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The Many Faces of Cleopatra: How Performance and Characterization Change Cleopatra in Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Legend of Good Women," William Shakespeare's The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra, and John Dryden's All for Love; or, The World Well Lost

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The Many Faces of Cleopatra: How Performance and Characterization Change Cleopatra in
Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Legend of Cleopatra," William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Antony
and Cleopatra*, and John Dryden's *All for Love; or, The World Well Lost*

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Abstract

Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, and John Dryden presented the character of Cleopatra differently, through both the written language of their pieces and their own and others' performances of her, in order to meet the demands of their respective audiences and performance conditions. Chaucer, in "The Legend of Cleopatra," portrays and performs Cleopatra comically. Shakespeare, in his *Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra*, characterizes Cleopatra as a complex woman. In *All for Love; or, The World Well Lost*, Dryden characterizes Cleopatra as sentimental, but the performance of her on stage by female actresses added depth to the role. For Chaucer and Dryden, the performance is key to understanding their Cleopatras. For Shakespeare, however, the characterization of Cleopatra through language is more important. By investigating the performance conditions of the Late Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Restoration while analyzing each of these pieces, I show how viewing these works through a lens of performance constructs a means through which modern audiences can understand each author's Cleopatra.

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Dedication

For Paul.

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction	1
II.	Chapter 1	8
III.	Chapter 2	26
IV.	Chapter 3	48
V.	Conclusion	71
VI.	Works Cited and Consulted	73

Introduction

During the late Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Restoration, similar topics provided entertainment both for court audiences and the masses. Throughout these time periods, playwrights and poets adapted the stories of Greek and Roman gods, ancient battles, Roman rulers, the East, and other mysterious places and people. Oftentimes, the great men and the governmental systems of antiquity acted as the focus of these adaptations; the contemporary audiences compared both to their own times and rulers. One person who interested writers and audiences across all three ages was Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, a fascinating and intelligent woman of the world, who deserves to be studied in her own right. Some accounts of her depict Cleopatra as jealous, self-indulgent, cowardly, and desperate; many portray her as a woman who succumbed only to the passion of love. However, even in accounts that focus on Cleopatra's powerful rule and passionate sexuality, such as John Dryden's *All for Love*, the authors still portray Cleopatra as needy and jealous. Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, and John Dryden are three authors whose audiences and time periods influence their portrayals of Cleopatra. Because people were so familiar with the story of Cleopatra and her lovers, this thesis explores how these three authors presented Cleopatra differently in order to meet the demands of their respective audiences and performance conditions.

I. Cleopatra: A Brief History

According to modern historians, who study Cleopatra¹—rather than early historians whose focus was the great men of antiquity—Cleopatra VII was quite the ruler. She was the last ruler of the Ptolemaic Dynasty, which began to rule Egypt after the death of Alexander the Great

¹ See, for example, Diana E. E. Kleiner's *Cleopatra and Rome*; Prudence J. Jones's *Cleopatra*; Elaine Fantham, Helene P. Foley, Natalie B. Kampen, Sarah B. Pomeroy, and H.A. Shapiro's *Women in the Classical World: Image and Text*

and after the Persians were expelled in 332 B.C. Cleopatra was born around 69 B.C. and killed herself in 30 B.C. Her death ended the Ptolemaic reign of Egypt, and Egypt and all its possessions became part of the Roman Empire. Cleopatra's life was very full: she spoke several languages, travelled, ruled an empire when no woman would have been thought capable of doing so, and just so happened to love and have children with two very powerful men (Grochowski).

It is not her rule of Egypt that people remember her for, though. It is her love affairs that gave birth to the ideas about her that most people remember. It is true that Mark Antony followed Cleopatra as she fled Actium, that false reports of Cleopatra's death caused Antony to kill himself, that when Cleopatra heard of Antony's death, she killed herself using Egyptian asps, and that they were buried together.² However, the intimacy of Cleopatra and Antony's relationship must be left up to the imagination, as we have no diaries or journals to tell how each of them felt. Perhaps this is why their relationship has fascinated so many authors over the years.

Geoffrey Chaucer introduced Cleopatra into English literature with *The Legend of Good Women*: "The Legend of Cleopatra."³ In it, Chaucer skips the bulk of Cleopatra's life, focusing on the Battle of Actium and, later, Cleopatra's death. Chaucer introduces her as a martyr for love. His Cleopatra, at Antony's grave, says others will remember her committing suicide to be with Antony and will say there "Was nevere unto hire love a trewer queen" (Chaucer l. 695). Chaucer, at the behest of Queen Anne, wrote the *Legend of Good Women*. In the prologue, Chaucer takes the audience into a dream vision, during which he dreams of Cupid and Alceste. Alceste commands Chaucer to write *The Legend of Good Women* as recompense for his previous works, many of which insulted women and portrayed them as unfaithful and as having cuckolded

² *Ibid.*

³ Throughout the thesis, I will use italics to refer to the entire text of *The Legend of Good Women*. I will use quotation marks to denote the segment that is "The Legend of Cleopatra."

their husbands, which bothered Cupid greatly. Chaucer accepts the real task from Queen Anne, and he accepts the much more stringent rules set before him by Alceste in the dream vision. What he creates is the *The Legend of Good Women*, containing nine odes to women, including Cleopatra, who loved purely and truly.

Following Chaucer, about 200 years later, William Shakespeare writes his Roman Trilogy: *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus* (Cantor). In this trilogy, Shakespeare revisits many themes of his other tragedies and histories: ideas of kingship, fears of government, relationships between men and women, homosocial relationships, and many more. However, while Cantor's conception of these plays as a trilogy makes sense because of their common geographical setting and because they all take place in ancient times, *Antony and Cleopatra* distinguishes itself from Shakespeare's other plays in several ways. First, the structure is singular in its messiness. Yes, it has five acts, but two of those acts contain more than ten scenes. The play takes place over a ten year period, and there are, including servants and guards, approximately fifty characters. Most importantly, rather than taking a single "great man" as its central character, as he does in *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare makes both Antony and Cleopatra central. Cleopatra joins these great men on center stage. In contrast to Chaucer's short treatment of Cleopatra's life, Shakespeare's version focuses both on the military and governmental aspects of the time period in which Antony and Cleopatra rule, as well as their love story. Shakespeare portrays the lovers as being very much in love with each other, to the detriment of both and to the detriment of their states. In Walter Cohen's introduction to the play, he writes that Antony and Cleopatra's deaths present an "outcome...desired by readers and audiences," and their deaths unite "Rome and Egypt ... martial valor and sexual ecstasy" (Cohen 2625). In the end, Cleopatra is not portrayed as a martyr, but, rather, she and Antony appear as

two people who could not think outside themselves and did not think of their responsibilities to others or to their countries. Their deaths act as a catharsis to the play's constant tension between Rome and Egypt, the public and the private, duty and love. In other words, while Chaucer focuses on Cleopatra's true love for Antony, Shakespeare focuses on the public consequences of Cleopatra and Antony's love for each other.

John Dryden, in his *All for Love; or, the World Well Lost*, focuses mainly on the "personal tragedy" of their romance and its effects on the domestic sphere (Canfield and Sneidern). Dryden increases the sentiment and decreases everything else; he adheres to the unities of time and space, but, like Shakespeare, he still engages in political commentary. In his preface to *All for Love*, Dryden writes,

I have therefore steered the middle course; and have drawn the character of Antony as favourably as Plutarch, Appian, and Dion Cassius would give me leave; the like I have observed in Cleopatra. That which is wanting to work up the pity to a greater height, was not afforded me by the story; for the crimes of love, which they both committed, were not occasioned by any necessity, or fatal ignorance, but were wholly voluntary; since our passions are, or ought to be, within our power.

In an era of increasing sentimentality on stage, Dryden would have liked to "work up the pity to a greater height," but, instead, he portrays Antony and Cleopatra as having chosen their path – a path of selfish desire. Chaucer shows Cleopatra to be a martyr; Shakespeare elevates her into the public ruling sphere; Dryden presents Cleopatra as a woman driven by her passions, giving his audiences insight into her emotional motivations. One reason Dryden is able to focus more on Cleopatra's inner self and on the personal interactions between Cleopatra and Antony lies in the fact that Cleopatra would have actually been played by a woman, rather than by a boy, as in Shakespeare's case. The inclusion of Antony's wife and his legitimate children in Dryden's play focuses the play even more on the personal rather than the public aspects of Antony and

Cleopatra's lives. Because of the presence of females on stage, Restoration audiences expected plays to delve more into the personal and sexual aspects of the characters. With the presence of female actresses, Dryden possessed the ability to create some titillating, or what Restoration audiences would have considered so, scenes and dialogues. He adds the "catfight" between Cleopatra and Octavia (III.474-532), not present in Shakespeare's version, as a way to intrigue the audience.

Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Dryden represent Cleopatra in varying ways: as a martyr, a lovesick woman, a manipulative woman, and a powerful and sexy queen. Since the audiences of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Restoration would have been familiar with the history of Roman antiquity, through cultural memory and through public retellings, it seems fair to assume that all three of these authors' audiences would have been familiar enough with Cleopatra and Antony's story to be able to note significant changes to it. Furthermore, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Dryden would have been extremely familiar with Cleopatra and Antony's story, through both Virgil and Plutarch's historical accounts. They would have been knowledgeable enough to very purposefully make changes to the historical version and adapt the story for their own purposes.

II. Chapter Breakdown

Chapter One: "The Legend of Cleopatra"

In chapter one of my thesis I will take an in depth look into Chaucer's "Legend of Cleopatra" in his larger *The Legend of Good Women*. Specifically, I will engage in a close reading of the text, focusing on the text's performance history and how Chaucer, through his performance, depicts Cleopatra.

Chapter Two: *Antony and Cleopatra*

In chapter two of my thesis, I will investigate William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. As I am doing in Chapter One, I will investigate the text's performance history and engage in a close reading of the text, focusing on how outside perceptions of Cleopatra differ from her own self-scripting within the play. Though I do discuss the performance of Cleopatra by a boy-actress and the implications of that performance, my main focus is on Shakespeare's characterization of Cleopatra rather than the actual performance.

Chapter Three: *All for Love; or, the World Well Lost*

In Chapter Three of my thesis, I will delve into John Dryden's *All for Love; or, the World Well Lost*. As I am doing in Chapters One and Two, I will discuss the piece's performance history and engage in a close reading of the text, focusing on how Dryden introduces Cleopatra, how Cleopatra interacts with Octavia, and the manner in which Cleopatra performs her own death.

These three authors develop one character in varied ways. Chaucer needed to satisfy a queen and her court with his recitation of "The Legend of Cleopatra"; Shakespeare needed to pass the censorship of the Jacobean court, but he also had a demanding public audience to please; a censorship board and a demanding audience also constricted Dryden's work. Each version of Cleopatra presents a new layer of her ever-developing mythos; however, each step in this development depended on several factors. Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Dryden navigated differing English courts, changing performance conditions, and ever-broadening audiences.

In Chaucer's comic performance of Cleopatra in "The Legend of Cleopatra" in *The Legend of Good Women*, the comedy of the piece comes out in each line, and Chaucer's performance of this comic Cleopatra delighted his immediate listening audience, as well as

succeeding audiences of the 15th and 16th centuries. Shakespeare's characterization of Cleopatra in *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra* shows her to be a deep and full character. This, combined with her own and others' inability to define her and the performance of her by a boy-actress, all lead to a complex and multi-layered characterization of her. In *All for Love; or, The World Well Lost*, Dryden's characterization of Cleopatra and the original actress's (as well as later actresses in the part) performance of Cleopatra show his Cleopatra to be a sentimental character, given more depth due to the actresses playing her.

For Chaucer's Cleopatra, his performance of her was absolutely key to his characterization of her as comic, and understanding his performance enabled his audience in the 14th century to perceive her as such, which is why we should read his text as a performance today. For Shakespeare's Cleopatra, his characterization of her is key to understanding his Cleopatra as complex and human. Since *Antony and Cleopatra* might have only been performed once or twice during Shakespeare's lifetime, as I point out in my literature review in Chapter Two, the boy-actress's performance of Cleopatra, though it does add depth to the performance, does not have a large effect on how we should read Shakespeare's Cleopatra today. Shakespeare's words are much more important than the performance. For Dryden's Cleopatra, his characterization of Cleopatra as sentimental was exponentially enhanced by Elizabeth Boutell's performance. Her sensational offstage lifestyle combined with her virtuous onstage persona made Dryden's Cleopatra much more interesting as an onstage character and understanding Boutell's performance enhances how we can read Dryden's *All for Love* today. In all three cases, understanding the performance or the characterization or both has an impact on how we read each piece today.

Chapter 1: The Comic Cleopatra

I. Introduction

This chapter will not only be concerned with what Chaucer says in “The Legend of Cleopatra,” but with how he says it. “To say” is the operative infinitive here, as I argue, along with other scholars such as William A. Quinn, that Chaucer did perform *The Legend of Good Women*⁴ as a poet-reciter before he re-wrote it as a text-writer. Chaucer’s own performance of the text made the transmission of the stories into a comic rehearsal. However, that comedy and that performance have been lost for many modern readers, and, now, it becomes important to regain both in order that “The Legend of Cleopatra” be viewed as a success instead of as a failure. Several textual clues in “The Legend of Cleopatra” indicate that Chaucer spoke this poem to a live court audience, and the audience responded well to his performance. Though “The Legend of Cleopatra” comprises only 126 lines of the thousands Chaucer wrote during his lifetime, including both diplomatic correspondence and fictional pieces, these 126 lines deserve investigation and discussion.

Robert Worth Frank, Jr. writes of scholars’ attention to the *Legend* that it is often “ignored completely” or “abruptly dismissed as an unwelcome task and a fragmentary failure” (vii). Because the transmission of the story adheres to few conventions and does not use the abbreviation of the narrative’s events to its full potential, Frank believes, “*Cleopatra*, the shortest of the narratives, is one of the least successful, in some part because of its extreme brevity...History, drama, and romance have all been cheated. What went wrong?” but he also says, “One misfortune he is not responsible for: Shakespeare also chose Cleopatra. ... Chaucer

⁴ For this thesis, I use the 3rd edition of *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson. This edition is based on *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, edited by F.N. Robinson.

has denied her charms and made a failure of what we know can be a triumph” (37 italics in original). So, even though Frank finds Chaucer’s presentation of Cleopatra less than satisfactory, he suggests that it is possible to attribute what many have seen as a failure on Chaucer’s part to the fact that Shakespeare also, more successfully in Frank’s opinion, took up a banner for Cleopatra. While I agree that Shakespeare’s version of Cleopatra presents the most complex and human of all three versions I discuss in this thesis, I nevertheless argue that Chaucer’s performance of Cleopatra is the most successful performance among all three that I discuss, even if his characterization is not as full as one might wish. Since Chaucer is so stylistically gifted, he made Cleopatra’s legend brief on purpose and left out or included certain events for a reason, such as the Battle of Actium and Cleopatra’s suicide. Chaucer’s performance of Cleopatra is the interpretive act indicating how his audience should interpret his characterization of Cleopatra. Rather than the failed fragment scholars such as Frank, Jr. perceive it to be, “The Legend of Cleopatra” is actually a successful comic performance by Chaucer. Understanding the tone of the performance is key in order to see the comedy of the piece and to view it as a successful work.

