

# Antony and Cleopatra Study Guide

## Antony and Cleopatra by William Shakespeare

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# Introduction

*Antony and Cleopatra* was first listed for publication in 1608, but evidence strongly suggests that the play was written and performed one or two years earlier. No evidence exists to indicate that *Antony and Cleopatra* appeared in print before its inclusion in the first Folio of 1623, therefore, the First Folio version of the play is considered by most critics to be authoritative.

Thomas North's "The Life of Antonio's" in his *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans compared together* (1579)—an English translation of a work by Plutarch—is the principal source for *Antony and Cleopatra*. Scholars have remarked that Shakespeare followed North's translation of Plutarch closely for his play; they note in particular a close match between Shakespeare's poetic rendition of Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra on her barge and North's own prose translation of the episode. Critics, however, are divided on whether Shakespeare's characterizations of Antony and Cleopatra are more or less flattering than they are in North's translation of Plutarch.

Scholarly debate over *Antony and Cleopatra* has centered around Antony's "dotage" or decline and the relative nobleness of his character; Cleopatra's contradictory behavior and the significance of her death; the nature of the lovers' passion for one another; and the comparative wisdom or rashness of their actions. Commentators have also examined *Antony and Cleopatra's* comparatively minor but nonetheless dramatically significant characters Octavius, Octavia, and Enobarbus. Some scholars have focused on the connections between Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and John Dryden's sixteenth-century version of the play, *All for Love* (1678). Other issues of interest to critics include the play's language, imagery, structure, and political context, as well as its treatment of the mores and politics of a changing Rome versus those of Egypt. Thematic concerns include the relationship in the play between reason and imagination or passion, the nature of love, the choice between love and empire, and political or social disintegration. Recent scholarship has stressed the nature of the play's mythological and supernatural elements, the degree of sexism practiced by earlier critics with regard to Cleopatra's character, and the relative merit of *Antony and Cleopatra* as a tragedy when ranked against such works as *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*. The irony and paradox that pervade *Antony and Cleopatra* and that render much of the play's action and many of its themes problematic are of particular interest to critics today, and there appears to be a growing consensus that Shakespeare in fact intended that this drama of love, politics, aging, and death be both ambivalent and ambiguous.



## Plot Summary

The Roman triumvir Mark Antony luxuriates in Alexandria with his lover, Cleopatra, while his men complain that their once great military leader has been ruined by his infatuation with this Queen of Egypt. Messages arrive from Rome, and Cleopatra teases Antony about his subservience to his wife, Fulvia, as well as to the younger triumvir, Octavius Caesar. In defiance, Antony sends the messengers away unheard.

Shortly afterward, Cleopatra's two maids-in-waiting, Charmian and Iras, ask a Soothsayer to tell them their fortunes. When he ominously suggests that they will not live long, the women misinterpret his warnings and instead joke about their good luck.

Meanwhile, Antony hears of separate battles being waged against Octavius Caesar—one of which has been started by Antony's wife, Fulvia. After another messenger tells him of Fulvia's death, Antony berates himself for being enchanted by Cleopatra and decides to return to his dunes in Rome. Cleopatra is hurt and angered by this news, but when he insists on going she relents and affectionately bids him farewell.

Back in Rome, Octavius Caesar tells his fellow triumvir, Lepidus, that he is disgusted with Antony's infatuation with Cleopatra and with his dissipation in Egypt. Word comes that Pompey is rebelling against the triumvirate, and Octavius once more laments that Antony is wasting his time and his reputation in Egypt.



# Act 1, Scene 1

## Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

The play opens in Cleopatra's palace at Alexandria, Egypt. Philo, who explains that the General's military and political reputation is suffering because of his affair with the Egyptian Queen, introduces us to the Roman General, Mark Antony. Antony and Cleopatra enter together, followed by her attendants and slaves. The couple is flirting openly; Cleopatra presses Antony to describe his love for her.

A messenger arrives with news from Rome. Cleopatra teases him that it may be from his estranged wife, or perhaps a summons from the Caesar, whom the Queen mocks for his youth and inexperience, and for his influence over Antony. He refuses to hear the news and insists instead that some entertainment be arranged for the evening. The couple leaves, and Philo and Demetrius are left on stage to reflect on Antony's scorn for his duty to Caesar and to the Roman Empire.

## Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

The conversation between Philo and Demetrius is crucial to our understanding of the background: it introduces the themes of tradition, duty, and personal and public reputation, which are put under pressure by counter-forces of ambition, vanity and infatuation.

We hear that Antony has been a celebrated Roman General, whose military successes are at odds with his recent behavior. Philo suggests that in his relationship with Cleopatra, Antony resembles a court jester, concentrating all his efforts into the amusement and flattery of the Queen.

Structurally, the conversation of Demetrius and Philo brackets the idle flirtation of Antony and Cleopatra in this scene. Their behavior is contrasted to the wider, political context of Rome, and of Antony's original commitment to the goals of the Empire. From the beginning, Shakespeare sets Antony and Cleopatra on a collision course with the Empire.

The exchange between Antony and Cleopatra clearly indicates the balance of power within this relationship: Cleopatra's extreme vanity, her need for constant praise and attention, is evident. She dominates the conversation; Antony persuades her against receiving the messenger by playing to her sense of vanity, which would appear to be the extent of his influence over her. In one speech, Antony declares that their relationship is his personal Empire, that it has more reality for him the entire structure of the Roman Empire, which he imagines crumbling into the river Tiber whilst their love, their new empire, endures. During this speech, he embraces her, which symbolically underlines the situation of Egypt, surrounded and threatened with assimilation into the greater Roman Empire. This embrace foreshadows the increasing pressure of Roman Imperial

expansion throughout the play, from which the couple distance themselves within the protective shell of their relationship.



# Act 1, Scene 2

## Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

Cleopatra's servants, Charmian, Alexas and Iras, and Antony's friend Enobarbus, are light-heartedly joking with a fortune-teller, or soothsayer, who brings them bad omens. They have been asking for news of wealthy husbands, long life and lasting beauty. Cleopatra enters, looking for Antony; she complains that his mood has been serious of late. They remove themselves on hearing the approach of Antony, who enters with a Messenger. The news from Rome is that Antony's wife and brother are joined in a plot to overthrow the Caesar, whilst other generals are winning praise for their successes in Asia and Arabia. Antony begins to feel his interests ill served by his affair with Cleopatra. A second message brings news of the death of Antony's wife, Fulvia. He is full of regret for her loss and resolves to leave Egypt to save his career. He talks privately with Enobarbus, who tells him that his business in Egypt is as pressing as the campaigns that call him elsewhere, and that Fulvia's death frees him to continue his relationship with Cleopatra, whom he describes as being genuinely in love with Antony.

## Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

Cleopatra's servants are oblivious to the significance of external events, which are sketched out in the form of the soothsayer's bleak prophecy. They are preoccupied with their own imagined fortunes, which are generally concerned with beauty, wealth, sexual pleasure and drunkenness. Shakespeare uses these subplots to contrast with and comment upon the main action. We can see that there is no place for serious, political work within the frivolous atmosphere of Cleopatra's palace; increasingly, we can also see that the Roman Empire is distancing itself from traditional principles. In Antony's absence, political ambitions and plots are the order of business. Antony realizes that he has become distracted from his true purpose, and that he must break free from the culture of pleasure and luxury in Egypt.



# Act 1, Scene 3

## Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

Cleopatra sends her servant Alexas to fetch Antony. She talks to Charmian and Iras about how best to keep him interested in her. When he arrives, she pretends to be ill, and protests that she has no hold over him. He explains that possible civil war in Italy calls him home, and shows her the letter with news of Fulvia's death. Cleopatra complains that her own death will go similarly un-mourned by him. She provokes an argument on this basis, but backs down and makes a show of giving him her permission to leave.

## Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

In this scene, we get a better picture of Cleopatra's powers of manipulation, of the internal struggle between her will and Mark Antony's duty. It is ironic that she affects weakness in order to increase her dominance, even after she learns that her sexual rival, Antony's wife, has died. Antony feels himself on trial, and uses the appropriate imagery, addressing her as judge and pleading his case as genuine suitor. She accuses him of putting on an act, which adds further irony to the scene, given that her own pretenses of weakness and insecurity have been deliberately chosen to wring out specific responses from him. In the course of their argument, Cleopatra reveals the true nature of her love, with the phrase, "O my oblivion is a very Antony, / And I am all forgotten!" (lines 90-91). Her vanity cannot support the idea that, in loving him, she will become less important, she will cease to be so powerful. When Antony threatens to leave without her approval, she feels overlooked and acts to reassert her personality by pushing him to declare his feelings.

The imagery in this scene recalls the hollow womb mentioned by the soothsayer in answer to Charmian's question about her future in scene ii. Cleopatra's description of her love as a sort of oblivion suggests a similar, empty circle, a lack that will come to signify the paradox at the centre of the Egyptian court.



# Act 1, Scene 4

## Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

The scene switches to Caesar's house in Rome, where we find Octavius Caesar reading a letter, and discussing Mark Antony's exploits in Egypt with Lepidus, a high-ranking Roman official. Lepidus seems unwilling to conclude that Antony is wasting his career in leisure at Cleopatra's palace; but Caesar is far more critical. A messenger reports that discontented men are rallying to the cause of Pompey, who controls the Roman naval fleet and is set for confrontation with Caesar. The men complain of Antony's absence.

## Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

This scene alters our perspective, allowing us to appreciate, from the Roman point of view, how distanced is Antony's standard of personal honor from the order in Rome. Lepidus draws Caesar towards harsher criticism of Antony by coyly suggesting that his faults do not outweigh his qualities. This reveals the subtle, calculating activity of the political campaigns now controlling the future of Rome, based upon the hearsay and insinuation of ambitious men. Antony's absence is contributing to his loss of reputation and to a loss of confidence in his fitness for office: Caesar describes him as a child who has traded in his wisdom for short-term pleasure.

Caesar gives a long speech to the absent Mark Antony, urging him to recover his soldierly qualities of honor and endurance and return to the service of the Empire. He contrasts Antony's experience of famine during one military campaign with reports of the excessive feasts in Alexandria, which marks his values in total contrast to those of Caesar.



# Act 1, Scene 5

## Act 1, Scene 5 Summary

The scene switches back to Cleopatra's palace. Cleopatra asks for a strong drink so that she might sleep for the duration of her separation from Antony; when Charmian suggests that she thinks of her lover too much, the Queen calls for her eunuch (castrated male singer) Mardian, and tells him to stop singing, because she takes no pleasure in him. She asks him if he has natural "affections" (sexual impulses). Her thoughts turn to Antony again, and she indulges in a little speculation about what he might be doing as she waits. Alexas arrives with a pearl, sent from Antony to Cleopatra with a message that he will win territory for her. She talks fondly of Antony, and compares her feelings to those we discover she once had for Caesar, when she describes herself as having been young and "green in judgment" (line 76).

