted character with some freshly provocative insights. Michael Attenborough's 2002 RSC presentation of the play received generally mixed critical reviews. While some commentators assert that Attenborough admirably balanced the dozens of scenes and deftly presented the transitions between Rome and Egypt, others find many of the production's dramatic shifts confusing. In addition, most reviewers express dismay that so many classically trained actors had so much trouble speaking Shakespeare's verse.

Criticisms: Overviews And General Studies
Frederick Turner (essay date 1999)

[In the following essay, Turner examines the theme of creativity in Antony and Cleopatra. The critic devotes particular attention to the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra; their attempt to devise a new world that, in contrast to the Roman one, would be unpredictable and self-generating; and the rhetorical figures, especially of hyperbole and paradox, that underscore the motif of emerging life.]

I. THE LABORATORY OF CREATION

At the core of Shakespeare's economic theory is a radical vision of the world as spontaneously generating order, structure, and value in a continual self-metamorphosis. *Antony and Cleopatra* is a sort of thought experiment, in which the object of study—how emergent structures and values are created—is isolated and
Shakespeare chooses for his grand fable of value a social world largely outside the calculations of the marketplace. His imagined Mediterranean world is one in which possession is determined by contestation, gift, or negotiation, not by market pricing. Furthermore, his characters—the triumvirs of Rome, the Empress of Egypt, and their chief followers and rivals—are the richest people in the world, governed to the extent that they are governed at all by the code of royal honor rather than the ethics of business practice, and beyond any possible need of commerce or labor for material gain. If a market of a kind emerges from such a state of affairs, that shows how natural the market is; but Shakespeare's concern here is with what it emerges from.

Shakespeare must also ensure that the source of creative energy he is seeking is not something else in disguise. Freud was not the first observer of human nature to notice that if we suppress some natural appetite or drive, it will often reappear in some other form. The moral rules governing sexuality have often been regarded as ways to sublimate sexual energy to the service of artistic or social goals. Indeed, Shakespeare could be said to be partly in agreement with this view in his treatment of Ferdinand, Miranda, and many other courting couples in his plays. But here his question is not about how to redirect and use the creative impulse, but what it is in itself. Thus he gives us a story of two people who have thrown over the sexual traces and live in open violation of the codes of marriage and sexual self-restraint. “Nay, but this dotage of our general’s / O'erflows the measure,” begins the play. Even if their uncontrol results in disaster—as it indeed does—we will see the unbanked furnace blazing and know its heat in its very waste.

To fulfill his purpose Shakespeare must also isolate his subject from any prudential considerations—that is, his hero and heroine must fail. The creative delight must be savored for itself, not for any success or gain that it might produce. The genre of tragedy is here put to a special use, to strip away the quiet satisfactions of victory and security from the central core of the creative drive. As events develop, it becomes clear to both Antony and Cleopatra that their interests are not being served by their association with each other. “These strong Egyptian fetters I must break,” Antony vows unavailingly to himself (I.i.117). Cleopatra is shrewd enough to consider doing a deal with Caesar to sell her lover out. But Shakespeare cannot give his lovers the conventional satisfactions of tragic self-destruction either. There is a sort of prudence in assuring oneself a niche in the tragic faithful lovers' hall of fame. This prudence, too, must not be allowed to muddy the waters. Cleopatra knows that she will be represented after her death as a strumpet, some “squeaking Cleopatra” will “boy” her greatness “i' th' posture of a whore” (V.ii.220). The “quick comedians,” including Shakespeare himself, will stage her, just as she fears. Neither Antony nor Cleopatra is motivated by saintly self-sacrifice or the grand romantic gesture, though they end up with death-scenes even more moving and effective in their own strange way. The one thing both are faithful to is the incandescent edge of creative activity, and this is what the play is about.

Shakespeare must also isolate the action of the play from any religious or ethical system that might legitimately claim its participants and thus serve as a basis of praise or blame. If there is a divine reward that the participants know will requisite their actions, or a divine after-death punishment that will settle the score, the enterprise of discovery will be lost. In the old Taoist system of China, the Tao itself is prior to Yin and Yang, prior to good and evil. It is that Tao that Shakespeare is after, that fountain of being that Melville
described as joyous, heartless immensities. We find it in the Old Testament in the Jehovah who tempts Job, who creates Leviathan, and who dances upon the mountaintops at the dawn of the world; but this God has been overlain with millennia of a deity who is much more responsible and ethically praiseworthy. In this play, we might say, he is unearthed, and his avatar is, blasphemously, Cleopatra. Thus Shakespeare sets his fable just before the dawn of the Christian era, before the Christian principles of his audience could fairly be expected to apply to his hero and heroine. “That Herod's head I'll have,” Cleopatra observes lazily one day (III.iii.4); her casualness with the name, and her complete unawareness of the gigantic resonances of her words with the fate of the Baptist, usher the audience into a pagan world where their religious preconceptions must be put aside. Shakespeare is doing something that Federico Fellini tried to do in his Satyricon: to imagine a pagan world, to remove a whole class of moral categories and poetic imagery that Christianity created.

But Shakespeare must engineer a further removal from the cultural and religious world of his audience. Elizabethans and Jacobean, like ourselves, were the heirs of the pagan Greco-Roman system of virtue, restraint, and reason as well as of the Judeo-Christian system of redemption, humility, and love. Shakespeare includes the Greco-Roman framework of judgment in the play, but takes his lovers out of it and plunges them into another, stranger place where even these rules do not apply. He invents an Egypt of endless fertility, luxury, desire and unrestraint, that finds Roman orderliness faintly ridiculous. Cleopatra's historically Greek roots are erased, and she is given a more ancient, genial, cynical, sensual wisdom that is applauded by her own holy priests. Certainly the uptight upstart new civilizations of the West will, with their greater discipline and political enthusiasm, overwhelm the old regime of the Nile; but they will have done so at the cost of truncating their own sources of pleasure, innocence, and joy. Or this is what Cleopatra would have us believe, and who could argue with such a lady? Antony is convinced, at least:

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space.
Kingdoms are clay: our dungy earth alike
Feeds beasts as man. The nobleness of life
Is to do thus …

(I.i.33)

—whereupon he kisses her. The Rome of Antony and Cleopatra, moreover, is not the idealistic and high-minded Rome of the Republic, but the sophisticated, theologically skeptical, politics-ridden, world-weary imperial Rome that Shakespeare would have been familiar with from the works of Plutarch, Martial, Juvenal, and his favorite authors, Ovid and Lucretius. If something strange and new and beautiful is to come to birth in such a world, it cannot be by dint of religious self-sacrifice or moral aspiration or the redirection of repressed desires.

In turning toward the classical pagan past in search of a space for new invention, Shakespeare was very much a Renaissance writer. Renaissance thought tended to seek out the neutral spaces in between established pairs of opposites. Artists took the line between the great dualities—thought and deed, good and evil, true and false, abstract and concrete, sacred and secular—and used that line itself as a spacious theatre of invention. They sought a third reality, transcending the existing categories. Between Christian Europe and the pagan Indies they found America. Between good and evil they found play. Between work and prayer they found poetry. Between truth and falsehood they found fiction, magic, and science. Between the merely serious and the merely comic appeared the Renaissance pastoral. The world was repopulated with what C. S. Lewis calls theologically neutral spirits, and between angels and devils there appeared much that was not dreamed of in the old philosophy. This was also the birth-time of modern science. Bacon and Descartes outlined for us that whole area of objective, morally and epistemologically colorless “fact”—that fictive space which became, two hundred years later, the only apparent domain for a respectable thinker.
The “new heaven, new earth” (I.i.17) of Antony, like More's concept of Utopia or John Donne's “new-found land,” (Elegy XIX: “To His Mistress Going to Bed”) was not bound by the old laws or describable by the old categories: It was a neutral space, a no-place where experiment isn't harmful. One cannot afford experiment, or science itself, in a place where, if the experiment fails, the world of the experimenter is destroyed. Utopia is neither truth nor falsehood: It is fiction, the line or space which separates them. Morally, Utopia cannot be called a good book or a bad book. The author takes no stand on whether the lessons to be learned are edifying or heretical; there are not necessarily any lessons to be learned. The only sin one could be accused of in reading the book would be the neglect of duties more important. The book is playful, it exists in the world between work and prayer. The beauty of Donne's mistress is that her body is not bound by the old dualities of good and evil, profane eros and sacred caritas—it is the place where he can pursue amor, that intense, spiritual-erotic-romantic love celebrated by Michelangelo, Spenser, Sidney, Shakespeare. Perhaps the greatest discovery of the Renaissance was a new kind of fiction, like the fictional space discovered by Brunelleschi in 1420 when he invented perspective, the space that divides the subject of the painting from its surface and its literal existence from its figurative one. An analogous artistic space was the “metrical fiction” discovered by the English sonneteers—the ability to vary the rhythm of a poem while keeping the verse form intact—a technique which enabled them to operate in a rhythmic space between strict meter and the rhythm of speech, and therefore to adopt poetic voices that were not necessarily their own.

Politically and socially the same process was at work. Between the Holy Roman Emperor and the aristocracy appeared the national monarch; between the Universal Church and the powerful local religious magnates appeared the nationalist Protestant churches. The old duality of peasant and aristocrat was broken and rendered irrelevant by the rise of the middle class (though of course the dualistic class myth persisted). With the overthrow of the old laws against usury, business could be done with other people neither as brothers in the same communion, nor as aliens whose just punishment for their infidelity was to be economically exploited. Business was the economic version of the neutral space.

Language, the Word, is the neutral space that lies between thought and action. For the new religion of Protestantism this meant the primacy of the Word of God, and the abolition of all other mediators between the human and the divine. The Word, though, can separate Man from God at the same time as it enables them to speak to each other. For humanists the new emphasis on language was embodied in their fascinated attention to the golden ages of classical literature: It expressed itself philosophically in a new interest in rhetoric as opposed to logic on one hand and grammar on the other. In its most extreme form—for instance, in the thought of the linguistic philosopher Peter Ramus—humanism violently rejected Aristotelian logic and insisted that the value of an idea was primarily its accessibility, expressibility, and convincingness, not its adherence to certain abstract forms. Only after the hearers had comprehended an argument emotionally, and understood it clearly, could they decide on its truth or falsehood; and by that time it would be too late: They would already have been convinced.

The great language-building of the sixteenth century all over Europe, in which monarchs and poets cooperated in expanding and refining the national languages, is related to this change of emphasis. To expand the language is to expand the thinkable; it is a heady project. We can see this spirit in Sidney's Defense of Poetry, where he contrasts the work of the poet with that of any professional who is bound to nature as it is:

Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect into another Nature, in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or quite anew, forms such as never were in Nature, as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimæras, Furies, and such like [how like Shakespeare's Antony this sounds!]; so as he goeth hand in hand with Nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit … Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.
For the great Elizabethans, artistic invention took its place at the summit of human capacities. Invention for Sidney

is not merely imaginative, as we are wont to say by them that build castles in the air, but so far substantially it worketh, not only to make a Cyrus, which had been but a particular excellency, as Nature might have done, but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyropses, if they will learn aright why and how that maker made him.

Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature … But these arguments will by few be understood, and by fewer granted …

It is perhaps hard for us to recapture that huge artistic hubris. They believed that though incapable of miracle, we may be capable of magic. Magic could make a man author of himself.

But with this hubris went a profound sense of insecurity, alienation and crisis. If one explored beyond the known world, there was the danger of falling off the edge. In many respects the opening of the neutral space created the gigantic rift that separates modern persons from their psychic home. The opening of the neutral space created the gigantic rift that separates modern persons from their psychic home. The genesis of the Renaissance adult ego cut child off from parents, the dependent from the comforter. Renaissance language separated thought from action, so we have Hamlet (“a neutral to his will and matter”—II.i.488) trapped within his own marvellous discourse. Renaissance phenomenology separated perceiver from perceived: Perspective at once creates a separate observer and a vanishing-point. The great social bond between lord and peasant broke down with the collapse of feudalism and the enclosure of land for bourgeois commercial purposes. The cold Word of God took the place of the Eucharist: Instead of communion there was the loneliness of the individual conscience. The great mediators—the sacraments, the Blessed Virgin, the liturgy, the Latin that one did not need to understand, for it was an incantation—were swept away. The earth itself, no longer at the center of the universe, pursued its lonely way somewhere between center and periphery in neutral ground.

In the absence of a workable technology (which was developed in the next three hundred years), the gap was filled by art. Renaissance art was on one hand a splendidly, assertively healthy growth, and on the other a lovely iridescent scar-tissue that filled the wounds of Medieval culture. Just as scar-tissue is liable to cancerous growths, so Renaissance art always had a tendency to proliferate wildly into disorder, excess, and drunken forms—witness Elizabethan melodrama, Tudor architecture, Euphuism, Renaissance epic, and so on. This phenomenon is not as clear to us as it was to the eighteenth-century neoclassicists. Indeed, eighteenth-century decorum, the obsession with order, control, metrical smoothness, and good taste, was in some respects a panicky reaction against the unbridled creativity of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Sidney's “invention” would have looked very much like chaos to these neoclassical Augustans.

The limitlessness that the Renaissance discovered (and that Shakespeare described in Antony and Cleopatra) was chaos for the eighteenth century; but in another sense it became also the marvellous adequacy of the physical world to account for and generate itself that was investigated in the nineteenth century—and in another sense still, it is that moral freedom we have attained in the twentieth century largely by means of technology. In practical terms such freedom was impossible in the Renaissance, though it flourished in fiction. Magic does not actually work except in stories. Such freedom would be possible only to absolute rulers of the world, like Antony and Cleopatra, and its exercise would endanger that rule. As for us, however, in comparison to the Elizabethans, we can do what we want with our lives, morally, socially, and politically. Existentialism, together with its postmodern philosophical issue, is a proclamation of the terrible freedom and boredom that our technology has made possible for all, and all but enforced for the intellectual. We have no stakes in the game of life; we spend with cultural play-money. We imagine we need the threat of death, before we feel we are really living. But suppose we could live without stakes, relishing the game not for some
extrinsic worth but purely for the intrinsic fascination of its structure … this is the way Cleopatra lives. Antony calls it “the nobleness of life” (I.i.36).

Much of what has been said here about the Renaissance is implicit and explicit in *Antony and Cleopatra*. The play is itself the creation of a neutral space, a new world, “new heaven, new earth.” It is primarily in the rhetoric of the play that this neutral space is generated; it is an area uncontrolled by the normal rules of linear logic, inference, morality, or political consequence; in it the central realities of love, self-awareness, creativity, and freedom are explored. This space is, however, doomed both by the outside world of history and by its own abandonment of form; and we can see the play as a convincing symbol of the close of the English Renaissance.

Shakespeare chose for his play a time in the history of the world that he sensed was comparable in importance to his own time: the change from the Roman Republic to the Roman Empire, the shifting of the centre of world culture from Greece to Rome (Plutarch was Greek, Octavius Roman), the decision of Europe to develop westwards rather than eastwards, the time of the birth of Christ (Jesus was born thirty years after the death of Antony), the waning years of the pre-Christian world. But Shakespeare sensed the forces that were gathering to suppress and control the chaotic liberties of his fictional universe. They are summed up in Octavius and his sister. Spenser, Sidney, Marlowe, Shakespeare, the Donne of the love poetry, would give way to Jonson, the Donne of the Holy Sonnets, Milton, and finally Dryden and Pope. Control and artistic austerity would triumph over abundance and deliquesence. And this process was taking place in Shakespeare’s own art. In *Antony and Cleopatra* the poetry is so overwhelming that it almost overcomes itself. Shakespeare can do anything in verse now. If he can do anything, he can do everything, and to do everything is to do nothing. In the plays written after *Antony and Cleopatra*, poetry is never quite so wildly given its head. When it occurs, it is, so to speak, in quotation marks, and Shakespeare never lets us forget that it is all only art, a play, an entertainment. By poetry I mean that rapturous and limitless creativity, which flourishes so luxuriantly in *Antony and Cleopatra*—a creativity that expresses itself in nature, in the lovers' human imagination, and in the peculiar self-reflectiveness of the language of the play.

**II. BOUNTY: SPONTANEOUS GENERATION IN THINGS AND PERSONS**

*Antony and Cleopatra* is packed with images of natural self-creation. Although Shakespeare's ultimate goal is the source of human imagination, he refuses, for reasons we are already familiar with, to divide humans from the rest of nature with respect to creativity and even freedom. As in the sonnets and *The Winter's Tale*, the artificial is but a continuation of the natural, and nature is made better by no mean, but nature makes that mean. In *Lear* the love-bond that we share with other animals can outdo the illusion of unconditional love, and in *The Merchant of Venice* the soul cannot be detached from the body. So the Egypt of Shakespeare's great experiment is not only a place of cultural creativity, but also a fecund womb of physical and biological diversity. The river Nile is the central symbol of this overflowing natural fusion.

The higher Nilus swells,
The more it promises; as it ebbs, the seedsman
Upon the slime and ooze scatters his grain,
And shortly comes to harvest.

(II.vii.21)

But the Nile, according to some in the play, does not merely nurture existing life; it is capable of spontaneously generating new life. Lepidus, drunk, owlishly buttonholes Antony:

LEPIDUS:

Y'have strange serpents there.
ANTONY:

Ay, Lepidus.

LEPIDUS:

Your serpent of Egypt is bred now of your mud by the operation of your sun: so is your crocodile.

ANTONY:

They are so.

(II.vii.25)

It is clear that Shakespeare is skeptical of the popular Medieval and Renaissance belief in the spontaneous generation of life. Lepidus' drunken rambling sounds like the credulity of the uninformed, and Antony, who despises Lepidus and considers him a source of amusement, may very well be agreeing with him just to put him on. But Shakespeare is half-inclined to think as Lepidus does. Images of spontaneous generation, ferment, seeding and fertility recur often in the play, as in this delightfully dissipated exchange among Cleopatra's handmaidens, Iras and Charmian, and the palm-reader that their friend Alexas has brought in for their entertainment:

CHARMIAN:

Prithee, how many boys and wenches must I have?

SOOTHSAYER:

If every of your wishes had a womb, and fertile every wish, a million.

CHARMIAN:

Out, fool! I forgive thee for a witch.

ALEXAS:

You think none but your sheets are privy to your wishes.

CHARMIAN:

Nay, come, tell Iras hers ...

IRAS:

There's a palm presages chastity, if nothing else.

CHARMIAN:

E'en as the o'erflowing Nilus presageth famine.

(I.ii.38)

If spontaneous generation is a popular superstition, it is one which raises a major philosophical question: How did life arise in the first place? Even the Biblical account gives to the prima materia of the world, to that chaos
over which hovers the Holy Ghost, the essential capacity of fecundity; and the emergence of life is the result of cooperation between God and the elements. The *prima materia* of contemporary physics, the quantum vacuum, is capable of spawning whole new universes. Alchemy maintained that the correct combination of elements might trigger the emergence of life. Although the Dutch spectacle-maker, Zacharias Janssen, had developed the principles of the microscope by 1590, it was not until after Shakespeare's death that Antony van Leeuwenhoek first observed microscopic organisms and thus revealed that life need not be visible to the naked eye. Indeed, it was only in this century that the mystery of plant seeds, which appear to be dead in all respects, began to yield to DNA research.

*Antony and Cleopatra*, like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with its similar obsession with the creative ferment of nature, is full of minute observations of iterative physical processes. It pays special attention to the turbulent flow of liquids that so fascinated Leonardo da Vinci. One example is the “vagabond flag upon the stream” which

_Goes to and back, lackeying the varying tide,  
To rot itself with motion._

* (I.iv.45)

What Shakespeare has noticed here is a classic physical feedback system. The rush or reed is caught in the current of the stream. It swings toward the bank, is then out of the current, and its natural resilience pulls it upright, where it is then able to reassert its lean into the current, and again it is pulled under and back, into calmer water; so again it rises out of the stream, and so on. Meanwhile variations in the current—its turbulent nonlinear dynamics, contemporary physicists would say—add a further element of unpredictability to the rhythm of the process. If a computerized camera were to record it, and the periodicity and amplitude of the reed's swings precisely measured and plotted on a graph, the Lorenz Attractor would emerge, a beautiful butterfly-shaped form whose shape is unmistakable yet never complete, for new fractal depth would be revealed at each iteration. Of course Shakespeare did not have cameras and computers. But the human eye and ear are deeply attuned to such processes and, as I have shown in my book *Beauty: The Value of Values*, the classical human arts are deeply based on the presence of these systems in nature and cultural practice.

>“Sometimes we see a cloud that's dragonish,” says Antony (IV.xiv.2), anticipating the language of Benoit Mandelbrot, the great mathematician who discovered fractal shapes and called them “dragons,” citing cloud structure as a prime example. The point is that “damped, driven, nonlinear dynamical systems,” as these phenomena are called, have a complex, self-organizing behavior much more elaborate than the simple inputs of energy they require. Something new, not given in the initial conditions, emerges out of the very process; their next behavior is the result of an impossibly complicated interaction of all their own previous behaviors, and thus they are in some very elementary fashion autonomous. They create the rules that govern them, and the creation process is too complex to be predicted by its inputs from the environment. This description would bear a striking resemblance to the psychological behavior of the two principal characters in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and it is this parallel that has caught Shakespeare's curiosity.

Did life itself, then, emerge as an inconceivably rich combination of such “dissipative systems,” as Ilya Prigogine calls them? Present day evolutionary biologists are almost unanimous in agreeing that it did, and if our analysis of Shakespeare's imagery is accurate, he must have intuited it, too. According to Prigogine, the order of dissipative systems is not thermodynamic order in itself, but rather a second-order kind of order, which feeds upon the flow of increasing thermodynamic disorder but is able to maintain itself at least temporarily against that flow, and even to elaborate itself in the meantime. Both Prigogine and Shakespeare know that such a system can “rot itself with motion;” but they also know that whenever a steep gradient exists between order and chaos, a current of flowing energy can be set up which can supply the nourishment for its renewal. And as both Shakespeare and Prigogine recognize, the “far-from-equilibrium” situations that encourage such gradients and flows will always arise out of any open system.
In *Antony and Cleopatra* the flow of energy is provided by the Nile. It is out of the mud of the Nile, where water, earth, the fire of the sun, and the fresh air intermingle, that new life is said to be engendered. That new life is in the terms of Shakespeare's time the basest and simplest kind: crawling creatures, worms, insects, and especially snakes. This vision of natural fertility can be definitely unpretty; Cleopatra in her wrath lays this curse on her country:

Melt Egypt into Nile, and kindly creatures
Turn all to serpents! ...
So half my Egypt were submerged and made
A cistern for scaled snakes!

(I.v.78, 94)

By “kindly creatures” she means creatures produced by normal reproduction, as opposed to spontaneous generation. But is Cleopatra herself a “kindly creature”? The poetry suggests not. Antony calls his lover his “serpent of old Nile” (I.v.25); plainly Shakespeare visualized her wearing the uræus, the snake-crown of the Pharaohs, and he may have known that its root, the Egyptian word “uro” (which is also the root of the Ouroboros, the world-encircling snake that eats its own tail) means “asp.” Of course Cleopatra commits suicide with an asp, so the instrument of her death is both the sign of her queenship and the major symbol for the Nile's powers of spontaneous generation.

The snake or serpent is also part of the caduceus, the snaky rod of the god Mercury, which is in turn symbolic of life itself. Thus Cleopatra concentrates in herself Shakespeare's deepest understanding of that protean, multitudinous, inventive, dying yet undying mantle of living tissue which envelops this planet.

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety; other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies; for vilest things
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
Bless her when she is riggish.

(II.ii.237)

The words “become” and “becoming” epitomize her:

Whom everything becomes, to chide, to laugh,
To weep; whose every passion fully strives
To make itself, in thee, fair and admired.