II. Literature Review: Chaucer’s Sources, his Performance, and his Audience

The ideas and characters depicted by Chaucer in *The Legend of Good Women* stem from many sources, learned through his schooling and travels. Chaucer gained inspiration both from local and regional sources as well as outside, foreign sources. One way to see who and what influenced him is to investigate his translated and adapted works to see how he fit them to his own time and culture. One such translation and compilation of these outside sources is *The Legend of Good Women*, a compilation of stories of non-English origin, of which “The Legend of Cleopatra” is the first. According to Robert Worth Frank, Jr., during the Middle Ages, “The poet is not so much an ‘inventor,’ a spontaneous creator, as he is a transmitter and reworker of

already existing materials... ‘Translating’ is an important activity of a medieval writer; in a sense, it *is* the activity of the writer” (30 italics in original). In other words, only part of the influence the other stories had on Chaucer was in their content; however, Chaucer’s task is not just to transmit the content; he must find new and interesting ways of presenting the content to his audiences.

Much of what Chaucer writes about comes from non-English sources, but many of his ideas also stemmed from his life experience and his fascination with the world around him. In addition to contemporary foreign influences and local and regional influences, the historical information found in Ovid and Virgil’s writings influenced Chaucer’s characterizations and portrayals of classical figures like Cleopatra. Frank, Jr. tells us, “The material and theme of the *Legend* were something Chaucer had been interested in for several years. Ovid, Virgil, Guido delle Colonne were his principal sources for the legends we have” (196). Writings from men like Virgil, Dante, and Boccaccio influenced not only Chaucer’s content but also his format and style. In other words, Chaucer transmitted content, and his performance style, formed after his instruction in the art of rhetoric, also transmitted the style of the ancient rhetoricians.

According to Robert Payne, the medieval writer provides the “key of remembrance” for his audience (qtd in Frank 30). For the medieval writer, Chaucer included, “the matter” consisted of “the written materials – literature, history, moral writings, and so forth, inherited from the past, both distant and recent. The literary artist is the transmitter of this heritage. Or, to put it less passively, this heritage is a principal source of his own art and his own inspiration... The act of ‘creating’ is not primarily the creating of material” (32) but the invention of a means to transmit the material to one’s audience. Again, Chaucer’s audience was probably familiar with the

material he brought them, so his contribution was in how he presented that material to them: the performance of the material was key.

Chaucer came of age and composed in an extremely performative culture. For example, Catholicism and the performance of faith dominated daily life in medieval England. Peter Ackroyd, in his biography *Chaucer*, provides an informative example of the pervasiveness of performance in this culture via the performance of faith:

An apt symbol for the Catholic culture of fourteenth-century London might be found in the fact that there were ninety-nine churches and ninety-five inns, within the walls...[and] The urban parades and religious processions upon London's streets, as well as the stridently colourful dress of the citizens, also testify to a culture of spectacle and display...in which the ideal and the real interpenetrate one another, so that the most vivid or naturalistic detail within Chaucer's poetry can be suffused with a sense of the sacred. (8)

The existence of so many churches in relation to the number of inns in London indicates how intertwined religion was with people's daily lives. The "parades" and "processions" indicate that faith alone was not enough. It was also imminent that one perform one's faith by partaking in these religious shows. Thus, Ackroyd points out, Chaucer's work is necessarily infused "with a sense of the sacred," (since it must be part of his performance) as evidenced through his work in *The Canterbury Tales*, but also in "The Legend of Cleopatra." Chaucer's use of religious terminology, such as "martyr" to describe Cleopatra, as well as his mockery of her suicide indicate that Chaucer was well aware of the methods by which he could show his audience his true attitude towards Cleopatra. He created "The Legend of Cleopatra" for an audience who certainly would pick up on his humor because they actively participated in the performance of Catholic beliefs and rites and understood life and the dichotomy between good and evil through a religious lens.

In addition to the performative nature of religion during this time, Chaucer and his school mates also were being trained in the performative nature of speaking itself. The art of rhetoric, as developed by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and other early philosophers, came about as a means of devising speeches and then reciting them or of engaging in argumentation. Chaucer learned this art throughout his time in school, and, because of his diplomatic experience, learned to put it in to practice fairly regularly. Because of his background in the art of rhetoric, it only makes sense that Chaucer would focus equally on *what* he was saying, his matter, and *how* he was saying it, the manner.

Both William A. Quinn's and Claire Sponsler's work illustrate that the performative culture in which Chaucer lived bled into the literary and entertainment experiences of the time. Performance analysis is "essential for understanding and appreciating medieval narratives because they are intended for performance" (Vitz, Regaldo, and Lawrence qtd in Quinn *Olde Clerkis Speeche* 15), but "manuscript publication necessarily omits numerous features of authorial recital, and again a reader's awareness of such a transcription's limitations both allows and requires a richer consideration of what may have been Chaucer's preferred reading on the basis of what the page records" (31-32). In other words, for Chaucer's original audience, Chaucer's performance demonstrated *how* the work should be understood. For modern readers, though, who, due to manuscript additions and subtractions, only read Chaucer's manuscripts, they are missing the original and true tone and intent of the piece. In "Drama in the Archives: Recognizing Medieval Plays," Claire Sponsler suggests that "we get incidental mention of performances in account books, chronicles, and other public and private records, but only occasional preservation of their verbal texts," but that it is possible that "more medieval plays have survived than we currently acknowledge and that they lie hidden within manuscripts that

conceal their distinctive performative features” because “scribal techniques ... do not always differentiate speaking parts or include stage directions” (113). So, for a piece like “The Legend of Cleopatra,” the manuscript produced somewhat stripped the performance features inherent in the text written for performance. However, the scribe writing the manuscript could have included the opening and closing demarcations, as well as the punctuation as a way to carry forward the piece’s original performance, as I will illustrate during my discussion of Cleopatra’s death speech. Sponsler writes that “medieval drama” is “an activity that merges— both in practice and in the documents that record that practice – with other creative activities produced within a broadly performative culture” (114) and that research into the archives has “demonstrated the pervasive nature of theatricality in medieval culture” (124). Thus, it is no surprise that Chaucer would have composed originally for performance rather than for a reading audience. Chaucer’s *performance* was the entertainment, and *how* he performed his compositions was important to the tone, presentation, interpretation, and public acceptance of the piece by his immediate audience and successive readers of the manuscript.

Chaucer was a performer in his daily life, through his diplomatic work, and he applied his understanding of and gift for performance to his literature (Ackroyd 108), such as *The Legend of Good Women*. Indeed, “The legends themselves have been abbreviated so that they might easily fall within the scope of an evening’s reading, and there are several references to elaborate court games and rituals” (Ackroyd 123). In other words, Chaucer acted his part in the performative culture in which he lived, and he purposefully designed his work so that he could perform it for a live audience. His ability to use abbreviation worked to his benefit, not only because of the entertaining moments he chooses to include rather than to abbreviate but also because his performance enables him to make the moments funny which he does include. The effect is

enhanced by what Chaucer chooses to leave out and what he chooses to emphasize, evidenced by what scenes he chooses to include in “The Legend of Cleopatra.”

The main debate amongst scholars who study *The Legend of Good Women* is whether or not to read the legends as serious or as “comic rehersynges” (recitals or rehearsals). William Quinn and Robert Worth Frank, Jr. take up the two sides of this argument. Quinn, in his book *Chaucer’s Rehersynges*, argues that *The Legend of Good Women* was composed by Chaucer to be performed by him to a coterie audience, and that performance was meant to be comic. To begin, Quinn defines how the term “legends” would have been understood by a medieval audience. It could have meant a defense, a story of a person’s life, a history that is meant to be read, or, most importantly, the history of a saint’s life (2 footnote 2). Frank, Jr., on the other hand, asserts that *The Legend of Good Women* is actually a failure because Chaucer describes neither history nor romance accurately nor according to the conventions of his time (Frank 42-46). I agree with Quinn: the legends were designed to be comic.

Though the tone and aim of the piece are up for debate, if we accept that Chaucer did perform the *Legend* and he did so for a court audience, we also must accept that he would have wanted to make it an entertaining evening. Thus, Chaucer’s first comic performance to the court was *the* “tone-defining” rehearsing for the piece (Quinn *Rehersynges* 10), for both Chaucer’s original listeners and its subsequent readers, during that time, who would have possessed the same social, political, and cultural knowledge and, thus, would have understood the humor. Unfortunately, over time, the *Legend* became polyphonic, or imbued with the tones and contributions of various scribes, printers, readers, and, possibly, reciters.

Chaucer's first performance was "an interpretive act" (*Rehersynges* 7). In "Pronuntiatio and its Effect on Chaucer's Audience," Beryl Rowland "emphasizes the role of Chaucer the performer *as critic* because this "'I' was the persuasive force governing the interpretation'" (Rowland 48 qtd in Quinn *Rehersynges* 7 italics in original). Quinn then comments, "It is this performance context that proves most relevant to any assessment of the tone and the artistic achievement of *The Legend of Good Women*" (*Rehersynges* 7). Bruce Rosenberg in his "The Oral Performance of Chaucer's Poetry" says, "But there is more to oral performance than the text....Chaucer must have interacted with his listeners in certain identifiable ways, and this immediate *situation* affected his performance. Also, because he was speaking to responding listeners, rather than writing for them, the *medium* of communication is other than the book readers usually consider (229)" (qtd in Quinn *Rehersynges* 7 italics in original). In other words, Chaucer's original performance was not only "tone-defining," but it also acted as an immensely persuasive force because of it being his own creation that he performed.

Finally, if Chaucer knew he would be interacting with his audience, then it seems as if a comic tone would be the best way to accomplish that interaction in a positive way. Of the *Legend's* original performance context, Quinn writes:

I imagine that Queen Anne herself presided over a mixed but fairly small group of mutually acquainted attendants who witnessed Chaucer's first *rehersynge* of the *Legend*. Among the thirty to fifty listeners in this party were some of England's most high-born ladies and lords, and many of the New Men too, each having a unique expectation as to Chaucer's performance on this particular occasion, and yet all familiar with his range of acts from prior presentations...The *Legend* was probably produced as part of a festive gathering, during an extended meal in May...Chaucer's recitation of the full *Legend* would have required no more than two hours. Such a *rehersynge's* actual duration depends as much upon the performer's recitative pace as upon the size of his text; this pace, in turn, depends upon the performer's attitude. (*Rehersynges* 11)

Though it feels circular, if we accept that Chaucer performed the text for a listening audience, the tone must be interpreted as joking; and, if we accept the tone as joking, it only makes sense that the first readers had to actually be listeners and Chaucer's rehearsal had to be comic in order to entertain them and keep their attention. It was the transmission of the subject matter that concerned Chaucer, as the transmission provided the bulk of the entertainment.

The Prologue to the *Legend* exists in two formats, an F-version and a G-version, and the F-version was what Chaucer would have performed for his live coterie audience, while the G-version he rewrote for manuscript publication, much later, after the death of Queen Anne. Quinn submits that the F-prologue was "composed sometime between 1386 at the earliest and 1388 at the very latest" (*Olde Clerkis Speche* 212). Chaucer's use of deitics is one of the most significant indications that the F-version was performed live and the G-version written for manuscript publication. Deitics are "terms that have no objective referential meaning but are used to describe objects or events in their spacio-temporal (and, by extension, emotional) relation to the person who uses them—I, you, here, this, that, and so on" (*Olde Clerkis Speche* 7 footnote 12 italics in original). In other words, they are references to the poet-reciter and people or items in his immediate vicinity during the original recital. So, the text and the culture both indicate that Chaucer wrote the original *The Legend of Good Women* for recital first, that his performance was in demand as a form of entertainment, and that the performance would have been comic.

Chaucer's audience was primarily a listening audience, a trait that transferred from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, as I will discuss in my chapter on Shakespeare. This aural orientation illustrates even more how important Chaucer's performance would have been for the comic success of *The Legend of Good Women*. In addition to knowing Chaucer performed for an

audience intent on listening, we also know that his performances catered to a small, educated, courtly audience, while his manuscript publications aimed towards a more generalized audience. Though Chaucer never composed orally (as the jongleurs would have), as in during a recital, he did perform orally; “Chaucer’s audience could read perfectly well for themselves...Green affirms that public reading was a courtly pastime but warns that it has often and ‘too easily been assumed to imply an illiterate audience’ (100)” (Quinn *Olde Clerkis Speche* 13-14 footnote 30). In other words, Chaucer performed because he wanted to and because his listeners wanted him to do so; they were literate and could read on their own, so they sought Chaucer’s performance as a form of entertainment.

In addition to being a coterie, court audience, according to Ackroyd, Chaucer’s “audience [was] composed primarily of women ... [who]were seen to be the natural audience for tales and romances of every kind. In succeeding centuries, in fact, the audience for the novel was deemed to be principally female. This may also provide a clue to the tone of Chaucer’s early and most courtly poetry” (xiv-xv). Ackroyd also points out, “The audience are indeed primarily auditors. They are engaged in a communal act, with its own rules and expectations. The poet will address those gathered before him in ways which engage and hold their attention” (110). Thus, with women being the primary auditors and Chaucer addressing the audience in certain ways *because* he is performing in front of them, it is fair to assume that “The Legend of Cleopatra” was performed for a small court audience, primarily composed of women, and, that the markers I point out in my textual analysis, indicating a comic performance of Cleopatra, were intentional on Chaucer’s part.

Chaucer’s performance and wordsmithing abilities not only appealed to his original audiences but also to audiences in later centuries. Frank, Jr. informs us that “references to the

Legend in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century suggest that, far from boring their readers, the legends delighted them. Indeed, in this period the *Legend of Good Women* seems to have been one of Chaucer's most popular creations, for it is alluded to and imitated a number of times. It obviously was in the main stream of literary tradition throughout the fifteenth century" (190). Perhaps, because the audiences of Shakespeare were primarily listening audiences, whereas modern readers are primarily reading audiences, 15th and 16th century readers still understood the performative humor of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*.

III. Textual Analysis: What Chaucer Wrote and How He Wrote It

Many scholarly studies have focused on what Chaucer said, without paying due attention to *how* he said it, which, from a performance standpoint, influences the content as well the actual performance itself. Thus, I will focus both on what Chaucer said and how he said it, in order to illustrate the comic tone of his original performance and to indicate how we could read "The Legend of Cleopatra" today.