## Act 1, Scene 5 Analysis

This scene contrasts with the serious events of scene 4, and underlines the moral and practical void at the centre of the Alexandrian court. Whilst her lover rides away to war, she can think only in terms of her physical desires. Her joke with the eunuch confirms that sexual pleasure forms the basis of her relationship with Antony: she confesses that she has no interest in "aught an eunuch has" (line 10), and her thoughts wander to Antony's body itself. She jokes crudely and enviously about the horse that bears Antony's weight. She describes him also as "demi-Atlas" (line 23), a version of the god-like figure of Greek mythology, who held the weight of the world on his shoulders. She recalls that Caesar and Pompey both had become infatuated with her, revealing the depth of her vanity. These memories are a "delicious poison" (line 27) to her, a fuel for her vanity and lust, which will eventually lead to her destruction: as such, the poison metaphor is a gesture towards her suicide at the end of the play. It is a dramatic irony, so-called because she herself is unaware of its true significance as she speaks, although the audience can appreciate its deeper meaning.

The eunuch's use of pagan imagery, the Roman War God Mars and the Goddess of love, Venus, are symbolic of the heroic tradition, the highest standards of which are honor and glory. Cleopatra's speech is full of references to this culture; her love for Antony is connected to its ideals.



# Act 2, Scene 1

## Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

The setting is Pompey's house in Messina. Pompey, Menacrates and Menas are gathered, as if fresh from battle or military preparations. Pompey says that fortune is on his side, for whilst men flock to his cause, Caesar can only raise money, and with Antony abroad, Lepidus is busy gaining Caesar's confidence and looking after his own interests. The trio of powerful Roman men is therefore weakened and divided. Pompey dismisses Menas' report that Caesar and Lepidus are mustering forces for battle. Varius arrives with news that Antony is indeed bound for Rome; Pompey speaks of his hope to lure Antony away from Caesar, while the conflict between Fulvia, Antony's brother and the Caesar exists as a wedge between their alliance. Pompey is hopeful that their internal differences will prove too great: his strategy is to divide and conquer.

## Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

This scene is structurally similar to the final scene in Act 1; however, its content differs markedly from Cleopatra's trivial personal issues. The men in Messina are plotting events that will undermine the Roman leadership and destroy all those in a position of power. They discuss themes of justice and religion, showing a fuller grasp of reality than the members of Cleopatra's court do, and perhaps even Caesar, who is consumed by material greed and personal rivalry. The men at Messina present an overview of the entire situation: they are aware that there are a number of factors that will decide their fate, such as their popularity with the people, the will of the gods and the personal lives of their enemies. At the end of this scene, Pompey uses a playing-card metaphor to illustrate their circumstances: he sees himself as a skilled gambler, a manipulator in a game of chance. He knows that he possesses the strongest suits, but relies upon the other players not discovering his plan. Pompey falls somewhere between new political Roman government, and glorious military tradition.



## Act 2, Scene 2

### Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

Enobarbus, friend to Antony, is at the home of Lepidus, in Rome. The two are arguing about Antony's lack of diplomacy, with Enobarbus insisting that he will not dampen his master's spirits. Antony, Ventidius, Caesar, Maecenas and Agrippa arrive. The men debate their differences: Antony insists that his wife and brother fought Caesar without his approval, to bring him back from Egypt, and that he did not mean to break his word to Caesar by remaining in Egypt when Caesar called for assistance. Agrippa proposes that the men bind themselves through marriage between Antony and Octavia, Caesar's sister. All but Enobarbus, Maecenas and Agrippa leave to arrange the ceremony. The talk between the remaining men is of life in Alexandria, its feasts, lavish entertainments and endless pleasures. Enobarbus explains that Antony can never give up his relationship with Cleopatra, despite the new marriage.

### Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

The two worlds of Rome and Alexandria share this scene. After the serious matters, and the proposed contract of marriage, the sensual delights of Alexandria compare more favorably. Shakespeare is suggesting that a world of pleasure, passion and personal glory is not without validity and, by extension, that a world in which wives, rather than wars, are used to buy political alliances, is not necessarily preferable. The feasts and sports of Alexandria may seem excessive, even trivial in contrast to the peaceful world order envisaged by Caesar.

In his play, Shakespeare points out the flaws and qualities of both systems, never wholly embracing or criticizing either, nor even suggesting that the two are capable of coexistence.

The imagery is laden with references to feasts and physical sensations. Again, the passionate bond between Antony and Cleopatra foreshadows their tragic fate.

"Other women cloy

The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry

Where most she satisfies (240-242)."

The triumph of progressive political ideals over tradition, and the resulting impact on English society forms a direct parallel to the immediate historical background of Shakespeare's times. The English Civil War (1642-51) pitted the land-owning, royalist cavalier class against republican parliamentarians and commoners, dividing families and culminating in the execution of King Charles I, after which there was a period of restrictive puritanical law. An early post-war government, made up from the Puritan



convention, was so strict it earned the nickname, 'The Barebones Parliament.' The puritans, led by Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), clamped down on the excesses of the old regime, closing theatres, and censoring works of art. Many saw this as the oppression and persecution of the aristocratic way of life, by a new order of strict, monotonous puritanical society. Although the war began long after Shakespeare's death in 1616, the two opposing belief systems were locked in a very public confrontation in parliament at the time Shakespeare was writing his plays.



## Act 2, Scene 3

### Act 2, Scene 3 Summary

The marriage ceremony takes place at Caesar's house. Antony is left alone with a soothsayer, who informs him that his fortunes are not favorable so long as he stays in Rome, and ignores his instincts with regard to Caesar. Antony dismisses him, but seems persuaded that he is better off in Egypt, sensing that Caesar is certain to take advantage of him. He sends Ventidius to Parthia in his place.

### Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

The soothsayer reminds Antony of the strength of his instincts, which have helped him in his glorious past. He speaks in gaming metaphors, which shows that he understands his weakened, isolated situation better. It is significant that, after the brief marriage ceremony, Caesar and Octavia leave together, and Antony hears his bleak fortunes alone. He decides to return to Egypt to recover the passion that his new political marriage of convenience lacks. The ceremony at the beginning of the scene sets up a direct comparison between the two relationships, the newer of which is basically a means of keeping Antony in check.



## **Act 2, Scene 4**

### **Act 2, Scene 4 Summary**

Lepidus, Maecenas and Agrippa talk on a street in Rome. Lepidus is flattering the two men with praise and good wishes. Agrippa speaks of the marriage of Antony and Octavia. The men leave Lepidus en route to meet their generals; he says he will follow after completing some business in Rome.

### **Act 2, Scene 4 Analysis**

This short scene is designed to show that events are moving at pace towards confrontation between Caesar and Pompey. Their conversation takes place on a street just before the men depart to meet their military leaders: in this way, Shakespeare shows the swift transition from talk to action. Lepidus is busy currying favor with all the major players, although by now we can see through his calculation.



## Act 2, Scene 5

### Act 2, Scene 5 Summary

Cleopatra and her servants are talking about wild times they have had with Antony. A messenger arrives, but Cleopatra delays him with panic and bad temper. When he finally breaks the news that Antony has married Octavia, she flies into a rage and strikes him, threatening him with torture and death. She sends Alexas to get news of Octavia's appearance.

### Act 2, Scene 5 Analysis

Before the arrival of the messenger, Cleopatra likens herself to an angler, using her bait to catch Antony. The metaphor tells us that she considers love to be an extension of sport, a game in which she can enjoy her power over men. She describes how in one game she out-drunk Antony and swapped her clothes with his whilst he was unconscious. The role-play demonstrates Cleopatra's dominance: she wears the most potent symbol of masculinity, the sword (a metaphor for the penis, or phallic symbol), and dresses Antony in her women's clothes. We can refer to this as the symbolic emasculation of Antony, which is a way of describing his loss of conventional masculine qualities in the face of Cleopatra's overwhelming character.

When she hears that Antony has remarried, Cleopatra's response is passionate and irrational. She wishes to find out as much about her rival as possible: we can see that the most dominant aspects of her personality, her pride and vanity, are wounded by the news.

## Act 2, Scene 6

### Act 2, Scene 6 Summary

Pompey and Menas meet Caesar, Antony, Lepidus, Enobarbus, Maecenas and Agrippa near Misenum. They talk of finding a resolution to their dispute, and are all invited to Pompey's ship for further talks. Menas and Enobarbus talk apart from the crowd. Menas asks if Antony is married to Cleopatra, and Enobarbus tells him of the marriage to Octavia. Menas asks whether this binds Antony in allegiance to Caesar, and Enobarbus says that it is a marriage of convenience, but that it will bring greater division between the two.

### Act 2, Scene 6 Analysis

The new order of Roman society, defined by political networking and arranged marriages, takes over from the traditional culture of military honor and glory. As Enobarbus points out, this new system is not without its flaws: the union between Antony and Caesar is unstable, because the marriage is no more than a token, and the match unsuitable. As Enobarbus says in line 122, "He will to his Egyptian dish again." Octavia's "holy, cold and still" (119) temperament will drive him towards his former pleasure, which will put pressure on his friendship with Caesar. The image of the wedding band as a kind of symbolic noose is ominous: it suggests the circle of the Roman Empire drawing inwards to smother Antony's way of life.



## Act 2, Scene 7

### Act 2, Scene 7 Summary

The men are at a banquet in Pompey's ship. Lepidus is drunk, and Antony is mocking him. Menas takes Pompey aside and suggests that they remain sober whilst the others become drunk, and take the opportunity to kill their opponents. Pompey refuses. Lepidus is carried away to bed by servants. The others dance and sing, before going off to bed.

### Act 2, Scene 7 Analysis

Menas' suggestion marks him out as a politician, an arch-manipulator; Pompey's refusal to murder his enemies, and repeat the wrong done to his father, shows that he still believes in the traditions of personal honor and glory. The two worlds are present at the banquet, represented by the men who take a full part in the entertainment and excess, and those who distance themselves from it in order to take advantage of their opponents. Caesar, to some extent, falls into the latter category, complaining that the mood of the party is unsuited to the business at hand.



# Act 3, Scene 1

## Act 3, Scene 1 Summary

The son of an enemy has been killed in vengeance for a Roman loss. Silius suggests that Ventidius continue on the back of his success, to conquer more territory in the pursuit of glory. Ventidius says that he will send news of his success to Antony, and wait for instructions. He says that it is not wise to act in the name of his general without permission, because his personal glory as a soldier is subordinate to his duty to Antony.

## Act 3, Scene 1 Analysis

Shakespeare frames the political worlds of Rome and Misenum with one that resembles more traditional Roman values. Ventidius' speech outlines a more traditional, unpolluted military virtue, one that carries out its orders for a greater purpose, and takes only the appropriate praise. Silius tempts him with images of "triumphant chariots and [...] garlands" (11-12), but Ventidius reminds him that, as a subordinate, humility is the better part of his soldierly virtue. As we have seen in the previous scene, this quality is missing in the new political order, where lower ranks plot and make pacts to overthrow their superiors.



## **Act 3, Scene 2**

### **Act 3, Scene 2 Summary**

At Caesar's house in Rome. Agrippa and Enobarbus are mocking Lepidus' flattery of Caesar and Antony. Caesar, Antony, Lepidus and Octavia arrive. Caesar is worried at leaving his sister with her new husband.

### **Act 3, Scene 2 Analysis**

This scene demonstrates that the new political order prevails in Rome. Caesar himself does not trust the strength of his bond with Antony; the men around them appear to be growing restless, and there is a general climate of suspicion.

