

THE THEME OF ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to suggest the theme of Antony and Cleopatra, the historical Roman play by William Shakespeare.

This study should give students of Shakespeare a better understanding of the nature of this play's hero and heroine. There are differences of opinion and some ambiguity surrounding the play. Many critics view the play as a kind of lyrical poem, exalting love as the greatest value in life; and this value is triumphant over death. These romantic critics hear and accept what Antony and Cleopatra say about their love, for most of the time the two lovers exalt love above all else in the world, including the power of Rome! Other critics make realistic observations based on the actions of the lovers and view the play as an exposure of human weakness and corruption. The soldiers in Antony's own army condemn his love of Cleopatra because to them Antony's actions are detrage and debauchery. Yet we see the two lovers call this love divine. Which view is correct? A rational view is expressed by Willard Farnham:

Shakespeare does not organize his tragedy as a drama of the love of Antony and Cleopatra, but as a drama of the rise and fall of Antony in the struggle for world rulership that takes place after he has met Cleopatra.<sup>2</sup>

G. Wilson Knight sees the play as stressing the transfiguration of man under the intense ray of love and poetic vision:

Antony and Cleopatra discloses a vision rather 'universalistic': nature itself is here transfigured, and our view is directed not to the material alone, nor to the earth alone, but rather to the universal elements of earth, water, air, fire, and music, and beyond these to the all-transcending visionary humanism which endows man with a supernatural glory. The vision is eminently a life-vision and a love-vision: and our love-theme ranges from purely sensuous delights to the rarefied heights. . .of intense spiritual contemplation.<sup>3</sup>

This paper will oppose the view expressed by Knight and support a rational view of the play.

A situation quickly develops in the play where Antony is caught in a conflict between his love of Cleopatra and his duty as a Roman soldier. Cleopatra represents a sensual power that is the driving force in the destruction of Antony. She will have her hero, and in having him she destroys him. Standing opposite Cleopatra is the reason and power of Rome, the other side of Antony's nature. Octavius and his sister Octavia are symbolic in the drama of the Roman traditions and virtues. Antony is faced with a choice: he may not have both Cleopatra and his stature as a noble Roman. This unresolved conflict develops a dual nature in Antony that leads to a loss of judgment, which is the ultimate cause of his tragedy.

## CHAPTER ONE

### VIEWS ON THE THEME

The most defensible basis for the theme of Antony and Cleopatra is the unresolved conflict of Antony. He is attracted one way by his sensual nature, represented by Cleopatra, and is influenced oppositely by Roman traditions, shown by actions toward Rome and by contrast with Octavius Caesar. His lack of unity causes the hero to vacillate between the choice of pleasure or reason, thereby causing his frustration, his loss of clear judgment, and his ultimate destruction.

At Actium the force of his sensual nature entices him to flee the battle and follow Cleopatra. Cleopatra wins the love of Antony but destroys him in the process, for Antony dies in the arms of his lover while he wishes to be remembered as a noble soldier of Rome. Cleopatra, now without her protector, destroys herself rather than face public display in Caesar's triumph.

#### The Romantic View

The strong demanding passion of these lovers causes many critics to look upon that love as a purifying flame or as the eternal diadem of life: Antony and Cleopatra may lose the world, but the world is well lost because their love is infinite.

Donald Stauffer takes a romantic view by seeing the play as a dramatic romance:

He [Shakespeare] dares to reverse the classic tragic pattern, to suggest that the quality of intensity of an emotion is superior to the counting-house reckoning of a social reason. He [Shakespeare] wagers all for love. . . . the play is not the next-to-last of the tragedies, but the first and greatest of the dramatic romances.<sup>1</sup>

Stauffer thinks that Shakespeare makes passion larger than the world and ". . . wagers all for love."<sup>2</sup> The love of Antony and Cleopatra becomes so boundless that death has little meaning to them because ". . . these lovers, far from fearing death, embrace it as a third lover,"<sup>3</sup> according to Mark Van Doren. We have a similar sentiment from G. Wilson Knight, who states:

. . . nature itself is here transfigured, and our view is directed . . . to the all-transcending visionary humanism which endows man with a supernatural glory.<sup>4</sup>

To A. C. Bradley the lovers become ". . . victims of passion; but the passion that ruins Antony also exalts him, he touches the infinite in it . . . ." <sup>5</sup> This idea applies not only to Antony but to Cleopatra. Thomas McFarland believes that a transformation of transcending quality also changes her nature into spirit itself:

We realize at last that Cleopatra's infinite variety encompasses not only variety but infinity.<sup>6</sup>

Dover Wilson adds that the lovers ". . . triumph over Caesar



and every other political 'ass unpolicied' who finds in life no purpose but an extension of his own tethered range upon this 'dungy earth'.<sup>7</sup> M. R. Ridley attempts an objective

view of the play, but he calls it a love tragedy because "The magnanimity of Antony sets him above fate at last, and the death of Cleopatra is her triumph. We see these lovers hasten to reunion 'where souls do couch on flowers'. . . ,"<sup>8</sup>

In an objective appraisal Franklin M. Dickey observes that the romantic critics do not admit that so rapturous a love can be degenerative, so that if Antony and Cleopatra lose the world, the world is well lost. Compared to the passionate glory of love, life itself is dross and the play is beyond good and evil. Conventional morality is therefore too paltry a measure by which to judge the imperial lovers. Franklin M. Dickey says, "At its extreme this criticism sees the play as an almost mystical exaltation of passion and Antony and Cleopatra as canonized martyrs to love."<sup>9</sup>

#### The Rational View

The romantic interpretation is answered by critics with a rational approach. Willard Farnham explains this view:

Largely because Shakespeare takes care to give his hero and heroine regal natures that demand expression, Antony and Cleopatra is not a drama in which the world is well lost for love. That is, it does not show the world to be, to the losers, as nothing when compared to their love. We certainly do not find Shakespeare implying that the world which is finally lost to Octavius weighs little in the balance against what Antony and Cleopatra find in each other. He lets us know that it weighs very much indeed.<sup>10</sup>

Some romantic interpreters also place this love above moral judgment; Franham says, however, that the final effect of Antony and Cleopatra does not seem a romantic cleansing of the lovers' faults:

Certainly the spirit in which he [Shakespeare] deals with their faults is not that of the preaching moralist; but neither is it that of the preaching romanticist who, because of sympathy for Antony and Cleopatra, would free them from the judgment of the moralist.<sup>11</sup>

According to William Rosen, we must question the power of passion's nobility to absolve man from all duty:

If we were to concentrate only on the imagery of love, neglecting dramatic context, there would be the danger of extracting Cleopatra's heightened vision of love, so magnificently phrased, to argue that the playwright presents it as life's highest value, more real than society or morality.<sup>12</sup>

Society cannot be dismissed just because Antony bends to his sensual nature, for he wishes to regain his heroic past and his stature as a noble soldier. The rational view is also supported by the traditional characterization of the lovers, for Franklin Dickey notes the following: "Traditionally Antony and Cleopatra are examples of rulers who threw away a kingdom for lust, and this is how, despite the pity and terror which Shakespeare makes us feel, they appear in his play."<sup>13</sup> Willard Farnham supports this view by showing how the Elizabethan writers regarded the lovers:

Elizabethan writers who found cause to mention Antony and Cleopatra in passing were apt to deal harshly with them: Antony was "besotted" upon Cleopatra and lost fame, power, and life through

"blind love" of her; Cleopatra, "Antonius Harlotte," was a woman who worked mischiefs "by subtile meanes," and it was known that there were "horrible murders she had done to manye Princes and noble men of all countreyes where she came"; Antony and Cleopatra got "that punishment which they both deserued," a punishment that was one of "Gods heauy judgements."<sup>14</sup>

David Cecil places the love of Antony and Cleopatra in second place behind the political struggle between Antony and Octavius.

With him [Shakespeare] the love-story is seen always in its relation to the rivalry between Octavius and Antony. A large part of the play is concerned with this only, and not with the love-story at all. . . . Shakespeare conceives his play as a piece of history; its interest is largely political.<sup>15</sup>

If love is the main theme of Antony and Cleopatra, Cecil says, "Shakespeare is shockingly careless about sticking to it. A large part of the plot has nothing to do with the love-story."<sup>16</sup>

The love of Antony and Cleopatra has a paradoxical nobility that is capable of creating sympathy and admiration, yet the love is deeply flawed like the lovers themselves. Farnham notes that sentiment was not the tendency in Shakespeare's age;<sup>17</sup> so we may doubt that Shakespeare planned to wash out the faults of Antony and Cleopatra. Although Dolores Cunningham thinks Cleopatra's actions are comparable to those of a penitent Christian,<sup>18</sup> Dover Wilson says that "The religious and ethical tone is in fact pagan. . . ."<sup>19</sup> Essentially the play is a panorama of the Roman world in which Antony is faced with a struggle between the antithesis of passion or political power. Antony tries to unite the two elements,

but he loses his power at Actium and finally loses his passionate happiness. A rational view of the play does not exalt the love, but views the action as a drama of human weakness. There is no significant change or transfiguration in Antony or Cleopatra. Cleopatra enjoys the physical passions and love of life in bringing the Roman to his end, but Antony dies desiring an honorable reputation as a soldier and does not seek to glorify his love. Cleopatra in her death scene does try to glorify the love but fails to sustain the vision and dies with her consistent flaw of sensuousness.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE NATURE OF ANTONY

Antony's great conflict is the capacity of responding not only to the traditions of Rome but also to the sensual nature of Cleopatra. But he cannot keep his balance while trying to bestride both natures.

Lawrence Bowling observes that every organism or organization must maintain perfect unity if it is to function properly.<sup>1</sup> Antony can have only one center; for if two elements of his nature attempt to function as dual centers, the result is duality and disaster, not unity. As a soldier of Rome, Antony has been dominated by Roman tradition; but at the opening of the play Cleopatra's seductiveness has increased the sensual in Antony. His passion is becoming stronger, for Antony shouts, "Let Rome in Tiber melt. . . ." (I.i.34).<sup>2</sup> Yet Antony understands his dangerous position because moments later he remarks, "These strong Egyptian fetters I must break, / Or lose myself in dotage" (I.ii.119-120). The opposites of Rome and Egypt merge, unite, and fall apart within Antony, according to John Danby, who says, "They enable him [Shakespeare] to handle the reality he is writing about--the vast containing opposites of Rome and Egypt, the World and the Flesh."<sup>3</sup> Thomas McFarland sees a love versus world pattern in Antony:

Love and the World, striding forth almost like personifications from an old morality play, contend in Antony's mind for domination. With added dimensions, transfigured into the love of Antony and Cleopatra, and the world of Octavius, the struggle breaks from every point in Shakespeare's pattern; and when this pattern imprints its form on the stuff of our own experience, the struggle, ever renewed, finds in each of us its agonized counterpart. . . . The world is viewed as virtue, the love of Antony and Cleopatra as lust.<sup>4</sup>

Antony has no method of expression except as Roman or Egyptian, and he cannot maintain his balance while he walks the tight-wire of these two opposites.