Cleopatra is, perhaps, one of the least likely candidates for the title of "good woman." Yet, defining "good" here is problematic. As Chaucer uses it, I think the term good connotes sexual purity, faithfulness in relationships, and willingness to die for one's true love. However, he also uses it ironically in relation to these women, specifically to Cleopatra. The comic and ironic tone of the piece is impressed upon us when we realize that "extant medieval accounts of 'Cleopatra's lussuriosa' are unanimous in their outrage at her immorality" (qtd in Quinn *Rehersynges* 61-62 footnote 1). Chaucer's audience, viewing Cleopatra through a medieval Catholic lens, was not very forgiving of her behavior. Since Chaucer was an intelligent and insightful diplomat and writer, he knew his audience possessed these negative attitudes towards Cleopatra before he began his performance. Thus, his conception and introduction of her as a

“good” woman show his comic tone before he even begins the recitation. Because of their preconceived negative view of Cleopatra, Chaucer’s audience would have immediately understood that his choice of Cleopatra, his titling of her story as a “legend,” and his reference to her as a “martyr” were all meant as mockery, as jokes.

Chaucer left almost no hints in his extant written work that the piece was meant to be funny because he believed his listening audience would pick up on that comic tone via his performance and succeeding readers at the time would have been intelligent enough and culturally sensitive enough to understand the joke. It would take “readers of extraordinary subtlety to see Chaucer’s initial choice of Cleopatra as anything but patently absurd” (*Rehersynges* 57), says Quinn, and I agree. One clue as to how to read each legend as a part of a larger performance are “the scribal demarcations (*explicitis, incipits, fits*) [which] seem to be silly superimpositions; [however] seen as intended to seem exactly so, they provide a rare instance of textually realized surrogates for a tonal effect that Chaucer’s script once achieved orally” (Quinn *Rehersynges* 16). So even though the polyphony of this text can seem like a hindrance because of just how many different people have contributed to the tone of the piece, one of the original scribes did write the manuscript to show at least parts of Chaucer’s original performance.

Cleopatra is a pagan, who exists outside the English Medieval Catholic framework of Chaucer’s audience. In “The Legend of Cleopatra,” Chaucer used his selection of material to emphasize the sexual aspects of Antony and Cleopatra’s wedding night, via a description of the Battle of Actium, and the absurdity of Cleopatra’s performance of her love for Antony during her death scene. This type of characterization and working outside the typical roles of histories and romances of the time is what makes “The Legend of Cleopatra” quite successful.

Chaucer opens and closes the “Legend of Cleopatra” by referring to Cleopatra as a “martyr,” or someone who dies for her religious or other beliefs. The term hardly applies to Cleopatra’s actions. Furthermore, in the hyper-religious society Chaucer lived and performed in, wherein martyrdom was a real and actual event, his audience would have picked up on his mocking and joking tone right away. In addition, Chaucer’s characterization of Cleopatra as “fayr as the rose in May” indicates his mocking tone, too (l. 613): Chaucer can do better than this to describe a real martyred woman, as demonstrated in “The Second Nun’s Tale” in *The Canterbury Tales*. In “The Second Nun’s Tale,” Chaucer as narrator admires Cecilia, and he describes her as “this mayden bright” and writes that she was “fostred in the faith,” never ceasing “of her preyere and God to love and drede” (ll.119-125). Chaucer dedicates one not very descriptive line to describing Cleopatra’s physical beauty, but his descriptions of Cecilia are more flattering and relate to the beauty of her soul rather than her physical beauty: she is a bright virgin; she has dedicated her life to her faith; she never ceases her praying nor her love and fear of God. Chaucer will give a detailed and flattering description to those figures he deems worthy of such. By leaving out such a description of Cleopatra, he indicates her lack of worth and provides more indications of his mocking tone.

The first half of “The Legend of Cleopatra” Chaucer dedicates to a bit of background information regarding Antony and Cleopatra’s love story, but he abbreviates the story quite a lot. This abbreviation of information indicates that the complete historical truth is not his main aim. Rather, the abbreviation serves another point: to demonstrate that the details included are the important ones, and to show that how he discusses those details is more important than presentation of the story in its entirety. Chaucer tells his audience that if he includes every thing for every story then he “shulde slake / Of thyng that bereth more effect and charge” (ll. 619-620).

So, the narrator continues, “wol I skyppe, / And al the remenaunt, I wol lete it slippe” (ll. 622-623). In other words, the narrator, and, thus, Chaucer, will only include the events that have the most effect and most importance, such as the Battle at Actium, Antony’s death, and Cleopatra’s death.

The first comic description Chaucer as the narrator provides the audience is in his performance of the Battle of Actium. Why include this battle, especially since, historically, Cleopatra abandoned Antony here, thereby going against Alceste’s command to include only women who were true and men who were untrue? The double entendres Chaucer uses give some insight; he included the scene, possibly, as a description of Antony and Cleopatra’s sexual intercourse on their wedding night, and, if read that way, the mocking and joking tone of the legend continues. The description of the battle is as follows: Antony and Cleopatra’s forces meet Octavian’s, their ships pull up side-by-side, and

In goth the grapnel, so ful of crokes;
 Among the ropes renne the sherynge-hokes.
 In with the polax preseth he and he;
 Byhynde the mast begynnyth he to fle,
 And out ageyn, and dryveth hym overbord;
 He styngeth hym upon his speres ord;
 He rent the seyl with hokes lyke a sithe;
 He bryngeth the cuppe and biddeth hem be
 Blythe;
 He poureth pesen upon the haches slidere
 With pottes ful of lyme they gon togidere;
 And thus the longe day in fight they spende. (ll. 640-650)

The sexualized diction—words such as grapnel, crook, pole axe, pressed in, out again, stung him on the spear, pour out, go together, fight—acts as a euphemism for male and female genitalia and for copulation. Sheila Delany, in her “The Logic of Obscenity in Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*,” argues that “the sexual overtones of this legend’s diction . . . , enhanced by the conventional use of nautical imagery to signify copulation, make Chaucer’s substitution of the

Battle of Actium for a wedding night scene a ‘uniquely appropriate replacement’ (“Logic” 192)” (Delany qtd in Quinn *Rehersynges* 67 footnote 4). In other words, the Battle of Actium itself is less important than *how* Chaucer describes the Battle, the words he uses. Though Chaucer as the poet-reciter has been tasked by Cupid and Alceste to tell about Cleopatra and to write these legends, respectively, he still can choose *how* to tell them. In this case, Chaucer uses a joking tone, expertly expressed via double entendres and asides.

Chaucer continues to show his distaste for Cleopatra as he describes the ending of the Battle of Actium and Antony’s resulting suicide. After Cleopatra flees the Battle, Antony becomes distraught and kills himself. The narrator says, “His (Antony’s) wife, that coude of Cesar have no grace, / To Egipt is fled for drede and for destresse” (ll. 663-664). She is worried and afraid of what will happen to her if she remains at the scene of the battle; she did not stay by her lover’s side in his time of need. However, once she returns to Egypt and is safe, then she begins to act the part of the despairing mourner. She has a shrine built for Antony’s body and has it covered in jewels and stones; she has it filled with “spicerye,” or delicacies, and she has the corpse embalmed and wrapped and put in the shrine. These burial rituals go against the normal Christian burials of the time, indicating that Cleopatra’s actions, rather than being the normal actions of a mourning woman, possess a less loving and more abnormal connotation. The shrine demonstrates Cleopatra’s concern with the appearance of her love, the performance of her mourning. She continues this performance with her own death. Next to the shrine, she has a pit dug and has it filled with snakes. She stands over it, naked, and says,

Now, love, to whom my sorweful herte obeyed
 So ferforthly that from the blisful houre
 That I yow swore to ben all frely youre –
 I mene yow, Antonius, my knyght –
 That never wakyng in the day or nyght
 Ye nere out of myn hertes remembraunce

...
 ...that shal be wel sene,
 Was nevere unto hire love a trewer queen. (ll. 681-695)

Now, one could read this seriously, if one read it as follows: “My sorrowful heart obeyed my love always. From the hour I swore to be completely yours, Antony, you were never off my mind. People will say of my suicide that there was never a truer queen than I.” However, the punctuation marks and the aside in the fourth line make this reading impossible. Instead, it should be read as follows: “Now, love, my sorrowful heart has obeyed you from the hour I swore to be freely yours.” Then, Cleopatra pauses and backtracks slightly, as if thinking, “Oh, of course, I am supposed to be speaking to Antony.” Upon reflection, she continues, “I mean you, Antony, my knight. You never were out of my heart. People will remember how true I was because I died for you.” The second interpretation, read to include the scribal marks, is funny. In the beginning lines, Cleopatra could be addressing love itself, or Cupid, which could make sense if Chaucer’s narrator is obeying Cupid and Alceste’s directive to write about true women; Cleopatra is true to love. In addition, the opening lines could be read as Cleopatra speaking to any number of men, which is why she must specify that she is speaking to Antony and not to anyone else. Chaucer as the poet-reciter could have turned this one moment of Cleopatra speaking into a laugh riot by impersonating Cleopatra standing on the edge of a pit of snakes, naked, speaking in a feminine voice.

Chaucer indicates to his audience that Cleopatra was far from true to Antony, or to any man whom she had been in love with. Her main goal was the performance of her love for Antony and what she could gain from that love, empire and safety, rather than the actual love itself. Once Cleopatra finishes her speech, she jumps into the pit of snakes to complete her suicide. If this is not a memorable death, then I am uncertain as to what would qualify as such. If

this scene is read seriously, as it is by Frank, Jr., then, yes, it does feel flat and like a failure because of how little introspection Chaucer gives Cleopatra. However, if this scene is read as one of performance before an audience, it is much more successful and much less serious. Chaucer's audience did have a sense of humor, and he, as a performer, intoned the words and turned the phrases as he wished. If he is in the court to entertain, why would he not have read this story with a touch of hilarity?

The ending of the legend suggests humor, as well. Chaucer closes the performance with these lines: "Now, or I fynde a man thus trewe and stable, And wol for love his deth so frely take, I preye God letoure hedes nevere ake! Amen" (ll.703-705). While the "Amen" could have been added by a scribe to indicate the end of this legend, it also could have been spoken by Chaucer. If Chaucer spoke it, I imagine he would have enunciated it much as he did the other important diction from the Battle of Actium and Cleopatra's suicide. His lines previous to "Amen" roughly translate as "If I find a man so true and so willing to die for his love, I pray to God that it will not make our heads ache." If he then succeeded these lines with "Amen" but enunciated it "Ah! Men!" then that would add to the joking tone of the rest of the legend (Quinn *Rehersynges* 73).

Chaucer's original listening audience was probably in stitches listening to him detail the Battle of Actium and Cleopatra's suicide, whereas those of us who are coming over 700 years late to the party might feel that the "Legend" is a failure. Reading "The Legend of Cleopatra" as a performance by Chaucer makes the legend successful, but, we have to pay close attention to the scribal marks and the cultural context in order to be able to do so and to understand the humor.

IV. Conclusion

Chaucer successfully portrays and performs Cleopatra as a sexualized woman more concerned with the performance of her love for Antony than with the actual emotion of love itself. And, though his characterization of her is not as expansive as one might hope, in the context of this legend and of Chaucer's performance, that characterization is enough to make the performance comic and, therefore, successful. Performance in the Middle Ages was not a necessity for people in the court; they could read. Thus, watching a performance was a choice. People wanted to be entertained. Chaucer's performance of "The Legend of Cleopatra" and the other legends in *The Legend of Good Women* served as a form of entertainment for an intelligent audience. Viewing the legends through a comic lens shows they were meant to be performed, and understanding the legends through a lens of performance shows them to be comic, as I demonstrate in my close reading.

Chapter Two: The Complex Cleopatra

I. Introduction

Previously, I defined Chaucer's characterization and performance of Cleopatra as comic. In my next chapter, I will define Dryden's characterization and conception of her performance as sentimental. In this chapter, I will show that William Shakespeare's Cleopatra evades such a simple classification due to Shakespeare's characterization and conception of Cleopatra's performance, as complex and human. When I say human, I mean the most reflective of how human beings, off stage, behave, think, and react. Shakespeare develops Cleopatra into a real person, whose motives and actions are not always consistent. According to Leslie Dunton-Downer and Alan Riding in their *Essential Shakespeare Handbook*, "In the 18th Century, Samuel Johnson put it elegantly: 'his (Shakespeare's) works may be considered a Map of Life'" (9), which accounts for their popularity across time, gender, and age groups. Despite this play's lack of popularity in the 17th and 18th centuries, evidenced in its being replaced on stage for over one hundred years by Dryden's version, Shakespeare's depiction of Cleopatra, I argue, is the most successful characterization because it is the most full and complex. Because they gave her one defining characteristic and made her easier to portray, Chaucer and Dryden's Cleopatras fit into their audiences' expectations better and were, inevitably, more entertaining and more easily accessible, which is not to say that both versions are not good. But Shakespeare's Cleopatra's unwillingness to be defined is, indeed, what makes her so memorable. The complexity of *Antony and Cleopatra*—its timeline, its structure, its amount of characters, and Shakespeare's deviation from and expansion of previous portrayals of Cleopatra—clearly illustrates that Shakespeare took quite a bit of poetic license with his creation of characters and his re-writing of popular

stories⁵. Though, at the time, this story was not successful on the stage, it does present, as Johnson said, a map of life. People's outside perceptions of us differ greatly from our perceptions of ourselves. We fashion ourselves through our actions and our language. Often, our responses to stressful situations show who we are more truthfully than our calculated reactions. Shakespeare provides these scenarios for Cleopatra: outside perceptions of her differ from her self-perceptions which differ from her linguistic fashioning of herself, as I demonstrate through my textual analysis. Such a complex character demanded a strong performer in the role, and, though Cleopatra would have been portrayed, on the Jacobean stage, by a young boy, these young actors were quite well-trained and up to the task. The boy player worked to make the audience see him as a woman; in this instance, he is not only fashioning himself as a woman, but acting the part of a woman who performs herself differently in almost every scene. Not only is the play structurally complex and not only are the characters conceived as being complex, but the performances demanded by those characterizations are complex, too.

II. Literature Review: Shakespeare's Sources, *Antony and Cleopatra's* Performance History, and the Role of Cleopatra

Shakespeare's sources, both classic and medieval, assisted him in developing deep and multifaceted characters. Scholars, as well as Shakespeare himself, demonstrate this. W. W. Lawrence in *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies* discusses Shakespeare's use of medieval sources and the value of reading his plays with these sources in mind. According to Charles Sisson, in his "Review of Lawrence's *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies*," "Among the most illuminating of approaches to Shakespeare is that which seeks to interpret his plays in the light of the material

⁵ For this thesis, I use *The Norton Shakespeare*, published in 1997 and edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katherine Eisaman Maus. It is based on The Oxford Edition.

used by him which he inherited from earlier generations, much of it coming to birth in the Middle Ages and bearing upon it the impress of mediaeval thought and manners” (216). Shakespeare himself, in his “last romance, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, opens with a prologue thanking Geoffrey Chaucer for the play’s story, from *The Canterbury Tales*” (400), illustrating that, at least towards the end of his career—*The Two Noble Kinsmen* was probably written around 1613-1614—Shakespeare had read some Chaucer and was familiar with his largest body of work: *The Canterbury Tales*. Paul Cantor, in his lecture on *Antony and Cleopatra* for the Program on Constitutional Government at Harvard University, confirms what most know as common knowledge: that Shakespeare used North’s translation of Plutarch’s *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* as the main source for his historical material for his Roman plays. Though, in his rendering, Shakespeare “makes Antony and Cleopatra more sympathetic than they are in Plutarch, they remain maddeningly self-absorbed and self-destructive – ignoring urgent business, acting impulsively, bullying underlings, reveling in vulgarity, lying, apparently betraying each other” (Cohen 2623). Cantor also points out that Shakespeare read Virgil and Cicero, who, in addition to Plutarch, aided Shakespeare in creating the historical settings of his Roman plays. In presenting Cleopatra to a 17th century audience, Shakespeare combines historical and literary accounts to design a complex Cleopatra.

Antony and Cleopatra’s performance history in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is sparse. To begin with, the play uses “two hundred distinct entrance and exits in forty-two scenes” (Hoxby 104), which makes understanding the current date and geographical location of each scene difficult. Some might think the complex structure of the play would have made it difficult to perform. However, despite these several scene changes—the actual demarcations for which were added by later editors, and, even then, there are disputes—the play itself would have

been fairly easy to perform, at the time Shakespeare wrote it, according to Margaret Lamb, in her *Antony and Cleopatra on the English Stage*. She writes, “The Folio text clearly shows” that “a platform, two doors, and the gallery would have been sufficient” (27). In other words, before the age of scenery—added by Sir William D’Avenant after the restoration of the theatres in 1660—*Antony and Cleopatra* did not present nearly the challenge it did after the Restoration. Lamb tells us,

The playwright’s unusual dramatic method in *Antony and Cleopatra* made this play especially difficult to stage after Shakespeare’s time. Originally written to be performed without break on an unlocalized platform, *Antony and Cleopatra* was given no act or scene division in the First Folio. Later editors gave the play more scenes than any other by Shakespeare—generally forty-two, a formidable obstacle in the age of scenery. Another performance difficulty lies in the fact that *Antony and Cleopatra*, a late tragedy, lacks the soliloquies that help make the characters of the more popular tragedies...comparatively detachable from their dramatic fabric. (23-24)

Thus, during Shakespeare’s original production, the number of scenes probably would not have presented any difficulties; however, after the publication of the First Folio in 1623, and successive publications wherein editors created divided scenes, the play became more and more difficult to perform over time. So, in addition to the structural difficulties the play later presented, the characterization of its two main characters also presented later performers with difficulties. Lamb explains, “The many brief exchanges, like the many brief scenes, make it particularly difficult to adapt the play drastically while retaining coherent characters and stage action” (24). In an aurally oriented age, the linguistic excitement of the play would have intrigued the audience; however, for later, more visually oriented audiences, the descriptive language which characterized Shakespeare’s version presented only a challenge to Restoration audience expectations. Shakespeare’s play “was written for a theater in which performance

tended to emphasize the spoken language, with greater pitch-range and speed than are characteristic of modern English” (25).

However, just because Shakespeare’s audience enjoyed listening to his language does not mean they loved *Antony and Cleopatra*. Their love of language was not enough to demand more performances of this play. In fact, “There is no direct evidence that *Antony and Cleopatra* was performed at all before the closing of the theaters in 1642” (25). Despite this lack of direct evidence, Lamb assumes that *Antony and Cleopatra* was performed, most likely at the Globe first (190) and then, evidence suggests, it was performed also at the Blackfriars theatre: “The Lord Chamberlain’s records of 1669 tell us that *Antony and Cleopatra* was ‘formerly acted at the Blackfriars’. This was the hall used by Shakespeare and his fellow King’s Men for indoor performances in the seventeenth century. It was smaller and more intimate than the outdoor playhouses and used indoor lighting for audience and stage alike” (Brown “Stage History” and Spencer 49-50). Therefore, *Antony and Cleopatra* was more than likely performed at least twice before it left the stage on its more than hundred year hiatus: “Until Garrick’s production of 1759, *Antony and Cleopatra* was apparently not performed at all. This bleak record is significant because it is unique: *Antony and Cleopatra* was the only Shakespearean tragedy not performed in some version in a hundred-year period of very free Shakespearean adaptation” (Lamb 37). *Antony and Cleopatra*’s performance history is unique because of its lack of popularity in its own and in succeeding time periods. However, despite this lack of popularity, its characters continue to capture the public imagination.

Both the Globe, though a larger arena, and the Blackfriars theatres formed somewhat intimate settings for the play’s performance: John Russell Brown writes, “There was no gap between audience and stage in Elizabethan theatre” (qtd in Lamb 28), and Hazelton Spencer tells

us that “the players and singers of old, either for the purpose of being better heard or, in an ill-lit theatre, of being better seen, confined their acting to the forepart of the stage” (Lawrence qtd in Spencer 53). With the audience surrounding the stage on three sides and the players performing on the forepart of the stage, the actors could have been well heard and easily seen. In an era sans scenery, Shakespeare’s play would have been much easier to stage as well as easier to follow because of the closeness of the audience and the stage. In his *Historia Histrionica*, James Wright compares the actors of the Restoration to the actors of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage: “It is an Argument of the worth of the Plays and Actors, of the last Age, and easily inferr’d, that they were much beyond ours in this, to consider that they cou’d support themselves meerly from their own Merit; the weight of the Matter, and goodness of the Action, without Scenes and Machines” (qtd. in Spencer 54). Wright asserts that the actors of the Renaissance must have been quite talented to have continued to bring in audiences without the need for “scenes and machines”; those actors brought in audiences through their portrayal of characters, whose characterization through language delighted aurally oriented audiences. Even though the play itself was not a success, the fact that several adaptations of the play arose during the Restoration and beyond illustrates the popularity of the characters, specifically Cleopatra, who, even before Shakespeare presented her on stage, fascinated audiences.

The depth of Shakespeare’s Cleopatra, as shown through both her own self-scripting and others’ inability to define her, is what provides her with such “infinite variety”; a variety that producers, directors, writers, actors, and actresses have been trying to capture for hundreds of years. Shakespeare brings in medieval characterizations of Cleopatra as being a woman of loose morality, to say the least, and a woman who, through seduction and other, indefinable because not western, methods somehow kept Antony, a battle commander of mythic proportions, from

following through with his duties to his family and to his country. He brings in classical characterizations of her being “maddeningly self-absorbed and self-destructive – ignoring urgent business, acting impulsively, bullying underlings, reveling in vulgarity, lying, apparently betraying” Antony (Cohen 2623). Shakespeare adds to these two, somewhat complementary (to each other, not complimentary to Cleopatra) depictions, other attitudes of admiration, of misunderstanding, of love, of lust, and of her own self-doubt. One minute, she compares herself to Venus and Isis, the next minute, she is a demurring lady, asking Antony’s forgiveness. She is, in short, an enigma, as is the performance of this very complex woman by a young boy. Though the boy was already a well-trained actor, he probably knew very little about the internal workings of a love-sick woman; he knows as little about how to portray her as she knows about how to perform herself. The contradictory depictions she provides in combination with the depictions others provide of her demonstrate this.

Despite these performance conundrums, the argument over whether a boy actor could have done Shakespeare’s Cleopatra justice ends in the conclusion that, yes, a boy actor, to Shakespeare’s audience, probably would have been very convincing. Now, had Dryden tried to use a boy actor for his Cleopatra, that would not have worked; however, Shakespeare’s audience knew nothing else, so, with a talented boy actor in the role, it could have worked. Margaret Lamb writes,

Many writers, however, have remarked on Shakespeare’s apparent confidence in his youthful Cleopatra, who prefers death to a Roman triumph. . . In Cleopatra’s death scene, young John Edmans or whoever played the queen had to ask, ‘Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,/That sucks the nurse asleep?’ (V.ii.308-309). It seems likely that rigorous training and stage tradition made the boys secure professionals in the better companies. The boy-actress was prepared by several years’ apprenticeship to do credit to the 670-line role of Cleopatra. The absence of any contrary history of women on the English stage helped sustain the illusion.
(30)

A boy would have been expected to play Cleopatra, so it would have been Shakespeare's characterization of her and the boy's performance of her that determined her success as a character. Lamb also asserts that, to supplement anything lacking in the boy-actress's performance, "The boy Cleopatra was never allowed to appear onstage alone but was always surrounded by other members of the closely knit company. Sometimes the boy-actress and the poetry carried the part, sometimes the ensemble did, and at other times poetical descriptions evoked the ideal Cleopatra in her absence" (30). If, as Lamb says, the boy actors would have been "secure professionals in the better companies," as the King's Men surely was, then this complex character would have been in rather good hands. In addition, the use of the poetry and of the surrounding players upheld the illusion that this boy-actress really was a great and beautiful queen. Again, since the audience expected a boy to play Cleopatra, a towering historical figure in our eyes but perhaps second to Antony for Shakespeare's audience, the actor probably met audience expectations for the time, even if he did not meet Shakespeare's expectations and would not have met the expectations of a post-Restoration audience.

Even though Shakespeare does create a very complex and very human Cleopatra, he also kept in mind that a young boy would be playing her. Due to Cleopatra's brief meta-dramatic critique of the theatre in which she is being performed—wherein she worries about seeing "Some squeaking Cleopatra boy [her] greatness/ I'th' posture of a whore" (V.ii.216-217)—one could argue that the performance of Cleopatra by a boy actor did not fully satisfy Shakespeare's expectations of what an actor *could* do with the characterization provided by his design.

Katherine Romack asserts, "The play's meta-theatrical commentary on acting is also supremely suggestive of the limits of male impersonation and raises the uncomfortable specter of a woman in control of her own staging. Cleopatra, within the terms of Shakespeare's play, manifests a

remarkable degree of representational self-possession” (198). However, Hazelton Spencer argues that it is clear, based on primary evidence, that “the acting of feminine rôles by boys in Shakespeare’s time was not necessarily the squeaking farce that Cleopatra shuddered to contemplate” (11). And Harvey Granville-Barker notes that “Shakespeare’s Cleopatra had to be acted by a boy, and this did everything to determine, not his view of the character, but his presenting of it” (qtd in Lamb 30). In other words, even if Shakespeare was not fully satisfied, he probably also wrote the character for a boy performer. It is not as if this was going to be the one play in which he would have been allowed to hire and direct a female actress in the role of Cleopatra; he was quite aware of his directorial situation and writing constraints. For Romack, “Cleopatra’s power as a Shakespearean character resides in her careful self-scripting, in her ability to control her reception, in her performative mastery” (193); but, we, as modern readers and viewers, must keep in mind that Cleopatra’s self-scripting was by design, and Shakespeare formed that design with a boy actress in mind. Walter Cohen points out that, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the entire character of Cleopatra is an artifice; she is “a veteran actress in her final performance” (2626) at the end of the play: She performs her love for Antony through her suicide; she performs her royalty and Antony’s through their presentation and death scene at the end; and she performs her womanhood through her lines to the asp in the final scene. To compound this constant performance, it is important to note that the boy-actress is performing a woman performing all of this self-scripting, which, perhaps, calls even more attention to her inconsistent self-scripting.

III. Textual Analysis

To understand the depth of Shakespeare’s characterization of Cleopatra, we must investigate both others’ descriptions of Cleopatra as well as Cleopatra’s description and

presentation of herself. Outside perceptions of Cleopatra frame the narrative of the play. *Antony and Cleopatra* opens with two followers of Antony discussing Cleopatra and ends with Caesar commenting on Cleopatra and on how she and Antony will be remembered. In the beginning, Philo and Demetrius discuss Cleopatra and refer to her as a “gipsy” (I.i.10), or a hussy, and a “strumpet” (I.i.13). They call Antony a “strumpet’s fool” (I.i.13). The first use of the word “strumpet” was in 1327, to refer to a “debauched or unchaste woman, a harlot, or a prostitute” (Oxford English Dictionary). Philo and Demetrius’s perceptions of Cleopatra as a woman lacking morality and chastity color the play from the beginning. This opening description calls to mind previous and well-established attitudes towards Cleopatra, dating at least as far back as the Middle Ages. Such is the negative outside perception of Cleopatra that Shakespeare sets up from the beginning and against which her character fights throughout the play and throughout history. As previously mentioned, Plutarch characterized Cleopatra as being selfish, and portrayals from the Middle Ages further depicted her as a woman lacking morality and sexual restraint. Thus, Shakespeare’s audience could have been familiar with the points of view espoused by Philo and Demetrius. If nothing else, Shakespeare immediately sets the scene for Cleopatra to either prove or disprove this first conception of her character in the play.

By presenting this information to the audience in the first act and scene, Shakespeare sets up the play in an intriguing way: we learn that outside perceptions of Cleopatra condemn her as sexually and morally loose. Both Antony and Cleopatra understand that these negative attitudes toward Cleopatra exist, as shown when Antony asks the messenger to “Name Cleopatra as she is called in Rome” (I.ii.95); thus, in order for Antony and Cleopatra’s relationship to work, a performance of love and a rejection of the outside world are necessary. Despite this conflict that

Shakespeare sets up—Cleopatra and Antony versus the outside world—the audience’s perceptions of these two characters are not necessarily sympathetic from the beginning.

These negative perceptions do not always stem from sources outside the couple, though: even Antony espouses negative attitudes about Cleopatra. He learns from the messengers that Fulvia is dead, at which time he asserts, “I must from this enchanting queen break off. / Ten thousand harms more than the ills I know / My idleness doth hatch” (I.ii.117-119). Antony has ignored his Roman family and his Roman duties. Because of his disavowal of his former responsibilities, political troubles brew in Rome. Furthermore, the loss of his wife means he will need to return home. However, the manner in which Antony discusses his need to leave presents the audience with a negative view of Cleopatra, coming from someone who, within the context of the story, knows her quite well. In the beginning of his speech, he refers to Cleopatra as an “enchanting queen,” pun intended, but, as he proceeds, he tells Enobarbus that Cleopatra is “cunning past man’s thought” (I.ii.132). Antony’s attitude toward Cleopatra develops into a negative perception quite quickly. Antony’s strength of will extends only to his will to blame Cleopatra for his own failures. She is spellbinding and cunning; how can he possibly break free from her? His inability to attend to his duties is clearly her fault.

Enobarbus, responding with colloquial and informal prose to Antony’s more noble sounding, formal verse, characterizes Cleopatra as having “celerity in dying” (I.ii.131), punning on the colloquial use of “to die” as “to experience orgasm”; in other words, even as Antony tries to break free from his emotional and physical ties to Cleopatra, Enobarbus suggests that Cleopatra already is sexually free. Then, in a turn of sorts for Enobarbus, he characterizes Cleopatra as being pure, as “her passions are made of nothing but the finest part of pure love” (I.ii.133-134), contradicting Antony’s assertion that she is cunning. Antony seems to believe

that, while Cleopatra is an enchantress, she is also smart enough to be one; Enobarbus, on the other hand, believes that Cleopatra is an enchantress but that it stems from her sexual prowess over which she lacks control because she is not smart enough to be that cunning. Enobarbus goes on to call Cleopatra a “wonderful piece of work” or masterpiece (I.ii.139-140), and, upon learning of Fulvia’s death, says, “This grief is crowned with consolation; your old smock brings forth a new petticoat, and indeed the tears live in an onion that should water this sorrow” (I.ii.152-154). Enobarbus implies that Antony did not love Fulvia, that Antony should not be sad that she died, and that, if he cries over it, those will be fake tears. He has a “new petticoat” in Cleopatra to replace his “old smock,” so Antony should not worry about Fulvia’s death or its consequences. Enobarbus and Antony, in this one exchange, illustrate many attitudes towards Cleopatra: she is smart or not smart, pure or cunning, a masterpiece, a new petticoat, a woman in control of her sexual prowess. Descriptions of Cleopatra increase in number as the play progresses.

Moving in to Act II, Enobarbus, a follower of Antony, provides a key description of Cleopatra, the East, and the “other,” as non-English, non-westerners were often perceived in the 17th century. Enobarbus describes Cleopatra’s opulence, and, thus, the opulence of the East:

The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne
 Burned on the water. The poop was beaten gold;
 Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
 The winds were love-sick with them. The oars were silver,
 Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke ...
 ... For her own person,
 It beggared all description. (II.ii.197-204)

Enobarbus spends many lines describing the ship on which Cleopatra sailed, the women and boys who surround Cleopatra and what they look like, how the air smelled, what marketplace Antony was in at the time, but he never actually describes the person of Cleopatra herself, as she

“beggared all description.” Any physical description of Cleopatra cannot be upheld by the boy-actress. The illusion of his womanhood can only be upheld if the woman herself is never described onstage. She only can be understood or perceived through an investigation of who and what surround her. These surrounding objects would have possessed significant connotations to the English, who were newly involved in the mercantilist system of the 17th century. The images of gold and silver, the almost sickening and cloying scent of perfume, the use of the flute: all of these items would have called up images of the East and of new exploration overseas. Shakespeare connects Cleopatra to the East and to things new and indescribable. And, the boy-actress performing this complex and indescribable woman would have confounded the description even more.

Enobarbus again explains Cleopatra, saying Antony will not be able to leave her 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.ii.240-243). Enobarbus cannot describe her because she is a woman of variety; she “beggars all description.” But, she is interesting because she resists being pigeon-holed. Thus, she captures men’s minds. So, even while Enobarbus and his companions’ discussion of the opulence of the East is pejorative, and they do not hold a high opinion of Cleopatra, describing her as both rare (positive) and promiscuous (negative), all of these men agree that Cleopatra defies all outside efforts to characterize and describe her, which makes her infinitely more difficult to deal with but also more interesting to be around than other women, such as Octavia.

Caesar, like Enobarbus, also embodies the negative attitudes the Romans and outsiders possessed towards Cleopatra. Caesar says, “I’th’ common showplace ... She / I’th’ habiliments of the goddess Isis / That day appeared, and oft before gave audience” (III.vi.12-18). Caesar

characterizes, in his speech, Julius Caesar and Cleopatra's relationship as unlawful and Cleopatra and Antony's as the same, by referring to all of their children as "unlawful issue." He continues by describing how Cleopatra performs her royalty for her subjects. She dresses as a goddess and appears in the public arena, or theatre, "in chairs of gold" and on a "tribunal silvered" to perform her royalty for the populace. Cleopatra, in Caesar's eyes, sees herself as a goddess, as above the laws of men. Once Octavia enters this scene, Caesar informs his sister that Antony has lied to her, that "Cleopatra hath nodded him to her. / He hath given his empire / Up to a whore" (III.vi.65-67). Caesar's speech, like Enobarbus's before, connects Cleopatra to silver and gold and to opulence. She dresses as a goddess when she appears before her subjects. She really makes a show of her power and her appearance. To Caesar, Cleopatra is a whore because she sells herself in order to gain empire, but she is also too full of herself, as demonstrated through her willingness to engage in unlawful relationships and to parade the progeny of those relationships in front of her subjects.

Antony carries these negative outsider perspectives of Cleopatra into his own responses to her perceived betrayal of him and his army. He calls her "This foul Egyptian," this "Triple-turned whore!" "my charm," "O this false soul of Egypt! This grave charm," and "a right gipsy" (IV.xiii.10-28). Antony invokes the term used to describe Cleopatra in the opening scene: gipsy, which meant both Egyptian and hussy. He also describes her as a whore; he references her three betrayals: of him, of Pompey, and of Caesar; he calls her a charm, or sorceress, and then calls her a grave charm, or a deadly sorceress. Finally, he ends by blaming everything bad that has happened – all the wars, destruction, cheating and lying—on Cleopatra, who tempted him to lust, which drove him to madness and made him perpetrate all these crimes. Antony quickly comes to these conclusions. He never takes the time to talk to Cleopatra about why her ships failed at this

current battle; instead, he immediately assumes she has betrayed him, that she never truly loved him, and that she really is a seductress and an evil doer. His jumping to conclusions drives the play forward into its final big action scenes: Antony's and then Cleopatra's suicide.

Antony, once Alexas falsely informs him that Cleopatra is dead, changes his tone. He believes she has died for love of him and says she possessed "courage," was "noble," and was "brave" (IV.xv.60, 98). In response to learning of his true love's suicide, committed because she could not bear the thought of Antony thinking she had been untrue, Antony decides to kill himself. Of course, before he dies, he learns Cleopatra lives and asks to be taken to her monument, from which she refuses to emerge for fear of being captured by Caesar. Cleopatra outlives Antony by an entire act. What she does with this time is define how she will be remembered after she actually commits suicide.

In Cleopatra's death, others' perceptions of her become more positive, as did Antony's when he thought she was dead. To prepare for her death, Cleopatra will dress like a queen. Charmian calls her the "eastern star" and "a lass unparalleled," telling Dolabella that this death is "fitting for a princess / Descended of so many royal kings" (V.ii.299, 306, 317-318). In her death, Caesar says of Cleopatra that "being royal, / [she] Took her own way" (V.ii.326-327) and that "she looks like sleep, / As she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace" (V.ii.336-338). He also tells the guards, "She shall be buried by her Antony. / No grave upon the earth shall clip in it / A pair so famous" (V.ii.348-350). Caesar describes her as royal, in charge of her own fate, as beautiful, and as famous. The play ends with this much more positive conception of Cleopatra. So, even though the play is framed by outside perceptions of Cleopatra, it ends on a positive note whereas it began on it a negative one.

Others' attempts to define Cleopatra both frame and flood the play, while at the same time her own attempts to define herself work against the tide of outside perceptions. Cleopatra's self-scripting presents just as many contradictions as the outside perceptions do. Cleopatra's self-fashioning begins early in Act I. When Cleopatra enters, she asks Enobarbus to bring Antony to her. Once Antony enters, Cleopatra says, "We will not look upon him" (I.ii.77). She calls Antony to her, and then, upon his arrival, refuses to even look at him. Using the royal "we," Cleopatra exits the room. She asserts her dominance over Antony by calling him to her, as if he is an underling whom she can command; she further asserts her power by leaving the room when Antony enters. Finally, by using the royal "we," she demonstrates her strength and her self-confidence in her position as queen.

Throughout the play, Antony and Cleopatra both switch between referring to themselves with the personal "I" and the royal "we." For Antony, his use of these pronouns demonstrates his confidence in his own power and his command. But, if he were truly a commander, he would speak in the royal "we" all the time, rather than switching back and forth, which is a sign of self-questioning and weakness in a ruler, as seen in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, *I Henry IV*, and *II Henry IV*. Cleopatra, in her switching back and forth, experiences and demonstrates the same self-doubt throughout the play. So, in this first instance of Cleopatra's self-fashioning, she shows herself to be strong and confident in her abilities, even though she also comes across as being manipulative through her actions of calling Antony to her and then ignoring him.

Cleopatra's manipulative side comes out in her interactions with her servants. When Cleopatra tells Alexas to find Antony, she says, "See where he is, who's with him, and 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" (I.iii.2-5). Cleopatra tells Alexas to change his report of her behavior dependent on

Antony's current mood, in order to manipulate Antony. Later in the scene, when Antony enters Cleopatra's presence, she pretends to feel faint and asks to be taken away; she tells Antony, "I have no power upon you; hers you are" (I.iii.23), referring to Fulvia, whom Cleopatra does not know is dead. In this exchange, Antony gets no room to speak. All his lines are broken and in spurts, as he tries to tell Cleopatra that Fulvia is dead and that he must go. In her command to Alexas and in her interaction with Antony, Cleopatra shows herself to be cunning and impatient, and she also performs her need for Antony to remain in Alexandria.

When Antony informs Cleopatra that Fulvia is dead, Cleopatra shows even more frustration with him. Antony tells her his reasons for his necessary departure and says, "I go from hence / Your soldier-servant, making peace or war / As thou effects" (I.iii.69-71); everything he does, he is doing for her. Still, Cleopatra insists on torturing him with her false fainting and bidding him to weep for his dead wife. Cleopatra's demonstration of impatience, anger, frustration, and desire for Antony only lasts until Antony regains control. Once he gets angry and begins to show his rage with her impertinence and unwillingness to listen, Cleopatra immediately demurs, calling him a "Herculean Roman" and says, "But sir, forgive me, / Since my becoming kill me when they do not / Eye well to you. Your honour calls you hence" (I.iii.96-98). Cleopatra performs her dominance only until Antony performs his. Then, she returns to a performance of submissiveness, asking for forgiveness. Throughout the scene, Cleopatra uses "I" to refer to herself, and she seems out of control of her emotions. Passion not reason drive her, and it turns her into the opposite of how she displayed herself in the beginning: she is weak in relation to Antony, whereas in the beginning she showed strength and confidence. This show of weakness contradicts others' portrayals of her as in control, manipulative, and cunning; however, the show

of weakness can also enhance those portrayals, as it appears that Cleopatra is only submissive because she thinks that is what will win Antony back to her.

Upon Antony's recapturing of his power over himself and Cleopatra, Cleopatra turns into a lovesick woman, but, through her speech here, she presents how she views herself in relation to the men who have loved her, and she regains her ability to self-fashion, rather than thinking of herself only in relation to whether or not Antony loves her. She speaks to her ladies in waiting, saying,

Where think'st thou he is now? Stands he or sits he?
Or does he walk? Or is he on his own horse?
O happy horse, to bear the weight of Antony!

...
He's speaking now,
Or murmuring, 'Where's my serpent of Old Nile?' –

...
Broad-fronted Caesar,
When thou wast here above the ground I was
A morsel for a monarch (I.v.19-21, 24-25, 29-31)

Cleopatra begins the speech by wondering about Antony's whereabouts and what he is doing. She hears Antony speaking to her, calling her the "serpent of Old Nile." By calling herself this—even though it is Antony's description, Cleopatra is still the one speaking it aloud—Cleopatra identifies herself with the asp, and thereby identifies herself with Isis, too, who is closely linked with the asp in Egyptian mythology (Greenblatt 2640 note 6). Cleopatra gives herself specifically Egyptian referents and characteristics. If, though, we consider the differences between the almost loving perception of the asp here and the attitude of Christian people towards snakes, we can see a disconnect between Cleopatra's positive self-depiction and how that depiction will be interpreted negatively, more than likely, by her English, Christian audience in 17th century London. As Cleopatra proceeds through the speech, she jumps from venerating Antony, to positive self-depictions, to a discussion of how she was used and perceived by other great men.

She was only a “morsel for a monarch” for Caesar; when Pompey looked at her, he would stare and “die with looking on his life.” This death she refers to is a sexual, orgasmic, death. So for Caesar and Pompey, Cleopatra is something to be conquered, devoured, had. But, with Antony, Cleopatra shares equal power: she is the serpent of Old Nile; she is a queen and a goddess. When she moves forward to speaking of her interactions with Caesar and Pompey, Cleopatra refers to herself as the object of their actions, whereas, with Antony, Cleopatra speaks of herself as a subject rather than an object.

Once Cleopatra learns of Antony’s marriage to Octavia, she loses her control and passion dominates her actions yet again. Cleopatra’s interruptions of the messenger show her impatience: “Good madam, hear me” (II.v.35), “Will’t please you hear me?” (41), “But yet, madam –” (49), “Good madam, patience!” (62), “Nay then, I’ll run” (73). Charmian tells Cleopatra, “Good madam, keep yourself within yourself” (75) and “Good your highness, patience” (107). In their responses to Cleopatra’s need for information but also her unwillingness to hear the truth, both the messenger and Charmian inform the audience of Cleopatra’s impatient nature. Throughout this scene, Cleopatra uses the personal pronouns “I” and “me,” rather than the royal “we,” “our,” and “us.” This change in pronoun use demonstrates Cleopatra’s lack of confidence and sense of self during this scene. In addition, Cleopatra performs her disappointment through her constant interruptions of the messenger, and through her actions she demonstrates she is a glutton for punishment. She asks the messenger three times directly if Antony is married, and every time he gives the same answer, yet she still asks the question again and again. She ends the scene by asking Alexas to describe Octavia’s appearance to her. This need for information is reiterated later in Act III when Cleopatra, demonstrating again her insecurity, asks the messenger to describe how Octavia looks, sounds, walks, talks, and behaves. Cleopatra always uses the

personal “I” and “me” when referring to herself in this scene, and she even says, “That Herod’s head / I’ll have; but how, when Antony’s gone, / Through whom I might command it?” (III.iii.4-6). She perceives herself as powerless when she is without Antony. Even though Cleopatra shows her impatience and her insecurity in these interactions with her ladies and with the messenger, she also shows her power, in that she is allowed to treat her ladies and the messenger as she does. She is allowed to be ruled by passion. Her position as queen prevents correction of her behavior from outside sources, and it allows her to behave as she feels rather than as she should.

By the end of the play, Cleopatra has shown herself to be a woman of intelligence and cunning, a woman in love, a desperate woman, an insecure woman, and, yet, a powerful woman. In her closing scenes, she performs her insecurity and fear of losing power even more: she fears losing Antony’s love, being conquered by Caesar, and being mocked by the Romans at the end of the play. Cleopatra runs to her ladies in waiting, yelling, “Help me, my women!” (IV.xiv.1), explaining Antony’s anger. Charmian replies with the lines that begin the denouement of the play: “To th’ monument! / There lock yourself, and send him word you are dead. / The soul and body rive not more in parting / Than greatness going off” (IV.xiv.3-6). Cleopatra sends Mardian, the eunuch, to carry out this order, but it is important to note that Cleopatra is not the one who conceives the idea to tell Antony of her death; she merely repeats what Charmian orders. Whereas in the beginning of the play, Cleopatra acts manipulatively towards Antony, by the end of the play, she no longer can do so. Once in the monument, Cleopatra will not exit, for she “dare not, lest [she] be taken” (IV.xvi.23-24). Once Antony is in the monument, Cleopatra says to him, “Noblest of men, woot die? / Hast thou no care of me?” (IV.xvi.61-62). Cleopatra’s fear, but also her selfishness, come through in this scene.

Once Antony dies, Cleopatra no longer sees herself as a queen, either (IV.xvi.74); she loses all power without him and his support. She says to her women, “Take heart; / We’ll bury him, and then what’s brave, what’s noble, / Let’s do it after the high Roman fashion, / And make death proud to take us” (IV.xvi.87-90). Now that Antony is dead, Cleopatra has lost all her power, lost her kingdom, and lost her will to live. She will take her own life in the brave Roman fashion in one last moment of greatness. Cleopatra’s pride and selfishness show through again. She and her ladies must commit suicide or they will be paraded through the Roman streets like “Egyptian puppet[s],” touched by “Saucy lictors” who “Will catch at [them] like strumpets”; and, worst of all, she “shall see / Some squeaking Cleopatra boy [her] greatness / I’th’ posture of a whore” (V.ii.204-217). Cleopatra cannot watch some boy-actress portray her as a whore in the streets of Rome. This line presents the sole moment of questioning of the abilities of boy-actresses, and it serves, momentarily, to attract the audience’s attention to the boy-actress currently performing Cleopatra. It forces the audience to confront the illusion that they have been watching a boy perform a woman this entire time. This one metadramatic moment further serves to complicate all descriptions and depictions of Cleopatra within the play, both others’ and her own. To prepare for her death, Cleopatra will dress like a queen to perform her royalty and her power over her own fate. She says, “Husband, I come. / Now to that name my courage proves my title” (V.ii.278-279). In her death, she comes together for eternity with Antony. She sees herself as Antony’s true wife now.

IV. Conclusion

In the end, Cleopatra did take her own way out, but, in this version, the audience is not directed, really, via Cleopatra’s performance of herself or through others’ depictions of her, to feel sad that Antony and Cleopatra commit suicide or to feel sorry for these characters. There is

little to no reference to their children with each other or with their other spouses and lovers. There is no sense that kingdoms will fall because these two have killed themselves. Caesar comes in, and he will take over. Ultimately, both characters are selfish, and Cleopatra fashions herself as such. Her ultimate fear is not to lose her children or even her life but to lose her power. By fashioning her own death, she also fashions how she will be remembered: as having been in control of her own fate, as beautiful, as royal.

Caesar has no words to describe Cleopatra but royal and beautiful. It is as if no one could truly figure out what was inside, which is why Shakespeare presents this woman as an enigma. She defies definitions and, thus, many definitions are thrown at her, each as inadequate as the others. The illusion of her femininity as portrayed by a boy-actress further complicates the task of trying to define Cleopatra. Her complexity proves her human-ness.

Chapter Three: The Sentimental Cleopatra

I. Introduction

John Dryden's *All for Love; or, The World Well Lost* debuted in 1677 as part of Thomas Killigrew's King's Company's repertory⁶. It is a classic example of personal tragedy, which arose out of the political unrest of the Restoration, as well as the Restoration's neoclassical attitudes. Personal tragedy "focuses on conflicts within individuals that have consequences for those around them," and "as the revolutionary period develops, protagonists become more domestic, more bourgeois; their motivation more banal, less Herculean; and the consequences of their mistakes less cosmic, less communal" (Canfield and Sneidern 217). Dryden's characters, on the surface, are full of conflict, but this is mostly due to the outside forces trying to sway them in the direction of honor and duty, while, internally, Antony and Cleopatra pull towards each other and to love. Their love, though it does throw their states into chaos and it does cloud their judgment regarding politics, does not destroy their states, as, at the end, Octavius is there to save the day. Dryden's focus, evidenced through what he chooses to actually portray on the stage, is the love between Antony and Cleopatra and the obstacles that block their paths towards the fulfillment of that love. In contrast to Shakespeare, who portrays both the private and public conflicts caused by Antony and Cleopatra's poor decision-making skills, Dryden, visually, leaves out the public conflicts, choosing only to have them reported when need be.

The complexity of Shakespeare's play, though pleasing to some modern readers, did not appeal to a Restoration audience, who, since the theatres had only been reopened in 1660, were drawn in with the use of female actresses and the spectacle of pictorial stages. *All for Love's*

⁶ For this thesis, I use *The Broadview Anthology of Restoration & Early Eighteenth-Century Drama*, published in 2005 and edited by J. Douglas Canfield and Maja-Lisa Von Sneidern.

“staging contributed to its great success right to the end of the eighteenth century (it kept *Antony and Cleopatra* from the stage and was performed 123 times between 1700 and 1800)” (Caldwell 218). *All for Love* supplanted Shakespeare, because of its drama, its sentiment, and its use of the actresses, such as Elizabeth Boutell, in the part of Cleopatra. All of the authorial performance that makes Chaucer’s Cleopatra comical, and all the complexity that makes Shakespeare’s play interesting and his Cleopatra intriguing are pulled out by Dryden and replaced with a play and a character who are easily understandable and accessible and an actress who was sure to draw in audiences. Dryden wrote his Cleopatra to suit the non-political, personal themes of the Restoration theatre and also to take full advantage of his ability to use a female actress in the role. Dryden’s audience wants to *see* their perception of what great love should look like, and the sentiment with which Dryden imbues Cleopatra provides the audience with the means to identify with that perception, and the actress he chose certainly could keep their attention.

II. Literature Review: Performance History, Audience, and Dryden’s Intent

Though evidence suggests that Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women* was popular both in its own time and in succeeding eras, and though I will show that Dryden’s *All for Love* was quite popular in its own and in succeeding times, both versions still compete, for modern readers, against Shakespeare’s Cleopatra. In the late 17th and throughout the 18th century, though, this was not the case for Dryden. In “Cleopatra, Queen of the Seine: The Politics of Eroticism in Dryden’s *All for Love*,” Ann A. Huse explains that “*Antony and Cleopatra* had not been performed in recent years. The play was not among the five Shakespearean works in repertory just before the Civil Wars, nor is it known to have been performed in excerpted form as a ‘droll’ during the twenty years that the public theaters stood empty” (26). Unlike many of Shakespeare’s plays which had a performance lineage that was carried into the Restoration

theatre via the Old Actors (who would become the King's Company) or living memory, *Antony and Cleopatra* essentially did not exist for Restoration audiences. Thus, even though some of the actors and managers, like Thomas Betterton and William D'Avenant would have seen or heard original Shakespeare plays or known men like Richard Burbage, at this time there would not have been a Shakespeare play for Dryden to wrestle with in the eyes of the public. And, as George C. Branam writes, "As long as Dryden's *All for Love* was pleasing audiences there seemed no need to revive Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*" (2). In other words, Dryden's audience was not comparing the Cleopatra of *All for Love* to Shakespeare's Cleopatra, and audiences loved Dryden's version, so there was no need to resurrect Shakespeare's original or to look further than Dryden when the adaptation was so much more successful.

The popularity of Dryden's *All for Love* is illustrated by its publication history. *All for Love* was reprinted in "1692: 1696: 1703: 1709: 1711 and in editions of Dryden's works" (Nicoll 34). Furthermore, it was "entered in the Stationers' Register for 31 Jan., 1677/8 (III.56) and acted at Drury Lane probably late in 1677...It was revived later on Wed., 20 Jan., 1685/6, at Court (L.C. Records]" (34). Charles Sedley, writing for the Duke's Company, had created a version of *Antony and Cleopatra* earlier in the year, ten months previous to Dryden's; in response, Dryden created *All for Love* for the King's Company. Even though the King's Company had been assigned Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* when Shakespeare's plays were divided between the two patent companies (Spencer 88), the company decided not to perform the original.

Hazelton Spencer, in *Shakespeare Improved: The Restoration Versions in Quarto and on the Stage*, asserts that the reason Killigrew's King's Company did not engage in as much Shakespearean adaptation as D'Avenant's Duke's Company did was that the King's Company's group of actors was of an older generation than the Duke's. Spencer writes that the King's

company's lack of staging Shakespearean adaptations can be attributed to "the natural conservatism of the older actors, who had been brought up in the pre-Wars companies and had there obtained their notions how Shakespeare should be handled. More to the point, perhaps, is the introduction of elaborate scenery by D'Avenant" (46). It only makes sense that actors who had first learned their trade prior to the closing of the theatres would have a set idea of how a Shakespeare play should be performed; thus, performing originals or adaptations that could not live up to the original pre-Wars staging did not appeal to this troupe. Interestingly, Spencer also argues that Dryden's play is really a version all its own rather than an adaptation of Shakespeare's play. Thus, perhaps because they viewed Dryden's play as a version all its own, they felt comfortable in performing it. For scholars studying Shakespearean adaptation in the Restoration, the King's Company's first attempt at staging a Shakespeare adaptation "was Dryden's famous imitation of *Antony and Cleopatra*, styled by him *All for Love, or the World Well Lost*. It was produced at Drury Lane with great success ... with Hart as Antony... Mrs. Boutell, Cleopatra" (97). So, to the actors of the time, Dryden's play might not have felt like an adaptation of Shakespeare, but, for those of us looking backwards from the here and now, we view it as an adaptation and study it as such.

One of the biggest boons to *All for Love* lies in Dryden's ability to cast a woman actress in the part of Cleopatra. The casting of Cleopatra, this time acted by a woman, presents an insight into how the audience would have viewed the role through the actress playing her. Spencer writes, "Mrs. Boutell, though ignored by Cibber, was an actress of importance. Among the rôles she created were Cleopatra in Dryden's *All for Love*" (83). In "Originally Shakespear's': Adaptation, Critique, and *All for Love* and *The Tempest*," J. Caitlin Finlayson points out that "In 1677, the casting of Elizabeth Boutell, who usually played virtuous heroines,

as Cleopatra, in opposition to Katherine Corey as Octavio [sic], ‘turne[d] the adulterous mistress into an innocent heroine and place[d] her at the moral centre of the tragedy’ (Mora 75)” (136). For Spencer and for Restoration audiences, Elizabeth Boutell playing the part of Cleopatra holds significance. Not only is a woman actually playing Cleopatra, but, as Finlayson informs us, a woman who usually played “virtuous heroines.” Boutell’s acting history of playing virtuous heroines provided strength to Dryden’s characterization of his Cleopatra as a virtuous woman, who lived only for her love of Antony. However, Boutell was also quite the vixen offstage (Howe 57). The casting of Boutell, a sensational woman offstage who always played virtuous heroines onstage, combined with the audience’s perception of the type of characters Boutell played, contributed to the perception of Dryden’s Cleopatra as innocent and virtuous, but perhaps also suggested there was more to her than met the eye. The layer added by Boutell to Dryden’s characterization of Cleopatra is exactly what made *All for Love* successful.

Dryden’s retelling of Antony and Cleopatra’s story as solely a love story in addition to the choice of Boutell as the actress to “create” the role of Cleopatra for Restoration audiences contributed to *All for Love*’s popularity. It was reprinted several times, as illustrated above, and, after the unification of the companies in 1682, performed again with Thomas Betterton and Elizabeth Barry, two big stars, in the lead roles (Spencer 97). The use of these actors in these parts suggests not only the actors’ fame but also the fame of the play itself. Katherine Romack, in “‘I wonder she should be so Infamous for a Whore?’: Cleopatra Restored,” writes that Dryden’s “Adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, was—in sharp contrast to the Shakespearean original—enormously popular and would constitute the dominant narrative of the tragedy of the ill-fated couple well into the century to follow” (195). So, the performance history of *All for Love* tells a very different story from *Antony and Cleopatra*’s performance history. It

shows that, though Dryden's written characterization of Cleopatra might not have been as complex as Shakespeare's, Boutell's stage presence added so much to the character and the audience's perception of her that the performance of Dryden's Cleopatra becomes complex.

Boutell's casting served another, more practical purpose, too. Audience demands had to be met in order for the two patent theatres to remain open and become successful. In "The Theatre," Edward A. Langhans informs us that "Though greater London by 1660 had a population of about 500,000, the potential audience after years of Puritan dominance was probably small" (2), and "Though the managers were assured from the beginning of royal patronage and a virtual theatrical monopoly, to fill their houses they had to attract members of the middle social class" (3). So, just because the managers knew they had a monopoly did not mean at all that they were assured of success. Because the theatres had been closed for so long, people needed to be drawn back in. Killigrew, opening first, used female actresses to bring in audiences. In addition to using actresses, D'Avenant, with his "scene-mad mind" (Spencer 65), also developed the use of elaborate scenery on stage. For Restoration audiences, "Scenes and lights became an end in themselves...The public flocked to D'Avenant's theatre as to a new toy" (Spencer 53). To see and to hear rather than just to hear became the purpose for audiences to attend the theatre. For Spencer, these innovations on stage do not represent a positive change. He writes, "D'Avenant's innovations had at least two evil effects on the Restoration drama and stage. In the first place, the popular lust for spectacle was systematically catered to as never before in English theatres; no longer was the play the thing" (Spencer 54). Rather than coming to hear spectacular orators declaim on stage like Elizabethan audiences did—I am not arguing that Elizabethan audiences were better behaved or more intelligent than Restoration audiences. They just attended the theatre for different reasons—Restoration audiences came for the spectacle. To

meet these audience expectations, the patent companies brought sensational women, like Elizabeth Boutell, on stage.

Through casting and through onstage scenery and spectacle, Restoration audiences' demand for the "sensual supply of sight and sound" (Cibber qtd in Spencer 3) was met. This demand was accompanied by another demand: simplicity of plot. On his adapting Shakespeare for the Restoration stage, Dryden says in his Preface to *All for Love*, "The fabric of the play is regular enough, as to the inferior parts of it; and the unities of time, place, and action, more exactly observed, than perhaps the English theatre requires. Particularly, the action is so much one, that it is the only one of the kind without episode, or underplot; every scene in the tragedy conducing to the main design, and every act concluding with a turn of it." In other words, all events within the play lead only to one end; there are no subplots, and there is no extraneous information. Every moment leads directly and clearly into the next. According to Branam, in contrast to the Elizabethan audiences, "The eighteenth-century audience...preferred clarity and simplicity of pattern, and was likely to be impatient of threads of action that could not be related easily and swiftly to what had gone before" (22). So, by adhering to the classical unities, Dryden, through this new and simpler aesthetic, betters Shakespeare in his own eyes and in the eyes of his audience.

Mimicking this interest in simplicity of plot and in clear and direct language are the Restoration and 18th century audiences' "Tastes in characterization [which] were similar to tastes in language. Along with the simpler, less metaphorical, but more elevated language of the alterations came flatter and more generalized characters" (Branam 114). Shakespeare's characterization of Cleopatra as complex and human did not appeal to their sensibility. Dryden's

characterization of Cleopatra as a more sympathetic, simpler, and less involved character greatly appealed to Dryden's audience, as shown by *All for Love's* performance history.

For Restoration and 18th century audiences, who wanted to be shown rather than told, it was the display of emotion rather than the exploration of the emotion or the report of an emotion that was important (Branam 148). To this end, "The 'tender' emotions associated with the female, if exhibited generously, were certain to gain the approbation of an eighteenth-century audience. Consequently Shakespearean adapters frequently touched up the warlike plays with a bit of feminine interest" (158). Thus, Cleopatra's emotional state must be shown throughout the play, as must Antony's, and the warlike aspects present in Shakespeare's play must be toned down for Dryden's audience.

For Dryden and his companions, though they valued Shakespeare and his writing, "The general assumption is the same in all: Shakespeare is uneven, and the adapter is doing a service by saving the good in Shakespeare" (Branam 6). It was important to men like Dryden to continue England's literary heritage but to make that heritage acceptable to Restoration audiences and amenable to their own aesthetic desires, by changes in plot, characterization, or emotional effect. During the process of improving Shakespeare, Dryden and his contemporaries gave in to audience demands for "clear and literal" statements and "clear" and "transparent" images (Branam 71); however, they did not see their work as being poorly done. It simply had a different means for effecting its end. Men like Dryden took liberties to make the language more understandable and the characters less deep and more oriented towards the playwright's endgame: emotional response from the audience, and, of course, the more practical goal of increased audience attendance. Dryden and his contemporaries' goals were the same: make Shakespeare better. For us, we view Dryden as making Shakespeare more simplistic and

accessible. However, Dryden truly believed that he was making *Antony and Cleopatra* better by observing the unities and by focusing more on Antony and Cleopatra's love rather than on the public consequences of it.

Simpler language and less complex characterization are evident in *All for Love*—and other contemporary tragedies—but so is the desire to evoke emotion from the audience. Contrary to the explanations of the impetus behind character actions that Shakespeare provides, for Dryden's audience, “The psychology leading to the fatal error is of no importance (as long as it is believable), but it is essential to create an ‘admirable’ character if the audience is to be touched by his fall and to feel the full force of the action's meaning, which is not personal and psychological” (Branam 126). This need to pull the audience's heartstrings and force them to identify with, or at least have sympathy for, characters is especially evident in *All for Love*. Dryden absolutely flattens both Antony and Cleopatra, removes their individual agency, makes them pawns of outside forces, and does everything possible to remove their psychological depth in order to move them towards the inevitable tragic ending and to his goal: increased audience sentiment towards Antony and Cleopatra's situation.

In order to evoke these emotions and this sympathy from the audience, Dryden made “certain the audience perceived the pathos of a situation by heavy underlining and liberal use of exclamation marks rather than ... depend[ing] upon shocking or bizarre and unexpected situations. The eighteenth-century adapter's play is usually melodramatic in manner rather than in matter” (Branam 135). The consistent demonstration of affect and melodrama by the characters would have been more intriguing to the audience than there being only one or two melodramatic scenes. Audiences appreciated the manner of speaking and acting more than they would have the change in or complexity of the matter. In Restoration and eighteenth century

plays, exclamation marks and question marks are used often and regularly to increase the drama and ensure melodramatic manner throughout.

Dryden created a play that would evoke the passions of the audience members. For Shakespeare, the investigation of the human condition was always something that concerned him in his characterizations and presentations of characters. For Dryden, what matters is not the investigation into characters' psychological states but rather the unifying of the time and setting, the unification of the plotline into a series of cohesive events, and the turning of the characters into people who will evoke an emotional response from the audience.

III. Textual Analysis

Dryden presents Cleopatra through both negative (mostly) and positive outside perspectives and through her own self-perceptions, and the negative outside perceptions usually serve the purpose of increasing the audience's sympathy for and sentiment towards Cleopatra. To begin, Dryden's *All for Love* opens with a talk of omens rather than with a discussion of Cleopatra. By opening with a discussion of what the omens portend, Dryden sets a scene, wherein the audience knows bad things are to come, and they are immediately given an insight into how the play will unfold. Dryden's opening act presents outsider points of view about Cleopatra, but the main focus of the opening lines is to cue the audience that what they are about to see is a tragedy. Dryden's opening sets the stage for how the play will unfold and end.

To set the scene and to provide the audience with the information it will need in order for the play's events to make sense, Dryden immediately introduces Alexas, a servant of Cleopatra. He gives the audience more information about the times during which the play takes place, showing the tension of the times of the play immediately, rather than showing perceptions of Cleopatra immediately. Further, Dryden also presents Alexas as the one who worries about the

state of Cleopatra's kingdom when Serapion says, "'Tis strange that Antony, for some days past, / Has not beheld the face of Cleopatra, / But here in Isis' temple lives retired / And makes his heart a prey to black despair" (I.64-67), to which Alexas responds, "'Tis true, and we much fear he hopes by absence to cure his mind of love" (I.68-69). In reality, Alexas fears that Antony will fall out of love with Cleopatra, leaving Alexas to fend for himself in the event of Egypt's downfall. This dialogue serves the dual purpose of showing Alexas's true and selfish concerns and telling the audience the setting of the play: the Temple of Isis. Alexas continues, "She dotes, Serapion, on this vanquished man / And winds herself about his mighty ruins" even though she could save them all by betraying him (I.85-89). Cleopatra is only mentioned in passing in the opening of the play, but through this one line, Dryden illustrates for his audience that they will be presented with a broken Antony and a doting Cleopatra, who, despite her impending doom, still will "wind herself about" a ruined hero.

Also in this opening scene, Dryden introduces Ventidius, the main dissenting voice against Cleopatra—and, thus, the representative of all negative outside views of her. When Alexas and Ventidius meet, Ventidius points out to Alexas that Cleopatra "has decked [Antony's] ruin with her love, / Led him in golden bands to gaudy slaughter, / And made perdition pleasing: She has left him / The blank of what he was. / I tell thee, eunuch, she has quite unmanned him" (I.187-191). Ventidius blames all of his and Antony's current circumstances on Cleopatra and her ability to unman Antony and lead him willingly to a "gaudy slaughter." Here, Ventidius presents the negative outside view of Cleopatra: she, through her seduction and manipulation, has ruined Antony, led him to slaughter, and, worst of all, unmanned him. Ventidius's simultaneous commentary on the excess and opulence of Egypt, demonstrated by his use of the word "gaudy," and Antony's lack of manliness sets him up, in the

audience's view, as the main enemy to Antony and Cleopatra's love. Ventidius's presence provides an enemy to Antony and Cleopatra's love, which increases the sentiment felt by the audience for the two lovers: they are beset on all sides⁷. The audience has yet to see or hear from Cleopatra, but, within the first two hundred lines of the play, the audience knows that outsiders view Cleopatra herself and Antony and Cleopatra's relationship negatively.

Though he uses different arguments to pull Antony away from Egypt, Cleopatra, and love and to Rome and honor, Ventidius's most effective argument is this negative outside view of Cleopatra: she is the creator of Antony's ruin. Ventidius tries to show Antony what he is losing by remaining with Cleopatra, but Antony will not hear it and, actually, sometimes manages to resist. He says, "Ventidius, I allow your tongue free license / On all my other faults, but on your life, / No word of Cleopatra: She deserves / More worlds than I can lose" (I.424-427). In other words, Antony willingly has lost the outside world for Cleopatra and would lose more worlds for his beloved if he could. Though she is, according to Ventidius, the cause of Antony's ruin, Antony seems gladly ruined by her and willingly so. Ventidius tells Antony that all of his kingdoms and powers are "weighed down, by one light, worthless woman!" (I.431). Ventidius presents this negative view of Cleopatra as a woman who is worthless, who ruined Antony by seducing him, and who does not care about Antony's reputation or about him winning wars. Antony, on the other hand, views Cleopatra as being worth everything, worth more than the

⁷ While Ventidius's characterizations of Cleopatra present another way to view her—as a home wrecker—his presence serves more to increase audience sympathy for Cleopatra. Ventidius does act as Antony's voice of reason, and he also presents a point of view which critiques Antony's participation in the excesses of Cleopatra's court and the East. This critique is a direct hit towards Charles II, adding political commentary to the play. While this political commentary does simmer beneath the surface, Ventidius's bigger impact, aside from this political function, is on how the audience views the state of Antony and Cleopatra's relationship from the very beginning: as under attack.

world, showing a positive outside view of Cleopatra. Ventidius provides the audience with a logical view about Antony and Cleopatra's relationship. He points out what everyone is thinking, which is that this relationship is destroying them both. Antony's response shows even more, though, the power of love over both himself and Cleopatra. Regardless of her faults, Antony loves her. This show of love sways the audience even more in his and Cleopatra's favor: how can Ventidius want to separate these two soulmates?

Then, in a moment of weakness, Antony decides to leave Cleopatra and Egypt and resume his duties elsewhere. At the time the audience would be pulled in the most by Antony's refusal of Ventidius's criticisms, Antony gives in, causing more problems for his and Cleopatra's relationship and heightened sentiment from the audience; these characters play with the audience's emotions. Pulled momentarily to the negative outside views of Cleopatra, Antony, because in his mind he knows he must to battle, tells Cleopatra, "We have loved each other / Into our mutual ruin" (II.285-286), "I derive my ruin / From you alone" (II.300-301). These accusations, put forth by her lover rather than by Ventidius, heighten the sympathy the audience now feels for Cleopatra; not only is the world against her, but so is her lover.

Eventually, though, Antony rejects Ventidius and the outside world's negative attitude towards Cleopatra and his and Cleopatra's love, reassuring the audience that they can continue to support this illicit relationship. When Antony gives in, he calls her "my eyes, my soul, my all!" (II.492), and, of course, Ventidius replies, "And what's this toy / In balance with your fortune, honor, fame?" (II.493-494). The release of tension between the lovers lasts only for a moment, until the conflict rises again: Cleopatra and love on one side and Ventidius and honor on the other. The outside world continues to view Cleopatra negatively, but, for the moment, Antony

views her in a positive light, which is all that matters for her. The negative views of outsiders mean nothing, as long as Antony continues to reject the outside world for her.

Antony, though he goes back and forth between positive and negative views of Cleopatra, depending upon whom he is speaking with, presents, at least on the surface, a positive view of Cleopatra. He says to her, “There’s no satiety of love in thee: / Enjoyed, thou still art new; perpetual spring / Is in thy arms; the ripened fruit but falls, / And blossoms rise to fill its empty place, / And I grow rich by giving” (III.25-29). Antony grows rich in her love rather than rich in material wealth, which, as suggested by Ventidius earlier, should be what he desires. Note, though, that Antony says, “Enjoyed, thou still art new.” Antony means enjoyed, as in he has enjoyed her, sexually. But, from an outside perspective, enjoyed could also mean Cleopatra has been enjoyed by other men, and, despite that, she is still new to Antony. Later on, Ventidius will refer to Cleopatra as not being used to sleeping alone. Combined with Antony referring to her as “enjoyed,” a picture is painted of Cleopatra as being easier with her favors than someone like Octavia is. While Antony speaks, seemingly, positively to and about Cleopatra, a deeper inspection into his language shows it lends itself to the negative outside attitude towards Cleopatra as well. Antony, who cannot decide where he needs to be, what he needs to do, or whom he needs to be with, shockingly cannot decide how he feels about Cleopatra. His actions, driven by emotion and passion, blow where the nearest person directs them. And his ambivalent language is indicative of his ambivalent, fickle emotions.

Again, a seemingly positive description of Cleopatra by Antony lends itself to the negative outside view when Antony describes the first time he and Dollabella saw Cleopatra: she looked so “languishingly sweet,” her smile was so beautiful that “men’s desiring eyes were never wearied, / but hung upon the object,” to look on her “twas heav’n, or somewhat more”

(III.188,194-195, 198). In this instance, Antony describes a woman of beauty, and a woman who knows she is beautiful, but he also refers to her as “the object” rather than as “the woman” or as “Cleopatra.” Despite his love for her, she is still something to be possessed; he gives up possession of the entire world for possession of her and of her love. Even though they are in love, their relationship dynamic still is about conquering and being conquered. They are not equals.

A boon to Ventidius’s case is the appearance and actions of Octavia. She appears, out of nowhere, to act as a foil to Cleopatra, but her presence and treatment of her rival serve to increase audience sympathy for Cleopatra. While Octavia does appear in Shakespeare’s play, she only appears in scenes without Cleopatra; Shakespeare never shows them together. Dryden adds Octavia into his play, and he pits Octavia and Cleopatra against each other in the sensational “rival queens” scene. Dedicating an entire stage to two female actresses, duking it out over who loves Antony the most, demonstrates the importance of these females’ performances to the play and also how much their performance helped create a full characterization of Cleopatra and Octavia. Initially, Octavia’s presence heightens sentiment against Antony and Cleopatra’s relationship, but when she verbally attacks Cleopatra and walks out on Antony, sentiment reverses and the audience is on Cleopatra’s side even more. At the end of the “rival queens” scene, she provides Cleopatra with a way to show her weakness and regain sympathy from the audience. Octavia describes Cleopatra as having a “haughty carriage,” being “long practiced in that lascivious art” of seduction, having “spread [her] snares” and “ruined [Octavia’s] dear lord,” being the owner of “black endearments,” having been Antony’s “ruin,” having made him “cheap” and “scorned,” having “betrayed” him, and having “made his children orphans” (III.474-532). These insults are many, but, from Octavia’s point of view, and, probably some of

the audience members' points of view, the insults are true. Cleopatra appears to be a solely sentimental character, but Octavia's criticisms complicate this point of view, much like Boutell's dual existence as sensational offstage and virtuous onstage makes more complex her performance of Cleopatra. Cleopatra does appear, in this scene, to think highly of herself, she did seduce Antony, she has caused his ruin on the world stage, she did betray him by fleeing the battle at Actium, and she has taken away Antony from his lawful children. In this moment, the audience sees clearly the truth of Ventidius and Octavia's accusations and the validity of the outside world's negative attitude towards Cleopatra.

Later, when Octavia learns that Antony sues Caesar not only for his own peace but Cleopatra's also, Octavia and Ventidius confront Antony about his continued devotion to Cleopatra. Antony becomes incensed about their insulting "his" Cleopatra. Ventidius's visceral response is, "Your Cleopatra; / Dollabella's Cleopatra; Every man's Cleopatra" (IV.348-350); "You know she's not much used to lonely nights" (IV.355). Ventidius asserts that any man can and probably has had Cleopatra, sexually. He points out that Cleopatra has always had a man with her, and if Antony leaves she will only find another. To follow that up, when Antony tries to defend Cleopatra, Octavia points out, "Indeed my lord, 'tis much unkind to me / To show this passion, this extreme concernment / For an abandoned, faithless prostitute" (IV.446-448), implying that Cleopatra sells her favors to keep her kingdom, and she will sell them to whomever can help her do so. Octavia goes further to ask Antony, "Am I false / Or infamous? Am I a Cleopatra?" (IV.456-57). In Octavia's eyes, even though the entire time she has been in Egypt she has been helping Ventidius to manipulate Antony into their preferred course of action, she sees herself as there to redeem Antony, as being always true to Antony, never lying to him, and never using him. Her use of the article "a" instead of "the" or instead of no article at all to

describe Cleopatra illustrates her attitude towards Cleopatra as being disposable. There are plenty of loose women like her around. This idea of Cleopatra's disposability presents the cruelest of the outside points of view about her. She no longer is just a woman of loose sexual morality, or a manipulative woman, but she is also a disposable woman. There is nothing about her worth saving, and Octavia does not understand Antony's love for her. In this moment, Dryden shows both sides: Octavia and Cleopatra both have earned the audience's pity, but, once Octavia continues to degrade Cleopatra and once she leaves Antony, thereby releasing him of his obligations to her, the audience can re-focus on what is important. While the audience probably did not forget about Octavia, by having her exit the play, Dryden redirects the audience and asks them to focus in again on Antony and Cleopatra.

By the end of the play, Antony and Cleopatra, as well as Dryden's audience, realize there is no escaping the outside world, so they escape the only way they know how: through suicide. When Serapion, the priest of Isis, discovers their bodies in the temple, he says, "See how the lovers sit in state together, / As they were giving laws to half mankind. / Th'impression of a smile left in her face / Shows she died pleased with him for whom she lived / And went to charm him in another world" (V.583-587). This last perception of Cleopatra before the end of the play shows her and Antony's happiness at finally being together; her death speech wherein she directs how she should be dressed and laid out also shows her importance on the stage. For her death speech to succeed rather than proceed Antony's makes her more central to the play, and it provides Elizabeth Boutell with an opportunity to show off her acting skills. Shakespeare's Cleopatra also survives Antony, but Dryden's Cleopatra gets to perform her death speech, illustrating her importance on the stage. Though Chaucer's Cleopatra also performs a death speech, naked next to the pit of snakes, Dryden's Cleopatra's death speech is geared towards

garnering sympathy rather than laughter, and it ends the tragedy by uniting the two lovers in eternal happiness rather than providing an illustration of a woman jumping into a pit of snakes.

In contrast to the largely negative outside perceptions of Cleopatra, her self-perceptions and self-scripting show her to be mostly innocent of the outside charges against her. Her inability to take action, her existence as the pawn of servants, such as Alexas, and her willingness to give in to despair all make her more sympathetic. Chaucer's characterization provides humor, should we choose to see it; Shakespeare's characterization gives Cleopatra complexity; Dryden's characterization gives Cleopatra inaction as her main characteristic.

While Cleopatra is only mentioned in passing in Act I, Act II opens with Cleopatra's discovery that Antony Antony is going to leave her to return to honor and battle. Cleopatra's response is, "What shall I do, or whither shall I turn? / Ventidius has o'ercome, and he will go" (II.1-2). Immediately, we see a Cleopatra who lacks agency. She cannot exist without Antony, and she has no idea how to even try to do so. Alexas tries to get Cleopatra to see herself in a different light. He asks, "Does this weak passion / Become a mighty queen?" (II.7-8), and Cleopatra responds,

I am no queen.
 Is this to be a queen, to be besieged
 By yon insulting Roman, and to wait
 Each hour the victor's chain? These ills are small,
 For Antony is lost, and I can mourn
 For nothing else but him. Now come, Octavius,
 I have no more to lose; prepare thy bands;
 I'm fit to be a captive: Antony
 Has taught my mind the fortune of a slave. (II.9-17)

Ventidius characterizes Antony as a slave to Cleopatra, but, here, Cleopatra characterizes herself as a slave to Antony. A slave possesses no personal agency. She must do as she is told and cannot make choices for herself when it comes to her actions—she obviously can choose how to

emotionally react to situations. But, this is just it, a slave can react but not act. Both Antony and Cleopatra being characterized as slaves illustrates both their inability to take action. Cleopatra's lack of personal agency is illustrated in her inaction. Cleopatra tells Alexas that she has nothing to lose now that Antony is leaving. Antony has lost the outside world for his love of Cleopatra, but her world is Antony, and she is losing her world when he leaves. Cleopatra's inaction and inability to try to take action show her to be the opposite of the threat Ventidius makes her out to be and increase audience sentiment towards her.

Cleopatra, however, in some instances, is not as innocent and weak as she has been perceived to be so far. When Charmion, one of her ladies in waiting, tells Cleopatra, "I told my message, / Just as you gave it, broken and disordered; / I numbered in it all your sighs and tears" (II.67-69). Charmion gives the message just as Cleopatra told her to give it. Cleopatra said to affect her sorrow and her sighs, to make sure the message showed as much as possible her sadness. The key, though, is that it was Cleopatra's idea to perform this sadness, not Charmion's or Alexas's, who, many argue, takes on all of Cleopatra's manipulative characteristics in Dryden's version. In this instance, Dryden shows that Cleopatra can still manipulate, but she can only do so as a demonstration of love rather than as a way to save her empire. Cleopatra's concerns are personal not public. Again, the effecting of Cleopatra's emotion, which she feels as part of her devotion to Antony, serves to increase the audience's concern for Antony and Cleopatra's relationship.

When Cleopatra enters Antony and Ventidius's presence, as Antony is about to depart, Ventidius plays the part of the opposition by saying, "Oh siren! siren! / Yet grant that all the love she boasts were true, / Has she not ruined you? I still urge that / The fatal consequence" (II.416-419). In the face of all that Ventidius reminds Antony he is leaving behind, Cleopatra responds

and classifies herself as “worthless” (II.427), as having “weak arms” (II.473), as being a “weak, forsaken woman” and “lover” (II.485). Even when accused by both Antony and Ventidius of being Antony’s ruin and of being a “siren,” Cleopatra does not stand up for herself. Much like the slave she classifies herself as, she can only react, and she does so by demeaning herself. She completely gives in and folds to the outside perceptions. She classifies herself as others see her: worthless and weak.

Cleopatra demonstrates her insecurity in her responses to Octavia. Just as in Shakespeare’s version, Dryden’s Cleopatra demands to know what Octavia looks like; she must understand the competition. She asks, “What tell’st thou me of Egypt? / My life, my soul is lost!...But thou hast seen my rival: speak, / Does she deserve this blessing? Is she fair, / Bright as a goddess? and is all perfection / Confined to her?” (III.451-458). Alexas responds that Octavia is full of goodness but that “in beauty, madam, / You make all wonders cease” (III.464-465). Cleopatra’s emphasis on how Octavia *looks* is important because this play takes place during, really, the first visually oriented English theatre. And, further, because beautiful female actresses are portraying these women, an onstage description of their looks serves to reiterate their female presence on the stage. Shakespeare’s Cleopatra demonstrates her concerns about what Octavia looks like, how she walks, what she sounds like, and many other aspects of Octavia’s person. For Dryden’s Cleopatra, only Octavia’s looks matter, illustrating even more the dominance of D’Avenant’s pictorial stage.

Any moments wherein Cleopatra does stand up for herself are succeeded by moments wherein she shows her weaknesses; moments of greatness serve only to enhance the moments of weakness and to increase audience sympathy for Cleopatra. From the point of view of Cleopatra’s self-perceptions, I return to the “rival queens” scene, during which Cleopatra

portrays herself as “a queen,” having “easier bonds” than Octavia, having had “the greatest of mankind” as her “slave,” having “lost [her] honor, lost [her] fame, and stained the glory of [her] royal house, and all to bear the branded name of mistress.” And, in one of her last responses to Octavia, she finally says that she “love[s] him better and deserve[s] him more” because of all these hardships she has gone through to persist in her love for him (III.471-532).

Throughout this scene, Octavia attacks Cleopatra, whereas Cleopatra defends herself against that attack. After Octavia departs, Cleopatra’s nerves fail and she must be taken to a “solitary chamber” wherein she “till death will unkindness weep” (III.546, 550). Cleopatra remains strong only until the unkind Octavia departs, at which point she completely breaks down and loses all semblance of the strength she demonstrated only moments before. The audience sees Octavia’s attack, Cleopatra’s responses to it, and then Cleopatra’s breakdown. All of this increases the audience’s sentiment for Cleopatra. As a response to Cleopatra’s weakness, Alexas immediately begins to plot again how to entice Antony back to Cleopatra. As Laura Brown asserts in her *English Dramatic Form*, in order “to maintain the passivity and pathos of Cleopatra’s situation, Dryden must keep her not only innocent, but also, like Antony, inactive. Cleopatra too does nothing for herself. Alexas initiates and implements” plots without Cleopatra’s knowledge or input, which “[excludes] Cleopatra from blame, [and]...actively [augments] her innocence and virtue” (83-84). Dryden must use other characters to move the action forward in order to maintain consistent audience sympathy for Cleopatra.

The only action Cleopatra chooses to commit to and follow through with is her choice to commit suicide. Even this choice, though, she attributes to fate. She does not take credit for the action; it has already been determined and she is just doing as she is told. In the end, Cleopatra lets fate guide her and she follows Antony into the afterlife, saying,

I have not loved a Roman not to know
 What should become his wife; his wife, my Charmion,
 For 'tis to that high title I aspire,
 And now I'll not die less. Let dull Octavia
 Survive, to mourn him dead; my nobler fate
 Shall knit our spousals with a tie too strong
 For Roman laws to break. (V.474-481)

Not only will she be his wife in death, but she will also escape any punishment by Caesar. She exclaims, “Yield me to Caesar’s pride? / What! To be led in triumph through all the streets, / A spectacle to base plebeian eyes, / While some dejected friend of Antony’s, / Close in a corner, shakes his head and mutters / A secret curse on her who ruined him? / I’ll none of that.” (V.488-494). Not only will Antony and Cleopatra be married in death, but Cleopatra will also be able to avoid being made a spectacle of. And she will make sure she and Antony go out in style; if there is going to be a spectacle, Cleopatra is going to direct it, not have it directed at her. It is really only in this death scene, once Antony and all the other outsiders are gone, that Cleopatra directs anything. But she can only take charge like this because fate has already decided she should die; Cleopatra is reacting to the situation. She instructs Charmion to “bring [her] crown and richest jewels, / With ‘em, the wreath of victory [she] made / (Vain augury!) for him who now lies dead” (V.504-506), so that she can dress so that she will “meet [her] love / As when [she] saw him first on Cydnos’ bank, / All sparkling like a goddess” (V.528-530). To finish, she tells her ladies how to present both her and Antony in death: “Seat me by my lord. I claim this place, / For I must conquer Caesar too, like him, / And win my share o’th’world” (V.535-537); she asks Charmion and Iras to “turn me to him, / And lay me on his breast” (V.573-574). Though Cleopatra attributes her final end to fate, she does ensure she goes out the way she wants to. She wears her finest jewels and decorates Antony, too. She has her ladies seat her and Antony side by

side. She has the last word, not Antony and not Alexas. Her death scene does present her with the opportunity to self-script, but, she attributes her ability to do so to fate.

IV. Conclusion

In the end of *All for Love*, Serapion describes Antony and Cleopatra as a “blest pair” and says “And fame to late posterity shall tell, / No lovers lived so great or died so well” (V.590, 593-594). The irony of this statement lies in that neither Antony nor Cleopatra was blessed and neither did they live great lives, at least in this play. This couple lost battles, abandoned their children, killed or lost their spouses, and eventually, to be together, had to kill themselves to escape a world that would not let them be. Dryden is absolutely successful in creating a personal tragedy throughout which the audience sympathizes with the main characters. However, his written characterization of Cleopatra falls flat due to her inability to take action and her willingness to be used as a pawn to outside forces in order to remain with her love. While the written characterization was simpler, the onstage performance by Boutell, with her sensational backstory, is what made the characterization complex. Dryden’s audience loved the idea of women, especially sensational women, like Boutell, on stage. They loved the spectacle of the rival queens scene between Octavia and Cleopatra. They loved to see Antony and Cleopatra resisting all outside attempts to pull them apart. The performance of Cleopatra by a woman as created by Dryden fits perfectly into the Restoration demand for sentimental female roles on the stage. It is the performance of this sympathetic character that makes Dryden’s play so successful for his audiences.

Conclusion

If Chaucer's performance of Cleopatra was comic, and Shakespeare's characterization of Cleopatra was complex, Dryden's characterization of Cleopatra, though bearing the trace of her stage ancestors, was neither comic nor extremely complex, but the performance of his Cleopatra by female actresses added complexity to the part. All three authors wrote for business and pleasure; they sought to please their own sensibilities and those of their audiences.

For modern readers, it is important to view especially Chaucer and Dryden's Cleopatras through a lens of performance. Chaucer's Cleopatra falls flat and feels a failure if read as a piece meant for publication. However, if we understand that Chaucer performed his Cleopatra for a live, court audience, his narration of the Battle of Actium and his performance of Cleopatra's death scene demonstrate his comic and mocking tone. The same holds true for Dryden. Simply reading the play and analyzing how he characterizes his Cleopatra on the page shows her to be a flat and sentimental character. But, once we add the layer of performance by, first, Elizabeth Boutell and, later, other sensational women such as Elizabeth Barry, Dryden's Cleopatra becomes more complex. These women actresses and their performance add depth to Dryden's work. For Shakespeare, because in his own time *Antony and Cleopatra* might have been performed only once or twice, the performance of his Cleopatra, while adding a layer of complexity to the part, is not what gives the part its depth. Rather, it is his characterization of Cleopatra, on the page, that makes her interesting.

John Dryden's Cleopatra, though she does not very closely resemble her stage ancestors, does carry their motives into the 17th century. Chaucer's Cleopatra was devoted to Love, Shakespeare's Cleopatra was devoted to Love, and, finally, Dryden just came out and said it: *All for Love; or, The World Well Lost*. The former portrayals of Cleopatra hesitantly assert that her

motive was for Love, but Dryden takes these previous portrayals and explicitly states the thread by which they are all linked: Love.

Chaucer focuses on the larger than life events: the Battle of Actium and Cleopatra's death scene. Shakespeare expands everything. He gives a scene to every moment of Antony and Cleopatra's time together. Dryden then cuts everything not having to do with Antony and Cleopatra's love. Through these additions and cuts, the audience sees three different perspectives on which story the author felt was important to tell and which parts they felt superfluous to the main.

Using varying tones and diction, diverse performance strategies, and audience awareness, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Dryden provide equally complex and simple and comic and serious portrayals of Cleopatra. Chaucer's performance of Cleopatra makes her comic. Shakespeare's characterization of her makes her complex. And, Dryden's characterization of her, combined with the performance of her by female actresses, makes his Cleopatra not as simple as she originally seems when read without the idea of performance in mind. Cleopatra's motivation throughout all three is to serve Love and to be in Love. Understanding the method of performance for Chaucer and Dryden's Cleopatras and investigating Shakespeare's characterization of his Cleopatra allow modern readers to better understand the importance of viewing each of these works through a lens of performance, as this lens constructs how modern audiences should understand each author's Cleopatra.

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