(I.i.49)

... my becomings kill me when they do not
Eye well to you.

(I.iii.96)

“Becoming” combines two contradictory senses: fitting, proper, dignified; and transformation, metamorphosis, evolution. She is a “breather,” not a statue like her rival Octavia, who “shows a body rather than a life,” and is of a “holy, cold, and still conversation” (III.iii.22, II.vi.122). Like the “terrene moon,” Cleopatra is changeable, and waxes and wanes by the month (III.xiii.153); as the snake sheds its skin, so she, as a woman, changes her inner skin, and renews her fertility. She is associated with the most feminine words in the Indo-European linguistic heritage: woman, womb, whore, queen, wench, and witch, whose roots also
give us gyn- and Guinevere. She epitomizes the ancient Mediterranean and Mesopotamian snake-and-moon goddesses: Ashtoreth, Innanna, Ishtar, Aphrodite, Venus. The hubris of Cleopatra—at no point does she refer to any deity, including that of the Hebrews, with more than a sense of fellow-feeling or even mild contempt—her presumption in daring to create herself, her assumption of complete freedom, her refusal to let any other power on earth judge her actions—all these would be hallmarks of a spiritual rebellion against God if she were living in a Christian system. There is even something Satanic about Cleopatra. She has magical powers, she is a “charm,” a “witch,” a “spell;” Charmian at her suicide exclaims “O eastern star!” and the names of that star include not only Venus, but also Lucifer (IV.xii.16, IV.xii.47, IV.xii.30, V.ii.308).

But the moment we try to pin Cleopatra down, she escapes. The holy priests bless her when she is riggish. The snare in which she catches Antony is a “strong toil of grace” (V.ii.346); the imagery of the Madonna and of martyrdom surrounds her death as densely as that of rebellion and damnation. Antony calls her “this great Fairy” (IV.viii.12); like the queen of Faerie in “The Ballad of True Thomas” she is a force neither of Heaven nor Hell, but of the energy field that precedes both. Cleopatra is a developed version of Titania in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, the divine lady who wraps herself in the enameled skin of a snake. In Fairyland there are no moral judgments, and the laws are the laws of beauty and psychology. The rules of empirical logic, which assert that you can’t get something for nothing, don’t seem to apply to her: She “makes a show’r of rain as well as Jove” (I.i.151). Cleopatra enables Shakespeare to perform artistic impossibilities in his play. Without her the fragmented plot, sprawled over half the world and a period of years, the extravagant language, the cast of thousands, the inconsistency of many of the major characters, and the gross theatricality of many of the big scenes, would cause the play to collapse. But she carries it.

Perhaps the finest description of living matter as revealed by the science of biology can be found in Thomas Mann’s Magic Mountain. It remains as true today in its broad outlines as when it was written a lifetime ago.

What then was life? It was warmth, the warmth generated by a form-preserving instability, a fever of matter, which accompanied the process of ceaseless decay and repair of albumen molecules that were too impossibly complicated, too impossibly ingenious in structure. It was the existence of the actually impossible-to-exist, of a half-sweet, half-painful balancing, or scarcely balancing, in this restricted and feverish process of decay and renewal, upon the point of existence. It was not matter and it was not spirit, but something between the two, a phenomenon conveyed by matter, like the rainbow on the waterfall, and like the flame. Yet why not material—it was sentient to the point of desire and disgust, the shamelessness of matter become sensible of itself, the incontinent form of being. It was a secret and ardent stirring in the frozen chastity of the universal; it was a stolen and voluptuous impurity of sucking and secreting; an exhalation of carbonic acid gas and material impurities of mysterious origin and composition. It was a pullulation, an unfolding, a form-building (made possible by the overbalancing of its instability, yet controlled by the laws of growth inherent within it), of something brewed out of water, albumen, salt and fats, which was called flesh, and which became form, beauty, a lofty image, and yet all the time the essence of sensuality and desire. For this form and beauty were not spirit-borne; nor, like the form and beauty of sculpture, conveyed by a neutral and spirit-consumed substance, which could in all purity make beauty perceptible to the senses. Rather was it conveyed and shaped by the somehow awakened voluptuousness of matter, of the organic, dying-living substance itself, the reeking flesh.1

Mann’s images, of warmth, fever, decay, slime, the intricate (or “intrinsicate”) knot of life, of impossibility, sweetness, balance and continually corrected overbalance, fluidity, incontinence, sexual desire, sucking and secreting, breath, fermentation, form, beauty, life as opposed to sculpture, voluptuousness, the “reeking flesh” itself—all these Shakespeare uses in his description of Cleopatra. Cleopatra, then, is an independent source of new reality, like the Nile that engenders life; not exactly an Unmoved Mover, since she is moved by
every little thing that happens to her, and is “sentient to the point of desire and disgust,” but a shaper of
surprises, a transformer of chaotic raw material into beautiful and unexpected form.

This quality is also central to her lover Antony, in whom it is given a name: bounty. In Cleopatra's great elegy
for Antony after his suicide, she compares him to the heavenly fires that give life to the world:

His face was as the heav'ns, and therein stuck
A sun and moon, which kept their courses and lighted
The little O, the earth …

Antony, then, is not a net taker of the world's energies, but a net giver; and as in King Lear, he is what makes
the “little O” of the zero a fertile source rather than an absence. Cleopatra continues her evocation of the
endless circle of productiveness:

… His legs bestrid the ocean. His reared arm
Crested the world: his voice was propertied
As all the tune'd spheres, and that to friends;
But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,
He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,
There was no winter in't: an autumn 'twas
That grew the more for reaping …

(V.ii.79)

What Cleopatra claims for Antony in her magnificent elegy is that his generosity is not achieved at the cost of
a diminution of value elsewhere; Antony is not a zero-sum game, his creativity is not accompanied by the
entropy of a winter, and does not wear out from being used. Antony's bounty is such that for the only time in
all of literature, a man is killed by sheer generosity alone. Enobarbus, Antony's friend, has deserted him and
gone over to Antony's enemy Octavius. Antony does not reproach Enobarbus, but sends after him all the
treasure that he had abandoned in his desertion, together with a huge gift of his own. Enobarbus, to do him
credit, cannot shake off the burden of this gigantic magnanimity; his heart stops, and he dies that night under
the moon. Enobarbus is not a fool; he is quite as capable as we are of seeing through an empty gesture. But he
has been struck by something superhuman—as one soldier puts it, “your emperor / Continues still a Jove”
(IV.vi.28). Even at his weakest and most self-indulgent point, Antony can still make his most cynical
followers weep—and even we, “asses,” are “onion-eyed” (IV.ii.35). This is the quality we know as charisma.
His vitality is such that he can keep going even after his defeats; he cannot commit a clean suicide, and lives
two more scenes after inflicting his own death-wound. Cleopatra continues:

… His delights
Were dolphin-like, they showed his back above
The element they lived in.

(V.ii.88)

This is the tender observation of the lover, who finds a sweet pathos in Antony's abandonment to his
passionate pleasure. Cleopatra is associated with the sea-goddess Thetis; she is the element he lives in. “Die
where thou hast lived,” she says to him in his last moments, his head cradled in her lap (IV.xv.38). The
motion of the dolphin plunging in and out of the sea is thus intensely sexual, and Cleopatra is talking about
that moment in sexual climax which leaps beyond, and is thrown beyond pleasure into another world.
“Hyperbolein,” from which we get “hyperbole,” is Greek for “to throw beyond.” But the image is also a
metaphysical statement. The dolphin was for Medieval and Renaissance natural philosophy the highest and
noblest member of the class of fishes, and thus shared in the characteristics of the next higher category in the
Great Chain of Being. This for them explained its warm-bloodedness and recognizable moral intelligence.
Antony thus transcends the category of human as the dolphin transcends the category of fish. He shows what we would call emergent properties, the higher integration and warm-blooded self-feeling of a more evolved being. Octavius is a cold fish by comparison. In another passage Cleopatra imagines the “tawny-skinned fishes” she “betrays” when she goes angling to be “each one an Antony,” and when she draws them up she will cry in triumph “Aha, you're caught!” (II.v.11) So it is Cleopatra herself that has drawn Antony up into the higher world. She continues her praise of his bounty:

... In his livery
Walked crowns and crownets: realms and islands were
As plates dropped from his pocket ...

(V.ii.90)

Again, the imagery of roundness, this time associated with “plates,” that is, silver coins signifying value. Finally she demands:

Think you there was or might be such a man
As this I dreamt of?

DOLABELLA:

Gentle madam, no.

CLEOPATRA:

You lie, up to the hearing of the gods.
But if there be nor ever were one such,
It's past the size of dreaming: nature wants stuff
To vie strange forms with fancy, yet t' imagine
An Antony were nature's piece'gainst fancy,
Condemning shadows quite.

(V.ii.93)

What she means is that Nature's creativity cannot match human fancy (because human fancy already has the raw material, the “stuff” of Nature to work with, while Nature must make her own stuff); but if Nature were to imagine an Antony, which indeed she must have done, that Antony would be Nature's masterpiece (“piece”), defeating utterly the mere shadows of human artistic fancy. It is a bewildering idea, this contest of imaginations, and its logical form, turning back reflexively upon itself, is one we must look at more closely later on.

The core problem of the play is the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra: for their bounty, their generativeness, takes place chiefly in the context of their love. Whatever mysterious process it is that they share with the creative forces of nature cannot be only internal to the person; it must also be something that happens between persons. But can it be love if it is virtually devoid of the moral characteristics we traditionally associate with love—constancy, faithfulness, dependability, trust, truthfulness, mutual support? After all, both history and Shakespeare's treatment of it agree that Antony and Cleopatra betrayed each other, lied to each other, and deserted each other in their hour of need. When we first see Antony in the arms of
Cleopatra he is married to another woman and planning behind Cleopatra's back to return to Rome to look after his political interests. After Fulvia's death he doesn't marry Cleopatra but Octavia; and even when he returns to Cleopatra he does not level with her about his military fortunes, and becomes so angry with her that he is ready to kill her. Cleopatra for her part is utterly untrustworthy, manipulating Antony mercilessly, abandoning him in the middle of a battle, sending him false messages about her death that indeed lead him to suicide, plotting a deal with Octavius behind Antony's back, and even flirting with Octavius' messenger. Nor was she a spring chicken when Antony came upon her, having already efficiently used her sex to exploit no less a personage than Julius Caesar. If bonds are essential to love, as so many of the other plays and poems of Shakespeare imply, surely Antony and Cleopatra must have broken them all.

The first words between the lovers in the play meet this problem head on.

CLEOPATRA:

If it be love indeed, tell me how much.

ANTONY:

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

CLEOPATRA:

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

ANTONY:

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

(I.i.14)

Quite casually, almost by accident, Antony and Cleopatra are spinning out immortal poetry. We do not experience the actual human drama through the convention of verse, as for instance we perceive the psychological conflict in an opera through the utterly unrealistic medium of music; rather, we see two people talking to each other and, astonishingly, it is poetry. They are being spontaneous, but not in the sense given by the romantic poets—unschooled, sincere. They are surrounded by followers, attendants, ambassadors, are aware of their own magnificence, and are exploiting to the full their licence to be intimate in public. But their “play-acting” of the roles of the great lovers within the play abolishes for a moment the theatrical medium; their reality is theatrical, and therefore our theater seems real for a moment. The bonds of theater are thus being broken.

Antony and Cleopatra are answering each other, and each answer generates an answer from the other. They have created, so to speak, a dyadic nonlinear feedback system that is unpredictable and can thus emerge across the threshold, or “bourn,” of the existing order into another plane of being. To cross that frontier is, it seems, to break the bonds of all established rules—here, the Roman code of marital decorum and military self-discipline. They cease to be earthbound. The conversation between them has built up enough power by its gathering oscillation from one to the other that it finally takes off with the words “new heaven, new earth.” The phrase “heaven and earth” and its variants are Shakespeare's own code for the grand boundary of the world—the present moment that divides the known past from the unknown future, that demarcates the realm of life and the “undiscovered country” of death “from whose bourn,” as Hamlet puts it, “no traveller returns” (Hamlet, III.i.79). This strange boundary-land is the dwelling place not only of lunatics and lovers, as Theseus points out in A Midsummer Night's Dream, but also of the poet, whose eye
Doth glance from earth to heaven, from heaven to earth,
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and give to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

(V.i.13)

In the conversation of Antony and Cleopatra what we see is a spontaneously self-generating system in action. It is unpredictable, self-organizing, and can surprise both participants. The threshold-crossing of “heaven and earth” is the result. We experience this state as a special intensity of time, a special attention to the present moment, in which we seem to have a greater subjective presence but also a greater sensitivity to the world:

Now, for the love of Love and her soft hours,
Let's not confound the time with conference harsh.
There's not a minute of our lives should stretch
Without some pleasure now.

(I.i.44)

Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
Bliss in our brows' bent, none our parts so poor
But was a race of heaven; they are so still …

(I.iii.35)

The world of Antony and Cleopatra creates a kind of present in the past, in contrast to the Roman history in which it is embedded. When we are switched rapidly from Rome to Alexandria and back, we feel a curious sense of anachronism. Though Egypt is the more ancient civilization, it feels more present to us. Antony and Cleopatra stand out of history, “stand up peerless,” full of surprises (I.i.40), almost able to make us disbelieve the historical account of Antony's defeat by Octavius (Shakespeare actually causes the result of the conflict to be much longer in doubt than it is in his source for the story, Plutarch's Lives). The relationship between the lovers and their historical world is the same as the relationship between Shakespeare's play (live, in the present, full of suspense) and the historical account (over and done with, a foregone conclusion). It is the difference between lived time and recorded time. The problem of any historical dramatist, which is to be true to the dead facts and to make a live play on stage at the same time, is thus brilliantly solved—by making the problem into the central theme.

This solution makes possible such total aesthetic triumphs as the passage describing Cleopatra in her barge, where Shakespeare transforms Plutarch's historical description into a thing of magic and wonder, changing only a few words from the original. Here is Plutarch, in the translation by Sir Thomas North that Shakespeare used:

Therefore when she was sent unto by divers letters, both from Antonius himself and also from his friends, she made so light of it and mocked Antonius so much that she disdained to set forward otherwise but to take her barge in the river of Cydnus, the poop whereof was of gold, the sails of purple, and the oars of silver, which kept stroke in rowing after the sound of the music of flutes, hautboys, cithers, viols, and such other instruments as they played upon in the barge. And now for the person of herself: She was laid under a pavilion of cloth-of-gold of tissue, appareled and attired like the goddess Venus commonly drawn in picture; and hard by her, on either hand of her, pretty fair boys, appareled as painters do set forth god Cupid, with little fans in their hands with the which they fanned wind upon her. Her ladies and gentlewomen also, the fairest of them, were appareled like the nymphs Nereides (which are
the mermaids of the waters) and like the Graces, some steering the helm, others tending the ropes and the tackle of the barge, out of the which there came a wonderful passing sweet savor of perfumes that perfumed the wharf's side, pestered with innumerable multitudes of people. Some of them followed the barge all along the river's side, others also ran out of the city to see her coming in, so that in the end there ran such multitudes of people one after another to see her that Antonius was left post-alone in the market place in his imperial seat to give audience.2

And here is Shakespeare:

The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Burned on the water: the poop was beaten gold;
Purple the sails, and so perfume'd that
The winds were lovesick with them; the oars were silver,
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke and made
The water which they beat to follow faster
As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
It beggared all description: she did lie
In her pavilion, cloth-of-gold of tissue,
O'er picturing that Venus where we see
The fancy outwork nature; on each side her
stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
With divers-colored fans, whose wind did seem
To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
And what they undid did ...
Her gentlewomen, like the Nereides,
So many mermaids, tended her i' th' eyes,
And made their bends adornings. At the helm
A seeming mermaid steers: the silken tackle
Swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands,
That yarely frame the office. From the barge
A strange invisible perfume hits the sense
Of the adjacent wharfs. The city cast
Her people out upon her; and Antony,
Enthroned i' th' marketplace, did sit alone,
Whistling to the air; which, but for vacancy,
Had gone to look on Cleopatra too,
And made a gap in nature.

(II.ii.193)

If we look at the changes Shakespeare makes we can see, with uncanny intimacy, the mind of this great subtle gentle genius at work. There are five ways in which he has systematically transformed Plutarch so as to make this passage the shimmering glowing mystery that it is. The first, of course, is by putting it into the easy sinuous blank verse of his mature period, giving it a subtle insistent rhythm that links all the words together in a musical, rather than just a grammatical fashion; the words feed back upon each other in a way that is beyond prose or free verse. (Enobarbus, the character who speaks this passage in the play, usually speaks in prose, so Shakespeare's choice of verse here is quite marked.) The second transformation Shakespeare makes in Plutarch is the faceting and texturing and filtering of the simple matte colors of Plutarch, so that the gold becomes beaten gold, the fans become divers-colored, the boys are dimpled, the perfume becomes strange in its invisibility. The third change, and perhaps the most striking, is to make the movements and actions of the scene feed back upon themselves, so that they seem iterated, reverberant, strangely self-referential: The water that the oars beat follows faster, the wind of the fans glows the cheeks that they cool, the city casts its own people out upon itself, and so on. Most odd of all is the reflexivity of the passage describing Cleopatra like a Venus in a painting. Since Roman art—already an imitation of Greek art—there had been at least two more iterations of the classical tradition: the Italian Renaissance, imitating the ancient Romans, and the English,
imitating the Italians; and now Shakespeare adds a bewildering contest between art and nature: Cleopatra makes a better picture than those works of fancy that surpass (“outwork”) nature. Is she art or nature?—we have seen the same reflexive emulation in the passage about Antony as “nature's piece 'gainst fancy.” The fourth change in Plutarch is the way Shakespeare has given to “inanimate” nature a consciousness and sensitivity reminiscent of an older imagined universe, where every natural object was inhabited by a spirit, a feeling, and a will of its own: The water is amorous of the strokes of the oars, the winds are lovesick with the odor of the sails, the ship's tackle becomes engorged and erectile with the touch of the mermaids' hands, the wharfes sense the perfume, the air itself yearns to go look at Cleopatra.

The fifth—the deepest and strangest—change Shakespeare makes in Plutarch is one which is at the core of his theory of creation. At the end of each of the two main segments of the speech there is a phrase of reflexive negation: “what they undid, did” and “made a gap in nature.” The fans of the cupids do what they undo, they inflame what they cool, and what they cool is Cleopatra. The air is dragged toward Cleopatra as to a vacuum; it is only the possibility of a paradoxical “vacancy” (Nature, according to Renaissance science, abhors a vacuum) that prevents the air from being sucked in toward her. The implication is that Cleopatra represents—is—one of those spaces or opportunities for nature to do new things, that are described by today's chaos theory. She is, in mathematical terms, an endless unrepeating space-filling algorithm; in physical terms, she is a universe-spawning quantum vacuum. Her “infinite variety” is fractally deep. And in this odd description of her all the other changes Shakespeare makes in Plutarch make sense. His verse provides the language of the speech with the feedback connections needed to make it nonlinear. That nonlinearity gives what is associated with her the faceted, textured, filtered qualities Benoit Mandelbrot attributes to fractal phenomena: They are “grainy, hydralike, in between, pimply, pocky, ramified, sea-weedy, strange, tangled, tortuous, wiggly, wispy, wrinkled.” Objects with these qualities “take on a life of their own,” they are active and sensitive in surprising ways.

All these strange phenomena take place in the charged field between Antony, enthroned in the marketplace, and Cleopatra, sitting in her barge. Love can constitute a field that generates its partners rather than vice-versa. What Antony and Cleopatra have discovered between them is literally, in the cant phrase, bigger than both of them. Without it he is an aging failed general, and she is an aging spoiled courtesan. If Antony and Cleopatra were mimed throughout, or rewritten by Hollywood screenwriters, that is all we would see. For in Shakespeare's play the spontaneously self-generating system of love is immanent in—is—the language of the play.

III. THE LANGUAGE OF THE OUROBOROS: HYPERBOLE, CLIMAX, REFLEXIVITY, TAUTOLOGY, PARADOX

The rhetorical style of Anthony and Cleopatra is what Jacobean called “Asiatismus”—a kind of writing full of figures and metaphors, a style opposed to the more severe “Attic” rhetoric. Cicero distinguishes two types of Asianism: the “subtle-sententious” and the “grandiloquent-impetuous.” The Romans in the play tend towards the cooler Atticism; the Egyptians are unfailingly subtle, sententious, grandiloquent, and impetuous. As it happens, Asianism in rhetoric was at the time the play was written (1607) going out of fashion, and the austere Attic or Senecan style was in the ascendant. Octavius' characteristic style is the successful style of the new post-Renaissance world. Let us look at five rhetorical figures in the play, all characteristic of “Asiatismus” or Asian rhetoric: hyperbole, climax, self-reflective figures, tautology, and paradox. In the greatest speeches of the play many of these figures are combined together.

Hyperbole in this play hardly needs illustration. Almost every scene dealing with Cleopatra and Antony contains in it riotous abundance:

His legs bestrid the ocean; his reared arm
Crested the world: his voice was propriety
As all the tune'd spheres ... 

A peculiarly strong form of hyperbole in the play occurs five times: “love of Love,” “man of men,” “captain's captain,” “king of kings,” “lord of lords.” This figure contains a variety of operations, all of which are central to the play's meaning: transcendence, superlativeness, the extraction of a quintessence, and the emergence of the absolutely concrete. It is also a reflexive figure, like so many in the play: the subject referring back to itself, requiring no comparison, complete in itself. Cleopatra threatens to give Charmian bloody teeth if she “with Caesar paragon again” her “man of men” (I.v.71). You cannot explain the less contingent by the more contingent. You cannot measure the superlative with the comparative. Infinite virtue cannot be counted.

Hyperbole is also used sarcastically and ironically, to describe falsity and weakness. There is a hint of this when Enobarbus describes Cleopatra as dying “twenty times upon far poorer moment” (I.ii.142)—but Cleopatra, even when she is acting a part, is always absolutely one hundred percent genuine as well: “she makes a shower of rain as well as Jove.” The irony is heavier when Enobarbus hyperbolically parodies Lepidus—

Hoo! hearts, tongues, figures, scribes, bards, poets, cannot
Think, speak, cast, write, sing, number—hoo!—
His love for Antony.

(III.ii.16)

—and hyperbolically deflates Antony's hyperbolical rhetoric: “Now he'll outstare the lightning” (III.xviii.195).

Another characteristic figure in Antony and Cleopatra is climax (gradatio, auxesis, ascendus, methalemsis), and a variant of it, a kind of “heaping up” figure (accumulatio, congeries). The evolutionary progression in the following example is typical:

Kingdoms are clay: our dungy earth alike
Feeds beasts as man: the nobleness of life
Is to do thus ...

Clay, dung, earth, feeds, beasts, man, nobleness of life: The series passes through all the levels of creation and explodes, like Cleopatra's dolphin, out of its element: Speech is replaced by Antony's great public kiss; the rhetoric has become concrete; and the world of comparison has given way to the unmeasurable, the least contingent, the “peerless.” Most of the great encomiums of the play (in other words, most of the great speeches, for this is a play of and about praise) are climactic or cumulative in form, and conclude with a hyperbolical leap at the end of the series.

But climax also has its opposite in the play: a sort of progressive reductio ad absurdum, reduction to absurdity:

O, let him marry a woman that cannot go, sweet Isis, I beseech thee! and let her die, too, and give him a worse! and let worse follow worse, till the worst of all follow him laughing to his grave, fifty-fold a cuckold!

(I.ii.64)

Our Italy
Shines o'er with civil swords: Sextus Pompeius
Makes his approaches to the port of Rome:
Equality of two domestic powers
Breed scrupulous faction: the hated, grown to strength,
Are newly grown to love: the condemned Pompey,
Rich in his father's honour, creeps apace
Into the hearts of such as have not thrived
Upon the present state, whose numbers threaten;
And quietness grown sick of rest would purge
By any desperate change.

(I.iii.43)

Ah, dear, if I be so,
From my cold heart let heaven engender hail,
And poison it in the source, and the first stone
Drop in my neck: as it determines, so
Dissolve my life! the next Caesarion smite!
Till by degrees the memory of my womb,
Together with my brave Egyptians all,
By the discandying of this pelleted storm
Lie graveless, till the flies and gnats of Nile
Have buried them for prey!

(III.viii.158)

The curious imprecision of these images is powerfully evocative of a descent into chaos, a dissolving of structure and a clouding of lucidity. The reflexiveness of the last two examples should also be noted: Rest is sick of itself, the poison hail that kills Cleopatra is engendered in Cleopatra's own heart.

For indeed, the figure that is perhaps most characteristic of Antony and Cleopatra is the reflexive figure: “Antony / Will be himself;” “whose every passion strives / To make itself, in thee, fair and admired;” “when he is not Antony;” “vows, / Which break themselves in swearing;” “my oblivion is a very Antony;” “my becomings kill me;” “now I feed myself / With most delicious poison;” “what they undid did;” “I myself / Have given myself the cause.”

Such figures, when they are unpacked, reveal the heart of this play. They express the consequence of peerlessness—if something is great enough, or terrible enough, it can be compared only to itself. A comic example is the crocodile that Antony describes to Lepidus, which is shaped like itself, is as high as it is, lives by what nourishes it, and has wet tears. But as with most of Shakespeare's jokes, the profoundest meaning is right beneath the surface. Antony has just finished describing the serpent of the Nile (which, we know, is Antony's nickname for Cleopatra)—a creature which is spontaneously generated out of the ooze of the Nile. In Egypt the laws of causality do not apply: The serpent is an uncaused cause, the crocodile has no attributes, for attributes can only be described with reference to entities at a similar level of contingency. Like the attributes of God, the characteristics of the crocodile cannot be described or accounted for except in terms of themselves. Of course the most important entity in Egypt is Cleopatra. Antony and Cleopatra is an attempt to portray her, to show her attributes, to do the impossible. The proper way to do the impossible in language is to use hyperbolical climaxes that carry the reader, by their momentum, out of the element of language; to make language attack or support itself in paradoxes and tautologies; to violate the linearity of ordinary logic in the densest possible way.

Reflexive figures, as suggested above, include paradoxes. There are two main types of paradox in the play: those that by their failure to describe a possible object, in fact describe an impossible one, and those that demonstrate how, in a world of logic, something that transcends logic will destroy and strangle itself. Most descriptions of Cleopatra contain the first type of paradox; here is a delicious example of what might be called “the paradox of decorum”:
I saw her once
Hop forty paces through the public street;
And having lost her breath, she spoke, and panted,
That she did make defect perfection,
And, breathless, power breathe forth.

(II.ii.230)

It is not only the paradoxes of breathless breath and defective perfection that interest us here, but the vision of the queen hopping through the street. Cleopatra destroys the normal, most basic, rationale of poetry: decorum, or fitness. The material a poet works in is the currents of association in his language—the links and pathways that constitute linguistic competence. But Cleopatra is a “lass unparalleled” (V.ii.316), a “strumpet” (I.i.13, V.ii.215), “a maid that milks and does the meanest chores” (IV.xv.77), a “royal wench” (II.ii.228); the priests “bless her when she is riggish;” her tragic death is a “lover’s pinch;” her “immortal longings” comically echo the malapropism of the rustic clown who warns her of the danger of the snake: “his biting is immortal” (V.ii.295, 281, 247).

The other kind of paradox—of self-destruction—is also widespread. Force entangles itself, vows break themselves, generosity kills, the great heart cracks itself, freedom is a snare. We who are in a sense the historical survivors of the battle of Actium, in which the fleet of Antony and Cleopatra was sunk by that of Octavius, have plenty wherewith to reproach its great casualties: They were authors of their own downfall, their way of life could not have been sustained, they chose a course that was not only self-indulgent but also self-destructive. Plutarch does not fail to make these points; but if Antony had won, Octavius' defeat would then appear quite as inevitable. The victors write history, or hire survivors among the vanquished, like Plutarch the Greek, to write it for them. At the heart of the great paradoxes of self-strangling there is a basic historical paradox. Once an event has happened, it was always inevitable; if it was inevitable there is nothing its victim can do to escape, and all his attempts merely bring him closer to his doom. History is the discipline by which we convince ourselves that what did happen had to happen.

The self-strangling metaphors also suggest a certain psychological condition, well-known to those who compete in games of skill: as when the natural golf-swing or tennis-stroke is ruined by excessive self-consciousness. It is a crippling syndrome; the consciousness of one's consciousness as the cause of failure becomes in turn the maiming consciousness of which we are maimingly conscious. It is an infinite regress that for once richly deserves the name “regress.” The psychological mechanism is the same in some forms of sexual impotence and insomnia. When this mechanism is at work in a game that combines luck and skill, its workings are almost indistinguishable from bad luck to the loser. A poker-player on a losing streak, conscious that he is on a losing streak and conscious of that consciousness as a bias to the game, always suffers from bad luck. This is exactly what happens to Antony in his games of dice and cock-fighting with Caesar. Antony's handicap is his limitless self-consciousness, taught to him by Cleopatra. Enormous sexual potency as well as sexual impotence can result from this feedback of awareness, and the line between them is very thin. Images of both are strongly associated with Antony: His reared arm crests the world, his virtue (manhood) is infinite; but he “cannot hold this visible shape,” and “the soldier's pole is fall’n” (IV.xiv.14, IV.xv.65).

All the great tropes that we have seen in the play suggest highly self-aware thought processes. Climax expresses the cumulativeness of mental feedback; hyperbole its curious power to be always one step further than one's assessment of it, since the assessing itself must then be assessed. Reflexive figures express the self-referential qualities of self-awareness; and paradoxical figures express the polarities which the mind oscillates between, and also its potential for self-paralysis. The reductio ad absurdum figure suggests the odd way in which the mind can run itself into an impossible situation that can only “purge itself” by some “desperate change.”

IV. CREATION AND CONTROL
It must now be clear what the central mechanism of creation is in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Shakespeare has isolated it by means of the peculiar historical setting and story of his play, and has turned the magnifying glass of his poetry on the operations of the creative process in physical and biological systems, in the psychology of creative individuals, in the relationship of his larger-than-life lovers, and in the microstructure and microprocess of language itself. The key mechanism is essentially the same, though it has many names: nonlinearity, feedback, sensitivity, reflexivity, self-reference; nonlinearity at the logical and mathematical level, feedback at the level of simple physical systems, sensitivity at the level of complex ecological systems with many players, reflexivity at the level of human consciousness, self-reference at the level of language. It is only recently that the grand synthesis of chaos and complexity theory has made possible the gathering of all these phenomena under one conceptual umbrella, and thus we do not yet have a single uncontested term for the general principle. But we can state it roughly as follows: New things emerge in the universe through the iterative process of old things (including even the originary nothing itself) affecting and being affected by themselves and each other. This is as true for persons as for turbulent flow systems, for fractal geometry as for interpersonal dynamics, for the structures of language as for the operations of the marketplace.

Put boldly this way, the principle seems oversimple—too abstract to use and commonsense anyway. But when we follow up its implications, we get a useful set of distinguishing characteristics or landmarks that will tell us when we are on the right creative track. One is that the elements of our system are free to communicate with each other—that is, they possess a common language and expressive medium and are not isolated from one another, and at the same time the constraints of that language do not erect barriers between the elements. Another is that the process goes on by itself and does not always have to be jogged. Another is the emergence of strange attractors, beautiful global forms, out of the apparently random results of repetitive iteration. Yet another is that articulated order does not decrease in such a creative system, as it would if it were based on linear dynamics, but increases. One hard-to-define characteristic is the kind of shape it produces—branchy, self-similar (its details resemble its macrostructure, with continuous variations), rhythmic, deep, multidimensional, rich yet simple, and esthetically satisfying.

The great advantage of the feedback principle shows up when we think of the errors we make when we try alternative explanations for creativity. If we wait for the advent of a boundless outside source of creation, we may neglect the humble growth that goes on in and around us, out of the fertile nothing here and now, when we participate in it. If we mistrust self-awareness and insist that creativity must always be unconscious of itself, we will miss the point where the iterative reflections of mental feedback begin to sketch out the new shape of a strange attractor, where the feedback process becomes so complex as to forget its own origins, where thought turns into mystical contemplation, and the self-mirrorings extend out into an infinite new country. If we believe that new things only happen by means of the linear application of power, our efforts will founder in thermodynamic decay amid the wreckage of what we have destroyed to fuel and clear the way for our actions. If we believe that no new creation can happen, we become parasites upon those who continue to take the risk of inner self-transformation and outer interaction. If we get too quickly bored by the repetitiveness of the iterations by which the feedback proceeds, and reject a mimetic tradition because of its apparent stagnation and lack of novelty, we may cut off the creative process before it has had its chance to crystallize into an emergent new structure. And if in panic or disgust at the apparent lawlessness of the creative process, we try to apply inappropriate constraints and bonds to it, that interrupt its interactions and development rather than provide a more sensitive medium of communication, we may abort it altogether. It is this last point which bears most directly on our present theme.

In *Antony and Cleopatra* there is everywhere a sense of the agonizing constriction and chafing of simple-minded bonds, prohibitions, and restraints, especially when the expedient political morality of the Romans attempts to curb what it takes to be the wild voluptuousness of the Egyptians. The Romans counter the excesses of random fertility and productiveness with an ethic based on negativity, control, restraint, and the cutting-off of extraneous possibilities. The characteristic images are of coldness, hardness, and tight bindings, which evoke the feeling of wearing armor. One must “pull oneself together” rather than “let
oneself go.” In the Alps, still a disciplined Roman, not yet corrupted by Cleopatra, Antony was like a stag in the snow, feeding on the bark of trees; his eyes glowed like “plated Mars,” his “great fights” “burst the buckles of his breast” (I.i.4). The league between Antony and Caesar is a “band,” a “knot,” a “hoop,” that “knits” or “cements” them together; Octavia is like a “statue,” “still,” “cold,” and “holy;” a man should control himself as he controls his horse, and the neigh of a curbed horse is used to symbolize restraint; the “squares” of war, and the “square” of moderation, the golden rule, imply a squareness and uptightness in the Roman worldview that are reminiscent of the hippie idiom. Above all, the Roman gods are invoked as principles of control (not forces of creativity)—a kind of moral body-armor that a man puts on to make his flesh insensitive. But these images of control become images of strangulation, freezing, tearing, and grinding, as the “band” between Antony and Octavius becomes a halter and a noose. The two surviving triumvirs are like teeth that fruitlessly grind each other. The tender flesh is torn by steel. The state crushes the creativity that it is meant to nurture.

It is not merely the restraints of the Romans, however unimaginative and “square,” but also the boundlessness—the bondlessness of the lovers—that brings about their downfall. They do, after all, commit suicide, and their deaths are full of the imagery of dissolution, of the loss of structure, of melting. Instead of fighting on land, where his strengths are, Antony insists on fighting at sea; indeed, he wishes he could fight in the fire and the air too. This attempt to transcend “the element he lives in” culminates in the scene of his suicide, whose poetry evokes a strange dissolving of the solid world into vapor:

Sometimes we see a cloud that's dragonish,  
A vapor sometime like a bear or lion,  
A towered citadel, a pendent rock,  
A forked mountain, or blue promontory ...

All this is like the painted backdrop of a stage, tiny, gaudy, hypnotic—but here revealed for what it is—

With trees upon't that nod unto the world  
And mock our eyes with air. Thou hast seen these signs;  
They are black Vesper's pageants.

Indeed, Antony's pageantry is being dissolved, since it was, after all, no more than a cloud, an optical illusion, the castles in the air of his rhetoric, the miraculous meaningful air of language.

... now thy captain is  
Even such a body: here am I Antony,  
Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave.

Antony prepares to take off his costume—the costume of the Roman general, the armor of self-control, the external shape of his character.

Unarm, Eros, the long day's task is done,  
And we must sleep.

(IV.xiv.2-36)

The noble Roman warrior would not ask his armorer to kill him, as Antony now does; Eros is more under control than Antony, and neatly dispatches himself rather than have to kill his master. Certainly a traditional hero would not botch his suicide; Antony, however, does not get his sword in right and survives another two scenes. The constraints and conventions of the theater have collapsed. There follows one of the most awkward and potentially ludicrous pieces of stage-business in Shakespeare—the hauling of Antony aloft into Cleopatra's monument. Antony even begins his last speech too early—“I am dying, Egypt, dying.”—and has to wait until they get him up before he can start again (IV.xv.18, 41). He asks for wine to clear his throat. Cleopatra's
lament for him reinforces the theme of melting, dissolution, the collapse of restraints and boundaries:

The crown o' th' earth doth melt. My lord!
O, withered is the garland of the war,
The soldier's pole is fall'n: young boys and girls
Are level now with men: the odds is gone,
And there is nothing left remarkable
Beneath the visiting moon.

(IV.xv.63)

But in his last moments Antony's Roman rhetoric recovers its martial splendor. Perhaps Antony is only “acting out” a grand suicide scene for which he is unqualified by his newfound self-consciousness and reflexive sensibility—the old uncomplicated Antony would make a better heroic actor!—but nevertheless on his deathbed he rediscovers the need for bonds and the keeping of contracts. He becomes a dying husband, rather than a failed lover; he earns back the title of hero, but in a new way, not as the one who is unconscious of pain and death, but as the one who carries his consciousness through to the end.

The miserable change now at my end
Lament nor sorrow at, but please your thoughts
In feeding them with those my former fortunes,
Wherein I lived, the greatest prince of the world,
The noblest; and do not now basely die,
Not cowardly put off my helmet to
My countryman …

(IV.xv.51)

Unarmed, he somehow still wears the poetic helmet of his bond, but it is a reinvented one. He is, in his own epitaph, “a Roman by a Roman / Valiantly vanquished.” The language is both reflexive and self-conscious, and at the same time simple and grand. Somehow between them Antony and Cleopatra have rescued this scene; and Cleopatra, having found her poetic voice, now takes complete control of the play, a grip that will not weaken until the last scene is over.

This strange recovery of bonds and legitimate titles is even clearer in the death of Cleopatra than in that of Antony. Although the images of melting and dissolution do not go away—“I am fire and air; my other elements / I give to baser life” (V.ii.289)—they are joined with a new emergent structure of commitment:

Husband, I come:
Now to that name my courage prove my title!

(V.ii.278)

She has recovered the notion of bond—literally, in the “band” of “husband”—and claims title, legal possession, through the sacrificial means with which we are familiar in the Henry plays. Blood is the sealing-wax that legitimates the contract. In her last words the imagery of melting combines strangely with the devotion of motherhood, as she takes the snake to her bosom:

Peace, peace! Dost thou not see my baby at my breast
That sucks the nurse asleep? …
As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle …

(V.ii.308)
She dies in her full queenly regalia, crown, robe, and all, asserting her sovereignty and the bonds that bind her to her people and to Antony.

In these last scenes there is an episode that has scandalized Shakespeare's critics: Cleopatra, part-prisoner of the victorious Romans, lies to Caesar's accountants about the extent of her wealth, holding secret the bulk of her treasure so as to keep at her disposal the power to give imperial gifts. How can she think of possessions at a time like this? But the attempt to stay ahead of the game is entirely in her indomitable spirit, it is delightfully comic, and more—it shows that she knows the worth of money, the concentrated and universalized fertility of human gratitude, obligation, incentive, bond. It is something, as Jane Austen says, to be “mistress of Pemberley,” and diamonds are a girl's best friend. Uptight Octavius, when her ruse is revealed, claims that he is above haggling: “Caesar's no merchant, to make prize with you / Of things that merchants sold” (V.ii.183). He is unaware of his own implied insult—that Cleopatra is a merchant, even a whore. This insult—or rather the priggishness that would make it one if Octavius had the sensitivity to see the implication—makes Cleopatra livid with fury and cements her resolution to frustrate his plans by suicide: “He words me, girls, he words me, that I should not / Be noble to myself!” (V.ii.191) Shakespeare allows the question to arise whether Cleopatra would have considered suicide if she had been able to avoid the indignity of being exhibited in Octavius' triumphal procession as a trophy, a belonging of his. The point here, though, is that Cleopatra does achieve a magnificent suicide. This is far more interesting than some abstract, disinterested Kantian decision to do the Right Thing. Who will blame Cleopatra if some of her motivations are not of the purest?—especially since her very principle is impurity, the inclusion and communication of all possible motions in a turbulence that issues in beautiful emergent form. She achieves, as a breather, the perfection of sculptural shape that Octavia her rival could only reach through bloodless stoicism and insensitivity:

My resolution's placed, and I have nothing
Of woman in me: now from head to foot
I am marble-constant: now the fleeting moon
No planet is of mine.

(V.ii.238)

This emergent form can be found in the very vocabulary of her final scene. The sounds of the words, energized by such an immense linguistic force field, fall naturally into certain patterns; the language was just waiting for this inevitable form to crop up in it. The word “aspic,” with its vowels “a” and “i,” and the consonants “s,” “p,” and “c,” are the key: “juice,” “Egypt's,” “grape,” “moist,” “lip,” “Iras,” “last,” “lips,” “aspic,” “stroke,” “as a lover's pinch,” “proves me base,” “spend that kiss,” “intrinsicate,” “poor venomous fool, / Be angry, and dispatch,” “speak,” “ass unpolicied,” “peace,” “sucks the nurse asleep,” “as sweet as balm, as soft as air,” “A lass unparalleled” (V.ii.280-319).

Thus the result of Shakespeare's grand experiment, his search for the inner mechanism of creativity and economic production, yields a further fruit. Indeed, the feedback processes and reflexivity that creation requires must be liberated by the breaking of existing ossified structures, the bounteous abandonment of economic prudence, and the apparent drowning of being in process. But the outcome of the self-organizing processes that result is new coherent form, new titles of possession, new being. The martial heroism of Antony and the marble-constancy of Cleopatra in their deaths arise spontaneously out of the brew of their claimed freedom; they are not artificial rules imposed from outside. The bonds that they rediscover, of husband and hero, queen and wife, are now proven to be necessary consequences and appropriate expressions of the creative turbulence.

V. A PHILOSOPHICAL CODA

In Antony and Cleopatra rhetoric claims for itself, and indeed possesses, concrete force (the dramatist, of
course, is at liberty to assign greater or lesser concreteness to whatever elements in his play he chooses: This is part of the amazing freedom of art). The rhetoric of Antony's reply to the desertion of Enobarbus has real killing force. The rhetoric of Cleopatra in her death-scene is able to fell Iras as if she were pole-axed.

In this play the distinction between how you find out and what you find out—between epistemology and ontology, between sensation and reality, between rhetoric and action—this great distinction breaks down. In the world outside the theater, it is our philosophical fashion to preserve the distinction; the distinction itself is a useful part of our rhetoric. Similarly, we are comfortable with a mimetic theory of meaning, since some idea of reference, mimesis or representation is useful to keep these two faces of reality apart. In some respects, Shakespeare makes that extra-theatrical world triumph in the play: Caesar remarks on the fact that the ground has not in fact convulsed with earthquakes at the death of Antony, which is the earthquake. The concreteness of rhetoric is apparent in another sense as well. The poetry that Antony and Cleopatra exchange is Shakespeare's theatrical convention to represent their sexual intercourse. The rhetorical medium of the play is the love between its protagonists.

It is therefore not surprising that of all Shakespeare's plays Antony and Cleopatra should have the largest number of messengers and scenes in which messengers are important. A messenger and his message are the natural symbols of knowing and what is known, of epistemology and ontology, rhetoric and reality. Cleopatra characteristically confuses them at all times. When Alexas arrives with the orient pearl Antony has kissed, she says to him:

... coming from him, that great med'cine hath
With his tinct gilded thee.

(I.v.36)

The passage where she physically attacks the bearer of the news of Antony's marriage is justly famous. We exclaim that Cleopatra is wrong, that she is totally unjust; but her performance in this scene is actually an uncanny piece of psychological self-preparation and auto-therapy. By the end of the scene we realize that she has received this crushing news without being crushed, that she has preserved all her weapons intact, that the encounter has actually toned up her emotional muscles for the battles to come. In the next scene in which we see her, she is both pumping the messenger for information on her rival and at the same time turning his replies into what she wants to hear. She is in splendid trim and there is no doubt she will get Antony back. In what sense, then, was she wrong in confusing the messenger with the message? By doing so she is able to alter the message so that she is capable of dealing with it, and deflecting its consequences. By her response she actually changes the nature of the event at a range of over a thousand miles, since an event is, after all, the sum of its consequences.

Antony, when under the influence of “Roman” thoughts, tends to separate messenger from message: “Speak to me home, mince not the general tongue” (I.ii.106); but under Cleopatra's influence he treats the bringers of unpleasant news much as she does. The classical example is the whipping of Thidias. One of the most poignant signs of Antony's decline is his use of the schoolmaster as an ambassador, where once he was able to send kings as errand-boys. The concrete force of Antony's rhetoric seems to be fading, though as the death of Enobarbus shows, it still has its impact. Ironically enough, it was the Thidias episode which persuaded Enobarbus to leave Antony. Antony's voice, which can be as “loud as Mars,” “like all the tuned spheres,” or like “rattling thunder,” is one of his most prominent characteristics. Again, it is described as having concrete force. Many of the descriptions of Antony and Cleopatra sound like directions to impossibly ideal actors. Clearly Shakespeare must have realized that these protagonists are unplayable, if one is to do them justice. This difficulty is itself put to emotional use by the dramatist. The actor is a sort of messenger, his part the message; the pathos of Antony and Cleopatra is partly that their roles must be performed by lesser human beings—by the stage actors, by themselves.
In deliberately confusing ontology and epistemology, Shakespeare is making a philosophical point of great importance: that physical objects have being only to the extent that they feel and are felt by other physical objects; that to be sensitive and sensible to other objects is to have being. For centuries material determinists have insisted on the deadness, the essential lack of internal spontaneous process, of self-awareness and self-motivation, in the fundamental matter of the universe. We now know, from Westfall's fine biography of Newton, that the reason natural philosophers of the Enlightenment insisted on the deadness and inert passivity of material nature was in order to concede to God a necessary role in giving it all life and animation, so that the divine would not be a fifth wheel in the world. Not daring to see God as immanent in the universe, and preferring to keep Him outside it where He could, so to speak, be kept an eye on, they tried to make physicality as incomplete as possible in respect of all the properties attributed to soul, consciousness, reflectiveness, initiative, originality, so that He would still have something important to do.

Partly because of their purely arbitrary distinctions between substance and accidents, the natural philosophers never sufficiently recognized how great a problem it was for their view—of the physical universe as insensitive and devoid of internal process—that matter has properties. That is, particles, atoms, and molecules are not totally transparent; they interrupt the forces that encounter them in such a way as to make them perceptible to humans and other animals. The light must be broken, scattered, transformed, absorbed, refracted, for us to see things at all: And it is only what is seeable—perceptible, in more general terms—that can be of any concern to science. If matter had no internal process, light would come to us utterly unaltered by the matter it had encountered, and thus the matter would be invisible. Further, it is only where matter resists the complete logical explication of its internal process, where it interrupts the linear flow of rational consequence and we are forced to establish a constant, a given, that we have any fixed point that might justify a claim for its actual existence. It is the irreducibility of the fundamental constants—the speed of light, the gravitational constant, the electron-volt constant, Planck's constant, pi—their darkness and opacity to any further reductive explanation, their idiosyncratic characterization of the fundamental relations of physical objects—that gives them their foundational role in our understanding of reality.