## **Act 3, Scene 3**

### **Act 3, Scene 3 Summary**

Meanwhile, the messenger returns to Cleopatra with news that Antony's new wife is no match for her beauty and charm.

### **Act 3, Scene 3 Analysis**

Cleopatra is satisfied by reports of Octavia's appearance. Her obsession with such details suggests that her love for Antony is of a physical, sexual nature; however, there is a certain simplicity to this in the light of the deceit and flattery that is beginning to dominate Roman society.



## Act 3, Scene 4

### Act 3, Scene 4 Summary

We find Antony and Octavia at Antony's home in Athens. They are talking about reports that Caesar has publicly criticized him, and about Caesar's renewed hostilities against Pompey, which are damaging to his reputation in Rome. Octavia complains that her loyalty is now split in two directions, and Antony advises her to go to Caesar to discover the truth and patch things up, and ultimately to choose whichever side appears to her to be in the right.

### Act 3, Scene 4 Analysis

Cracks are appearing in the alliance between Antony and Caesar, as predicted. Caesar has taken a course with which Antony disagrees; his personal honor is at stake if he continues to allow Caesar to act in his name or spoil his reputation. The alliance therefore threatens the traditions according to which Antony lives his life.





# Act 3, Scene 5

## Act 3, Scene 5 Summary

Enobarbus and Eros meet in Antony's house. Eros explains that Caesar has fought Pompey, and afterwards denied Lepidus any part of the credit for their victory; he has since arrested Lepidus under suspicion that he communicated with Pompey during the wars, and has condemned him to death. Antony is furious that Lepidus ordered the murder of Pompey.

## Act 3, Scene 5 Analysis

The conversation between Eros and Enobarbus advances the action of the play, and gives the sense that events are running out of control, that the net of circumstances is drawing in on the isolated figure of Antony. The murder of Pompey and arrest of Lepidus show that integrity and honor are not natural principles within the new Roman political culture. Caesar has taken his opportunity to destroy his enemy, and reclaim the navy. The marriage to Octavia appears at this point to have been a decoy, a false promise to hide Caesar's true designs.



## Act 3, Scene 6

### Act 3, Scene 6 Summary

Caesar, Agrippa and Maecenas are talking at Caesar's house in Rome. Their subject is the scandal of Antony publicly behaving like a husband towards Cleopatra, making her gifts of territory won by him, and appearing with their illegitimate children, as well as a child who is said to be half-brother to Caesar. Rome has learned of this, and of the rift between Caesar and Antony. Antony has claimed that he has not received his portion of the gains in the war against Pompey, and that Caesar has not returned some shipping lent by him. He has also complained about the treatment of Lepidus. Caesar has sent a reply to Antony, offering part of the gains in Sicily in return for a share of Antony's territories. Octavia arrives to make the peace, but she is told that in her absence, Antony has gone back to his mistress in Egypt, from where he is making allies to support him against Caesar. Octavia is told that she has been used as a decoy to conceal Caesar's plans until he was sure that Antony was moving against him.

### Act 3, Scene 6 Analysis

Again, Shakespeare uses a conversation to move the action forward, and to summarize the political environment in Rome. Antony is further isolated at this point, because Caesar appears to have predicted his actions, and has been pulling the strings, using his sister as a pawn in their deception. Essentially, this scene is a plot device, but thematically, Caesar's descriptions of Alexandria and Cleopatra, whom he calls a whore and a trull (troll), stresses the difference between these two worlds. This scene also contrasts the two women of these worlds: we learn that Octavia has been used to serve the purposes of the men around her, whereas Cleopatra commands Antony's affections as well the territories that Caesar is so keen to share. Octavia represents the feminine ideal in the new order: placid, powerless, and virtuous; Cleopatra represents the opposite ideal: a strong, powerful woman who is able to influence the men around her.



# Act 3, Scene 7

## Act 3, Scene 7 Summary

Enobarbus tries to persuade Cleopatra that she should not physically take part in the wars against Caesar, but she refuses his advice. Antony gives his reason for fighting at sea, when the odds are not in his favor: he says that Caesar has challenged him to do so. A messenger brings news of Caesar's swift progress, and Antony leaves for his ship, even though one of his soldiers urges him to fight instead by land, where his forces are strongest.

## Act 3, Scene 7 Analysis

Antony is acting under the influence of his traditional soldierly virtues, and is about to fight a battle for which he is unprepared. He demonstrates heroism, but also recklessness. Cleopatra shows similar traits, even when Enobarbus points out that, as a childbearing woman, she is vital to the future of her Empire. His pun on the word 'bear' shows that men and women represent different roles in political life: men are likened to horses, who carry soldiers into battle and therefore perform the dangerous, physical work of Empires; women carry heirs, who can then go on to bear arms for their country.



## **Act 3, Scene 8**

### **Act 3, Scene 8 Summary**

On the field of battle, Caesar orders Taurus to concentrate on his war at sea before facing Antony's forces on land.

### **Act 3, Scene 8 Analysis**

This short scene brings events rushing forward, and shows a different style of leadership than that of Antony, who has shared his lands and power with Cleopatra, therefore coming under her influence. Caesar is more cautious, calculating and autocratic, which means that he is the sole source of authority. This scene also shows that Caesar is in control of the war.



## **Act 3, Scene 9**

### **Act 3, Scene 9 Summary**

Antony orders Enobarbus to arrange his troops near the coast, so they can judge how to handle the battle as it comes ashore.

### **Act 3, Scene 9 Analysis**

These two brief scenes build a sense of pace and urgency; Antony appears the weaker, with this scene following the previous scene in which Caesar controlled the progress of battle according to his plan. Antony reacts to the movements of Caesar, and seems therefore to be the less prepared.

## **Act 3, Scene 10**

### **Act 3, Scene 10 Summary**

The battle at sea is lost: Cleopatra's fleet of sixty ships retreats and Antony follows her. Canidius says he will follow the example of six of Antony's allies, and surrender his forces to Caesar; Enobarbus leaves to follow Antony, who is making for the Greek islands of Peloponnesus.

### **Act 3, Scene 10 Analysis**

This conversation reveals the weakness of Antony's alliance. Antony is restricted by his relationship with Cleopatra, and the entire plan has collapsed on the shaky foundation of their leadership.

# Act 3, Scene 11

## Act 3, Scene 11 Summary

In Alexandria, Antony is devastated with shame at his loss. He tells his comrades to take his ship and treasure and leave him to his own plans. Cleopatra apologizes for retreating, saying that she did not expect Antony to follow. He regrets his loss of honor.

## Act 3, Scene 11 Analysis

The imagery in this scene returns to the theme of Antony's symbolic emasculation. In his speech to the comrades, he uses the metaphor of age overcoming his youth and strength to demonstrate his fall from the masculine ideal.

"My very hairs do mutiny; for the white

Reprove the brown for rashness, and they them

For fear and doting (lines 13-15)."

This metaphor denotes Antony's inner struggle, between the traditional values, which urge him towards valor but encourage him to recklessness, and the weaker elements of his character, his obsession for Cleopatra and loss of perspective. Later, he uses another metaphor of his decline, the sword, which represents his masculinity (we call this a phallic symbol, from the Greek *phallus* = figurative or literary representation of the penis). In his speech, he says that his sword was "made weak by affection" (line 67): in other words, his passion for Cleopatra has cost him his independent status, and in his culture, his honor.

## **Act 3, Scene 12**

### **Act 3, Scene 12 Summary**

Caesar hears the terms of Antony's surrender, but tells his messenger that he will meet with Cleopatra to discuss her terms on the condition that Antony becomes his hostage. Caesar sends Thyreus to lure Cleopatra away from Antony with false promises.

### **Act 3, Scene 12 Analysis**

Caesar is encamped in Egypt, and surrounded by loyal generals, in contrast to Antony, who is bound to Cleopatra, having sent away his men. Caesar plans to isolate him further by tempting Cleopatra's vanity. In this scene, Antony and Cleopatra, and their way of life are caught in a stranglehold, with the new political order closing in around them. In this order, flattery, talk and deception are the weapons of choice: Caesar will destroy his enemies through political skill rather than old-fashioned military power.





## Act 3, Scene 13

### Act 3, Scene 13 Summary

Enobarbus tells Cleopatra that the defeat was Antony's fault. Antony and the messenger, Euphonius, enter with the response from Caesar. Enobarbus realizes that he might serve his own interests by pretending loyalty to Antony. He says in an aside that he thinks Cleopatra might defect. With Antony out of earshot, she tells the messenger that she will surrender to Caesar. As Caesar instructed, the messenger, Thyreus, flatters her, and when Antony returns, he finds him kissing her hand. He orders the man to be whipped, and turns on Cleopatra, who manages to convince him of her loyalty. Antony intends to fight back with his army, which has not been conquered yet, and to regroup his fleet, and orders a feast to celebrate. Enobarbus decides to defect.

### Act 3, Scene 13 Analysis

Anger makes Antony bolder, and he begins to recover his sense of valor, although his friends are secretly planning to desert him. His supporters are betraying him, and are already in this scene behaving like Caesar and his politicians, by giving false pledges of loyalty and serving their own ambitions. Enobarbus, who has been one of Antony's closest aides, speaks in asides or direct addresses to the audience, in which he criticizes Antony's boldness. His monologue at the end of the scene questions the entire basis of Antony's leadership, and shows that he has begun to think like a scheming politician rather than a fellow warrior.

"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 (lines 196-200)."

Roman society now values politics and reason over heroism, where before it celebrated the kind of bravery and pursuit of honor shown by Antony. Shakespeare allows us to see both sides of the argument, however. While Enobarbus' betrayal makes practical sense in terms of preserving his life and career, it lacks moral virtue yet it is clear that there is no place for traditional values in the new Rome.



# Act 4, Scene 1

## Act 4, Scene 1 Summary

Caesar receives the latest message from Alexandria and laughs at Antony's challenge to duel. He and Mecaenas discuss the imminent battle, with Caesar remarking that enough of Antony's troops have defected to give Caesar the advantage by land as well as sea.

## Act 4, Scene 1 Analysis

This scene shows how vulnerable Antony's old values are in the face of scheming opposition. In comparison to the previous scene, this opening to Act IV is short and simplistic, and in terms of the tone and content, it is the antithesis, or opposite, of that which has gone before it. Caesar and his men plot calmly; no one questions the orders or talks of mutiny. In contrast, what passes between Antony and Cleopatra is dramatic and emotional, and his friends no longer support him.



## Act 4, Scene 2

### Act 4, Scene 2 Summary

Antony is told that Caesar refuses to fight him personally; he resolves to go to battle the next day, and asks his company to take a last, special meal with him. Enobarbus and Cleopatra talk apart from the others, about Antony's strange state of mind. Antony insists that they spend the evening with him as a last comfort. Nobody speaks directly to Antony or answers him during this part of the scene.

### Act 4, Scene 2 Analysis

The asides between Cleopatra and Enobarbus, combined with the lack of conversation, create a powerful sense of isolation around Antony in this scene. The ties that bind him to his men and to Cleopatra seem to be disintegrating, as Antony appears more and more alone in his desire to confront Caesar. Antony's actions and words are met with shame, everyone else having recognized the defeat of the situation.