The unity of the play is the structural pattern of opposing values, Rome and Egypt, revolving around and within Antony. He desires fulfilment of his sensual manhood and retainment of his heroic Roman virtue. William Rosen comments on the two Antonys, one of Rome and one of Egypt:

There are two Antonys: the illustrious public figure of the past and the decadent private figure of the present, the Antony of Rome and the Antony of Egypt. . . . Part of Antony endorses the soldier's ideal and urges him to return to public life, recapture his reputation as peerless warrior and become the magnificent man he used to be. The other part of Antony yields to private emotion, the all-consuming passion for Cleopatra, and urges him to love in the grand manner, to deny and exclude the outside world and create a romantic paradise.<sup>5</sup>

Yet we may not classify the conflict as a completely external one between Rome and Egypt. "It is a conflict within Antony's own being. . . ." <sup>6</sup> says Alan Warner; and Dean Lyman calls Antony an unmeditative, unreflective Hamlet.<sup>7</sup> Antony is faced with the two external forces, but he cannot make the mental choice for one over the other. The doctrine of duality

is therefore asserted as the theme: Shakespeare portrays Antony as responsible for his own tragedy by Antony's failure to reconcile the two opposing elements of his being.

### Textual Support For The Theme

First impressions of drama are of prime importance; so Shakespeare asserts the theme at once through the indignant, hard-natured Roman soldiers. Philo labels Antony ". . . the triple pillar of the world transformed / Into a strumpet's fool" (I.i.12-14). Philo heralds the characteristic attitude of the Roman mind,<sup>8</sup> as he introduces a world placed in perpetual contrast: the opposition of Roman and Egyptian reflected in the conflict of Antony. William Rosen comments on Philo's role:

Philo's words constitute a kind of prologue to the forthcoming action. And since his speech is addressed to soldiers and audience alike, we, the audience, are asked to view the ensuing performance in a very particular way: to determine whether Antony and Cleopatra, in their words and actions, either confirm or deny Philo's judgment.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the play Antony alternately confirms and denies the judgment of Philo. His first move is to confirm the soldier's belittlement, for Antony rejects the messages from Rome; but his dual nature is soon indicated by Cleopatra:

He was dispos'd to mirth, but on the sudden  
A Roman thought hath struck him. (I.ii.86-87)

Antony accepts the messages, learns that Fulvia is dead and

that Pompey is threatening the empire--Rome and reason call. He must leave Cleopatra not only for Roman business but also because he knows "These strong Egyptian fetters I must break" (I.ii.119). Yet before Antony leaves Cleopatra his sensual nature forces him to admit:

Our separation so abides, and flies,  
 That thou, residing here, goes yet with me,  
 And I, hence fleeting, here remain with thee.  
 (I.iii.103-105)

Antony hurries to Rome, and we see him as a Roman; yet underneath we still feel the sensual nature calling from Egypt. Indeed, the Romans do not think Antony will leave Cleopatra, for Pompey remarks that "Mark Antony / In Egypt sits at dinner, and will make / No wars without-doors. . ." (II.i.11-13). Caesar also has a derogatory view of Antony's actions:

It is not Caesar's natural vice to hate  
 Our great competitor. From Alexandria  
 This is the news: he fishes, drinks, and wastes  
 The lamps of night in revel; is not more man-like  
 Than Cleopatra; nor the queen of Ptolemy  
 More womanly than he; hardly gave audience, or  
 Vouchsaf'd to think he had partners. (I.iv.2-8)

Octavius and Antony meet and seal their differences in a pact against Pompey. Willard Farnham thinks this implies a recognition by Octavius that Antony is his equal. It is a ". . . willingness on the part of Octavius to let him hold sway in the East so long as the terms of an alliance are duly kept. Thus Antony rises to undisputed control of half the world."<sup>10</sup> The triumvirs form a temporary compact which only averts for



the moment their own disputes due to Pompey's bid for power. Pompey makes this judgment:

. . . lesser enmities may give way to greater.  
 Were't not that we stand up against them all,  
 'T were pregnant they should square between themselves.  
 (II.i.43-45)

Antony and Octavius are reconciled, and they seal the agreement with the marriage of Antony to Caesar's sister. We soon learn, however, that this union will make conflict inevitable between Antony and Octavius. Enobarbus says, "But you shall find the band that seems to tie their friendship together will be the very strangler of their amity. . ." (II.vi.127-129). Antony will ruin the alliance because "He will to his Egyptian dish again" (II.vi.134).

In the barge scene the sensual Antony emerges: he leads the drinking, singing, and dancing. Willard Farnham says this scene is one of Shakespeare's masterstrokes, since character revelation makes it a crucial scene in the play.

Antony is thoroughly in his element, all too willing to put the cares of the world out of his mind and exercise his genius for revelry. Poor Lepidus goes down and out, no more able to succeed in a drinking bout than in a bout for world rulership. Pompey shows himself incapable of winning the world by ruthlessness, which is the only way he can possibly win it. At the end of the scene it is plain that Antony has nothing to fear from Lepidus and Pompey and everything to fear from Octavius. In the course of the scene Octavius reveals an ominous ability to remain master of himself and keep graver business in mind. Antony dominates the revelry, but Octavius dominates the gathering.<sup>11</sup>

✓ In Act III we see the decline and fall of Antony, and the end is in sight. Octavia becomes a wedge between Antony

and Caesar, as Caesar had warned; for Caesar had earlier stated, "Let not the piece of virtue. . . be the ram to batter / The fortress of it" (III.ii.28-31). When Caesar and Antony again drift apart, Octavia goes to Rome as a mediator. Without Octavia's knowing, Antony returns to Egypt, where he gives Cleopatra rule of several countries. This betrayal of his Roman obligations slights Octavia, angers Caesar, and starts a war for the entire Roman world. Pompey and Lepidus, having been disposed of by Caesar, are now out of the picture.

As the Battle of Actium looms heavy over the lovers, Antony determines to fight by sea despite warnings from Enobarbus, Canidius, and a common soldier. He has no reason for fighting by sea; his mind seems a blank. The sensual nature is dominating his military logic. The fatal decision of Cleopatra to enter the battle is enlightened by the exchange between Cleopatra and Enobarbus:

Cleo. I will be even with thee, doubt it not. . . .  
 Thou hast forspoke my being in these wars,  
 And say'st it is not fit.

Eno. Well, is it, is it? . . . .  
 Your presence needs must puzzle Antony;  
 Take from his heart, take from his brain,  
 from 's time,  
 What should not then be spar'd. He is already  
 Traduc'd for levity; and 't is said in Rome  
 That Photinus an eunuch and your maids  
 Manage this war. (III.vii.3-16)

The lines indicate the setting for disaster. Antony fails to free himself from Cleopatra and turns from military customs that have made him great. He takes Cleopatra into the Battle

of Actium, and she causes his loss by fleeing when she knows he will follow. John Munro points to this episode as the turning point in the play:

The turning-point is the disaster at Actium. After that, Antony's ancestral guardian spirit, Hercules, and his own genius for command in war and government in peace, desert him. The might of Rome is then bound to prevail.<sup>15</sup>

Antony's sensual nature continues to dominate his tradition-oriented mind because this crisis sees Antony give himself more completely to Cleopatra. Antony says,

Fall not a tear, I say; one of them rates  
All that is won and lost: give me a kiss.  
Even this repays me. (III.xi.69-71)

Antony is sliding rapidly downhill. His request for single combat with Octavius is ridiculous. "Caesar, thou hast subdu'd / His judgement too" (III.xiii.36), comments Enobarbus. And Cleopatra provokes Antony to anger at last when she allows Thyreus to kiss her hand.

You were half blasted ere I knew you; ha!  
Have I my pillow left unpress'd in Rome,  
Foreborne the getting of a lawful race,  
And by a gem of woman, to be abus'd  
By one that looks on feeders? (III.xiii.105-109)

Yet a few gentle words from Cleopatra, and Antony is ready for a party.

Moving into Act IV we know the power of Rome will prevail. Caesar wisely refuses single combat with Antony because he has everything to lose and little to gain. The Roman soldiers believe that Antony's patron god and ancestral spirit--

Hercules--leaves him during the night. Antony rises early for battle, and realizes as he goes into this second conflict that he should not have fought by sea at the Battle of Actium. Antony regains temporary control; he becomes a Roman and wins the battle. He then marches triumphantly into the city anticipating another great victory on the morrow.

Repeating his earlier error, Antony fights by sea in the third battle and suffers his final defeat. The Egyptian fleet surrenders to Caesar, and the Roman nature within Antony forces him to cry, "All is lost! / This foul Egyptian hath betrayed me" (IV.xii.9-10). He seemingly believes at this point that Cleopatra has made a pact with Caesar, for he culminates his remarks with:

The witch shall die.  
To the young Roman boy she hath sold me,  
and I fall  
Under this plot. She dies for 't. (IV.xii.47-49)

With his defeat and this disillusionment about Cleopatra, Antony decides to follow Roman custom by planning suicide even before he learns the lie about Cleopatra's death, for he tells Eros, ". . . there is left us / Ourselves to end ourselves" (IV.xiv.21-22).

When he hears the false story that Cleopatra has killed herself, he falls on his sword after Eros has given the example, but Antony bungles even this job. G. B. Harrison says, "It is pathetically right and proper, for in these last days Antony has bungled everything."<sup>15</sup> Granville-Barker finds this a fitting end for Antony:

What more fitly tragic end for the brilliant general and statesman, the great realist and paragon of worldly wisdom, than to be tricked into emulating the heroism of a Cleopatra, who is, we know, even now safe in her Monument; than to be outdone in quiet courage by his servant; than to bungle his own death-stroke and have to lie begging, in vain, to be put out of his misery? And as he lies there, he learns the ridiculous truth.<sup>16</sup>

Antony learns that Cleopatra is alive and safe in her monument. His Roman valour led him to fall on his sword, but his sensual nature now causes a desire to see his love. Before being drawn up to Cleopatra, Antony says, "Not Caesar's valour hath o'erthrown Antony, / But Antony's hath triumph'd on itself" (IV.xv.14-15). There is no mention of love here; and he asserts pride that not Caesar but he caused his own destruction.

Once in her arms, however, Antony yet lingers between love and reason.

I here importune death a while, until  
Of many thousand kisses the poor last  
I lay upon thy lips. (IV.xv.19-21)

He soon tells Cleopatra, "Of Caesar seek your honor, with your safety" (IV.xv.45). She will not consider this, but he then tells her, "None about Caesar trust but Proculeius" (IV.xv.48). These lines bring controversy into the interpretation of Antony's death scene and his final attitude toward Cleopatra. Willard Farnham, although not a romantic, gives the general opinion of the majority of critics:

When he finds that he is dying because she has practised one of her artifices and that she is

alive and free to deal with Octavius if she will, he is beyond being able to feel resentment. With true unselfishness he even urges her to deal with Octavius and gain safety if she can.<sup>17</sup>

This view is questioned by David S. Berkeley, who views Antony by these lines as a possible would-be avenger, clothed with some of Cleopatra's cunningness.