As we now know, simply taking up space is a complex performance for matter, and its other qualities, of mass, charge, parity, and so on, are the maintained achievements of its internal process. Its external communicative process is more remarkable still, of course—crystals, plants, animals, we ourselves, are the emergent forms that such communication makes possible. Thus the universe postulated by the material determinists, lacking that mysterious inner negotiation and external sensitivity that makes matter observable, would be completely invisible—and of course untouchable, unsmellable, inaudible, and tasteless as well. Since science relies essentially on observation, science would be impossible in such a universe. It is only to the extent that the universe and the things in it have some analogue to inner metabolism and outer sociability—that is, the extent to which they are alive—that they can be said to be at all. Being is not given. It is the achievement of the universe's continuous originating inventiveness, its life and growth.

A large part of this liveness, this internal reflexivity, of ordinary matter is devoted necessarily to making more or less crude representations of the rest of the universe. Butterfly chrysalises often combine two or three levels of representation, aimed at various possible predators: the appearance of a dead leaf for the stupidest ones, a spot of color denoting poison for the cleverer ones that have spotted the disguise—and sometimes the false appearance of a chrysalis of a truly poisonous species, saving the metabolic expense of manufacturing real poison. Vines pestered with butterflies will grow leaves that look like butterflies, on the correct theory that butterflies will not lay eggs on what they think are fellow-butterflies. But these are simple forms of representation and imitation compared to what one finds among higher animals. The greylag goose expresses its love for its mate by pointedly making a mimed attack on an absent, counterfactual goose, in a “triumph ceremony” that is a fine analogy of human theater. Courting bowerbirds build elaborate useless bowers as representations of their excellent nestbuilding genes. But the need to represent and depict goes all the way down to the most primitive entities in the universe. An atom must find ways of translating the impact of incoming energy into terms that it can absorb without flying apart; indeed, all the atoms that exist are the ones
that didn't fly apart. Atoms do this by adjusting the disposition of the electrons in the harmonic series of electron shells that makes up their outer skin; and they relieve the pressure of such impacts by giving off photons of their own, whose unique signature can be picked up by a spectrograph. Those spectral emanations are in fact representations of their environment, in terms that are unique to the element that produces them.

A former student of mine, the designer and architect Jack Rees, has suggested in unpublished work that it is no coincidence that the great physicists—Newton, Einstein, and so on—tended to make their discoveries in mechanics simultaneously with their discoveries in optics. Perhaps, he suggests, optics and mechanics are at base the same thing. That is, objects in the universe exist (have mechanical properties) only in and through the fact that they express themselves and experience the expressive activity of other objects (they see and are seen). All exchanges of information are conducted by the photons of light or by particles that can be translated into photons. And mechanical processes are fundamentally exchanges of information. Certainly the basic principle of all physical science is that it must be based on observation—that is, it assumes that an object has reality only to the extent that it is observable, even if indirectly. Scientific reality is observability. At the same time the only way that anything can be observed is by its effect on other things; thus for scientific reality we need not only a world of observable objects but also a world of observing objects, that is, objects that can register by their response the presence of other objects. The power of the observer in the constitution of fundamental reality has been confirmed again and again by quantum physics, and is already a feature of our electronic technology. We can generalize this idea to the proposition that every thing exists if and only if, and to the extent that, it represents other things and is represented by them—that is, it expresses itself in such a way as to be intelligibly recognized as what it is, and it registers and records its fellow-beings in such a way as to make their existence concrete.

Thus, representation is a fundamental feature of reality, not just a superficial freak of civilized mimicry. The universe was only a “buzzing, booming confusion,” as William James put it, in its first moment. Since then it has been painting and sculpting itself with greater and greater precision, evolving complex chemistry, plants, and animals, and achieving thereby a denser and denser reality and concreteness, the more sensory modalities it has brought into play.

It is significant that at the very beginning of Western material science, in the age of Bacon and Descartes, Shakespeare should have given us a play that founds being upon creativity rather than the reverse. It has taken us four hundred years, through some of the most brilliant intellectual achievements of the human race, to reach a scientific view of the world that confirms his insight; in which we can now see the particles of matter, no less than living organisms or conscious-brained beings, as feedback processes with some measure of autonomy, self-determination, unpredictable historical identity, and reciprocal communication with the rest of the universe. One way of putting this is in the language of another former student of mine, the Belgian philosopher Koen dePryck. He says that the world we live in is an onto-epistemological universe—that is, it only exists to the extent that its participants know and experience themselves and each other, and it is only knowable to the extent that all its inhabitants have an individual inexplicable existence. Everything experiences itself and each other into being.

Putting this thought in economic terms, we may even say that the universe is a market, a system of communication and exchange, in which value—that is, being—is built through internal and external feedback processes. It is a network of bonds, a “fair chain of love” as Chaucer put it, and the warrant of being is what Dante called “the love that moves the sun and the other stars.” The currency of the market is a codified and abstracted obligation—debt—which is the economic version of gratitude and love in the moral sphere. Money is love incarnated as best it can in physical property relations. But art is also the incarnation in crude physical terms of values that are the result of far more subtle and complex (though no less physical) neural and social processes. A great painting or sculpture must endure its material enactment in paint or stone, as love and gratitude must endure theirs in bequests, wages, gifts, and payments. As modernist critics of the market have rightly pointed out, markets are based on reproducibility, representation, and image. Thus an artist of the
twenty-first century, seeking to create truly authentic art—art that has the concrete reality and presence of other objects in the universe—should not avoid or seek to undermine the methods of the market, which are themselves a developed and concentrated version of the universal process of natural evolution. Rather, such an artist should, as his or her predecessors did in Florence, Amsterdam, and Paris, include the turbulence of market feedback in the work of art, especially the turbulence that results when an object both is and represents, and thus has both a face value and an intrinsic value. The intrinsic value of an object, say one made of gold or precious stone, is itself fossilized face value, for the properties of an object—its color, ductility, crystalline structure or refractive capacities—are already the way it represents the rest of the world and declares its own meaning; it has being to the extent that it has meaning.

Notes


Ania Loomba (essay date 2002)

*[In the following excerpt, Loomba evaluates the play's dichotomies between East and West, Egypt and Rome, and Cleopatra and Octavius in terms of early modern English culture. The critic finds many reflections in Antony and Cleopatra of the English fear of foreigners and outsiders—particularly those whose skin color is darker than theirs—and anxieties about the power of alien women to emasculate men or divert them from their commitment to political domination.]*

Written only a few years after *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606-7) looks at the intersection of racial difference, colonial expansion, and gender from a very different angle. In this play, Shakespeare reaches back to events which had occurred in the first century bc, and which had been repeatedly narrated by Roman and other storytellers from that time to his own. By taking as his central figure a foreign queen who was already a symbol of wanton sexuality and political seduction in European culture, Shakespeare comments on a long tradition of writing in which sexual passion expresses, but also ultimately sabotages, imperial ambition. Shakespeare harnesses a long history and wide geography to early modern English anxieties about women's power, foreigners, and empire. This chapter will highlight this layering of past and present, suggesting that racial ideologies fuse ideas received from different historical periods, and from both literate and popular cultures.

In an introduction to the play, Michael Neill contrasts ‘Cleopatra's playful sense of herself as “with Phoebus's amorous pinches black”’ (1.5.28) with ‘Othello's anguished “Haply for I am black”’ (3.3.267) in order to argue that ‘the issue of racial difference’ in this play is ‘relatively insignificant’. Cleopatra's attitude to her own skin colour might indicate that she does not think of it as a sign of inferiority, but it does not tell us that her colour is unimportant in Roman constructions of her as an Egyptian wanton, as the very antithesis of a chaste Roman wife. And Cleopatra is far from indifferent to what the Romans think of her, although one of her strategies is to play up to, and exaggerate, their images of her. Even if she were indifferent, of course, that would not be evidence for a lack of racial tension in the play as a whole. Although skin colour is not the only marker of such tension, it is a good place to start examining different aspects of the history and myth of Cleopatra.

Although Cleopatra calls herself ‘black’, and Philo calls her ‘tawny’ (1.1.6), none of the repeated, hyperbolic, and contradictory descriptions of her in the play tells us much about her physically. She is the ‘wrangling queen, / Whom everything becomes’ (1.2.50-1); she is both ‘Rare Egyptian’ (2.2.224) and ‘foul Egyptian’ (4.13.10); she is a ‘triple-turned whore’ (4.13.13), ‘a right gipsy’ (4.13.28), and a ‘vile lady’
Enobarbus' lyrical account of her on the barge describes the boat, the pavilion, the attendants, the perfume, the effect Cleopatra has on others—everything but her appearance: 'For her own person, / It beggared all description' (2.2.204-5). As with Othello, critics have sometimes suggested that Cleopatra is 'tawny' rather than black, and some Renaissance texts indeed registered the difference—Heylyn's *Microcosmus* says that Egyptians are 'not black, but tawny and brown'. 2 Shakespeare uses both terms in relation to Cleopatra, and many of his contemporaries used them interchangeably, referring to the 'tawny colour' of the 'Blackamoor'. Moreover, 'tawny' skin was not necessarily viewed as less offensive than black—Portia's suitor Morocco is called 'tawny' and yet she says he has the 'complexion of a devil'. 3

We know that the historical Cleopatra, like the rest of the Ptolemaic dynasty that ruled Egypt, was of Greek descent, although the ethnicity of her grandmother is not known, and has led to some speculation about whether or not Cleopatra was of mixed race, or of dark colour. To complicate matters, ancient Greece was culturally, ethnically, and religiously diverse. Africa, especially Egypt, deeply influenced Greek society. This was acknowledged by the Roman writer Plutarch, whose *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, in Sir Thomas North's English translation, was a source for Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. The Egyptians themselves were also a highly diverse people; Herodotus described them as having black skins and woolly hair, but both black and white persons are depicted on Egyptian vases and artifacts of the time. However, there was a distance between the Greek rulers of Egypt and its citizens—the rulers did not integrate with the common people or speak their language, although they identified strongly with the Egyptian gods Osiris and Isis.

In spite of this gap between Egyptian rulers and the populace, Roman historians identified Cleopatra as Egyptian; Cleopatra herself laid the ground for this by being the only Ptolemy to learn Egyptian, and to control popular unrest. Roman accounts of her as a luxurious wanton, given only to pleasure, deliberately ignore the fact that she was an astute political leader (retrospectively some Egyptian histories even cast her as a nationalist). 4 Like Ptolemaic queens before her, she encouraged identification of herself with Egyptian goddesses. Whereas they had used a single or a double 'uraeus' or cobra head as their symbol, Cleopatra used three cobras, perhaps in order to indicate her control over Upper Egypt, Lower Egypt as well as the additional territories which Antony gifted her. For the Romans, an identification between Cleopatra and Egypt was strategically necessary in order to highlight an absolute division between Rome and Egypt.

In Shakespeare's play too, Cleopatra is repeatedly identified with Egypt. She is called ‘Egypt’ by Antony (1.5.42; 3.11.51 and 56; 4.13.25; 4.16.19), by herself (1.3.41), and by her followers (4.16.74); she is ‘Egypt's widow’ (2.1.37), an ‘Egyptian dish’ (2.6.126), a ‘serpent of Egypt’ (2.7.26), a ‘serpent of Old Nile’ (1.5.25); her charms are, for Antony, ‘these strong Egyptian fetters’ (1.2.109) which he must break free from. In early modern Europe, Egyptians were widely grouped with other dark-skinned people of Africa and Asia as the descendants of Ham. Africanus repeats this belief that ‘the Egyptians … fetch their original from Mesraim the son of Chus, the son of Cham, the son of Noe [Noah]’ (857). Thus, despite only two explicit references to it, Cleopatra's darkness is reinforced by suggestions that Cleopatra embodies Egypt.

But which Egypt does she embody? In early modern England, Egypt was known as a land of ancient religion, philosophy, and learning. There was an interest in Egyptian antiquity, and a flourishing trade in mummies, which were sold in vast quantities because they were used in various medicines—an English merchant, John Sanderson, recorded that over 600 pounds of mummy were exported at the end of the sixteenth century. 5 But Egypt was also increasingly identified as a Turkish dominion. It had been part of the Ottoman Empire since 1516; Leo Africanus, in his influential *History of Africa*, claimed that he had been in the city of Rasid when ‘Selim the great Turke returned this way from Alexandria’. 6 According to Africanus, Egypt was now devoid of ‘any true Egyptians’ because the majority of the population, ‘embracing the Mahumetan religion, have mingled themselves among the Arabians and Moores’ (856). Henry Blount's *A Voyage into the Levant* confirmed that ‘the light’ of the ancient glory of Egypt was now ‘almost quite extinct’.
Now as for the Justice and Government, it is perfectly Turkish … only it exceeds all other parts of Turkey for rigor, and extortion; the reason is because the Turk well knows the Egyptian nature, above all other Nations, to be malicious, treacherous and effeminate, and therefore dangerous, not fit for Arms, or any other trust; nor capable of being ruled by a sweet hand.\textsuperscript{7}

Blount sees Turkish cruelty as justified by the effeminate and malicious ‘nature’ of Egyptians, but Africanus suggests that they have become mixed with their Muslim masters. In similar vein, Cesare Vecellio’s costume book depicted a lady of Cairo as heavily veiled in the Islamic fashion. …

The view that Egypt no longer contained pure Egyptians was reinforced by the confusion between Egyptians and the gypsies who had arrived in England from Scotland in 1500. Although historical research now traces their roots to Northern India, in early modern England gypsies were supposed to have originated in Egypt. Andrew Borde’s \textit{First Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge} (1542) connects their migration to England with the absence of ‘real Egyptians’ in Egypt itself: ‘The people of the country be swart and doth go disguised in their apparel, contrary to other nations they be light fingered and … have little manner. … There be few or none of the Egyptians that doth dwell in Egypt for Egypt is repleted now with the infidel aliens.’ \textsuperscript{8} Thus, Egypt has been overtaken by ‘infidel aliens’ or Turks, just as England has been invaded with ‘swart’ Egyptians. In Shakespeare’s time, then, ‘Egypt’ and ‘Egyptian’ did not indicate any one ‘race’ but conjured up images of various peoples, all of whom were regarded as dark-skinned and associated with ‘Moors’. The effect of this confusion was to resurrect a central division between ‘East’ and ‘West’ which had been a feature of classical Roman and Greek literatures. Shakespeare’s play refers to Cleopatra as both Egyptian and a gypsy, but it also identifies Egypt as the ‘East’; more importantly, it plays upon a dichotomy between Rome and Egypt in which each is defined by its difference from the other.

\textbf{HISTORY, LITERATURE, AND EMPIRE}

Imperial conquest is routinely demonstrated through the sexual possession of conquered women. Julius Caesar had an affair not just with Cleopatra but with Eunoë, wife of King Bogudes the Moor. Alexander, whom Antony tried to emulate, married Roxana, daughter of a Persian king he conquered. But neither Alexander nor Caesar allowed their sexual liaisons to distract them from their imperial enterprise, and both returned home to conduct other missions of conquest. Antony’s association with Cleopatra, by contrast, reversed the dynamics of sexual possession and signified not his victory but hers. Roman writers were alarmed that Antony ‘forgot his nation, his name, the toga, the axes of power and degenerated wholly into the style of that monster [Cleopatra], in mind, in dress, in all manner of life’. \textsuperscript{9} This is the fear we see animated in \textit{Antony and Cleopatra}.

The historical Octavius (who went on to reign as the Emperor Augustus) represented his battle against Antony and Cleopatra as a patriotic war to save Rome. The opposition between a masculine Rome and a feminine ‘East’ animates Virgil’s epic, \textit{The Aeneid}, which was written to celebrate Augustus’ reign. The epic narrates the story of another famous African queen, Dido, who was loved but abandoned by the Roman voyager Aeneas. Aeneas’ shield is decorated with a depiction of the battle of Actium in which Antony and Cleopatra were defeated by Octavius. On one side stands lofty Augustus; on the other

Egypt and all the East; Antony, victor
Over all the lands of dawn and the Red Sea,
Marshals the foes of Rome, himself a Roman,
With—horror!—an Egyptian wife.\textsuperscript{10}

Aeneas’ resolve to leave Dido and return to his Roman duty implicitly criticizes Antony’s capitulation to Cleopatra and celebrates the victory of Octavius/Augustus over the pair. Shakespeare’s play returns to this
victory, but infuses the event with loss and tragedy.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* suggests that such an opposition between ‘the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”)’ has animated ‘European imaginative geography’ from Greek times till the present.\(^\text{11}\) This suggestion has been criticized for being ahistorical—how could the same binary opposition be so important to different periods and cultures? Said, his critics say, is attributing a colonial vision of the East to pre-colonial times. As already discussed, the ‘East’ could hardly be regarded as Europe's ‘other’ during the Renaissance. Europeans desired to enter the powerful economic networks of the Mediterranean, Levant, North Africa, and Asia, feared the military might of the Turks, and were dazzled by the wealth and sophistication of many Eastern kingdoms. In fact recent scholars have gone so far as to suggest that Europe was really on the periphery of powerful economic networks whose centre was in the East, and that European global domination did not begin till the eighteenth century.\(^\text{12}\) Moreover, there were interactions, cross-overs, and mixing between East and West which are overlooked by the suggestion of a binary opposition.

However, while we need to ‘de-centre’ Europe by historicizing its global dominance rather than assuming it was always in place, there are two central questions that we still have to contend with. One: if early modern Europe was peripheral to other powerful global economies, what explains the tilting of balance in its favour in the eighteenth century? A partial answer is that, though in the seventeenth century neither colonialism nor capitalism were fully formed, their wheels had been set in motion. Europeans may not have been able to colonize every part of the globe in the seventeenth century but certainly their position in the New World or in parts of the old (such as the Moluccas, or Goa) cannot be described as ‘peripheral’. And two: even before colonialism, European (including English) writings do rehearse and repeat certain ideas about cultural and geographic difference. The Roman Empire may not have established Europe's global mastery, indeed the very idea of Europe did not exist at that time, but Roman imperial conquests did spawn negative images that were appropriated by later writers, especially because countries such as England looked towards Rome to establish their own genealogy as an imperial nation.

To acknowledge these repetitions is not necessarily to suggest a static unchanging discourse, or to misunderstand the actual power relations between ‘East’ and ‘West’ in different periods. Often, literary texts as well as historical documents reach back to previously established motifs in order to make them serve entirely new purposes, including that of establishing or asserting a superiority that does not exist. Shakespeare drew from Plutarch's tales about Cleopatra, but also infused them with other literary and cultural myths, as well as more contemporary materials, not because England was already an empire but because empire was one of the subjects of his play. Thus the older idea of a division between East and West, and specifically Egypt and Rome, energizes his play, although, as we will see, it is not as if England stands in for Rome in any straightforward way.

To some extent, all early modern European writings about non-European lands rehearse older accounts. For example, the Greek writer Herodotus had initiated the myth of *Egypt* as a land of inversion:

> The Egyptians themselves in their manners and customs seem to have reversed the ordinary practices of mankind. For instance, women attend market and are employed in trade, while men stay as home and do the weaving … men in Egypt carry loads on their heads, women on their shoulders; women pass water standing up, men sitting down.\(^\text{13}\)

Johannes Boemus's *The Fardle of Facions* (1555) repeats this idea almost verbatim, but also infuses a specifically English imagery into it by commenting that Egyptian women ‘revelled at the Tavern and kept lusty cheer: And the men sat at home spinning, and working of lace and such other things women are wont’.\(^\text{14}\)
Picking up on this, Richard Knolles writes that Egyptian women always choose their own husbands. Similarly, Leo Africanus informs readers that the women of Cairo ‘are so ambitious and proud, that all of them disdain either to spin or to play the cooks: wherefore their husbands are constrained to buy victuals ready dressed at the cooks’ shops …’ (883). In repeating the idea of gender reversal, each of these reports also infuses it with contemporary references. Henry Blount even attributed it to Turkish occupation of Egypt, arguing that because Egyptians were a ‘false and dangerous people’, the Turkish Sultan Selim decided not to employ them as soldiers but use them to produce food for all his own people, ‘whereby, without scandal, the Nation is made effeminate and disarmed’ (54).

However, this is not to suggest that as time went on, there was a greater attempt to rationalize the idea of gender reversal. Often the opposite was true—as late as 1653, Bulwer's *Anthropometamorphoses* claimed that Egyptian men have breasts large enough to suckle their babies, while the women have ‘small and manlike Breasts’. Thus, what older texts regard as inversion of custom, Bulwer transforms into biological difference.

**‘MANKIND’ WOMEN**

Gender reversal is also central to the world of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Early in the play, Caesar comments that Antony's revelry in Egypt has effeminized him; Antony is now

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Than Cleopatra, nor the queen of Ptolemy
More womanly than he.
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(1.4.5-7)

Whereas in the writings mentioned earlier, gender reversal is contained within Egypt, in this play, it becomes an aspect of Egypt's relationship with Rome. By effeminizing Antony, Cleopatra threatens the hierarchy between imperial Rome and its dominion, Egypt:

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I laughed him out of patience, and that night
I laughed him into patience, and next morn,
Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed,
Then put my tires and mantles on him whilst
I wore his sword Phillipan.
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(2.5.19-23)

Such cross-dressing is not just bedroom play but manifests a larger reversal of gender roles. Cleopatra persuades Antony that they should fight the Romans by sea rather than land, a decision that is seen to unman not just Antony but all his Roman soldiers. Enobarbus pleads with Antony: ‘Transform us not to women’ (4.2.36) and Camidius laments: ‘So our leader's led / And we are women's men’ (3.7.68-9).

In Shakespeare's England too, debates about appropriate clothing were actually battles about status and identity. Authorities legislated the kind of clothing appropriate to people of different genders and classes. A proclamation of 1588 seeking to enforce ‘the Statutes and Orders for Apparel’ frowned against the ‘inordinate excess in apparel’ embraced by many of the queen's subjects, and claimed that such excess led to both a ‘confusion of degrees of all estates’ (i.e. a blurring of differences in social rank) as well as to the import of ‘superfluity of foreign and unnecessary commodities’. The proclamation suggests that to transgress the dress code is both to challenge existing social hierarchies and to endanger the ‘natural merchandise of the realm’ by relying on alien goods.
A popular pamphlet against female cross-dressing could spot transgressive women everywhere:

Since the days of Adam women were never so masculine: masculine in their genders and whole generations, from the mother to the youngest daughter; masculine in number, from one to multitudes; masculine in case, even from the head to the foot; masculine in mood, from bold speech to impudent action; and masculine in tense, for without redress they were, are, will be still most masculine, most mankind, most monstrous.\(^{17}\)

*Antony and Cleopatra* speaks to these gender debates; for many, an Egypt where women are granted too much freedom and gender roles are reversed would have offered an uncomfortable parallel with contemporary England.

In Shakespeare's England, several people could spot parallels between Cleopatra's seduction of a great soldier, and Elizabeth's affair with her favourite, Essex, who ultimately betrayed her and was executed in 1601. Apart from the fact that both queens encouraged identifications of themselves with goddess figures (Elizabeth with the Virgin, Cleopatra with Isis), the crucial parallel between the English queen and the Egyptian legend was that as women, they both held onto political power against many odds. But, rather than simply evoking Elizabeth in any singular sense, Shakespeare's Cleopatra plays upon widespread cultural fears and fantasies about powerful, emasculating, and cross-dressing women, which are expressed in plays, pamphlets, sermons, laws, and conduct-books during both Elizabeth's rule and that of her successor, James I.