## **Act 4, Scene 3**

### **Act 4, Scene 3 Summary**

Soldiers outside the walls of Alexandria hear strange music. They interpret this as a sign that Antony will fail.

### **Act 4, Scene 3 Analysis**

A strange scene, which builds the suspense ahead of the final confrontation and deepens the sense of impending doom. The fact that the soldiers are so close to Alexandria, encircling the walls of the palace, suggests that Antony and the traditions of his heroic military Empire are about to be consumed by the advancing forces of Caesar and his new Rome.



## Act 4, Scene 4

### Act 4, Scene 4 Summary

Antony dresses on the morning of battle.

### Act 4, Scene 4 Analysis

Quite a tender scene between Antony and Cleopatra. She helps him put on his armor, he insists that she is part of his spiritual armor. Antony jokes that she has replaced his squire, Eros, whose job it is to fit his suit of armor and fetch his weapons. He speaks lightly, as if he is going to some pleasurable pastime, rather than certain death. This is very much in keeping with heroic traditions. There is a touching moment when he kisses her and apologizes that she should have to accept a kiss from a soldier. This humble compliment touches on the spiritual truth of their mutual affection, and whilst we know that Antony's heroism will end in tragedy, this brief glimpse of intimacy hints at the humanity of Antony's way of life. Compare the conversation between Caesar and Octavia: whilst their love is filial (between family members), it is arguably less natural, less humane.



## Act 4, Scene 5

### Act 4, Scene 5 Summary

Antony learns that Enobarbus has defected to Caesar. He orders that Enobarbus' personal treasure, which he has left behind, be sent with a friendly farewell letter.

### Act 4, Scene 5 Analysis

Antony makes a significant gesture in this scene in returning Enobarbus' treasure. The betrayal seems to affect his outlook, and he begins to understand the errors he has made. His sentiments in lines 15-16 are admirable, and once again serve to reveal his humanity and natural goodness: "O, my fortunes have / Corrupted honest men!" It is ironic that he should choose the word 'honest,' although he seems to appreciate that Enobarbus has made the only practical decision.



## Act 4, Scene 6

### Act 4, Scene 6 Summary

The battle: Caesar orders Antony to be taken alive, and for Antony's captured soldiers to be dumped in the middle of the field, so that Antony must suffer losses on his side to reach the opposition. Enobarbus reports that Caesar has arrested and hanged Alexas, after the former servant of Cleopatra had persuaded King Herod to join Caesar and forsake Antony. He regrets leaving Antony, and offers his treasure to a soldier. He decides not to fight against his former friend.

### Act 4, Scene 6 Analysis

Caesar's speaks about the "universal peace" (line 5) that will follow his victory. His desire to achieve peace for the Empire and to manage its wealth may not be glorious in the manner of Antony's heroics, but it is reasonable, and perhaps even enlightened. On the other hand, Antony's generosity to Enobarbus exposes the negative side to political life in the new Roman Empire: the hazards of deception and ambition will become a constant feature of government. Enobarbus is moved to give up his treasure when he realizes the spiritual price he has paid for his disloyalty. This sets him apart from the men around him.



## **Act 4, Scene 7**

### **Act 4, Scene 7 Summary**

The battle: Agrippa sounds a retreat. Antony, Scarus and Eros talk of victory.

### **Act 4, Scene 7 Analysis**

This short scene shows the balance of power wavering towards Antony, and generating suspense by delaying the outcome. This time we see Caesar's forces retreating, which allows Antony to appear heroic, and to enjoy the glory of some success.





## **Act 4, Scene 8**

### **Act 4, Scene 8 Summary**

Antony announces his strategic victory, gives his troops a night's rest, and orders festivities and parades to welcome the troops into Alexandria. Cleopatra offers a gift of gold-plated armor to Scarus.

### **Act 4, Scene 8 Analysis**

For a time, Antony resurrects the traditions of feasting and celebration, the usual tributes paid to heroic warriors.



## Act 4, Scene 9

### Act 4, Scene 9 Summary

Caesar's guards are talking about plans to attack at dawn. Enobarbus is heard praying to the moon for forgiveness from Antony and for a quick death. He dies.

### Act 4, Scene 9 Analysis

For Roman writers, like Seneca, with whom Shakespeare and his contemporaries would have been familiar, suicide was considered a noble death; for Shakespeare's Christian audiences, it would be considered a sin, which would carry terrible spiritual consequences. If we choose to assume that Enobarbus' death was self-inflicted, (he certainly wished for it), we can understand it as the fitting and honorable result of his disloyalty.

The moon is a symbol of war and wisdom, represented in Roman mythology by the god Apollo. Enobarbus' prayer to the moon can be seen as a final gesture to the traditional values that he has abandoned in joining Caesar.

The conversation between the guards informs us that Caesar has cleverly opted to attack early, when his enemies will be distracted by their celebrations. The battle begins to tilt again in favor of Caesar, whose less heroic style of command will give him the tactical advantage.



## **Act 4, Scene 10**

### **Act 4, Scene 10 Summary**

Antony and Scarus talk about Caesar's plan to move the battle to sea.

### **Act 4, Scene 10 Analysis**

This scene demonstrates Caesar's shrewd tactics. He has stretched Antony's forces on land, and now moves the battle to sea, where he is far stronger. Antony can only react with his bold, heroic statement that he would fight Caesar on any element.



# Act 4, Scene 11

## Act 4, Scene 11 Summary

Caesar has made his preparations by sea as a decoy, to lure Antony's best forces to sea. He orders his men to the field.

## Act 4, Scene 11 Analysis

Antony's lack of cunning has exposed him to absolute defeat. His preference for honorable, direct assaults will be exploited by shrewd tactical planning. At this point, Antony's values appear naïve.



## **Act 4, Scene 12**

### **Act 4, Scene 12 Summary**

Antony is outraged by the surrender of the Egyptian fleet, and he orders his entire force to disband. He threatens to kill Cleopatra, whom he thinks is to blame.

### **Act 4, Scene 12 Analysis**

This scene decisively severs the bond between Antony and Cleopatra, leaving him in total isolation, having sent his comrades away to escape. He decides to take revenge, which is a central theme in the Roman plays, especially in the Senecan tragedies.



## **Act 4, Scene 13**

### **Act 4, Scene 13 Summary**

Cleopatra and Charmian leave for the monument, where they will hide themselves and send false news of Cleopatra's suicide to Antony.

### **Act 4, Scene 13 Analysis**

Cleopatra's vanity and pride reach their height with this petty stunt. At this stage, she is still motivated by her taste for melodrama, an exaggerated form of theatrical expression that seems in keeping with her passionate nature. Her performance of suicide is another example of dramatic irony, when we consider that she will later be compelled to kill herself.



# Act 4, Scene 14

## Act 4, Scene 14 Summary

At Cleopatra's palace, Antony talks to Scarus of betrayal. Mardius arrives with the false news of Cleopatra's suicide. He is devastated, and asks Eros to help him end his life. Instead, Eros kills himself, and Antony falls on his own sword. He survives, and asks the guards to kill him, but they refuse. Diomedes arrives with news that Cleopatra is still alive. Antony asks his personal guard to carry him to the monument.

## Act 4, Scene 14 Analysis

Talking to Eros about Cleopatra's love, and the battles he fought in its name, Antony uses the metaphor of the desert mirage, "black vesper's pageants" (line 8). He feels that his vision of his honor and of Cleopatra is comparable to an oasis, a false effect on the sense of sight caused by the imagination. Cleopatra has been central to his vision, and with his opinion of her, his entire belief system now begins to evaporate, like a mirage in the hot desert wind.

Mardian's speech relates directly to this theme: Cleopatra has staged her suicide in an attempt to gauge Antony's love for her, sending her servant to make a dramatic performance that will prove her love in a heroic manner. Eros' suicide and Antony's attempted suicide are truer expressions of the heroic ideal, which Cleopatra is only staging for her own benefit. Antony explains that suicide is an act of final defiance against defeat, a way of controlling one's destiny, and of gloriously martyring himself to Cleopatra's love. He thinks that his death can serve his idealistic concept of love, which is symbolized in his speech by the tragic figure of Dido and her lover Aeneas. There are thematic parallels between the stories, which Antony uses to exalt, or glorify his love: Dido was initially abandoned by Aeneas, who had promised to free her from the island on which she lived alone; he left her to pursue glory in battle. The island exile represents Antony's isolation, in terms of his heroic beliefs; Aeneas' betrayal is likened to Cleopatra's apparent desertion, and her bond with Antony can be compared to Aeneas' passion for Dido, which was rooted in physical pleasure, but which developed into a deep spiritual love.

# Act 4, Scene 15

## Act 4, Scene 15 Summary

Antony dies outside the monument, and Cleopatra plans her suicide.

## Act 4, Scene 15 Analysis

With Antony's death, Cleopatra realizes she has lost the qualities of glory and heroism, and the power that Antony bestowed on her. We realize that, behind the passions, she had a real appreciation of the value of Antony's love. She compares herself to a common woman or a maid, and complains that heaven has taken from her world what had made it glorious. She decides to do "what's brave, what's noble... after the high Roman fashion" (86-7). In death, she moves closer to Antony's heroic ideal, and further from the petty concerns that characterized her earlier scenes.





# Act 5, Scene 1

## Act 5, Scene 1 Summary

Dercetas arrives with the sword that killed Antony, and tells Caesar of his suicide. Caesar seems genuinely regretful, and praises him. He sends word to Cleopatra that he will show mercy to her.

## Act 5, Scene 1 Analysis

In this scene, Caesar shows humane qualities. He mentions his writings, which he says demonstrate his peaceful nature and sense of justice. This recalls Dercetas' image from lines 21-22, which compares Antony's sword to a pen, and emphasizes again the contrast in the natures of the two leaders. The sword has written of honorable feats and glorious battles, and records its owner's greatness in his own blood. Caesar's pen is the pen of a politician, who acts out of necessity to preserve what he governs. Both the pen and the sword can be seen as phallic symbols, for each can be used as a tool of authority, although each is particular to its own culture. Shakespeare offers the two opposing sets of ideals for analysis, but shows us that neither is perfect in the vague and conflicting moral scheme of the play.



## Act 5, Scene 2

### Act 5, Scene 2 Summary

Cleopatra sends Caesar word that she wishes to die. Caesar visits her at the monument, to tell her that she will be spared if she submits to share her rule of Egypt. If she kills herself, he has promised to destroy her heirs. Cleopatra learns that Caesar will take her with him to Rome in three days' time; she imagines that she and Antony will be humiliated and mocked on Roman stages. She prepares for her suicide: a clown brings the basket bearing figs and multiple asps. Iras kisses her and dies. She holds the asp to her breast, puts another to her arm, and dies from the bites. Charmian kills herself. Caesar returns and orders for Cleopatra to be buried next to Antony.

### Act 5, Scene 2 Analysis

With Antony dead, the final scene provides insight into the power of Cleopatra's personality, the strength of her passion for Antony, and the relative strengths and weaknesses of heroic ideals. To Caesar, she shows humility and gratitude; yet in hiding part of the treasure that she must give up to Caesar because of her defeat, we see that her pride survives in her unwillingness to surrender all the signs of her power. Before her death, she reveals that the heroic aspect of suicide attracts her: "I have / Immortal longings in me" (lines 278 - 9). The phrase suggests that she not only wishes to be dead, but to achieve celebrity, or what we call posterity: she likes the idea that her actions might acquire legendary status. Like Antony, her personality becomes more fully developed in the moments before her death. She appears to have achieved wisdom, with the realization that her own nature has been partly responsible for her fate (in lines 122-3 she talks of "[ ] frailties which before / Have often sham'd our sex").

The Clown temporarily contradicts the serious mood of this scene. Like many of Shakespeare's clowns, he provides insight into the actions and characters of both Cleopatra and Antony. The foolishness of their actions is heightened by exposition through a ridiculous medium.

At the end, Shakespeare uses a confusing image to strike home the moral ambiguity of heroic suicide: Cleopatra refers to the asp as a breast-feeding infant. The child/snake is an ironic symbol, denoting both the monstrous reality of her actions, and her perception of the suicide as the natural consequence of her love. In this way, the maternal metaphor exposes the paradox of heroic culture. In addition, Caesar's generosity reveals that his government is based on reason, and that he himself is not without compassion. The play does not offer any simple moral judgments in conclusion, except perhaps that the passions of individual men are capable of massive destruction.



# Characters

## 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

## Antony:

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 overwhelms 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' th' East my pleasure lies" (II.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.

## **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.

## **Caesar:**

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, Octave'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 'sin 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.

## Canidius: Act I

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.



## Charmian:

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 unparalleled" (V.ii.315-16). She tenderly straightens her mistress's crown. As she places an asp on her own breast, she reminds her on-stage 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 kings" (V.ii.326-27).

## Cleopatra:

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 to 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 spell-binder 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).

## **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 o' th' 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 dreamt of?" Dolabella replies in the manner of a practical but gracious man: "Gentle madam, no" (V.ii.93-94). 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," Dolabella confirms her worst fears: "Madam, he will, I know't" (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 her 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.

## Enobarbus:

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 on-stage 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"; of silver oars that beat the water like lovers' strokes; of "pretty dimpled boys, like smiling cupids," whose fans cooled Cleopatra's cheeks even as they made them glow with greater warmth (II.ii. 193-94, 202). 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.

## **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 Proculeius. 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.

## Lepidus:

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.

## **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 n'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.

## Octavia:

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.

## 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 Li, 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).

## Pompey:

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 triumvirate. 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.

## 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" (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," he 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 "used 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).

In IV.iii, on the night before the first battle of Alexandria, four soldiers in Antony's army are patrolling the streets of Alexandria. They take up separate positions, apart from each other. Suddenly, music is heard, as if from oboe-like instruments. To one soldier the music seems to be borne on the air. To another it seems to come from beneath the earth. One asks what it might signify, and another answers "'Tis the god Hercules, whom Antony loved," now forsaking him. The four men meet two other soldiers who have also heard the music, and they all marvel at it. This episode heightens the sense of the supernatural that recurs throughout the play. For more on the Roman soldiers in *Antony and Cleopatra*, see Guards and Sentry.

## Soothsayer:

He predicts the future and lends emphasis to supernatural elements in the play. The soothsayer's prophecies are sometimes obscure and sometimes forthright. Charmian and Iras, Cleopatra's attendants, turn his predictions into bawdy jokes or discount them as entertainment, a way to pass the time. He understands the quality of Charmian's devotion to her mistress - "You shall be more believing than beloved" - and presages the moments after Cleopatra's death when Charmian pauses to straighten the queen's



crown - "You shall outlive the lady whom you serve" (I.ii.23,31). With Antony, the soothsayer is more direct. When Antony asks him "whose fortunes shall rise higher, / Caesar's or mine?" he replies tersely and accurately: "Caesar's" (II.iii.16-17,18). He then goes on to explain why Antony should stay away from Caesar. He says that Antony's guardian spirit is "Noble, courageous, high unmatched" (II.iii.21), but whenever it is near Caesar it becomes overpowered. The soothsayer alludes to Caesar's reputation for being fortune's favorite: "If thou dost play him at any game," he tells Antony, "Thou art sure to lose; and of that natural luck / He beats thee 'gainst the odds" (II.iii.26, 27-28). Antony sends the soothsayer away, but admits to himself privately that the man "hath spoken true" (II.iii.34).

## **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.

## **Varrus:**

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, Varrus 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. More over, 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*



# Character Studies

## Antony

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.

## Cleopatra

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.

## Octavius

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.

## Conclusion

*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.



# 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? Other 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 in stance, 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.



## 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 mind full 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 the world sees us isn't a trait shared by all human beings.



# Overviews

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# Critical Essay #1

Source: "Antony and Cleopatra," in *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, W. W. Norton & Company, 1997, pp. 2619-27.

*[In this introduction, Cohen places Antony and Cleopatra within its literary context- with Shakespeare's own Julius Caesar as its prequel and the writings 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 arch rival 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 grandnephew 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 reemerged 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 geographic 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:

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?

(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 *A marry 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 grandnephew 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 Caesarion, 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 Caesarion 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 gypsy'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.  
(2.2.209-11)

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.  
(2.2.239-43)

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.  
(3.10.1-3)  
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.  
(4.13 9-13)

Beginning with Act 4, 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 1" (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 Philippi" (2.5.2123). 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 (13.6.17).

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 asp 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 counter currents 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 / Unpoliced" (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."



## Critical Essay #2

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 gypsy'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 cliché. 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.

Source: "Imagery and Meaning in *Antony and Cleopatra*," in *English Studies*, Vol. 43, No.5, October, 1962, pp. 343-58.

*[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 lover commits suicide but that it also leaves us wondering 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 Antony 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 or 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 of 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 meaning. 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 gypsy'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 proverb 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 dismissal

Is come from Caesar, therefore bear it, Antony. Where's Fulvia's process? Caesar's I would

say. Both?

Call in the messengers. As I am Egypt's queen,

Thou blushest, Antony, and that blood of thine

Is Caesar's homager: 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 annihilated. 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 asp 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 1. 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 Dolabella:

His legs bestrid the ocean, his rear'd arm  
Crested the world: his voice was propertied  
As all the tuned speres, 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, Chamian,  
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 to-day 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 tambourines, 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 '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 cunning 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 human-ness 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 abysm 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 pan of Shakespeare's intention. At the same time Antony's almost genial acknowledgment 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: 'Coldhearted 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 realizes 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 birth- day,  
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:

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.

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:

Give me my robe, put on my crown, I have Immortal longings in me.

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:



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.

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:

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



## Critical Essay #3

Source: "Death Imagery in *Antony and Cleopatra*," in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No.4, Autumn, 1963, pp. 399-410.

[MacMullan describes the artistic and literary image of Death that was familiar to Renaissance audiences- a grim but erotic bridegroom coming to claim his mate 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 arms in a 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 mori* 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 skillfully 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 (111.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 later 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 Shakespearean 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 Shakespearean 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 III 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 tall 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.  
*E no.* Fulvia!  
*Ant* Dead. . . .  
(1.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.  
(II1.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 (0.63 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.5 6- 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 (0.95), Antony deplores the fall of his guiding stars "into the  
abysm of hell" a.147), Cleopatra will be true to him or "lie graveless" a.166, and see  
above), and Antony determines once more to "fight maliciously. . . / And send to  
darkness all that stop me" (II.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 **in**creasing 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" (II.47, S1). He will face death as if running "to a lover's bed" (a.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.ii.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 ill's 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 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 *I 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" (II. 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 the omen or symbol of death; but he also uses an analogous image to create atmosphere for the perpetration of dark deeds, for the decline of a character's fortunes, for the death of lovers, or for the destruction of love itself. The extinguishing of light attends destructive acts and impulses of every sort. But in Antony and *Cleopatra* an added dimension is supplied to this traditional concept. The quenching of the torch describes death as it did in *Henry VI*, but the image serves also to relate characters and actions within the context of the play as a whole. Mortimer's image serves a descriptive purpose only, but the analogous figure as it is used by both Antony and Cleopatra fulfills a multiple function in the plot.

In Antony and *Cleopatra* the lovers are consistently linked by association with the great cosmic forces of the universe, particularly the stars. The "Herculean" stature of Antony is portrayed in images of light from the very first scene of the play (see I.i.2), and omens of darkness presage his fall. In keeping with the sequence of light-and-dark images



which attend Antony's eclipse, his death appears as the extinguishing of a brilliant light. In the final acts of the play, however, Antony's radiance seems a reflection of his "eastern star", and from this point on, darkness, or the quenching of light, becomes one of the primary symbols relating the deaths of the lovers. After his defeat in Act IV, when Antony thinks Cleopatra has betrayed him, he proclaims:

O sun, thy uprise shall I see no more:  
Fortune and Antony part here; even here  
Do we shake hands.  
(IV.xi.18-20)

But when Mardian reports Cleopatra's death his anger turns to grief, "all length is torture: since the torch is out" (IV.xiv.46), and with the extinction of his source of light Antony determines to die. Gazing on the mortally wounded commander moments later, a guard proclaims "the star is fall'n" (l. 106); and, catching sight of him, Cleopatra expands this image of Antony as the destruction of the heavenly bodies:

O sun,  
Bum the great sphere thou movest in!  
darkling stand  
The varying shore O' the world. O Antony.  
(IV.xv.9-11)

He dies in her arms and she cries to her attendants "our lamp is spent, it's out!" (l. 85). Her resolution to "do it after the high Roman fashion" (l. 87) recalls Antony's image of her as the torch and his attempt to follow her into darkness. In her praise of him to Dolabella, Antony appears as the source of light illuminating the vast regions of the earth:

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)

Cleopatra's hopes in Caesar dead, Iras sanctions her release to death in the image Cleopatra has adopted as the omen of her own fate, now linked with the death of Antony:

Finish, good lady; the bright day is done,  
And we are for the dark  
(V.ii.193-194)

In the consummation of her resolve to join Antony, Cleopatra becomes all "fire and air", but her light too is extinguished in death; such a pair of noble eyes will never gaze on "golden Phoebus" again. Thus the lovers, like the "starcross'd" Romeo and Juliet, appear to each other in images of light, and their deaths as the quenching of that radiance. Their brightness serves to illuminate each other as well as to brighten the



sphere in which they move. *Antony am Cleopatra* illustrates, in addition, Shakespeare's mature technique of using a conventional emblematic death-image for the purposes of characterization and for establishing the important relationships of the play. Shakespeare has used the images of death and love, of sleep and death, and of light and darkness to display the natures of the central figures, their influences upon each other, the continuity of their fates, and the union of all these factors in the dramatization of their deaths. To a greater degree than in *Romeo and Juliet* or even in *Othello*, imagery of death has become organic to the structure of Shakespeare's plot in *Antony am Cleopatra*, and it functions to preserve a kind of unity within the tragedy's vast scope.

There are numerous peripheral death images in *Antony and Cleopatra*, a number of which suggest analogies to the iconographical tradition. For example, the Servants on Pompey's galley discuss the royal feast within and the ill-omened dissension among the participants, which inspires one of them to describe moving in a sphere of greatness with a figure that suggests the death's head:

To be called a huge sphere, and not to be seen to  
move in't, are the holes where eyes should be, which pitifully disaster the cheeks.  
(II.vii.15-17)

A similar image is reiterated and expanded in the conversation between Eros and Enobarbus following the murder of Pompey:

*Eros*. . . . so the poor third is up, till death  
enlarge his confine.  
*Eno* 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.13-16)

The "chaps" or jaws which destroy by grinding again suggest the skull, but it is clearly the strife between rulers which enlarges the "confine" of death, as the rotten jaws of the tomb engulf Shakespeare's heroes and lovers. "Death" here approaches personification as the devouring skeleton which appears in Baldung Grien's etchings. The figure of Death, however, is invoked at least twice in the play, first upon the occasion of Enobarbus' death: "The hand of death hath raught him" (IV.ix.29). This conventional phrase suggesting the Dance of Death occurs again in the plea of Cleopatra as Proculeius wrenches the dagger from her hand:

Where art thou, death?  
Come hither, come! come, come, and take a  
queen  
Worth many babes and beggars!  
(V.ii.46-48)



In this brief cry to Death, Cleopatra manages to call to mind the whole progression of Death's victims of every age and condition. When Cleopatra contemplates the morality of suicide she speaks of rushing "into the secret house of death, / Ere death dare come to us" (IV.xv.8182), again suggesting the personification of Death and creating an image which is pictorially realistic if not directly related to the *danse macabre* tradition. The feeding of the mortal worm is not specifically designed to suggest the gruesome funeral statuary familiar in the Renaissance, but the punning of Cleopatra and the rustic Clown should rec Hamlet's conceits on the medieval theme, "wormes fode thu schald beo", though the context and dimension of these scenes differ widely.

A number of the death images echo the natural associations with death as Shakespeare had employed them in earlier plays. Antony links death with the preservation of honor, a theme akin to that of death in battle found in the Histories. Likewise Cleopatra's imagery of a "graveless" death and of corpses lying prey to flies and vermin (III.xiii.164 ff.; V.ii.58 ff.) recalls the description of Shakespearean battle scenes. Scarus, Antony's general, describes the rout of Actium as "the token'd pestilence, / Where death is sure (III.x.9-10), echoing plague imagery associated with death in *Timon of Athens*, for example. Antony consumed by anger against Cleopatra uses the conventional curse, "die the death" (IV.xiv.26). A series of familiar omens of death portend Antony's fall- mysterious music, "black vesper's pageants", and Fortune's desertion.

Finally Shakespeare's tragedies of love, culminating in *Antony and Cleopatra*, are related to each other by their dying scenes. The lovers Romeo, Othello, and Antony, having suffered from various forms of delusion drawn from the nature of their passions, "die with a kiss"-Romeo in joining Juliet to save her from the lustful advances of Death, Othello in realizing the innocence of Desdemona, and Antony in snatching the last moment of life to proclaim once his love for Cleopatra. Othello's is a kiss of parting, Romeo's and Antony's of reunion with the beloved. Antony's death at Cleopatra's feet allays his ironic failure by evoking a tragic pathos from his devotion to his queen:

I am dying, Egypt, dying; only  
I here importune death awhile, until  
Of many thousand kisses the poor last  
I lay upon thy lips.  
(IV.xv.18-21)

His tribute to their love *inspires* a similar image from Cleopatra:

. . . die where thou hast lived:  
Quicken with kissing: had my lips that power,  
Thus would I wear them out.  
(IV.xv.38-40)

Tragic is the realization that all her powers of attraction cannot seduce death into releasing Antony to her. Kisses will not reclaim her lover, and her grief vents itself on "the false housewife Fortune" (I. 44), whom she has offended by her enchanting of Antony. Life is suddenly meaningless to her, as *it* was for Romeo and Othello, when



Antony has breathed his last. Cleopatra's ranting is histrionic and impatient but the storm of her emotions is quickly over, giving way to the calm nobility of aspect in which we last see her. Her characteristic sensuality and emotion color her expression to the end, transforming the death scenes into final expressions of passion. Caesar's last tribute to her and his order for the burial of the lovers is appropriate to the character of the pair and the immortal reunion they sought in death:

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 ill it  
A part so famous.  
(V.ii.359-363)

The royal burial was derived from Plutarch, but the images relating character and circumstance which make the death scenes memorable are peculiarly Shakespeare's own. There is no greater tribute to his art than the consummate fascination evoked by the spectacle of the dying queen, garbed in all the verbal apparel of seductiveness and death.



## Critical Essay #4

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 C. 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 gypsy'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 *suspensions* 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 withholds 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.





Source: "'Nature's Piece 'gainst Fancy': Poetry and the Structure of Belief in *Antony and Cleopatra*," in *The Common Liar: An Essay on Antony and Cleopatra*, Yale University Press, 1973, pp. 102-68.

[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 hyperbolic 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 besonneted 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.

Shakespeare'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, Shakespeare 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 Shakespeares & 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 hyperbolic poetry which contrasts sharply with Philo's equally hyperbolic 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 gypsy'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 hyperbolic 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 hyperbolic 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 aversion 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 *de 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 Artegall 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 Artegall 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 Artegall 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 monstrosity 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 of 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 me 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 faith, and I shall  
see  
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness I' the posture of a whore.  
[5.2.215-20]

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 semi divine 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 fame. 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 *Anton;; 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 ill 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*, a knot intrinsic like love itself. In his discussion of the Neoplatonic doctrine of Blind Love [in *Pagan mysteries in the Renaissances*], [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 patts 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 Tuttle" 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.

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

Thus Henry Peacham defines paradox [in *The garden of Eloquence*]. The figure *paradox on*, or as [George] Puttenham calls it [in *The Arte of English Preze*], "the wondrer," 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 Preze* 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 nversion of sense by transport; your *allegorie* by a duplicitie of meaning or dissimulation under covert and darke intendments: one while speaking obscurely and in riddle called *A enigma*: another while by common proverbe or Adage called *Premia*: then by merry skoffe called *Irinia*: . . . 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 callum the over reacher 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 beleeve, 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 despite 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 coop" (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 hyperbolic 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 hyperbolic 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 hyperbolic 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 hyperbolic praise of them:

*Eno* Caesar? Why he's the Jupiter of men.

*Agr.* What's Antony? The god of Jupiter.

*Em.* Spake you of Caesar? How, the nonpareil?

*Agr.* O Antony, O thou Arabian bired! [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 part of the world, man; see'st not?



*Men* The thud 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 hyperbolic 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 hyperbolic 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 hyperbolic 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 o' 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 hyperbolic, Antony appeals to his ancestor Hercules as teacher:

The shirt 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 1, 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 hyperbolic 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 3, scene 13) is fundamentally comic in structure; as I have noted elsewhere, it follows the classical pattern of *miles gloriosus* 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 homed herd, for I have savage cause" (3.13.126-28), we are disinclined to believe in the extent of his grievances or in his hyperbolic 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 hyperbolic 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 hyperbolic 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 hyperbolic 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 / 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 him 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 hyperbolic appeal to the sun ("Bum 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 hyperbolic portrait of her Antony, it is only because she herself tells us that wishers are fools.



## Critical Essay #5

Source: "Doing and Undoing: The Value of Action in *Antony and Cleopatra*," in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No.3, Autumn, 1981, pp. 295-304.

[Berek locates the source of the play's dualism in the verbs "to do" and "to undo." He notes the play's frequent focus on the paradox that "doing" or completing an action also ends it, or "undoes" action. Berek remarks further 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 15 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 / Itself with strength" (IV. xiv. 4749). 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 a 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 adorning" (II. ii. 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 gypsy'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 bum 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 *A many 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. 2122). 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.

*E no.* At sea, I think.

*Men.* We have, sir.

*E no.* You have done well by water.

*Men.* And you by land.

*E no.* 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:

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

Indeed, military victory in *A many 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!" (II. 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 always more fortunate when they made wane 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 rum 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 1. 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.  
(I.iv.44-47)

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 1. 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 borne 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 ann'd neck, leap thou, attire and all, Through proof of harness to my hean,  
and  
there  
Ride on the pants triumphing!  
(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 excrement, 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" (I. 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 (including 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 contradictoriness doesn't wither the gesture's wonder. As the play proceeds, Antony comes more and more to substitute the dramatic gesture for practicable deeds. *Mter* 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,

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)



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',

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 an his sword.]*  
I learnt of thee.  
(IV. xiv. 97-103)

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 self-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 the frailties of clay. Cleopatra yields none of her infinite variety; she can chide and laugh while weeping. But she accepts Antony as he wishes to be seen, and he does the same for her.

With Antony dead, Cleopatra knows the wonder has gone out of life: "the odds is gone, / And there is nothing left remarkable / Beneath the visiting moon" (IV. xv. 66-68). Antony's death dims Cleopatra's polymorphous splendor and makes her a mere woman whose "doings" have no more glamour than a milkmaid's "meanest chares" (IV. xv. 75).



But only a few more "chares" remain to be done. Cleopatra sends Charmian and Iras to fetch her best attires and tells Charmian, "when thou hast done this chare, I'll give thee leave / To play till doomsday" (Y. ii. 231-32). Reunion with Antony in death, for Cleopatra, is a translation from a world of toil to a world of freedom. She goes from "chares" to "play." Her doings are theatrical; she returns to the mode of "doing thus" as she tells her women to show her like a queen, garbed as she was on Cydnus when she met Mark Antony. She gives up the fruits of the dungy earth; her noble act turns her to fire and air. Dying as a "lass unparallel'd" (V. ii. 316), Cleopatra transfigures the asp's poison into a lover's pinch and a nursing babe. Cleopatra transforms death's undoing into a magical doing that replicates in a dying moment courtship, begetting, and childrearing. But such magical deeds exist only in the play-world of *imaginatio*. Shackling accidents and bolting up change costs not just kingdoms, but all doing hereafter. She has done the deed that ends all other deeds.

#### IV

Caesar, Antony, and Cleopatra all agree that there are grim limits to the joys one can take in earthly achievements. Antony and Cleopatra refuse to palate the dung. So long as they are united, they assert, performing deeds of love-"doing thus" - has intrinsic value with out reference to its effects in the public world. Embracing paradox as they embrace one another, they choose life and die, though the realm in which they will forever play their parts is knowable only in imagination. For Caesar, the absence of pleasure is no reason for an absence of action. Unheroically, he presses on from success to success, knowing that the power he achieves assures neither permanence nor affection. If the world is not well lost, neither is it well won.