If Antony's last scene exhibits nothing of the mud in his nature, nothing of his vow that "The witch shall die," nothing of his consciousness of Cleopatra's plot against him, nothing of bent toward rudimentary justice, we have here--let us recognize it--a transfigured Antony, an angelic Antony, and an unnatural Antony.<sup>18</sup>

The emphasis by Berkeley is toward the Roman view of Antony's character, but Berkeley explains that the text points in both directions: the quintessence of Antony's passion or revenge. However, with Berkeley's reading of Antony, ". . .the play becomes a richer, more subtle, more dramatic, and more human drama worthy of more critical esteem than it has won."<sup>19</sup>

It is interesting to note that the Romantic interpreters of this play overlook Antony's final speech:

The miserable change now at my end  
Lament nor sorrow at; but please your thoughts  
In feeding them with these my former fortunes  
Wherein I liv'd, the greatest prince o' th' world,  
The noblest; and do now not basely die,  
Not cowardly put off my helmet to  
My countryman,--a Roman by a Roman  
Valiantly vanquish'd. Now my spirit is going;  
I can no more. (IV.xv.51-58)

These are his last words, and there is no express mention of his love for Cleopatra. He desires to be remembered as a soldier and a noble Roman. William Rosen says:

. . . he dies with the comforting thought that in taking his own life he shows himself strong and valiant, worthy of the virtue and nobility associated with his former fortunes.<sup>20</sup>

In this last moment Antony's Roman nature is dominant, as it should be. His words do not celebrate his love or lighten his fall. In the same way William Rosen notes that "Antony's death does not glorify his love nor make of it the play's transcendent value."<sup>21</sup> For Antony an honorable death and honorable reputation are the important values at this time. He dies in Cleopatra's arms with visions of having been a noble Roman, but his dual nature gave him a conflict which brought lack of decision and judgment, which in turn prevented this last desire.

#### The Conflict Overthrows Antony's Judgment

As David Cecil points out, we have a play that might well have been labeled "The Decline and Fall of Antony."<sup>22</sup> There is really no rise in the hero's fortunes because we meet him in Act I already under the spell of his sensual nature struggling against the imbedded virtues of Rome. The drama is devoted to his fall.

In the first two acts the situation is expounded to us, in the third and part of the fourth we follow the process of decline, and still more its effect on the actors. The last section exhibits in detail the incidents of that catastrophe which is the logical outcome of all that has gone before.<sup>23</sup>

The question now arises, what brought about the fall of Antony-- the influence of Cleopatra or Antony's disregard for Roman values. One force does not dominate Antony: he dies in

Cleopatra's arms but is thinking of his soldiership; therefore neither force causes complete defeat. Antony's tragic flaw is a frustrating duality that overthrows his judgment. Cleopatra is the enticement that ruins his power to judge and reason. Some argue that lust is the downfall of Antony, but lust takes deeper meaning by seeing it bring Antony into a state of self-destroying duality.

We also must remember that to Shakespeare's contemporaries the two lovers did not provide a beautiful picture, as Franklin Dickey shows:

Instead of seeing Antony and Cleopatra as patterns of nobility and of a deathless love, the Elizabethan reader must have seen them as patterns of lust, of cruelty, of prodigality, of drunkenness, of vanity, and, in the end, despair. Nowhere does an author hint that their love enriched their lives. Instead the Elizabethans pointed to their love as destructive, not only of their own happiness but of that of their followers and subjects as well.<sup>24</sup>

Dickey provides an excellent point in his study on precedent treatments of Antony and Cleopatra from classical times to the Elizabethan age. By tracing the sources about the lovers from Horace and Plutarch to the Renaissance, Dickey points to an unsentimental, pro-Roman view of Antony's behavior. And the influence of Plutarch, which is strong, must also be considered.

Plutarch emphasizes the moral elements of the story and pictures Antony as a man ruined by women. According to Plutarch, the downfall of Antony is his meeting of Cleopatra.

Antonius being thus inclined, the last and



extremest mischief of all other (to wit, the love of Cleopatra) lighted on him, who did waken and stirre up many vices yet hidden in him, and were never seene to any: and if any sparke of goodnesse or hope of rising were left him, Cleopatra quenched it straight, and made it worse than before.<sup>25</sup>

But Shakespeare departs from this source material and places more blame on Antony than Cleopatra. For example, Shakespeare makes Antony responsible for Cleopatra's presence at Actium and ultimately for the defeat of Actium. Plutarch, on the other hand, stresses that Cleopatra's treacherous actions lead the hero into following her will. This change and others by Shakespeare give Antony more character, and they better picture the failure of his Roman reason. The tragedy of the hero is due, not to Cleopatra's influence, but to Antony's loss of will-power and judgment caused by the conflict between passion and Roman virtue. William Rosen emphasizes the importance of virtue to Antony:

The association of valor and virtue is to be found in the opening section of Plutarch's life of Coriolanus and has relevance to Antony as well: "Now in those days, valiantness was honoured in Rome above all other virtues: which they call Virtus, by the name of virtue self, as including in that general name all other special virtues besides. So that Virtus in the Latin was as much as valiantness." In being the greatest of soldiers Antony fulfilled himself as man, became, indeed, the paragon of man. This is what is stressed by those who remember his former days. In his own being Antony has no real worth; he can have value, he can be his true self, only in so far as he performs valerosusly, for this constitutes virtue, the ideal.<sup>26</sup>

Roman virtue is of vital importance to Antony: he wants to be remembered as a noble Roman soldier. Perhaps this answers

in part why the Antony of Plutarch in the last year is more amorous of Cleopatra than the Antony of Shakespeare, why Shakespeare omits the destruction of Antony's statues mentioned in Plutarch, why Antony tells Cleopatra to trust Proculeius, and why the past of Antony is glorified by Shakespeare while Plutarch goes to some lengths to show Antony had possessed or cherished a number of vices in his youth.

Shakespeare not only ignores Antony's past but inserts references to make the hero's past a great ideal. Antony's past in Shakespeare is almost an image of perfection that serves as a contrast to the present confusion and weakness of Antony. The hero strives in the end to die a Roman, not a foolish lover. His past is an ideal to be regained and the remembrance measures the fall.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE SENSUAL NATURE OF CLEOPATRA

Cleopatra is responsible for some events that cause Antony's unresolved conflict, which leads to the hero's deterioration in will-power and judgment. The queen is endowed with vitality and variety; but one aspect of her character is conspicuous because it is emphasized throughout the play: Cleopatra is a passionate, seductive woman who delights in entrancing and capturing men. Before meeting Cleopatra, Antony is a soldier in the best tradition of the Roman army; but once he is poisoned with love, he becomes frustrated in his attempt to control his passion and remain a noble Roman. Cleopatra is so greedy in her love that she does not want to share him with Rome; therefore she entices and perplexes him until he loses judgment, flees from Actium, and finally takes his own life.

Cleopatra's past reveals that she has been the same queen we observe in the play, for her mental and physical charm has infatuated Julius Caesar, Pompey the Great, and now Antony. William Rosen says:

Each time Cleopatra recalls her past it is to exult in her power to entrance men. For Antony the past is an ideal manhood to be regained; its remembrance measures his fall. Cleopatra's past is a mirroring of her present character. She is now what she was before, passionate, seductive, a woman who revels in her power to entrance men.<sup>1</sup>

She is an enchantress and remains so throughout the play because her nature inflames Antony and keeps his conflict boiling at feverous intensity. Shakespeare gives her all the feminine wiles of which he capable; and her inner greed causes Shakespeare's disapproval, according to John Danby.

The profusion of rich and hectic colour that surrounds her is the colour of the endless cycle of growth and decay, new greenery on old rottenness, the colour of the passions, the wild flaring of life as it burns itself richly away to death so that love of life and greed for death becomes indistinguishable. . . .<sup>2</sup>

She asserts an indulgence in personal appetites, appetites that cannot be approved; therefore Cleopatra provides a dynamic antithesis to the Roman tradition which Antony attempts to retain while enamored of the flesh.

Cleopatra takes the center of the stage following Antony's death, and some critics elevate Cleopatra to a major role by asserting that a change then takes place in her nature. To glorify Cleopatra, however, by saying her physical love is transfigured into spiritual love is essentially to change the minor role she plays of luxuriating in the flesh to prevent Antony from regaining his virtue and honor. A careful reading of the play shows that the drama really does not exalt love or triumph over death: the drama is rather a play about human weakness.

#### A Textual Analysis of Cleopatra

The text of Antony and Cleopatra supports the view that Cleopatra is a driving, relentless force of sensuality. We

cannot always forecast her actions, except to know that her variety will keep Antony in constant agitation. Early in the play we get a taste of her tactics:

She where he is, who 's with him, what he does.  
I did not send you. If you find him sad,  
Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report  
That I am sudden sick. Quick, and return. (I.111.3-5)

And her determined desire to dominate Antony is indicated by a continual stream of letters while he is Rome; for she is resolved to keep Antony's sensual nature vibrating until he breaks his Roman bonds and hurries back to Egypt. Enobarbus describes the voluptuous Cleopatra with his picture of her arrival on the river Cydnus:

For her own person  
It beggar'd all description: she did lie  
In her pavilion--cloth-of-gold of tissue--  
O'er-picturing that Venus where we see  
The fancy outwork nature. On each side her  
Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,  
With divers-colour'd fans, whose wind did seem  
To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,  
And what they undid did. (II.11.202-210)

Who can resist her? Certainly not Antony, for despite the fact that Antony agrees to marry Octavia, Enobarbus divulges the truth and the reason: Antony will not leave Cleopatra because

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. . . . (II.11.240-243)

Antony does not and cannot grow weary of her because she is

forever enticing him in some unusual, original way. She continually adds to Antony's inner discord between his love and allegiance to Roman conventions.

As a woman Cleopatra has no place in the battle at Actium, yet she joins the fleet as Queen of her navy. As soon as serious battle gets underway, Cleopatra flees; Antony follows, deserting his forces in the midst of possible victory. Cleopatra, in causing the defeat at Actium, is now victorious in winning Antony; but with her victory she loses the real Antony, for no longer is he a soldier, the man of men. He must "To the young man send humble treaties, dodge / And palter in the shifts of lowness. . ." (III.xi.62-63).

When Thyreus arrives with a message from the victorious Caesar, Cleopatra's selfish nature leads her to a cunning, political attitude toward Thyreus and thus provokes her lover to real anger:

You were half blasted ere I knew you; ha!  
 Have I my pillow left unpress'd in Rome,  
 Forborne the getting of a lawful face,  
 And by a gem of woman, to be abus'd  
 By one that looks on feeders? (III.xiii.105-109)

Antony realizes that he is faced with a fickle woman: her past has shown this nature, perhaps her future will also. There is no indication here that Cleopatra has made a political agreement with Caesar. This question often arises, but it can be answered by a close look at Act V. A careful reading indicates that Cleopatra is trying for any consideration from Caesar; this search would be unnecessary had she earlier

coöperated with him. This principle applies also to the third battle in the play when Cleopatra's fleet surrenders to Caesar and brings the final destruction of Antony's forces. The loss of his army forces Antony to another savage attack on his queen, which gives indication of the possible betrayal on her part:

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. Triple-turn'd whore! ✓  
 't is thou  
 Hast sold me to this novice; and my heart  
 Makes no wars on thee. (IV.xii.9-15)

Since there seems to be no evidence for this accusation by Antony, the reader does not know whether to believe it or not. It does seem reasonable, however, that Cleopatra's retreat from Actium reveals a strong interest in her own safety at the peril of the fortunes of her lover. A truly strong love would seemingly keep her with her lover through the very ultimate dangers.

In fear of Antony's raging and of Caesar, Cleopatra lock herself within the monument. She then sends Mardian with her fatal lie:

Mardian, go tell him I have slain myself;  
 Say, that the last I spoke was "Antony,"  
 And word it, prithee, piteously. (IV.xii.7-9)

She thinks Antony's ardor is weakening; so she resorts to another trick to bring him back in line. The seriousness of the situation also fails to deter her from the theatrical

touch that is so much a part of her character, for the words must be presented piteously. The dying Antony is soon brought to the monument where he dies in her arms. Cleopatra rises to the occasion:

. . . what 's brave, and what 's noble,  
 Let 's do it after the high Roman fashion,  
 And make Death proud to take us. (IV.xv.86-87)

These lines have an intensity that begin to reveal greatness in her character, yet she soon weakens in her desire to die. M. W. MacCallum notes that she ". . . sends submissive messages to Caesar; she delays her death so long that Proculeius can surprise her in her asylum; she accepts her conqueror's condescension; she stoops to hold back and conceal the greater part of her jewels."<sup>3</sup> She continues to reveal her selfish nature in Act V.