In Shakespearian plays, and in Shakespeare's day, intense liaisons with all women were regarded as potentially effeminizing. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the danger posed by women is fused with that of foreign lands. Earlier we discussed how such fusion was also central to the myth of the Amazons, who were 'foreign' women evoked in order to contain female unruliness at home. The French essayist Montaigne writes:

> For the queen of the Amazons replied to the Scythian who was inviting her to make love: *The lame man does it best!* In that feminine commonwealth, to escape the domination of the males, they crippled them from childhood—arms, legs, and other parts that gave men an advantage over them—and made use of them only for the purpose for which we make of use of women over here.\(^{18}\)

Stories of Amazonian cruelty to men, Montaigne suggests, are projections of the real crippling of women in patriarchal Europe, a crippling that is necessary in order to produce compliant sexual partners. No wonder, then, that figures of Amazons abound in the debates about the proper place of women in England from the mid-sixteenth century onwards. John Knox's ‘The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women’ (1558), which was directed at Mary Tudor but appeared after Elizabeth had become queen, describes an England ruled by a queen as ‘a world … transformed into Amazons’.\(^{19}\)

**COLOUR AND CONVERSION**

*Antony and Cleopatra* maps such concerns about powerful, foreign women onto an imperial theme. As it contemplated its place in the world, England looked back in conflicted ways to the legacy of imperial Rome. Rome was both a model for the English to emulate and a reminder that the English had themselves been colonized in the past. The literature and mythology of imperial Rome, and especially of Virgil's *Aeneid*, were freely appropriated by English monarchs, but often by editing the meanings of the original stories. For example, when Elizabeth was identified as Dido, the African queen's chastity and heroism in founding Carthage provided the basis of the comparison, which could only be sustained by disregarding her abandonment by Aeneas. James I also disregarded this feature of the original story in order to encourage identifications of himself with Aeneas.\(^{20}\) James was also often identified as the new Augustus in official
entertainments.

By the time Shakespeare wrote *Antony and Cleopatra*, the classical literary tradition was not the only one to represent an encounter between a feminine ‘East’ and a masculine ‘West’. The biblical tale of the Queen of Sheba and the wise King Solomon also played upon this theme, and became a widespread cultural motif, as did stories of the Saracen princess who converts to Christianity and marries a European man. Leo Africanus had reported that Sheba was the queen of Ethiopia and had ‘brought unto Salomon an hundred and twenty talents of gold, which amount to 720,000 golden ducats of Hungary, that is, seven tons of gold, and 20,000 Hungarian ducats besides …’ (1032). Sheba gave all this wealth to Solomon after Solomon demonstrated his ‘wisdom’ to her; their contact resulted in a child called David who ensured that Ethiopia became a Christian land. The Sheba story sexualized the exchange of wealth and religion—an exchange that became a regular feature of the Renaissance stage. James encouraged identifications of himself with Solomon, and several English masques, pageants, and plays depicted foreign women gifting their wealth, beauty, and respect to Western monarchs, traders, and colonists. The homage-paying stranger or wild man of medieval court entertainments mutates into an ‘Indian’ king or queen in the London civic pageants, which were sponsored by various Livery Companies of London. Middleton’s *The Triumphs of Honour and Virtue* (1622), for example, depicts ‘a black personage representing India, called, for her odours and riches, the Queen of Merchandise’. She asks the viewer to observe her ‘with an intellectual eye’ and to see beyond her native blackness and to perceive her inner goodness, which has been made possible by her conversion to Christianity. ‘Blest commerce’ has brought English traders to her land, and made possible a wonderful trade between them—her wealth for their religion. All ‘the riches and the sweetness of the East’, she thinks, are fair exchange for the ‘celestial knowledge’ that is now hers (43-61).

The Sheba story was also collapsed into that of the ‘black and beautiful’ woman and her fair male lover in the biblical *Song of Songs*, also known as the *Song of Solomon*. As discussed in Chapter 2, medieval and Renaissance interpretations of the Song which suggested that the black woman was emblematic of the physical body in need of being blessed and whitened by the power of Christ incriminated the sexuality of real black women, as when the medieval divine Abelard compared such a body to ‘the flesh of black women [which] is all the softer to touch though it is less attractive to look at’. The beauty of black women increasingly began to represent the paradox of sexual desire, its power as well as its shame, and the connections between such desire and particular exotic, dangerous, or promising territories of the world.

The stories of Sheba and Solomon, and of the Shulamite in the *Song of Songs*, are collapsed into one another and also retold with renewed vigour during the Renaissance because these stories offer a framework which can enclose the attractions as well as the anxieties of colonial and mercantile contact. Kim Hall suggests that Solomon provided ‘two models for relations between Western males and “Other” females’. In the first the ‘white male refashion(s) and whiten(s) the dark foreign female into an object of transcendent wedded love’ and in the second, ‘Solomon (is) too much given to pleasures of the flesh, which are associated with the allures of a foreign female’. I would like to suggest that both these models simultaneously shape the English theatricals which stage the encounter between foreign women and European men. The foreign woman is alluring, dangerous, and powerful, which makes her ultimate capitulation all the more meaningful. Thus the possibility of a European ‘turning Turk’ is averted by the conversion, assimilation (or in some cases death and destruction) of the alien woman.

This theme was revisited by many plays of the period. In Fletcher's *The Island Princess*, a Moluccan princess Quisara asks her Portuguese lover to convert to her religion. It ends with her own conversion to Christianity as the wife of another Portuguese suitor. In Philip Massinger's play *The Renegado*, Donusa, a niece of the Turkish Sultan, tries to convert her Italian lover Vitelli but finally converts to Christianity and escapes to Europe as Vitelli's wife. We find stories of Muslim and other foreign women's desire for white men not just in literary texts but also in some of the travelogues, although in the latter, such desire is often just speculation on the part of the European traveller and does not end in conversion or marriage. Stories about the Amazons also
play upon a similar pattern, featuring the containment of an alien, seductive, and powerful woman, and in story after story, Amazonian queens are subdued and often married by Greek heroes like Theseus. The defeat and marriage of the Gothic empress Tamora in *Titus Andronicus*, we saw in Chapter 3, can also be situated within this scenario.

But there is a crucial difference between these plays and *Antony and Cleopatra*. These Amazonian figures and converted Muslim princesses are extremely fair, and their skin colour facilitates their assimilation into their new families. Dark-skinned women are allowed to pay homage to white men, but in English drama, they cannot be whitened, and cannot be invited to join the Christian family. The dark skin of Shakespeare's Cleopatra, the fact that she revels in it, and that Antony is ensnared by it, is thus especially striking. Earlier writers had visualized Cleopatra as black in order to indicate that inner virtue is more important than outer beauty, as in George Pettie's *A Petite Pallace*: ‘Did not Antonius (that lusty gallant of this city) prefer Cleopatra that black Egyptian, for her incomparable courtesy, before all the blazing stars of this city? … Whereby you see that bounty before beauty is always to be preferred.’ 23 Or else to suggest the blindness of love: Robert Greene's *Ciceronis Amor, or Tullie's Love* (1589) asks ‘Is not Antony enamoured of the black Egyptian Cleopatra: Doth not Caesar envy in his love. … Affection is oft blind and deemeth not rightly, the blackest ebony is brighter than ivory.’ 24 For the most part, however, in a culture that increasingly associated ideal femininity with whiteness, Cleopatra's fabled beauty was visualized as white, as in Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women* which depicted her as ‘fair as is the rose in May’.

In Shakespeare's play, Cleopatra's darkness is part of her intractability and her stubbornly Egyptian identity. The recurrent food imagery suggests her sexual availability and desirability: ‘salt Cleopatra’ is a tasty tidbit; she is Antony's 'Egyptian dish' (2.6.126), a 'morsel' that he found left on Caesar's plate (3.13.117). But Cleopatra does not remain a delicious treat for Roman men, making ‘hungry where most she satisfies’; instead she threatens to devour them. She gleefully compares Antony to the fish she intends to catch:

> My bended hook shall pierce
> Their slimy jaws, and as I draw them up
> I'll think them every one an Antony,
> And say ‘Ah ha, you're caught!’

(2.5.12-15)

Such passages resonate with the Roman view of her as a predator, but they also remind us that Cleopatra is not Antony's Egyptian conquest. The role reversal complicates the pattern of representing the colonized land as a sexually available female.

Unlike the figures of Eastern royalty that were brought onto London streets in the mayoral shows, Cleopatra does not leave the shores of her native land and goes to great lengths to maintain her power within it. Like Quisara in *The Island Princess* and Donusia in *The Renegado*, Cleopatra is in love with a white man, but unlike them, she is sovereign as well as royal, and she does not surrender her sovereignty easily. She refuses to think of her relationship with Antony in matrimonial terms until he is dead, and is willing to negotiate with Caesar even while Antony is alive. After Antony's death, Cleopatra continues to resist being incorporated into Rome, although she now addresses Antony as 'husband'. Her suicide is double-edged: it outwits her would-be captors, but it also marks her adoption of 'the high Roman manner'—a trademark of Antony's culture. *Antony and Cleopatra* ends with the picture of the 'serpent of the old Nile' outwitting her adversaries by holding a snake to her breast, translating her defeat 'in this vile world' into 'immortal longings' (5.2.308, 276). Instead of a European converting an Eastern queen, in this play it is that queen who tempts him to 'flee himself'. Given the precariousness of the English toe-hold in Eastern lands at this period, we can appreciate the meaning of the recurrent image of a converted and compliant queen for audiences at home. A slippery Cleopatra, 'cunning beyond men's thought', takes on a special resonance here, playing
upon the pattern, altering it.

Antony's predicament echoes Othello's—both are soldiers who have given themselves excessively to women who anchor them to a new but fraught cultural identity, but also lay them open to charges of unmanliness. Antony's passion makes him oscillate between his Roman martial self and a newly acquired 'Egyptian' identity, which appears incompatible with military valour. Cleopatra's followers are either women or eunuchs, and an 'unmanned' Antony joins their fawning assembly. Eunuchs were prominent symbols of the luxury and decadence of the Eastern empires, as well as of the potential of these empires to 'unman' Christians. Moreover, conversion to Islam entailed circumcision, which Christians viewed as a sort of castration. The theatre featured the threat of both to English identity—in The Renegado, the Turkish damsel Donusia is attended by Carazie, an English-born eunuch. In Heywood's The Fair Maid of the West, Gazet, a foolish English servant, hopes to gain wealth by converting to Islam but instead finds that he has been castrated. William Daborne's play A Christian Turn'd Turk depicted a conversion ceremony complete with circumcision; its hero Ward is circumcized and also 'unmanned' by his Turkish wife. Antony and Cleopatra pre-dates these other plays, but we can appreciate the contemporary significance of Antony's supposed loss of manhood in Egypt. The story of Antony and Cleopatra had always been a cautionary tale, a story that warned aspiring imperialists of the dangers of the East. We can understand why during Shakespeare's time, when the powerful markets of Asia and North Africa were both intensely desired and feared to lure Christians to Islam, this story acquired a new urgency.

GYPSY LUST

The dangers of Antony's conversion are announced in the opening lines of the play by his comrade Philo who tells the audience that Antony's 'captain's heart' seems to have 'become the bellows and the fan / To cool a gipsy's lust' (1.1.9-10). The slippage between 'Egyptian' and 'gypsy' reinforces the dangers of conversion in the play, and brings them closer home to England. Samuel Daniel had previously associated Cleopatra with gypsies, as had Shakespeare himself in Romeo and Juliet where Mercutio says 'Laura to his lady was a kitchen wench … Cleopatra a gypsy' (2.3.37-9). In early modern England, the confusion between Egyptians and gypsies was not limited to popular usage, but became part of English legal vocabulary. John Cowell's dictionary of legal terms, The Interpreter (1607) explained that English statutes defined Egyptians as a counterfeit kind of rogues, that being English or Welch people, accompany themselves together, disguising themselves in strange robes, blacking their faces and bodies, and framing to themselves an unknown language, wander up and down, and under pretence of telling of fortunes, curing diseases, and such like, abuse the common people, by stealing all that is not too hot or heavy for their carriage … These are very like to those, whom the Italian call Cingarì …

Cowell suggests that English gypsies are fake rogues who only pretend to be gypsies by blackening their faces and appropriating a strange language. But ‘real’ gypsies were also regarded as inauthentic—John Florio's Italian-English dictionary defines the Cingari as 'the roguing Giptians that go filching about the countries' and Montaigne refers to gypsy women as 'Counterfeit Egyptian women who have shown up in our midst'.

Gypsies were widely compared to Jews and Muslims, both of whom were also popularly associated with disguise, trickery, and conversion. Thomas Dekker writes:

They are a people more scattered than the Jews, and more hated. Beggarly in apparel, barbarous in condition, beastily in behavior and bloody if they meet advantage. A man that sees them would swear they had all the yellow jaundice, or that they were tawny Moors' bastards, for no Red-ochre man carries a face of a more filthy complexion. Yet are they not born so; neither has the sun burnt them so, but they are painted so. … If they be Egyptians,
sure I am they never descended from the tribes of any of those people that came out of the land of Egypt.28

The defining feature of gypsies is their artifice; their darkness is not natural, and yet not less threatening for being artificial. Dekker pursues the idea of artifice further, comparing gypsies to ‘Morris-dancers, with bells’ and to actors (‘like one that plays the Rogue on a Stage’ (244)). It was often supposed that actors imitated ‘Moorish’ dances that Christians had become familiar with during the Crusades. The remark that gypsies look like ‘tawny Moors' bastards’ picks up on associations between Moors and gypsies that were rife since at least the mid-fifteenth century, when a Scottish laird who obliged the king by killing the captain of the gypsies adopted a Moor's head as his crest.29 Early gypsies were also referred to as Saracens.

The confusion between gypsies and Egyptians only strengthened the association of each with Moors, since, as we've noted earlier, contemporary Egypt was understood to be overrun by the ‘infidel’ Moors and Turks. It also underlined their supposed propensity for artifice: in early modern sermons, travelogues, and histories, the prophet Mohammed is repeatedly called a ‘juggler’ and trickster. Thus Cleopatra's ‘false soul’, her theatricality, and her cross-dressing pick up a complex web of connections between gypsies, stage actors, Moors, as well as local tricksters. Antony claims that Cleopatra

Like a right gypsy hath at fast and loose
Beguiled me to the very heart of loss.

(4.12.28-9)

‘Fast and loose’ was one of the games with which gypsies were supposed to cheat the public. In his Art of Juggling (1612), Samuel Rid suggests that Egypt is the origin of such tricks:

Certain Egyptians banished (from) their country … arrived here in England, who being excellent in quaint tricks and devises, not known here at that time among us, were esteemed and had in admiration … insomuch that many of our English loiterers joined with them, and in time learned their craft and cozening. The speech which they used was the right Egyptian language, with whom our Englishmen conversing with, at last learned their language.30

Cleopatra as the ‘enchanting queen’ brings together magic associated with non-Western cultures, the sorcery associated with witches and enchantresses, domestic and alien, as well as the trickery associated with petty crime at home.

Royal acts of 1559 forbade the use of ‘charms, sorcery, enchantments, invocations, circles, witchcrafts, soothsaying or any like crafts or imaginations invented by the Devil’; a statute of 1604 reinforced the prohibition.31 Other legislation attempted to curb the tricks of gypsies and those who impersonated them. From 1530 onwards, the English authorities repeatedly banished gypsies from the realm and proclaimed harsh punishments for English people who associated with gypsies. In 1562, ‘An Act for further punishment of vagabonds, calling themselves Egyptians’ warned that anyone found

in any company or fellowship of vagabonds, commonly called or calling themselves Egyptians, or counterfeiting, transforming or disguising themselves by their apparel, speech or other behaviour, like unto such vagabonds … shall therefore suffer pains of death, loss of lands and goods, as in the cases of felony by the order of the common laws of this realm’. 32

The legislation concerning gypsies reveals a fear of contamination that might pass from ‘real’ to ‘false’ gypsies and spread among the local populace; at the same time the laws suggest that all gypsies are ‘counterfeit’. In April 1577, eight people were hanged for associating with gypsies; in May 1596, 106 men
and women were condemned to death for ‘having wandered in diverse parts of this realm in this country of York, some of them feigning themselves to have knowledge in palmistry, physiognomy, and other abused sciences, using certain disguised apparel and forged speech, contrary to diverse statutes and laws of this realm …’.

Eventually most of these people were deported back to their place of birth but nine of them were hanged because they were found to be ‘strangers, aliens born in foreign parts across the seas, and none of the Queen Majesty natural born subjects’. English-born gypsies were treated differently to those considered ‘foreign’, and the laws sought to reinforce the distinction between the two, and to prevent any association between them.

‘Egyptians’ were regularly sentenced to death in England under these laws, but several contemporary commentators felt that legislation was not very effective, and Samuel Rid noted that even though Queen Elizabeth endeavoured

by all means possible to root out this pestiferous people, but nothing could be done, you see until this day: they wander up and down in the name of Egyptians, colouring their faces and fashioning their attire and garment like unto them, yet if you ask what they are, they dare no otherwise then say, they are Englishmen, and of such a shire, and so are forced to say contrary to that they pretend.

(R2c-v)

Rid points out that gypsies can only make a living by pretending to be what they are not, and yet, given the laws of the land, they can never openly admit to the impersonation.

Gypsies were especially disliked by the authorities because they were not simply ungovernable individuals but formed tight communities with their own hierarchies and forms of governance; Rid mentions a Giles Hather and Kit Calot who ‘style themselves the King and Queen of Egypt’. Analogously, Cleopatra is threatening to Rome because she is not just Antony's ‘Egyptian wife’ but a sovereign who resists Egypt's incorporation into the Roman Empire. Caesar is threatened because Antony gifts her entire kingdoms and territories which, in his view, belong to his empire. While English gypsies can hardly be read as embodying a similar threat of alternative governance and insurgency, stories of their theatrical and stubborn communities add another dimension to Shakespeare's depiction of the conflict between Rome and Egypt. Above all, the theme of Antony 'going native' or becoming an Egyptian by associating with Cleopatra and her train, brings together the fears of conversion generated by both the ‘infidels’ and imposters associated with Eastern empires, and the lowly gypsies. Gypsies, as well as Saracens and Muslims, are commonly spoken of in terms of a disease, a pestilence, an infection, that can threaten the health of the English body, and yet both are enormously seductive to Englishmen. The powerful Muslim empires hold out the promise of trade, luxury, and sensuality for the middle-class and noble adventurer, while the gypsies are similarly attractive to vagabonds and poor English wanderers.

Finally, it is the combination of uncontrollability and changeability in the gypsy lore that can be seen to inflect Shakespeare's picture of Cleopatra. Rid opens his book on juggling with the tale of the Moon asking her mother for a garment, ‘comely and fit for her body: how can that be sweet daughter (quoth the mother) sith that your body never keeps itself at one stage, nor at one certain estate, but changeth every day in the month, nay every hour?’ The gypsies were also called ‘moon-men’; their slippery nature is also Cleopatra's. She is ‘cunning past man's thought’, a person of various moods and disguises. At the end of the play she claims to have become ‘marble-constant’ and renounces the moon as her governing deity: ‘Now the fleeting moon / No planet is of mine’ (5.2.236-7). However, even this gesture can be read as supreme theatricality, an attempt to outmanoeuvre Caesar and prevent him from displacing her from Egypt:

Shall they hoist me up

And show me to the shouting varletry
Of censuring Rome? Rather a ditch in Egypt
Be a gentle grave unto me ...

(5.2.54-7)

THE POLITICS OF PERFORMANCE

Roman emperors had displayed their captives in the official triumphs, and during Shakespeare's time, European monarchs imitated this practice by recreating extravagant processions which showcased captured slaves, animals, and goods, and also displayed personifications of the territories they traded with or colonized. Given her own propensity for cross-dressing and for theatrical display, it is significant that Cleopatra is averse to the idea of being displayed by Caesar, and especially to the possibility that a Roman actor may impersonate her, or 'boy my greatness / I'th' posture of a whore' (5.2.216-17). The remark draws attention to the fact that throughout the play, the audience has been watching a white male actor, not an Egyptian woman or a gypsy, play the queen.

Do the racial and cultural metamorphoses that we see on the Renaissance stage, as well as in the plays, suggest a flexibility with regard to ideologies of skin colour and race in early modern culture? We need to be cautious while jumping to that conclusion. Antony and Cleopatra's focus on performance and theatricality does not suggest that all identities are simply, or equivalently performative. Rather, it draws attention to the politics of performance—who is allowed to perform? Who is allowed to represent and appropriate others? Whose performance is effective? The answers, within the play, and in the culture at large, depend upon who has social and political power. Whereas the poor vagabonds of England were persecuted for impersonating 'Egyptians', the upper classes flaunted such impersonations. In 1515 two ladies attended court with their heads rolled in gauze, tippers 'like the Egyptians, embroidered with gold' and their faces, necks, arms, and hands covered with black ‘pleasance’ so that they appeared to be 'negroes or black Mores'. In 1520 eight ladies appeared at a state banquet dressed also like Egyptians. Among royalty and upper classes, the wearing of foreign clothes suggested their social and economic power rather than a collapse of their identity. Queen Elizabeth received Thomas Platter dressed in a white gown ‘gold-embroidered, with a whole bird of Paradise for panache, set forward on her head studded with costly jewels’. The rare bird was found only in the East, and England had recently staked its claim in the Moluccas. All over Europe, the upper classes borrowed Asian fabrics, designs, and patterns, and court fashions reflected the contact between Europe and these other worlds. To mention one example here, the exposing of breasts among European court ladies may have been inspired by the transparent smocks ('bajus') that were worn in Goa by wives and mistresses of the Portuguese.

Court entertainments went a step further—nobility and royalty impersonated gypsies, the Irish, Asians, and Africans, but the disguises were often dismantled at the end. Jonson's masque The Gypsies Metamorphosed in which several noblemen shed their disguises as gypsies was a favourite with King James. We have already mentioned The Masque of Blackness and The Masque of Beauty in which Queen Anne and her ladies blacked up as 'Mores' but were magically transformed to whiteness at the end. Such impersonations and cross-dressing, by controlling the terms and direction in which identities were 'exchanged', were reassuring in the context of pervasive fears that Englishmen would go 'native' or lose their identities overseas. The Masque of Gypsies was published in 1621; the very next year, Lord Keeper Williams asked the Justices of Berkshire to enforce the laws against the 'whole troupe of rogues, beggars, Egyptians and idle persons' in that county. An ideology which does not pathologize racial difference may be less pernicious than one which does, but that does not necessarily make the former either benign or ideologically flexible. The supposed fluidity of dark-skin colour that we see in the court masques works to reinforce the ultimate power of whiteness over it. Moreover, these theatrical scenarios of assimilation do not reflect an actual openness in the culture at large. Official legislation throwing out Jews, gypsies, and blacks reflects a fear of contamination; at a more popular level too there is a distrust of foreigners and outsiders. The contemporary diatribes against cross-dressing, against actors, as well as against Englishmen ‘turning Turk’, show that at
least one section of the population feared, rather than embraced or celebrated, fluidity.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony's fatal attraction to Cleopatra speaks to contemporary English fears about the erosion of racial identity and masculinity. But the play offers no reassuring scenario of a foreign queen's assimilation. Cleopatra's love for Antony does not mean that she will submit to Rome. She plays with different personas to control Antony as well as to negotiate with Caesar; in the end, she becomes both the goddess Isis, with an asp at her breast, as well as Antony's Roman wife. These images are contradictory, but Cleopatra inhabits them both. Cleopatra's 'Egyptian' self is constructed both by her and by the Romans; it is an essential aspect of the political struggle between the imperial power and its would-be colony. Cleopatra plays the Egyptian flamboyantly, thus appropriating, and flaunting the difference that Rome assigns to her. She knows that performance is a sign of power—she must impersonate whom she wants but no one else must be allowed to represent her. Once she has lost political power, and knows she will no longer be able to control the terms of the performance, she stages her suicide, the last performance she can script. Similarly, the extent to which Antony 'goes native' or remains a 'Roman' is determined by his need to gain a foothold in Egypt, a place from which he can assert himself against Caesar. His oscillations are controlled by Cleopatra on the one hand, and Caesar on the other because his position in Egypt depends upon the former, and in Rome upon the latter.