How does this shared perception of the limited joys rewarding worldly success affect our response to *A many and Cleopatra*? I believe that it reinforces [A.C.] Bradley's conclusion [in "Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*'] that the tragic effect of the play is different from, and lesser than, that of *Harriet*, *Othello*, *Lear*, or *Macbeth*. Bradley points out that the external magnitude of the play's public conflicts "fails to uplift or dilate the imagination." He attributes this failure to the selfishness of the contending politicians, whose narrow concerns make it difficult for us to care deeply about the outcome of their quarrels. But it seems to me that the "failure" surely part of Shakespeare's conscious artistic intention- arises rather from the sharpness of the play's rendering of the limited joys of worldly success. By and large, the play's politicians and soldiers aren't bad men; it is not they who are flawed so much as it is the dungy element they work in. Bradley goes on to say that "we are saddened by the very fact that the catastrophe saddens us so little; it pains us that we should see so much triumph and pleasure." Because the lovers have from the first been "tarnished," "it is better for the world's sake, and not less for their own, that they should fail and die." Though right in his basic response, Bradley is surely wrong in this last detail. The reason we aren't saddened, as we are at the end of other great tragedies, is that we cannot value highly the world the lovers have lost. Antony and Cleopatra haven't been defeated in their efforts to achieve and sustain success in the world; they have decided, for reasons even Caesar would have no trouble understanding, that beneath the wide arch of the ranged empire there are no successes worth having. Only deeds blessed by the paradoxical imaginations of the



loving pair escape the decay of the varying tide. Contemplating dead Antony, dead Cleopatra, we may echo Cleopatra's words to Iras:

Dost thou lie still?

If thus thou vanishest, thou tell'st the world It is not worth leave-taking.

(V. ii. 296- 98)



## Critical Essay #6

Rome and Egypt function effectively as characters in *A many 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.

Source: "Antony and Cleopatra," in *Rome and Romans According to Shakespeare*, Jacobean Drama Studies, edited by Dr. James Hogg, No. 51, Institut fur Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1976, pp. 246-64.

*[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 *A many 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 Cassius 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 16 *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 *thymatic* 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 *Cariolanus* 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.

*A many 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 ('til 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 Tonight 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 of 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-presentations 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 'Urtu 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'st Hirtius and Pansa, consuls, at thy heel  
D,d 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 glided 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 honor that I speak it now)  
Was borne so like a soldier that thy cheek  
So much as lank'd not.  
(1.4.56-71)

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, 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 worthy 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 *A many and Cleopatra*. Shakespeare focuses upon Rome at times of grave constitutional crisis or innovation. In *The Rape of Lucrece* we have the transition from tyranny to an aristocratic Republic; in *Coriolanus* we have the innovation of Tribune 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-Re publican rule of Caesar; in *A many 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 *A many 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 about the whole matter; in procreation and bringing to birth the mortal creature is endowed with a touch of immortality.

It is this mode, the lowest rung on the classical ladder, which claims our attention in regard to *A many 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 similar 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.



## Critical Essay #7

Source: "The Social Dimensions of Tragedy: *Timon of Athens, Coriolanus, Antony and Cleopatra*," in *Shakespeare's Tragic Perspective*, The University of Georgia Press, 1976, pp. 201-65.

*[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 than 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 dotting 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 mom, 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 Chamey observes [in *Shake speare'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 *A many 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 historic 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 rain to batter / The fortress of it" (III, ii, 30-31); Octavia will be a "blessed lottery" (II, 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.



## Critical Essay #8

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. Barroll 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 conflict amounts to a sense of duty toward Rome rather than simply toward himself; specifically, she contends 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 Charney in the section on CLEOPATRA, and the excerpt by Gordon Ross Smith in the section on OCTAVIUS.

Source: "Shattered Personality in Shakespeare's Antony," in *The Psychiatric Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No.3, July, 1965, pp. 448-56.

*[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 "wiles" 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 over 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 allurements. Even in the first scene, Philo says that "his captain's heart. . . is become the bellows and the fan / To cool a gypsy'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 Antony*, 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 choleric 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 choleric, 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.

Modern 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 Scarus 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 ill 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 gracing 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.



## Critical Essay #9

Source: "Mark Antony and the Tournament of Life," in *Shakespearean Tragedy: Genre, Tradition, and Change in Antony and Cleopatra*, Associated University Presses, Inc., 1984, pp. 83-129.

*[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. A many 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 heard that Cleopatra has apparently killed herself, he becomes suicidal.]*

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.

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 follow'd that 1 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 Man 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 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.  
(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 canst 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.  
*A nt.* 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. "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 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 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 "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." Such moral terms need not over concern 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:

Ha, my brave emperor!

Shall we dance now the Egyptian bacchanals And celebrate our drink?

*Pam* 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.  
(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.

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 Me  
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 Pans a, 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 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'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 adamant 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.  
(3.1.25-27)

This is what must be done to avoid irritating Antony:

I'll humbly signify what ill 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 throwaway  
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.  
(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 Brundisium  
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 lieutenantry, 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, cloud-like 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 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;* He will not fight with me, Domitius?

*Eno.* No. *A'nt;* 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 parts so poor



But was a race of heaven. They are so still,  
Or thou, the greatest soldier of the world,  
Art tum'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 mom,

Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed;

Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst

I wore lus 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 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 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 Criems Pompey's- besides what hotter hours,

Unregist'ed 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 till's speech as any kind of orthodox repentance of the error of his ways: Antony, by "tem perance," 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.



## Critical Essay #10

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 C 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 C 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 MacMullan 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.

Source: "Cleopatra's Tragedy," in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. XI, No.2, Spring, 1960, pp. 147-62.

*[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 afire and the action unresolved. Mills then defines what makes Cleopatra tragic: she is a self-centered, "self-pitying," and manipulative character who is unable to admit her tare for Antony or to recognize his worth or his tare 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 Landon 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 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). 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 5 sounds and the concatenation of /ls and f's and is 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",



contrarities 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 Playwrights*] 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,

(II.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,

(II.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 Caesarian 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" (II. 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?

(IV.viii.16-18)

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! 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.

(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 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

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.n) 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" (ll 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' "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 rum,

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 Nuus' mud

Lay me stark- nak'd and let the waterflies



Blow me mto abhorring! Rather make

My country's high pyramides my gibbet

And hang me up in chains!

(V.u.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:

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.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!" 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,

(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

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.

(I.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 other world 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 through out 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 [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. (Pp.375-376)

Much nearer to the text 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 Schucking 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 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 *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.



# Critical Essay #11

Source: "Antony and Cleopatra," in *All of Shakespeare*,

Columbia University Press, 1993, pp. 289-98.

*[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 *riggish* 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'erpicturing 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 "discandying" in the play.

We see a very different Cleopatra in act 2, scene 5, 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 1, scene 5, 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! y' 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" (2.5.11819). 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 runs.

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" (1.1.12). *Dotage* is an Elizabethan word specifically connected with foolishness in love, especially on the part of an old lover for his young mistress. The warlike 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" (46). There is a pun on *front*, both battlefront and Cleopatra's dark and sensual forehead or face (or her own "front" in a more general sense). This is dotage, 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 4, scenes 14 and 15, and in act 5, scene 2, 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 dislimning* At the beginning of act



4, scene 14, 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 symbolic 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)-*sport* is a specifically all sexual word- "How heavy weighs my lord! / Our strength is all gone into heaviness" (32-33). This echoes the earl's 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.

(2.7.72-75)

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 3, scene 1 immediately following repeats the same political reality in a different form, it is a companion scene to act 2, scene 7. 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 'rwould 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, meta-theatrical, 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, and I shall  
see Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness /  
th' posture of a whore.  
(5.2.218-21)

This is alarmingly specific, since the role of Cleopatra on the Elizabethan stage was played by an adolescent boy actor, whose squeaking voice was just breaking. The reference is doubly histrionic since Cleopatra's "rear" part is exceedingly stagy. The passage on Caesar's triumph leads directly into the ending, where Cleopatra wants to be staged appropriately: "Show me, my women, like a queen: go fetch / My best attires" (227-28). Costume and properties are emphasized in Cleopatra's final sequence: "Give me my robe, put on my crown, I have / Immortal longings in me" (280-81).

Another staged scene is the mysterious act 4, scene 3, where a company of soldiers enter- there are only three speaking parts- and then "*place themselves in every corner of the stage*" (7 s.d.). Presumably Shakespeare is remembering the medieval staging of the world and its four comers. There are also portentous sound effects: "*Music of the hautboys is under the stage*" (11 s.d.). This is like the music of hautboys, or oboes, in *Macbeth* when the Witches' caldron sinks (4.1.106 s.d.). The scene of the anonymous soldiers in *Antony and Cleopatra* signifies that "the god Hercules, whom Antony loved, / Now leaves him" (4.3. 15-16). The music in the air and under the earth, like the uncanny music of Ariel in *The Tempest*, indicates the defeat of Antony because his tutelary deity, Hercules, now departs.

This gives a mythological largeness to this strange scene. Incidentally, it is probable that this is the exact moment when Enobarbus also leaves Antony. The theatricality of act 4, scene 3 changes the dimension of the play, whose dramatic realities it translates onto another level of significance. I think Shakespeare wanted us to think that there is no way of separating the histrionic from the real: there is only a single reality in *Antony and Cleopatra* composed of many contradictory parts.





## Critical Essay #12

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 out. comes 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. O1ampion in the ROME VERSUS EGYPT section.

Source: "The Melting of Authority in *Antony and Cleopatra*," in *Oilege Literature*, Vol. 1, No.1, Winter, 1974, pp. 1-18.

*[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 "re. strained" but "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-serving 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 recalls 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.

Ant 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 a-feared," and that his "lustre thickens" when Caesar's angel is by (II.iii.16-29). Dramaturgically this extended warning is pointless unless true. It *is*, more over, 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.iii.S-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 ill 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 if I knew / What hoop should hold us staunch from edge to edge / O' the world, I would



pursue it" (II.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 unforgivable 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 dissension 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 behoves us to go back to Pompey's first appearance, which occurred shortly after Caesar's (I.iv. and III, 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 (II.i.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" (II.vi.102).

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.122123); 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.105107), and needs to be steadied upon leaving (II.vii.126128), 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.7375). 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 Commagena, . . . offered him a thousand talents to be pardoned his rebellion. . . . But Ventidius made him answer, that he should send unto Antonius, who was not farre off, and [who] would not suffer Ventidius to make any peace with Antiochus, to the end that yet this little exploit 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.ii.120). 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.ii.24-25). But Agrippa and Enobarbus continue in asides their quizzical and skeptical comments upon the doings of the great folk (III.ii.5159). 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 warre 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, bicause 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 call'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 offense 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 Shakespeare'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.2629; 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 temperaunce, modestie, and civill life, as for his three triumphes. For it grieved them to see the gates commonly shut against the Captaines, Magistrates of the citie, and also Ambassadors of straunge 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 he got by all kind of possible extorcions, briberie and policle. For they did not only sell by the crier, the goods of those whom they had outlawed, and appointed to murder, slaunderously 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 teachest like a fool: the way to lose him" (I.iii.9-10). Her technique works: he finds her "enchanted" 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 the conversation rather 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.2025). 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.6166), 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 mares  
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.3335). 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.xii.11-15), and he deceives' elf 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.11-15, 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 anyone 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 blanche* 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 poynt." 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' facesaving 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 transcendent 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.1011). 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.2429); "The witch shall die, To the young Roman boy she hath sold me, and I fall/ Under this plot" (IV.xii.4749); "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?" (111.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:

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)

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 Florus*, Bolton's translation is quite specific: "Antonius was the first of the two who slew himself. The Quenne kneeling at the feete of Caesar, laid baite 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 beene to Antony, / Thinke thou the same I might have beene 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 heroic 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:

73. 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 self-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 rascallitie of that age commonly represented itself to its public.



# Adaptations

*Antony and Cleopatra*. Great Britain/Spain, 1972.

Directed by Charlton Heston. Heston stars as Mark Antony and Hildegard Neil stars as Cleopatra. Eric Porter plays Enobarbus. Available on video. 160 minutes.

*Antony and Cleopatra*. BBC and *Time/Life*, Inc., 1980. Directed by Jonathan Miller. Starring Colin Blakely, Jane Lapotaire, and Ian Charleson. Available on video, 180 minutes.



## Further Study

### Literary Commentary

Barroll, J. Leeds. "Shakespeare and the Art of Character: A Study of Antony," pp. 159-235. *Shakespeare Studies Annual*, No. V, edited by J. Leeds Barroll. Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers 1969.

A thorough analysis of what distinguishes Antony from other characters. Barroll asserts that the character of Antony is defined by his own interpretation of what it means to be a soldier. In other words, for Antony, soldierly virtue includes chivalry as well as courage. However, Barroll points out, those men who serve Caesar believe that soldiers should follow policy- or a practical, Machiavellian form of warfare and strategy.

"The Characterization of Octavius," pp. 231-87.

*Shakespeare Studies Annual*, No. VI, edited by J. Leeds Barroll. Dubuque, IA Wm C. Brown Company Publishers, 1970.

Discusses the difficulty of settling on a single character description for Octavius Caesar. Barroll observes that unlike Antony, Octavius fails to inspire loyalty in his men. Further, Barroll suggests that for someone who likes being in control of events, Octavius is ultimately unable to control either Antony or Cleopatra.

- - - "Cleopatra and the Size of Dreaming." In *Shakespearean Tragedy: Genre, Tradition, and Change*, in "*Antony and Cleopatra*," pp. 130-87. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1984.

Analyzes the wide variety of responses- both positive and negative- to Cleopatra's character. Barroll acknowledges that Cleopatra's lack of self-understanding or of feelings of guilt might disqualify her for tragic status. Barroll locates Cleopatra's tragedy in the destruction of all of her "grandiose" plans- for herself and for Antony- and in her genuine grief at Antony's death.

Bevington, David. Introduction to *Antony and Cleopatra* by William Shakespeare, edited by David Bevington, pp. 1-70. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Provides a detailed overview of the play, including date and source material and critical assessments of the characters. Bevington also focuses on the use of irony in the play- in particular, how irony sets the play's dialogue at odds with the play's action. Finally, Bevington evaluates the numerous ways in which *Antony and Cleopatra* has been performed before live audiences and includes a discussion of the difficulties of staging so elaborate a play- with its barges, battles, and monuments.

Cantor, Paul A. "Part Two: *Antony and Cleopatra*." In *Shakespeare's Rome: Republic and Empire*, pp. 127-208. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976.



In his three chapters on *Antony and Cleopatra*, Cantor argues first that the play cannot be divided neatly into private versus public life; second he asserts that Antony is not "bewitched" away from Rome by Cleopatra, but that he is already aware and disapproving of Rome's faults. Third, Cantor argues that the love between Antony and Cleopatra is made possible through its very originality and tendency toward exaggeration, and that "the guiding principal of [the two lovers] in both public and private life is open hostility to stale custom." Incidentally, Cantor also argues that Antony and Cleopatra achieve marriage through death- thus turning a potentially tragic play into a comedy.

Doran, Madeleine. "'High Events as These'; The Language of Hyperbole in *Antony and Cleopatra*." *Queen's Quarterly* LXXII, No.1 (Spring 1965): 26-51.

Interprets the play in the context of the Elizabethan fascination for hyperbolic language, or the expression of things as grandiose, perfect, and ideal. Doran concludes by suggesting that Shakespeare used hyperbole not only to satisfy his audience's tastes but also to demonstrate that the "true wonder" of human beings- of Antony and Cleopatra for example- exists not in exaggeration but in the story of their lives.

Fitch, Robert E. "No Greater Crack?" *Shakespeare Quarterly* XIX, (1968): 3-17.

Contends that we cannot mourn Cleopatra's death as tragic because it is the result of a pre-Christian struggle between power and pleasure in a world that is "coldly geopolitical" rather than genuinely loving or honorable.

Fitz, L. T. "Egyptian Queens and Male Reviewers: Sexist Attitudes in *Antony and Cleopatra* Criticism." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 28, No.3 (Summer 1977): 297-316.

Asserts that critical approaches to the character Cleopatra have been for the most part misogynistic. Fitz explains that critics either condemn Cleopatra as "a treacherous strumpet" or celebrate her love for Antony as "transcendental." Both assessments, Fitz explains, do a disservice to the character and to the play. Fitz argues that Critics need to suspend their own preconceived notions at least long enough to humanize their characterization of Cleopatra- to understand her emotions- before they can interpret the play accurately.

Harrier, Richard C. "Cleopatra's End." *Shakespeare Quarterly* XIII, No.1 (Winter 1962):63-65.

Briefly assesses the characters of Cleopatra, Antony, and Octavius. Harrier concludes that Antony is superior to Cleopatra but that when she dies for his sake, Cleopatra raises herself somewhat to Antony's level.

Honigmann, E. A. J. "Antony versus Cleopatra." In *Shakespeare: Sewn Tragedies*, pp. 150-69. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1976.

Discusses the ways in which the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra changes halfway through the play. Honigmann contends that in the first half, Cleopatra



dominates the action and Antony is the butt of her jokes; however, in the second half, Antony newly ashamed by his military losses- achieves moral and theatrical superiority over Cleopatra.

Jose, Nicholas. "Antony and Cleopatra: Face and Heart." *Philological Quarterly* 62, No.4 (Fall 1983): 487-505.

Argues that in *Antony and Cleopatra*, characters form the central interest of the play. Specifically, Jose discusses the characters' emotional attachments to one another, to an idea, or to their homeland as crucial to the outcome of the play.

Kuriyama, Constance Brown. "The Mother of the World: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*." *English Literary Renaissance* 7, No.3 (Autumn 1977): 324-51.

Applies Freudian psychology to the play. Kuriyama argues that *Antony and Cleopatra* should not be read merely as a moral lesson or for its poetry. Instead, she asserts that critics should acknowledge that the play functions as a sexual fantasy which provides us the pleasure of knowing that when Antony and Cleopatra are at last "united in death," they achieve "honor," "selfhood," and "immortality."

MacKenzie, Clayton G. "Antony and Cleopatra: A Mythological Perspective." *Orbis Litterarum* 45, No.4 (1990): 309-29. Argues against those critics who suggest that the play is based on the militaristic sensibility of Roman mythology. Instead, MacKenzie argues that Shakespeare intentionally undercuts Roman mythology in *Antony and Cleopatra* and replaces it with an original mythology based on love.

Nevo, Ruth. "Antony and Cleopatra." In *Tragic Form in Shakespeare*, pp. 306-55. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972.

Describes the characters Antony and Cleopatra as "mutual pairs" participating equally in a tragic end- unlike Othello and Desdemona or Hamlet and Ophelia. Nevo contends that, despite scholarly complaints that Cleopatra is fickle and "devious," the Egyptian Queen is in fact faithful to her love for Antony throughout the play and she remains convinced that their love will survive after death.

Shapiro, Stephen A. "The Varying Shore of the World: Ambivalence in *Antony and Cleopatra*." *Modern Language Quarterly* XXVII, No.1 (March 1966): 18-32.

Observes that there have been two opposing critical approaches to the characters Antony and Cleopatra: a moralistic view that censures the two lovers; and a "transcendental" view that asserts that the pair's love is superior. Shapiro focuses on the play's dualism, arguing that the series of opposites in the play- love and war, fertility and death, Rome and Egypt- serves to draw our attention to the ambiguities in our own world.

Smith, Sheila M. "'This Great Solemnity': A Study of the Presentation of Death in *Antony and Cleopatra*." *English Studies* 45, No.2 (1964): 163-76.



Sees the guiding force behind *Antony and Cleopatra* as the struggle of opposites: Octavius versus Antony; Rome versus Egypt; Antony versus Cleopatra. Smith demonstrates how Shakespeare skillfully maneuvers these opposites to their ultimate resolution, which is death.

Whitney, Cynthia Kolb. "The War in *Antony and Cleopatra*." *Literature & Psychology* XIII, No.3 (Summer 1963): 63-66. Describes the war between Egypt and Rome as one where "the world is split in half and fights itself." Whitney observes that this actual war becomes a symbol for the inner struggles of characters such as Antony, who feels torn between his loyalty for Rome and his attraction to Cleopatra. The inner struggle even affects less central characters such as Octavia, who is caught between her sense of duty to her new husband, Antony, and her love for and loyalty to her brother, Octavius.

Williamson, Marilyn. "The Political Context in *Antony and Cleopatra*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* XXI, No.3 (Summer 1970): 241-51.

Evaluates Antony and Cleopatra as "rulers as well as lovers." Williamson focuses on the play's politics, arguing that much can be learned about Antony and Cleopatra from their treatment of their subordinates as well as from the manner in which their subordinates view them.

Williamson, Marilyn L. "Fortune in *Antony and Cleopatra*." *JE GP* LXVII (1968): 423-29.

Demonstrates how preeminent Fortune is in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Williamson asserts that by their changeable natures, both Antony and Cleopatra resemble the goddess, Fortune. Williamson also contends that Shakespeare relies on Fortune as a motif in the play to indicate the unpredictability of life and to underscore the point at which Cleopatra changes into someone who- after Antony's death- refuses to be ruled by Fortune.

Wolf, William D. "'New Heaven, New Earth': The Escape from Mutability in *Antony and Cleopatra*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 33, No.3 (Autumn 1982): 328-35.

Acknowledges the opposing forces at work in the play: politics versus love, public versus private, Rome versus Egypt. Wolf then proceeds to point out that despite these differences, the worlds of Rome and Egypt share an important element: both are subject to violent fluctuations.

With regard to Rome, Wolf observes, the change is political; with regard to Egypt, it is emotional. In both cases, Wolf asserts, the changes revolve around Antony.

Wright, Austin. "Antony and Cleopatra," pp. 37-51. In *Shakespeare: Lectures on Five Plays, Carnegie Series in English, Number Four*, by A Fred Sochatoff et al. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Institute of Technology, 1958.

Observes that the play's central issues are politics and love. Wright views Antony as a straightforward, tragic figure but sees Cleopatra as much more complex. Cleopatra, he asserts, is "fascinating" but untrustworthy.



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## **Introduction**

### **Purpose of the Book**

The purpose of Shakespeare for Students (SfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's □For Students□ Literature line, SfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels



frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

### Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

### How Each Entry Is Organized





Each entry, or chapter, in SfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
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- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
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- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
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SfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Shakespeare for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

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□Night.□ Shakespeare for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Shakespeare for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Shakespeare for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

### We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Shakespeare for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: [ForStudentsEditors@gale.com](mailto:ForStudentsEditors@gale.com). Or write to the editor at:

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