Viewing Cleopatra as a selfish queen who loves life heightens the tragedy of Antony, prevented from regaining his virtue by a human weakness exploited by the treacherous Egyptian. After Antony's death, Cleopatra almost immediately shows her selfish nature and her desire to live by sending a messenger to Caesar. She has hopes of remaining a tributary queen under Caesar.

The Queen. . .  
 Of thy intents desires instruction,  
 That she preparedly may frame herself  
 To th' way she 's fore'd to. (V.1.52-56)

She hesitates in her death pursuit until she knows Caesar's mind. Octavius is her antagonist here, but the more vital



issue is whether Cleopatra's love for Antony is so strong that she cannot live without him. If the cause of her death is love for Antony and a desire to join him, then perhaps there is a transfiguration in her character; but this supposition negates her delight in the flesh and love for life: she is too engrossed in herself to give complete love to any one man. She enjoys Antony, but she does not truly love him. Act V shows her true nature by her delay of death and by the suicide which comes only after she sees that her fate is sealed by Caesar, who will disgrace her by the triumph.

She willingly listens to the message brought by Proculeius; and with theatrical technique to determine whether the Romans want her dead or alive she attempts suicide. Proculeius stops her and she knows they want her alive, but for what--to be a queen under Caesar or to be led in triumph to Rome? Cleopatra, to learn the truth, makes her last request: Dolabella bends to her will and reveals Caesar's plan. It seems reasonable that had Dolabella told Cleopatra she would remain alive as ruler of her people she would not have chosen the course that she eventually takes. It is more consistent with her character and the text of the play to accept a view that up to this point she really wanted to live; and now her self-respect, her desire to be noble, and fear of the triumph seem stronger motives for suicide than love of Antony. She has taken to heart Antony's advice, "Of Caesar seek your safety with your honour" (IV.xv.45). She was ready to seek safety despite her brave words earlier; therefore she clearly reveals the selfish nature that has

afflicted Antony. Her great fear becomes reality: her real determination to die fully crystallizes with Dolabella's affirmation of her place in Caesar's triumph. She must immediately meet with Caesar, who smoothly lies to her. During the interview Seleucus reveals to Caesar that Cleopatra has held back half her fortune, indicating two possible motives on the part of Cleopatra: she desires to live and wants her treasure, or she is resolved to die and uses this exposure to deceive Caesar into thinking she wants to live. The more reasonable view is to believe that she really has desires of continuing with life.

To view Cleopatra's reason for death as pride and escape from the triumph gives more structure to the play by strengthening the antithesis she provides for the conventions of Rome. Cleopatra indicates a desire for a lover's bond with Antony through death; but her essential being, her love for pleasure, desires to continue with life. William Rosen says, "Clearly she entertains the possibility of living on, though Antony is dead."<sup>4</sup> This is true, according to E. E. Stoll, because "Her decision was not quite fixed till she saw for sure that she was to be led in triumph. . . ."<sup>5</sup> If she is really in love and truly wants to join Antony, she should not be alive to send a messenger to Caesar, to talk with Proculeius until caught, to possibly try to save some of her treasure in the Seleucus episode, or to entrance Dolabella to learn the truth. Only when assured by Dolabella that the triumph awaits her does her determination become set. She is certain of disgrace;

her only escape is the poisonous bite of the serpent.

Perry Westbrook says, "In Shakespeare it is royal pride that brings her to self-destruction."<sup>6</sup>

The peasant brings the asps, and with theatrical gestures of self-love she dons her royal robes and crown. To William Rosen these actions show ". . . her personality is such that she always gives the impression of playing at life, of being intensely aware of every stance, as if she cannot help but live and die before a mirror."<sup>7</sup> J. I. M. Stewart finds contriving on Cleopatra's part in the death preparations:

Does not the essence of the last scene of Antony and Cleopatra consist partly at least in this observation of the continuing grip of 'character': that for Cleopatra Antony's death after the high Roman fashion would be indeed impossible, a piece of theatrical psychology such as we reject in a film, but that she yet contrives her own heroism, exploiting an exotic and womanly ritual of robe and crown to dredge up attitudes and potencies that ordinarily lie sunk and obscured below her grasp?<sup>8</sup>

She is an actress with the corresponding desire for pomp and circumstance. With her resolution set her vision turns to Antony: "Methinks I hear / Antony call. . . ." (V.11.287). Yet even with this effort she cannot gain higher levels, for Caesar slips into the vision, "I hear him mock / The luck of Caesar. . . ." (V.11.288-289).

Husband, I come!  
Now to that name my courage prove my title!  
I am fire and air; my other elements  
I give to baser life. (V.11.290-293)

Now dying, Cleopatra turns her thoughts to her love. These lines give her a beauty and nobility that increase her stature

through poetic utterance; but they do not last, for she cannot sustain the vision. The bite of the asp becomes ". . . as a lover's pinch, / Which hurts, and is desir'd" (V.11.299-300). With Iras dead, Cleopatra wants to hurry death:

If she first meet the curled Antony,  
He'll make demand of her, and spend that kiss  
Which is my heaven to have. (V.11.304-305)

These lines indicate that heaven for Cleopatra is going to be a pagan competition for sensual kisses, a rapid apostasy from her ennobling vision a few lines earlier. She urges the asp to action:

Be angry, and dispatch. O, couldst thou speak,  
That I might hear thee call great Caesar ass  
Unpoliced! (V.11.309-311)

These lines are indicative, coming only seconds before her death, of her resentment at the Roman triumph--this is her reason for urging the asp to action rather than a desire to join Antony. With great poetry her vision returns to Antony as she dies:

As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle,--  
O Antony! (V.11.314-315)

Her exit has a grace and dignity of imperial quality that demands praise. She seems to lose her prodigality and treachery; no wonder critics lose sight of her continuing essential sensuousness. The picture with which we remember Cleopatra is this:

Peace, peace!  
 Does thou not see my baby at my breast,  
 That sucks the nurse asleep? (V.11.311-313)

This is certainly poignant pathos, yet it also seems a sensual gratification.

Cleopatra may profess great love for Antony, but her actions and many speeches reveal that she loves herself more. She wants to live and enjoy life just as she wanted to enjoy Antony. She used Antony for her gratification and by this action helped to increase his conflict. Faced with such a woman, the "noble Roman" sinks into the embrace of passion. He cannot resolve his conflict and ends his life. Cleopatra then searches for an escape from the corner into which she is pushed by Caesar. Finding no refuge she chooses death rather than disgrace. The tragedy is complete: the hero has succumbed to his weakness and the blight that afflicted him is removed.

#### The Romantic View of Cleopatra

The basic role of Cleopatra in the play is to build and sustain Antony's desire for sensual pleasure. Her actions cause Antony's unresolved conflict and prevent him from maintaining the values of the Roman tradition. Cleopatra's character is flawed until the end of her life, but she does attain great poetic expression in her death scene. Some commentators, however, are overwhelmed by the ending and read the play backwards, according to William Rosen, who says these critics attempt to reconstruct a consistent characterization so that the final glory of Cleopatra may prevail.<sup>9</sup> This type

of reading maintains that Cleopatra is transfigured and gains innocence at her death. This interpretation emphasizes the exaltation of love and its victory over death and thereby dismisses the idea that the play is about human weakness and corruption.

John Munro believes that great adversity ennoble Cleopatra: "It is clear in the latter part of the play that, Antony dead, Cleopatra means to join him; and that the prospect of figuring in Caesar's triumph gave her no option but death."<sup>10</sup> This issue is a matter of opinion, certainly, but the text strongly reveals that the threat of Caesar gave Cleopatra no other option than death, and after this decision she returned her thoughts to Antony. Romantic critics who do not attempt to reconstruct a consistent characterization for Cleopatra agree with Levin Schücking that Cleopatra changes in the final act: "It cannot well be doubted that this woman, who is now inwardly as well as outwardly a queen, has but little in common with the harlot of the first part."<sup>11</sup> Cleopatra appears outwardly a queen in her lines of great poetic quality, but an inward change can well be doubted in light of her winning of Delabella, her fear of the triumph, and her jealousy of Iras.

Cleopatra is said to attain infinity through her transformation in her death scene; she becomes boundless and immeasurable according to Thomas McFarland:

We realize at last that Cleopatra's infinite variety encompasses not only variety but infinity. The things which are Caesar's are rendered unto Caesar; but Antony and Cleopatra, who love one another, have overcome the world.<sup>12</sup>

McFarland's Biblical allusions suggest that for him Antony and Cleopatra have attained the Christian Heaven. Her true infinity, however, is a lasting reputation as a seductive beauty in the tradition of Delilah. McFarland has also reversed the basic proposition because the world in the form of the Stoic Octavius has in truth overcome Antony and Cleopatra as a result of the hero's divarication and her carnality. William Hazlitt believes Cleopatra ". . .tastes a luxury in death,"<sup>13</sup> but she has rather a vision of luxury: she thinks of death as a lover's pinch and heaven as a place where she will retain her sex and be in competition for her lover's kiss.

G. Wilson Knight, a great exponent of the Romantic view, makes this statement:

But, though East and West. . .eternity and time, feminine love and masculine warriorship, are opposing values here, there is no strong dualism. The final effect is a blending, a melting, with a victory for the finer, over the cruder, ideal.<sup>14</sup>

Knight's view indicates a lack of conflict in the drama, but Antony's unresolved conflict between passion and Roman values is vital to the structure and meaning of the play. Antony lacks unity and ends in tragedy, while Caesar with his single purpose crushes the lovers until they retreat in death.

The romantic critics also claim that Cleopatra wins a great victory over Caesar in the conflict of Act V, described by John Munro:

At the one end was Octavius, icy-hearted, with Stoic principles, and clear-sighted, who sold his sister Octavia for diplomatic advantage, disposed of Lepidus and lied to Cleopatra; and at the other, Cleopatra, endowed with all the luxury, prodigality, complexity, charm, feline wilfulness, treachery and temperamental diversity which Shakespeare gave her.<sup>15</sup>

Part of the conflict in Act V, then, is Roman against Egyptian: Rome cannot allow a compromise and Cleopatra cannot submit to a contrary philosophy of life. These two elements are important to thematic development because they are the two sides of Antony's conflict. Antony tries to balance the elements and fails. The opponents must now resolve the discord, and the Roman values prevail. Cleopatra may fool Caesar by thwarting his planned triumph, but Caesar applies pressure until Cleopatra knows she cannot escape. Caesar is concerned with the safety of the state, and Antony's death does not completely remove the danger. Octavius knows Cleopatra has captured Julius Caesar, Pompey, and Antony; therefore the female opponent of the Roman desire for order and reason must be defeated. Yet A. C. Bradley insists that

The death of Cleopatra, which closes the play, is greeted by the reader with sympathy and admiration, even with exultation at the thought that she has foiled Octavius; and these feelings are heightened by the deaths of Charmian and Iras, heroically faithful to their mistress. . . .<sup>16</sup>

There is certainly sympathy and admiration, but not because Cleopatra has foiled Caesar; it is because she has the fortitude to take her own life in beautiful, dramatic fashion.



