

THE WOMAN AND SOVEREIGN IN ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

by

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The Woman And Sovereign In Antony And Cleopatra

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Abstract

Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra poses many problems for the critic, not the least of which is how we are to understand the character of Cleopatra. Is she a whore or a queen, or both? How are we to react to her relationship with Antony? Is her suicide an expression of her love for Antony, of her dread of the triumph Octavius plans, or is it simply her admission that she is powerless to manipulate Octavius? Why does she delay that suicide? While critical opinion varies, the greatest emphasis has been upon her degeneracy, her absolute control of Antony, and her neglect of her sovereign responsibilities. Most frequently, critics see Cleopatra as the dominant and malign influence in Antony's life; they see him as a man torn between two worlds: that represented by honour, duty and empire, and that represented by his submission to his obsessive love for Cleopatra and his repudiation of the world of power and prestige. It is my belief that Cleopatra is a dedicated and responsible queen, and that, far from being the destructive and dominant influence in Antony's life, she is his captive, her person and her state held subject to the will of an ambitious and headstrong Antony.

In reviewing Cleopatra's life and death as they are portrayed in Antony and Cleopatra, I have given some attention to the historical context of the play. Antony was the most powerful influence in Cleopatra's life, Octavius the most powerful influence in her final hours. I have, therefore, before turning to a closer examination of her relationships with these two men, undertaken a brief review of both of their characters. Since any examination of Cleopatra's behaviour--especially of her behaviour in Act V--must be incomplete if it concentrates predominantly upon her role as a

woman, I have paid particular attention to her role as a sovereign, and have assessed her responses to the political events depicted in the play, for these events directly and tragically affect her life and her reign. I have included some critical opinion which, because of its almost unanimous support of a view of Cleopatra that is contrary to what I believe to be Shakespeare's portrayal of her, is of value in the interest of balance.

The evidence of the play does not support the generally accepted view of Cleopatra's degeneracy; her reputation as a harlot is one that is carefully nurtured by the Romans. As well, the evidence of the text is more suggestive of a Cleopatra who is powerless to move Antony to any act towards which he is not already favourably disposed and in which he does not see his own interests being served. I do not agree with those who see Cleopatra as the cause of Antony's "tragic fall"; rather, because of Antony's folly and mismanagement, Cleopatra's long struggle to maintain her state against overpowering odds is brought to its tragic conclusion and she is precipitated into Octavius' power. An unprejudiced reading of the text shows that her death is her acknowledgement of the close of that struggle, an assertion of her nobility, and a determination that if her life has passed out of her control, her death will not. Further, the delay that precedes her death is motivated by her sense of responsibility to Egypt and to her heirs; she must, if possible, make a final attempt to gain that which, from the moment of her defeat, has been her one request of Octavius: the crown of Egypt for her son. She fails, but her character as a responsible queen is untarnished.

To W. E. W.

Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls.
Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
But he who filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed.

(Othello III.iii.155-161)

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Introduction

Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra poses many problems for the critic, not the least of which is how we are to understand the character of Cleopatra. Is she a whore or a queen, or both? How are we to react to her relationship with Antony? Is her suicide an expression of her love for Antony, of her dread of the triumph Octavius plans, or is it simply her admission that she is powerless to manipulate Octavius? Why does she delay her suicide?

"She is cunning past man's thought" (I.ii.142) Antony declared, and later, "Triple-turn'd whore, 'tis thou / Hast sold me to this novice, and my heart / Makes only wars on thee" (IV.xii.13-5).¹ His words form the basis for many critics' attitudes towards Cleopatra's character. Coleridge found that "the sense of criminality in her passion is lessened by our insight into its depth and energy" ² J. Wilson Knight speaks of Cleopatra's "inscrutably evil callowness."³ And Bradley's condemnation of her is unequivocal: "She destroys him [Antony]."⁴ Thus the critics accept, perpetuate, and add dimensions to what is, in the play, a Roman creation: the myth of Cleopatra, the traitorous, destructive harlot who brought ruin to Antony. Not only does the myth distort Cleopatra's character as Shakespeare portrayed it, but it is directly opposed to what I will demonstrate to be the reality of her position in the play. As I understand the play, Cleopatra was Antony's captive, her person and her state held subject to his will. She was nothing as simple as a destructive harlot; she was a composite of conflicting opposites, frail, feminine, and vulnerable; strong and dominant, an intelligent and capable strategist; a woman enslaved by

her love for a man she knew to be shallow and inconstant; a queen equally enslaved by the political reality.

Many of the misconceptions about Cleopatra may be attributed directly to a tendency to emphasize the personal at the expense of the sovereign aspects of her dual role as a woman and a queen. MacCallum speaks of Cleopatra as "the incarnate poetry of life without duty, glorified by beauty and grace; of impulse without principle, ennobled by culture and intellect."⁵ Champion finds that the spectators of the play never have "even the slightest sense of the queen's concern for her kingdom and for the welfare of her subjects."⁶ This, too, is part of the myth of Cleopatra. Shakespeare's setting and his characters represented the Mediterranean world: the Roman Empire, Egypt, Parthia, Pompey and his sea pirates, and an impressive list of states and kings that supported Antony in his conflict with Octavius. By land and by sea, it was a world of corruption, aggression, and betrayal. It is simply unrealistic to believe that Cleopatra existed in but apart from, and untouched by, that world. The historical Cleopatra ruled her kingdom for a number of years before Antony came to Egypt; she could not, with impunity, have been negligent of or indifferent to her sovereign duties. Her political position is an implicit rather than an explicit component of the play; it is central to our understanding of the magnitude of her struggle against overpowering odds, of the greatness of her character and her tragedy.

In Shakespeare's play, the myth of Cleopatra, which the Romans so insistently reiterate, sets up a false standard by which to judge her; it can only fail us when, in Act V, we seek an explanation for her suicide and for the delay that preceded it. In trying to resolve this vexing

problem, critics who are convinced that the myth is the reality and who emphasize the woman at the expense of the sovereign offer such disparate views as those of Battenhouse and Ribner. Battenhouse is convinced that she remained a harlot to the end and, unsuccessful in her attempt to have Octavius "force" her to be his mistress, sought in death a "martyrdom that was marred by vainglory."⁷ In Ribner's view, the final act portrays Cleopatra's "awareness of sinful lust, her casting it off, and her dedication of herself instead to a love to which her death is a sacrifice in expiation of former sin."⁸ I find nothing in the play to support either view. As I read the play, Cleopatra's death was her acknowledgement of the close of her long struggle to maintain her state, an assertion of her nobility, and a determination that if her life had passed out of her control, her death would not. While her resolve to die was firm, Cleopatra was a queen with a compelling reason for delay: she must, if possible, make a final attempt to negotiate with Octavius for that which, from the moment of her defeat, had been her one request of Octavius: the crown of Egypt for her son.

Antony was the most powerful influence in Cleopatra's life, Octavius the most powerful influence in her final hours. We cannot understand or judge her actions without first understanding what sort of men Antony and Octavius were. I have, therefore, before turning to a closer examination of Cleopatra's relationships with these two men, undertaken a brief review of their characters. I then examine the three periods in Cleopatra's life: before Antony, with Antony, and finally, after Antony's death or, if we prefer, the period of her confrontation with Octavius. Her time with Antony may be further defined: before Antony left for Rome, we have a

fiery, outspoken Cleopatra who stood up to, even challenged Antony; after Antony's return to her, there was a pronounced change in Cleopatra's behaviour: she was subdued and submissive. The determined and intelligent Cleopatra we had first known was gone; she was present briefly at the beginning of the play, then disappeared, to return only after Antony had died. Although the reverse is generally accepted, a close reading of the play has led me to believe that Antony commanded, Cleopatra followed.

Footnotes: Introduction

¹ William Shakespeare, Antony and Cleopatra, ed. M.R. Ridley, introd. R.H. Case and M.R. Ridley (1954; rpt. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1975). Within the text of the thesis, all references to Antony and Cleopatra are taken from this edition.

² S.T. Coleridge, Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare and Other Dramatists (London: George Routledge & Sons, Limited, n.d.), p. 146.

³ G. Wilson Knight, The Imperial Theme: Further Interpretations of Shakespeare's Tragedies Including the Roman Plays (1931; rpt. London: Methuen & Co., 1972), p. 304.

⁴ A.C. Bradley, "Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra," in Oxford Lectures on Poetry (1909; rpt. London: MacMillan & Co., 1963), p. 297.

⁵ M.W. MacCallum, Shakespeare's Roman Plays (1910; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1967), p. 413.

⁶ Larry S. Champion, Shakespeare's Tragic Perspective (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1976), p. 241.

⁷ Roy W. Battenhouse, Shakespearean Tragedy: Its Art and Its Christian Premises (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), p. 168.

⁸ Irving Ribner, Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy (1960; rpt. New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 1962), p. 172.

Chapter One: Antony

Antony was the most powerful influence in Cleopatra's life. We cannot understand or judge her actions unless we understand what sort of man Antony was. In general, the response to Antony has been to see him as a great leader and warrior-general destroyed by his emotional involvement with a self-indulgent Cleopatra. I cannot accept this point of view. As I will demonstrate, Antony was not a great man ruined by love, but a great ruin of a man incapable of love. Outside forces reacted to Antony more often than they acted against him; they acted more often to appease than to oppose him. Antony, not Cleopatra, not Octavius, was the instrument of his own destruction and, given his particular character, that self-destruction was inevitable. Through folly and blind arrogance, Antony brought ruin to himself and to Cleopatra; through Antony, Cleopatra's kingdom was lost to her and she was precipitated into Octavius' power. In reviewing Antony's life, I will concentrate upon Antony the Triumvir, the warrior-general, the lover, and Antony the defeated in order to identify those traits that constitute a consistent pattern in all his personal relationships, and to determine what code of conduct Antony imposed upon himself. In establishing a standard of behaviour that we could reasonably expect of a man in Antony's position, I will use the criteria which Reese determined were those Shakespeare demanded of a good ruler: a just ambition, patriotism, dedication, and humanity. That is, a man should be "neither greedy for power, nor frightened of it"; he should have an instinctive love for his country; he should recognize that power is a privilege and a trust, and that a concomitant of power is service;

he should have courage, humility, self-awareness, and self-mastery.¹ For Antony the lover, I will use Sonnet 116 to which Shakespeare makes specific reference in this play, and in which he defines true love as a love that is immutable, constant—fixed--independent of mutuality, and unshaken by the tempests of life.² To insist that all these qualities be embodied within one man would be to demand perfection, to fail to realize that human frailties are not cast aside when a man assumes office, leads an army, or becomes a lover. It is, then, not so much a matter of whether Antony fulfills all our expectations, but of whether he fulfills any of them.

The play opens upon an Antony who has, Philo and Demetrius claim, repudiated his warrior occupation and yielded himself to the wiles of a lustful Cleopatra. In what immediately follows, many critics have found ample support for such a judgement. To Cleopatra's "If it be love indeed, tell me how much," Antony's response, "There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd" (I.i.14-5), impresses us by its eloquence. Antony seems so captivated by his affair of the heart that the affairs of state are of minor importance. The news from Rome may be summarized for him by an attendant: "Grates me, the sum" (I.i.19). In Cleopatra's repeated urgings that he hear the messengers there is, in addition to an edge of jealousy and insecurity, more than a suggestion that his present unwillingness to hear the ambassadors stems from his past neglect of Rome, which has allowed Octavius to become the dominant and commanding partner:

Fulvia perchance is angry; or who knows
If the scarce-bearded Caesar have not sent
His powerful mandate to you, "Do this, or this;
Take in that kingdom, and enfranchise that;
Perform't, or else we damn thee." (I.i.20-4)

Antony seems determined to remain unmoved by her demands; he declaims his philosophy:

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space,
Kingdoms are clay (I.i.33-5)

Cleopatra's evaluation of all this as "Excellent falsehood!" and her query, "Why did he marry Fulvia, and not love her?" (I.i.40-1), irritate him; he reminds her that he can be "stirr'd," suggests that time should be filled with pleasure, not harsh "conference," moves quickly to a new subject: "What sport tonight?" (I.i.48). But Cleopatra's insistent "Hear the ambassadors" (I.i.48) moves him first to accusation, "wrangling queen," then to flattery, "Whom everything becomes," and finally, to soothe and quiet her, he offers what he had denied her the previous evening:

. . . all alone,
To-night we'll wander through the streets, and note
The qualities of people. Come, my queen,
Last night you did desire it. (I.i.52-5)

In this brief exchange we see Antony, on two occasions, strongly resist any suggestion that does not originate with him. Eventually he does attend to the business of the ambassadors, just as in time he offers the night of pleasure he had previously refused her. But Antony, it seems, will attend to matters only in his own good time.

It is, then, difficult to see in this scene what Traversi sees there: Antony's surrender to a Cleopatra who "has enslaved him" and a situation that is "perilously false" in that Antony's "gesture of triumphant love" may be seen "in its double nature of splendid yet finally mean, a product of personal degradation."³ But Antony's "gesture of triumphant love" is just that--a gesture. Antony is evasive, his words hollow; both Cleopatra

and he know that the world and its events cannot be pushed aside. Stampfer finds in Antony's "Let Rome in Tiber melt" evidence of Antony's sincerity: "With language clothed in absolute value and sanctity, he reduces man and beast to 'dungy earth.' . . . These are not raw outpourings of passion, but noumenous iterations of value."⁴ The evidence of the play, however, is not of a man in love, but of a man avoiding a commitment to love or to anything else. As Lloyd comments: "It is folly to attempt, as Cleopatra does, to force on Antony's pleasure an interpretation of love."⁵ Antony is not "enslaved" by Cleopatra; quite the contrary: he is a man stubbornly impervious to outside demands and opinions, completely immovable once he has made up his mind. I agree with Schwartz who finds that Antony's "exploitation of Cleopatra and his imperial ambitions do not fundamentally conflict with each other; both stem from the egotistic drive toward possession and dominance."⁶

Only a short time after his sweeping assertions of his "love," Antony repudiates everything he has told her. His invitation to the messenger is gross, ignoble: "Name Cleopatra as she is call'd in Rome. / Rail thou in Fulvia's phrase, and taunt my faults / With such full license as both truth and malice / Have power to utter" (I.ii.103-6). Antony's outrage at Thidias' familiarity with Cleopatra's hand (III.xiii) will be somewhat qualified in our minds when we recall this crudely outrageous encouragement of an unnamed messenger to assume such familiarity with Cleopatra's name. And while Antony seems to be in a mood of self-castigation, accuses himself and seems to invite reproaches, "taunt my faults" (I.ii.104), it is a liberty no cautious messenger will dare to presume upon; such a stooping "confession" of his faults to an inferior hardly reflects to his credit--especially when we will

see him, later in Rome, unable to bring himself to admit responsibility for his failures to Octavius, his equal. But Antony has drawn attention to the faults of others: to Fulvia's bitter tongue which he fled and to the allegedly "easy morals" of the woman to whom he fled, thus making the subtle point that he is a man caught between two women equally bad for him. His remark about Fulvia, "what our contempts doth often hurl from us, / We wish it ours again" (I.ii.120), reflects Antony's emotional instability and his tendency to value something or someone only after it has been irretrievably lost to him. Fulvia is "good, being gone, / The hand could pluck her back that shov'd her on" (I.ii.123-4).

Antony's meeting with Enobarbus, ostensibly to set in motion the mobilization of his forces, offers a male view of women which, while it seems opposed to what Shakespeare presented in the first scene, actually confirms all that Antony's behaviour has already intimated. Enobarbus draws a distinction between business (war) and pleasure (women): "under a compelling occasion let women die: it were pity to cast them away for nothing, though between them and a great cause, they should be esteemed nothing" (I.ii.134-7). As for Cleopatra, to Antony's vehement "Would I had never seen her!" (I.ii.150), Enobarbus' denial reduces her to a point of interest on a journey: she is a "wonderful piece of work, which not to have been blest withal, would have discredited your travel" (I.ii.151-3). Antony's "She is cunning past man's thought" (I.ii.143) is ironic indeed, coming as it does from the man who so recently out-manoeuvred her "cunning" and who will shortly out-manoeuvre her again (I.iii); but this seems to be a part of Antony's pose of helplessness and victimization at the hands of women.⁷

Enobarbus' sarcastic comment on Fulvia's death, "Why, sir, give the gods a thankful sacrifice" (I.ii.159), makes the point in another way: Fulvia's death offers Antony release for which he should be grateful. Antony seems not to take offense that a "soldier only" should speak so of his dead wife. And, a trait we note later with Octavius, Antony's brief tribute to Fulvia--his mourning, if we prefer--is not permitted to interfere with the "business" at hand. Antony is the cool commander as he issues orders to Enobarbus and, while there is a sense of urgency, "Our quick remove from hence" (I.ii.193), Antony seems not to be desperately worried that affairs are out of control: "Much is breeding, / Which like the courser's hair, hath yet but life, / And not a serpent's poison . . ." (I.ii.189-92).

Everything Antony has said of Cleopatra since he parted from her has indicated his eagerness to be away from her and his rejection of their "love." I am at a loss then to understand why Dickey should conclude that Antony suffers anguish in his attempts to leave her.⁸ As Schwartz points out, "When Antony's political status is threatened, he . . . scarcely hesitates; leaving Cleopatra gives him as little pain as did the loss of Fulvia."⁹ Certainly the same cannot be said of Cleopatra who, her fears and insecurities aroused the moment she sees him, interprets his departure as a return to Fulvia, a betrayal of their love and of his vows to her. Only after Cleopatra has compromised all good feeling between them does he explain his departure and offer her reassurances: "And that which most with you should save my going, / Is Fulvia's death" (I.iii.55-6). But this serves only to upset her further, for she sees in Fulvia her own example, and is appalled by his callousness: "Where be the sacred vials thou

shoulds't fill / With sorrowful water?" (I.iii.63-4). By the time Cleopatra has calmed enough to wish him well, "And all the gods go with you!" (I.iii.99), the damage has been done. Feelings are strained, and despite his protests that they will not really be parted, his departure is coldly formal and abrupt. As Granville-Barker notes, "it is hardly, one would say, a very fatal passion that shows in his farewell."¹⁰ It is hard to understand how this farewell could have been botched so--especially by a man who has shown himself so skilled at sidestepping the unpleasant and manipulating events for his own ends. But perhaps this is exactly what Antony has done: his submission to the hysterical outburst of a jealous woman will have been to good effect if Antony's "pleasure" takes him elsewhere. Then Cleopatra can only blame herself for her emotional and unreasonably selfish attempts to hold him from the call of "honour" (I.iii.97) and from the world of men and business.

It is in the world of "business" that Antony has won praise. Granville-Barker speaks of Antony "confronting Caesar and outtopping him,"¹¹ and Farnham claims that "Antony . . . is at his best as a statesman-like contender for world power when he deals with Octavius in Rome."¹² Significantly, both views of Antony, "confronting," and as a "contender for world power"--which he already has--see him as an opponent rather than as a partner of Octavius. Certainly Antony's opening remarks to Octavius (II.ii.29-30) are offensively belligerent, like Mars (II.ii.6), but within a short time, confronted by Octavius' cool summary of what Antony is indeed doing, "You praise yourself / By laying defects of judgment to me" (II.ii.54-5), Antony retreats: "Not, so, not so; / I know you could not lack, I am certain on't"

(II.ii.56-7). To Octavius' suspicions, "if you . . . / Did practise on my state" (II.ii.38-9), Antony's response, as Ridley points out, "deals at once and solely with the proof of practice . . . without troubling to deny the charge of practice" ¹³ As for Fulvia who, "To have me out of Egypt, made wars here" (II.ii.95), Antony claims that she was "incurable" and he "could not help it," a weak and questionable admission, but one that makes it clear that for Antony public good must yield to personal good, that is, to Antony's desire to remain in Egypt. The main thrust of Octavius' complaint, "You have broken / The article of your oath" (II.ii.81-2), offends Antony who, despite the fact that his sophistry has reduced that "honour" to shreds, moves to a self-righteous stand: "The honour is sacred that he talks on now" (II.ii.85); but the accusation of his failure, "To lend me arms and aid when I requir'd them, / The which you both denied" (II.ii.88-9), Antony merely brushes aside: "Neglected, rather; / And then when poisoned hours had bound me up / From mine own knowledge" (II.ii.89-91). And here, it seems, we are to blame Cleopatra. Antony has used two women to excuse his negligence.

Clearly, Antony is determined to take umbrage at the least suggestion that he should be held accountable for his actions, and equally determined to avoid any frank discussion of his differences with Octavius. His "honour" now yields easily as Octavius moves to establish a firmer relationship with him. Whatever other valid reasons Antony could offer for his swift departure from Egypt, the unavoidable fact is that, free to marry Cleopatra, he fled her. And as he urges Agrippa to speak the words from which he knows there can be no retreat without giving serious personal

offense to Octavius, "Let me hear / Agrippa further speak" (II.ii.127-8), Antony has dismissed completely his pledge to Cleopatra: "Our separation so abides and flies, / That thou residing here, goes yet with me; / And I, hence fleeting, here remain with thee" (I.iii.102-4). There seems to be considerable difference between what Antony says and what he means. I agree with Lloyd: "When Antony left Cleopatra, he forgot her."¹⁴ His sense of personal worth, desirability, and good humour now restored by the offer of Octavia, he eagerly embraces the proposal: "May I never / To this good purpose, that so fairly shows, / Dream of impediment" (II.ii.144-6). It is not a question of love; Antony speaks of "the business" (II.ii.166). His promise to Octavia that in their future all will be "done by the rule" (II.iii.7) is forgotten with similar ease when his meeting with the soothsayer convinces him, not that Octavius is bad for Rome, but that he is bad for Antony's personal interests, and he determines to return to Egypt: "though I make this marriage for my peace, / I' the east my pleasure lies" (II.iii.38-9). As he and Octavia prepare to leave for Athens, his words to Octavius are unconvincing: "I'll wrestle with you in my strength of love" (III.iii.62); Antony seems cruelly indifferent to the injury he will give the dutiful Octavia.

Antony alternates between stubborn immovability and sudden submission to impulse, a response to the emotion dominant at a given moment or the route that promises the easiest escape from whatever difficulty presses upon him. We cannot claim that marriage to Octavia is necessary if Antony is to maintain power; Octavius' need of Antony and Antony's forces placed Antony in an ideal position to negotiate with Octavius, and his own pride,

obstinacy, and aggressiveness created the atmosphere of hostility that this new alliance is supposed--magically--to eradicate.

Antony seems to rely on "attack" to prove his greatness, strength, and fearlessness, and the approach he took with Octavius is again in evidence when he meets Pompey. Unmindful of the debt he has acknowledged as his first obligation in dealing with Pompey, Antony moves to assert the superiority of the Triumvirs' strength: "Thou canst not fear us, Pompey, with thy sails, / We'll speak with thee at sea. At land thou knowst / How much we do o'er-count thee" (II.vi.23-6). By his lack of diplomacy and his failure to express his thanks to Pompey--a matter of honour--he endangers all the careful planning that had preceded the meeting, for as Pompey says: "I came before you here a man prepar'd / to take this offer. But Mark Antony / Put me in some impatience . . ." (II.vi.40-3). Antony's threats seem to antagonize rather than strike fear, and difficulties are resolved in spite of, rather than because of, Antony.

Antony has not distinguished himself in these meetings with Octavius and Pompey, and he gains no praise for the incident with Lepidus during the celebration aboard Pompey's galley. Here he draws a distinction between Lepidus and Octavius, and what critics have variously described as Antony's "parody of reason," his "baiting" or "teasing" of the inebriated Lepidus, reflects to his discredit. His nonsensical response to Lepidus' question about the crocodile stands in contrast to his courteous and detailed explanation in response to Octavius' question about the Nile. Antony seems to forget that a victory is only as great as the opponent, and a Lepidus too drunk to appreciate the humour--and if such was intended, it is the only

obvious sign of Antony's humour throughout the play--or to resent the insult is really not much of a challenge. It is a break with decorum, a tawdry and mean mockery of Lepidus before servants who already hold him of little account; and it diminishes Antony--especially when we remember Lepidus' defense of Antony, perhaps too enthusiastically and indiscreetly offered to an irate Octavius.

Lepidus is not alone in his praise of Antony; Cleopatra speaks of him as "the greatest soldier of the world" (I.iii.38), and Pompey of Antony's "soldiership" as "twice the other twain" (II.i.34-5). But all the praise is not so unqualified: Philo and Demetrius, who first establish the Mars association, speak of the past, as does Octavius, whose tribute to Antony centres, not on a victory--such as Philippi where they both fought--but on a flight; he praises the stamina and fortitude, "so like a soldier" (I.iv.70), with which Antony met the privations of the difficult journey from Modena.

The Ventidius scene (III.i) is of interest in what it reveals of Antony's character and his method of command, and because it presents a view of an Antony who is less than praiseworthy. Antony, jealous of his authority and of his superior warrior reputation, has severely limited Ventidius in the effective discharge of his command: Ventidius, the man in the field, is not permitted to exercise his judgement or his initiative, for he works with Antony leaning over his shoulder, so to speak. Clearly, the good of Rome (if Ventidius enlarged the victory) is yielding to the good of Antony in that Antony's reputation must not suffer by the greater victories of his lieutenant; and that reputation is being enlarged and

glorified, not through his own efforts, but through those of Ventidius. Ventidius' claim that "Caesar and Antony have ever won / More in their officer than person" (III.i.16-7) is an unexpected devaluation of Antony's abilities that is even more effective because of Ventidius' detachment from animosity or envy. It is ironic that these are almost the same words that Antony will later use to convey his absolute contempt of Octavius: "he alone / Dealt in lieutenantancy, and no practice had / In the brave squares of war" (III.xi.38-40).

Agrippa and Enobarbus use extravagant language to describe Antony: "O thou Arabian bird!" (III.ii.12), but they are mocking Lepidus' seeming idolatry, not expressing their own views. And for all his admiration of Antony, there are moments of frankness when Enobarbus is less than flattering, for he speaks of Antony's insincerity: of the tears Antony shed for Julius Caesar and Brutus as a "rheum." Clearly he recognizes Antony's marriage for the arrangement of convenience that it is: "He married but his occasion here" (II.vi.128). Octavius speaks of himself and Antony as having dispositions "So differing in their acts" (II.ii.114), but Enobarbus speaks of them both as men driven by ambition and a desire for personal power: "Then world, thou hast a pair of chaps, no more, / And throw between all the food thou hast, / They'll grind the one the other . . ." (III.v. 114-5). Enobarbus obviously views the power struggle as destructive and ugly. Given their particular characters and the fragility of the bond that unites them, open hostilities between the two seem inevitable. But exactly who--Antony or Octavius--bears the greater responsibility for their final, violent confrontation is unclear.

In Athens with Octavia, Antony has achieved but the first step in his flight from Octavius, and clearly life with a discontented Antony is neither loving nor easy. Having expressed his intention to return to Egypt, Antony seeks a "colour for his going" (I.iii.31), and Octavius' alleged activities in Rome lend that "colour." Octavia's role as reconciler is hopeless, and her plea that Antony "believe not all" (III.iv.11) falls on deaf ears. Antony, a man posed for flight, wants escape, not appeasement, and he concentrates upon his grievances: apparently Octavius, less than generous in his praise, has gone so far as to express in public, not just antipathy, but animosity toward Antony. Octavia is Antony's envoy to Octavius, not because he urges it, but because, "as you requested, / Yourself shall go between's" (III.iv.24-5), and surely we do not misjudge Antony if we feel that any interest he has in her mission is limited to the new freedom he anticipates once she is gone. The threatening note on which he terminates their relationship, "I'll raise the preparation of a war / Shall stain your brother" (III.iv.26), is about as close as he can come to quarrelling with the submissive Octavia and is, as usual, the notice of intended aggression that has seemed to serve him well in the past.

In the past, obfuscation, bluster, and threats have been useful to Antony; he has acted with impunity, indeed has been rewarded for undiplomatic, even offensive, behaviour. Having issued a threat to this opponent whose warrior skills he holds in contempt, Antony seems to have held Octavius of so little account that the actual planning and organization of the war are limited largely to a spur-of-the moment affair. Yet Actium is, in a very real sense, the supreme test of Antony's abilities as a great

warrior and outstanding leader; it is a test he fails miserably. Most critics accept the fact that Shakespeare makes it clear that Antony, and Antony alone, is responsible for the decision to fight by sea. Even Ribner, who sees Cleopatra as "the source of [Antony's] sin," exonerates her-- although with reservations--when he admits that she "seconds his decision to fight by sea."¹⁵ But Bradley, among others, insists that "Antony fights by sea simply and solely because she [Cleopatra] wishes it."¹⁶ Such a view is typical of critics who tend to link Cleopatra, in one way or another, to all of Antony's failures in a sort of cause and effect relationship that Shakespeare's play does not support. The Actium fiasco is pure Antony; his decision to fight in heavy ships, poorly manned by inexperienced landsmen, because Octavius "dares us to't" (III.vii.29), is foolhardy and childish. He is deaf to the good advice of Candidius and Enobarbus, and dismisses his own experience and their protests with a casual "But if we fail, / We then can do't at land" (III.vii.52-3). Antony is stubbornly insistent on having his own way: "By sea, by sea" and "I'll fight at sea" (III.vii.40, 48). The "boy" Octavius, in refusing Antony's challenge to "single fight" and his proposal to wage "this battle at Pharsalia," shows more maturity and judgement. Antony has been negligent: "Trust not to rotten planks" (III.vii.62) may express nothing more than a land soldier's fear of ships, but it gives us pause; his soldiers are clearly the product of a press gang, "Ingross'd by swift impress" (III.vii.36), and his strategy is makeshift. Further, Antony allows into the battle an inexperienced woman who, in spite of her protests, has no business there; and the Egyptians who are expected to bear their share of the battle seem either not to have been admitted to this important conference--although a Roman soldier later is--or to have dissociated themselves from Antony's leadership.

His flight at Actium is but a more easily identified example of impulse usurping all sense of responsibility. Scarus, in shocked anger at their having "kiss'd away / Kingdoms and provinces" (III.x.7-8), lays the fault, in most derogatory terms, upon Cleopatra. Of Antony's flight he says: "I never saw an action of such shame; / Experience, manhood, honour, ne'er before / Did violate so itself" (III.x.22-4). Antony's immediate feelings of shame and anguish are expressed in "I have fled myself" and "I have lost command" (III.xi.7, 23). His collapse is total; having thrown away all chance of success by sea, he has not the resilience of spirit to seize upon his alternative: there is no effort, no thought even to his plan to "do't at land" (III.vii.53). He dismisses his captains and makes oblique references to suicide: "I have myself resolv'd upon a course, / Which has no need of you" (III.xi.9-10).

But this mood of self-recrimination does not last, and when he faces Cleopatra, he accuses: "O whither hast thou led me, Egypt?" (III.xi.51). To her plea for forgiveness, "Forgive my fearful sails: I little thought / You would have follow'd" (III.xi.55-6), Antony offers a facile explanation that transfers to Cleopatra all responsibility for what has happened:

Egypt, thou knew'st too well,
My heart was to thy rudder tied by the strings,
And thou shouldst tow me after. O'er my spirit
Thy full supremacy thou knew'st, and that
Thy beck might from the bidding of the gods
Command me. (III.xi.55-61)

According to Antony, Cleopatra's domination is complete. His forgiveness, when it is finally granted, seems a magnificently generous gesture: "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). Nevo speaks for many

critics when she claims, "Thus what Antony expresses and confirms, despite the abortive sea fight, is the supremacy of love, cost what it may."¹⁷

But "love, cost what it may" is really not for Antony alone to decide: what Antony ignores, and critics seem equally reluctant to admit, is the tremendous loss Cleopatra, as well as Antony, has suffered by this defeat. Antony is conspicuously silent on a failure that is his and his alone: his failure, after Actium, to rally and inspire his forces, if not to victory, at least to a valiant attempt to recover what has been lost to them. Antony offers, not a paean to love, but a lament for his lost power, and in so doing defines for us his concept of leadership:

Now I must
To the young man send humble treaties, dodge
And palter in the shifts of lowness, who
With half the bulk o' the world play'd as I pleas'd,
Making and marring fortunes. (III.xi.61-5)

This is the real Antony, by his own evaluation not a mature and wise statesman, but a careless child who held men and kingdoms as playthings, a mischievous little god that rewarded and punished as the whim of the moment moved him.

The truth is Antony does not bear defeat nobly, and that, rather than the defeat itself, is what the admiring Enobarbus finds so painfully disturbing. Antony's instability is reflected in his swift shifts of mood: self-reproach leads to reproaches of Cleopatra, of the troops that desert to Octavius (III.xiii.22), of Octavius' failure to remember him as he was rather than as he is now (III.xiii.142); he stoops to plead to live, in Egypt or in Athens, and blinds himself to the fact that Octavius cannot and will not let him live; he issues a challenge to Octavius and seems not to

understand why Octavius, who rejected his challenge before the battle, would now, in the flush of his victory, reject it again; he searches for an identity that seems to be fast slipping away from him (III.xiii.93). To say the least, Antony is distraught, a man completely absorbed in his own misfortunes and in Cleopatra only insofar as she is a convenient repository for his own failures. There is no noble gesture of loving self-sacrifice, no move to save her by absolving her of complicity in the conflict--such as might be forthcoming from a man who is, most critics claim, deeply and totally committed to her. It would have been in vain, of course; nevertheless, it would have been an endearing gesture we could admire in him. Instead, she merely affords him relief from the tensions and frustrations that finally erupt in violence as he orders the whipping of Thidias and subjects Cleopatra to a viciously cruel tongue-lashing. Only after she has first submitted to him completely and silently, and then declared her love for him, does Antony experience a sense of restored power and self-esteem, and his spirits are so buoyed up that he decides to be "treble-sinewed, hearted, breath'd, / And fight maliciously" (III.xiii.178-9). Antony understands what has happened to him; he does not understand why it has happened. Barroll is correct when he says that Iago-like, Antony has only contempt for theorists like Octavius; Antony insulates himself from any reality that threatens his concept of self, and takes as his ultimate criterion for military superiority the mere intensity of his military drives.¹⁸ This seems to be what is happening here. Planning the strategy of war and battles is not for Antony; he places all his faith in "sinew" and "heart." Having accused Cleopatra of intemperance, Antony seems not to find the least

inconsistency in his own resolve: "Let's have one other gaudy night: call to me / All my sad captains, fill our bowls once more; / Let's mock the midnight bell" (III.xiii.183-5).

The "gaudy night" deteriorates, insofar as we witness it, into a maudlin affair that is, at least in my view, both pathetic and offensive. Middleton Murry, however, views the scene quite differently. He sees Antony as a Christ-like figure, royal, "one for whom the final sacrifice of Enobarbus and Eros is a natural duty paid, which he receives by 'sovereignty of nature,'" and on this basis Murry transforms the event into something holy: "It is, if I may dare to put it thus, the Last Supper of Antony, sacramental, simple, and strange."¹⁹ I find Murry's interpretation too extreme, too worshipful, too much a glorification of an Antony who has in him nothing of a Christ-like asceticism; who is guileful, irresponsible, and ambitious--the establishment of an empire separate from Rome is an ambitious and unpatriotic repudiation of his homeland; who, first in accepting and then in fleeing Actium, showed a careless disregard for the lives of the men entrusted to him; whose self-love precludes "brotherly love."²⁰ Antony is not a Christ-like figure. And we have no textual evidence to support Murry's view that it is "the royalty of it that strikes Enobarbus to the heart"²¹ On the contrary, Enobarbus responds to Antony's speech to his servants, "Tend me tonight; / May be it is the period of your duty, / Haply you shall not see me more, or if, / A mangled shadow" (IV.iii.25-8), by reproaching him:

What mean you, sir,
To give them this discomfort? Look, they weep,
And I, an ass, am onion ey'd: for shame,
Transform us not to women. (IV.iii.33-6)

Barroll calls Antony's speech a "naked and unreasoning appeal for love"²² and it is; but most of all, it is an offensively deliberate and overt bid for sympathy that disturbs Enobarbus. Antony is stooping, pleading for service for a "gaudy night," and royalty would not have stooped. Perhaps this is what Enobarbus senses, in addition to the repugnance he feels for womanly tears. It is the plea that Antony, a warrior-general, should have made, not in morbid contemplation of his death, but using words of inspiration and strong, vibrant tones--not to his serving men, not to his followers in a banquet hall--but to his soldiers on the battlefield, to stir them to great deeds. Antony is out of time and place: he transforms men into women; he should, after Actium, have transformed his demoralized soldiers into brave and fearless warriors. Clearly, Antony is no Henry V: "Once more onto the breach, dear friends, once more" (H 5 V.i.1); nor even a Richard III who had his moment of inspiration: "Let's whip these stragglers o'er the seas again" (R 3 III.iii.327).

Cantor views the scene as another example of Antony's ability to "snatch victory not from defeat but in defeat"²³ and claims that Enobarbus' fate bears out Antony's belief that his words have so impressed them that anyone who deserts him "will not do so with peace of mind."²⁴ But Antony does suffer massive desertions and will suffer a brutal rejection as he lies dying (IV.xiv.105-13). Enobarbus' situation was unusual, and dependent on the special and close relationship he had with Antony. I agree with Barroll: "Anthony [sic] never understood Enobarbus' desertion as disgust."²⁵ Barroll suggests that Antony "seems to recompense Enobarbus for being deprived of an ideal worthy of fidelity."²⁶ Actually, Antony claims: "O,

my fortunes have / Corrupted honest men!" (IV.v.16-7), which is not strictly true. Enobarbus was, as I have said, more disturbed by Antony's reactions to defeat than by the defeat itself. Enobarbus is undone by Antony's "gentle adieus and greetings," for he convinces himself that Antony's "bounty overplus" is a concrete symbol of Antony's love for him. But Antony, having sent along Enobarbus' treasure (recompense), dismisses Enobarbus, "one ever near [him]" (IV.v.7), completely from his life.

If, as Cantor suggests, Antony snatches "victory . . . in defeat," it is, then, ironic that defeat will snatch away his few, brief moments of victory. Only in the scenes of Antony preparing for, in, and after the battle (IV.iv; v; vii; viii) do we experience the least sense of the charm that could draw men to him. Perhaps it is Antony's misfortune that in life all his battles were not waged on the field, for it is obvious that Antony excels and glories in the physical: "O love, / That thou couldst see my wars today, and knew'st / The royal occupation, thou shouldst see / A workman in't" (IV.iv.15-8). Successful physical encounters in battle lift him to a mood of exultation, fill him with confidence: "to-morrow / Before the sun shall see's, we'll spill the blood / That has to-day escap'd" (IV.viii.2-4). He generously praises Scarus (IV.viii.24-6), speaks of Cleopatra as "O thou day o' the world" and "my nightingale" (IV.viii.13, 18); his exuberance flows over onto everyone around him, and his men are "all Hectors." We realize that in typical Antony fashion he draws to himself attention and adulation entirely disproportionate to the importance the battle holds in the context of the war with Octavius: "Trumpeters, / With brazen din blast you the city's ear" (IV.viii.35-9); nevertheless, he is

lavish in his praise of his followers, and makes them feel that there is a greatness in their deeds. It is, however, a generosity of spirit which, Shakespeare has shown, occurs only before and in the heat of battle, and in the flush of victory.

Antony senses that he has allowed matters to slip away from his control, for on the day of his final defeat he is "valiant and dejected" and torn by "hope and fear" (IV.xii.7-9). The desertion of the navy oddly parallels his own desertion at Actium, and brings full circle the destructive conclusion to Antony's hopes when they are entrusted to sea strength. In direct contrast to his followers' "Fly, not we" (III.xi.6) when, following Actium, he urged their flight, is the Egyptian navy's exuberance; Antony is shocked: "They cast their caps up, and carouse together / Like friends long lost" (IV.xii.12). There is nothing in this image to suggest coercion, everything in it to suggest a willing alliance. Significantly, Antony does not seek within himself for a cause of this disaster, but turns his rage against Cleopatra: "This foul Egyptian hath betrayed me" (IV.xii.10). His "All come to this? The hearts / That spaniel'd me at heel, to whom I gave / Their wishes, do discandy, melt their sweets / On blossoming Caesar" (IV.xii.21-3) is a bitter comment upon man's inconstancy, but his "spaniel'd" is especially ugly in what it suggests were Antony's expectations of the men who served under him, and of the contempt in which he held and holds them. His accusation against Cleopatra, "Whose eye beck'd forth my wars and call'd them home" (IV.xii.26), may serve to comfort and excuse him to himself, but the evidence of the progression of events is to the contrary, and certainly Enobarbus had no doubt that Antony was "the mered question" (III.xiii.10).

Nevertheless, Antony's claim has found support. Ribner speaks of Antony's "self-destruction through dedication to a sin which is heroic and magnificent," and of the world Antony "abandons" for love of Cleopatra.²⁷ But as Antony's ingathering of supporters made clear, he meant to hold that world, not abandon it; as Barroll says, Antony "may indeed have renounced Caesar, but he never 'renounced' the world; it has been taken from him."²⁸ Bradley speaks of Antony's "magnanimity and gentleness which shine through his desperation" and of his love, "how pathetic and even sublime the completeness of his love for Cleopatra He is more than love's pilgrim, he is love's martyr."²⁹ But a review of Antony's treatment of women makes suspect even his image as a lover.

Erotic passion and sexual gratification Antony certainly experiences, but love as we find it in the Shakespearean sonnet to which Antony draws our attention, "May I never . . . dream of impediment" (II.ii.144-6), is not Antony's kind of love. There is within him neither fidelity nor constancy: Fulvia, Cleopatra, Octavia, each in her turn is deserted by Antony. He lacks humility and, surrendering nothing of himself, has only disdain for what others offer him; Fulvia was one his "contempts" hurled from him, and his "There's a great spirit gone!" is offset by his admission, "Thus did I desire it" (I.ii.119). Having Octavia, he treated her dishonourably but, like Fulvia, Octavia gone becomes Octavia good and, as he transforms his desertion of her into a sacrifice he made for Cleopatra, Octavia is "a gem of women" (III.xiii.106-9). As early as the messenger scene (I.ii) and certainly in the farewell scene (I.iii) his scathing remarks to Cleopatra convey his contempt for her: "But that your royalty / Holds

idleness your subject, I should take you / For idleness itself" (I.iii.91-3).

The Thidias incident calls forth a tirade, and it is difficult to find either "magnanimity" or "gentleness" in the scurrility Antony pours upon Cleopatra:

I found you as a morsel, cold upon
Dead Caesar's trencher: nay, you were a fragment
Of Gnaeus Pompey's, besides what hotter hours,
Unregister'd in vulgar fame, you have
Luxuriously pick'd out (III.xiii.116-22)

It is equally difficult to find that love "sublime" which Antony himself speaks of as "filth" (III.xiii.113-4).

That his empire has been lost through his own neglect, blind folly, and poor judgement is a reality that Antony will not face. He turns his wrath upon Cleopatra; let Octavius show her "monster-like" in Rome (IV.xiii. 33-6). His rage swells to a threatening crescendo: "The shirt of Nessus is upon me" and "The witch shall die" (IV.xiii.43-7). But here Antony goes too far. Our understanding of and sympathy for him, already strained when we contrast his rantings with Cleopatra's quiet acceptance of his abuse and of a loss that is as catastrophic for her as it is for him, rebel at this self-dramatization, this deliberate association of himself with a great figure who was betrayed by a woman. But the ebb, Antony's experience in the cloud scene when he asks, "Eros, thou yet beholds't me?" (IV.xiv.1), this is an Antony stripped of all posturing and bravado. As he watches clouds gather, shape, and dislimn to become as "indistinct as water is in water," Antony experiences a terrifying disintegration and finds himself "Even as such a body: here I am Antony, / Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave" (IV.xiv.13-4). In his extremity Antony seeks in another's

eyes confirmation even of his physical being. These are, without doubt, the most moving moments in the play, sustained to perfect length; for Antony, being Antony, cannot bear long such a confrontation with the naked truth. No more can we, who have watched all of Antony's identities disintegrate as the play progressed: the Triumvir who was, not a statesman, but merely an evasive, bullying politician, negligent of his responsibilities, ambitious, and abusive of his power; a man, reputedly a great general and leader of men, who was, when not in active service upon the battlefield, an incompetent lover who was incapable of giving love.

I do not agree with Champion that Antony gradually becomes accountable for his actions.³⁰ Even as the cloud scene fades, he is still insisting that he made the wars for Egypt and for Cleopatra, still accusing: "She hath betray'd me, and shall die the death" (IV.xiv.16, 26). But hearing that she is dead, which is what he had wanted (III.xii.16, 48; IV.xiii.36), he launches into a tribute to her courage and nobility and, insisting that he cannot live without her, calls upon Eros to kill him. Like Fulvia and Octavia before her, Cleopatra gone has become Cleopatra good.

Critics have pointed to this false report of her death as the cause of Antony's death: Ribner claims that "Antony dies, still the 'strumpet's fool' he had been at the beginning of the play."³¹ And Goddard claims that "by her lie she has thrust a sword into the man she loves . . . as certainly as if she had done it with her own hand."³² But according to Enobarbus, Cleopatra's "death" was a frequent occurrence: "I have seen her die twenty times upon far poorer moment" (I.ii.138-9). There is no reason then for Antony to attach credence to this particular report. Basic to both Ribner's

and Goddard's reasoning--that Antony dies because Cleopatra has died--is the idea that Antony dies for love, and this simply is not so. Cleopatra, alive or dead, is really extraneous to Antony's choice, which is not whether he will live or die, but is whether he will die by his own hand (or Eros') or by the hand of one of Octavius' followers. Antony's summary of his prospects is succinct: "the inevitable prosecution of / Disgrace and horror" (IV.xiv.65-6). It is more noble to do the deed than to submit to an execution that would be ignominious whether it were publicly or surreptitiously performed. Even so, Antony approaches Death in his last flight, with reluctance. He has to prime himself to action: "I'll be true to the courage and nobility of Cleopatra and Eros, and romantically view the event by envisioning an afterlife in which he and Cleopatra will make the ghosts gaze" (IV.xii.52), and by likening death to a "lover's bed" (IV.xii.101). Antony does not die a "strumpet's fool"; he has never been one. Antony is Antony's fool, vain and self-deceiving to the end. He "defeats Caesar," but this is exactly what Octavius wants.

Shakespeare has not granted Antony a warrior's death or a clean death. He is separated from his armour, the outward manifestation of his "nobility" and his "royal occupation," and a self-inflicted wound, as ineptly struck as were so many of Antony's other undertakings, imposes a lingering death. Murry says: "We have watched him die royally."³³ But for the most part, what we observe borders upon the pathetic and the grotesque. There are the guards' humiliatingly brutal rejection of his plea, "Let him that loves me strike me dead" (IV.xiv.107), and Decretas' cruelly cold summary of their esteem and affection: "Thy death and fortunes bid thy followers fly"

(IV.xiv.111). It is his personal guard and Diomedes who lift him from this fallen and forsaken state and carry him to Cleopatra. At and in the monument he is something precious. Cleopatra's response is immediate and agonized: "O Antony, / Antony, Antony! . . . let's draw him hither"

(IV.xv.11-2). Charney notes that in the monument "Antony's place is an elevated one (both literally and figuratively) and in its own way defies the temporal height of Caesar."³⁴ It is ironic then that Antony owes that "elevated place" to a Cleopatra Charney sees as having played Antony "false" on every occasion; for, significantly, the physical task of lifting Antony to the monument rests with Cleopatra.³⁵ And, only through Cleopatra does Antony's death receive the royal touch. She enfolds him and impresses upon him the desolation she feels at his loss. It is she who would set him beside Jove, she who calls upon the sun to "Burn the great sphere thou mov'st in, darkling stand / The varying shore o' the world" (IV.xv.10-1). In her presence Antony is restored to all the former glory he had assumed: he is fit cohort for the greatest of the gods.

Critics have been tremendously impressed by what they see as Antony's loving and generous "forgiveness" of Cleopatra's deception. MacCallum is but one who speaks of Antony's "complete self-abnegation," his concern for her "honour" and her "safety," and his solicitous counsel: "None about Caesar trust but Proculeius" (IV.xv.47).³⁶ In examining Antony's motive for such a recommendation, Barroll concludes that Antony trusts Proculeius because he is a soldier. But the two have differing concepts of soldier-ship, and Proculeius, who considers loyalty to his lord a part of his soldier's oath, is not prepared to betray Octavius in order to protect

Cleopatra. Antony was guilty of poor judgement.³⁷ But given the vivid and explicit description of the triumph Antony wished upon Cleopatra (IV.xii.33-9), which reflects the reality as Antony knows and expects it, "disgrace and horror," and indeed as Octavius plans it, I find the two extremes, a triumph and "Of Caesar seek your honour, with your safety" (IV.xv.46), irreconcilable--especially when that "honour" and "safety" rest upon a powerless soldier and a ruthless Octavius. Surely we cannot credit Antony with that much naïveté nor charge him with that much gullibility. I cannot believe that by this time Antony does not understand the intensity of Octavius' drive for supreme power and prestige. And "self-abnegation" is hardly an accurate reflection of the self-praise, "the greatest prince o' the world" (IV.xv.54), with which he comforts himself and shuts out his present reality. It is ironic that Cleopatra, the object of his contempt, abuse, and base accusations, is his final solace. She affirms all that he claims he was and is, and comforts him with a vision of a world that will be a mere "sty" without him, the "noblest of men." Antony dies secure in his sense of personal greatness and nobility.

But placed against Reese's criteria, Antony's greatness and nobility are more illusory than real. Shakespeare's Antony aspired to and attained positions of power to which he brought neither dedication nor ability. He accepted the privileges of power, rejected its responsibilities, and abused it outrageously: "With half the bulk o' the world play'd as I pleas'd, / Making and marring fortunes" (III.xi.64-5). He gave neither loyalty nor love to his homeland; as his ambitious acquisition of subject nations demonstrates, Antony's "service" was to Antony, not to Rome. He alienated

his character from his reputation, destroying the one in his concern to enhance the other: he reconciled his "honour" to whatever self-gratification and personal aggrandizement demanded of it, and rendered his "oath" worthless by his duplicity and inconstancy. In his ruthless pursuit of limitless political power, Antony sacrificed every ennobling quality. Arrogantly holding himself above all other men, he deemed himself accountable to no one. Antony's courage and "spirit" were limited to the physical. Responsibility for his failures he transferred to others, for he lacked the courage, wisdom and self-awareness to confront, examine, and discipline his own weaknesses. Ruled by self-interest, Antony's decisions and actions were a response to the emotion of the moment, his commitments thoughtlessly undertaken and lightly dismissed. Firm in his belief in his own inestimable worth, Antony valued others--their love and their commitment to him--only insofar as they served his needs and his desires; they were a means to an end. He used women for "pleasure," and personal advantage: marriage to Octavia extricated him from an embarrassing political position and represented a "social coup" in Rome; Cleopatra offered love and a country well removed from Octavius. Proudly disdainful of their love, Antony treated them despicably. He was "changeable . . . proud, fantastical, apish, shallow, inconstant . . . for every passion something, and for no passion truly any thing . . ." (A Y L I III.ii.411-4). We could not say of Antony's love that it "look[ed] on tempests and [was] never shaken" (Sonnet 116,1.6). Having made no commitment of self to Cleopatra, he judged her love for him by the mean and traitorous thing that passed for love with him. Antony never came to terms with his own weaknesses or with other men's

strengths, and so was defeated by them both. Nor did he ever understand a basic truth: to diminish others is to diminish self. By reducing Octavius to a "boy," Antony called into question his own stature, for it took only a "boy" to defeat Antony. By reducing Cleopatra to a "whore," Antony reduced himself: if he saw himself as her warrior, her "man of steel," and her protector, "I made these wars for Egypt, and the queen" (IV.xiv.15), he was, then, merely the protector of a "whore." Antony could have been the warrior of a Queen.

Footnotes: Antony

¹ M.M. Reese, The Cease of Majesty: A Study of Shakespeare's History Plays (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961), pp. 143-57. To determine these criteria, Reese examines the role of history and historians and the political complexities of Shakespeare's age; he touches briefly upon Shakespeare's Roman plays, and examines in more detail the English rulers in Shakespeare's history plays.

² In both the sonnets (especially Sonnet 116) and the plays, these qualities consistently represent what Shakespeare views as the "ideal," what an individual may strive towards, what only the rare spirit will achieve. For example, in As You Like It: Rosalind, in speaking of a "cure" for love, defines it by expressing its opposite (III.ii.409-21); she takes Phebe to task for her pride, disdain, and her lack of humility and gratitude for a "good man's love" (III.v.40-2, 62); out of love and sympathy for Rosalind, Celia shares her exile (I.iii.96-8); Adam surrenders all his worldly possessions and follows Orlando with "truth and loyalty" (II.iii.45, 70), and is repaid by Orlando's tenderness and devotion (II.vi.16; vii.129-33).

³ D.A. Traversi, "Antony and Cleopatra," in Discussions of Shakespeare's Roman Plays, ed. Maurice Charney (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1964), p. 92.

⁴ Judah Stampfer, The Tragic Engagement: A Study of Shakespeare's Classical Tragedies (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), p. 238.

⁵ Michael Lloyd, "Cleopatra as Isis," Shakespeare Survey, 12 (1959), 88.

⁶ Elias Schwartz, The Mortal Worm: Shakespeare's Master Theme (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1977), p. 73.

⁷ Enobarbus' comment that "our courteous Antony, / That ne'er the word of 'No' woman heard speak" (II.ii.222-3) reenforces the idea of an Antony who is putty in the hands of women. But as the opening scene demonstrates, Antony does not need "no" to refuse a woman. Fulvia's apparent repeated efforts--which culminate in war--to have Antony return to her are rejected; both Cleopatra and Octavia are humiliated publicly by Antony's rejections. What Antony accepts or rejects seems to be a matter of personal desire. To evaluate this on a more fundamental level: implicit in the Cleopatra of the barge scene and in the Octavian offer of Octavia is the idea that in return for certain favours Antony, by his acceptance of what they offer, commits himself to a political stance that furthers Cleopatra's and Octavius' goals; implicit in Antony's behaviour is his failure to "honour" those agreements. Antony's helplessness is, I believe, a pose; Antony takes exactly what he wants from a relationship and repudiates any aspect of it that inconveniences him.

⁸ Franklin M. Dickey, "The Elizabethans' Antony and Cleopatra" (1957), in Shakespeare: "Antony and Cleopatra," A Casebook, ed. John Russell Brown (London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1968), p. 153.

⁹ Schwartz, p. 73.

¹⁰ Harley Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare Vol. 1 (1930; rpt., London: B.T. Batesford Ltd., 1964), p. 425.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 427.

¹² Willard Farnham, Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier: The World of His Final Tragedies (1950; rpt. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), p. 187.

¹³ M.R. Ridley, ed., Antony and Cleopatra, p. 49, n. 44.

¹⁴ Lloyd, p. 88.

¹⁵ Ribner, p. 176.

¹⁶ Bradley, p. 297.

¹⁷ Ruth Nevo, Tragic Form in Shakespeare (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 326.

¹⁸ J. Leeds Barroll, "Shakespeare and the Art of Character: A Study of Anthony," Shakespeare Studies, 5 (1969), 176, 174.

¹⁹ John Middleton Murry, "Antony and Cleopatra" (1939), in Shakespeare: "Antony and Cleopatra," A Casebook, ed. John Russell Brown (London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1968), p. 135.

²⁰ It would be hypocritical to condemn Antony simply for being ambitious and desirous of power; it is, after all, her state and her power that Cleopatra seeks to maintain, and it is Rome's and his own power that Octavius wishes to maintain and enlarge. Antony's failure to formulate a long-term strategy or to evaluate the consequences of his impulsive actions changes the whole character of his power struggle: he ends by challenging Rome rather than championing her.

²¹ Murry, p. 122.

²² Barroll, p. 196.

²³ Paul A. Cantor, Shakespeare's Rome: Republic and Empire (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 150.

²⁴ Cantor, p. 151.

²⁵ Barroll, p. 219.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 181.

- 27 Ribner, p. 172.
- 28 Barroll, p. 159.
- 29 Bradley, pp. 297-8.
- 30 Larry S. Champion, Shakespeare's Tragic Perspective (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1976), pp. 248-53.
- 31 Ribner, p. 182.
- 32 Harold C. Goddard, "Cleopatra's Artifice" (1951), in Shakespeare: "Antony and Cleopatra," A Casebook, ed. John Russell Brown (London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1968), p. 135.
- 33 Murry, p. 132.
- 34 Maurice Charney, Shakespeare's Roman Plays: The Function of Imagery in Drama (1961; rpt. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 135.
- 35 Ibid., p. 122.
- 36 MacCallum, p. 450.
- 37 Barroll, pp. 219-20. See pp. 211-21 for Barroll's detailed explanation of Proculeius.

Chapter Two: Octavius

Victory gave Octavius control of Cleopatra, of her kingdom, and of all that was in it; within a short time she had taken her own life. This has posed a problem that critics have found particularly vexing: was it the threatened Roman triumph, her love for Antony, or her failure to charm Octavius that drove her to suicide? Why did she delay her suicide unless she thought that Octavius could be manipulated? It is my view that Cleopatra would never have so misjudged Octavius' character and the political reality either to have entertained a hope of an alliance with him or to have wanted him as a substitute for Antony. Cleopatra had no illusions about Octavius; she knew him for what he was. Nor have critics disagreed greatly about Octavius: for the most part they find him cold, ambitious, and humourless; they frequently point to him as an example of Roman reason as opposed to the Eastern emotionalism that so controlled Antony. Octavius has won few admirers; opposed to the more colourful Antony, he has drawn little sympathy for or understanding of the problems he faced in dealing with Antony. He has won praise for his abilities as a strategist, but he is most often seen as ending a period of chivalry and beginning a period of cold, administrative efficiency. In his confrontation with Cleopatra, Octavius has been viewed, if not in a kindlier light, at least as dealing with an opponent who was equally ambitious, equally Machiavellian. Octavius and Cleopatra are frequently seen as engaged in a tug of war with the helpless Antony as the prize. Such a view denies the reality of both Octavius' and Cleopatra's problems with the elusive Antony. In reviewing that part of Octavius' life which is portrayed in Shakespeare's play, I will

concentrate upon his character and upon his particular political situation. Octavius' political problem is threefold in nature, separate yet related: Antony, Antony and Cleopatra, and Cleopatra. I have reserved for the final chapter Octavius' confrontation with Cleopatra. In establishing a standard of conduct for Octavius, I will adopt the same criteria I used in examining Antony's life.

Octavius is not an attractive character; perhaps this and sympathy for Antony have distracted our attention from the seriousness of the political and military problems with which he had to cope, for the most part alone, on occasion handicapped by Antony's "assistance." Yet from the beginning we are aware that Octavius' worries have been aggravated rather than alleviated by Antony. Octavius finds Antony's present behaviour outrageous: "he fishes, drinks, and wastes / The lamps of night in revel" (I.iv.4-5); Antony is, for the most part, insultingly indifferent to Rome and his partners there: "hardly gave audience, or / Vouchsaf'd to think he had partners" (I.iv.7-8). Octavius' "Let's grant it is not / Amiss" (I.iv.16) actually does nothing of the kind: in his view, Lepidus is "too indulgent" in his defence of Antony. Octavius could understand it if Antony's pleasure "fill'd / His vacancy" (I.iv.25), but such behaviour at a time when the state needs him is "to be chid: / As we rate boys" (I.iv.30-1). Octavius is not idly complaining when he claims that "we do bear / So great weight in his lightness" (I.iv.24-5). Octavius is assailed on all sides: his maritime borders and the sea are controlled by pirates; the Fulvia-Lucius rebellion is no sooner put down than the much more dangerous threat of Pompey rises; Labienus' expansionism signifies an increasing strength which,

if not at present an active threat to Rome's colonies, challenges Rome's supremacy. There is civil unrest, "flush youth revolt" (I.iv.52), much of which, we assume from Pompey's remark that "Caesar gets money where / He loses hearts" (II.i.13), is a consequence of Octavius' tax policies to deal with his assorted problems. Cantor remarks upon the "remoteness of the ruler from the ruled"¹ and here one of Octavius' failures is apparent: he lacks the common touch. He has neither sympathy for nor understanding of the hardships imposed upon the people; they revolt, not because of his policies, but because instability is part of their natures. His contempt for them is obvious: "This common body, / Which like the vagabond flag upon the stream, / Goes to, and back, lackeying the varying tide" (I.iv.44-6).

His contempt for Antony's self-indulgence mingles with his respect for Antony's past fortitude and patience in the terrible flight from Modena. But memories will not serve the present, and the military concerns that harass Octavius are increased by his uncertainty about Antony: Octavius really does not know where Antony stands, either in the past dispute with Fulvia and Lucius or in this present crisis. Octavius obviously feels that Antony is indispensable at this time, both for a show of unity and for the military value of his reputation. But if Octavius has assessed accurately Antony's complicity in recent incidents against the state, then Antony may now pursue one of the several options that are open to him: simply stand by--as he seems to be doing--and let Pompey destroy Octavius; ally himself, either temporarily or permanently, with Pompey and depose Octavius; even appeal directly for support from a populace which, having neither affection nor loyalty for Octavius, may be only too willing to assist in his removal.

The meeting in Rome is of particular importance then to Octavius, and surely he approaches it with hopes for and fears of Antony's intentions. Octavius finds an Antony who is unchanged: he is belligerent, offhand about his carousing, casual in his interpretation of his oath; clearly Octavius can have no reasonable and frank discussion of their differences with the elusive Antony who is touchy about his "honour" and unwilling to be reminded of or to accept responsibility for his failures to Rome and his partners. Octavius resorts to desperate measures to appease the stubborn Antony, and his offer is one that Antony finds irresistible: a woman and an alliance with a noble Roman family. Antony is libertine enough to accept the first, social climber and snob enough to accept the second, and fickle enough to forget Cleopatra. As Markels comments: "Antony's empty posturing is exquisitely matched by the ethical shallowness of Octavius' response, for Octavius is willing to respect a mere show of honor if it helps to consolidate his power."² Lee notes that Octavius "is obsessed with power and political business"³ and certainly his action here could be interpreted as the unscrupulous sacrifice to political expediency of one he claims to hold most dear. But Dickey claims that in view of Octavius' repeated and generous comments on Antony, there is no reason "to suppose that he is cynical in offering his beloved Octavia to Antony for his wife."⁴ There is no doubt that Octavius loves Octavia, and no doubt that he is not completely comfortable with his decision. More than once he reminds Antony that Octavia is precious to him: "A sister I bequeath you, whom no brother / Did ever love so dearly" (II.ii.150-1) and "You take from me a great part of myself" (III,ii.24). Octavius' warning is one that Antony cannot fail to note:

Let not this 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)

Octavius may have every hope that the marriage will succeed, and that he and Antony will be united by "brotherly" love, but it is also possible that Octavius may be using Octavia to provoke what Enobarbus predicts will be the outcome: "But you will find the band that seems to tie their friendship together will be the very strangler of their amity" (II.vi.117-9).

The meetings in Rome, near Misenum, and aboard Pompey's galley only confirm all Octavius suspects are the weaknesses of his partners. Antony is unreliable and devious, a liability rather than an asset--the treaty with Pompey is almost ruined by Antony's aggressiveness and his lack of courtesy and diplomacy--and drunk or sober, Antony is impulsive, emotional, and frequently offensive. In Lepidus Octavius sees a weak sycophant, of whom Pompey has said:

Lepidus flatters both,
 Of both is flatter'd: but he neither loves,
 Nor either cares for him. (II.i.14-6)

And if Enobarbus and Agrippa are to be believed, Lepidus' flattery is incredibly extravagant: Caesar is "the Jupiter of men" and Antony is "the god of Jupiter" (III.ii.9-10). Lepidus is like the "vagabond flag" in that he goes back and forth trying to lackey to both Caesar and Antony at the same time. He lacks self-control and is, before the evening aboard Pompey's galley is well advanced, in a drunken stupor. Such weak submission to the frivolous will be duly noted to Antony's and Lepidus' discredit by an Octavius whose own moderation is determined by his concern for his public image. Farnham notes: "Octavius reveals an ominous ability to remain master

of himself and keep 'graver business' in mind."⁵ Markels comments that "Octavius is the most repellent Roman of them all. His superior restraint only adds to his unloveliness."⁶ While Octavius deplores Antony's waste of time, "he fishes," we note that Octavius, too, is an ardent fisherman; he turns this sport into serious business indeed, baiting his hook with attractive lures that tempt men to him: in the past, one third the world each for Lepidus and Antony, and now Octavia for Antony and Sicily and Sardinia for Pompey. And when we consider Octavius' record of ruthlessness and duplicity, such lures are neither waste nor generosity--merely loans, for Octavius will take it all back. He is humourless; as Barroll points out, what amuses Octavius is not what others find humourous; he is amused only if "one reacts out of proportion to an offense against the self [(II.ii.30-5)]."⁷ Later, Antony's challenge to a duel will arouse the same humour: in Octavius' view, such a challenge from the defeated is stupid, a joke, and he will "Laugh at his challenge" (IV.i.6). Octavius is obsessed with legalities: "my bond" (I.iv.84), "your oath" (II.ii.82), "our written purposes" (II.vi.4), and the marriage in which, as Barroll points out, "Octavia herself [is] the legal 'proof' and bond of this fraternal relationship."⁸ It is as if such abstracts as love and honour can only have reality if they are reduced to some concrete and visual symbol of their existence.

Nandy notes: "Rome is the world of utilitarian realism ruled by the principle of political self-interest, where values are arrived at by calculation . . . ,"⁹ and Markels finds that "Octavius is only the play's most conspicuous example of Roman opportunism and duplicity."¹⁰ It is not that Octavius is insensitive, but that he is sensitive only to the needs of the

state and to his own position within that structure. If political necessity requires him to swallow his pride and deal with Antony and Pompey, Octavius will do so. But the lesson he has learned is clear: a divided command weakens; Rome must have one supreme commander with absolute control and, in his arrogant view of himself as the most worthy, Octavius determines to be that commander. