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"A PLACE IN THE STORY":

DISTINCTION IN
ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

by

Angela Pelly, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English

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Distinction in

Antony and Cleopatra

submitted by Angela Pelly, B.A.

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ABSTRACT

The pursuit of distinction is the motivating force behind Antony's behaviour in this play. Motivated by a need to show greatness beyond other men, Antony believes too simply that distinction is attainable through the roles of great lover, ruler and warrior.

Chapter II maintains that distinction is a primary component of Antony's relationship with Cleopatra. This relationship can inspire him to realize distinction as a courageous leader. More often, Antony abdicates self to Cleopatra and loses his eminent position.

Chapters III and IV contend that distinction is the motive behind Antony's politico-military conflicts with Caesar. Ideally, distinction incorporates honourableness and external recognition of honourableness. Concentrating on acquiring recognition, Antony endangers his honour.

Chapter V concludes that a double-edged distinction is affirmed for the pair in Act V: Cleopatra gives Antony a heroic identity while recalling his flawed life, before her dramatic death which ensures their "place i' th' story."

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The power of Antony and Cleopatra is beyond dispute. From Coleridge who comments on its "giant strength,"¹ to Jan Kott, who writes of its "magnificent" exposition,² commentators have described this play's great strength. Yet, alongside these writers' admiration, we discern their appreciation of the play's difficulties, which have led them to many different attempts at coming to terms with Antony and Cleopatra. Commenting on the "variety of strangely contrary solutions" which critics have evolved to resolve the problem of Shakespeare's intentions in this play, Derek Traversi outlines the two types of interpretation most often applied to the play:

Is Antony and Cleopatra, to put the matter in other terms, a tragedy of lyrical inspiration, justifying love by presenting it as triumphant over death, or is it rather a remorseless exposure of human frailties, a presentation of spiritual possibilities dissipated through a senseless surrender to passion?

¹ S.T. Coleridge, Coleridge's Writings on Shakespeare, ed. Terence Hawkes (New York: Capricorn Books, 1959), p.246.

² Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, trans. Boleslaw Taborski (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1967), p.134.

³ Derek Traversi, An Approach to Shakespeare, Vol. II (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1969), p.212.

The play's difficulties lie in the very constituents which make it fascinating: its characters are great and base, heroes and frail humans; their complicated and paradoxical motives make them difficult to understand. Judgments cannot be lightly made since heroes and villains do not exist as such, and the elements of tragedy mingle with comedy and ironic detachment.

Interpretation of the play must, therefore, be closely linked to the play's subtle and ambiguous language, close examination of which reveals the values and emotions which prompt the protagonists' actions. This thesis re-examines the motives of the principal characters, especially Antony, by considering the various implications of their words and actions. To help define these elusive meanings, this thesis has drawn on Shakespeare's other works, particularly the Sonnets, and on some of the values of his time. To this end, significant modifications Shakespeare has made to his major source are also considered.

In concentrating on character, that is motive, behaviour and values, this thesis excludes close examination of other aspects of the play which have absorbed commentators, except where they impinge on character. Thus, this thesis does not deal primarily with the differences and similarities between Rome and Egypt, as so many critics have done,⁴ but rather with what Rome and Egypt reveal about character and motive. It is not concerned with the play's imagery per se; rather, it interprets imagery in order to understand a character's role. It does not unfold the ways in which this play demonstrates Shakespeare's

⁴ Maurice Charney, Alan Downer, Northrop Frye, Julian Markels and Dipak Nandy all maintain that the theme of Antony and Cleopatra is a choice or conflict between the values and worlds of Rome and Egypt.

development as an artist; only using Shakespeare's other work to clarify the values of Antony and Cleopatra. It does not pursue the influence of his sources on Shakespeare; only comparing the play and its main source when Shakespeare's intentions may be clarified as a result. Finally, this thesis is not primarily concerned with the study of generic form. Attempts to define the play's genre may obscure the complex delineation of character and motive within the play.⁵

We must examine the play itself to appreciate the complex effect of its characters. Rather than starting from the premise that Antony is a hero or an exemplar of human frailty, we should look to his most distinguishing feature, passion, and proceed from there. A.P. Rossiter has identified Shakespeare's interest in the man who is "passion's slave." "Suffering beyond solace, beyond any moral palliation, and suffering because of a human greatness which is great because great in passion: that, above everything else, is central to Shakespeare's tragic conception." Rossiter goes on to say that Shakespeare's tragic hero is distinguished by, distinctive because of his great passions; an essential quality of such a hero is Renaissance pride, seen as self-greatness.⁶

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to pursue Rossiter's full argument; however, it is clear that in Antony and Cleopatra Shakespeare is profoundly

⁵ See Maurice Charney, Shakespeare's Roman Plays (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), p.141, and H.A. Mason, "'Antony and Cleopatra' Telling 'versus' Showing," The Cambridge Quarterly, I (1966), 347-348, whose preoccupation with genre leads to a certain one-sidedness.

⁶ A.P. Rossiter, Angel With Horns, ed. Graham Storey (London: Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., 1961), pp.263,264.

concerned with the question of distinction, as he is in Hamlet and Troilus and Cressida. Ideally, distinction means "excellence or eminence that distinguishes from others" (O.E.D.); one is distinguished by intrinsic merit, which is, in turn, supported by distinguished action. Although this usage of 'distinction' was not noted until 1699, the word 'distinct' was used in Shakespeare's time to mean "marked in a manner so as to be distinguished, decorated, adorned" (O.E.D.). Distinction may also have a less obviously positive sense if it is taken as meaning "distinctly or clearly perceptible" (O.E.D.); distinctness or differentiation may be achieved through singular baseness, as well as singular honour. It is Antony's confusion about the meaning and underlying responsibilities of distinction which causes his tragedy.

This thesis contends that Antony and, to a lesser extent, Cleopatra are motivated by a quest for distinction, by a need to prove greatness beyond other men. Shakespeare questions the value of distinction in this sense by giving Antony an imperfect understanding of distinction. For Antony, distinction is not necessarily intrinsic excellence, but a way of being viewed by others. He pursues the roles of great lover, ruler and warrior because they bring with them an automatic differentiation; in these roles, he is distinctive in the eyes of the world. When he loses his pre-eminent and distinguishing position, he mourns, not so much his failure of honour, but his 'indistinctness';⁷ he is no longer differentiated from the common masses, and can no longer maintain his own self-image, which is tied to the world's perception of him.

⁷ Antony and Cleopatra, ed. Barbara Everett, Signet Classic (New York and Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, 1964), IV.xiv.10. All further references to this play are from this edition, except where otherwise noted.

Shakespeare has chosen an apt vehicle for an examination of distinction. The story of Antony and Cleopatra provides a double opportunity to approach this question: through Antony's relationship with Cleopatra, and through his politico-military ambitions. Approached this way, the play can be seen, not as a conflict between love and honour, or duty, but as a coherent work of art, powerfully directed to examining the pursuit of distinction through love and honour/reputation.

This view of the play is outlined in four chapters. Chapter II looks at Antony's relationship with Cleopatra, both in terms of the distinction it brings him and in terms of Shakespeare's complex view of love. The language of Act I, scene i, and Enobarbus' description of Cleopatra's entrapment of Antony (II.ii.196-224) clearly indicate Antony's belief that his relationship with Cleopatra supplies him with the greatest stature known to man, a distinction that does not require the world. As Peter Brook says, Antony takes on Cleopatra because she is a legend.⁸ John Holloway considers that the lovers' mutual inspiration of each other with a spectacle of greatness characterizes their bond more than love or lust.⁹ The protagonists are attracted by and feed off each other's sense of peerlessness, as Berners Jackson points out in a review of Robin Phillips' 1976 production of the play at Stratford, Ontario: "Antony and Cleopatra were two invincible egotists, dazzling performers on the world's stage to whom their times had given star rating. They were conscious of themselves as

⁸ Quoted by John Higgins, "Peter Brook's Antony variations," The Times, 18 Oct. 1978, p.11.

⁹ John Holloway, The Story of the Night (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), p.105.

famous people, each attracted -- and enhanced -- by the aura of the other."¹⁰

At the same time, Cleopatra contributes to Antony's private as well as his public persona, and it is in this private relationship that Shakespeare raises again the issues of the Sonnets: the inspirational and destructive effects of love with its rhapsody and ugliness. The language of some of the Sonnets bears a striking resemblance to passages in Antony and Cleopatra; other sonnets hold up an ideal which Antony cannot sustain. Examining the language of the Sonnets and the play clarifies Antony's absorption in, repulsion against and abdication of self to Cleopatra.

Chapters III and IV examine Antony's quest for distinction through his politico-military ambitions. By drawing upon the studies of Elizabethan-Jacobean values by writers such as Curtis Brown Watson, Ruth Kelso and C.L. Barber, and upon the writings of Machiavelli and Aristotle, these chapters put forward the argument that Antony's understanding of the distinction he pursues is faulty. Distinction contains a fundamental ambiguity. The old heroic ideal saw the hero seeking his distinctive stature in order to win glory and the praise of other men; distinction and honour were accolades awarded to the hero, external recognition of the hero's stature. Later this meaning was developed to include the necessity for inward virtue; the distinctive man is given external recognition because of his excellence; in other words, his title to distinction is deserved. Antony is not aware of this ambiguity and is trapped by it, concentrating as he does on the

¹⁰ Berners Jackson, rev. of Antony and Cleopatra, by Shakespeare, Shakespeare Quarterly, 28 (1977), 203.

the land's fertility possible; on the other hand, the limitless food Egypt grows for its people is overabundant, and the excess will rot, decay and dissolve. Similarly, Cleopatra's children are positive results of her own fertility; on a natural level, they legitimize the relationship of Antony and Cleopatra, making it a more appropriate 'marriage' than that between Antony and Octavia. At the same time, these children are also "unlawful issue" (III.vi.7), in Caesar's words; Antony's liaison with Cleopatra has meant that he has "Forborne the getting of a lawful race" (III.xiii.107), a change Shakespeare made to his source. There is a suggestion that nature which is devoted to sensual pleasure is without lawful issue. In his current repugnance for Cleopatra, Antony ignores the positive implications of Cleopatra's fertility, concentrating on the unwanted products of fertility. As a creative symbol, Cleopatra makes, in the sense of 'motivate' or 'influence,' Antony's actions. "Make" has, thus, developed from its sense of 'bring forth' and 'produce,' in Cleopatra's role as creator of life, to the senses of 'bring about,' 'cause to become' and 'transform.' Cleopatra has become the serpent which has poisoned Antony, and distorted his true self.

It is at this point that a separation begins to develop between the point of view of Antony and that of the reader. Antony's sudden reversal of feeling makes suspect his repudiation of Cleopatra, and his comment on Fulvia applies more appropriately to his feelings about Cleopatra, though he may not realize it:

The present pleasure,
By revolution low'ring, does become
The opposite of itself

(Lii.125-127)

Cleopatra is as she has always been; it is Antony who, unable to experience her power moderately, perceives her as alternately heaven and hell. Like the speaker's reaction to the Dark Lady, Antony might alternately say of Cleopatra:

his defeat in the first and third battles, and, finally, of the loss of his distinction. With defeat and Cleopatra's apparent betrayal, Antony finds himself as "indistinct / As water is in water:"

here I am Antony,
Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave.
(IV.xiv.10-11,13-14)

Eros' death and Cleopatra's reported suicide finally spur Antony to take his life; as David Kaula writes, death for Antony is "a means of fixing unalterably the 'visible shape' he will hold in memory . . . his main satisfaction is that in his suicide he has performed an entirely autonomous act of honor, 'conquering' that self which had proved so difficult to hold intact at the latter end of his career."¹¹ At the same time, the positive nature of Antony's deed is marred by his failure to act effectively.

It is the play's final act, the subject of Chapter V, which affirms the distinction of Antony and Cleopatra. Always singular, the pair are also vouchsafed excellence, though we are conscious of the limitations of that excellence. Cleopatra gives Antony a verbal life and heroic identity, before dying in a manner which will ensure their place in history. Kaula summarizes her achievements thus: "if the living Antony must forever struggle to preserve his image against the pressures of time, once he is bodily removed from the scene his image is liberated into a visionary realm where 'fancy outworks nature'."¹²

¹¹ David Kaula, "The Time Sense of 'Antony and Cleopatra'," Shakespeare Quarterly, 15 (1964), 220.

¹² Kaula, p.220.

The afterlife which Antony and Cleopatra envision is double-edged, however. As historical personages, they were famous and infamous, the subject of Roman calumny and Elizabethan-Jacobean moralizing. As the protagonists of Shakespeare's play, they are brought to life each time the play is performed: their passionate, vital lives, which form the subject of the play which will immortalize them, are displayed as equivocally as in life, flawed and noble, ugly and beautiful. At the same time, however, their afterlife and their distinction are shown to be limited. Cleopatra's consummate acting and staged suicide highlight the fact that we are watching, not a great queen brought to the level of humanity at its simplest and most primitive, as Holloway asserts,¹³ not life, but a theatrical performance. Her own words raise the possibility that those creating this afterlife are no more than "quick comedians" (V.ii.216), caricatures of reality.¹⁴

Hence, like their lives, the fates of Antony and Cleopatra are ambiguous, in the sense of eliciting a double or uncertain response. Shakespeare rarely allows us a straightforward judgment, and forces us to see both nobility and self-indulgence, honour and a degrading search for reputation, reason and sterility. He does this by appealing to our hearts and our heads, often with independent results. Our hearts are swayed by Cleopatra's stirring and beautiful language; at the same time, close examination of her language reveals a

¹³ Holloway, p.120.

¹⁴ Hamlet acknowledges that, although "the purpose of playing" is to hold "the mirror up to nature," some actors "have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of Nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably." *Hamlet*, ed. Edward Hubler, Signet Classic (New York and Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, 1963), III.ii.21-23, 34-37.

contrived artistry in her words, which causes us to view her performance with a certain perceptive detachment.

Shakespeare also blurs events which are clear in his principal source, North's translation of Plutarch, so that we never have a straightforward opportunity to judge Cleopatra in particular. For example, the text never completely clarifies whether the episode with Seleucus in Act V, scene ii is designed by Cleopatra to deceive Caesar "as though she desired to live,"¹⁵ or whether she intends to try to conquer Caesar as she conquered Antony. Similarly, Antony's belief that Cleopatra has betrayed him, first with Thidias (III.xiii) and then in the final battle (IV.xii), is neither confirmed nor denied in the text. Thus, although we may believe Cleopatra to be innocent in the face of no contrary evidence, the suspicion always lingers, colouring our perception of her final act and highlighting her ambition to acquire thereby a more noble and lasting reputation than Caesar.

In the same way, we are not allowed to see Antony as only noble or only foolish. By his death, he shows he is "conqueror of myself" (IV.xiv.62); by bungling it, he confirms that the ineffectiveness he has displayed through much of his life continues into death. Cleopatra's great paean on Antony (V.ii.79-92) gives him verbal life after death, and raises him to the stature of a god; however, its lack of proportion, Cleopatra's self-conscious artistry and the suggestion of her lack of belief in the Emperor she has created undercut the glorifying effect of the speech, reminding us of the far-less-elevated reality.

¹⁵ North, "Extracts from North's 'Plutarch' (1579)," in Antony and Cleopatra, ed. M.R. Ridley, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1954), p.276. All further references to this text are from this source.

Caesar is, perhaps, the only major character who is judged; yet even this judgment is not simple. Caesar's ruthlessness and treachery are hinted at in the text, but never proved; a consummate politician, Caesar is also a loving brother and a superb militarist. Viewed dispassionately, Caesar must earn our limited admiration. However, reason divorced from its human context is not reasonable, as this play makes clear; it must be tempered with emotion, just as emotion must be moderated by reason. If the final act is seen as a combat between Caesar and Cleopatra, Cleopatra wins: Caesar's reasoned control is shown to be sterile compared with the originality and power of Cleopatra's passions and language. Furthermore, as informed readers know, though Caesar achieved his ambition to rule the Roman empire, his ultimate heritage after a string of corrupt rulers was the empire's dissolution; Cleopatra, on the other hand, is recreated as heroine, and reunited with Antony each time the play is read or performed.

In summary, Shakespeare examines the question of distinction in the context of two subjects, one or both of which have absorbed him in all his other work: love and honour. With Cleopatra and Caesar loosely representing these two 'worlds,' the play ties Antony's self-image to these 'representatives'; the great queen reflects back to Antony the distinctive image of the warrior/lover he sees himself to be; while Caesar represents the political and, later, military power Antony would like to regain.

Within this unified theme, Shakespeare separately dramatizes the confused human response to and pursuit of love and honour through Antony. Embodying all manifestations of love, Cleopatra elicits entranced, addicted and sordid responses, the effects of which are inspirational at their best and destructive at worst. Meanwhile, confusing honour acquired through action with its reward,

distinction, Antony tends to concentrate on acquiring reputation, political and military, without effecting the necessary action or assuming the responsibility concomitant with excellence.

CHAPTER II

Distinction through Love

Love is an emotion which has preoccupied Shakespeare in almost all of his plays and throughout his Sonnets. Shakespeare has described love, to varying degrees, as nobly self-sacrificing and as foolish, as a near-spiritual emotion and as lust, as inspirational and as destructive. At its height, love can affirm identity, promoting a sense of one's own distinction, and can generate great deeds which bring with them a distinctive reputation. Love can also lead to a hatred of oneself, to a destruction of judgment and reason, to ruinous and foolish behaviour which will result in a loss of distinction.

In Antony and Cleopatra, Shakespeare is absorbed by the complexity of this emotion. He realizes his interest by creating, in Cleopatra, an embodiment of love, and by dramatizing, through Antony, the conflicting human responses to love.

Cleopatra is 'spiritual' and physical love; she embodies sexual delight and revulsion; she represents the entrancing and addictive qualities of love and sexual passion. Cleopatra is also associated with the irresistible generative powers of nature: she is earth mother, but gives birth to illegitimate offspring; she is both creator and destroyer, embodying life and death. Cleopatra is also a human figure; through her Shakespeare describes a passionate nature, in which vitality and self-indulgence coexist, a nature which itself can attract or repel.

Antony, like the speaker of the Sonnets, responds to such a figure with alternate passion and revulsion. His love for Cleopatra inspires him to a sense of his peerlessness, and crushes him with the knowledge of his worthlessness; it prompts him to feats of great leadership and courage, and leads him to cowardice and total failure. At the height of his love, he sees Cleopatra affirming his distinction and his sense of worth. His perception of himself is bolstered by Cleopatra, and her powerful physical presence fills him with sexual exhilaration which can inspire him to great speech and deeds. However, as his love for her reaches a peak, it comes dangerously close to idolatry and an abnegation of self and power. A powerful figure in his own right, Antony can be overcome by his reaction to Cleopatra, and this reaction can result in a distortion of his true sight, or judgment:

O me, what eyes hath Love put in my head,
Which have no correspondence with true sight!
Or, if they have, where is my judgment fled,
That censures falsely what they see aright?
Sonnet 148¹

When a failure of judgment results in disaster, as it must inevitably, Antony sees Cleopatra denying or threatening his distinction, rather than affirming it. He reacts to Cleopatra with revulsion, expressed in terms of sexual disgust, for which the imagery of natural corruption acts as a metaphor.

Hence Antony dramatizes the extreme and contradictory reactions possible in love. When balanced, rather than overwhelming, when placed in proportion with the other demands of human existence, love can be a powerful creative

¹ Shakespeare, The Sonnets, ed. William Burto, Signet Classic (New York and Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, 1964). All further references to The Sonnets are from this edition.

force, as it is just before and during Antony's second battle with Caesar. However, such is the nature of love that it will not always conform to reason. Then, love can destroy values, judgment, reason and will, as it does prior to Antony's first and third battles with Caesar. In his love for Cleopatra, Antony binds his self-image too closely with her response to him; when it appears that his love is not reciprocated, Antony loses himself (IV.xiv.15-20).

Notwithstanding her humanity, Cleopatra's role in this play is partly symbolic and is completed by Antony's response to the qualities she embodies. Antony's reactions to Cleopatra tend to be contradictory, with the changes in his feelings becoming more rapid and extreme as the play progresses. The reasons behind such changeable responses are closely linked to the reasons for Antony's love for Cleopatra. An important factor in this love is the reflection of himself and his distinction which she provides for him. When the world confirms that distinction, and when Cleopatra, by her response, reflects back to Antony what he wants to see, his response to her is positive and his love reigns supreme. However, when the world's opinion of Cleopatra as a whore transforms Antony into a "strumpet's fool" (LI.13), or when Antony can no longer see himself reflected in Cleopatra because he cannot see the mirror her love should be creating, he experiences hatred, distaste and anger.

Complicating this response is Antony's tendency to projection at the height of his love. Blind to his judgment at such times, Antony seems to confuse the mirror, Cleopatra, with himself, so that he sees her possessing his own martial abilities. Either he assumes a unity of identities, or her possession of those qualities she inspires in him. As a result, Antony abdicates action, identity and responsibility, and, as the consequences of that abdication become clear, he

blames Cleopatra with anger and a sense of betrayal. Towards the end, there is a suggestion that Antony sees the possibility of a middle ground between the extremes of love as loss of identity and abdication of action, on the one hand, and hate as assertion of identity through action, on the other. By the end, he finally accepts both love and responsibility. Cleopatra's apparent death and Eros' suicide show Antony the way to action. However flawed his suicide is, the action and, perhaps, his consequent closeness to death enable him to see more clearly that love involves bearing responsibility for himself and accepting responsibility for Cleopatra:

love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
(Sonnet 116)

"Bears" connotes not simply constancy, but constancy despite fault, and responsibility, both of which form Antony's ultimate response to Cleopatra's "alteration."

The play's opening scene establishes clearly the equivocal nature of Antony's love for Cleopatra. The Romans feel disgust, as Antony does in a Roman mood, at how Antony's relationship with Cleopatra has destroyed his Martial and Herculean qualities. Antony is Mars, the god of war, and his personal god is Hercules, who represents physical strength, courage and fortitude. The Roman Philo clearly believes, as Caesar does later, that Antony's great military spirit and strength have been swallowed up by a powerful, but negative figure of love (Li.1-13). In the disgusted Roman view, Antony's eyes have been distorted by Cleopatra, while his heart has given up its self-control to her.

There is a basis in the play for such a judgment, as Enobarbus' description of Cleopatra's arrival on the Cydnus makes clear (II.ii.196-246). Cleopatra's impact is a physical one, but the extent of this impact seems to have a divine basis. Like the Dark Lady, Cleopatra is not beautiful: "black" and "wrinkled deep in time" (Lv.28-29), Cleopatra should be as undesirable as the woman of whom Shakespeare wrote in Sonnet 141. Yet her lack of beauty merely gives greater impact to her physical power which can "make defect perfection" and even the vilest things become themselves in her (Li.49-51; II.ii.244-245). As woman, Cleopatra's sexual presence blinds others to her physical imperfections and unseemly deeds: satiating, she creates hunger for more; black in her deeds, she is condoned and appreciated (II.ii.242-246). As goddess, Cleopatra is an enchantress with the power to distort true sight, the same power Shakespeare attributes to the Dark Lady in Sonnet 150.

However, despite the Roman judgment of Antony, Antony is not the simple figure that the Romans, and Antony himself believe him to be. Antony, like Mars and Hercules, is more than the god of war and the figure of courage and fortitude. Like Mars and Hercules, Antony has an amorous side to his nature. Furthermore, although Shakespeare makes a great deal less than Plutarch of Antony's resemblance to Bacchus,² there is a suggestion that Antony has a certain kinship with the Bacchanalian way of life which characterizes the Egyptians, a kinship he shares with Hercules who was noted for his love of eating and drinking.

² North, p.271.

In Act I, scene i, Antony has given himself up to this side of his nature (Li.44-47). More important than the indulgence of his sensuality, however, is Antony's belief that his position with Cleopatra supplies him with the greatest stature known to man. His love provides him with a distinction that does not need the world:

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

(Li.33-40)

In its high-flown rhetoric, its contrast between the imprecise, abstract notion of love and concrete, physical earth, and in its repudiation of duty, power and state, this speech expresses Antony's delight and faith in his love. However, this speech also portends the reasons for Antony's failure. A comparison with Sonnet 124, which also expresses a unique love, demonstrates significant differences:

If my dear love were but the child of state,
It might for Fortune's bastard be unfathered,
As subject to Time's love, or to Time's hate,
Weeds among weeds, or flowers with flowers gathered.

Antony is a public figure, and his love is ostentatiously displayed; it is, therefore, "the child of state" and suffers from the exigencies of political life. Antony cannot sustain the position of Sonnet 124: his love will 'grow' and 'drown' as circumstances change, because it is tied to his perception of himself. Where the speaker of the sonnet expresses his belief in his love, Antony's speech reflects his belief in his own distinction. Where in Sonnet 124, "love" is not "Weeds among weeds, or flowers with flowers gathered," in Antony's speech, he, not love, is "peerless." Antony's sense of his own distinction depends, not in an

intrinsic belief in himself, but in the world's recognition of his superiority. Hence, his belief in himself and his love is "subject to Time's love, or to Time's hate," and must fear "Polity" and Fortune's capricious acts.

Antony's sense of peerlessness is closely related to his sexual passion for Cleopatra. Philo's concentrated series of instructions to "Look," "see" and "Behold and see" (Li.10,11,13) bring to mind the spectacle associated with the pair's distinctive stature. They also suggest, in retrospect, the pair's sexual intimacy, in view of the later linking of sight imagery with sex: 'look upon' comes to act as a metaphor for Cleopatra's sexual favours; not simply her interest in men, but also the sexual act. Her refusal to "look upon" Antony (Lii.88) implies the withdrawal of sexual favours, as well as her refusal to see him. Later, Antony will accuse Cleopatra of looking "on feeders" (III.xiii.109), suggesting far more than flirtation.

However, without losing its sexual connotations, 'looking on' also comes to suggest inspiration of the spirit. Antony can be seen as Plato's beloved whose love and self-perception are reflected back to him by his lover's looking on him, thus fulfilling his perception of himself. In other words, he sees "himself in his lover."³ By 'looking on' Antony, Cleopatra inspires him to consummate himself as a great and noble warrior, just as the eyes of the young man of Sonnet 78 inspire the poet.

Both the sexual and 'spiritual' sides of Cleopatra's inspirational effect on

³ Plato, Phaedrus & Letters VII and VIII, trans. Walter Hamilton (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973), p.64.

Antony are interwoven through his "Let Rome in Tiber melt" speech. The "dungy earth" is both repudiated as not matching the 'divinity' of "such a mutual pair," and accepted as a vital part of life (Li.35-36): the "earth" feeds men as well as beasts, just as Cleopatra feeds Antony both spiritually and sexually. Food and eating become important metaphors for Antony's response to Cleopatra, who is repeatedly described in terms of food (Lv.31; II.vi.63; III.xiii.116-117). Antony's eyes do not see Cleopatra; they "eat" her (II.ii.252). His response to her seems similar to that of the speaker to the young man in Sonnet 75:

Thus do I pine and surfeit day by day,
Or gluttoning on all, or all away.

This metaphor for sex is ambiguous. "Morsel," "fragment" and "dish" (Lv.31; III.xiii.116,117; II.vi.126) debases Cleopatra to the level of the "dungy earth" (Li.35), which both Antony and Cleopatra try to transcend. The metaphor also tends to suggest excess: Alexandrian feasts are famous for their lack of restraint (II.vii.98-99) and this association darkens Cleopatra's physical role. At the same time, the food metaphor emphasizes Cleopatra's role as earth mother, as a life force. Food is essential to life, and Cleopatra at times provides a physical inspiration for Antony, just as her 'looking on' can inspire him 'spiritually.' Act I, scene i makes it clear that Antony is both "stirred" (Li.43) sexually by Cleopatra, and motivated by her; his words and actions here suggest that he is giving himself up to her inspirational power, the sexual merely underlining the emotional.

Cleopatra's role in this scene is a type of devil's advocate. Paradoxically arguing for duty, she mocks his stature and belittles his role as triumvir and husband. She takes over the Roman role, portraying Antony as Philo's fool, in

contrast to Antony's perception of himself as "peerless." At the same time, she belittles what he has repudiated, thus reinforcing his renunciation of the world:

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

(Li.19-24)

Thus the whole scene presents the paradoxical nature of Antony's situation. He is both destroyed and inspired by love; he is a fool and peerless; Rome is where he can regain his lost glory and subject himself to the domination of Caesar and Fulvia; Egypt is the source of his self-indulgence and the "space" where he can repudiate the rest of the world. There is no middle ground in Antony's perception of his situation at this point, and the reader tends to share the extreme views that the characters present at this time, to perceive conflict rather than harmony. Love connotes either pleasure or excess; Cleopatra is associated with peace or the temptation to desert duty.

These contrasts are emphasized by the following scene. Where Cleopatra was Antony's peerless partner, his playfellow in Act I, scene i, she becomes in scene ii an enchantress who has fettered him, so that by Act II, scene ii, he will say

... poisoned hours had bound me up
 From mine own knowledge.

(II.ii.94-95)

Antony's assertion that he is "stirred by Cleopatra" (Li.43) has become a belief that she has denied the free exercise of his will. Regarding himself with

self-disgust and accusing himself of idleness, Antony recognizes in language similar to that of Sonnets 69 and 94:

O, then we bring forth weeds
When our quick winds lie still
(Lii.110-111)

Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know,
My idleness doth hatch.
(Lii.130-131)

The responsibility for such "idleness" is shared, however. Antony's references to "strong Egyptian fetters," his "dotage" and "enchanted queen" (Lii.117,118,129) in this scene, and his association of Cleopatra with "idleness" in the next (Liii.92) make it clear that he considers Cleopatra the instigator of such harms. This change of mood is primarily motivated by his growing awareness that his reputation, which was so distinctive and secure in the previous scene, has been besmirched by the "general tongue" (Lii.106). Now his association with Cleopatra will bring down abuse on his name (Lii.107-110).

Antony's present aversion to Cleopatra is expressed in terms of sexual repugnance, with the imagery of distorted and excessive fertility acting as a metaphor. The sexual jokes of the Egyptians in the early part of the scene and Enobarbus' later sexual puns overlay the scene with an aura of earthiness which, while not in itself unpleasant or unhealthy, provides an appropriate background for Antony's revulsion. Cleopatra, symbolizing the irresistible generative powers of nature, has prompted Antony to breed weeds and harms.

As a creative symbol, Cleopatra's role is both positive and negative. On the one hand, she embodies the rich plains of Egypt and the Nile, which makes

the land's fertility possible; on the other hand, the limitless food Egypt grows for its people is overabundant, and the excess will rot, decay and dissolve. Similarly, Cleopatra's children are positive results of her own fertility; on a natural level, they legitimize the relationship of Antony and Cleopatra, making it a more appropriate 'marriage' than that between Antony and Octavia. At the same time, these children are also "unlawful issue" (III.vi.7), in Caesar's words; Antony's liaison with Cleopatra has meant that he has "Forborne the getting of a lawful race" (III.xiii.107), a change Shakespeare made to his source. There is a suggestion that nature which is devoted to sensual pleasure is without lawful issue. In his current repugnance for Cleopatra, Antony ignores the positive implications of Cleopatra's fertility, concentrating on the unwanted products of fertility. As a creative symbol, Cleopatra makes, in the sense of 'motivate' or 'influence,' Antony's actions. "Make" has, thus, developed from its sense of 'bring forth' and 'produce,' in Cleopatra's role as creator of life, to the senses of 'bring about,' 'cause to become' and 'transform.' Cleopatra has become the serpent which has poisoned Antony, and distorted his true self.

It is at this point that a separation begins to develop between the point of view of Antony and that of the reader. Antony's sudden reversal of feeling makes suspect his repudiation of Cleopatra, and his comment on Fulvia applies more appropriately to his feelings about Cleopatra, though he may not realize it:

The present pleasure,
By revolution low'ring, does become
The opposite of itself
(Lii.125-127)

Cleopatra is as she has always been; it is Antony who, unable to experience her power moderately, perceives her as alternately heaven and hell. Like the speaker's reaction to the Dark Lady, Antony might alternately say of Cleopatra:

And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
 As any she belied with false compare.
 (Sonnet 130)

and

All this the world well knows, yet none knows well
 To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.
 (Sonnet 129)

Enobarbus elucidates our ambivalent response to Cleopatra. His feelings towards her combine a realistic assessment of her humanity and genuine admiration for her power. The deliberate exaggeration in Enobarbus' comments shows Cleopatra to be the "cunning" (Lii.147) woman of Antony's accusation, using every sexual and emotional trick to divert Antony from his 'better' self. However, Enobarbus denies Cleopatra is "cunning," or if she is, "she makes a show'r of rain as well as Jove" (Lii.152-153). His words also suggest there is a real elemental power in Cleopatra that is beyond moral judgment, and he advises Antony to appreciate what Cleopatra is, without becoming obsessed by, and thus vulnerable to her. To Antony's regret at having met her, Enobarbus responds, "O, sir, you had then left unseen a wonderful piece of work, which not to have been blest withal would have discredited your travel" (Lii.155-157). This scene marks the opening of the possibility of a middle ground; the audience will become gradually more aware that the extremes can be reconciled, that Cleopatra's influence can be inspirational rather than destructive; it is Antony's tragedy that he cannot achieve this reconciliation until it is too late.

Enobarbus' assessment of Cleopatra is validated by the following scene; yet Antony's response continues to be extreme, despite the apparent reconciliation of their farewell. Cleopatra's speeches are clearly designed to

hold Antony (Liii.62-65). In this she is cunning, and Antony has a right to resist her wiles. Yet her speeches also contain some of the most powerful language in the first part of the play:

Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
Bliss in our brows' bent, none our parts so poor
But was a race of heaven . . .

(Liii.35-37)

Antony's resistance is, in a sense, incomprehensible; his language of affection is cold and suggests insincerity by contrast:

. . . but my full heart
Remains in use with you.

(Liii.43-44)

Moreover, Cleopatra's accusations of inconstancy put into words the reader's suspicion at Antony's sudden reversal of feelings between scenes i and ii. Her reaction to Antony's crude attempt to appease her with an apparently hard and untruthful account of his feelings about Fulvia's death also has a ring of sincerity:

I prithee turn aside and weep for her;
Then bid adieu to me, and say the tears
Belong to Egypt.

(Liii.76-78)

Yet Antony is not quite the invulnerable politician-soldier he would like to appear. His extreme aversion to her in the previous scene suggests the continuing presence of strong feelings for her. Cleopatra still has the power to influence his perception of himself. Her mockery of his "perfect honor" (Liii.80) angers him because it is a slur on a highly-prized quality which he believes he is regaining by leaving her. His reaction also suggests that he continues to rely on the reflection of himself that Cleopatra provides. Her acceptance of his honour (Liii.97) has as much to do with prompting his final expression of affection as

her acceptance of the necessity of his departure.

Cleopatra's vitality and power are maintained by a number of devices in the principally-Roman scenes which follow, so that Antony's eventual return to Egypt will be a natural consequence of his failure to maintain his distinction and stature in Rome. The Romans' fascination with her provides Enobarbus with the opportunity to describe her power and its source, while the scenes in which she appears exhibit both her sensuality and passionate nature. Thus Shakespeare develops a strong impression of the basis for the protagonists' relationship, despite their separation; their reunion is an inevitable occurrence, and needs no flamboyant description. Cleopatra alone can provide Antony with a strong self image, and, with her, he has a chance to overcome Caesar's superiority. At the same time, Cleopatra's presence in this period of separation helps to maintain our awareness of the two conflicting worlds of Rome and Egypt, and the conflict taking place within Antony.

Antony's first reported action on returning to Egypt is to reinforce his authority and stature. In a resplendent, public pageant, Antony makes Cleopatra absolute queen "Of lower Syria, Cyprus, Lydia," and his sons "kings of kings" (III.vi.10,13), in the most public place possible. He has taken steps to regain his position in Rome, even though, ironically, his Egyptian pageant will make Rome fear and despise him. In addition, he has levied "The kings o' th' earth for war" (III.vi.68). Caesar's words, paradoxically, both reinforce Antony's stature, with a long list of exotic-sounding kings, and detract from it, suggesting that Antony's actions are now determined by Cleopatra:

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

(III.vi.65-67)

Mæcenas' words emphasize the scorn with which the Romans regard Antony's giving up of control (III.vi.95-96). In other words Antony has become emasculated, and, in the Roman view, Caesar's early assessment has proved correct: Antony

is not more manlike
 Than Cleopatra, nor the queen of Ptolemy
 More womanly than he

(I.iv.5-7)

There is enough truth in this critical Roman view that it should not be entirely dismissed as biased. However, it fails to take account of the much-more-than-sexual nature of Cleopatra's attraction for Antony, and the identity she confirms for him.

The fine line between confirmation of identity and domination over identity is explored closely in the following scenes. Antony can no longer leave Egypt, so his conflict is internalized. At one brief point, Cleopatra's influence is purely inspirational, is not permitted to overwhelm so that it becomes destructive. The rest of the time, Antony's feelings and Cleopatra's influence are in states of continual change, waxing and waning in harmony with the play's changes of location, loyalties and atmospheres. Antony's submission to her power, which results in a disastrous swapping of responsibilities, alternates with sexual nausea. Antony confuses the opposing acts of love and war; he is bewitched, simultaneously fascinated and transformed, and, as a consequence, Cleopatra, the symbol of femininity, love and peace, will bear a charge in the war

And as the president of my kingdom will
Appear there for a man.

(III.vii.16-18)

while Antony, the strong, Martial warrior, will allow love to

Take from his heart, take from his brain, from's time,
What should not then be spared.

(III.vii.11-12)

The ruinous nature of Antony's submission to Cleopatra's influence in the first sea battle is actual and symbolic. Antony's decision to fight at sea, against all Roman reason, is initially provoked by Cleopatra's rebuke (III.vii.24-25); it is effected by her ships and men, and is supported by her encouragement. Symbolically, Antony's decision entails fighting on water, Cleopatra's medium, and suggests his failure to see clearly that water, associated for him with love, is not a suitable forum for war. The disastrous nature of the decision is evident from the reasoned arguments of Enobarbus and Canidius (III.vii.30-48), from the Soldier's deeply-felt comment (III.vii.61-66), and from Antony's own words: it is not good policy to talk blithely of the possibility of defeat (III.vii.52-53); while Antony's mention of the size of his land forces (III.vii.58-59) contrasts unfavourably with his choice of a badly-manned navy, of which the

mariners are muleters, reapers, people
Ingrossed by swift impress.

(III.vii.35-36)

According to the Romans, Antony's "whole action grows" (III.vii.68), not from the source of its possible strength, reason and judgment, but from his domination by Cleopatra:

. . . so our leader's led,
And we are women's men.

(III.vii.69-70)

There is a certain truth to this statement, but like many of the Romans' judgments, it is not subtle enough to encompass the complexity of Antony's experience. Antony is not led by Cleopatra directly; rather, his perception, or judgment, has been distorted as a result of his reaction to her powerful presence. Enobarbus' suggestion that Cleopatra has the power to distort true sight (II.ii) proves true.

Cleopatra's non-martial nature causes her to flee from the battle, and her influence on Antony leads him by "an action of such shame" to violate "Experience, manhood, honor" (III.x.21-23). Shakespeare blurs Plutarch's condemnation of the conduct of Cleopatra, who forced Antony "to put all to the hazard of battel by sea: considering with her selfe how she might flie, and provide for her safetie, not to helpe him to winne the victory, but to flie more easily after the battel lost."⁴ There is no such clear indication in Antony and Cleopatra that Cleopatra's fear deliberately prompted her to encourage a sea battle. Her destructive influence is more subtle, as the double meaning in Antony's words indicates: in a growing tendency to refuse to accept his own responsibility for what occurs, Antony blames Cleopatra for fleeing:

O, whither hast thou led me, Egypt? See
How I convey my shame out of thine eyes
By looking back what I have left behind
'Stroyed in dishonor.

(III.xi.51-54)

Usually interpreted as "See how I take my disgrace out of your sight by giving

⁴ North, p.264.

myself up to solitary brooding over the wreck of my fortunes and my honour"⁵, line 52 can also refer directly to Cleopatra's part in this defeat. If "convey" is taken to mean 'derive',⁶ rather than 'remove,' Antony is also saying that his shame arises as a result of Cleopatra's eyes; in other words, her powerful influence over him caused him to flee. The extent of this influence is clear in Antony's next speech (III.xi.56-61).

Antony sees himself dominated by Cleopatra, yet seems to accept the symbolic emasculation which results:

You did know
How much you were my conqueror, and that
My sword, made weak by my affection, would
Obey it on all cause.

(III.xi.65-68)

His main concern at this point is not his domination by Cleopatra, but the fact that his reputation and distinction are besmirched: hence his recollection of Philippi (III.xi.35-40) and his regret about his present position in relation to Caesar (III.xi.61-65). Antony fails to realize that, while "doting" (III.xi.15) itself may be acceptable, it should not mix with war; ~~that~~ "doting" as he does on Cleopatra, her presence at battle should not be allowed; and that Cleopatra, a figure of love and peace, cannot participate successfully in war. Enobarbus crudely makes this clear: to Cleopatra's question, "Is Antony, or we, in fault for this?" (III.xiii.2) Enobarbus replies:

⁵ R.H. Case, in Antony and Cleopatra, ed. M.R. Ridley, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1954), p.126.

⁶ O.E.D. cites Shakespeare's use of 'conveyed' in Henry V, I.ii.74 as an example of this meaning.

The itch of his affection should not then
 Have nicked his captainship
 (III.xiii.7-8)

Cleopatra's submission, her tears and apologies, restores the balance and Antony's sense of distinction; neither the defeat nor his diminished stature matter now:

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

Antony is expressing the sentiments of Sonnet 29. However, while the emotions expressed may be similar, the way they are received cannot be. Sonnet 29 ends with:

For thy sweet love rememb'ed such wealth brings,
 That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

Antony, having lost the world through his response to Cleopatra, will now react to her influence in such a way as to "change my state with kings." Again, Antony cannot sustain the stance of the Sonnets; he cannot renounce the world and its glories for love; rather his love fuels his ambition, so that his reawakened love will provide him with the inspiration to beat Caesar and change places with him. His call for wine and food (III.xi.73) sets a sexual seal on his reconciliation with Cleopatra. In view of the food metaphors which have characterized Cleopatra's sexual attractions, Antony's call for wine and food suggests the sexual act, and, further, a firing of his spirit through physical means. It is in such a way that Cleopatra can be his inspiration, and this pattern of rebuke, followed by physical and spiritual inspiration, characterizes the protagonists' subsequent encounters. Roman reason, which would keep Cleopatra in an ancillary position to war, cannot account for her inspirational qualities.

Before another reconciliation occurs, however, another quarrel takes place, with the excuse provided by Cleopatra's apparent favours to Thidias, and thus Caesar. Antony's stature is at stake here, too. Not only is his inspiration, his affirmation of self apparently deceiving him, she also appears to be transferring those powers to the enemy, with the result that Antony is no longer one of a peerless pair, but the equivalent of a cuckolded husband (III.xiii.123-126). The wound to his stature is underlined by his consciousness that "Authority melts from me" (III.xiii.90). The form Antony's rage takes is, consequently, a downgrading of Cleopatra, in which sexual disgust is emphasized. In his jealousy, Antony suggests that Cleopatra is the prostitute the Romans have always called her; she has been "a boggler ever" (III.xiii.110). In a situation of betrayal, Shakespeare often has a character turn on another in violent sexual terms; such an attack is a way of justifying to oneself one's weaknesses, and, in this respect, Antony's reactions can be compared to Claudio's spurning of Hero in Much Ado About Nothing.⁷

Although the validity of Antony's accusations is made suspect by the rage with which he makes them, their impact is strengthened by the suggestion of common to all, established earlier in the play. Antony's choice of words parallels Cleopatra's in Act I, scene v; her use of a sight metaphor to describe Pompey's love (I.v.31-34), the diction of which bears a striking resemblance to that of Sonnet 137, is repeated here by Antony, who takes it a step further to suggest the sexual act more directly: "mingle eyes" and "looks on feeders" (III.xiii.156, 109).

⁷ Shakespeare, Much Ado About Nothing, ed. David L. Stevenson, Signet Classic (New York and Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, 1964), IV.i.31-41; 55-60.

The impact of Antony's accusations is strengthened further by his use, once again, of imagery of the natural cycle (III.xiii.105-109). Antony's disgust at having loved second-hand goods takes the form of a perversion of the natural cycle which Cleopatra represents. Ignoring the creative connotations of decay, Antony sees Cleopatra as distorted life. In addition to meaning 'worn out,' "blasted" connotes 'blight,' 'blown' and 'swollen' (O.E.D.); the primary sense of "feeders" is 'servants,' but it can also suggest 'parasites.' Thus Cleopatra is seen as the blight which has prevented lawful fertility, while her own fertility is associated with rapidly breeding parasites.

Antony also expresses his fear of losing his distinction, and thus losing his identity, in his growing refusal to take responsibility for the consequences of his own actions. Increasingly, he blames something outside himself for his worsening situation. Antony's words here are both an accusation of self and an assertion that his actions are beyond his own power:

But when we in our viciousness grow hard
(O misery on't!) the wise gods seel our eyes,
In our own filth drop our clear judgments, make us
Adore our errors, laugh at's while we strut
To our confusion.

(III.xiii.111-115)

The self-disgust here echoes that in Sonnet 147, particularly in view of the sonnet's references to "Feeding" and reason's desertion. Antony recognizes in part his own "viciousness," his "errors," lack of judgment and absurdity. Unlike the sonnet, however, which uses the first-person pronoun throughout, Antony uses "we" which tends to generalize his fault. Further, he suggests that much of this results from the gods' desertion of him, a suggestion emphasized by the desertion of the god, Hercules, in Act IV, scene iii. This double sense is clear in:

When my good stars that were my former guides
Have empty left their orbs and shot their fires
Into th'abyss of hell.

(III.xiii.145-147)

Antony's "stars" are both guiding spirits and his own eyes. His blindness is a result of desertion by the gods and by his own faculties as a result of his love for Cleopatra. She has the power, through her physical presence, to distort sight, in its widest sense; thus judgment becomes tainted by sexual "filth" and spirit is expended in "th'abyss of hell." Like that of the speaker of Sonnet 148, Antony's perception is distorted, but the consequences are different. In the sonnet, the speaker's love blinds him to his beloved's faults; in the play, however, Cleopatra's faults are not an issue. While the play has suggested that she has the power to distort sight, ultimately it is Antony's acceptance of that power and his consequent blindness to the means by which he can effectively rule which matter. Shakespeare has expanded the sphere of the sonnet from the private world of a lover and his beloved to the world itself; a failure of reason and judgment is infinitely more harmful in the larger sphere.

Even here, Antony does not consider rebelling against Cleopatra's power. He can see, at times like these and in somewhat exaggerated form, that his perception is distorted, but he cannot see why it happens or that its occurrence is his responsibility. In his violent reaction against Cleopatra, his perception is distorted by rage, just as, at other times, his consciousness of the extent to which he is motivated by her is blunted by pleasure. The extreme emotions with which he reacts to her generally blind him to the process and nature of love, as in many of Shakespeare's Sonnets (for example, 137, 148 and 150).

The unreasoned nature of love is clear in Cleopatra's great imprecation (III.xiii.158-167). This speech, which answers Antony with the same corruption

imagery with which he accused her, is forceful and appropriate; however, it does not completely account for the sudden ending of Antony's rage. She is still dead Caesar's morsel and Pompey's fragment (III.xiii.116-118); while she may not have intended to betray Antony, she did "mingle eyes" to flatter Caesar. Thus, the ending of Antony's rage is a result of his acceptance of what Cleopatra is, rather than a conviction of what she is not.

Perhaps the most important image of herself that Cleopatra's speech affirms is the rightness of her physical nature and, transcending the physical, of herself. Antony's subsequent response to her bears this out. Reconciliation is again marked by his calling for a feast; the physical passion suggested by this call for "one other gaudy night" (III.xiii.183) stirs Antony to physical courage and inspiration:

Come on, my queen,
There's sap in't yet! The next time I do fight,
I'll make death love me, for I will contend
Even with his pestilent scythe.

(III.xiii.191-194)

Their physical joining affirms Antony's masculinity and those traits, such as courage, strength and fortitude, associated with masculinity. Their physical closeness symbolizes a spiritual identification, so that, where Cleopatra was and will be death's lover (Lii.144-145; V.ii.295-296), Antony will "make death love me." If each can maintain his or her identity within the association, inspiration will result in, distinction, rather than domination in disaster. Enobarbus' concluding comment (III.xiii.195-200) only partly detracts from the positive note upon which Antony leaves: while Antony's exhilaration is put in the perspective it deserves in view of his abrupt mood change, the positive possibilities of co-operation continue through the next battle. Furthermore, Enobarbus' reasoned approach is, itself, proving defective. His fate amply demonstrates that, for all

its weaknesses, love is more powerful and important in human affairs than reason alone.

However, the creative possibilities of 'co-operation are not maintained steadily. Antony's brave words temporarily give way to sorrow and a premonition of disaster, which hover between self-pity and magnanimity (IV.ii). Overshadowed by the strength of his imagination, the unsuccessful leader calls for the love and service which will assure his distinction.

As if in response to Antony's unmilitary behaviour, the god, Hercules, leaves him. The effect of this scene (IV.iii) is uncertain. On the one hand, Shakespeare's construction of the scene contains the real possibility that the soldiers' interpretation of the music is mere superstition; apart from the Egyptian Soothsayer, whose words are prompted by wisdom as much as paranormal abilities, this is the only supernatural touch in the play. On the other hand, Shakespeare has made a change to his source here, suggesting that the scene cannot be dismissed as mere superstition. Plutarch has Bacchus leaving Antony immediately before the final, fatal battle;⁸ the implication is clear: Bacchus is identified with all Antony's followers as a fair-weather friend. The significance of Shakespeare's scene can be explained in other-than-supernatural terms if Hercules is seen as representing Antony's martial qualities, which are driven out by "dotage." The scene's new position immediately before Antony's victorious battle may suggest that he is doomed despite his victory; it may also indicate, on a more prosaic plane, that unless Antony balances his love with the

⁸ North, p.271

demands of his role as leader, he will fail. Antony's subsequent success without the patronage of Hercules reinforces the impact of his victory; furthermore it validates the relationship that Antony and Cleopatra establish just prior to the battle (IV.iv), and proves the power their co-operation can unleash.

Antony's victory is the greater for the proliferation of conflicting responses between the two battles. The land battle is distinctive for two reasons, both of which involve Cleopatra: it is fought on land, which has neither the instability of water, nor water's close associations with Cleopatra; and Cleopatra does not actively participate. The implication is evident: when Cleopatra does not become actively involved, Antony's military judgment and courage are unaffected and he succeeds. Cleopatra simply assumes the conventional role of wife or mistress: the arming of her man before battle. However, Cleopatra's military effect on Antony is paradoxical: she is not only the armourer of his body; she is also the "armor of [his] heart" (IV.iv.7). She steels Antony's heart with courage⁹; she also arms it against her interference. This dualism is matched by Antony's regretful decision to do without her presence at the battle, which is implied rather than stated in:

O, love,
That thou couldst see my wars today, and knew'st
The royal occupation: thou shouldst see
A workman in't.

(IV.iv.15-18)

Antony's comment stresses "see" and excludes participation; by not participating, Cleopatra symbolically 'looks upon' battle, with all the sexual connotations of

⁹ Deighton, in Antony and Cleopatra, ed. M.R. Ridley, the Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1954), p.152.

that phrase, firing it with the same kind of spirit with which her physical attraction fires Antony after their reconciliations.

After Antony's victory, Cleopatra's role in his success is clear:

To this great fairy I'll commend thy acts,
 Make her thanks bless thee. -- O thou day o' th' world,
 Chain mine armed neck; leap thou, attire and all,
 Through proof of harness to my heart, and there
 Ride on the pants triumphing.

(IV.viii.12-16)

Cleopatra is the "great fairy" who has dispensed, as goddess, and inspired, as beloved, the day's good fortune. At the same time, the word used, "fairy," does not allow the audience to forget that Cleopatra is also an enchantress, a witch. The context and an earlier reference to Cleopatra as the sun's lover (Lv.28) suggest that Antony is addressing Cleopatra in "O thou day o' th' world," identifying her with his day of victory. Earlier, Antony arose from the bed he shares with her, to be armed physically and 'spiritually' by her. Now he asks her to share in his military exultation and, at the same time, suggests that this exultation is closely allied with sexual exhilaration. She is both "day o' th' world" and his "nightingale" (IV.viii.18); in riding "on the pants triumphing," she assumes her rightful rôle in the triumphal procession, as co-author of his victory and partner in sexual joy. This alliance of their spirits suggests a way in which Antony's twin selves might be reconciled in a successful formula; but even here, the extremes to which Antony will let his love lead him are implied: "Chain my armed neck" is both a request for an embrace and a recollection of the "fettters" (Lii.117) with which she bound him. In accepting eagerly her power, which seems to ensure victory and joy, Antony is also submitting himself to her power.

So again, Antony goes too far. Cleopatra's role should be inspirational,

his active; but, in the third battle, these roles are completely reversed. The battle is fought on water, with Cleopatra the navy's leader; Antony merely looks on (IV.x.9) and the inevitable disaster occurs.

Antony responds with grief at his eclipse by "this novice" (IV.xii.14), Caesar, and anger at the desertion of his love (IV.xii.24-25, 28-29). The hearts, those of his followers, allies and Cleopatra, have left him, and his own heart, his power, his identity, is lost, left with nothing more than the power to make war on Cleopatra (IV.xii.15) and to end himself (IV.xiv.22). Initially, Antony holds on to his conception of self by concentrating on revenge. Cleopatra's stature is downgraded and Antony, by identifying his pain with that of Hercules, can maintain a stature, a "worthiest self" to subdue (IV.xii.47). Abdicating all responsibility for what has happened, Antony accuses Cleopatra of false-playing "my glory" (IV.xiv.19). In a manifestly inaccurate statement, he sees Cleopatra as warmonger (IV.xii.25-26). Her authorship of his defeat and loss of identity is, according to Antony, evident: her media, air and water, make up "black vesper's pageants" which "mock our eyes with air" (IV.xiv.8,7); she is the creator of pageants, and, as Venus the evening star, black vesper itself. By taking away his heart, she has left Antony without the power to draw "A million moe" (IV.xiv.18) hearts to him. She has emasculated him by robbing him "of my sword" (IV.xiv.23), and by refusing him in return her own heart, the reflection of himself which he needs to confirm his own distinction.

The essentiality of Cleopatra to Antony's perception of himself becomes even clearer on his hearing the news of her apparent suicide. Cleopatra's death inspires Antony's on a number of levels. He cannot live without her, and, in this respect, Antony's decision to join her parallels his earlier decision to leave

Octavia. With Cleopatra, Antony can still ensure his distinction, even if they are both dead:

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

(IV.xiv.51-54)

Without Cleopatra, Antony's distinction and stature will be sacrificed to the ends of his triumphant enemy; a one-time triumvir of the world would be "windowed in great Rome" (IV.xiv.72) as a base and unsuccessful warrior. Furthermore, Antony cannot be seen "to lack / The courage of a woman" (IV.xiv.59-60). His notion of honour requires that, since Cleopatra killed herself, the man who "Quartered the world" with his sword and "With ships made cities" (IV.xiv.57-59) cannot allow himself to remain alive. The disgrace which would attend his reputation would not allow it.

Important as it is, Antony's suicide, with all its courageous and farcical connotations, is not the note on which Antony leaves this play. His reaction to Cleopatra's lie is evidence of a certain change in Antony's response to her. Without blaming Cleopatra, Antony finally accepts his fate with courage and magnanimity:

Bid that welcome
Which comes to punish us, and we punish it,
Seeming to bear it lightly.

(IV.xiv.136-138)

Moreover, Antony assumes responsibility for Cleopatra in a speech which, however ill-advised, confirms his generosity and love (IV.xv.45-48). This assumption of responsibility marks, perhaps, the turning point which will allow

Antony to inspire, in part, Cleopatra's death.

7

Antony's final words suggest this new care, but they do not ignore the force which has driven him throughout the play, the desire for distinction. Intending to comfort her, Antony instructs Cleopatra:

The miserable change now at my end
Lament nor sorrow at, but please your thoughts
In feeding them with those my former fortunes,
Wherein I lived; the greatest prince o' th' world,
The noblest

(IV.xv.51-55)

The solace Cleopatra may receive ensures that Antony's reputation as "the greatest prince o' th' world" is kept alive. Antony can die in peace, knowing that Cleopatra will feed her thoughts and those of others with a larger-than-life picture of Antony which will maintain his stature throughout history. Like Isis, the faithful wife and widow who went to the Underworld to rescue her husband, Cleopatra, by her suicide, will journey to Antony's side to rescue him from the oblivion of history.

Cleopatra's effect on Antony throughout the play is encapsulated in her final actions with him. Attempting to give him life (IV.xv.38-40), and denying him easy access and speech (IV.xv.21,43) summarize her constructive/destructive effect on his life. While Cleopatra does not have the power to maintain Antony's life, she does give him verbal life after his death. Ironically, it is only in death that he attains the distinction he has sought in life, and that he acquires the quality of love denied him in life. Though his love plays a part in destroying Antony, ultimately, it creates of him the superhuman figure he has always wanted to be. His search for distinction through honour is associated with his love for Cleopatra, with his belief in himself as one of a "peerless" pair (L1.40);

but it goes beyond his love, forming a parallel theme which Shakespeare explores with the same thoroughness with which he looks at love.

CHAPTER III

Distinction through Politics

Like love, distinction and honour have engrossed the protagonists of many of Shakespeare's plays, and form a major subject in such plays as Hamlet, Julius Caesar, Othello, Troilus and Cressida, Macbeth, both parts of Henry IV and Henry V. Shakespeare's work reflects the reappraisal to which distinction and honour were being subjected in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The old heroic ideal, which considered honour simply as an external accolade, still counted, but was slowly giving way to a belief that the truly distinctive man is recognized as outshining his fellows because of his excellence, because of his honourable behaviour and his inner virtue. True distinction is not sought; the distinctive man is distinctive because his honourable actions have gained him the esteem of his fellow men.

Considering honour somewhat critically,¹ Shakespeare expresses the ambivalent attitude that distinction may be either transitory and undeserved or the just acquisition of the virtuous man. Furthermore, Shakespeare seems to question the extreme to which a basic tenet of his age is taken: that "it is one of man's primary obligations to act so that he wins the esteem and the praise of

¹ C.L. Barber, The Idea of Honour in the English Drama, 1591-1700 (Goteborg: Elanders Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1957), p.20.

his fellow men."²

Antony and Cleopatra expresses this ambivalence about distinction, raising such important issues as the discrepancy between active honour and mere reputation, and the extent to which a man will go to win public esteem and the reverence of his fellow men. Antony is a man who has known an honourable and deserved reputation and the distinction it ensures. Not fully understanding that, in the world in which he lives, "Perseverance, dear my lord, / Keeps honor bright,"³ Antony fails to maintain his distinction through honourable action, and loses his reputation as a great warrior. The importance to Antony of public esteem is such that he will eventually mourn its loss as the loss of his identity (IV.xiv.12-22). At this point, however, he is determined to re-establish his reputation, with or without honour, not fully appreciating that he should pursue, not reputation, but virtue which will ensure distinction.

Antony is cast in the Aristotelian mould. The heroic ideal of the middle ages, which had an important influence on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, arose out of the Aristotelian concept of honour as the highest of all external goods, the only proper reward for virtue, and synonymous with reverence, glory and fame. The heroic ideal sought glory in courage, virtue, magnanimity, justice and courtesy.⁴ As Aristotle stresses, honour is a reward for

² Curtis Brown Watson, Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honour (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960), p.66.

³ Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, ed. Daniel Seltzer, Signet Classic (New York and Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, 1963), III.iii.150-151.

⁴ Ruth Kelso, The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964), p.97.

virtue,⁵ and, as such, its use here conforms to the O.E.D.'s definition of honour as "high respect, esteem or reverence, accorded to exalted worth or rank."

Curtis Brown Watson expands on this meaning of honour:

Honor, in one of its meanings, is an exclusively social virtue. Honor, in this sense, may refer to one's reputation in the community, to one's credit as a man of integrity, to the honors or rewards which are bestowed publicly as a testimony to one's virtue, to the glory and fame which one acquires as the result of exceptional or heroic accomplishments, or to the good name which is gained when one consistently behaves in a fashion which wins the respect and esteem of one's fellows.⁶

Aristotle also emphasizes that virtue is an indispensable prerequisite for honour.⁷ Thus, the esteem or reputation must be accompanied by "personal title to high respect or esteem; honourableness; elevation of character" (O.E.D.). Watson takes this closely-related meaning of honour further: "honor also refers to one's private and personal judgment of one's own actions, one's inner conviction of innate moral rectitude. Honor, in other words, relates to self-esteem as much as to public approbation."⁸ In order to distinguish between these two closely-related meanings of honour, the esteem accorded to a person of exalted worth will be referred to as reputation, while title to honour, or honourableness will be called honour. Distinction is thus an earned reputation; honourableness has earned recognition and esteem.

⁵ Aristotle, The Nichomachean Ethics of Aristotle, ed. R.W. Browne (London: George Bell & Sons, 1907), Book IV, ch. iii, p.98.

⁶ Watson, p.11.

⁷ Aristotle, Book IV, ch.iii, p.100.

⁸ Watson, p.12.

Antony's great prowess as a military leader and his prodigious military exploits, described by Philo and Caesar (Li.1-10; L.iv.55-71), have established his title to the reputation he bore as a hero. Antony's honour is, therefore, "acquired honor . . . a reward for well doing, and . . . perfect because it is positive and requires action."⁹ The Courtier's Academie, quoted by Watson, bears out this emphasis on action, in defining true and perfect honour as that which "is knowne by exterior action."¹⁰ The reputation concomitant on true honour has ensured an exalted position or distinction for Antony in the eyes of the world.

However, as Antony becomes enmeshed in Cleopatra's world, he puts aside those activities which gained him his distinction, relying on his position with Cleopatra and the reputation he has already acquired to maintain his stature. As a result, his reputation declines, and, when he becomes aware of it, he is devastated (Lii). As Watson points out, public esteem was so closely related to self-esteem in the opinion of the Renaissance aristocrats that it was a cardinal, moral imperative to maintain honor, reputation and good opinion.¹¹ The approbation of others was required to confirm one's inner sense of honour.¹² In Antony's case, however, there is little evidence that he can judge his own actions inwardly; he appears to rely on public esteem entirely, and, in the

⁹ Kelsp, p.98.

¹⁰ Watson, p.146.

¹¹ Watson, p.72.

¹² John Donne substantiates this in lines 337 and 338 of The First Anniversary: "For good, and well, must in our actions meet: / Wicked is not much worse than indiscreet." John Donne's Poetry, ed. A.L. Clements (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1966). All future references to Donne's poetry are from this edition.

shifting, political world of Rome, public esteem is not necessarily awarded to men of virtue.

The military threat posed by Pompey provides Antony with the opportunity of re-establishing his distinction, and he decides to return to Rome. However, there is no chance of returning to the battleground, since peace with Pompey is achieved through diplomacy. With no battle to substantiate his military reputation, Antony takes the political road, a difficult and potentially dangerous way to distinction.

Politics is neither intrinsically honourable nor dishonourable: the desire to appear politically honourable can result in true honour. However, political power is most successfully acquired through craft, as Machiavelli recognizes: popularity and a reputation for honourable authority ensure power; modesty, liberality and justice should be accompanied by a character of greatness, dignity and leadership, all characteristics of the Aristotelian heroic man. However, where Aristotle emphasizes the necessity of actually possessing these qualities,¹³ Machiavelli stresses the necessity of appearing to possess them.¹⁴ Machiavelli's advice is principally aimed at acquiring and holding onto power, and at governing a vulgar and naturally corrupt people; in fact, Antony and Caesar seem to share Machiavelli's opinion of the common man (Lii.187-189; iv.44-47). Machiavelli believes that true honour may be more of a hindrance than a help in governing

¹³ Aristotle, Book IV, ch.iii, p.98.

¹⁴ Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince, (n.p.: The National Alumni, 1907), pp.74-75.

him. Thus the prince must walk a tightrope between craft and popularity. On the one hand, "A prince that wishes to maintain his power ought to learn that he should not be always good." He "cannot and ought not to keep his word, except when he can do it without injury to himself." On the other hand, the prince must appear to respect his people, for "there is nothing a prince should dread so much as his subjects' hatred!"¹⁵

The confrontation between Antony and Caesar, which follows the treaty with Pompey, is set in an atmosphere which recalls Machiavelli's advice, and suggests that both men are more interested in political power than in disinterested government. While there are few actions by either Caesar or Antony that can be categorically classed as dishonourable, the Roman scenes are overlaid with an air of craft, dishonesty and betrayal, which affects our perception of Antony's talk of his honour; the implication being that Antony is hovering on the edge of betraying his honour in order to re-establish his reputation.

This contradiction is possible because of the close alliance between public esteem and self-esteem. Ideally, virtue should be pursued for its own sake, and reputation will follow; but the importance of reputation was such that it could be confused with honour, itself, and pursued at the expense of honour. When the battle with Pompey is averted, the only course open to a man who fails to distinguish clearly between positive honour and reputation is the pursuit of power, which will elicit public esteem and ensure his reputation. Thus, seeking to

¹⁵ Machiavelli, pp. 64, 73, 68.

confirm his reputation and authority, Antony spends Act II and the first part of Act III jockeying to establish a stature equal to Caesar's, if not superior.

Act I draws the outlines for the two worlds symbolized by Caesar and Cleopatra, and suggests a third world, or, more accurately, a third set of values, represented by Pompey and Antony as he was. The Act describes Antony's movement from the world of heroic ideals, through the sexual, motion-filled world of Cleopatra, to the political world of Rome, represented principally by Caesar. Furthermore, it defines Antony's motives, his quest for stature which prompts his actions throughout the remainder of the play.

Philo's opening speech conveys simultaneously Antony's heroic abilities and his changeable, questing nature, which the rest of the Act will confirm. Philo describes Antony as a Martial figure, who inspired his men with his whole-hearted absorption and courage. In the words of Sonnet 116, Antony used to be "the star to every wand'ring bark," a constant, brightly-lit example to his men and Rome. Yet, just as Sonnet 116 describes the unalterable ideal by comparing it to the changeable emotion "Which alters when it alteration finds," so Philo uses the picture of the heroic Antony to emphasize the ruin Antony has become:

Those his goodly eyes
That o'er the files and musters of the war
Have glowed like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
The office and devotion of their view
Upon a tawny front. His captain's heart,
Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper
And is become the bellows and the fan
To cool a gypsy's lust.

(Li.2-10)

Using the same kind of diction as Sonnet 116, Philo's speech shows that steadfastness has become the 'bending' and 'turning' of useless activity; courage and energy have been misdirected to the cooling of "a gypsy's lust;" the great leader has become "a strumpet's fool" (Li.13). While we cannot fully accept the Roman condemnation of Antony's love as "dotage" (Li.1), the play does bear out the statement that Antony "now bends, now turns:" through the play, Antony displays changes of mind and mood, and constant, generally profitless action, in contrast to Caesar's effective stillness. What Philo's speech fails to show is that, where Caesar has a single goal to which all his actions are directed, Antony is torn between and confused by his apparently conflicting desires for love, honour and reputation.

Thus, with the play's opening speech, we see a man who has earned his distinctive reputation, losing that reputation because he has failed to maintain it with action. Having acquired distinction for great deeds, Antony is now relying on his good name. However, the evidence of Rome's falling opinion of him prompts Antony to an attempt to regain his reputation. Where, in Act I, scene i, Cleopatra and his love for her bolstered his self-image, so that he could say "Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch / Of the ranged empire fall" (Li.33-34), by the next scene, Antony has discovered what "the general tongue" (Lii.106) is saying of him in Rome, and how important the general opinion is to him. The context suggests that Antony sees his authority and power emasculated by Cleopatra, where earlier she had helped to substantiate them. Antony realizes that, in Roman eyes, his conduct has become "light, inconstant, pusillanimous, irresolute and effeminate." Like Machiavelli's example, Alexander, Antony has become an object of contempt because he has allowed himself to be governed by

a woman.¹⁶

As a result of his perception of the decline in his reputation, Antony moves towards reacquiring it in the capital and symbol of the empire, Rome. Rome needs him and his duty calls him there (Lii.173-174). At the same time, Rome's very need of him substantiates his image of himself as a figure of authority and power. This dual sense of duty and power underlines much of Antony's speech to Enobarbus in scene ii:

For not alone
The death of Fulvia, with more urgent touches,
Do strongly speak to us, but letters too
Of many our contriving friends in Rome
Petition us at home.

(Lii.181-185)

The use of "contriving," the usual sense of which is 'plot' or 'conspire',¹⁷ suggests that more than mere duty recalls Antony to Rome; he has taken steps to protect his interests, and intends following the advice of his "friends" who recognize that his interests require his presence in Rome at this time.

Rome's need of Antony reaffirms his self-image, elevating him above the common man, whose opinion had earlier depressed him (Lii.106-112). Now he can feel a disgust for the people, a disgust which parallels and illuminates his growing distaste for Cleopatra. His choice of the imagery of serpents and fertility to describe the people suggests an alliance between his feelings for the people and those for Cleopatra:

¹⁶ Machiavelli, pp.76, 81-82.

¹⁷ Case, p.22.

Our slippery people,
Whose love is never linked to the deserver
Till his deserts are past

. . . Much is breeding,
Which, like the courser's hair, hath yet but life
And not a serpent's poison.

(Lii.187-189, 194-196)

Recognizing her power over him, Antony restores the balance by condemning what she stands for. The "serpent of old Nile" (Lv.25) and emblem of the Nile's fertility is now seen as a devious breeder of intrigue. Yet, like the people, she is without the "serpent's poison," for Antony has removed her fangs by leaving her. Furthermore his distaste for the fertility which Cleopatra represents, clear here in "breeding" and "yet but life," and, in the following scene, in "Breed," "grown" and "creeps" (Liii.48,49,50), suggests a sexual nausea, a repudiation of his physical relationship with Cleopatra.¹⁸

This moving away from Cleopatra occurs as Antony moves towards the philosophical and emotional preferences of Caesar. Antony's increasing political awareness is touched on in Act I, scene ii, and developed through scene ii and into Act II. As Machiavelli recognized, power is dependent on both military and political expertise. Antony's return to Rome entails returning to the battleground to prove he is still the world's greatest soldier, and outcrafting "Our slippery people" and Caesar to maintain his political power base. Both the military and political aims are apparent in Antony's explanation of the threat Pompey poses (Lii.185-194).

¹⁸ The parallel between this description of the people and Cleopatra becomes even more apt in retrospect, for Cleopatra's behaviour towards Antony will be seen to follow the people's towards the "deserver:" her love is most clearly evident when Antony is dying and dead.

Pompey's dare to Caesar is a personal challenge to Antony, whose military instincts are excited by the opportunity to meet with an admirable and worthy opponent. At the same time, Antony is torn between respect for Pompey's qualities and the threat Pompey poses to Antony's own reputation. Pompey represents many of the values both Antony and a Renaissance man would admire: his name is backed up by "blood and life" (Lii.192); his challenge (Lii.185-186) presages Antony's later dares to Caesar (III.vii.30-31; III.xiii.25-28). By a combination of this daring and his father's name, Pompey has acquired command of the sea, power and reputation, and can set himself up as "the main soldier" (Lii.193) in challenge to Antony's position. Pompey's stature diminishes Antony's. Furthermore, such a great leader poses a threat, not only to Antony the great soldier, but also to Antony as a representative of world government. Pompey endangers, not the world itself, but the "sides" of the world (Lii.194), its structure or government. Thus, Antony's speech conveys a dichotomy not simply between admiration and envy, but between respect and the determination to destroy Pompey's political and military future.

This instinctive and ambivalent reaction to Pompey gives way, in the next scene, to a more politically conscious speech on the same subject, which suggests that Antony has had time for reflection and rationalization (Liii.44-54). This second speech occurs in a different dramatic context. With Enobarbus, Antony may feel free to speak his mind; furthermore, his speech to Enobarbus provides an opportunity for Antony to verbalize his conflicting feelings. The second speech, addressed to Cleopatra, forms part of Antony's pacification of her, his desire to persuade her of the need to leave her; as such, it is bound to exaggerate the danger Pompey poses. At the same time, however, the speech shows a development in Antony's political consciousness: to defeat such a popular figure, Antony's motives must appear to be pure. As a result, he stresses

the civil war Pompey is instigating (Liii.44-48). He uses no positive words to describe Pompey, who is no longer a leader by virtue of his courage, energy and authority. "Hated" and "condemned," Pompey has wormed his way into leadership on the basis of his father's reputation, while those he has attracted are no more than the ungrateful, the permanently discontented and the restless (Liii.48-54). Antony's assessment that divided rulership cannot result in harmony is persuasive, and a principle that Caesar will take to its logical conclusion.¹⁹

While Antony's first reaction to Pompey may have been a more honest reflection of his true feelings for Pompey, this second speech cannot be dismissed as political rationalization. This 'Machiavellian' excuse' is also a genuinely justifiable reason for taking up arms against Pompey. Antony is finally returning to his duty as one of the world's leaders to safeguard that world. Thus the parallels between Antony and Caesar, which become clearer later, are not, at this point, negative. Where Caesar's ambition to be sole ruler will lead him to betray Pompey and Lepidus, and will contribute to Antony's defeat, Antony's ambition to reacquire his former stature leads him to put down a civil war. Where Caesar's contempt for motion (Liv.44-47), with its suggestion of sexual distaste, ultimately results in sterility, Antony is merely repudiating sexual indulgence to perform his duty. While Antony has an eye open for his political future, he is not sacrificing innocent victims for his ambition.

¹⁹ Machiavelli writes in The Prince:

"In a country governed by a prince and ministers of his own appointment, the sovereign enjoys infinitely the greatest authority, because throughout the whole province no authority is acknowledged but his" (p.15).

Yet we continue to be aware of a tension between honour and politics, which will reach its peak in Act II. While Act I, scenes ii and iii provide no clear evidence of dishonourable action, Cleopatra's accusations of betrayal in scene iii affect the way we view Antony's return to duty and his affirmation of his honour. Cleopatra's reproaches refer to love, and recall Antony's breaking of his marriage vows to Fulvia and his betrayal of his promises to Cleopatra; but the diction of her reproaches, "betrayed," "treasons," "vows / Which break themselves in swearing" (Liii.25,26,30-31), can as easily be applied to the actions of political intrigue:

Or thou, the greatest soldier of the world,
Art turned the greatest liar.
(Liii.38-39)

In a sense, these lines describe the direction upon which Antony has started. Cleopatra's juxtaposition of "the greatest soldier" with "liar" suggests that Antony has allowed his most successful talent, and the one he can indulge without loss of honour, to become subordinate to the dishonourable exigencies of political life.

However, as yet Cleopatra's accusations are true only insofar as they apply to her relationship with Antony. His derogatory references to her in Act I, scene ii (117-118,147,154) and his subsequent marriage to Octavia suggest that his endearments in scene iii are hypocritical, and that his statement that "I go from hence / Thy soldier-servant, making peace or war / As thou affects" (Liii.69-71) is false. Thus his plea that she "give true evidence to his love, which stands / An honorable trial" (Liii.74-75) deserves the rebuke:

Good now, play one scene
Of excellent dissembling, and let it look
Like perfect honor.
(Liii.78-80)

Antony's ambitions in Rome, and his desire to leave Cleopatra are made to look "Like perfect honor," like the need to put down a civil war, like duty and like chivalry towards his "precious queen" (Liii.73). What makes Antony's behaviour so interesting is that, despite the shaky basis of his honour, he can persuade himself that he is acting with "perfect honor," and can believe himself to be truly honourable: hence his angry reaction to Cleopatra's insult is to swear on the symbol of his honour and reputation, "Now by my sword --" (Liii.82).

The existence of a possible dichotomy between Antony's behaviour and his belief in his honour has been established in Act I, scene iii, and the tension will be developed in Act II, scene ii when Antony's sacred honour is shown to be pliable. However, while we may be aware of such tension, Antony himself is able to reconcile his actions with his honour, with Cleopatra's acceptance of his departure:

Your honor calls you hence;
Therefore be deaf to my unpitied folly,
And all the gods go with you. Upon your sword
Sit laurel victory, and smooth success
Be strewed before your feet!

(Liii.97-101)

Antony's subsequent loving response (Liii.101-105) suggests he takes Cleopatra's words in the most positive light: her acceptance of his honour is an acceptance of his honourable behaviour. However, Cleopatra's use of "honor" connotes not only honourable behaviour and duty, but also reputation. Her references to "laurel" and "smooth success" suggest the accolades and, therefore, the power he desires so strongly.

The extent of Antony's move away from the qualities represented by Pompey towards the attractions of political life becomes clearer with the introduction of Caesar in Act I, scene iv. Where Pompey and the Martial Antony of Philo's speech displayed an almost-rash daring and courage, Caesar admires and will come to exemplify the more prudent qualities of the code of honour, which, in turn, will become allied with Caesar's political skills. Caesar admires, not so much the valour which spurred Antony and Pompey to great enterprises, but the fortitude which Antony displayed in the retreat from Modena (I.iv.68-71). Caesar's admiration of this virtue is a direct result of his temperate tastes: fortitude entails self-denial, while rash action is self-indulgent and associated with physical excess. His distaste for excess is substantiated by his forbearance throughout the rest of the play. Temperance is the moderator among the virtues, requiring, in Humphrey's words, that "a Noble man thinke modestlye of hym selfe, live temperatlye, and continentlye, behave hym selfe moderately, and soberly in all things."²⁰ Insofar as it applies to physical appetites and emotional passions, this description fits Caesar very well. Caesar believes himself to be a man of self-mastery, whose desires are regulated by reason; his control and adherence to reason do not allow passion to influence his actions,²¹ in complete contrast to Antony, who tends to lack moderation and lets passion dominate at the expense of reason.

²⁰ Quoted by Kelso, p.91.

²¹ Kelso writes that temperance was an unpopular and unattractive virtue to the Elizabethans, "as one might expect of a generation that set a premium upon action, dangerous exploit, imagination-feeding enterprise," p.91.

Confirming Antony's former reputation and the current Roman opinion of him, Caesar also serves to emphasize the direction in which Antony is, at present, proceeding. His criticism of Antony's failure of duty highlights Antony's determination to break away from enchantment in order to take up service for his country. Antony's scorn for "Our slippery people, / Whose love is never linked to the deserver" (Lii.187-188) matches Caesar's contempt for "This common body" (Liv.44). Above all, Caesar's extreme temperance, and his repudiation of physical, sexual and emotional motion emphasize Antony's present distaste for the sexual, changing, motion-filled world of Cleopatra.

Act I serves to introduce and define the direction in which Antony is moving, and the worlds from which and to which he is moving. It also establishes an undercurrent of tension and betrayal which will necessarily affect our perception of the action of Act II. Despite his present distaste for the changeable world of Cleopatra, Antony's behaviour has already shown a pattern of motion which will continue through Act II and into Act III.

Perceiving the Romans' falling opinion of him, Antony attempts to regain his distinction in the power centre of the world. Rome is a world in which few are disinterested, in which ambition for power characterizes not only the leaders, but also their followers. Ambition, like the desire for reputation, is equivocal, leading men to perform great action, unworthy action or no action at all. Action, in turn, is double-edged, and may result in either glory or loss of honour; while failure to act can similarly lead to either reputation or its loss, as Antony's 'lieutenant,' Ventidius, comments in his discourse on the political realities of military life:

. . . ambition
 (The soldier's virtue) rather makes choice of loss
 Than gain which darkens him.
 I could do more to do Antohius good,
 But 'twould offend him, and in his offense
 Should my performance perish.
 (III.i.22-27)

In Rome, action tends to be directed towards ambition, rather than honour, per se. Power, in turn, is maintained through public relations: through establishing an appearance of greatness, of justice, of liberality and dignity. Furthermore, power depends on being seen to wield power, as the First Servant succinctly explains: "To be called into a huge sphere, and not to be seen to move in't, are the holes where eyes should be, which pitifully disaster the cheeks" (II.vii.14-16). Hence Caesar's final ambition is to manifest his triumph in Rome by displaying Cleopatra to the Roman people, "For her life in Rome / Would be eternal in our triumph" (V.i.65-66).

The separation between political ambition and honourable ambition has been suggested in Antony's actions of Act I, and becomes more overt in his speech and behaviour of Act II. Antony's entrance into the political forum puts him into direct confrontation with Caesar. To maintain his position, Antony must walk a tightrope between conciliation and dignity, between establishing at least the appearance of friendship with Caesar, and his own reputation as a strong-minded, powerful figure. The answer to these apparent contradictions lies in marriage to Octavia, which maintains his power while demonstrating his good faith to Caesar. However, Antony's marriage to Octavia is dishonourable in both the conscious present, because it entails breaking his promises to Cleopatra, and in a future of which a knowledgeable reader is aware, because he will betray the marriage itself when he sees he will never succeed in gaining power in Rome. Antony's decision to leave Rome, on which he does not act immediately, is

prompted by his awareness of Caesar's domination in the political forum, rather than a consciousness that his integrity will be further sacrificed if he continues to seek his distinction in Rome. In leaving Rome, Antony is choosing another means to regain his distinction, the battleground in which he has excelled.

The first and principal political scene, Act II, scene ii, creates numerous opportunities for the display and sacrifice of honour. Appearance doubtfully reflects reality. Antony may be seen as struggling to hold onto his honour in the face of superior political craftsmanship, or sacrificing his honour for stature. Caesar may genuinely want friendship with Antony, or he may see the future advantages of linking his sister in marriage with a known adulterer. The implications of the scene go far beyond the reconciliation of two men for the politico-military purpose of defeating Pompey.

Our sense of this world of political intrigue and questionable motives stems primarily from Caesar's words and those of his cohorts. Caesar's motives can be interpreted in at least two contrasting ways. Reconciliation with Antony could be prompted by a desire for true friendship. Evidence for this can be found in his Act I, scene iv discussion with Lepidus, which displays an emotional feeling for Antony rarely evident elsewhere. Caesar's language, usually business-like, becomes descriptive and vital when talking about his "great competitor" (Liv.3). Mixed with his personal distaste for Antony's excesses is a genuine regret at the change in Antony. Their relationship, at one level, is composed of that mixture of love and rivalry which characterizes the relationship of brothers. The feeling may be the reason why Caesar only superficially taxes Antony with his faults, is ready to accept his excuses, and ultimately offers his sister as a guarantee of good behaviour. In his love for

Antony, Caesar is chiding him

As we rate boys who, being mature in knowledge,
Pawn their experience to their present pleasure
And so rebel to judgment.

(I.iv.31-33)

However, without losing sight of this interpretation, it seems more likely that Caesar is aiming at a political friendship, and, moreover, one that may not last once the need for it has gone. Caesar needs Antony to defeat Pompey. Act I, scene iv stressed the threat Pompey poses, Antony's military expertise and his dereliction of duty, emphasizing Caesar's urgent need for Antony: "Antony / Leave thy lascivious wassails;" "Let his shames quickly / Drive him to Rome" (I.iv.55-56,72-73). The first scene of Act II further reinforces Antony's importance to Caesar. Pompey, somewhat dismayed by the news that Antony has left Egypt, guesses correctly that

The fear of us
May cement their divisions and bind up
The petty difference . . .

(II.i.47-49)

The appearance of friendship, rather than friendship itself, is required to defeat Pompey, whose own words suggest the possibility that, once the greater threat has been removed, "lesser enmities" will once again cause Caesar and Antony to "square between themselves" (II.i.43,45).

Caesar accuses Antony in Act II, scene ii in order to maintain his own dignity and stature; he will not, however, let the substance of his dissatisfaction with Antony affect his ultimate purpose of reconciliation. The seriousness of this substance is itself open to question: if Caesar had been genuinely concerned that

Antony was practising "on my state" (II.ii.43), it seems likely he would have brought the subject up in his earlier discussion with Lepidus. His failure to take this threat seriously is further suggested by his ready acceptance of what he, himself, refers to as Antony's "patched up" (II.ii.60) excuses.

Caesar's motives in this scene are, perhaps, most clearly seen in his reaction to Enobarbus' assessment of the situation:

Enobarbus. Or, if you borrow one another's love for the instant, you may, when you hear no more words of Pompey, return it again: you shall have time to wrangle in when you have nothing else to do.
(II.ii.107-110)

Caesar. I do not much dislike the matter, but
The manner of his speech: for't cannot be
We shall remain in friendship, our conditions
So diff'ring in their acts. Yet if I knew
What hoop should hold us stanch, from edge to edge
O' th' world I would pursue it.
(II.ii.116-121)

Enobarbus' words confirm the possible impermanence of the friendship between Antony and Caesar. The latter's response is significant: not only does its mention of "matter" and "manner" raise the question of reality and appearance, suggesting a discrepancy between the two, but it also accepts the truth of Enobarbus's wisdom. This is an unnatural friendship which cannot endure, and which requires an artificial aid to maintain its appearance. Furthermore, Caesar's metaphor suggests imprisonment, upon which Agrippa's subsequent speech enlarges:

To hold you in perpetual amity,
To make you brothers, and to knit your hearts
With an unslipping knot, take Antony
Octavia to his wife
(II.ii.130-133)

This will be a forced friendship, its lack of real love emphasized by "hold," "make" suggesting 'force,' and "knot:"²² events will bear out the connotations of force in Agrippa's words. This same knot will become "the very strangler of their amity," as Enobarbus points out: "then shall the sighs of Octavia blow the fire up in Caesar, and, as I said before, that which is the strength of their amity shall prove the immediate author of their variance" (II.vi.122, 127-130).

Agrippa's imprisoning diction applies equally to Caesar and Antony, but several clues suggest this apparent friendship is designed to benefit Caesar at Antony's expense. It would be difficult to substantiate an accusation that Caesar foresees the consequences of this marriage and has deliberately engineered the situation to trap Antony. Nevertheless, this marriage does become a trap for Antony, whose fate is foretold here. The diction of Agrippa's speech recalls the "strong Egyptian fetters" (I.ii.117) which "bound" Antony up in "poisoned hours" (II.ii.94). The consequences of this enforced bonding of the two men will prove successful for Caesar, who, having dispatched Pompey, will use the failed marriage as an excuse to make war against Antony.

Agrippa's subsequent words suggest a blinding to the truth by appearance which augurs ill for Antony:

All little jealousies, which now seem great,
And all great fears, which now import their dangers,
Would then be nothing: truths would be tales,
Where now half-tales be truths

(II.ii.137-140)

²² Cleopatra will later urge the asp to untie "this knot intricate / Of life" (V.ii.304-305).

Again, Agrippa's words apply equally to Caesar and Antony, and again the context suggests that Agrippa's words are directed at Antony: it is Antony who, blinded by appearance, will fail to see the truth, a suggestion borne out by subsequent events. Though Antony may not be blinded to the truth of his friendship with Caesar, he will see truths as rumours, while continuing to regard half-tales as truths: on the one hand, his alternately incredulous and belittling reaction to Caesar's skill at war will be a result of his failure to accept the "dangers" his rival poses; on the other hand, his later feeling of betrayal by Cleopatra will be founded on her ambiguous actions -- "half-tales" will have "great" consequences. The negative and predictive connotations of Agrippa's words apply equally to his 'happy' conclusion:

. . . her love to both
Would each to other, and all loves to both,
Draw after her.

(II.ii.140-142)

Agrippa predicts the global respect Antony desires; however, his words may also foretell the love or "hearts" which will 'draw' away from Antony to "melt their sweets / On blossoming Caesar" (IV.xii.20,22), and in the use of "Draw" may suggest Antony's ~~disembowelling~~ or disembowelling.

This world of intrigue and appearance is one to which Antony has readily returned, for he is as interested in the appearance of friendship with Caesar, though in a subtly different way. As Antony sees it, his distinction is dependent on this appearance of friendship; but it is also demeaned by the means he uses to gain it. He strives to regain his reputation, but the means he chooses only lead to dishonour.

The scene opens to tension between the two men, with Antony attempting to achieve friendship through direct conciliation, a bald strategy in contrast to Caesar's more subtle approach. Initially, Antony confronts Caesar aggressively, insisting on specific accusations. However, this military directness sits somewhat uneasily with the long, conciliatory and somewhat evasive explanations which follow. Far from speaking "as loud as Mars," as Enobarbus predicts (II.ii.6), Antony appeases Caesar with direct compliments and apologies, mention of their partnership, and such non-aggressive diction as "graceful" and "peace." He displays his own weakness when referring to Fulvia's power to control him and when describing his undignified behaviour, drunk and apologetic to a mere servant (II.ii.61, 73-74, 62-63, 64, 65, 74-75, 80-83).

Caesar's third accusation comes closest to impugning Antony's honour, and the ambiguity of Antony's response suggests, for the first time in this scene, a struggle between his desire for stature and his integrity. There are at least two separate responses to Antony's defence of his honour, which suggests that Shakespeare intended our final response to be ambivalent. Antony initially replies:

The honor is sacred which he talks on now,
Supposing that I lacked it.

(II.ii.89-90)

This seems to stress the sacredness of Antony's honour to him, and the general interpretation of the lines follows Malone's: "The theme of honour which he now speaks of, namely, the religion of an oath, for which he supposes me not to have a due regard, is sacred; it is a tender point, and touches my character

nearly²³ Following Caesar's specific accusation, Antony, admitting the fault, excuses it with a reference to Cleopatra, and finally apologizes while emphasizing the integrity of his honour:

As nearly as I may,
I'll play the penitent to you: but mine honesty
Shall not make poor my greatness, nor my power
Work without it.

(II.ii.95-98)

Again, Malone sees Antony maintaining his honour. With the final "it" referring to "honesty," Antony is suggesting his honour is composed of a balance between integrity and "greatness." The impression he apparently wants to convey is that he has kept his sacred oath, he has apologized for neglect of duty and he has maintained his integrity, greatness and power, despite the apology.

When the lines are examined more closely, however, an entirely different impression is possible. The tone of Antony's reply is very unlike his impassioned responses to similar attacks on his honour made by Cleopatra in Act I, scene iii. Furthermore, he never clearly refutes either Caesar's accusation or the slur on his honour. Malone's interpretation of lines 89 and 90 may convey the impression Antony desires to give, but it strains to do it. Antony fails to personalize "honor" in line 89, only doing so in the following line, when he raises the possibility of his own lack of honour. As Case writes, "the following sense seems not impossible: 'He is speaking of an undeniable point of honour, even supposing mine failed me.'²⁴ Antony subsequently comes close to admitting that he failed

²³ Malone, in Antony and Cleopatra, by Shakespeare, ed. M.R. Ridley, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1954), p.52.

²⁴ Case, p.52.

to carry out "the article of my oath," saying:

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

(II.ii.93-95)

Recognizing the need for an apology, Antony attempts to give it in such a way that his honesty²⁵ in admitting the need for an apology "shall not make poor my greatness." This semi-apology may be robbed of whatever integrity it possessed, if, in Antony's subsequent words, "it" is taken to refer to "greatness," rather than "honesty." Antony may be saying that "honesty" must come second to greatness and that his "power" will not work without that greatness. The extreme to which this interpretation can be taken is that honesty, a potential barrier to greatness, will be sacrificed if necessary to ensure greatness and, thus, power.

The ambiguity is reinforced by the final words of the speech:

myself . . . do
So far ask pardon as befits mine honor
To stoop in such a case.

(II.ii.100-102)

"Honor" here is synonymous with both integrity and reputation, though Barber stresses reputation.²⁶ Antony suggests both that his integrity prompts him to "stoop" to "ask pardon," and that his apology must be limited in order that his

²⁵ "Honesty" has connotations beyond 'truthfulness,' suggesting 'honour,' and including constituents of honour, such as loyalty (III.xiii.41) and chastity (V.ii.253).

²⁶ Barber, p.153.

dignity not be debased.

The ambiguity here seems deliberate, reflecting Antony's own ambivalence about the demands and meaning of honour. However, there may be a larger implication: Shakespeare may be examining, not simply the discrepancy between honour and reputation, but also the conflicting demands of those Christian-based constituents of honour, such as integrity, and the Aristotelian pagan constituents, of which magnanimity was perhaps the most important. Although Aristotle clearly states that the magnanimous man must be good, magnanimity was ultimately "the virtue of self-expansion, self-assertion. The conduct of the high-minded man was to be governed at all points by an unshakeable sense of his own undeniable worth, in comparison with which nothing else had value."²⁷ If magnanimity "gives the gentleman his highest personal worth,"²⁸ integrity may be sacrificed if it threatens that sense of worth.

Antony asserts his honour, while predicting its failure; this failure occurs, not with Caesar's accusation to which Antony offers an apology however limited, but with regard to his future actions: his decision to marry Octavia, whom he sees as the means to his future glory. Antony marries Octavia "for my peace" (II.iii.40), to eliminate the discord between himself and Caesar and, thereby, to reinstate himself as a power in Rome. Emphasizing this motive are the homophonic and semantic links between "peace" and 'appease.' Antony's mention of "peace" suggests, more positively, the freedom from civil war that

²⁷ Kelso, p.94.

²⁸ Kelso, p.94.

reconciliation achieves. Furthermore, "my peace" implies freedom from the emotional disturbance of Antony's relationship with Cleopatra. The additional homophonic similarity between "peace" and 'piece' may suggest that Antony makes this marriage to ensure that he continues to wield power over his third of the world; 'piece' was once spelt 'peace' (O.E.D.) and the word may refer to Antony's segment of the world.

Antony's acceptance of the proposed marriage confirms many of the equivocal impressions of Act II, scene ii. Preoccupation with the fair appearance of the marriage, which promises Antony so much, is juxtaposed with language that suggests that the true meaning of marriage is being betrayed. The act which disentangles him from Cleopatra is also a betrayal of her; free of Cleopatra, Antony may be moving into a trap set by Caesar:

May I never
To this good purpose, that so fairly shows,
Dream of impediment! Let me have thy hand
Further this act of grace: and from this hour,
The heart of brothers govern in our loves,
And sway our great designs!²⁹

Antony's opening words are an echo of Sonnet 116 and of the book of Common Prayer. However, the lines also suggest the dishonourable nature of his decision to marry Octavia, for they recall the potential impediment caused by Antony's relationship with Cleopatra, and foresee the obstacle which will prompt him to break away from Octavia. Furthermore, the splitting of the first sentence by "that so fairly shows" suggests that Antony is concentrating on the appearance

²⁹ Shakespeare, Antony and Cleopatra ed. M.R. Ridley, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1954), II.ii.144-149.

of this marriage, not on the real meaning of the promises he will be making. Thus, the words he uses both affirm and deny his promises, suggesting ultimately his approaching failure of integrity.

The changeable nature of Antony's desires in this play, for Cleopatra, for Octavia and for Cleopatra again, and the changeable political loves this speech recalls bring to mind, once again, Sonnet 116, which, by its use of the same diction and phraseology, clarifies the nature of the play's loves to this point:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments; love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.

Philo's opening words are confirmed. In the context of Sonnet 116, love's unalterable nature is affirmed and strengthened by the negative main clause which precedes the definition. In the play, however, where the marriage's fair show does not reflect an underlying truth, where love "alters," "bends" and is removed, "love is not love." Love, the "purpose" and "grace" are suspect, and the "heart of brothers" suggests Cain and Abel, rather than David and Jonathan. Having let Caesar "Further this act of grace," Antony may be putting himself in a position in which Caesar will "sway," in the sense of 'effect,' his own "great designs," and "sway," in the sense of 'make untenable,' Antony's "great designs."

Antony's betrayal of his honour may be mitigated somewhat by the Soothsayer's words of the next scene:

Thy daemon, that thy spirit which keeps thee, is
 Noble, courageous, high, unmatchable,
 Where Caesar's is not. But near him thy angel
 Becomes afeared, as being o'erpow'ed
 (II.iii.20-23)

How much reliance should be put on the Soothsayer's words is debatable. The Soothsayer wants to return to Egypt; furthermore, there is always the possibility that Cleopatra has sent him to scare Antony back to Egypt. On the other hand, the Soothsayer's earlier appearance (Lii) and his disturbing and accurate forecasting there give him a certain credibility. Antony has seemed "o'erpow'ed" by Caesar in the preceding scene; in Caesar's presence, he has proved himself more capable of political cunning than at any time before. Yet Antony showed he had the seeds of political cunning in him before he left Egypt. Our reaction to the Soothsayer is thus ambivalent: his predictions are both the superstitions of a primitive race and the mysterious truth arising from the ancient wisdom of the East. Antony is both the noble character perverted by Caesar, and himself capable of intrigue and self-interest.

The truth of Antony's relationship with Caesar, while not entirely clear, lies at neither extreme. Caesar represents a temptation for Antony. He is successful Rome, more skilled than his fellow countrymen at the game of political intrigue, at acquiring power and holding onto it. Antony, anxious to maintain his position, is attracted temporarily by the skills Caesar exemplifies and, thus, when with Caesar, his "unmatchable" spirit gives way to the cunning of the politician. However, Caesar's ability at the game of power politics is greater than Antony's: the betting games to which the Soothsayer and Antony refer merely represent this. Antony's decision to leave Rome is prompted by a recognition of Caesar's skill or "chance" (II.iii.36), not by the Soothsayer's main

point, that Antony is less noble when with Caesar. He returns because he realizes he can never maintain his power in Rome.

While the temptations offered by Caesar may mitigate our criticism of Antony's betrayal of his honour, the Soothsayer scene may also emphasize Antony's lack of integrity. Shakespeare has changed Plutarch's chronology here, moving the incident from after the feast with Pompey to immediately following the scene in which Antony promises to marry Octavia. In fact, it is never made clear whether Antony and Octavia are married before he decides to leave her. This timing may suggest that Antony is as ready to seize the opportunity for political advantage as Caesar. Yet this judgment is, in turn, extenuated by our awareness of Caesar's superiority at this game: Antony is a victim of political strategy, as well as a willing participant in it.

Antony's dual role of victim and intriguer continues to be implied throughout the remaining Roman scenes, with honour moving in and out like the alternate sharpening and blurring of a picture being focussed. In Act II, scene vi, Antony is a redoubtable figure who will not bend to Pompey's threats. Yet Caesar is the mastermind behind Pompey's taunting, and his "words" (II.vi.3) lie behind Antony's fierceness. Antony's generous thanks are appropriate to the man of honour, but they also recall his earlier threat to do battle with Pompey (II.ii.161-163). Antony's offer of hospitality (II.vi.61) is a fine example of liberality; but the feast which follows will be seen in retrospect as a fair face which merely covers over treacherous thoughts. Antony's teasing of Lepidus (II.vii.43-47) casts doubt on the truth of "description" (II.vii.52), while, at the same time, directing the onlooker to look at the essence of what is being described. His mention of crocodile tears (II.vii.51) is an allusion to hypocritical

emotion. His double-edged warning to Lepidus (II.vii.61-62) suggests the unstable and treacherous nature of political life and forecasts Lepidus' own fate. The significance of this warning is emphasized by the succeeding episode between Pompey and Menas, which demonstrates the appropriateness of "quicksands" as a metaphor for political life. While there is no specific evidence here that Caesar plans to break the treaty with Pompey, the fact that he does so later casts doubt on the validity of appearances. Antony seems aware of these troubled undercurrents; his desire to drown his senses in the feast, though primarily evidence for his reputation for overindulgence, may also suggest a burial of his more perceptive self (II.vii.108-110). Antony's use of "conquering" (II.vii.109) may also be an allusion to Caesar's use of friendship to allay suspicions and to defuse opposition.

The questionable honour which Antony has displayed in the scenes with Pompey is juxtaposed, in the next scene, with evidence of Antony's dishonour. Ventidius' speech (III.i.11-27) suggests for the first time that the retrospectives of Philo and Caesar do not tell the full story. Where, in Act I, Antony's former reputation was unequivocally stressed in order to provide a motive for his return to Rome, here his present dubious actions are seen as true to form. Ventidius confirms an impression Shakespeare has been building up through Acts I and II: Antony was never simply the great and noble figure, brought down by Caesar and Cleopatra; he was primarily a politico-military leader who knew how to obtain the most from his men (III.i.16-17). Furthermore, his desire to maintain his reputation has always had a dishonourable component:

Sossius,
One of my place in Syria, his lieutenant,
For quick accumulation of renown,
Which he achieved by th'minute, lost his favor.
(III.i.17-20)

Jealousy, political acumen, and/or fear for his own reputation have led Antony to put down a rival, and have ensured that Sossius' colleagues fail to fulfil their potentials. This scene suggests that Antony was always a typical Roman, ambitious and out for his own interests; more generally, it damns the Roman world, where action, the route to distinction, is sacrificed for ambition and power.

Antony's subsequent fate both confirms and denies the truth of Ventidius' implication that Antony's military prowess lies in his officers. On the one hand, Caesar defeats Antony first when Antony has refused to take his generals' advice, and, finally, when Antony is forced to do without his generals, many of whom have deserted. On the other hand, Antony's victory, his active participation in which is stressed, limits Ventidius' statements and supports Philo's description of Antony as a great leader.

The ambiguous impressions of Act II reach a peak in Act III, scene ii, which concludes and summarizes the shifting relationships of politics. The whole scene oscillates between real emotion and political dissimulation, providing a context in which it is difficult to gauge Antony's sincerity. Octavia's naivety and love appear genuine, and her tears at parting from her brother sincere. Thus Antony's descriptions of her are credible, and suggest his authentic affection for her. Octavia's sincerity, which makes Antony's desertion of her the more condemnable, is further suggested by her speechlessness (III.ii.47-48) which recalls, by contrast, the glibness of the politician, Caesar's "words" (II.vi.3). Moreover, she is the constant figure "That stands upon the swell at the full of tide / And neither way inclines" (III.ii.49-50), highlighting both Antony's changeable nature and the shifting political loves of the play. She is also fragile,

a "swan's-down feather" (III.ii.48), that will be tossed by the tides resulting from these shifting loves.

Octavia, therefore, provides a standard by which the actions of Caesar and Antony can be judged. At the other extreme is the triteness and unreliability of political love, manifest in the mockery of Lepidus by Enobarbus and Agrippa (III.ii.15-19). Love is banal and the tool of the insecure flatterer, who seeks to maintain his position by creating good relations with all. Caesar and Antony are at neither extreme. Caesar's sadness at parting from his sister appears sincere and his words to Antony convey a truth of feeling because the "mean" herself loves so sincerely:

. . . for better might we
Have loved without this mean, if on both parts
This be not cherished.

(III.ii.31-33)

Yet, Caesar's use of "mean" recalls his use of Octavia as a political tool, and the speech, cold and mechanical for the most part, is too similar to Agrippa's politically-wise speech (II.ii.130-134) and Enobarbus' forecast of enmity (II.vi.120-122) to be regarded neutrally:

Let not the piece of virtue which is set
Betwixt us as the cement of our love
To keep it builded, be the ram to batter
The fortress of it

(III.ii.28-31)

The "love" between Caesar and Antony, which does not spring from spontaneous emotion, is not love, and Caesar will use Octavia as "the ram to batter" Antony. Similarly, while Caesar's tears are uncomplicated enough now, his emotion in Act III, scene vi is limited by his perception of the opportunity presented by Antony's

desertion of Octavia. His tears are allowed to flow until the exigencies of the moment intrude.

The ramifications of Antony's words are similarly multifold. His avowals of friendship with and loyalty to Caesar can hardly be genuine in view of his feelings about Caesar in Act II, scene iii; yet there is a complicated impression of simultaneous love and rivalry in his final speech, conveying a truth of feeling which may be compared with Hamlet's feelings for Laertes in Act V of Hamlet:

Come, sir, come,
I'll wrestle with you in my strength of love;
Look, here I have you; thus I let you go,
And give you to the gods.
(III.ii.61-64)

As Case points out, "wrestle" refers "at once to their embrace and rivalry in mutual goodwill."³⁰ However, the word's connotations of violence also suggest rivalry for Octavia's love, and the violence of the struggle to come: Antony's repetition of "come" presages his later dares to Caesar, and the war with Caesar is waged both as a result of and from the secure base of "my strength of love" for Cleopatra. "Lines 63 and 64 not only foretell Antony's behaviour in the second battle, but also suggest the control he would like to have over Caesar and the fate, with its twin connotations of death and heaven, he would like to achieve for Caesar.

Similarly, Antony's apparently genuine affection for Octavia is qualified by our knowledge that he intends to leave her (II.iii.39); hence the aptness of

³⁰ Case, p.100.

Enobarbus' bantering remark, "What willingly he did confound he wailed" (III.ii.58). Like the crocodile (II.vii.51), Antony weeps as he devours his victims: his affection is genuine, but will not prevent him from tossing Octavia aside when the need arises. The similarity between Caesar and Antony in this respect, and the contrast between this reasoned, political approach and Antony's emotional behaviour after his return to Egypt are instructive: in leaving Rome and politics, where reason roots out emotion, Antony opens himself to emotion at the expense of reason.

These political scenes are important, not simply because they show Antony prepared to sacrifice 'honourable qualities for political leadership and reputation, but also because they convey the complexity and tensions of a primarily sincere man with conflicting desires. Craving power and reputation, Antony believes that the only way to achieve them is through political cunning. Believing himself a man of honour, Antony manages to delude himself that his actions continue to be honourable. Love, disgust and ambition prompt his varying responses to Cleopatra; affection and political opportunism influence his feelings for Octavia; regard, rivalry and a sense of inferiority make up his complicated reaction to Caesar. Through Antony, Shakespeare has managed to convey the multifold and contradictory nature of a man whose desires and life are fatally complicated by the position of power he has achieved. This complexity continues to be delineated in subsequent scenes, as Antony returns to the battleground, the formerly uncomplicated forum, where his responses to Cleopatra and Caesar, and his continuing quest for distinction result in his death.

CHAPTER IV

Distinction through War

Failing to achieve the distinction he seeks in Rome, Antony takes the Soothsayer's advice, and returns to Egypt to substantiate his distinction on the battleground where he formerly excelled. Despite Antony's betrayal of his promises to Octavia, it can be argued that his decision to return is a true turning to the road to distinction. Antony sees that politics require too much cunning for the honourable man, and is now making a fresh start; action in battle and assumption of responsibility as a leader will gain him both title to esteem, and a deserved reputation.

However, there is also a great deal of evidence, outlined in Chapter III and substantiated in this Chapter, that Antony confuses honour and reputation, seeking public esteem to give reality to his own sense of identity. He has failed to establish himself as Caesar's equal in Rome, and his first perceived action on returning to Egypt is a public display of his power to make "kings of kings" (III.vi.13).

Notwithstanding the specific questions raised concerning honour and reputation, Antony's very quest for distinction may be questionable. The truly honourable man does not seek out distinction, according to Aristotle.¹ Ideally,

¹ Aristotle, Book IV, ch.iii, p.101.

honour is a natural "instinct and spur which at all times impels [the gentleman] toward virtuous deeds, and draws [him] away from vice."² Watson elaborates further: "It was often suggested that one should seek virtue, and honor will follow like a shadow, whereas it would be folly to pursue honor for its own sake."³ The pursuit of distinction implies a preoccupation with the rewards of virtue, and, as Robert Ashley observes, "neither to be praised, nor to be revered, nor to be esteemed is for it self to be desired."⁴

The military setting of Acts III and IV allows Shakespeare to take further the question of action and responsibility, intrinsic components of honour. Confusing the accolades concomitant on honour with honour itself, Antony does not seem fully aware that distinction requires active and virtuous deeds.⁵ By the end of Act IV, Antony has lost both honour and public esteem because he has failed to act consistently and with responsibility. His partial elevation in Act V is only possible because he finally does act, to kill himself.

The military setting also provides Shakespeare with the opportunity to examine military honour, itself. The values of the military world are rooted in medieval chivalry; a world in which danger is embraced eagerly with daring and

² Rabelais, quoted by Kelso, p.99.

³ Watson, p.94.

⁴ Quoted by Watson, p.94.

⁵ In this context 'virtuous' applies principally to military virtues, such as courage.

valour. However, this medieval ideal had given way in the sixteenth century to a more moderate view, in which courage was tempered with wisdom. Where the medieval knight

ran eagerly into danger and rejoiced to show his bravery in the enduring of suffering and loss, or gladly met death, finding in death a reward, as it were, for his valor [the] gentleman, though no less ready to prove his mettle in great and dangerous undertakings, saw no virtue in meeting danger for its own sake.⁶

The great-minded man, valuing himself highly, did not court danger or incur small risks, according to Aristotle: few things were important enough to justify placing himself in danger. However, he would incur great danger, and even be prodigal of his life, if the situation warranted it.⁷ Thus, the sixteenth-century gentleman combined a certain temperance with his sense of superiority. He took the reasonable mean, as Aristotle suggested, between foolhardy action and cowardice, applying, through reason, self-control so as not to display an excess of any particular quality.

The value of reason is, itself, questioned in Acts III and IV of Antony and Cleopatra. As Aristotle defined it, reason "is that faculty of the soul which takes cognizance of truth and falsehood, both moral and scientific."⁸ It

⁶ Kelso, p.93.

⁷ Aristotle, Book IV, ch.iii, p.100.

⁸ R.W. Browne, in The Nichomachean Ethics of Aristotle, by Aristotle (London: George Bell & Sons, 1907), p.150n.

determines the mean state of a particular quality, which is considered a virtue when it is neither excessive, nor lacking or defective. Courage, for example, is the mean state between fear and rashness. The brave man will feel fear, "but he will bear up, as far as right and reason dictate, for the sake of what is honourable."⁹

Reason itself should be handled reasonably. Its absence and its misuse are equally condemnable, as Antony and Enobarbus demonstrate. Antony, in his intense search for distinction, is not generally guided by reason, and suffers disastrously, as Enobarbus predicts: "When valor preys on reason / It eats the sword it fights with" (III.xiii.199-200). Without reason, action and passion are undirected, lacking a governing principle, as Sonnet 147 suggests. Reason allied with courage and strengthened with controlled passion is, however, an unbeatable combination, as Antony's success in the second battle shows.

Despite the importance of reason, passion or emotion should not be rooted out altogether; as Castiglione points out, reason without controlled passion would be very weak.¹⁰ Reason must exist in a human context, or it is abused, and it is this that Enobarbus fails to realize until after his desertion of Antony. Ultimately, it is the contrast between Caesar's passionless reason and Cleopatra's vital emotions which draws our sympathies away from Caesar, to ally our hearts with Cleopatra; yet, even while swaying our hearts with the power of Cleopatra's language, Shakespeare kindles our reason, placing a moderating

⁹ Aristotle, Book III, ch.vii, p.72.

¹⁰ Quoted by Kelso, pp.91-92.

influence on our empathy with Cleopatra.

The questions Shakespeare raises about distinction and honour continue through Acts III and IV, permeating and colouring Antony's actions through the preparations for battle, the battles themselves, and his final defeat and death. Returning to Egypt to remove himself from Caesar's 'luck' (II.iii.33-41), Antony plays as great a part as Caesar in inciting the war which he hopes will affirm his distinction: his insults to Caesar and Rome act as a challenge, and may have been designed as such. The battleground is itself a gamble: with victory, Antony's honour and reputation are assured for a short time; in defeat, they may be crushed for ever. Having renounced reason and strategy for the medieval chivalric ideal, Antony is vulnerable, not only to those who combine reason with skill at war, but also to the dictates of his own passions. At the same time, his great desire for distinction opens him to manipulation by Caesar, who uses the appearance of honour when it suits him. Thus, Antony may be, and is beaten; cowardice and jealousy can, and do at times replace courage and magnanimity; great deeds can be, and are superseded by incompetent action. War proves of questionable value, and, ultimately, unsuccessful, and Antony will discard his military self, as he did his political ambitions, before he dies.

Act III, scene iv, which bridges the political and military scenes, clearly identifies Antony's desire to leave Rome with his preoccupation with distinction and Caesar. His opening speech is primarily an impassioned response to Caesar's attempt to steal Antony's good name from him. Concern that Caesar should break the treaty with Pompey is placed in a context of excuse, and then superseded by resentment at his own treatment:

Nay, nay, Octavia, not only that,
 That were excusable, that and thousands more
 Of semblable import -- but he hath waged
 New wars 'gainst Pompey; made his will, and read it
 To public ear;
 Spoke scantily of me; when perforce he could not
 But pay me terms of honor, cold and sickly
 He vented them, most narrow measure lent me;
 When the best hint was given him, he not took't,
 Or did it from his teeth.

(III.iv.1-10)

This issue is crucial to Antony. Whatever the motives behind Iago's comment that "Good name in man and woman . . . / Is the immediate jewel of their souls,"¹¹ its truth was generally accepted in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, since public respect was a confirmation of one's inner sense of honour.¹² In the context of this speech, Antony's mention of his "honor" in the following speech refers primarily to his good name:¹³

Let your best love draw to that point which seeks
 Best to preserve it. If I lose mine honor,
 I lose myself: better I were not yours
 Than yours so branchless.

(III.iv.21-24)

Antony's good name, the opinion others have of him, is indispensable to his own sense of self; without this substantiation of identity, he is lost, as he will be after his final defeat (IV.xiv. 12-22).

¹¹ Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. Alvin Kernan, Signet Classic (New York and Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, 1963), III.iii.155-156.

¹² Watson, pp.94-95.

¹³ see Barber, who classifies this use of honour as an example of reputation, p.153.

Antony assumes that Octavia believes in the same values, not realizing that, to her, love and loyalty supersede good name. His assumption partly arises from the strength of his belief in the importance of good name; but it may also be prompted by his need to rationalize his intention to leave Octavia. In instructing her to choose the man who "seeks / Best to preserve" her love, Antony suggests the pragmatic approach of choosing whoever can best maintain her position. Lines 23 and 24 seem to suggest that this person is unlikely to be Antony, if interpreted as 'it would be better that I did not remain your husband than that your husband should be so impoverished,' with the second "yours" denoting Antony and his good name. There also seems to be a blurring of distinction between the "honor" of Antony and that of Octavia, in the implied identification between the second "yours" and Octavia's honour: as Antony's wife, Octavia and her good name would be tarnished along with Antony; alone, her good name would be retained.

Act III, scene iv also introduces the question of who is responsible for the war which follows. Caesar's actions, which suggest his ambition to oust Antony, are juxtaposed with Antony's talk of his good name and his subsequent threat to "raise the preparation of a war / Shall stain your brother" (III.iv.26-27). Antony's excessive response to Caesar's stratagems suggests, not only his desire to eclipse Caesar, but also, perhaps, his need to create a forum in which this can take place. Act III, scene vi brings this question into the open, along with the enmity between Antony and Caesar. Not only does the resplendent public ceremony affirm Antony's stature and ensure that Rome will hear of his authority, but it also throws down the gauntlet to Caesar. The juxtapositioning of the speeches, which convey Antony's demands, then Caesar's (III.vi.24-38), indicates that the

two men are using their prior knowledge of each other's reactions in order to stir the conflict into open war.

Responsibility is shared; both men want war. Antony's assembling of "The kings o' th' earth for war" (III.vi.68) is immediately succeeded, in the following scene, by Caesar's rapid invasion of the East. Shakespeare enforces this sense of mutual responsibility by having each principal report the words and actions of the other. With two exceptions, this process of challenge and counter challenge is reported to us at second hand: Caesar's insults by Antony; Antony's by Caesar. Antony's preparation for war is described by Caesar, while Caesar's march on Egypt is conveyed to us by Antony (III.vii.20-23).

War offers Antony and Caesar the chance to realize their real ambitions. Though these ambitions use the same means and demand the same ends, they are subtly different, and it is in this difference that Caesar's victory is ordained. Caesar is not concerned with honour; his pragmatism demands victory by any means. Antony seeking to regain his distinction, must suit his actions to his conception of honour. Thus, Antony is potentially vulnerable to one who will use the appearance of honour to trap his enemy.

This honour demands that Antony fight at sea in the first battle. Cleopatra's part in Antony's decision has already been described; Caesar shares the responsibility for that decision, for his 'dare' (III.vii.29) touches on Antony's courage and dignity. Antony believes that failure to accept the dare would reduce him to a coward in the eyes of the world, and this concern blinds him to the powerful arguments of reason. Antony's conception of honour, a desire to

protect his name from the charge of cowardice and a foolhardy courage paradoxically result in defeat and cowardice, because Antony cannot sustain his identity without Cleopatra, and is unable to back up courage with action.

In defeat, Antony's reputation continues to be his paramount concern; but, initially, at least, Antony also reacts with a sense of shame (III.xi.1-4), which prompts him to magnanimity and to consider suicide. Yet, on Cleopatra's entrance, shame gives way to his ingrained concern with his reputation:

I have offended reputation,
A most unnoble swerving.
(III.xi.49-50)

Antony displays an obsessive concern with his stature in relation to Caesar's. Antony, who had "half the bulk o' th' world" to play with, "Making and marring fortunes" as he pleased, is mortified that he must now humble himself "To the young man" who

at Philippi kept
His sword e'en like a dancer, while I struck
The lean and wrinkled Cassius
(III.xi.64, 65, 62, 35-37)

In his need to wipe out this blow to his stature, Antony alludes, first, to Caesar's former lack of courage, then to his supposed lack of experience (III.xiii.20-25).

Antony's challenge of a duel can be seen in two contrary ways. On the one hand, it may be the response of the brave, experienced, chivalric warrior to the youthful coward, who depends on intrigue, stratagem and words to win, rather than appropriate military courage. Although condemned by Renaissance

moralists, the duel was designed to preserve the Renaissance gentleman's honour from injury, and was "the gentleman's one suitable way of maintaining his dignity and individuality . . . and of winning repute as a man of courage and honor."¹⁴ Antony's challenge is, thus, an honourable way of wiping out his cowardice. On the other hand, it may also be a desperate expedient: depressed about the likelihood of ever defeating Caesar's army, Antony may believe that the only way to overpower his rival is in single combat, in which Antony's superior strength and skill would dominate. The possibility also exists that Antony knows Caesar would never accept such a challenge; as a result, Antony can restore his name for courage in the eyes of the world without injury.

Whatever his motives, Antony's "fear and doting" (III.xi.15) in the first battle make both the challenge and his slurs on Caesar's courage foolish and desperate, as Enobarbus points out:

Yes, like enough: high-battled Caesar will
Unstate his happiness and be staged to th' show
Against a sworder! I see men's judgments are
A parcel of their fortunes, and things outward
Do draw the inward quality after them
To suffer all alike.

(III.xiii.29-34)

Though there is a certain reservation in our response to Enobarbus, who fails to recognize the reasons for and value of the ideal Antony is pursuing, Enobarbus' insight is accurate. Antony's declining fortunes are infecting his judgment so that both deteriorate together, destroying each other. Beyond that, Enobarbus recognizes that Antony's sense of self is tied to his fortune and reputation, and

¹⁴ Kelsey, pp.100-102.

that Antony is always most content with himself when his reputation and stature are established securely by his good fortune or victory in battle. Furthermore, Enobarbus sees Caesar's influence on Antony's actions: "Caesar, thou hast subdued / His judgment too" (III.xiii.36-37). This insight is borne out by Antony's later exclamation about Caesar:

He makes me angry with him; for he seems
Proud and disdainful, harping on what I am,
Not what he knew I was. He makes me angry
(III.xiii.141-143)

This is a direct reference to Plutarch's account of the episode; but, where North's translation of Plutarch merely indicates that Caesar's superior attitude to Antony angers the latter,¹⁵ Shakespeare introduces the ever-present question of Antony's reputation. On one level, Antony is saying that Caesar's treatment of him as a defeated enemy is inappropriate in view of Antony's former military prowess. Beyond that, Antony, while recognizing his present declined state, is angered that Caesar, the emblem of the Roman world whose respect he craves, does not pay homage to his name.

Antony's recognition of his deteriorating position is juxtaposed with his expectation that honour continue to be his due, and is placed in a context of excuse and failure to accept responsibility:

And at this time most easy 'tis to do't,
When my good stars that were my former guides
Have empty left their orbs and shot their fires
Into th'abysm of hell.
(III.xiii.144-147)

¹⁵ North, p.269.

One interpretation sees Antony attributing his present misery to the fact that his guiding spirits, gods or destiny have turned against him. However, if "my good stars" also refers to judgment or perception, Antony may be imputing his failure of judgment to the influence of his two most powerful associates, Cleopatra and Caesar: in the context of the scene's sexual jealousy, "shot their fires / Into th'abyss of hell" invokes the addictive passion of lust so eloquently described by Shakespeare in Sonnet 147; furthermore, the parallel between "my good stars that were my former guides" and the Soothsayer's words (II.iii), suggests that Antony ascribes his faulty judgment to Caesar's influence.

Yet Antony's inability to recognize that he must sway his own destiny is not simply an excuse for his present failure. As demonstrated earlier, Antony's motives, which are simultaneously admirable and limited, place him in a vulnerable position, open to the influence of opinion. Hence, with the melting away of authority (III.xiii.90), Antony seeks to prove "I am / Antony yet" (III.xiii.92-93). His treatment of Thidias is as much a result of his desire to belittle Caesar as an expression of his jealousy, as his frequent references to Caesar demonstrate (III.xiii.135-137, 139-140). A perverted magnanimity is prompted by Antony's desire to be recognized as superior to Caesar:

If he mislike
My speech and what is done, tell him he has
Hipparchus, my enfranchised bondman, whom
He may at pleasure whip, or hang, or torture,
As he shall like, to quit me.

(III.xiii.147-151)

Antony is angered almost as much by Cleopatra's apparent flattery of Caesar as by her apparent infidelity. Her imprecation inspires him as a protestation of loyalty, as well as a declaration of love. Finally, her love and his denigration of Caesar succeed in restoring to Antony a sense of his own worth, so that he is

"Antony again" (III.xiii.187), as Cleopatra recognizes.

Antony has convinced himself of his distinction, not by proving himself, but by some dubious rationalizations and actions. The lack of any reason in and for his new-found confidence is suggested by Enobarbus (III.xiii.195-201). However, Enobarbus is confusing reason with ambition and expediency. His words are ceasing to have their former impact, and, as Antony's subsequent victory shows, reason is not the only consideration of merit. An inner sense of worth, emphasized by Cleopatra's belief in him, succeeds where "reason" fails, as the juxtapositioning of Antony's victory and Enobarbus' desertion makes clear. "Reason" leads to the destruction of Enobarbus' better self, and, when he realizes it, he dies of grief (IV.ix). At the same time, Antony's dubious self-assertion, which lacks all apparent rationale, nonetheless effectively restores his heart so that he is able to act in accordance with his conception of himself.

Physically and emotionally inspired by his lady, who sends him off to battle suitably armed (IV.iv), Antony has no need of a public display of his magnanimity towards Enobarbus (IV.v). His generosity is allowed full rein, if not inspired by his comparative content in himself. Similarly, his generous accolades towards his men after the battle (IV.viii) are the mark of the great leader, who has no need to stint praise in order to bolster his own stature. Antony's victory has already been described as a re-creation or inspiration of the great warrior by Cleopatra. Caesar also contributes towards Antony's success. Perhaps angered by Antony's insults and self-aggrandizement in defeat, Caesar fails to depend on his cunning and skill. His overconfidence is unusual in one who generally depends on his own intelligence:

Let our best heads
 Know that tomorrow the last of many battles
 We mean to fight.

(IV.i.10-12)

Caesar's confidence results in a dangerous presumption and he is defeated (IV.vii.1-3). Antony's victory, therefore, owes something to Caesar's failure, and indirectly, to Antony's assertion that "he had power / To beat [Caesar] out of Egypt" (IV.i.1-2). Thus, Antony's self-assertion, which seemed pitiful as a futile attempt to hold onto his dying reputation, is justified. Not only has he proved himself the great warrior, but he has also beaten Caesar at his own game.

In view of this victory, the actions which lead to Antony's final defeat are puzzling. The successive inspirational and destructive qualities which characterize his relationship with Cleopatra appear to apply to his response to Caesar. Success leads him to abandon leadership to Cleopatra and strategy to Caesar in the third battle. Caesar prepares to fight by sea, and Antony accepts the forum which so clearly belongs to his enemy, Caesar, and to the symbol of peace, Cleopatra. Again, Antony's motives seem to be prompted by his limited conception of honour: failure to accept Caesar's choice of venue would be cowardly and display a lack of confidence in oneself. Antony's confidence has become overconfidence:

I would they'd fight i' th' fire or i' th' air;
 We'd fight there too.

(IV.x.3-4)

The influence on Antony's actions in defeat continues to be shared by Caesar and Cleopatra, though not in equal proportion. Antony's fury is

a man who will sacrifice principle for political ends. Here, finally, he is the ruthless politician; in choosing this destiny he forfeits the empathy Antony and Cleopatra will receive.

Cleopatra's power to affect and effect life ultimately wins against Caesar's sterility: Caesar achieves his ambition to rule the Roman empire, while Cleopatra's imagined afterlife will not come about as she envisions it. However, Caesar's prosperous 42-year reign as Emperor will end in a string of corrupt rulers, and finally with the dissolution of the Roman empire.

Cleopatra, on the other hand, will be recreated and reunited with Antony in the words of Shakespeare, and in each reading or performance of his play. As Arnold Stein writes, "the victor possesses the prosaic world, and its business, to which he is subject in order to be master; but the defeated possess their dream, even if the question of that dream still remains an open one."⁵

While Antony is not physically present in the last act, he is far from forgotten. The structure of the last act is such that he is perceived in two differing ways by the play's two consciousnesses, Roman and Egyptian; these perceptions, in turn, evoke a final and appropriately ambivalent impression of him. Each perception conforms to the particular consciousness by which he is being viewed, but is not limited by it. In scene i, the Romans, pragmatic and realistic, clearly summarize the human Antony. The man both great and frail,

⁵ Arnold Stein, "The Image of Antony: Lyric and Tragic Imagination," in Essays in Shakespearean Criticism, ed. J.L. Calderwood and H.E. Toliver (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1970), p.574.

principally directed against Cleopatra; his response is to degrade her, but his reputation is still his primary concern and his anger that "this novice" (IV.xii.14) should eclipse him is an echo of his response after his first defeat. Grief at loss of love combines with Antony's awareness of his loss of reputation:

The hearts
That spanieled me at heels, to whom I gave
Their wishes, do discandy, melt their sweets
On blossoming Caesar; and this pine is barked,
That overtopped them all.

(IV.xii.20-24)

The context suggests that lines 23 and 24 refer primarily to reputation; however, Antony did tower over his fellow men, and these words are therefore valid, expressing, perhaps, his awareness of his own present unworthiness. "Barked" refers both to the stripping of the honours he received, and to the honourable qualities he possessed.

With the melting away of his distinction, Antony, using the decay and dissolution imagery of the life cycle, begins to feel a dissolution of his own identity. While Caesar blossoms, 'fertilized' by the very "hearts" which ensured Antony's own distinction, Antony has become "the blown rose" (III.xiii.39). Authority, and thus power and identity, have, with his allies, melted away from him completely (III.xiii.90; IV.xii.22), leaving him as indistinct "As water is in water" (IV.xiv.10-11). Antony's question to Eros, "thou yet behold'st me?" (IV.xiv.1), emphasizes the importance of perception to Antony's sense of self-worth: others' perception of his stature as glorious must be reflected back to him to confirm his conception of self. Because he is no longer seen as distinctive by Cleopatra and the world, he can no longer "hold this visible shape" (IV.xiv.14). No longer distinctive, Antony is no more than a common plebeian, with only the power of life and death over himself left to him.

While Antony's suicide is inspired principally by the news of Cléopatra's death, Caesar continues to exert an influence even here. Caesar must not be allowed to believe that he has conquered Antony:

Eros,
Wouldst thou be windowed in great Rome and see
Thy master thus: with pleached arms, bending down
His corrigible neck, his face subdued
To penetrative shame, whilst the wheeled seat
Of fortunate Caesar, drawn before him, branded
His baseness that ensued?

(IV.xiv.71-77)

Antony's honour and his reputation demand a noble death, and suicide is such a death: first, Antony is a Roman and beyond Christian judgment; second, despite the strong Christian taboo against suicide, there was, according to Watson, a growing tolerance of suicide in the literature of the Renaissance.¹⁶ Antony certainly considers that suicide will set the record straight, as his final words make clear:

. . . and do now not basely die,
Not cowardly put off my helmet to
My countryman; a Roman, by a Roman
Valiantly vanquished.

(IV.xv.55-58)

Yet the meaning of these words may not be as simple as it appears. If the second "Roman" is taken to refer to Caesar, an interpretation suggested by its proximity to "My countryman," Antony is both accepting magnanimously defeat at Caesar's hands, and recognizing the victor's superiority and power over him. On the other hand, both 'Romans' may be Antony, and, by killing himself, he tells Caesar, "I

¹⁶ Watson refers to Fritz Eisinger's Das Problem des Selbst-mordes in der Literatur der Englischen Renaissance, which he calls "an exhaustive, painstaking study of the growing tolerance of suicide in the literature of the Renaissance," p.118.

. . . we'll hand in hand,
 And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze:
 Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops,
 And all the haunt be ours.

(IV.xiv.51-54)

These words do not simply demonstrate Antony's exchange of the world for love; by repeating that "such a twain" stands up "peerless" (Li.38, 40), Antony is expressing one of the three key notions of Renaissance humanist philosophy: that posthumous reputation can give the mortal individual a sense of permanence.¹⁸

Lear-like, Antony strips, pleading with his heart (IV.xiv.35-43). There are important differences between this speech and those of Lear, however. Lear's stripping is a result of his recognition that "Thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art".¹⁹ Lear's realization that clothes cover with artificiality man's essential nature. Antony's stripping is accompanied by no such revelation. While not denying the validity of what his armour has represented, Antony realizes it is no longer appropriate for him: he has failed it and it has failed him. At the same time, the discarding of his armour signifies the final removal of his defences against Cleopatra. Its weight symbolizes the responsibilities which have tied him to Rome and the world; by unarming, he achieves the freedom to go to Cleopatra and the afterlife. Antony's craving for this freedom is evident in his appeal to his heart. Unlike Lear who pleads for the relief of breaking down (II.iv.196),

¹⁸ Watson, pp.68-69.

¹⁹ Shakespeare, King Lear, ed. Russell Fraser, Signet Classic (New York and Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, 1963), III.iv.108-110. All future references to King Lear are from this edition.

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Antony asks his heart "to have for once the strength to break out into freedom from the confining body."²⁰ Where Lear emphasizes the strength of his "sides," Antony would infuse his heart with strength, the strength to break out, not break down, implying by contrast, its failure of strength in the past.

Strength and action, with this exception, are discarded along with the armour:

. . . now
All length is torture: since the torch is out,
Lie down, and stray no farther. Now all labor
Mars what it does; yea, very force entangles
Itself with strength.

(IV.xiv.45-49)

However, physically swayed by the abstract notions he is expounding, Antony cannot perform the act which will free him: in Cleopatra's words, "that thing that ends all other deeds" (V.ii.5). The same precipitate extremity, which resulted in a defective life, culminates in a defective death: Antony's repudiation of "labor" overtakes the "sleep" which will accomplish it, and he fails to kill himself immediately.

Antony's penultimate scene both summarizes and brings full circle his actions throughout the play. The final eight lines before his suicide (IV.xiv.95-102), with their general absence of words of action, strongly parallel his repudiation of the world in Act I, scene i. There, as here, his distinction was an over-riding concern; there, as here, his words were imprecise and abstract. His desire for distinction requires Antony "To do thus" (IV.xiv.102), as it did in

²⁰ Ridley, p.175.

Act I, scene i (36-37). Now, as throughout the play, his subsequent actions are a combination of success and failure. The flight of his guards and Decretas' self-serving theft (IV.xiv.111-113), which succeed his sword thrust, recall the flight of and betrayal by his generals and allies. At the same time, Antony's magnanimous acceptance of Cleopatra's betrayal parallels his treatment of Enobarbus, lending a certain validity to Antony's final claim to be "the greatest prince o' th' world, / The noblest" (IV.xv.54-55).

War has also failed to fulfill Antony's aims. The same confused and limited desires which prompted him to seek distinction through political means have led to the three battles; and the same responses to Caesar and Cleopatra, complicated by his close identification of his distinction and self, have resulted in failure. In putting aside political and military ambition, Antony has not changed or developed to any great extent; although he realizes that the political and military routes have failed him, or that he has failed them, he never reaches the awareness that it was his own obsession with distinction that was at fault. As a result, he has no other choice than death. Honourable suicide will restore his distinction in the eyes of the world; it will also give him "A nobleness in record" (IV.xiv.99), a place in the story or the afterlife: his fame will continue to live. However, it is Cleopatra who assures that place in the story. Her words glorify him and her death enshrines the two of them: hence the need for Act V.

CHAPTER V

"A Place i' th' Story"

Our response to the play's major characters would be less complex, less rounded without Act V. Our final impression of the protagonists would be Antony's bathetic ending, his failure to achieve excellence, and Cleopatra's self-serving actions. By removing Antony physically, and allowing Cleopatra the full power of her language and theatricality, Act V permits the possibility of triumph, canonization and tragedy to round out our reactions to a very human pair. At the same time, we are not allowed to forget the preceding scenes: Cleopatra's somewhat exaggerated paeon on Antony (V.ii.79-92), her contrived artistry and her uncertain intentions are a reminder of Antony's weakness, and Cleopatra's self-aggrandizement and selfishness. The pair are always distinctive, in the sense of singular; they are not always distinctive, in the sense of singularly excellent.

Yet, whether singular or excellent, the distinction of Antony and Cleopatra, which ensures and is ensured by a place in the story, is affirmed in Act V. Cleopatra's vivid language allows Antony the distinctive identity of great lover, leader and warrior, which he pursued so ardently in life. Her words, courage and actions fertilize the seeds of their story, providing Shakespeare with the subject of one of his greatest plays. Only a pair distinguished from the common masses, outshining even Dido and Aeneas (IV.xiv.53), warrants a place in the story or play; at the same time, that place assures the pair's continued distinction.

- The play acts as the afterlife Antony and Cleopatra envision, an afterlife which is not simply their delusion. Every time Shakespeare's powerful language is heard or read, Antony and Cleopatra will walk "hand in hand," making "the ghosts gaze" (IV.xiv.51,52). However, in creating this afterlife, the play is not only celebratory; it is also condemnatory, for each reading brings to life the pair's honour and dishonour, love and selfishness, strength and failure.

Our consciousness of the play, which is heightened by Cleopatra's vivid and theatrical language in Act V, raises the question of the play's validity as reality. Antony and Cleopatra are historical figures; therefore the poet cannot be accused, in Theseus' words, of giving "to airy nothing / A local habitation and a name."¹ In immortalizing Antony and Cleopatra in verse, the poet may be said to be giving the pair "immortal life," as Shakespeare wrote in Sonnets 81 and 18:

Nor shall Death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Yet, in reading the play, we only see the protagonists' afterlives in our imaginations, and, in watching the play performed, we require our imaginations to "amend" "shadows" into characters in whom we can believe for a while, as

¹ Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream, ed. Wolfgang Clemen, Signet Classic (New York and Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, 1963), V.i.16-17. All further references to this play are from this edition.

Theseus points out.² Cleopatra forecasts that:

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

— (V.ii.216-221)

These words convey beautifully the folly and grandeur of the protagonists, but they also confirm the impression left by Theseus, that it is folly to anticipate reality from play acting, that those creating this afterlife are no more than "shadows," "quick comedians" who may only be capable of exaggerating faults and 'boying' "greatness."

So, despite its power, Shakespeare's play can only create a memory; Antony and Cleopatra will never walk "hand in hand" in reality. Rather, the play elicits a multifold reaction to its creations. Its achievement can best be compared to that of some of the Sonnets, in which the speaker's response to his beloved is composed of both critical insight and accepting love (for example, Sonnet 96), of hatred, fascination and renewed love (for example, Sonnet 119).

The play, as a whole, insists that black and white judgments cannot be made. The love of Antony and Cleopatra, like the love described in the Sonnets, is beautiful and ugly, passionate and feverish; Antony's desire for distinction is both right and proper, and misguided and wrong; Caesar is a

² A Midsummer Night's Dream, V.i.212-213.

brilliant leader and a cold politician; hence the widely divergent views of the play by modern critics, who may not be able to hold in simultaneous suspension the totality of the elements which comprise these characters.

The pragmatists among us will dismiss Antony's and Cleopatra's visions of the afterlife, convinced by the value of Caesar's ambitions: "Antony and Cleopatra is not a drama in which the world is well lost for love. That is, it does not show the world to be, to the losers, as nothing when compared to their love." The romantics, however, like G. Wilson Knight, see the endings of Antony and Cleopatra bathed in a transcendent light: "By synchronizing death, the most absolute of all negations, with the positive aspect of life; love, we are left with a sense of peace and happiness, an apprehension of pure immortality."⁴

These widely divergent views are both defensible, but they are also limited for they fail to take into account that both truths coexist at the end, at least if the characters' words and actions are looked at alone. While Shakespeare encourages our minds to encompass all elements, we are swept up by Cleopatra's language into feeling that her ending is as triumphant for her as she believes it to be. So it is that we come to empathize with Antony and Cleopatra with our hearts, while continuing to criticize their human frailty:

³ Willard Farnham, Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), p.175.

⁴ G. Wilson Knight, The Imperial Theme (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1954), p.289.

In faith I do not love thee with mine eyes,
 For they in thee a thousand errors note;
 But 'tis my heart that loves what they despise,
 Who in despite of view is pleased to dote.

(Sonnet 141)

Similarly, Caesar may elicit our limited admiration for his strength, intelligence and leadership capabilities, but it is the ambiguous admiration, heavily imbued with distaste, of Sonnet 94:

They that have pow'r to hurt and will do none,
 That do not do the thing they most do show,
 Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
 Unmoved, cold, and to temptation slow;
 They rightly do inherit heaven's graces
 And husband nature's riches from expense;
 They are the lords and owners of their faces,
 Others but stewards of their excellence.

Though Antony is not forgotten, the principal focus of the last act is on Caesar and Cleopatra. The confrontation between them imparts dramatic tension to the last act and serves as a nucleus from which the two move towards different fates. Caesar and Cleopatra are alike in that each is engaged in a struggle for his or her ambition, ultimate reputation. Similarly, both oscillate between reality and performance: Caesar is alternately man and politician, Cleopatra woman and goddess. The difference between them lies here: while both finally choose performance, Cleopatra reconciles human and divine roles. As goddess, she maintains strong ties to the living world, envisaging her new role in the afterlife as constituted of the same elements as her human role. Cleopatra's passions and language give her life and a certain uniqueness in eternity. On the other hand, Caesar's reasoned control lacks, not only emotive force, but also life. Through the play, he has been seen as both capable of human feeling, and prepared to sacrifice that feeling for his ambition; he has been shown as a man of courage, expertise and leadership, yet

a man who will sacrifice principle for political ends. Here, finally, he is the ruthless politician; in choosing this destiny he forfeits the empathy Antony and Cleopatra will receive.

Cleopatra's power to affect and effect life ultimately wins against Caesar's sterility: Caesar achieves his ambition to rule the Roman empire, while Cleopatra's imagined afterlife will not come about as she envisions it. However, Caesar's prosperous 42-year reign as Emperor will end in a string of corrupt rulers, and finally with the dissolution of the Roman empire.

Cleopatra, on the other hand, will be recreated and reunited with Antony in the words of Shakespeare, and in each reading or performance of his play. As Arnold Stein writes, "the victor possesses the prosaic world, and its business, to which he is subject in order to be master; but the defeated possess their dream, even if the question of that dream still remains an open one."⁵

While Antony is not physically present in the last act, he is far from forgotten. The structure of the last act is such that he is perceived in two differing ways by the play's two consciousnesses, Roman and Egyptian; these perceptions, in turn, evoke a final and appropriately ambivalent impression of him. Each perception conforms to the particular consciousness by which he is being viewed, but is not limited by it. In scene i, the Romans, pragmatic and realistic, clearly summarize the human Antony. The man both great and frail,

⁵ Arnold Stein, "The Image of Antony: Lyric and Tragic Imagination," in *Essays in Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. J.L. Calderwood and H.E. Toliver (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1970), p.574.

whose actions led his nation to triumph and the brink of civil war, and himself to glory and disaster, the man who elicited love and scorn is recalled in the speeches of Caesar, Decretas, Agrippa and Maecenas. In scene ii, the human Antony no longer exists. In the fertile, imaginative, Egyptian world, Antony is deified as leader and lover by a woman whose own self-perception relies on her ability to create this exaggerated picture. Though this picture is only lightly based on reality, its exaggeration recalls the real Antony, both noble and greatly flawed. Antony also remains an active force in Act V, for he provokes emotion in Caesar, and is the spiritual instrument of Cleopatra's death. As in life, though, Antony's influence is not entirely effective: Caesar's emotion does not alter his behaviour, while Cleopatra's suicide, in part motivated by love for Antony, is also performed to defeat Caesar and to acquire a place in the story.

Act V, scene i plays an important part in closing the events of Act IV, preparatory to the conclusion of Act V, scene ii. At the same time it introduces some of the themes of the final scene. Its greatest significance lies in its summary of the real Antony, and its removal of him to make way for the transformed Antony of the subsequent scene. In addition, the scene summarizes Caesar and finally judges him sterile, paving the way for Cleopatra's triumph of vitality. Act V, scene i also introduces the tensions of the approaching confrontation between Caesar and Cleopatra.

In this summary of Antony, his flaws, which have been so evident throughout the play, are placed in the context of his former greatness. The double picture which emerges is itself dependent on the man who is speaking at the time; it is therefore never a final judgment, but is, perhaps, deliberately

left open for individual interpretation. For example, Maecenas, whose comments have always been gentler than those of Agrippa, says that Antony's "taints and honors / Waged equal with him" (V.i.30-31). On the other hand, politically wise Agrippa, while recognizing Antony's faults, reacts far more positively, and hints at Antony's approaching deification:

A rarer spirit never
Did steer humanity; but you gods will give us
Some faults to make us men.

(V.i.31-33)

Neither remark provides a complete summing up, but both, together with the motives and natures of the speakers, must be taken into account as we attempt to determine for ourselves the complex human situation which Antony represents.

The same is true of the two major commentators on Antony, Decretas and Caesar. Decretas, a figure of uncertain probity, provides us with an appropriately equivocal picture of Antony; the equivocalness is itself dependent on our recognizing Decretas' questionable integrity. The man, whose self-serving attitude suggested betrayal in Act IV, scene xiv (112-113), shows an apparent sincerity in his offer to yield up his life to Caesar (V.i.12). His former betrayal of his master, his offer of service to Caesar and a certain similarity to the cunning manipulator, Thidias, suggest that Decretas is not to be trusted. The parallel with Thidias is suggested by the similarity between Decretas' summary of Antony, "who best was worthy / Best to be served" (V.i.6-7), and Thidias' earlier praise of Caesar:

One that but performs
The bidding of the fullest man, and worthiest
To have command obeyed.

(III.xiii.86-88)

However, as these quotations suggest, the similarity between Thidias and Decretas lies in their loyalty as well as their cunning: for his belief in Caesar as "the fullest man" Thidias suffered greatly, and Decretas offers to do the same. Meanwhile, Decretas' betrayal of Antony is somewhat counteracted by his unostentatiously sincere praise of Antony here, while his offer of service to Caesar is matched by his offer of his life.

Decretas' ambiguous actions may lend an uncertain tone to his remarks on Antony, and may prompt us to suspect deliberate ambiguity in his choice of diction and phraseology. The overall intent of his description of Antony's death appears to be praise and honour of Antony: the use of "honor," "courage," "heart" and "noble" (V.i.22,23,26) suggests that Antony's courageous heart prompted him to take his own life. However, Decretas' speech contains reservations. His mention of "a public minister of justice" and "a hired knife" (V.i.20,21), although intended to lend force to "that self hand" (V.i.21), imparts a sordid quality to what follows. Furthermore, Decretas raises the possibility that Antony's fate might have been settled by justice: a degrading end for one such as Antony.

Decretas' description of Antony's suicide also seems to open the possibility of double meaning:

. . . but that self hand
Which writ his honor in the acts it did
Hath, with the courage which the heart did lend it,
Splitted the heart.

(V.i.21-24)

Antony's acts were often dishonourable, while his suicide was not the entirely courageous act these words apparently assert. Decretas' words may be

posthumous exaggeration: Like Caesar and Cleopatra, Decretas appears to see the dead Antony as noble and worthy, while the living Antony was betrayed. On the other hand, Decretas' speech may be deliberately ambiguous, with "honor" suggesting both honour and dishonour. The parallel between these words and Sonnet 111 raises further possibilities:

Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
 And almost thence my nature is subdued
 To what it works in, like the dyer's hand.

Antony spent most of the play ensuring that his name earned him the distinction he felt it deserved. On the way, his nature became temporarily infected by the medium in which it was acting. Thus, Antony's hand, stained by the dishonourable acts he performed to acquire a name, in fact spelled out his failure of honour, as often as it "writ his honor." It is this same ambiguously described hand which "Splitted the heart." Antony's hand, alternately pure and stained, could not split his heart with immediate success. His heart, of which his hand is the outer manifestation, was alternately cowardly and brave. The oscillating courage, which the heart gave the vacillating hand, resulted in a defective death.

These implications continue to be evident in Decretas' final words:

This is his sword,
 I robbed his wound of it: behold it stained
 With his most noble blood.

(V.i.24-26)

Again, "sword" and "noble blood" indicate Decretas' ostensible intention, but other words, with which these are juxtaposed, set up a counterpoint: "robbed" is an explicit reference to Decretas' betrayal of Antony, and thus to Antony's inability to maintain leadership at crucial periods of his life; "wound" is a reminder of Antony's failure to kill himself immediately; "stained" suggests

'fainted,' the stigma some of Antony's acts lent to his name.

Like Decretas' speech, Caesar's words at once convey Antony's greatness and his failure; but, where Decretas' remarks may be deliberately double-edged, Caesar seems to articulate openly his ambivalent feelings about Antony, and, thus, his perception of Antony's nature. His reaction to the news of Antony's death has tremendous force and conveys the reverence with which the name of Antony is held:

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

(V.i.14-19)

There is, however, a reservation in Caesar's words. The death of Antony should have caused the world to move, like the approaching death of Julius Caesar,⁶ but it did not. Furthermore, Caesar's honouring of Antony's name, in which "lay / A moiety of the world," is ambiguous in view of the picture of the world this play has presented.

Caesar's subsequent speech conveys sincere approbation of Antony, which is juxtaposed with ambiguous and somewhat-contorted statements about him. Love and praise for Antony is mixed with a sense of his flawed humanity.

⁶ Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, ed. William and Barbara Rosen, Signet Classic (New York and Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, 1963), l.iii.

On the one hand, Antony is

• my mate in empire,
Friend and companion in the front of war
(V.i.43-44)

In the past, Antony has reinforced Caesar's success, even led him to the success and power they shared. On the other hand, Antony is associated with the "Diseases in our bodies" which "we do launch" (V.i.37,36), the disease, perhaps, which has provoked civil war in the empire. Moreover, Caesar's sentence recalls the equivocal nature of Antony's actions: Antony acted heroically in 'lancing' his disease by curing himself "with a wound" (IV.xiv.78); yet he originally 'launched' his disease by indulging his passions. In Caesar's words, Antony is also

The arm of mine own body, and the heart
Where mine his thoughts did kindle
(V.i.45-46)

Antony's description of the battle of Philippi (III.xi.35-40) is clarified by Caesar's tribute, in which the latter suggests that Antony both protected Caesar by his skill as a warrior, and enacted the military success which brought them to power; thus Caesar's military experience and courage were kindled by Antony. However, the convolution of "the heart / Where mine his thoughts did kindle" suggests a second meaning, which refers back to Caesar's political and military manipulation of Antony. In their ambiguity, Caesar's words may also be saying, 'my heart kindled thoughts in Antony's heart'; Caesar's earlier admission that "I have followed thee to this" (V.i.36) supports this second interpretation.

That Caesar, the cold, expedient politician, can show apparently sincere

grief and love for the dead Antony increases Antony's stature, corroborating Agrippa's description of him as "A rarer spirit" (V.i.31). Only a man of unusual qualities would have the power to break through Caesar's shell. However, Caesar's motives for his praise of Antony are mixed: his grief may be a genuine reflection of his feelings for Antony, but it is also directed towards political effect. Antony, or, more particularly, Caesar's response to Antony, assists us finally to evaluate Caesar, just as Caesar helped to focus our perception of Antony. Both men are complex and difficult to assess definitively. Our final reaction to Antony must be based on our perception of his greatness and his flaws, which coexist to the end; Shakespeare will not allow us to see Antony's flaws without his greatness, or his greatness without his flaws. However, a judgment of Caesar may be possible, and it is made possible, first, by Antony, and, later, by Cleopatra. Caesar's response to Antony indicates his humanity, and it is Caesar's denial of this human feeling, on the entrance of the messenger, which will finally result in our condemnation of him as sterile, a judgment reinforced by the contrast between Caesar and Cleopatra whom we see together for the first time in the next scene.

Caesar's response to Antony's death is multifold. It is simultaneously composed of grief and relief, a certain self-knowledge and a rationalization of guilt, and, finally, it is an opportunity for Caesar to increase his popularity. The words of Agrippa and Maecenas articulate Caesar's several responses:

And strange it is
That nature must compel us to lament
Our most persisted deeds.

(V.i.28-30)

Agrippa is repeating here Enobarbus' half-jocular words about Antony: "What willingly he did confound he wailed" (III.ii.58); the repetition of a paradox

applied to the more human Antony makes more plausible Caesar's apparently contradictory words and behaviour. In their subsequent interchange, Agrippa and Maecenas touch on Caesar's motives:

Agrippa.

Caesar is touched.

Maecenas. When such a spacious mirror's set before him,
He needs must see himself.
(V.i.33-35)

In Antony, Caesar must see himself because, as he says subsequently, he could as easily have been in Antony's position now, and Antony in his (V.i.37-39). In the mirror that Antony provides for him, he must see where he falls short of Antony's spaciousness. There is also a suggestion of Caesar's egoism here: Antony reflects back to Caesar Caesar's own triumph. Caesar sees his almost-fulfilled ambition satisfied at Antony's expense, and, in this way, Maecenas' words predict Caesar's use of Antony's death for his own purposes.

The first lines of Caesar's subsequent speech combine personal and political justification with a certain self-awareness:

O Antony,
I have followed thee to this. But we do launch
Diseases in our bodies. I must perforce
Have shown to thee such a declining day
Or look on thine: we could not stall together
In the whole world.

(V.i.35-40)

In admitting his responsibility for Antony's fate, Caesar explains, in part, his compulsion to rid himself of Antony. On a political level, Antony was an obstacle which had to be removed before Caesar's ambition could be fulfilled. There is also a personal reference here to Caesar's complex reaction to Antony: the only individual who had the power to move Caesar to disturbing

emotion, Antony was a disease in Caesar's body which interfered with Caesar's cool, rational intelligence. Both political and personal senses are developed in the remainder of the speech. Caesar's explanation of his actions is Machiavellian in its realistic assessment of the world situation. Caesar recognizes, where Antony never did clearly, that world power involves survival of the strongest, that power devolves upon the person who can kill before being killed. This is a scathing indictment by Shakespeare of the Roman Empire, but the truth of Caesar's remark, his acceptance of a similar fate if Antony had won and his authentic feeling for Antony rob Shakespeare's indictment of some of its sting.

The political explanation gives way to a personal lament, which refers back to "Diseases" and introduces the paean which follows:

But yet let me lament
With tears as sovereign as the blood of hearts
(V.i.40-41)

In interpreting these lines, Case refers back to Antony's earlier words:

. . . or I will live,
Or bathe my dying honor in the blood
Shall make it live again.
(IV.ii.5-7)

Case notes that this may be an allusion to baths of blood as a remedy, and comments on Caesar's words, "the thought being, perhaps, of a sovereign remedy."⁷ Thus Caesar's words do two things: the simile adds force to the extent of his grief, while his tears may be the means whereby the wound

⁷ Case, p.146, 192.

caused by the excising of Antony is healed. The lament which follows expresses genuine regret for the loss of Antony and for the situation which did not allow them to coexist:

. . . that our stars,
Unreconcilable, should divide
Our equalness to this.

(V.i.46-48)

At the same time, regret and loss are matched by relief and an acceptance that their "stars," both destinies and natures, were incompatible. Similarly, "brother" (V.i.42) conveys both their actual relationship and the love-hate relationship between siblings. "Competitor" (V.i.42) is both 'colleague' and 'rival,' suggesting the dual relationship of the two men. This speech, which attempts to come to terms with the enigma that was Antony and with Caesar's own ambivalent feelings about Antony, has a plausibility which Cleopatra's great eulogy lacks (V.ii.79-92). On the other hand, Caesar's speech is a summary and, finally, a dismissal of the real Antony, while Cleopatra transforms the dead Antony into a god, giving him distinction and life after death.

Caesar's insertion of "good friends" (V.i.48), which recalls his stage audience, and his sudden switch to business on the entrance of the messenger are a reminder of the political aims of this man. Shakespeare has made a significant change to his source here, a change which emphasizes the public nature of Caesar's grief.⁸ Where North shows Caesar indulging his grief privately and only then attempting to manifest his innocence, Shakespeare has

⁸ See North, pp.273-274.

Caesar display his grief publicly. This is good stagecraft, but it may also indicate that Caesar has all along been aware of the good public relations of such grief. If so, the publicity limits the effect on us of Caesar's response to Antony, without necessarily detracting from its sincerity. Furthermore, Caesar's tears, to which he draws attention in "Look you, sad friends" (V.i.26), recall the varying connotations of sincerity and dissimulation that tears have evoked earlier (II.vii.51, III.ii).

Caesar's concern with public relations is confirmed by his closing words:

Go with me to my tent, where you shall see
How hardly I was drawn into this war,
How calm and gentle I proceeded still
In all my writings. Go with me, and see
What I can show in this.

(V.i.73-77)

He is determined to display a reputation as a peace-loving man, with his repetition of "see" and his use of "show" accenting the publicity-oriented nature of his words and suggesting the importance of appearance. Words, rather than action, are Caesar's means of achieving success and his words, the only clear act we see of Caesar, are generally calm, gentle and reasonable. Again, Caesar has allowed himself to show sincere emotion because it has not interfered with the business at hand; to the contrary, emotion and business work well together here, for he uses emotion to enhance his public image.

Upon the arrival of the Egyptian, Caesar hardly considers Antony again; his concern lies with his political future and with Cleopatra, who has the power to make or break that future. Just as Cleopatra's words, delivered by the Egyptian, provide a subtle indication of the tactics she will use against

Caesar in the next scene, Caesar's response rehearses the tactics he will use against her:

She soon shall know of us, by some of ours,
How honorable and how kindly we
Determine for her. For Caesar cannot live
To be ungentle.

(V.i.57-60)

These words are not meant to convince us of Caesar's good faith. They are designed to indicate the type of false reassurance Caesar will use in his attempt to overcome an enemy whom he recognizes as formidable. He respects Cleopatra as a worthy political adversary, as a grieving lover, and as a great queen, a respect he denied Antony before the latter's death. Caesar recognizes the need for careful plotting to keep Cleopatra alive, for he believes that she has the courage to kill herself. His somewhat confused instructions subsequent to Proculeius' exit indicate the urgency of his intentions (V.i.69-72).

Thus, Act V, scene i has set the stage for the final triumph of Antony and Cleopatra. By summing up the real Antony in a form of valediction, it allows the near-deification of Antony in the final scene, a development that would not have been possible if it had followed immediately Antony's death scenes with all their absurdities. Act V, scene i also places Caesar and Cleopatra in position, not only for their direct confrontation, but also for the spiritual battle which will take place between their values.

Cleopatra's triumph would not be as effective without Act V, scene i, which makes a judgment of Caesar possible, and clarifies the similarities between Caesar and Cleopatra. Like Caesar, Cleopatra is highly conscious of her audience, deliberately staging a superb theatrical event to wring maximum

effect from her death. Like Caesar, she manipulates in the interests of her reputation and ambition. This similarity, highlighted by Act V, scene i; and the confrontation between the pair which takes place in Act V, scene ii, permits our fuller appreciation of the differences which develop between the values of the two.

Cleopatra's powerful language cannot leave us unmoved and unconscious of her triumph. Yet this is the same Cleopatra we have seen throughout the play; as David Kaula points out, in preparing for her own death, Cleopatra "does not undergo complete regeneration so much as a refinement of qualities she has shown all along."⁹ Her shrewdness and egotism are as evident here as in the rest of the play. So we are alternately stirred by her power and conscious of her humanity. We take her part in her confrontation with Caesar, approving the stratagems she employs to deceive him, even while these stratagems recall her deception of Antony. We enter into the spirit of her deification of Antony, while remaining, like Dolabella, unconvinced of the reality of the portrait she presents. Her fear of physical degradation evokes pathos, while we recognize that physical perfection and control are essential to perfect the final tableau she will stage. Her renunciation of the physical world is as absurd for one whose power depends on the physical as it is moving. Her suicide, prompted by love and her ambition to achieve an enduring reputation, evokes pity and detachment. The symbolism of the final speeches brings together all the connotations of life and death, love, lust and fertility which are associated with Venus. The life cycle rounds out as the protagonists' rebirth comes about. At the same time, the conscious artistry of Cleopatra's

⁹ Kaula, p.222.

However, it is combined with an uncourteous recollection of those "injuries," lending the whole an air of martyrdom. Caesar is not convinced by Cleopatra's performance, as we can see when his "gentle" (V.ii.127), "princely," graceful (V.ii.22,24) and "honorable" (V.ii.108) nature is revealed to be utter ruthlessness:

. . . but if you seek
To lay on me a cruelty by taking
Antony's course, you shall bereave yourself
Of my good purposes, and put your children
To that destruction which I'll guard them from
(V.ii.128-132)

In threatening to kill Cleopatra's children, Caesar displays his true intentions, but, in Machiavellian style, he words his threat in such a way that Cleopatra will seem ultimately responsible for their deaths: "you" will force me to be cruel; "you shall bereave yourself;" you will "put your children" to death, while "I'll guard them from" it.

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¹³ North, p.275.

his ~~own~~ fortune, and comes as close to being Fortune as any mortal can be. Although Cleopatra is triumphant and earns herself and Antony victory over Caesar, Caesar does achieve his ambition, a victory nowhere near as splendid as that of Antony and Cleopatra, but a victory all the same.

It has been suggested that Cleopatra's humble submission to Caesar is a reflection of her intention to betray Antony's memory and make a deal with Caesar. On the surface, this is a valid interpretation in light of Cleopatra's characteristics and her ambiguous actions in the past (III.xiii.46-85). Her submissive words and the episode with Seleucus conform only too well to her past behaviour, and even her apparent changes of mind are further evidence of her volatile nature. I would suggest that Shakespeare intends this interpretation to coexist with a second interpretation, that Cleopatra deliberately uses such behaviour to allay Caesar's suspicions long enough to give herself the opportunity to commit suicide. If a decisive interpretation is made difficult, the dramatic tension of this scene is increased immeasurably. However, despite the legitimacy of the first interpretation, it is the second which is more interesting.

The speeches containing Cleopatra's apparently differing intentions are juxtaposed such that her true intentions seem clear. Furthermore, her lines often have a double meaning which cannot be other than deliberate. Both strategy and mockery are evident in Cleopatra's second speech to Proculeius, a dress-rehearsal for her coming performance with Caesar himself. After an opening response to Proculeius, in which depression gives way to a sly and somewhat humorous request for "conquered Egypt for my son" (V.ii.19), Cleopatra almost parodies the humble submission of the captured prisoner:

I am his fortune's vassal, and I send him
 The greatness he has got. I hourly learn
 A doctrine of obedience, and would gladly
 Look him i' th' face.

(V.ii.29-32)

Johnson's explanation of the lines is clearly the impression she intends to convey: "'I allow him to be my conqueror; I own his superiority with complete submission'."¹¹ However, the lines quiver with mockery. Cleopatra intends that Caesar's fortune will be cheated, ~~that~~ it will be less spectacular than he anticipates; she is, thus, the servant of his fortune, and will do all in her power to enact his failed fortune. Furthermore, "I send him / The greatness he has got" suggests 'I send him nothing that I would want,' after "'Tis paltry to be Caesar." "Look him i' th' face" sounds almost insulting in its brevity after the grandiloquent phraseology that precedes it; it also connotes an equality very different from the kneeling humility she promises and later enacts.

Cleopatra's attempted suicide on her capture is an expression of her determination to die and may confirm the falsity of her earlier submission to Caesar's will. In desolation at her failure, Cleopatra comes close to betraying that suicide has been her intention all along. Case writes; "Hitherto (and she reverts to this course in her interview with Caesar) Cleopatra has silently nursed her purpose and deceived her conquerors. Now, shaken out of her self-possession she reveals it in threats, idle talk, as she calls them by contrast with her settled and previously dissembled purpose."¹²

¹¹ Johnson, in Antony and Cleopatra, ed. M.R. Ridley, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1954), p.196.

¹² Case, p.197.

This background suggests that the reverential submission she displays before Caesar is false, while the double meaning to be found in her language to him indicates the mockery with which she regards him:

Sir, the gods
Will have it thus. My master and my lord
I must obey.

(V.ii.115-117)

Intending that Caesar should take this as referring to himself, Cleopatra may in fact be alluding to Antony and the exemplum he provides for her. This is borne out by her earlier eulogy on Antony, in which he is described as masterly, lord-like and even godlike (V.ii.79-92). Cleopatra's subsequent admission to possessing frailties sounds suspiciously meek, while the over-elaborate metaphor which follows suggests her disbelief in what she is saying:

And may, through all the world: 'tis yours, and we,
Your scutcheons and your signs of conquest, shall
Hang in what place you please.

(V.ii.134-136)

Caesar's own cunning, however, makes him a hard man to deceive. His words to Cleopatra are an unattractive mixture of graciousness, condescension, martyrdom and ruthlessness. His opening question belittles Cleopatra's stature: "Which is the Queen of Egypt?" (V.ii.112). The graciousness of "Arise! You shall not kneel" (V.ii.114) is continued in

Take to you no hard thoughts.
The record of what injuries you did us,
Though written in our flesh, we shall remember
As things but done by chance.

(V.ii.117-120)

However, it is combined with an uncourteous recollection of those "injuries," lending the whole an air of martyrdom. Caesar is not convinced by Cleopatra's performance, as we can see when his "gentle" (V.ii.127), "princely," graceful (V.ii.22,24) and "honorable" (V.ii.108) nature is revealed to be utter ruthlessness:

. . . but if you seek
To lay on me a cruelty by taking
Antony's course, you shall bereave yourself
Of my good purposes, and put your children
To that destruction which I'll guard them from
(V.ii.128-132)

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¹³ North, p.275.

Shakespeare gives no such explicit indication as North that "Cleopatra finely deceiveth Octavius Caesar, as though she desired to live."¹⁴ Thus Shakespeare provides for the possibility of both deception and a desire to live.

Cleopatra calls forth Seleucus and instructs him under threat:

This is my treasurer; let him speak, my lord,
Upon his peril, that I have reserved
To myself nothing. Speak the truth, Seleucus.
(V.ii.142-144)

Her direct insistence that he tell the truth may indicate that this is exactly what she wants him to do, particularly in view of the double meaning of much of her language in this scene. Her order is followed by an equally direct question: "What have I kept back?" (V.ii.147), which Seleucus answers with a corresponding straightness. A further indication that Seleucus is participating in this plan to deceive Caesar may be found in a comparison between Seleucus' response to Cleopatra's anger and that of the messenger in Act II, scene v. The messenger attempted to justify himself several times: "I that do bring the news made not the match" (II.v.67). In contrast, Seleucus does not say another word, despite Cleopatra's intense anger and physical threats. Though not conclusive, his actions imply that her anger is staged and that he has nothing to fear.

Cleopatra reinforces the effect she is trying to create with a number of apparently sorrowful comments on her fortune. Concern with property and reputation are clearly indicated, and these concerns must denote in Caesar's eyes a desire to live. Her reference to "Mine will now be yours, / And should

¹⁴ North, p.276.

we shift estates, yours would be mine" (V.ii.151-152) suggests hope for the future beneath the general observation of "How pomp is followed" (V.ii.151). In referring to the shame that Seleucus has added to "my disgraces" (V.ii.163), Cleopatra sounds concerned about Caesar's opinion of her, with the implication that, if Caesar's opinion matters, she will be more likely to take his advice. Her distortion of the true state of affairs in her final speech to Caesar suggests a rearrangement of reality for future use, rather than suicide:

Be it known that we, the greatest, are misthought
 For things that others do, and when we fall,
 We answer others' merits in our name,
 Are therefore to be pitied.

(V.ii.176-179)

While "we" may be primarily the royal 'we,' Cleopatra is also implying an identification with Caesar in "we, the greatest." Cleopatra reinforces this impression of closeness with Caesar by her announcement that she has reserved "Some nobler token" "For Livia and Octavia" (V.ii.168,169). This, in itself, would be suspicious except that she admits to having done it "to induce / Their mediation" (V.ii.169-170). Further evidence of Cleopatra's covert intentions may be found in the apparent ambiguity of her words: "O slave, of no more trust / Than love that's hired!" (V.ii.154-155) is directed ostensibly to Seleucus; it may also be a hint that Caesar is trying to hire her love or loyalty, and that, as a result, he cannot expect her to be trustworthy. Her exaggerated submission to Caesar also rings falsely:

O Caesar, what a wounding shame is this,
 That thou vouchsafing here to visit me,
 Doing the honor of thy lordliness
 To one so meek

(V.ii.159-162)

Malone interprets "meek" as "tame, subdued by adversity . . . Cleopatra, in

any other sense, was not eminent for meekness'.¹⁵ The point is not to change the sense of "meek" so that it rings true of Cleopatra, but to realize that, in using such an uncharacteristic word of herself, Cleopatra may be revealing her deception.

Cleopatra gains the time she needs. Caesar appears to be convinced by the picture she paints of herself, for, in its lies, distortions and rages, it fits in all too well with the kind of caricature of Cleopatra rumour might create. Ironically, Caesar has to be persuaded that his perception of Cleopatra and "her greatness" (V.i.64) is false; in order to demonstrate her greatness to Caesar and the world, Cleopatra must conceal it and appear small-minded. Her petty actions in the confrontation with Caesar have appealed to his Machiavellian nature: lie, cheat and steal all you want in the interests of power and survival. His approval and understanding are evident:

Nay, blush not, Cleopatra, I approve
Your wisdom in the deed.
(V.ii.149-150)

Caesar's words in this scene betray him for what he is and form a contrast which highlights Cleopatra's final act. Through this scene, he appears to want to give the impression of gracious and honourable nobility in order to conceal his ruthlessness: "still be't yours;" "Caesar's no merchant" (V.ii.181,183). However, there is a sense in which Caesar is merely a "merchant, to make prize with" Cleopatra (V.ii.183). In his final instructions to Cleopatra to "Feed and sleep" (V.ii.187), he is suggesting that, like a Christmas goose, Cleopatra must be at peak condition when she is displayed to the Roman people.

¹⁵ Malone, p.206.

Cleopatra's reaction upon Caesar's departure reinforces this impression:

He words me, girls, he words me, that I should not
Be noble to myself!

(V.ii.191-192)

There is an exulting mockery in these lines, which strikes at Caesar's nature. Cleopatra's use of "words" to mean 'he urges me with words,' the only example of such usage in the O.E.D., recalls Caesar's reliance on words rather than clear action; it shows this reliance for what it is by emphasizing the discrepancy between Caesar's false words, which have no reality in action, and her planned action "that ends all other deeds" (V.ii.5).

Though Cleopatra's stratagems are designed to gain her time, she appears to enjoy the very process of deceiving Caesar. Her preoccupation with this mocking aim is clear even after Caesar has departed. Iras' threat and Cleopatra's response to it reinforce Cleopatra's ridicule towards Caesar and the Roman world:

Iras. I'll never see't! For I am sure mine nails
Are stronger than mine eyes.

Cleopatra. Why, that's the way
To fool their preparation, and to conquer
Their most absurd intents.
(V.ii.223-226)

Iras does not threaten suicide, but her own blindness; the Romans' reactions will have no significance if they cannot be seen, as Cleopatra confirms. The Romans' preparations and intentions are foolish and "absurd," in view of Cleopatra's intentions.

This theme is developed in Cleopatra's "I am again for Cydnus" speech (V.ii.228). While an important aim of her suicide is "To meet Mark Antony" (V.ii.229), her desire to recreate Cydnus must recall her intentions for creating the first Cydnus spectacle. Then, according to North's translation of Plutarch, she aimed to gain the favour of one of the world's three rulers. She achieved this, not simply by the magnificence of the spectacle she staged and her own beauty and grace, but also by mocking and taunting Antony.¹⁶ This is clearer in Plutarch than in Shakespeare, but Enobarbus' description does suggest that Cleopatra, 'by her powers of entrancement which leave Antony sitting alone in the marketplace, is mocking the extent of Antony's power by displaying her own (II.ii.196-232). Her actions in Act V, scene ii parallel those of the first Cydnus. She has no further need to win Antony, but she intends to gain the esteem and interest of the world by enacting an exhibitionist suicide. She will be shown like a queen in her magnificent robes and crown (V.ii.227-228,232,280), and she will perform the ultimate act by means of an unusual, even bizarre, and thoroughly Egyptian instrument; the world she intends to leave will be mocked and fascinated as a result.

All the elements of her death contain at times this suggestion of a taunt. She sees the man whom she will meet in the afterlife "mock / The luck of Caesar" (V.ii.285-286). The secondary instrument of her death, the figs which conceal the asps, suggests the contemptuous gesture to Caesar which Cleopatra's death becomes (see O.E.D.). Finally, the asp itself is imbued with mockery:

¹⁶ North, pp.246-247.

O, couldst thou speak,
That I might hear thee call great Caesar ass
Unpoliced!

(V.ii.306-308)

The asp does not, and cannot speak; nevertheless, its bite calls Caesar "ass / Unpoliced" as clearly as any words could. In this sense, Cleopatra's suicide is an immense practical joke, as much to demonstrate the foolishness of the Roman world, as to "meet Mark Antony" in the afterlife.

Alongside her mockery and the pageant-like atmosphere she creates, Cleopatra displays a self-conscious and exultant gravity. Her courage is admirable and her loss and approaching death are pitiable. At the same time, her self-glorification is evident and her belief in her spirituality and place in the afterlife is a form of self-deception. Yet, even her self-aggrandizement elicits a double interpretation: the power of her language persuades us to believe in her glory, even while we see her jealousy and remember her former exploits. We are caught up in her renunciation of baser elements, while recognizing that her sensuality can never be denied. We are swayed by her belief in a physical ascension to the afterlife, while knowing that her afterlife will consist of "Some squeaking Cleopatra [boying] my greatness / I' th' posture of a whore" (V.ii.220-221).

By dying, Cleopatra believes she will be reunited with Antony and deified herself. In preparation for her triumphant entrance into the afterlife, Cleopatra must match herself and Antony. The very-human Antony has to be elevated to a stature which equals her own, while Cleopatra's physical self must be discarded in order that she, like Antony, can attain spirituality. Neither process is, however, entirely straightforward.

The speech in which Cleopatra deifies Antony is a magnificent piece of artistry (V.ii.79-92). The man whose loss has left "this dull world" unremarkable (IV.xv.61-67), has been transported to another realm. In Cleopatra's recollection, this man, whom she often dominated and upon whose frailties she played, was a god whose

face was as the heav'ns, and therein stuck
A sun and moon, which kept their course and lighted
The little O, th'earth.

(V.ii.79-81)

When he was with her or alive, Cleopatra may not have been able to reconcile Antony's humanity with his stature. When absent, and especially when dead, Antony is glorified and deified. Though this description of Antony is obviously exaggerated, it clearly identifies him. The first part of the speech refers to Antony's leadership over the world, his exploits after the death of Julius Caesar which returned the Roman Empire to its course. The remainder of the speech describes Antony's more personal qualities. Cleopatra does this, as Winifred Nowottny points out, by making Antony "at once amply physical and superior to the merely physical," as she will do for herself later.¹⁷

However, despite the appropriateness of Cleopatra's metaphors, there is a lack of proportion about this picture of Antony. He may have been a leader, bounteous, strong and vigorous, but he was not the godlike figure Cleopatra pictures him to have been. The extent of Cleopatra's belief in this picture is debatable. There are arguments for and against her belief in the "Emperor Antony" (V.ii.76); once again, Shakespeare may have intended that the question

¹⁷ Winifred Nowottny, The Language Poets Use (London: The Athlone Press University of London, 1975), pp.64-65.

of Cleopatra's belief or disbelief should remain ambiguous in order that we see both possibilities.

The magnificence of her metaphors, her flowing speech and the element of truth in each of the qualities she attributes to Antony all suggest her belief in the "Emperor Antony." Furthermore, it is in the interests of her own stature that she convince herself that her mate was such a man. However, there is a sense of deliberate self-consciousness about this speech and an air of cultivated omniscience about her earlier question to Dolabella (V.ii.74-75), which may suggest that the speech arises, not simply from spontaneous emotion, but also out of a deliberate attempt to impress her audience with Antony's distinction and her own.

This deliberateness may create the impression that the "Emperor Antony," as the exaggerated title implies, is a conscious inflation of reality, combined with an element of wish-fulfilment, a view reinforced by the several uses of 'dream' (V.ii.74,76,94,97):

I dreamt there was an Emperor Antony.
O, such another sleep, that I might see
But such another man.

(V.ii.76-78)

Cleopatra's emphasis on the dreaming/sleeping state in which this portrait was created seems to point to the shadowy, unreal nature of the portrait. Her lack of belief in the reality of the Emperor she has created is further suggested by the ambiguity of her response to Dolabella's "Gentle madam, no" (V.ii.94):

You lie, up to the hearing of the gods.
 But if there be nor ever were one such,
 It's past the size of dreaming; nature wants stuff
 To vie strange forms with fancy, yet t' imagine
 An Antony were nature's piece 'gainst fancy,
 Condemning shadows quite.

(V.ii.95-100)

There appears to be a deliberate confusing of nature or reality and imagination here. The lines suggest on the surface that, since it would be impossible to create such a man in the imagination, Cleopatra's description must be real. However, when studied more closely, the lines do not actually say that such a man existed; rather they seem to say, 'to create such an Antony in the imagination would be a masterpiece of nature, quite impossible to imagine in reality, putting into the shade dreams or illusions.' The validity of this interpretation does not detract, however, from the importance of the surface impression, which must carry some weight. Shakespeare allows for the possibility of such a man existing; not the actuality or the impossibility, but the possibility.

This ambiguity has a significant implication: since Cleopatra is a masterpiece of nature, it is quite possible for her to create an "Emperor Antony"; she is, after all, the figure of creativity in the play. There may not have been an "Emperor Antony" during Antony's lifetime; but, dead, he will be given life through Cleopatra's deifying language, and his death and subsequent elevation will prompt Cleopatra's suicide in turn. She dies for "such another sleep, that I might see / But such another man" (V.ii.77-78). Then the way is paved for Shakespeare, the poet, to give life to both protagonists in turn.

Cleopatra's decision to die is accompanied by a spiritual renunciation of

the world together with a sense that her physical self will be transported to the afterlife. In Cleopatra, we are even more conscious of the simultaneous physicality and divinity which she attributes to Antony in lines 79 to 92. Her repudiation of the physical world is clear at the beginning of this scene:

And it is great
To do that thing that ends all other deeds,
Which shackles accidents and bolts up change;
Which sleeps, and never palates more the dung,
The beggar's nurse and Caesar's.

(V.ii.4-8)

The repudiation here of an abstract concept, life, is succeeded by a threat to ruin "This mortal house": "Sir, I will eat no meal, I'll not drink sir--" (V.ii.51,49). This threat is inappropriate: it is difficult to see the very physical Cleopatra starving herself to death; her final choice of death, by contrast, suits her nature perfectly. Cleopatra will eventually balance the apparently conflicting claims of her physical self and the need for death when she moves beyond the fear of gracing Caesar's triumph. At this point, however, the fear of being "pinioned at your master's court," of being "chastised with the sober eye / Of dull Octavia," and of being "hoist" up and shown "to the shouting varletry / Of censuring Rome" (V.ii.53,54-55,55,56-57) predominates. Cleopatra will not allow her concept of self to be subject to this degradation: the connection between the sexual act and 'looking on,' described in Chapter II, may suggest that Cleopatra views her exhibition to the Roman masses as a form of rape. She finds preferable a fate that seems equally appalling:

Rather a ditch in Egypt
Be gentle grave unto me! Rather on Nilus' mud
Lay me stark nak'd and let the waterflies
Blow me into abhorring! Rather make
My country's high pyramids my gibbet
And hang me up in chains!

(V.ii.57-62)

The difference between the two fates lies in the fact that, in Caesar's plan for her, Cleopatra remains alive to see her physical self degraded, where, dead, her reputation will reach supernatural status. The second difference lies in the location of her suffering: by remaining in Egypt and returning herself to "Nilus' mud," whence arise the products of her creation, she is ensuring the creation of new life, the continuity of her role as mother of Egypt.

The ruining of Cleopatra's body does not take place, however, in significant contrast to Shakespeare's source. In North's translation of Plutarch, Cleopatra becomes "marvelously disfigured" by her own hand.¹⁸ Cleopatra's ultimate triumph depends in part on her refusal to deny her physical self. The type of death she chooses must enable her to create a pageant which culminates in perfect grandeur; it must achieve her incarnate removal to the afterlife in order to meet Antony. If Cleopatra was disfigured, neither achievement would be possible.

The repudiation of the physical, which dominates in the early part of the scene, gives way to an exultant tone, in which the world is renounced, and the physical pleasures Cleopatra has known on earth are envisaged as part of life in the hereafter: hence Cleopatra's words, "I'll give thee leave / To play till doomsday" (V.ii.231-232), which, under normal circumstances, would be inappropriate in view of the gravity of the situation. For Cleopatra, as for Antony, the afterlife is not a severe, awesome existence, but one in which husband and wife will play hand in hand "And with our sprightly port make the

¹⁸ North, p.275.

ghosts gaze" (IV.xiv.52), in Antony's words. Sensuality will be satisfied: "I have / Immortal longings in me" (V.ii.280-281) suggests both the sexual desires of a goddess and a longing for immortality. Though Cleopatra's speech after the departure of the Clown is primarily a valediction, the diction she uses, "juice," "grape," "moist" and "lip" (V.ii.282), which appeals to the tactile senses, evokes a powerful sensuality which makes her departure from the world a sacrifice, and introduces a physical reality to the afterlife. As William Hazlitt comments, Cleopatra "tastes a luxury in death."¹⁹ The intertwining of physical/sensual with spiritual imparts a sexual sense to:

methinks I hear
Antony call: I see him rouse himself
To praise my noble act.
(V.ii.283-285)

Cleopatra does not simply imagine Antony approving her courage verbally. She also sees the resumption of their sexual partnership in the afterlife; her reward for her suicide will be sexual, as well as spiritual, and these two elements are combined in her perception of death as a marriage:

Husband I come:
Now to that name my courage prove my title!
(V.ii.287-288)

The deified Antony requires an equally worthy mate. Their worldly relationship was simply a rehearsal; Antony's 'wife' will earn her title by killing herself, and their meeting in the afterlife will represent the consummation of the marriage. Where Antony uses marriage and the marriage bed as a metaphor for death in order to stir up his courage (IV.xiv.99-101), Cleopatra sees suicide

¹⁹ William Hazlitt, Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, The World's Classics (London: Oxford University Press, 1917), p.81.

as a means to marriage.

Cleopatra's subsequent repudiation of her baser side seems to deny or contradict the theory that, in leaving life, she is not renouncing her sexuality:

I am fire, and air; my other elements
I give to baser life.
(V.ii.289-290)

"Fire, and air" are associated with spirit and spirituality; the "other elements," earth and water, with dullness, earth-bound natures and inconstancy. In killing herself, Cleopatra takes her spirit to the afterlife, leaving her body to the mud of the Nile, as fertilizer for the recreation of new life. However, the connotations of these lines have further ramifications: here Cleopatra is not denying the whole of her physical essence, only what earth and water symbolize: earth is common to all, feeding "beast as man" (Li.36), "The beggar's nurse and Caesar's" (V.ii.8); earth is associated with "this dull world" which, in Antony's absence, is "No better than a sty" (IV.xv.61,62). Water is one of the symbols of inconstancy and instability in the play, and has been closely associated with Cleopatra. In leaving it behind, she becomes "marble-constant" (V.ii.240), resolved to die and to assume her place beside Antony. "Fire, and air," while associated with spirituality, also suggest the passion which will be reignited in the afterlife.

Cleopatra's conversation with the Clown establishes an important physical atmosphere which affects our interpretation of Cleopatra's subsequent speech. The Clown does not simply provide comic relief to break the tension of high tragedy. He introduces an element of domesticity which emphasizes Cleopatra's physical self, an impression that continues to linger. The Clown is undoubtedly garrulous, but Cleopatra does not simply put up with him

good-humouredly. She alternately encourages his observations and bids him go. In the context of the last half of the scene, this apparently changeable behaviour does not really convey a dichotomy between wanting to remain alive and wanting to get the deed done; the impression is rather of a savouring of the acting out of the deed.

More important is the point of and impression created by the Clown's words. The Clown, himself, is described as "a rural fellow" (V.ii.233); he brings the fruits of the earth, both figs and snakes. His way of speaking is rustic, while his diction contains physical language and meaning, with strong sexual overtones: "touch," "biting," "immortal" and "die" (V.ii.246-247) contain references to Cleopatra's suicide, but "touch," "biting," "die" and even "immortal," as a malapropism for 'mortal,' also refer to physical/sexual acts. The Clown's second speech can be seen as describing a sexual encounter between a snake and a woman, an interpretation that does not seem so bizarre when Cleopatra's sensual acts with the asp are considered. Cleopatra's final question to the Clown, "Will it eat me?" (V.ii.271), and the Clown's response reinforce this physical/sexual impression. As described in Chapter II, the act of eating has become a metaphor for the sexual response to Cleopatra; thus Cleopatra's choice of "eat," rather than the Clown's 'bite' (V.ii.254), implies her acceptance of the explicitly sexual atmosphere the Clown's words have created. The Clown's response reinforces these sexual connotations: "I know that a woman is a dish for the gods, if the devil dress her not" (V.ii.273-275); recalling Enobarbus' description of Cleopatra as an "Egyptian dish" (II.vi.126), the Clown's words link her sexual nature to the afterlife to which she expects to succeed. In this way, the Clown establishes an atmosphere of sexuality for the coming event, without ignoring the mortal and immortal nature of

Cleopatra's suicide. The Clown's words implant the idea, which will be substantiated by Cleopatra's actions, that she becomes the asp's lover; the asp is the instrument of death and so Cleopatra becomes lover of death or orgasm, and Death's lover, as Enobarbus described: "I do think there is mettle in death, which commits some loving act upon her, she hath such a celerity in dying" (Lii.143-146). The circle which connects sex with death becomes complete.

The truth of the Clown's insinuations becomes clear with Cleopatra's realization, on Iras' death, that:

The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch,
Which hurts, and is desired.

(V.ii.295-296)

Briefly, before this, Cleopatra herself becomes death, with Iras her lover, a goddess with power, not only over love and life, but also over death: "Have I the asp in my lips? Dost fall?" (V.ii.293). This close identification between Cleopatra and the asp recalls Antony's name for Cleopatra, "my serpent of old Nile" (I.v.25), and the speech in which she mentions it (I.v.24-34). Where there she was Phoebus' lover (I.v.28), here she becomes Death's lover; where there she stimulated herself "With most delicious poison" (I.v.26-27), a metaphor to express her self-indulgent memories, here she actually feeds herself with a fatal and stimulating poison.

It is important to note, however, that Cleopatra is not all goddess here. She is also in the position of a pupil, gaining reassurance from Iras' death, which, by its gentleness, shows her the desirability of death, and finally convinces her that the world "is not worth leave-taking" (V.ii.298). Weak, frightened Iras is herself seen as transformed by death, as Antony was, in a

rehearsal for Cleopatra's death.

To Cleopatra's spiritual sexuality is added another element as her death approaches. Charmian's "O eastern star!" (V.ii.308) refers to Cleopatra's role as Venus, which is completed when goddess of spiritual and sexual love is rounded out as a figure of the generative powers of nature, an earth mother:

Peace, peace!
Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep?
(V.ii.308-310)

The maternal solicitude here continues almost until her death: "As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle" (V.ii.311) recalls Cleopatra's awareness of the ease of death, and suggests a lullaby to her "baby"; the longing in "O, Antony!" is juxtaposed with "Nay, I will take thee too" (V.ii.312), where her desire for that gentle death combines with concern for the "baby" which has been left out.

Suckling the mortal worm suggests Cleopatra's identification with the fertile Nile which feeds Egypt, and the giving up of her body to the earth to provide the seeds for new life. The idea of "Ripeness is all" in King Lear (V.ii.11) is vividly developed here. Where in King Lear Edgar comforts Gloucester with "Men must endure / Their going hence, even as their coming hither" (V.ii.9-10), in Antony and Cleopatra the process from birth to death becomes not only a necessity or fact of life, but also vital because of the circular nature of the life cycle. Ripeness is all because it leads to rebirth; not simply rebirth of new mortal life, but also a recreation, however insubstantial, of Antony and Cleopatra in eternity. The life cycle ultimately

acts as a metaphor for the play itself; in other words, the passionate lives of Antony and, particularly, Cleopatra have created the seeds of their immortality in the poet's words. Immortality is not, of itself, either positive or negative, however. Like life, the actions of Antony and Cleopatra, brought to life in each performance, are flawed and noble, ugly and beautiful. This, perhaps, is where their power lies.

Shakespeare's magnificent poetry has Cleopatra's fertility transcending its association with the produce and life of Egypt. This movement away from the physical parallels that of the Sonnets, in which Shakespeare moves from procreation to the power of poetry in his desire to capture eternally the spirit of the young man. Scorning his "barren rhyme" (Sonnet 16), Shakespeare exhorts the young man in his first sonnets to reproduce an image of himself before time destroys his beauty:

Then of thy beauty do I question make,
That thou among the wastes of time must go,
Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake,
And die as fast as they see others grow,
And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defense,
Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee hence.
(Sonnet 12)

However, Shakespeare moves quickly away from the power of procreation to ensure immortality, to the power of poetry:

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall Death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.
(Sonnet 18)

In the same way, Shakespeare has given a limited life, eternity and reputation to Antony and Cleopatra, who have been immortalized, not through their children, but through the power of Shakespeare's verse.

This conclusion of the play's movement is further suggested by Caesar's words on the pair:

No grave upon the earth shall clip in it
A pair so famous. High events as these
Strike those that make them; and their story is
No less in pity, than his glory which
Brought them to be lamented.

(V.ii.358-362)

Though Caesar's summary of the fate of Antony and Cleopatra as pitiable does not reflect the general tone of the play and, particularly, the last scene, his reference to "their story" may suggest that the man whose "glory" "Brought them to be lamented" is as likely to be Shakespeare as Caesar himself. This subtle reference to the immortalizing of the protagonists by Shakespeare, the story teller, is emphasized by Caesar's suggestion of the exemplary possibilities of their love. It is possible to see in these lines the legitimizing of the relationship of Antony and Cleopatra: in death, they will lie together by Caesar's legal consent, and their grave will become their marriage bed. Thus Caesar is confirming Cleopatra's belief that her suicide will transform her into Antony's wife. Beyond this legitimizing is a suggestion of canonization: "A pair so famous" evokes the possibility of world reverence. With the death of Cleopatra, her relationship with Antony becomes a type of exemplum for lovers everywhere; in John Donne's words:

And by these hymns, all shall approve
 Us canonized for Love.²⁰

The fact that the play itself has a part to play is emphasized by a heightening of our consciousness of the theatricality of Cleopatra's death scene. Her supremely rhetorical speeches suggest the declamation of an actor bent on swaying an audience. Her great eulogy on Antony contains a self-conscious artistry, which is part of a deliberate attempt to impress Dolabella. Her successful confrontation with Caesar is the performance of a consummate actress. Her speeches to Iras, describing their fate at Roman hands, do not evoke the horror and pity of her earlier speech to Proculeius (V.ii.49-62); a device intended to steel Iras' courage, they constitute a performance containing humour, and a certain deliberate enjoyment and exaggeration, which is evident in the unnecessary addition of descriptive touches:

. . . mechanic slaves
 With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers shall
 Uplift us to the view. In their thick breaths,
 Rank of gross diet, shall we be enclouded,
 And forced to drink their vapor.
 (V.ii.209-213)

The contrived nature of Cleopatra's suicide becomes increasingly evident as she sets the stage for a magnificent display of her person. Her "Show me, my women, like a queen" (V.ii.227) is followed by "Give me my robe, put on my crown" (V.ii.280). Charmian's final action for her mistress, her rearrangement of Cleopatra's "awry" crown (V.ii.318-319), confirms the dramatic nature of the

²⁰ John Donne, "The Canonization," ll.35-36.

event Cleopatra has staged. Charmian's "play" (V.ii.319), suggesting her own approaching suicide, refers back to Cleopatra's words, "I'll give thee leave / To play till doomsday" (V.ii.231-232); however, in following "I'll mend it" (V.ii.319), "play" also confirms the theatricality of these suicides. Though there is nothing unreal about the deaths of Iras, Charmian and Cleopatra within the life of the play, they are clearly stage-managed to create the greatest possible effect, and, in this sense, they constitute a play, culminating in a perfect tableau. This impression of theatricality is clear in Dolabella's reaction to the tableau:

. . . . thyself art coming
To see performed the dreaded act which thou
So sought'st to hinder.

(V.ii.331-333)

With its diction of stage performance, these lines suggest the role that Cleopatra has foreseen for Caesar and, ultimately, us: that of audience. In the world of the play, Cleopatra has created a theatrical event which concludes with the ultimate reality of death. However, these references to the theatricality of the event seem designed to emphasize the fact that we are experiencing dramatic illusion, a "squeaking Cleopatra boy" the real Cleopatra's greatness; the boy playing Cleopatra does not die. There is, therefore, a certain ambivalence about our reaction to her death. Fear, pity and, above all, a sharing in Cleopatra's triumph exist alongside our awareness that this is simply an illusion.

Thus, our reaction to Cleopatra's final tableau is composed of both involvement and detached assessment. We are caught up by the simultaneously triumphant and grave-tones of the three women. Cleopatra's banter with the

This proves me base:
 If she first meet the curled Antony,
 He'll make demand of her, and spend that kiss
 Which is my heaven to have.

(V.ii.300-303)

These lines also confirm her continuing humanity. Despite her courage and constancy, this is the same jealous Cleopatra we saw in Act II, scene v, and Antony, notwithstanding his deification, will "make demand" of Iras, given the chance. Caught up in Cleopatra's passionate triumph, we also stand back and assess Cleopatra as she is. Admiration at her refusal to let herself be taken to Rome is matched by our perception of the way she belittles Caesar to increase her own sense of worth. Approbation for her masterly manipulation of Caesar is countered by a hint of ambiguity at the time about her ultimate intentions. Her impressive eulogy of Antony is marred as a spontaneous outpouring of love by our realization of the self-conscious artistry of her performance. Her valediction to the physical world (V.ii.280-292) does not allow us to forget her very sensual nature. Cleopatra is simultaneously human and divine. If she becomes a goddess, she becomes a humanized goddess of Roman mythology, a Venus who has all the emotions and indulges in all the intrigues of humanity. Cleopatra is indeed a "lass unparalleled" (V.ii.316). The whole play confirms the pertinence of these words. The connotations of freedom from responsibility, playfulness and, even, sexual freedom in "lass" are juxtaposed with "unparalleled," a superlative for all practical purposes, and, shortly thereafter, with

It is well done, and fitting for a princess
 Descended of so many royal kings.

(V.ii.326-327)

Cleopatra's dual roles of girl and mother of her country are fittingly summarized.

Caesar's final comments confirm our mixed response to Cleopatra. Although his reactions are not necessarily to be trusted in the play itself, his acknowledgement here of Cleopatra's courage and royalty (V.ii.334,335), combined with his role as the play's final commentator, give his words a certain validity. By mentioning her fame (V.ii.359) as well as her royalty, her pursuit of "easy ways to die" (V.ii.355) as well as her courage, Caesar reminds us of the mixed motives for Cleopatra's death. Her love, courage and refusal to let herself be prostituted in Rome are worthy of being called noble. However, her love contains elements of self-aggrandizement; her courage is qualified by the fact that she feared pain²¹ and exposure to the Roman mob, both of which she avoids by the suicide she chooses; her nobility, like Antony's, is a complex mixture, prompted both by the Roman ideal of honourable suicide and her desire to attain distinction in the eyes of the world. Cleopatra is not transformed in the last scene, so much as her characteristics are refined. Her deed is noble; it is also the climax of her self-serving actions throughout life.

Our involvement in Cleopatra's triumph may be further limited by our recognition, on a more rational level, of the implications of Charmian's final words. Charmian does not anticipate the afterlife that Cleopatra expects.

²¹ Caesar's reference to Cleopatra's pursuit of "easy ways to die" is Shakespeare's only use of a long description in North's translation of Plutarch (p.268), in which Cleopatra's ruthlessness is evident. By qualifying the impact of Plutarch's account, Shakespeare encourages pity for her fear, rather than severe judgment.

Death is simply an escape from "this vile world."²² Cleopatra will not consort with the gods in heaven:

Downy windows, close;
And golden Phoebus never be beheld
Of eyes again so royal!
(V.ii.316-318)

Death has conquered, and is only Cleopatra's lover metaphorically:

Now boast thee, death, in thy possession lies
A lass unparalleled.
(V.ii.315-316)

THE END

²² Shakespeare, Antony and Cleopatra, ed. M.R. Ridley, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1954), V.ii.313.

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