In looking for a Cleopatra victory the romantic critics turn their attention continually to the fact that Cleopatra deceives Octavius. They avert their eyes from the fact that the play closes with Caesar in complete control of the then-known world. We know the enchanting power of Cleopatra is failing when Caesar can look her straight in the eye and lie about his plans for her. The situation is certainly a contrast to Antony's submission to her charms, but political failure is also part of Antony's tragedy. Antony had an opportunity to control the Roman Empire, but his lack of stability lost it at Actium. With Antony dead, Cleopatra is stripped of her power and protection and, in the words of Granville-Barker, she ". . . shows a very child beside Caesar."<sup>17</sup>

#### Cleopatra Is Not Transfigured

Even Shakespeare seemed taken with the famous queen as he wrote the play, for he pours forth his art more completely upon Cleopatra, love, and the attraction Antony should renounce than upon the military values of the political setting. It is understandable then, according to William Rosen, that ". . . these who are dazzled by the incomparable language often celebrate its paean of love and minimize or disregard the unfolding events that chronicle a man's fall."<sup>18</sup> The poet had an evenhandedness in developing the last scenes of the play; for Cleopatra moves toward death at times with a vision of love for Antony and at other times with concern for her pride and honor. But this treacherous queen has exploited the human

weakness of Antony that causes his conflict and fall. Her character is flawed in these closing scenes by her love of life as she is swayed alternately by thoughts of Antony and thoughts of Caesar's triumph. We may question her love of Antony because of the selfish question asked of Delabella, "Know you what Caesar means to do with me?" (V.ii.106). Why should she worry about Caesar if she is determined to leave the dull world and seek her Antony?

A look at Shakespeare's departures from the source supports the view of a self-centered Cleopatra. Cleopatra is painted even darker by Plutarch than by Shakespeare. By lessening somewhat the dark side of Cleopatra, Shakespeare is able to increase the character of Antony by showing him as a man of inner turmoil. In Shakespeare he is destroyed not so much by Cleopatra as he is by his own weaknesses, but Plutarch casts blame upon Cleopatra for ruining Antony. In Plutarch Cleopatra is responsible for leading Antony to the mistake at Actium, but Shakespeare heightens Antony's role by making the hero solely responsible. In Plutarch Cleopatra clearly betrays Antony by bribing Canidius to support her argument for fighting by sea and also to speed preparations for war to avoid a reconciliation between Caesar and Antony. But the betrayal in Shakespeare's version is doubtful: she seems more likely to have fled in terror, for she does apologize, which Plutarch's queen does not do. The loss at Actium thereby focuses more forcefully upon the loss of judgment by Antony.

Herman Simpson, in a graduate thesis at Oklahoma State

University, describes the Cleopatra of Plutarch after the death of Antony:

Plutarch's queen was in the sad position of having betrayed Antony and now finding that she in turn was being betrayed by Octavius. Only at this point did Antony's real worth become apparent to her. She did not lament over Antony's body immediately after his death. She demanded the kingdom of Egypt for her sons. Later, after burying Antony, Plutarch's Cleopatra seemed to realize she was to be a slave because she mentioned in her formal lament at Antony's tomb that when she buried him she was free, but later she became a prisoner. She tried to let herself die from infection which resulted from the self-inflicted wounds she had made while Antony was dying, perhaps to convince him that that she had not been false. Caesar threatened her children with ignominious death, and Cleopatra allowed herself to be cured. Plutarch's Cleopatra was told by Delabella, for some unknown reason, of Caesar's plans for using her and her children, and since she did not wish to be led in triumph through Rome, she paid homage to an idealized Antony and died a ritual death.<sup>19</sup>

Shakespeare, however, puts more emphasis upon both the reason for death and her delay in joining Antony. She resolves to die in the Roman fashion but then deviates from the purpose. Shakespeare departs from Plutarch by inserting the Egyptian messenger, a change that darkens Cleopatra's character, for it shows her looking for an escape after having promised to join her lover. Shakespeare's queen does not embrace the asp until she fails to seduce Caesar and faces only the triumph. This fact tends to show an agreement of Shakespeare with Plutarch that the Egyptian was more interested in herself than she was in Antony. So the tragedy of the hero is heightened by his weakness in loving a woman who was probably unworthy of his great devotion. Plutarch emphasizes the

theory that Antony is a man ruined by women; and the downfall of Antony is certainly associated with his love for Cleopatra, but Shakespeare's departures from Plutarch make Antony more responsible than Cleopatra.

Although Cleopatra's love for Antony did not match his devotion of her, she does achieve exalted poetic expression through her vision of what such a love could be. She cannot sustain the vision that leads her to call Antony "Husband," but William Resen says the play, after all, ". . . is a chronicle of their lives and exposure of the illusions they would live."<sup>20</sup> Cleopatra does not gain transfiguration in her death scene. She is selfish to the end as evidenced by two aspects of her character: she does not want to die, for she delays her death until there is no escape from the triumph; and she wants to retain her throne because she negotiates with Caesar, and it seems a reasonable assumption to think that she would have remained alive had Dolabella reported a favorable treatment by Caesar. The change in character presentation in the last act gives her a prominence that is deceiving, but she supports the theme by remaining passionate and seductive to indicate the source of frustration for Antony. Even in death Cleopatra looks "As she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace" (V.11.350-351).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE ACCENTUATION OF DUALITY BY MINOR CHARACTERS

The minor characters in Antony and Cleopatra support and develop the theme of duality in Antony by showing that an attempt to have two centers of interest leads to lack of unity and disaster. Four minor characters--Enebarbus, Pompey, Octavia, and Lepidus--exhibit binary interests or purposes that bring misfortune. Persons with unity usually succeed: Caesar and Cleopatra are examples of wholeness in character and picture the two opposing sides of Antony's duality. Caesar pursues absolute leadership of the empire, which he hopes will bring peace. Cleopatra's unity is a selfish, sensual nature that demands the pleasures of life and her domination of men.

#### Caesar, The Man of Single Purpose

The presence of Caesar in the play develops the conflict between personal love and duty to the state. Caesar is an example of the rational Roman efficiency which escapes Antony. Antony desires to be the heroic soldier of his former days, but Cleopatra heightens his sensual awareness to a peak of frustration that causes indecisiveness in Antony. The presence of Caesar also builds a political theme of the lovers against

the strength of Rome. Irving Ribner gives a summary of this conflict by saying:

The sensual and wasteful opulence of the East is opposed to the cold, bare efficiency of the West. Egypt stands for passion and human weakness, Rome for duty and self-denial: the world of sense against the power of Octavius.<sup>1</sup>

A retreat that ends in suicide is forced upon the lovers by political necessity as well as by their own sins. Octavius is not the greater of the two men because he is victorious. In fact, ordinary theatre audiences sympathize more with Anthony. His success, according to M. W. MacCallum, comes ". . . because he concentrates all his narrow nature on a single issue, while Antony with his greater width of outlook disperses his interest on many things at once."<sup>2</sup>

John Danby looks on Caesar as a cold and universal force, a perfect commissar, invulnerable as no man should be.<sup>3</sup> Caesar knows his wants and what must be done to gain his goal. He wins the mastery of the Roman world; and we recognize the justice: Antony and Cleopatra are threats to Caesar's desire for universal peace and must be destroyed. Caesar, then, is a foil to Antony not only on the political front but also as an opposite of the hero to show that a man of unity and single purpose is the one that succeeds.

#### The Divided Loyalty of Enobarbus

Enobarbus appears in Plutarch as merely a name, but Shakespeare developed this character to serve as a commentator,

a reincarnation of the old chorus, to comment on events and characters, Enobarbus, a cynic, uses logic and practical sense to retain a firm grip on his imagination, thereby supplying contrast to irrational Antony. But Antony's dualism sets off a discord within Enobarbus, who is incapable of determining which of Antony's natures is the real Antony. Lawrence Bowling explains this point:

During the time of Enobarbus' tragic struggle, he is attempting to find the correct answers to two questions: Is Antony a fallen lord or a fool? Should he (Enobarbus) obey his feeling of loyalty (which tells him to remain with Antony), or should he follow his practical good sense (which tells him to seek his safety elsewhere)?<sup>4</sup>

The attitude of Enobarbus following the defeat at Actium shows that he prefers to think of Antony as a noble lord:

I'll yet follow  
The wounded chance of Antony, though my reason  
Sits in the wind against me. (III.x.36-37)

His reason is warning him, however, that the folly of Antony may ruin them all. He continues to analyze his variance:

Mine honesty and I begin to square.  
The loyalty well held to fools does make  
Our faith mere folly; yet he that can endure  
To follow with allegiance a fallen lord  
Does conquer him that did his master conquer,  
And earns a place i' the story. (III.xiii.41-46)

Enobarbus here indicates the issues in his own conflict and forecasts his tragedy at the same time. He soon fails in his allegiance to Antony, deserts, and conquers only despair. His decision comes when Antony plans a birthday party for Cleopatra

immediately after the Actium defeat; Enobarbus cannot accept more:

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. (III.xiii.198-201)

We next see Enobarbus in Caesar's camp, but his internal conflict is still unsettled. His conscience exposes his error, and he cries:

I have done ill;  
Of which I do accuse myself so sorely  
That I will joy no more. (IV.vi.18-20)

The magnanimous spirit of Antony compounds the grief in Enobarbus when the hero sends the traitor's treasure and forgives Enobarbus for deserting to Caesar. This is all it takes to break the heart of Enobarbus.

This blows my heart:  
If swift thought break it not, a swifter mean  
Shall outstrike thought; but thought will do 't I feel.  
(IV.vi.34-36)

Thought manages the job, for Enobarbus is soon praying to the moon. The generosity of Antony has rebuilt Enobarbus' impression of the magnificence of Antony, and this magnifies his feeling of transgression against his now noble lord. His only desire is that Antony might forgive. Crying "O Antony! O Antony!" (IV.ix.23) Enobarbus dies of a broken heart, a ". . . heart divided between practical judgment and personal loyalty,"<sup>5</sup> according to Lawrence Bowling. The enlargement by



Shakespeare of the tragedy of Enobarbus reflects the tragedy of Antony. Enobarbus develops a dual nature that ends in tragedy because he, like Antony, cannot make a clear choice although he is considered the rational man.

#### The Divided Heart of Octavia

Octavia, although given few lines in the play, is of importance: she portrays the morality of Rome and is used unsuccessfully to bridge the difference between her brother and Antony. Octavia is first an antithesis of Cleopatra, for her morality and chastity place a glaring light on the vulgarity of Cleopatra. Cleopatra dominates and tries to make the politicians bow to her, but Octavia is made a tool of the Roman alliance without a whisper of complaint. When Shakespeare presents Octavia after having given us two acts in which to become enraptured with Cleopatra, there is no question whom Antony will choose. Shakespeare also skips over the years spent by Antony and Octavia in Rome and Athens that Plutarch develops fully. Octavia lacks the warmth and vitality of Cleopatra, just as Caesar lacks the emotional impact of Antony.

In order to maintain a middle position between Antony and her brother, Octavia tries to love both equally. When disagreements face Caesar and Antony, she says:

A more unhappy lady,  
If this division chance, ne'er stood between,  
Praying for both parts. . . .  
. . . Husband win, win brother,  
Prays, and destroys the prayer; no midway  
'Twixt these extremes at all.

(III.iv.12-20)

Octavia cannot escape from the middle ground between the opposites that threaten to split the world. She has been used by Antony to appease Octavius and by Octavius to keep Antony from Egypt. Both intuitively know, however, that the marriage will be a failure because Antony cannot stay from Cleopatra and because Caesar hopes to use such an insult to Octavia to launch a battle for world supremacy. For a time Octavia manages to keep the rational side of Antony's duality settled in Rome and Athens. Once she leaves his presence, however, he flies back to the arms of Cleopatra; and his sensual nature smiles in triumph. As with Octavius Caesar, the intellect approves the moral position of Octavia; but the lack of warmth in her nature adds emphasis to the stature of Antony by showing cause for his conflict of choice. Even Octavia recognizes her own tragic dual nature:

Ay me, most wretched,  
That have my heart parted betwixt two friends  
That does afflict each other! (III.vi.76-78)

She calls them both friends and indicates the equal division of her heart. This division of love is her serious error. She does not gain wholeness by love and support of one man over the other but divides her love equally between Antony and her brother, thereby destroying unity in herself and in her marital relations.

#### The Duality Between Honor and Ambition in Pompey

Pompey is an ambitious Roman who desires to rule the

Roman Empire. When he refuses the offer of Menas in the barge scene to make him emperor by murdering the triumvirs, a few lines reveal the character of Pompey:

Men. These three world-sharers, these competitors,  
Are in thy vessel: let me cut the cable;  
And, when we are put off, fall to their threats:  
All there is thine.

Pom. Ah, this thou shouldst have done,  
And not have spoke on 't! In me 't is villainy;  
In thee 't had been good service. Thou must know,  
'T is not my profit that does lead mine honour:  
My honour, it. Repent that e'er thy tongue  
Hath so betray'd thine act. Being done unknown,  
I should have found it afterwards well done;  
But must condemn it now. (II.vii.76-85)

Pompey decides to retain the status quo, and his hesitation brings ruin. When Menas offers an opportunity for world domination, Pompey is too concerned with his honor to seize this practical means of achieving his ambition. He is afflicted with duality between honor and political ambition.

M. W. MacCallum makes the observation that Pompey is the type who excites more contempt than the resolute malefactor because he would not openly play false and yet would wrongly win.<sup>6</sup>

He [Pompey] would have no objection to reap the reward of crime, and would even after a decorous interval approve it; but he will not commit or authorise it, because he wishes to pose in his own eyes and the eyes of others as the man of justice, principle and chivalry.<sup>7</sup>

Menas loses respect for Pompey and later leaves him to join Caesar. The plan by Menas is the only way Pompey may achieve his ambition. Pompey would like fate to give him honor and

his ambition at the same time, but as Lawrence Bowling points out, ". . . Fortune does not confer or permit dual success."<sup>8</sup> Pompey thinks his decision is in favor of honor, but he really just leaves things as they are and becomes insignificant as a world power. With Antony joining Caesar in an alliance Pompey retreats from a war and gives in to the triumvirs. Later, Caesar, the man with a single purpose, crushes Pompey of his power and his honor. Pompey will not act in a decisive way; he will not be a Macbeth, therefore he is not a strong character. In this respect Pompey reflects and heightens the tragedy of Antony because Antony, although he so desires, also cannot act in a direct, decisive way.

#### Lepidus Fails As A Peacemaker

Lepidus, the weak third triumvir, invites destruction by attempting an intermediate course between Antony and Octavius. If he would choose one side he might save himself, but instead he develops a dual nature by trying to treat his partners in the triumvirate as equals. M. W. MacCallum sees the efforts of Lepidus as ". . . proof of incompetence rather than nobility."<sup>9</sup> Evidence of weakness in Lepidus comes in the barge scene, where he cannot maintain balance in a drinking bout and thereby indicates a probable incompetence in other affairs, including world events. He brings ridicule upon himself by trying to agree with everybody, and Lawrence Bowling believes the peacemaking efforts of Lepidus create a comic effect.<sup>10</sup> In the barge scene two servants laugh about

Lepidus. As Caesar, Antony, and Pompey start to quarrel Lepidus ". . . ories out, 'No more'; reconciles them to his entreaty, and himself to th' drink" (II.vii.8-9). The result is a drunken Lepidus carried from the barge before the festivities are over. Bowling says that the comic effect is heightened by the exchange a few scenes later between Agrippa and Enobarbus:

. . . Enobarbus and Agrippa also enjoy a hearty laugh about the extravagant phrases which Lepidus uses in his attempt to lavish superlative praise equally upon both Antony and Caesar. Lepidus, they say, calls Caesar "the nonpareil" (that which has no equal) but then immediately calls Antony "thou Arabian bird" (this is, the phoenix, which also had no equal, since there was only one at any one time). In short, Lepidus gets himself into the awkward and ridiculous situation of trying to praise both men equally by asserting that neither has an equal.††

The equal praising by Lepidus shows clearly his character flaw--a lack of unity. His attempts to negotiate between powerful men brings him to ruin: Lepidus joins with Caesar to destroy Pompey, but Caesar immediately turns on Lepidus, accuses him ". . . of letters he had formerly wrote to Pompey" (III.v.11), disposes of the weak triumvir, and takes his revenue. Lepidus, destroyed by a binary purpose in attempting peace between opposing forces, supports the fact that one who is divided in allegiance and intention invites annihilation, especially when faced with a single-purposed man like Caesar.

The minor characters are therefore juxtaposed with Antony's dual nature. Caesar destroys Antony in politics

and provides a contrast for Antony's duality by a unity of purpose, which is to gain single control of the empire and bring peace. The tragic dual nature of Enobarbus is a direct result of his confusion in trying to determine the correct nature of Antony. Octavia divides her love between her brother and husband, thereby ruining her marital happiness. Pompey reflects indecision between honor and ambition and extinguishes his strength in much the same manner as Antony. Lepidus divides his support and praise equally between Antony and Caesar and invites his own removal from the triumvirate. With the exception of Cleopatra and Caesar the minor characters attempt to pursue dual interests and fail because of the duality, just as Antony fails to find unity between Roman virtue and Egyptian passion.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### IMAGERY SUGGESTIVE OF THE WEAKNESS OF ANTONY

With metaphorical language Shakespeare increases the eminence of the early Antony by sketching him as a great world figure whose reason commanded his actions, but the imagery also emphasizes the human weakness which has brought him to lethargy. Additional figurative language expands the color and warmth of Egypt and the enchantment of Cleopatra, factors which cause Antony's duality by inflaming his passions.

#### Imagery Suggests Antony's Former Stature

Antony is a triumvir who shares world domination; he has attained his high position through the exercise of reason and soldiership. The metaphors developing his greatness provide contrast for the human weakness of Antony, who loses his world position through duality of desire and purpose. Early in the play we receive the setting in which he moves and acts, and we also recognize his changing attitude:

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch  
Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space. (I.1.33-34)

Antony's love is corrupting his Roman desire for world control; his love has grown to such proportions that Cleopatra "needs

find out new heaven, new earth" (I.i.17) if she wishes to measure his love. The "wide arch" is therefore the setting within which Antony and the other characters move and within which the action strides boldly back and forth across half the then known world. Margaret Webster has perhaps the best description: "If ever Shakespeare's imagination wore seven-league boots, it is here."<sup>1</sup> Caroline Spurgeon notes that the word "world" is used forty-two times in the play; she says this usage

. . . increases the sense of grandeur, power and space, and . . . fills the imagination with the conception of beings so great that physical size is annihilated and the whole habitable globe shrinks in comparison with them.<sup>2</sup>

The images of the world, the firmament, and the ocean all enable us to see the colossal figure of Antony, who is "The triple pillar of the world. . . ." (I.i.12), and "The demi-Atlas of this earth, the arm / And burgenet of men" (I.v.23-24). Caroline Spurgeon says these images are ". . . built on so vast a scale that the whole habitable globe is but a toy to him, as it were a ball or apple which he quarters with his sword, playing with 'half the bulk of it' as he pleases, 'making and marring fortunes' (III.xi.64-65)."<sup>3</sup> Antony gives this same image when he recalls his greatness late in the play:

I, that with my sword  
Quarter'd the world, and o'er green Neptune's back  
With ships made cities. . . . (IV.xv.57-59)

✓ Antony was a soldier and statesman who attained his mastery



of the world through his merits by proper exercise of his duties. His Roman nature brought him to power; now his duality of purpose usurps all he has gained. This fact is increased by Shakespeare's departure from Plutarch where Antony's youth is pictured as a succession of vices. In Shakespeare Antony's past is an ideal manhood to be regained and the imagery strengthens and ennobles Antony's past.

After Antony's death he is remembered as a colossus by Cleopatra and Caesar, the two human forces that exploit and utilize Antony's weakness. Cleopatra says:

His legs bestrid the ocean; his rear'd arm  
 Crested the world; his voice was propeertied  
 As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends:  
 But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,  
 He was as rattling thunder. (V.11.82-86)

This former giant of the earth is the Antony who has now been destroyed by a loss of unity through the influence of Cleopatra, who intensifies his passion until it creates a numbing effect upon his thinking and acting. Caesar, who politically ruins Antony at Actium, recognizes in him the strength and power of half the world.

The breaking of so great a thing should make  
 A greater crack. The round world  
 Should have shook lions into civil streets,  
 And citizens to their dens. The death of Antony  
 Is not a single doom; in the name lay  
 A moiety of the world. (V.1.14-19)

These lines give the former greatness of Antony and build more appreciation for Antony's tragedy and for the single, obsessive purpose of Octavius. Octavius has unity because his one desire

is world control. Although he deplures the vice of the lovers, he does not set out to destroy them because of their sin; Antony and Cleopatra just happen to be in the way of his objective. The loss of the world at Actium thereby magnifies Antony's flaw because when a true Roman he is obviously the better soldier. Antony's sensual nature forces him to flee from battle just when his soldiership is leading him to a great victory in this world setting; so Antony becomes a strong tragic figure because his virtue brought him to world power, but his duality causes the human weakness that brings him ruin.

Imagery of the heavenly bodies and the universe also elevates the stature of Antony by suggesting his relationship to the stars and his equality with the gods. Thus it seems inevitable that such a man would gain great power; it is no accident or turn of fate that puts Antony in the triumvirate. Antony's conflict is described at the very beginning of the play in metaphorical language by Philo, who compares the hero to the god Mars:

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. (I.1.1-6)

This triumvir is no ordinary man; he is a "Herculean Roman" (I.1.1.84) and "The god of Jupiter" (III.1.1.10), but his human weakness has transformed him "Into a strumpet's fool" (I.1.1.14).

Yet, according to Lepidus, even the defects of Antony seem to glow with celestial light:

I must not think there are  
Evils enow to darken all his goodness.  
His faults in him seem as the spots of heaven,  
More fiery by night's blackness. . . . (I.iv.10-13)

Benjamin Spencer points to these verses as giving great stature to Antony: "Lepidus would seem to be saying that out of the vast darkness of Antony's virtues his faults shine like stars-- that his very defects involve a bright beauty."<sup>4</sup>

Not only does the nature of Antony take on the atmosphere of light, but W. H. Clemen explains that his death appears as a quenching of this light:

He is allied with the stars; hence they too grow  
dim at his death; hence the whole world darkens.<sup>5</sup>

A hint that Antony's brilliance might once fade is given by the Soothsayer, who tells Antony, "Thy lustre thickens / When he [Caesar] shines by" (II.iii.27-28). As the dual nature weakens the character of Antony the images of light change to darkness. Antony refers to his loss of brilliance after the Actium defeat, when he explains to Thyreus why it is easy for Caesar to anger him:

He makes me angry;  
And at this time most easy 't is to do 't,  
When my good stars, that were by former guides,  
Have empty left their orbs, and shot their fires  
Into th' abysm of hell. (III.xiii.143-147)

Antony acknowledges his doom with similar imagery:

Alack, our terrene moon  
 In now eclips'd; and it portends alone  
 The fall of Antony! (III.xii.152-154)

After his final defeat Antony turns to the sky and cries, "O sun, thy uprise shall I see no more. . ." (IV.xiv.45-46). When he falls on his sword the guards cry out, "The star is fallen. / And time is at his period" (IV.xiv.107-108). With his brilliant imagery, of course, Shakespeare goes beyond the source of Plutarch to develop the light and dark in Antony's character.