Thus the play suggests that to be an Egyptian or a Roman is to play certain roles which are defined by their difference from one another. But this does not mean that these roles can just be chosen at will, put on and discarded when one likes. Rather, they are shaped by long histories as well as political and cultural antagonisms. Individuals give these roles their particular meanings and force, but do not entirely control them. By showing us how identities which we call ethnic, or cultural or racial are fluid and yet not, for that reason, easy to manipulate, *Antony and Cleopatra* captures the contradiction that lies at the heart of race.

**Notes**

9. Florus, quoted by Christopher Pelling, “‘Anything truth can do, we can do better’: the Cleopatra legend”, in Susan Walker and Peter Higgs (eds.), *Cleopatra of Egypt, from History to Myth* (London, 2001), 300.
17. *Hic Mulier; or the Man-Woman*, in Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. Mcmanus (eds.), *Half Humankind* (Urbana, Ill., 1985), 265.


32. 5 Elizabeth C.20 (1652), in Danby Pickering (ed.), *The Statutes at Large* (Cambridge, 1763), 211.

33. The official report of the Yorkshire Quarter Sessions is quoted by McPeek, *The Black Book*, 264.

34. See also Dympna Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women, Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage* (London, 2000).


The Luck of Caesar: Winning and Losing in Antony and Cleopatra

"The Luck of Caesar": Winning and Losing in Antony and Cleopatra

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Those critics of Antony and Cleopatra who touch on the subject of Caesar's involvement are usually brief and disparaging before moving on to consider the principal love interest or to draw cultural comparisons between Egypt and Rome. Janet Adelman calls Caesar 'the exemplar of measure' in the play, while Dipak Nandy characterizes him as 'the epitome of the Renaissance "politique" '. J. Leeds Barroll's lengthy characterization of Octavius reinforced the efficient but enigmatic nature of the character, while Lord David Cecil expressed guarded admiration in his study, describing Caesar as 'far-sighted, cool, self-controlled, and so single-mindedly intent on the achievement of his ambition, that nothing, neither the happiness of his sister nor a genuine feeling of pity for Antony in his fall, can turn him from it'. More recently David Bevington, in his introduction to the New Cambridge Shakespeare, seems to have registered the last word on Caesar, calling him 'the voice inside the play for those male readers who cannot entertain the wholeness of Cleopatra and are threatened by the challenge she represents to a male desire for control'.

Perhaps so. Those male readers thus described would benefit greatly from a quick perusal of an article by L.T. Fitz (better known as Linda Woodbridge), an article which Bevington cites, entitled 'Egyptian Queens and Male Reviewers: Sexist Attitudes in Antony and Cleopatra Criticism'. Caesar is clearly an unsympathetic, rank misogynist. Indeed, 'Tis paltry to be Caesar' (5.2.2) as Cleopatra claims. But such rejection out of hand nullifies learning anything about Caesar and his characteristic procedures, strategic procedures which, however detestable, are nonetheless effective within the play. These procedures mask personal power through civic piety, collapse military and political jurisdictions in populist fascism, subdue sensual representation, and proscripively manipulate all opposition. Dispassionate information, plotting, and surveillance continually undermine romantic idealizations. In this essay I plan to argue that the play exploits romantic identification by inviting rejection of Caesar's attitude; and yet, at the same time, the play suggests that materialist survival is the most important single value.

Marilynn Williamson observes: 'We may never warm to Caesar (we seldom warm to effective rulers in Shakespeare), but we should not miss the fact that Shakespeare seems to have had some interest in stressing Octavius's control and responsibility'. Such stress reinforces sympathy with Antony and Cleopatra at the same time as it intensifies the nature of Caesar's effect: win at all costs; losers die. The play generates crucial contradictory responses wherein identification with the romance of the title couple is also slanted towards uncomfortable complicity with the mandate of Caesar. Consequently, audience response is richer and more complex than the trimly paradoxical one suggested in Bevington's introduction to the play: 'Better to be Antony and lose than to be Caesar and win'. Like Caesar, one might laugh at this sentimental rationalization about a story concerning power politics and personal notoriety.

Romantic critical associations, however, continue to thrive, as in the rhapsodic notions of Hélène Cixous: 'They have—from the moment Antony saw Cleopatra coming to him—abandoned the minuscule old world, the planet—the shell with its thrones and rattles, its intrigues, its wars, its rivalries, its tournaments of the phallus, so grotesquely represented by the game of penis-check played by the imperialist superpowers of the triumvirate, with the mean solemnity that makes history'. This, as if history is made only retrospectively by such 'tournaments' and 'superpowers' and not lived in a moment-by-moment construction of meaning. Cultural historians and materialist critics alike posit constructions of love and emotional meaning that are inseparable from the specific material, historical, and political conditions which they constitute and which constitute them. Thus, the love of Antony and Cleopatra does not transcend the politics of the play. As Linda Charnes

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puts it, their love does not represent an 'authoritative and sacralizing epistemology'.

Doubtless, Antony and Cleopatra are in love, but love for a Roman triumvir and an Egyptian queen can be neither transcendent nor private. Indeed Cleopatra's first question about love is as publicly bruited as it is quantitative: 'If it be love indeed, tell me how much' (1.1.14). Their love is as public as their every gesture, and hence political. Caesar's more solitary 'love' is the same.

I will analyze *Antony and Cleopatra* from the dual perspective of game/strategy theory and audience response, foregrounding Caesar as amoral exemplar, to explore the realist material nature of Shakespeare's play. Postwar materialist critics have usually seen *Antony and Cleopatra* in political terms, but not usually in terms of strategic analysis. The play, however, is rife with notions of positional strategy and tactical movement suggestive of an amoral godgame. Triumphant power is the object, and this power is inflected among the lines observed by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*: 'Power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the "privilege", acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions—an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated'.

Power thus circulates in complex ways between and among characters in the play and within the shifting allegiances of audience response.

Novelist John Fowles originated the term; theorist R. Rawdon Wilson expands on its implications: 'Godgame is John Fowles's term for the literary situation in which one character of superior intelligence and cunning creates a context of contrived bamboozlement that forces another character to struggle, as within a complex cognitive trap, to discover the godlike gamewright's hidden rules'. At first glance, the Roman rules of engagement might seem clear and apparent to a successful military leader such as Antony. Antony's 'bamboozlement' is carried on within the wiles of Cleopatra's administration. But Cleopatra craves personal allegiance which she interprets as political, and her strategy of emotive reversal is simplistic: 'If you find him sad, / Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report / That I am sudden sick' (1.3.3-5). One can credit the power of her sexuality and her politics as 'infinite variety' (2.2.241) in Enobarbus's uncritical terms, and yet still question the place of love and political commitment in an individual's scale of values. Caesar certainly does. He demands more of Antony through Roman political catechism than Cleopatra can elicit through romantic exploration. After all, Caesar compels Antony's Roman obedience through deception, surprise, manipulation, sexual appeal, reverse psychology, false feeling, misinformation, sectarian prejudice, and personal plea—tactics contrived to gain total political dominance at the same time as they expose Antony's personal fears and inadequacies.

Again Foucault on the diversified nature of power relations: 'They define innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of the power relations'. In a sense, Caesar 'holds all the cards', forces the play, and manipulates the action. But Antony's allegiances and choices as well as Cleopatra's actions and understandings complicate audience commitments. Antony accepts the governing rule of Roman political preeminence, and engages with Caesar hoping to gain and consolidate power within the triumvirate through a separate peace in Egypt. But he is naive to the exclusive interconnections that Caesar both fosters and compels. Antony considers himself to be in a 'fight', the single object of which is to destroy the opponent. He thus leaves Cleopatra to 'engage' his competitor only to be cleverly aligned, engaged, and married to his competitor—a situation personally and politically intolerable to Cleopatra. Caesar, however, understands that he, Antony, Lepidus, Pompey, Cleopatra, and all other foreign potentates are involved in a dangerous 'game', a movable situation concerned with rules and involved with tactics that eventuate in testing, harming, and finally overcoming all opposition. 'Separate' peaces are disallowed. Antony and Cleopatra will learn this later, separately and to their individual chagrin. The emergent victor dictates the terms for all. And everything—military, political, personal, and symbolic—is implicated. 'All's fair in love and war', the cliché holds, and Cleopatra knows it just as Caesar does, even if Antony would rather not think about it. The simple fight of the soldier in Antony is buried by the complex game of the tactician in Caesar.
The main thrust of the play has to do with complexities of power at the end of an epoch, complexities more variable and historically consequential than Margot Heinemann suggests: 'Win or lose, the struggle between the triumvirs marks the end of the republic, so admired and idealised in the European Renaissance for its stern Roman virtues and the anti-absolutist principles of its aristocracy'. In fact the play generates contradictory responses on emotional and political levels where romantic identification with Antony and Cleopatra (and in a pathetic lower key with Octavia), is slanted toward uncomfortable agreement with Caesar's sense of historical necessity. At one point, Caesar even ruminates with obvious self-satisfaction, 'The time of universal peace is near' (4.6.5), and although some like to consider this as an apprehension of the birth of Christ, it might better be conceived as an historicized, partisan statement of the `Pax Romana'. Under Caesar's new world order, dissent will dissolve as all opposition is eradicated. 'Universal peace' really means world peace as conceived, enforced, and policed by Caesar.

The play makes it clear that such a position is harrowing. And yet the drama takes its audience inside Caesar's complex youthful paternalism, a paternalism that integrates personality and power within a gamesphere where Caesar makes the rules and the only thing disallowed is losing. Indeed Caesar's 'powerful mandate' is present from the very first as performed in Cleopatra's insouciant mimicry: 'Do this, or this; Take in that kingdom, and enfranchise that. Perform't, or else we damn thee' (1.1.22-4). The terms are unmistakable and exclusive. And yet Caesar enters scene 4, indulgent, but not 'too indulgent' (1.4.16) of his senior 'great competitor' (3) about whom he appears completely informed. Ironically, the youthful Caesar infantilizes Antony's conduct, 'As we rate boys who, being mature in knowledge, Pawn their experience to their present pleasure' (1.4.31-2). Caesar, by contrast, takes no present pleasure in the military and political controversies of the day, foreign and domestic controversies about which his senior triumvirs are either ignorant or uninterested. And it is only when driven to the breaking point of administrative frustration that Caesar calls out Antony's name in a mixture of retrospective admiration and present disgust, narrating Antony's past accomplishments as Roman patriot, victor, and survivor in opposition to his present dissolute behavior in Egypt. As complex as he is resolved, Caesar patronizes Lepidus at the same time as he mobilizes action against Antony.

The dramatic action of the play, however, constantly registers a discrepancy between Antony's power (oddly passive, retrospective, and subject to idealization) and the fact that (as the Soothsayer says and the play by Shakespeare dramatizes) Caesar always prevails. Much of the dramatic texture of the play derives from this sense of doubleness, suggesting that tactical plot dominates romantic hope. Caesar offers invitations; Antony rationalizes and accepts. Caesar suggests tactical scenarios; Antony defies but complies. Caesar directly challenges; Antony, to his own disadvantage, responds. In response to Antony's question concerning outcomes—'whose fortunes shall rise higher, / Caesar's, or mine?'—the Soothsayer is unequivocal:

Caesar's
Therefore, O Antony, stay not by his side.
Thy daemon—that thy spirit which keeps thee—is
Noble, courageous, high, unmatchable,
Where Caesar's is not. But near him thy angel
Becomes afeard, as being o'erpowered. Therefore
Make space enough between you.

(2.3.18-24)

But Antony has spent nearly the whole of the preceding scene at Caesar's very side, the space between them metaphorically filled and conjugated through Caesar's sister in proposed marriage. And the Soothsayer's advice, 'Make space enough between you', (2.3.24) hearkens back to one of Antony's first assertions in the play: 'Here is my space' (1.1.34). Here, for Antony, denoted Egypt generally and Cleopatra's embrace specifically. He currently finds himself displaced when in place in his office as Roman triumvir.
It is significant that Antony has to hear these hard truths from the Egyptian soothsayer who has been mocked and patronised by Cleopatra's attendants. Consistently dignified and truthful, this third-world seer responds to Antony with a candor that no first-world Roman politico would dare to venture. He grasps the life-and-death nature of the stakes at play as he urges Antony, 'hie you to Egypt again' (2.3.15). And his final warning about Caesar is painfully direct: 'If thou dost play with him at any game / Thou art sure to lose' (2.3.26-7). But Antony, cynically manoeuvered into position as Caesar's brother-in-law, finds himself at play in the cutthroat world of Roman politics where he can neither dictate terms nor stop play. Antony is caught within a manipulative godgame, a contrived power-play wherein he is under observation and his usual tactics of direct confrontation are ineffective. The inextricable nature of his predicament is literalized jokingly in his absence by Cleopatra as she ponders catching fish:

And as I draw them up,
I'll think them every one an Antony,
And say 'Ah, ha! Y'are caught!'

(2.5.13-15)

Her fantasy is literalized in Rome. Antony is indeed 'caught', metaphorically reeled in and netted during his meeting with Caesar. But he thinks he is gaining politically. Caesar offers a sealing handshake to Antony, saying 'There's my hand' (2.2.155). But his offer is really an imperative, an order for Antony to shake hands at the same time as it represents a literalized, iron handclasp: 'Y'are caught'. Antony is indeed caught within Caesar's gamesphere, a gamesphere involving militarism, deceit, communication, and power politics.

At the same time, and with similar irony, Octavia is declared 'A blessed lottery to him' (2.2.248). But Antony has won nothing in his new Roman wife. The Penguin edition glosses 'prize' for 'lottery', but is thereby inadequate to the sense of chance signaled by the term. Indeed, the OED even uses the line from Antony and Cleopatra as an example of 'something which comes to a person by lot or fortune'. And yet even the OED is wrong in this instance. Octavia was deliberately thrust upon Antony in a manipulative move by Caesar. Nothing much was left to chance. Caesar mused aloud with a mixture of unctuousness and false rhetoric—

It cannot be
We shall remain in friendship, our conditions
So diff'ring in their acts. Yet if I knew
What hoop should hold us staunch, from edge to edge
O'th'world I would pursue it.

(2.2.117-21)

—and Agrippa interceded with his rehearsed suggestion that Antony be wed to Caesar's sister. Antony then takes Caesar's hand in a grotesque literalization of the real marriage to take place, a political marriage of convenience fraught with mutual animosity and competition. Even the contiguity of their proper names—Octavia/Octavius—suggests confusion in the identity of Antony's spouse. And Caesar's concluding phrase—'from edge to edge / O'th'world'—chillingly suggests the wide-ranging extent to which he will pursue Antony's matrimonial obedience, a pursuit literalized in the remainder of the play.

Antony, even at this point, is as aware of Caesar's superior gamesmanship as he is himself uncertain of his own moves. Having heard and dismissed the Soothsayer, Antony ruminates as follows:

Be it art or hap,
He hath spoken true. The very dice obey him,
And in our sports my better cunning faints
Under his chance. If we draw lots, he speeds;
His cocks do win the battle still of mine
When it is all to nought, and his quails ever
Beat mine, inhooped, at odds. I will to Egypt;
And though I make this marriage for my peace,
I'th'East my pleasure lies.

(2.3.33-41)

He knows that Caesar is a winner, and he knows also that Caesar will play the game out to its final, painful, inevitable move. But Antony also harbors the romantic notion that he can acquiesce in Caesar's game, comply with Caesar's rules while retaining his own mental reservations concerning personal commitment in Egypt. Such reservations are deluded. The audience experiences the same compliant, romantic moves. And such compliance accentuates the painful irony of commitment and participation played out in the entire drama.

Antony withdraws even as he attempts to assert his position. Ruminating significantly, 'If we draw lots, he speeds' (2.3.36), Antony seems to be subconsciously aware that Caesar has already won the 'blessed lottery' (2.2.248) of Octavia's marriage which Maecenas attributed to Antony. Antony even picks up on and echoes Caesar's diction, his image of quails 'inhooped, at odds' (2.3.39) recalling Caesar's hypothetical 'What hoop should hold us staunch' (2.2.120). Later, as he departs with his new wife, Antony applies a staunch brotherly wrestling hold on Caesar, declaring,

Come, sir, come,
I'll wrestle with you in my strength of love.
Look, here I have you; thus I let you go,
And give you to the gods.

(3.2.61-4)

But his bluff confidence is as superficial as it is misplaced. Antony is the one who has been 'caught'. Indeed, Caesar sees to it that the 'old ruffian' (4.1.4) never lays his hands on him again. The marriage ensures either Antony's fraternal obedience or, failing that, his correction and punishment. Caesar's admiration for Antony is decidedly in the past, rendering Barroll's postulation of Octavius's 'serious attempt at rapprochement with an esteemed but puzzling colleague' a partial interpretation at best. The two triumvirs nervously calculate each other. Brotherly tussles escalate quickly into mistrust and full-scale war. And the gods, mentioned so often in this play, gravitate toward Caesar in support of his tactical, political, and military assertions, assertions which take on the form of a deeply strategic godgame.

Antony's ill-fitting yoke of marriage to Octavia is signaled in the imagery with which it is reported. The message to Cleopatra is as clipped as it is concise:

MESSENGER He's bound unto Octavia.
CLEOPATRA For what good turn?
MESSENGER For the best turn i'th'bed.

(2.5.58-9)

Politics, as the saying goes, makes strange bedfellows, and Antony is bound to Caesar's sister's bed where he will receive a violent political pounding. The incestuousness of the imagery is as inescapable as is its violence and its sense of incapacity. Hence, Antony's early observation is rendered doubly ironic: he mused to himself, 'These strong Egyptian fetters I must break, / Or lose myself in dotage' (1.2.117-18), only to learn immediately
that his first wife was conveniently dead and that leaving Egypt for Rome was relatively easy. The return trip will be infinitely more difficult, as understood by Menas who comments on Antony's marriage with politic discernment: 'Then is Caesar and he for ever knit together' (2.6.113). Inextricably so. Enobarbus, so often hailed for his bluff clarity, gets it all wrong, stating of Antony, 'He married but his occasion here' (2.6.129). Antony did nothing of the sort. He married Caesar's occasion in a tactical error which facilitates Caesar's strategy and governs the rest of the play.

Barroll thinks otherwise, de-emphasizing the politics of Antony's marriage to Octavia in an attempt to further characterize Caesar:

This whole marriage-situation served Shakespeare not as a means of forwarding the political interaction between the two antagonists, but as a way of further characterizing Caesar himself. For what emerges here is the Roman leader's ability to subordinate what he calls his closest personal relationship to his acquisitive desires. Such subordination, however, is political. Octavia is subordinated to positional, political play. She represents a materialist literalization of her brother's position, a competitive position announced self-reflexively upon his first entrance: 'It is not Caesar's natural vice to hate / Our great competitor' (1.4.2-3). But a serious competition is underway even as he speaks. And strong feelings are involved. Consequently, Octavia's choric wishful thinking places her in an impossible neutral position as she declares,

Husband win, win brother,
Prays, and destroys the prayer; no midway
'Twixt these extremes at all.

(3.4.18-20)

Her image of prayer is unavailing within the realpolitik of her situation. But Octavia realizes the instability of her middle ground at the same time as she unconsciously explicates the nature of the zero-sum game into which her husband and brother manoeuver themselves.

In Fights, Games, and Debates, conflict theorist Anatol Rapoport defines the situation succinctly: 'A zero-sum game is one in which A's gain is B's loss, and vice versa'. Cleopatra recognizes these terms with the instinct of a hardened politico when she declares, 'In praising Antony I have dispraised Caesar' (2.5.107). But Antony still thinks he can have Rome and Egypt too, musing 'And though I make this marriage for my peace, / I'th'East my pleasure lies' (2.3.40-1). A couple of tactical assassinations begin to disabuse him of the notion, as Caesar has Lepidus rubbed out at the same time as Antony's subordinate liquidates Pompey. Antony has lost valuable potential allies as a result. But even Pompey subscribed to the old order of honor and decorum as he backhandedly reprimanded Menas for suggesting that the three triumvirs be assassinated in one stroke: 'Being done unknown, / I should have found it afterwards well done, / But must condemn it now' (2.7.78-80). Not so Caesar. He is already planning the demise of Lepidus, and would quietly endorse such a ruthless terrorist manoeuver. Then Menas would be conveniently disposed of, perhaps executed as a murderous madman or exposed as a traitor. Antony finds himself in a fight for his life, in a zero-sum game of political ascendancy. Herein audience sympathy and identification is also implicated. Like Antony, the audience must now face Caesar with romantic rules of honor suspended, with the ruthlessness of total war imposed.

Intelligence and delegation define the new terms for engagement. These are power terms which Antony never fully understands or utilizes. But Caesar has understood from the very first, as a messenger assures him,
How 'tis abroad.

(1.4.34-6)

As imperialist outsider, Caesar requires constant information. Such knowledge implies power in Foucault's terms. According to Edward Said, knowledge directly reinforces power gains: 'Knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control'.\(^\text{18}\) Presumably this explains Caesar's complete information in Act 3, scene 6, as he informs Octavia of her husband's whereabouts with Cleopatra and includes a lengthy roll-call of Antony's foreign allies. But Antony can never fully 'know' Bocchus or Archelaus or any of the other disparate foreign kings with whom he is allied. His new allegiances are inconsistent, treasonous, un-Roman. That Antony has committed adultery against Octavia is maddening; that he has committed adultery against Caesar, against Rome, is unforgivable. Hence the scolding tone and barely concealed contempt of Caesar's final domestic word: 'Be ever known to patience. My dear'st sister!' (3.6.98). This, in the same lugubriously sarcastic tone as Caesar's later authoritative comment, 'Poor Antony!' (4.1.16). As he advances and consolidates his international power, Caesar both uses his siblings and, at the same time, loses personal respect for them.

Her tactical usefulness expired, Octavia is neither seen nor heard again in the play. But Caesar continues to delegate authority and move into striking position at the same time as he speeds up the action of his deadly game. Antony reacts with confusion and disbelief concerning Caesar's swift positional movements:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Is it not strange, Canidius,} \\
\text{That from Tarentum and Brundisium} \\
\text{He could so quickly cut the Ionian sea} \\
\text{And take in Toryne?}
\end{align*}
\]

(3.7.20-3)

And Cleopatra answers him in a tone of voice that combines bitchy remonstrance with the self-assurance of a political officer: 'Celerity is never more admired / Than by the negligent' (24-5). Earlier in the scene, Enobarbus warned the Queen of Egypt that 'Your presence needs must puzzle Antony' (10), but Caesar's presence puzzles and distracts him even more. Having learned that Caesar himself is with his troops in Toryne, Antony stammers, 'Can he be there in person? 'Tis impossible; / Strange that his power should be' (3.7.56-7). To Antony, Caesar's power is indeed strange, a power based on the indirection of tactics, movements, intelligence, strategy, and delegation. Indeed the many short and swift scene changes of Acts 3 and 4, take on the nature of positional play on a giant chess board. They suggest the provisional, mobile, and variable points of contact that are touched upon and explored in the exercise of power relations.

Antony would rather meet his competitor head-on. But his retrograde personal challenge is as desperate as it is ill-conceived. After his defeat in the first sea battle, Antony nostalgically compares procedures at the Battle of Philippi, declaring of Octavius,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{He at Philippi kept} \\
\text{His sword e'en like a dancer, while I struck} \\
\text{The lean and wrinkled Cassius; and 'twas I} \\
\text{That the mad Brutus ended. He alone} \\
\text{Dealt on lieutenantry, and no practice had} \\
\text{In the brave squares of war.}
\end{align*}
\]

(3.11.35-40)
However, Antony's lieutenant Ventidius knows well that 'Caesar and Antony have ever won / More in their officer than person' (3.1.16-17). And the 'brave squares' of squadron-like military formation are currently being revised in Caesar's more innovative tactical approach. Thus Antony's desperate speculation rings hollow:

His coin, ships, legions,
May be a coward's, whose ministers would prevail
Under the service of a child as soon
As i'th'command of Caesar.

(3.13.22-5)

Caesar will prevail through organization and delegation. And he responds to Antony's challenge of personal combat with undisguised levity: 'Let the old ruffian know / I have many other ways to die; meantime / Laugh at his challenge' (4.1.4-6). Antony has become an anachronistic joke. Caesar holds the main power position in their contest for ascendancy. Cleopatra even uses the approved political (and game theory) term in describing Caesar: 'He is a god, and knows / What is most right' (3.13.60-1).

Caesar's godgame has victimized Antony within deromanticized rules of engagement. Additionally, Caesar has brought formal strategy to bear upon his tactics. In standard game theory, such strategizing suggests a complete program governing what any opposing player will do in every conceivable situation within a game. Attack by sea and Antony will respond, although compromised, by sea. Laugh at his personal challenge and Antony will only be further enraged. Caesar confronts Antony with himself by ordering Antony's deserters to the front in order to emphasize the futility of his opposition:

Plant those that have revolted in the vant,
That Antony may seem to spend his fury
Upon himself.

(4.6.9-11)

Caesar's infiltration is extensive, operating at the power center of his opponent as he offers clemency to Cleopatra in return for her termination of Antony, seeks to destabilize her through Thidias's extravagant promises, and zeros in on Antony's reactions:

Observe how Antony becomes his flaw,
And what thou think'st his very action speaks
In every power that moves.

(3.12.34-6)

Caesar gains tactically from confirmation of Antony's reaction. Confused, Antony is both subject and object of his own destruction, as signalled earlier in Enobarbus's comment concerning Antony's rash personal challenge: 'Caesar, thou hast subdued / His judgement too' (3.13.36-7).

For Antony, opposition to Rome is opposition to oneself, is desertion and deposition. In her previously quoted article, 'The Political Context in Antony and Cleopatra', Marilynn Williamson notes the many desertions and depositions of the play as a distinct pattern of action leading to political tragedy: Menas deserts Pompey, Enobarbus deserts Antony, Antony deserts Octavia (having previously deserted Cleopatra), Octavius deposes Lepidus, Antony's officer deposes Pompey, Hercules deserts Antony, Cleopatra deserts Antony in battle, and Antony finally deserts himself for Cleopatra who eventually does the same for him. The series reads like a
schematic, like a tactical endgame. Any audience is subject to and vicariously implicated in these many vacillations of commitment and loyalty. But while characters and audience alike constantly reassess political positions and degrees of support, Caesar, as the informed 'god' of the game strategizes and benefits from confused opposition.

True, Antony wins a further land skirmish, but this minor victory only delays and intensifies the nature of his ultimate loss. Moreover, Cleopatra's greeting to Antony after his land victory over Caesar is decidedly ironic:

 Lord of lords!
 O infinite virtue, com'st thou smiling from
 The world's great snare uncaught?

(4.8.16-18)

Antony smiles in ignorant, intermediate satisfaction. He is caught within the exchanges of an all-out zero-sum game where only Caesar knows the cumulative score. Antony knows the extent of his disadvantage from the first, knows that his time of expert competition is over. Yet, throughout the play, he buries his sense of puniness and incapacity within retrospective grandeur:

 Now I must
 To the young man send humble treaties, dodge
 And palter in the shifts of lowness, who
 With half the bulk o'th'world played as I pleased.

(3.11.61-4)

But he no longer dictates terms. Finally defeated outright, Antony lays blame elsewhere, refers to Caesar disparagingly as 'this novice' (4.12.14), 'the young Roman boy' (4.12.48), and 'boy Caesar' (3.13.17). His stunned exhortations of grandeur border on the delusional:

 Of late, when I cried 'Ho!',
 Like boys unto a muss, kings would start forth
 And cry 'Your will?'

(3.13.90-2)

Such retrospective language is common among veteran players defeated at last by younger, sharply-skilled competitors.

Antony's self-confidence, however, continues toward desperation and exposes the extent of his uncertainty. He has already brutalized Caesar's envoy Thidias, has already inappropriately dispatched a schoolmaster to negotiate terms of withdrawal. Despite Antony's localized and romanticized overstatements to himself and his lover, Paul Yachnin hears the relative voices of command accurately: 'Antony's language of command grows weaker as Caesar's grows stronger'. Such an observation relates directly to the zero-sum game in which the two have been involved. And Caesar sums up the situation accurately at news of Antony's death when he publicly addresses his vanquished rival:

 I must perforce
 Have shown to thee such a declining day
 Or look on thine. We could not stall together
 In the whole world.
Throughout, Caesar has played for keeps. His technique involved calculated risk and dispassionate decision in line with a strategy. Antony, by contrast, made decisions passionately out of personal bias and then tried to rationalize his decisions. The superior gameplayer prevailed.

It is true that Cleopatra is a gameplayer too. But her games throughout are various and insouciant: billiards, angling, cross-dressing, dance, moral support, military gestures, the 'sport indeed!' (4.15.32) of physically power-lifting Antony toward her. Enraged in his defeat, Antony immediately suspects that she has 'packed cards with Caesar' (4.14.19). Cleopatra does indeed play for political advantage as seriously as Caesar does, but her methods are as passé as Antony's, involving romantic trust—'He's speaking now, / Or murmuring "Where's my serpent of old Nile?" ' (1.5.24-5)—simple reversals—'If you find him sad, / Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report / That I am sudden sick' (1.3.3-5)—and wish-fulfilment: 'I dreamt there was an emperor Antony' (5.2.76). Her ruse with her treasurer Seleucus is easily seen through. Even if exposure of her deceit is calculated to dupe Caesar into believing that she wishes to live, she merely buys time to die. She contains the fabulous wealth of an ancient hereditary regime, and her proudest associations are, like Antony's, in the deific past tense, involving Isis and Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great. Her famous suicide rescues her from the shame of a new and unfeeling administration. Sadly, she plans afterward to 'play till doomsday' (5.2.232). It's all a lark. Within Antony and Cleopatra, Caesar's game is more logistical, more task-and-goal oriented in terms of consolidated ascendant power.

Moreover, Caesar plays for advantage in an eternal present tense wherein necessary conclusions are drawn 'on the move', are built upon in terms of complex and dispassionate strategy. His expertise suggests the advantage of gamewright. He alone knows the new rules fully, rules which subordinate military honor and magnanimous romance in the interests of political manoeuvering and imperialist domination. Romantic loyalty gives way to partisan support. Rationalizations are disallowed. Antony, by contrast, mourns the past, fixating on his own past glories and achievements while discrediting Caesar's newer and more tactical politico-military assertions. But Antony never fully understands that a new game is afoot. He competes, but competes at a terrible disadvantage within Caesar's strategizing gamesphere. Antony may indeed 'mock / The luck of Caesar' (5.2.284-5), as Cleopatra imagines, but Caesar's 'luck' might better be considered as a critical narrowing of possibility, a thoroughgoing sense of tactical advantage, a complete subordination of personal desire to political success. 'Luck' is the loser's word for it.

Antony and Cleopatra depended on luck. Caesar depended on strategy wherein Antony's behavior was observed, judged, and manipulated. Antony blustered impotently and desperately within a gamesphere where the rules were unfamiliar and his competitor stolidly unsentimental. Antony's consequent feelings of inadequacy and scorn for Caesar's youth are endemic to the nature of godgames, as explained by Wilson: 'Behind every godgame, there lies a situation that recalls, with full power to evoke the appropriate feelings, the common human intuition of being made a victim, a scapegoat, or a sacrifice and of being made puny or deluded by someone superior, a they set over and against oneself.20 Antony, with his Herculean associations and all-too-human weaknesses, experiences every situational possibility. Throughout, Caesar manipulates Antony with all the callousness of the gods in ancient myth.

In Antony and Cleopatra, the game of love has been à game of politics, has been a game of power. Within such a game, rules and objectives change with bewildering verve. Caesar alone anticipates, dictates, and stays informed of every instance. Steadfast consistency is a fiction of romantic love; tactical flexibility determines the politicized love of Shakespeare's play. The audience experiences uncomfortable material vacillations, vacillations such as those in the play, wherein romantic identification with Antony and Cleopatra is slanted toward political survival with Caesar. Necessary, even painful, choices must be made. Antony will never be a political winner. Neither will Cleopatra. True, Cleopatra cheats Caesar of her humiliation in Roman triumph, but such a victory is only victory by default. Besides, it too was anticipated. Caesar no doubt regrets the loss.
of public ostentation, but he wastes no time in bemoaning it. Instead, his last lines are conveyed, as Paul Yachnin puts it, 'in the form of a command so confident of obedience that it can slide casually toward a tone of solicitation'.

Just so. Such is power as underwritten by an expert whose very name is synonymous with ruthless imperialist domination. Admittedly, there are more things in life than politics. But one must survive in order to enjoy them. And in this play, it is Caesar who survives. Deromanticized performances of *Antony and Cleopatra* necessarily accentuate power politics along with the amoral basics of serious tactical gameplay. Caesar's godgame of political consolidation ensures Roman cultural survival and expansion.

**Notes**


4 See L.T. Fitz, 'Egyptian Queens and Male Reviewers: Sexist Attitudes in *Antony and Cleopatra* Criticism', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 28 (1977), 297-316.


6 Marilynn Williamson, 'The Political Context in *Antony and Cleopatra*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 21 (1970), 244.

7 Bevington, ed. *Antony and Cleopatra*, p. 27.


10 Linda Chames, 'What's love got to do with it? Reading the Liberal Humanist Romance in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*', *Textual Practice* 6 (1992), 1. I depart, however, from Charnes's more dismissive readings of liberal humanist romance in *Antony and Cleopatra*. For example, I doubt that the standards of formulaic romance novels are uppermost in the minds of liberal humanist critics of the play.


13 Foucault, *Discipline*, p. 27.

15 Barroll, 235.

16 Ibid., 263.


20 Wilson, p. 142.

21 Yachnin, 350. I see little significance, however, in Dollabella's putative 'secret loyalty' to Cleopatra as stressed by Yachnin. Such 'emotional defection' would be difficult to portray on stage and might better be considered as subversion contained within the authority of Caesar. That is, any scruples are permitted so long as Dollabella does as he is told.

Analysis

Historical Background

Although Shakespeare was well acquainted with the history and literature of his day and of preceding centuries, he did not hesitate to amend the known facts of history, if it served his dramatic purposes. *Antony and Cleopatra* was not well received when it was first produced. Since then, *Antony and Cleopatra* has grown in favor with both producers and readers. Modern productions have received considerably better reviews, on the whole, than any that were published during the playwright’s lifetime.

*Antony and Cleopatra* is the second in a trilogy of Roman plays (the first was *Julius Caesar*; the third, *Coriolanus*); Shakespeare wrote about an era some 1700 years before his own time. His main source of historical information was Plutarch, whose biographies of great Greeks and Romans has remained a staple of literature for nearly 2,000 years and is still read today.

The famous first triumvirate of Rome—consisting of Julius Caesar, Marcus Crassus, and Pompey the Great—dissolved with the conspiracy of Brutus, Cassius and others against Julius Caesar, and resulted in his assassination. Crassus was murdered by the Parthians, and Pompey the Great was defeated in an uprising against Rome. Following the death of Julius Caesar, the second triumvirate came into being and consisted of Octavius (the adopted son and designated heir of Julius Caesar), Mark Antony, and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus. The members of the second triumvirate defeated the forces led by Brutus and Cassius at Philippi in 42 B.C. The triumvirate’s forces in that battle were led by Mark Antony.

Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, lived in Alexandria, the Egyptian capital city. Mark Antony went to see her, fell in love with her, and remained for a considerable time, much to the disgust of the other two triumvirs. The matter came to a head when Sextus Pompeius, a son of Pompey the Great, became militarily powerful and threatened Rome itself. He maintained his headquarters near Messina (in Sicily); his henchmen were engaged in piracy in and around the Straits of Messina. The pirates became so strong that normal shipping became impossibly dangerous in that area. The three triumvirs met with Sextus Pompeius and offered him the islands of Sicily and Sardinia, if he would cease his piracy of the Straits of Messina and his threat to Rome itself. He agreed.

Later Octavius arrested Lepidus, charging him with treason against Rome. Octavius sailed, with an armada, for Greece and fought a sea battle with Antony near Actium. Octavius won and forced Antony back to Egypt. Finally, Octavius, in Egypt, defeated Antony and added Egypt to the Roman Empire. Antony committed suicide, followed by Cleopatra, thus leaving Octavius as the sole ruler of the Roman Empire.
Places Discussed (Critical Guide to Settings and Places in Literature)

*Egypt

*Egypt. Located on the outskirts of the vast Roman Empire, the Egypt of 30 b.c.e. is portrayed as an exotic land of mystery, fecundity, extravagance, and unconventional behavior, where the Nile River rises and falls to signal the crudely designed planting and harvest seasons, and open sexual experimentation includes transvestism. Cleopatra embodies Egypt in her wildly extravagant behavior and passion. As one of Rome’s three rulers after the death of Julius Caesar, Mark Antony has been sent in a period of political instability to govern Egypt but soon wavers in his commitment to Roman values and falls in love with Cleopatra. As the scenes shift rapidly between Cleopatra’s palace in Alexandria and various locations in Rome, Italy, and Greece, the shifting of place symbolizes the conflict of values in Antony’s mind. In act 1, Antony feels guilty about his un-Roman behavior and temporarily returns to Rome, where he marries Octavia to strengthen his political power, but he soon quarrels with Octavius, his fellow triumvir, and returns to Egypt in act 3. As Antony battles Octavius for political power, the scenes shift rapidly between Cleopatra’s palace and various battle scenes in the eastern part of the empire until Antony finally loses the political struggle with Octavius.

*Rome

*Rome. Rome is seen in the play as the center of a highly ordered and established civilization with stately political and social values. In the first words of the play, set in Cleopatra’s palace, Antony is being judged harshly by his followers for ignoring his Roman duties in order to satisfy sensual pleasures. When a messenger from Rome arrives with news from Octavius, Antony dismisses the him, symbolizing his break with Rome. From the very first moments of the play, then, Shakespeare is juxtaposing the two cultures and forcing the audience into a complex assessment of their competing values. This conflict has been described in various ways, for example as a conflict between culture and barbarity, reason and passion, duty and desire, or decorum and hedonism. Plutarch, the source for Shakespeare’s story, clearly chooses sides in this conflict and sees Antony as a foolish old man, but Shakespeare remains uncommitted, suggesting value and limitations in both cultures. This leaves the thematic conflict richly open-ended and the rapidly shifting places that embody this thematic conflict serve as another reflection of the play’s great tension.

Cleopatra’s monument

Cleopatra’s monument. The play ends in this mausoleum near Cleopatra’s Alexandria palace as she takes her own life after learning of Antony’s suicide at the end of act 4. The scope of the play’s action shrinks after act 3, scene 6, in which Rome is last used as a setting. Thereafter, the action begins moving eastward, contracting toward the more intimate setting of the tragic conclusion. The intimacy of Cleopatra’s monument is contrasted with the epic scope at the beginning of the play, but even here, with Antony close by in Cleopatra’s palace, Shakespeare emphasizes how distant the lovers are from each other. Cleopatra’s sequestration and initially false report of suicide leads to Antony’s real suicide. Then the two struggle, almost comically, to be near each other, as Antony’s body is hoisted up the monument walls for a final kiss. After he dies, Roman soldiers invade Cleopatra’s space and Rome and Egypt are finally merged, with Cleopatra a prisoner and in danger of being carried to Rome to be put on humiliating display as a trophy of war. In her own suicide, Cleopatra thwarts this plan and “marries” herself to Antony at last.
Modern Connections

Antony and Cleopatra depicts the conflict between Roman and Egyptian values. The play does not present one as superior to the other. It does, however, seem to demonstrate that in order to achieve worldly success, one must be cautious, self-disciplined, and rational. And choosing this course means turning one's back on spontaneity, joy, and laughter. Antony cannot find a way to combine these two ways of living. Is such a compromise possible? Or must each of us choose between professional achievement and personal happiness? Is it possible to "have it all"?

Commentators repeatedly point out that there are no answers to many of the questions raised by the play. The quality of Antony's love for Cleopatra, the essence of her eternal fascination, and Caesar's motivations remain uncertain and debatable. No single interpretation of Antony and Cleopatra is possible. On the one hand, this is frustrating. But on the other, it mirrors the complexity of human experience. Perhaps the play suggests that trying to judge Antony's love or Cleopatra's sincerity is just as risky as attempting to define or categorize human beings.

Similarly, the ambiguous presentation of the central characters in Antony and Cleopatra may be a reflection of the contradictions inherent in all of us. The combination of comic and tragic perspectives in the play troubles many readers and commentators. Antony's love for Cleopatra sometimes seems foolish—particularly when one considers that he's a middle-aged man. But it also enriches his life and adds to our appreciation of him as a person who has an all-embracing view of the world and its pleasures. Is Cleopatra as devoted to Antony as her great speeches in the final portion of the play would lead us to believe? Or is she playing a part, trying to convince herself as well as those around her that her love for Antony is beyond the experience of ordinary mortals? Is Caesar a pompous, self-important, and narrow-minded man, or is he the best leader for Rome at this time in history? Maybe the answer to each of these questions is "yes." Perhaps choosing between alternative views of characters—or between contradictory assessments of the people we encounter in our own lives—is a serious error. It might be better, as perhaps the play suggests, to acknowledge conflicting elements and celebrate these contradictions rather than condemn them.

Sometimes we say we "know" ourselves or our friends and acquaintances. Is this really possible? We form judgments about people we know only by reputation—people whose actions and personalities are reported to us by intermediaries. Do we ever consider whether these reports are reliable? Are modern intermediaries any more dependable than the various messengers in Antony and Cleopatra? Are the reports we receive biased or objective? Are they timely or out-of-date? Do they offer only one perspective or do they provide a fully rounded view? Is an "eye-witness" report necessarily accurate or truthful? If one report contradicts another, which one should we believe? Or should we not believe either one?

The central characters in the play are all mindful of how the world perceives them. Each of them tries, consciously or unconsciously, to control his or her own public image. Antony uses inflated language to amplify his achievements and his greatness. Cleopatra is almost always performing for an audience—whether the audience consists of a single person or the population of an entire city. Caesar foreshadows the modern public relations experts who advise politicians and celebrities. But it isn't only the great ones of the world who are concerned with what people think of them. Most of us would prefer to have our strong points noticed and our flaws overlooked. Many people modify their appearances, wear clothes that flatter them, and try to keep the less attractive aspects of their personalities hidden from public view. We may scorn the play's protagonists for their concern with public image and reputation, but perhaps we should ask ourselves whether wanting to influence the way world sees us isn't a trait shared by all human beings.
Bibliography (Great Characters in Literature)


Riemer, A. P. *A Reading of Shakespeare’s “Antony and Cleopatra.”* Sydney, Australia: Sydney University Press, 1968. A monograph-length, lucid introduction to the background of the play and its plot, characterization, and dramatic structure. Also contains a very useful chapter that discusses important criticism of the play during the early and mid-twentieth century.

Traversi, Derek. *Shakespeare: The Roman Plays*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1963. In chapter 3 of this classic study, Traversi offers a methodical, analytical commentary on *Antony and Cleopatra*. Sees the play as a profound work of art that in its spaciousness, episodic form, and morally ambivalent valuations of Rome and Egypt escapes traditional definitions of tragedy.
Bibliography and Further Reading


Important Quotes

Take but good note, and you shall see in him
The triple pillar of the world transform'd
Into a strumpet's fool. (I, i)

One of the plays opening quotes, Philo tells his comrades to observe that Antony, one of Rome's rulers, has been reduced to a "fool" -- at the beck and call of Cleopatra. The quote establishes one of the basic thematic threads of the play, that of a clash between the east and west.

Other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies; for vilest things
Become themselves in her (II, ii)

One of the play's most recognizable quotes, Enobarbus expresses the cunning and treachery of Cleopatra. He says most women overindulge and fully satisfy their men, whereas Cleopatra always leaves her men wanting more, and uses this as means to her ends.

I will to Egypt;
And though I make this marriage for my peace,
I' th' East my pleasure lies. (II, iii)

Although Antony is portrayed by Shakespeare as a mostly honorable figure, he is capable of disingenuity and wile. He agrees to marry Octavia, though it is out of political concerns and not genuine commitment. He admits that his passion is for Cleopatra, "I' th' East".

O sun, thy uprise shall I see no more!
Fortune and Antony part here (IV, xii)

His defeat imminent, Antony laments the loss. His words ring with the one of the themes of the play, a common one in Shakespeare's works: Fortune. In this case, Fortune dictates that the Roman empire and Western civilization will prevail, thus Cesar's defeat of Antony and Cleopatra is, so to speak, written in the stars.

Here I am Antony:
Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave.
I made these wars for Egypt; and the Queen -
Whose heart I thought I had, for she had mine (IV, xiv)
The theme of honor figures prominently in the play, and Antony as one of its exponents. Antony believes that if he should lose his honor, he shall, in a sense, cease being Antony. He now recognizes that he has been defeated, both by Caesar and by Cleopatra's cunning. He feels his personal identity defeated.

The death of Antony
Is not a single doom; in the name lay
A moiety of the world. (V, i)

Spoken by Caesar in the play's final act, they express one of the dominant themes in the play, that being the sheer scope and magnitude of the events and the characters. Antony's death shakes the entire world stage, and it represents Caesar's triumph and the victory of Western civilization.

My desolation does begin to make
A better life.
'Tis paltry to be Caesar:
Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave,
A minister of her will (V, ii)

Cleopatra consoles herself after defeat with the thought that it is not Caesar but Fortune that is the victor. This quote again illustrates the theme of Fortune and how man is at its whim.
Quotes in Context

"A Roman By A Roman Valiantly Vanquished"
Context: Twice defeated by Octavius Caesar in their struggle to gain control of the Roman Empire, Mark Antony falls on his own sword, fatally wounding himself. Before he dies, however, he is carried by his guard to the monument where Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt and his lover, has taken refuge from Caesar's forces. Although he has twice seen victory against Octavius Caesar slip from his grasp because of Cleopatra's desertion of his forces, the dying Antony still loves the Egyptian queen, as she loves him. Her attendants lift Antony to her place of refuge, that he may kiss her once more before he dies. Held in his beloved's arms, Antony bids Cleopatra neither lament nor feel sorrow at his defeat and death. He tells her to remember him as he once was, the noblest Roman and the strongest. He reminds her that he dies by his own hand, by his own choice, and not conquered by a fellow Roman.

ANTONY
The miserable change now at my end
Lament nor sorrow at; but please your thoughts
In feeding them with those my former fortunes
Wherein I lived, the greatest prince o' th' world,
The noblest; and do now not basely die,
Not cowardly put off my helmet to my countryman—
a Roman by a Roman
Valiantly vanquished. Now my spirit is going,
I can no more.

"After The High Roman Fashion"
Context: Dissension and struggle for power mark the rule of the Roman Empire by the triumvirate, Aumvirate, Antony, Octavius Caesar, and Lepidus. Antony loses influence to young Caesar when he becomes romantically entangled with Cleopatra, the betwitching queen of Egypt. When the forces of Caesar and Antony finally meet in battle, Antony is defeated. Accusing Cleopatra of double-crossing him and causing his downfall, Antony vows to kill the queen. Cleopatra dispatches word to Antony that she is dead, hoping to bring her lover to repentance. Antony, distraught, falls upon his sword and is taken to die in the arms of Cleopatra. Cleopatra faints with her dead lover in her arms, but quickly recovers and commands Charmian and her other attendants to put aside their sorrow and to prepare a noble funeral befitting the noble Roman who has died:

CLEOPATRA. . . How do you do, women? What, what, good cheer! Why how now Charmian! My noble girls! Ah women, women, look Our lamp is spent, it's out. Good sirs, take heart. We'll bury him. And then, what's brave, what's noble, Let's do it after the high Roman fashion, And make death proud to take us. Come, away. This case of that huge spirit now is cold. Ah women, women! Come, we have no friend But resolution, and the briefest end. [Exeunt, bearing off ANTONY'S body.]

"Age Cannot Wither Her, Nor Custom Stale Her Infinite Variety"
Context: These famous lines are frequently employed today to convey a compliment not only to or about a woman, but, with the substitution of a few words, any skill or talent. Thus, by changing the feminine pronouns to masculine, a very accurate comment is made on Shakespeare himself. In the play, Enobarbus, friend of Mark Antony and officer in his forces, describes the beauty and fascination of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt. He is in Rome, where he and Antony have recently arrived from Egypt, and is talking to two fellow-officers, one of whom suggests that now Antony must desert her.

ENOBARBUS
Never he will not. Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety: other women cloy The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry Where most she satisfies. . . .

"Antony Should Conquer Antony"
Context: Battling against Octavius Caesar for the right to rule the Roman Empire, Mark Antony is twice
defeated, once at the Battle of Actium and again later, near Alexandria. Antony's defeats are caused by his
love for Cleopatra. Twice she deserts him in battle, leaving the scene with her forces, and twice he loses a
victory because of her defection. Realizing that his love for Cleopatra has cost him victory, the empire, and
even his honor, Antony vows revenge, despite his love. But when Cleopatra learns of his anger she sends him
the false news of her suicide. These tidings persuade Antony that Cleopatra truly loved him, and in remorse he
falls upon his sword, fatally wounding himself. Before he dies, however, members of his guard carry him to
the monument where Cleopatra has taken refuge. The dying Antony assures Cleopatra that he dies of his own
will, personally unconquered by Octavius Caesar. That he should slay himself is proper, replies Cleopatra.

ANTONY Peace! Not Caesar's valour hath o'erthrown Antony, but Antony's hath triumph'd on itself. CLEOPATRA So it should be, that none but Antony should conquer Antony, but woe 'tis so! ANTONY I am dying, Egypt, dying; only I here importune death a while, until of many thousand kisses the poor last I lay upon thy lips.

"As She Would Catch Another Antony In Her Strong Toil Of Grace"
Context: The love of Antony, one of the reigning triumvirs of the Roman Empire, and Cleopatra, voluptuous
Queen of Egypt, has run its course, with Antony, dead from his own sword and Cleopatra from a poisonous
snake. Caesar, in Egypt to carry its mighty queen back to Rome as a display for his own grandeur, views the
bodies of Cleopatra and her attendants, unmarred by the venom of the asp.

CAESAR O noble weakness! If they had swallowed poison, 'twould appear by external swelling; but she looks like sleep, As she would catch another Antony in her strong toil of grace. DOLABELLA Here on her breast, There is a vent of blood, and something blown. The like is on her arm. FIRST GUARD This is an aspic's trail, and these fig-leaves have slime upon them, such as the aspic leaves upon the caves of Nile. CAESAR Most probable That so she died; for her physician tells me She hath pursued conclusions infinite Of easy ways to die. . . .

"Eternity Was In Our Lips And Eyes"
Context: Mark Antony, one of the triumvirate that rules Rome, dallies at the court of Cleopatra, Queen of
Egypt, in Alexandria. Because he, a grizzled veteran general, is hopelessly in love with Cleopatra, he is the
object of much gossip among his followers. Word comes that there is great unrest in Rome threatening the
state, and that Fulvia, Antony's wife, is dead. Antony, enchanted by the queen's charms, knows he must break
off and mind the affairs of Rome. He approaches Cleopatra to take his leave, but she, pretending to be ill and
sensing his intention, rails coquettishly at him, chiding him unmercifully.

ANTONY Most sweet Queen—CLEOPATRA Nay pray you seek no colour for your going, But bid farewell, and go. When you sued staying, Then was the time for words. No going then; Eternity was in our lips and eyes, Bliss in our brows' bent; none our parts so poor, But was a race of heaven. . . .

"He Wears The Rose Of Youth Upon Him"
Context: The vast Roman empire is ruled by Antony, Octavius Caesar, and Lepidus, a shaky triumvirate,
filled with friction and disputes of power. Antony, enamored of Cleopatra, the bewitching Queen of Egypt,
makes such a fool of himself that he loses his power in the empire to young Caesar. Antony attempts to
negotiate a treaty with Caesar. Caesar refuses to consider his bargain, but does agree to a bargain sought by
Cleopatra—that she be granted the crown of the Ptolemies—on the condition that she have Antony beheaded. In
his extremity, Antony, deriding his opponent for youthfulness and cowardice, vowing that he will challenge
Caesar to a duel, conveys to Cleopatra the message that she must send his head to Caesar in exchange for the
power she seeks.
ANTONY...To the boy Caesar send this grizzled head,And he will fill thy wishes to the brimWith principalities.CLEOPATRAThat head, my lord?ANTONYTo him again, tell him he wears the roseOf youth upon him; from which the world should noteSomething particular. His coin, ships, legions,May be a coward's, whose ministers should prevailUnder the service of a child as soonAs i' th' command of Caesar. I dare him thereforeTo lay his gay comparisons apart,And answer me declined, sword against sword, Ourselves alone. . . .

"I Am Dying, Egypt, Dying"
Context: Mark Antony, co-ruler of Rome, is so beguiled by Cleopatra, beautiful Queen of Egypt, that he employs poor judgment in military decisions and acts on impulse rather than on deliberation. As a result, he is dishonored. Defeated in a sea battle at Actium by his rival, Octavius Caesar, he is deserted by his men. He believes, too, that Cleopatra betrayed him. But brought word that she is dead, he desires to follow her, and falls upon his own sword. Mortally wounded, he learns she is not dead. Brought to her, he lies in her arms, dying.

ALLA heavy sight. ANTONYI am dying, Egypt, dying. Give me some wine, and let me speak a little.

"I Have Immortal Longings In Me"
Context: Cleopatra, enchanting Queen of Egypt, is alone in her tomb with her attendants and the Roman guards. She is the captive of Octavius Caesar. Her lover and husband, Mark Antony, is dead by his own hand after a disgraceful defeat. Her imperial dreams of ruling Rome jointly with him are also dead. Caesar, impervious to her charms, promises her a future, but she sees through his scheme. She realizes she is no match for him, and that he desires to exhibit her in his triumph in Rome. Cleopatra determines upon a noble death rather than such dishonorable exhibition. She arranges for an asp to be brought to her in a basket of figs, which, when it bites, brings quick, painless death. She prepares for death.

CLEOPATRA Give me my robe, put on my crown, I have Immortal longings in me. Now no more The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip. Yare, yare, good Iras; quick. Methinks I hear Antony call; . . .

"I Will Praise Any Man That Will Praise Me"
Context: The rulers of the Roman Empire—Mark Antony, Octavius Caesar, and Lepidus—force the rebellious Pompey to come to terms, and the four prepare to seal their pact by a round of eating and drinking. In the general euphoria that follows, the delightfully shrewd and cynical Enobarbus, friend and officer of Antony, greets an old acquaintance, the equally shrewd and cynical Menas, friend and officer of Pompey. Their conversation is a humorous foil to the dialogue of the four military leaders:

MENAS. . . You and I have known, sir. ENOBARBUS At sea, I think. MENAS We have sir. ENOBARBUS You have done well by water. MENAS And you by land. ENOBARBUSI will praise any man that will praise me, though it cannot be denied what I have done by land. MENAS Nor what I have done by water. ENOBARBUS Yes, something you can deny for your own safety. You have been a great thief by sea. MENAS And you by land. ENOBARBUS There I deny my land service. But give me your hand Menas, if our eyes had authority, here they might take two thieves kissing.

"In Time We Hate That Which We Often Fear"
Context: From Cleopatra's love and Egypt's luxury, Antony is recalled to a stern sense of duty as one of the three rulers of the Roman Empire. The Parthians have invaded from the East ("These strong Egyptian fetters I must break"); his wife, Fulvia, is dead ("There's a great spirit gone."); rebellion is afoot in the West. "I must from this enchanting queen break off," asserts Antony. Cleopatra, however, has other ideas, and we now see
her at work. She tells one of her attendants: "See where he is, who's with him, what he does—/ I did not send
you. If you find him sad,/ Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report/ That I am sudden sick. Quick, and return." But
one of her ladies-in-waiting thinks Cleopatra is going about her business in the wrong way:

CHARMIANMadam, methinks if you did love him dearly, You do not hold the method to enforce
The like from him. CLEOPATRA What should I do, I do not? CHARMIAN In each
give him way, cross him in nothing. CLEOPATRA Thou teacheest like a fool— The way to
lose him. CHARMIAN Tempt him not so far too; ywis forbear, In time we hate that which we
often fear.

"It Beggared All Description"
Context: This saying is heard frequently today in either the past or present tense. In the play, Mark Antony,
one of the triumvirate that rules Rome, is deeply in love with Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, and wastes his days
and nights in Alexandria. Urgent affairs of state and a threatened military action against Rome finally force
him to turn his back on Cleopatra and hasten home, accompanied by his friend and officer, Enobarbus. Now,
in Rome, Agrippa and Maecenas, fellow military officers, are eagerly questioning Enobarbus about the
extravagances and beauty of Cleopatra. He describes her arrival when first she met Antony.

ENOBARBUS . . . The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne, Burned on the water; the poop
was beaten gold, Purple the sails, and so perfumed that The winds were love-sick with them;
the oars were silver, Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made The water which they
beat to follow faster, As amorous of their strokes. For her own person, It beggared all
description: . . .

"Let's Have One Other Gaudy Night"
Context: Mark Antony, co-ruler of the Roman Empire, falls in love with Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt. Through
a series of circumstances he ends his friendship with Octavius, his fellowruler, and the opposing forces of
Octavius and Antony meet at the Battle of Actium, in which Antony is defeated. He is defeated because, at a
crucial point in the sea-battle, Cleopatra and her fleet desert him. Antony, who can think only of Cleopatra,
leaves the fighting to follow her, thus losing the battle, the empire, and his honor. The lovers meet at
Alexandria, some time after the battle, in Cleopatra's palace. At this meeting Antony tells Cleopatra that he
knows his whole cause is lost; he says, "Alack, our terrene moon/ Is now eclipsed, and it portends alone/
The fall of Antony." Reassured by Cleopatra that she still loves him, Antony recalls his courage, and resolves to
ty once more, with his land forces, to seek the defeat of Octavius, after a celebration. Cleopatra, in her reply
to him, reveals the selfishness that is part and parcel of her nature. She thinks and speaks, not of Antony and
his future, but of the fact that the present day is her birthday. The quotation supplied the title of a famous
mystery story by Dorothy Sayers.

ANTONYI will be treble-sinewed, hearted, breathed, And fight maliciously; for when mine
hours Were nice and lucky, men did ransom lives Of me for jests. But now I'll set my
teeth, And send to darkness all that stop me. Come, Let's have one other gaudy night. Call to
me All my sad captains, fill our bowls once more. Let's mock the midnight
bell. CLEOPATRA It is my birthday. I had thought t'have held it poor. But since my lord Is
Antony again, I will be Cleopatra. ANTONY We will yet do well.

"My Baby At My Breast, That Sucks The Nurse Asleep"
Context: Cleopatra, beautiful Queen of Egypt, is in the act of killing herself. Alone with her attendants in her
tomb, a captive of Octavius Caesar, she prefers to die rather than to allow herself to be exhibited to the
populace of Rome as his prisoner. There is nothing left to live for since her lover Mark Antony is dead, and
with him, her imperial dreams. Charmian, an attendant, is with her.
CLEOPATRA. . .Come thou mortal wretch,[Applies an asp to her breast.]With thy sharp teeth this knot intrinsicateOf life at once untie. Poor venomous fool,Be angry, and dispatch. O couldst thou speak,That I might hear thee call great Caesar ass,Unpolicied.CHARMIANO eastern star!CLEOPATRAPeace, peace.Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,That sucks the nurse asleep?CHARMIANO break! O break!

"My Salad Days, When I Was Green In Judgment"

Context: Usually shortened to "my salad days" or "the salad days," this saying is still current, and refers to the fresh, green, early years of life. In the play, Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, is separated from Mark Antony, her lover and a ruler of Rome, who is at home on urgent affairs of state. She has him constantly in her thoughts, writes him every day, and is hungry for news of him. Cleopatra asks her attendant Charmian if ever she loved Julius Caesar so, and Charmian teases her about that earlier affair. She finally admits she is but echoing words Cleopatra once used about Caesar.

CHARMIANBy your most gracious pardon,I sing but after you.CLEOPATRAMy salad days,When I was green in judgement, cold in blood,To say as I said then. But come, away;Get me ink and paper.He shall have every day a several greeting... .

"No Worse A Husband Than The Best Of Men"

Context: After the death of Julius Caesar, Antony and Octavius Caesar, together with the ineffectual Lepidus, rule the Roman Empire. Antony, however, whiles away his time in Alexandria with the fascinating Cleopatra but, when he learns that the Empire is threatened by rebellion and invasion, breaks his passionate enthrallment and returns to Rome. Temperamentally and otherwise, Antony and Octavius are at opposite poles and are destined to come to blows. In Rome, Octavius airs a number of grievances against Antony. Finally, it is suggested that, since Antony's wife, Fulvia, has just died, Octavius and Antony might end their quarrels and cement an alliance if Antony were to marry Octavius' sister. Since Antony is scarcely free of his passion for Cleopatra, the marriage ultimately serves as an occasion for further enmity. But for the moment, and only for the moment, the marriage seems a possible source of friendship. A Roman noble, Agrippa, makes the proposal:

AGRIPPATo hold you in perpetual amity,To make you brothers, and to knit your heartsWith an unslipping knot, take AntonyOctavia to his wife; whose beauty claimsNo worse a husband than the best of men;Whose virtue and whose general graces speakThat which none else can utter. By this marriage,All little jealousies which now seem great,And all great fears, which now import their dangers,Would then be nothing... .

"O Sovereign Mistress Of True Melancholy"

Context: Domitius Enobarbus is Mark Antony's trusted friend, as well as one of his most talented and faithful officers. But when Antony decides, after his disastrous defeat at Actium, to risk another battle against Octavius Caesar, Enobarbus, seeing no other way to save his own life and future, abandons Antony to join Caesar's forces near Alexandria. Learning of Enobarbus' desertion, Antony exhibits no ill-will, for he believes that he has lost the right to his friends' and subordinates' loyalty through his own dishonorable actions, which spring from his uncontrollable passion for Cleopatra. So far from being angry, Antony even sends all Enobarbus' treasure after him to Caesar's camp. Antony's charity, and his refusal to become angry, strike Enobarbus with shame. Filled with emotion, he wanders from the Roman camp, berating himself for his disloyalty. He apostrophizes the moon as witness of his repentance just before he falls dead of shame for his revolt.

ENOBARBUSBe witness to me, O thou blessed moon,When men revolted shall upon recordBear hateful memory, poor Enobarbus didBefore thy face repent... .O sovereign mistress of true melancholy,The poisonous damp of night dispponge upon me,That life, a very
"Serpent Of Old Nile"
Context: Mark Antony, one of the three rulers of Rome, whiles away his time and his cares of state in the arms of the enchanting Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt. Messages arrive from Rome which, because of their grave importance, force him, reluctantly, to take his leave of her and return home. Now, in his absence, Cleopatra cannot get Antony out of her thoughts as she speaks to her attendant, Charmian.

CLEOPATRA...O Charmian, Where think'st thou he is now? Stands he, or sits he? Or does he walk? Or is he on his horse? O happy horse to bear the weight of Antony! Do bravely horse, for wot'st thou whom thou mov'st, The demi-Atlas of this earth, the arm And burgonet of men? He's speaking now, Or murmuring, where's my serpent of old Nile-- For so he calls me... . .

"The Bright Day Is Done, And We Are For The Dark"
Context: Cleopatra, beautiful Queen of Egypt, is alone in her tomb with her attendants and her Roman guards. She is the captive of Octavius Caesar. Her lover, Mark Antony, is dead. Her dreams of ruling the Roman world with him and their children are likewise dead. Caesar comes to her with sweet words and fair promises for her well-being, but she sees through his words. He wants to keep her alive to display in his triumph when he returns to Rome. When Caesar leaves her, Cleopatra whispers to an attendant, Charmian. As she does so, the other attendant, Iras, tries to hurry her with words of heavy foreboding.

IRAS Finish good lady, the bright day is done, And we are for the dark.

"The Demi-Atlas Of This Earth"
Context: Once the greatest of generals, Antony has ceased to concern himself with affairs of empire because of his passion for Cleopatra. As one of his friends disgustedly notes, "His captain's heart" "is become the bellows and the fan/To cool a gypsy's lust." But now rebellion and invasion have recalled Antony to Rome, where the other members of the ruling triumvirate--Lepidus and Octavius Caesar--are in great need of his soldierly qualities. In Alexandria, meanwhile, Cleopatra awaits the return of her lover, writing letter after letter to her "demi-Atlas," for if Atlas bore the globe on his shoulders, Antony bears half of it (the other half being borne by Octavius, Lepidus being too ineffectual to matter). As a general, moreover, Antony is the protector of men, their armor--"arm," and helmet--"burgonet." Thus, the intensity of the conflict within Antony--between his passion for Cleopatra and his Roman sense of duty--is suggested unwittingly by Cleopatra herself:

CLEOPATRAO Charmian, Where think'st thou he is now? Stands he, or sits he? Or does he walk? Or is he on his horse? O happy horse to bear the weight of Antony! Do bravely horse, for wot'st thou whom thou mov'st, The demi-Atlas of this earth, the arm And burgonet of men? He's speaking now, Or murmuring Where's my serpent of old Nile-- For so he calls me... . .

"The Nature Of Bad News Infects The Teller"
Context: Antony, one of the triumvirs ruling the Roman Empire after the death of Julius Caesar, has been infatuated with Cleopatra, and, ignoring his imperial duties as well as his wife, Fulvia, has spent his days and nights in Alexandria reveling with and loving the Egyptian Queen. When a messenger arrives from Rome, Antony, to the disgust of his friends, at first dismisses him without a hearing. But then, as Cleopatra puts it, "a Roman thought" possesses him, and he recalls the messenger, who hesitates to speak for fear his bad news may "infect" the messenger, making him seem hateful to the great Antony. But now we see another Antony, one who refuses to turn away from duty or truth. He hears that while he lay idle in Alexandria, the Parthians
seized, or "extended," large portions of the Empire. The passage gains in effect by contrast with the way Cleopatra later treats a messenger who brings her bad news. Overwrought, she takes her feelings out on the messenger.

ANTONYWell, what worst?
MESSENGERThe nature of bad news infects the teller. ANTONY When it concerns the fool or coward. On. Things that are past, are done. With me, 'tis thus, Who tells me true, though in his tale lie death, I hear him as he flattered. MESSENGER Labienus—This is stiff news—hath with his Parthian force Extended Asia from Euphrates; His conquering banner shook from Syria To Lydia and to Ionia, Whilst—ANTONY Antony thou wouldst say—MESSENGER O my lord! ANTONY Speak to me home, mince not the general tongue... ...

"Thou Didst Eat Strange Flesh"
Context: At the opening of the play, Antony and Cleopatra are immersed in love and pleasure. But as messengers bring news of rebellion, invasion, and the death of his wife, Fulvia, Antony is transformed until he becomes again the great general, one of the three rulers of the Roman Empire. He leaves for Rome, where he is awaited impatiently by the other triumvirs, Lepidus and Octavius Caesar. Fearing rebellion and piracy, even Caesar, who loathes Antony, pays tribute to Antony's qualities as a soldier:

CAESAR Antony, Leave thy lascivious wassails. When thou once Was beaten from Modena, where thou slew'st Hirtius and Pansa, consuls, at thy heel Did famine follow, whom thou fought'st against Though daintily brought up, with patience more Than savages could suffer. Thou didst drink The stale of horses, and the gilded puddle Which beasts would cough at. Thy palate then did deign The roughest berry on the rudest hedge; Yea, like the stag, when snow the pasture sheets, The barks of trees thou browsed. On the Alps, It is reported thou didst eat strange flesh, Which some did die to look on. And all this—It wounds thine honour that I speak it now—Was borne so like a soldier, that thy cheek So much as lank'd not.

"Unarm, Eros, The Long Day's Task Is Done, And We Must Sleep"
Context: Mark Antony, a co-ruler of Rome, is so smitten with love for Cleopatra, beautiful and voluptuous Queen of Egypt, that he uses poor judgment in his decisions and acts on impulse, rather than on cool deliberation, where she is concerned. Now, dishonored by his actions and defeated by Octavius Caesar at Actium—a sea battle to decide who will rule the world—deserted by his forces, and informed that Cleopatra is dead, he feels his heart break. He asks his servant, Eros, with words that have double meaning, to remove his armor.

ANTONY Dead then? MARDIAN Dead. ANTONY Unarm, Eros, the long day's task is done, And we must sleep... ...

"We Have Kissed Away Kingdoms And Provinces"
Context: This saying is no doubt the source for the slang phrases heard today, "Kiss it away" and "kiss it off." In the play, Mark Antony, one of three co-rulers of Rome along with Octavius Caesar and Lepidus, rules the eastern portion of the Roman world. He is hopelessly enamored of Cleopatra, beautiful and voluptuous Queen of Egypt. He remains with her until urgent affairs of state and threats to his position force him to return home. He makes alliances with Caesar, marries his sister Octavia to bind the renewed friendship, takes his new wife to Athens, but is unhappy. When word comes that Caesar has renewed their rivalry, he dispatches Octavia to Rome to smooth affairs, and then slips off to Alexandria and Cleopatra's arms. Meanwhile, Caesar removes Lepidus from power and is now Antony's only rival for control of Rome. When Antony gives Roman provinces to his twin children and their mother, Cleopatra, and proclaims them rulers, Caesar moves against him. Unwisely, Antony ignores his advantage on land and chooses to fight a sea battle at Actium. He flees with Cleopatra and loses. Two officers discuss the disaster.
SCARUS: Gods and goddesses, All the whole synod of them!
ENOBARBUS: What's thy passion?
SCARUS: The greater cantle of the world is lost
With very ignorance, we have kissed away
Kingdoms and provinces.

"Young Boys And Girls Are Level Now With Men"

Context: With friction rather than harmony a triumvirate, Antony, Octavius Caesar, and Lepidus, rules the vast Roman Empire. Antony, whose charge is the Eastern portion of the kingdom, loses power to young Caesar when he falls foolishly in love with the voluptuous and beguiling Queen of Egypt, Cleopatra. Finally the forces of Antony and Caesar meet in battle. Antony, badly beaten, feels that Cleopatra has caused his downfall and vows to kill her. Cleopatra tries to bring her lover to repentance by sending him a message saying she is dead. Antony, receiving the false message and filled with grief, falls upon his sword. He is taken to die in the arms of Cleopatra, who says to her attendants:

CLEOPATRA: O see, my women, [ANTONY dies.] The crown o' th' earth doth melt. My lord! O withered is the garland of the war, The soldiers' pole is fall'n: young boys and girls Are level now with men; the odds is gone, And there is nothing left remarkable Beneath the visiting moon... No more but e'en a woman, and commanded By such poor passion as the maid that milks, And does the meanest chores. It were for me To throw my sceptre at the injurious gods, To tell them that this world did equal theirs Till they had stolen our jewel. . . .