Cleopatra, after seeing what her treachery has caused, calls on the sun to "Burn the great sphere thou movest in! Darkling stand / The varying shore o' th' world" (IV.xv.10-11). The greatness of Antony is obliterated and she cries, "Ah, women, women, look, / Our lamp is spent, it 's out!" (IV.xv.84-85). The nature of Antony cannot contain the great complexity of spirit that pervades him. His nature becomes split as he struggles to regain the light that glowed brilliantly while he was a great soldier but darkened when he could no longer control his balance between Roman virtue and desire for Cleopatra.

#### Antony and Sword Imagery

The basis for the double nature of Antony is heightened in Antony and Cleopatra by the relation of sword imagery to the hero's struggle with passion for Cleopatra and desire for Roman soldiership. The sword is symbolic of the warrior,

power, and "The royal occupation!" (IV.iv.17); therefore Antony exclaims, "I and my sword will earn our chronicle" (III.xiii.175). We observe Antony in military dress in the battle scenes, the conferences with Caesar and Pompey, and at the opening of the play to enforce the words of Philo, who speaks of "plated Mars" (I.1.4) and "buckles on his breast" (I.1.8). Antony recalls his past to speak contemptuously of Caesar, who is not manly because he did not unsheath his sword and depended upon others to fight for him.

. . . he at Philippi kept  
His sword e'en like a dancer, while I struck  
The lean and wrinkled Cassius; and 't was I  
That the mad Brutus ended; he alone  
Dealt on lieutenantry, and no practice had  
In the brave squares of war. . . . (III.xi.35-40)

In the past Antony asserted himself as a man by the use of his sword, but Caesar's sword is more like an ornament. In an attempt to regain power Antony resorts to his sword and challenges Caesar to single combat:

I dare him therefore  
To lay his gay comparisons apart,  
And answer me declin'd, sword against sword,  
Ourselves alone. (III.xiii.25-28)

Caesar refuses this request which Enobarbus recognizes as futile. Enobarbus indicates Antony is now the one with an ineffectual sword in the contemptuous reference to the hero as a "sworder":

Yes, like enough high-battle'd Caesar will  
Unstate his happiness, and be stag'd to th' show,  
Against a sworder! (III.xiii.29-31)

And when he determines to leave Antony, Enobarbus again mentions the weak sword that Antony now possesses:

. . . when valour preys on reason,  
It eats the sword it fights with. I will seek  
Some way to leave him. (III.xiii.199-201)

The sword imagery builds the stature of Antony and is then used to show loss of judgment.

Cleopatra also has a strong effect upon Antony through her control of his sword, which is rendered almost powerless in Egypt. The association of the sword with Cleopatra gives sexual implications to the image. Agrippa notes that

She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed.  
He plough'd her, and she cropp'd. (II.ii.233-234)

The sword changes with this metaphor into an agent of sexual pleasure because of the phallic suggestion. Cleopatra's determination is shown by her taking of his sword and wearing it:

That time,--O times!--  
I laugh'd him out of patience; and that night  
I laugh'd him into patience; and the next morn,  
Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed;  
Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst  
I wore his sword Phillippan. (II.v.19-23)

Even Antony refers to her effect on his actions following his defeat:

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)

These verses are support of the theme because he indicates that his power to act, represented by the sword, has been weakened by his equal capacity for passion.

As Antony nears his ultimate death by suicide, the sword imagery takes more significant meaning by creating his loss of manhood by his loss of the sword. Antony tells Mardian that Cleopatra ". . .has robbed me of my sword" (IV.xiv.23), thus implying that he has been rendered impotent. To Eros he says:

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

Antony realizes he is "No more a soldier" (IV.xiv.42), yet he cannot help but recall the greatness of his sword before he falls upon the sword in his suicide attempt:

I, that with my sword  
Quarter's the world, and o'er green Neptune's back  
With ships made cities. . . . (IV.xiv.57-59)

The memory of his accomplishments and the desire to go down in history as a great soldier remain the unfulfilled images he carries to his death. Even Antony's ability to use the sword is too weak for the suicide and he must ask the guard to "Draw thy sword, and give me / Sufficing strokes for death" (IV.xiv.116-117). The ultimate symbol of Antony's loss of soldiership is shown by Dercetas' theft of Antony's sword, which he takes to Caesar, knowing that "This sword but shown to Caesar with this tidings, / Shall enter me with him" (IV.xiv.112-113). Caesar receives the sword of Antony and acquires sole ownership of the world.

### Food Imagery

Much of the play's imagery is associated with food, which suggests the indulgence of Antony in the sensual delights of Egypt. Antony is the consumer in terms of appetite; and Cleopatra is the tempting, delicious food:

. . . other women cloy  
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry  
Where most she satisfies. . . . (II.ii.240-243)

Her variety increases her desirability each time Antony tastes this sustenance, for she is his "Egyptian dish" (II.vi.134) and a "dish for the gods" (V.ii.275). Cleopatra confirms this idea by saying, "I was / A morsel for a monarch. . ." (I.v.30-31). J. Leeds Barroll explains, ". . . The gluttony motif was so firmly established in the tradition of the story that Shakespeare has only to allude to it lightly to evoke the association."<sup>6</sup> Barroll adds:

When we also consider his imagery which expressed lechery in terms of appetite for food, we might conclude that an understandable consistency links the terms of that basic metaphor. Gluttony led to lust, and, therefore, could symbolize lust.<sup>7</sup>

Barroll's point is that the Elizabethans saw the connection between feasting and sexual indulgence and would associate these actions with idleness and loss of judgment. Antony realizes his idleness is dangerous, "Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know, / My idleness doth hatch" (I.ii.133-134). He recognizes that Cleopatra is the cause of his inactive state:





This early Antony was the hard, traditional soldier; but his gluttony has caused "lascivious wassails" and idleness. Antony therefore indulges too deeply in his emotional appetites, loses the desire for action, and fails through lack of judgment caused by the dual conflict.

#### Imagery of Cleopatra As a Serpent

Surrounding the Queen of Egypt is imagery that increases her reputation as the seductive mistress of sensual pleasure to show that she is the temptress who entices Antony into her arms and poisons him with her endless appetite for love. Imagery of serpents and poison begins early in the play and fittingly terminates with a Nile serpent extinguishing Cleopatra's life. She identifies herself with the serpents while Antony is in Rome:

He 's speaking now,  
Or murmuring "Where 's my serpent of old Nile?"  
For so he calls me. Now I feed myself  
With most delicious poison. (I.v.24-27)

Daniel Stempel believes that emphasis in these lines should be placed on "myself"<sup>8</sup>: "The implication of these lines in Cleopatra's reverie is that hitherto she has been feeding her delicious poison to Antony."<sup>9</sup> Allusion to this poison is made by Antony in Rome as he explains to Caesar how ". . .poisoned hours had bound me up / From mine own knowledge" (II.11.90-91). This statement is a clear indication of his loss of judgment through the poisonous influence of the queen. George Brandes labels the play a poisoning story like that of Macbeth except

that Macbeth's weakness was ambition and Antony's is the poison of sensuality administered by Cleopatra.<sup>10</sup>

The queen's character is illuminated further by a series of references to the serpent when she learns of Antony's marriage to Octavia. She tells the messenger, "Thou shouldst come like a Fury crown'd with snakes. . ." (II.v.40). After she learns the truth she cries: "Melt Egypt into Nile! and kindly creatures / Turn all to serpents!" (II.v.78-79). The messenger refuses to lie and Cleopatra snarls:

O, I would thou didst,  
So half my Egypt were submerg'd and made  
A cistern for scald'd snakes! (II.v.92-95)

Her quick anger in this scene reveals her affinity with the serpents of the Nile.

A touch of irony is applied to the poison motif, for Cleopatra invokes death by poison if she has been unfaithful to her lover in the Thyreus episode.

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! (II.xii.158-162)

Her feelings are expressed, but the lines also serve to forecast her fate with the asp. She asks the rustic who brings the basket: "Hast thou the pretty worm of Nilus there, / That kills and pains not?" (V.ii.243-244). The peasant adds his own dramatic irony in his discussion with her:



to his loss of judgment. The gluttony imagery reveals his appetite for Cleopatra, the treacherous serpent who deliberately poisons him with love for the flesh. He is a truly great Roman who is weakened by duality between Roman values and passion for his queen until reduced to the fatal suicide.

## CONCLUSION

A study of Antony and Cleopatra reveals that the most defensible basis for the theme of the play is Antony's unresolved conflict between passion for Cleopatra and allegiance to conventions he should maintain as a Roman. Antony indicates his tragedy by saying:

. . . when we in our viciousness grow hard--  
O misery on 't!--the wise gods see our eyes;  
In our own filth drop our clear judgements; make us  
Adore our errors; laugh at 's, while we strut  
To our confusion. (III.xiii.111-114)

The life of Rome and the life of Alexandria both vie for his attention, and he does not wish to give up either way of life. He becomes confused and loses his judgment, for he fails to understand that the two philosophies of life cannot be reconciled. A choice is open to him early in the play, and a decision in favor of either Rome or Alexandria must be made if he is to gain unity; but he does not resolve his conflict because he tries to maintain his Roman power while sleeping, eating, and whoring in Egypt. His confusion and loss of judgment propel him to flee the battle at Actium; this action induces his loss of manhood and paves the way for his final destruction. He hopes to regain his valor, but he cannot force himself to leave Cleopatra; therefore the paradox of his nature is complete when he fittingly dies in Cleopatra's

arms desiring remembrance as a valiant soldier.

Shakespeare departs from Plutarch to build the character of Antony, for the historian pictured Antony as a man ruined by women. Shakespeare gives Antony more character by making the hero responsible for insults to Caesar, the desertion of Enobarbus, the loss at Actium, and a final loss of judgment. Shakespeare also pictures a glorious, ideal past for Antony that Plutarch recorded as debauched by military mistakes and private vices. This departure by Shakespeare gives more emphasis to Antony's dying desire for remembrance as a noble Roman soldier, a fact which leaves a doubt about some critics' assertions of a final commitment of Antony's entire being to Cleopatra.

Cleopatra is an integral part of Antony's internal turmoil. Antony has been a great soldier, but he is seduced by the queen into the lethargy of indulgence of sensual pleasures. He realizes his danger: "These strong Egyptian fetters I must break, / Or lose myself in dotage" (I.11.119-120); but he neglects to divorce himself from Egypt, and we witness the tragedy of the destruction of a man whose nature is divided. Cleopatra provides a direct antithesis of the mores and values of the Roman Empire. She is used by Shakespeare to provoke and intensify the sensual desires of Antony. Cleopatra's selfish nature prevents a true love of Antony, but she gains great expression by a vision of such a love. She attains no transfiguration through love because she delays her death with optimistic expectations of retaining royal status. She searches without success for a refuge from the disgrace of

Caesar's planned triumph; thereafter she takes her own life.

In developing the character of Cleopatra, Shakespeare departs somewhat from Plutarch by lessening the dark side of her nature to show better the inner turmoil of the hero. Antony in Shakespeare is destroyed by his own weaknesses, not by the Egyptian queen as in Plutarch's account. It is doubtful in the drama that Cleopatra betrays Antony; so the loss at Actium makes Antony's loss of judgment more forceful. Shakespeare darkens and builds Cleopatra's selfish nature by inserting the Egyptian messenger and by her dramatic search for an escape from the triumph that is so clearly pictured for her by an angry Antony before his death.

Caesar is a foil to Antony, for the victorious Roman has a unity and singleness of purpose that enable him to gain mastery of the empire. He becomes the strength of Rome by removing the threat which Antony and Cleopatra pose. He is then able to move a step closer to his desire for universal peace.

Other minor characters are juxtaposed with Antony's unresolved conflict. Enobarbus ends in tragedy because he cannot decide the true nature of Antony. This confusion causes an internal conflict concerning the folly of loyalty to a foolish lord or the wisdom of desertion; he decides on the latter course and dies of a broken heart. Octavia tries to bridge the differences between her brother and Antony, but this divided love destroys her unity and marital happiness. Pompey refuses to accept Menas' offer to murder the triumvirs



because his honor conflicts with his ambition; therefore he reflects the tragedy of Antony, since both reveal an inability to act in a direct, unified way. Lepidus also reveals a lack of unity by attempting equal treatment of opposing forces. His actions, like those of Pompey, Octavia, and Enobarbus, support the doctrine that a person divided in allegiance and intention will be destroyed, especially when faced with a man of unity like Caesar.

The imagery of the play also develops the portrait of a great soldier weakened by a conflict between his passion and virtue that he cannot resolve. As a great soldier he is aligned with worldly stature and the light of the stars, but when faced with lack of judgment his celestial light slowly dims and dies. His sword is an image of power and greatness, but his professional ability weakens until he cannot even make a clean stroke in his suicide. Food imagery reveals his gluttonous appetite for sexual pleasure. Cleopatra is treated metaphorically to develop her association with serpents and to imply her poisonous effect upon Antony.

Antony has a paradoxical nobility that is capable of creating sympathy and admiration, but his nature is deeply flawed. He tries to retain both his rank as a great soldier and his sexual relationship with Cleopatra, but the two elements defy unification and he ends in tragedy.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup>William Rosen, Shakespeare and the Craft of Tragedy (Cambridge, 1960), p. 104.

<sup>2</sup>Willard Farnham, Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier (Berkeley, 1950), p. 175.

<sup>3</sup>G. Wilson Knight, The Imperial Theme (London, 1951), pp. 199-200.

CHAPTER ONE

<sup>1</sup>Donald A. Stauffer, Shakespeare's World of Images (New York, 1949), p. 233.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>3</sup>Mark Van Doren, Shakespeare (Garden City, 1939), p. 239.

<sup>4</sup>Knight, p. 200.

<sup>5</sup>A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (London, 1956), p. 83.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas McFarland, "Antony and Octavius," Yale Review, XLVIII (1959), 228.

<sup>7</sup>Dever Wilson, ed., Antony and Cleopatra, by William Shakespeare (Cambridge, 1954), p. xxxiii.

<sup>8</sup>H. R. Ridley, ed., Antony and Cleopatra, by William Shakespeare (London, 1954), p. xlix.

<sup>9</sup>Franklin M. Dickey, Not Wisely But Too Well (San Marino, California, 1957), p. 177.

<sup>10</sup>Farnham, p. 175.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>12</sup>Rosen, p. 152.

<sup>13</sup>Diekey, p. 179.

<sup>14</sup>Farnham, pp. 178-179.

<sup>15</sup>David Cecil, Poets and Story-Tellers (New York, 1949), p. 8.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>17</sup>Farnham, p. 179.

<sup>18</sup>Delora G. Cunningham, "The Characterization of Shakespeare's Cleopatra," Shakespeare Quarterly, VI (1957), 14. She makes the assertion that Cleopatra's actions in the final act are in their main outlines comparable to those of the penitent Christian. This idea is based on four theories: (1) Shakespeare would interpret Plutarch in Christian terms, (2) Enebarbus gives us Christian principles throughout the play, (3) the lovers' acts of judgment are in line with the Christian idea that men sin through being ill disposed towards their death, and (4) a parody of the Christian life is shown by Antony and Cleopatra placing the absolute in themselves and their love. The answer to this unusual view is best given by John Danby, Poets on Fortune's Hill, p. 148: "There is no so-called 'love-romanticism' in the play. . . . Egypt is the Egypt of the biblical glosses: exile from the spirit, thralldom of the flesh-pots, diminution of human kindness. To go further still in sentimentality and claim that there is a 'redemption' motif in Antony and Cleopatra's love is an even more violent error. To the Shakespeare who wrote King Lear it would surely smack of blasphemy. The fourth and fifth acts of Antony and Cleopatra are not epiphanies. They are the ends moved to by that process whereby things rot themselves with motion--unhappy and bedizened and sordid, streaked with the mean, the ignoble, the contemptible. Shakespeare may have his plays in which redemption is a theme (and I, think he has), but Antony and Cleopatra is not one of them.

<sup>19</sup>Wilson, p. xxi.

## CHAPTER TWO

<sup>1</sup>Lawrence E. Bowling, "Duality in the Minor Characters in Antony and Cleopatra," College English, XVIII (1957), 251.

<sup>2</sup>All textual references to Antony and Cleopatra will be taken from Thomas Marc Parrott, ed., Shakespeare Twenty-three Plays and the Sonnets (New York, 1953).

<sup>3</sup>John F. Danby, Poets On Fortune's Hill (London, 1952), p. 148.

<sup>4</sup>McFarland, p. 204. McFarland, an anti-romantic, later sees love winning over the world.

<sup>5</sup>Rosen, pp. 111-112.

<sup>6</sup>Alan Warner, "A Note On Antony and Cleopatra," English, XI (1957), 140.

<sup>7</sup>Dean B. Lyman, "Janus in Alexandria: A Discussion of Antony and Cleopatra," Sewanee Review, XLVIII (1940), 104. Lyman adds this point: "The unifying principle of this story . . . resides in the perplexity of a soul which, Janus-like, looks two ways. Antony and Cleopatra. . . are characters of great psychological complexity. Like Hamlet, Antony cannot resolutely choose one difficult alternative and resign the other; moreover, his inability to do so leads, like Hamlet's, to tragic disaster, but a disaster in which Cleopatra and an empire must fall with him."

<sup>8</sup>Michael Lloyd, "The Roman Tongue," Shakespeare Quarterly, X (1959), 461.

<sup>9</sup>Rosen, p. 109.

<sup>10</sup>Farnham, p. 176.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>13</sup>John Munro, ed., The London Shakespeare (New York, 1957), p. 1215.

<sup>14</sup>Rosen, p. 122.

<sup>15</sup>G. B. Harrison, Shakespeare's Tragedies (London, 1951), p. 221.

<sup>16</sup>Harley Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare (Princeton, 1952), p. 240.

<sup>17</sup>Farnham, pp. 193-194.

<sup>18</sup>David S. Berkeley, "On Oversimplifying Antony," College English, XVII (1955), 98-99. Frank Hook objects to the Berkeley reading: he insists that ". . . the dross is purged in the fire of agony and only pure gold remains" (College English, XVII [1956], 365-366). Berkeley's answer in part says: "Mr. Hook seems to believe that sentiments are true because they are inspiringly phrased and movingly uttered. . . . Experience of Antony must be explained away by something more substantial than an appeal to Antony's poetic utterance, however genuine its ring. . . ." (Rejoinder by Berkeley, College English, XVIII [1957], 286-287). Cynthia Grill also objects to a realistic reading of Antony

in Notes and Queries, N.S. VII, 191. She says, "Antony is utterly incapable of base treachery." But if Antony is not capable of treachery, how do we explain away his deception of Octavia and Caesar in his short-lived marriage? Willard Farnham (p. 187) says, "The Antony of Antony and Cleopatra, like the Antony of Julius Caesar, can cloak dishonesty with plausibility." Shakespeare gives no clue on how to interpret these dying lines; so perhaps the "wise ignorance" of David Berkeley is the better explanation.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>20</sup>Rosen, p. 155.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Cecil, p. 16.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>24</sup>Diskey, p. 159.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>26</sup>Rosen, p. 115.

### CHAPTER THREE

<sup>1</sup>Rosen, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup>Danby, p. 145.

<sup>3</sup>W. MacCallum, Shakespeare's Roman Plays (London, 1910), p. 426.

<sup>4</sup>Rosen, p. 154.

<sup>5</sup>Elmer Stoll, Art and Artifice in Shakespeare (New York, 1951), p. 147.

<sup>6</sup>Perry D. Westbrook, "Horace's Influence on Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LXII (1947), 394.

<sup>7</sup>Rosen, p. 150.

<sup>8</sup>J. I. M. Stewart, Character and Motive in Shakespeare (London, 1949), pp. 77-78.

<sup>9</sup>Rosen, p. 153.

<sup>10</sup>Munro, p. 1214.

<sup>11</sup>Levin L. Schücking, Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays (New York, 1948), p. 132.

<sup>12</sup>McFarland, p. 228.

<sup>13</sup>William Hazlitt, Characters of Shakespeare's Plays (London, 1926), p. 76.

<sup>14</sup>Knight, p. 324.

<sup>15</sup>Munro, p. 1214.

<sup>16</sup>Bradley, p. 84.

<sup>17</sup>Granville-Barker, p. 401.

<sup>18</sup>Resen, p. 146.

<sup>19</sup>Herman H. Simpson, A Study of Shakespeare's Departures From Plutarch In the Characterization of Cleopatra in Antony and Cleopatra (Unpublished M. A. thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1961), pp. 104-105.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

<sup>1</sup>Ribner, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup>MacCallum, p. 382.

<sup>3</sup>Danby, p. 144.

<sup>4</sup>Bowling, p. 255.

<sup>6</sup>MacCallum, p. 377.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Bowling, p. 252.

<sup>9</sup>MacCallum, p. 369.

<sup>10</sup>Bowling, p. 252.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

#### CHAPTER FIVE

<sup>1</sup>Margaret Webster, Shakespeare Without Tears (New York, 1942), p. 261.

<sup>2</sup>Caroline Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us (New York, 1936), p. 352.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Benjamin Spencer, "Antony and Cleopatra and the Paradoxical Metaphor," Shakespeare Quarterly, IX (1958), 375.

<sup>5</sup>W. H. Clemen, The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery (London, 1953), p. 162.

<sup>6</sup>Barrell, p. 712.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Stempel, p. 68.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>George Brandes, William Shakespeare, A Critical Study (London, 1905), p. 462.

<sup>11</sup>Stempel, p. 71.

<sup>12</sup>Spencer, p. 377. Spencer emphasizes the following point: "The virtue whose feature the dramatic mirror shows here is an as yet undefined synthesis lying beyond both Rome and Egypt but partaking of the values of both. For this undefined synthesis paradox was the inevitable mode of discourse. Hence at the end of the play we have the paradox of nobility in failure and pettiness in success, of magnanimity in passion and calculation in reason. What Shakespeare precisely intended we can never know." Spencer wishes to prevent a narrow didactic reading of the play, whether moralistic or political, and to show the mysterious effect of Cleopatra upon the rational Romans through the ambivalence of the two lovers.

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TRAINING PATENTMENT

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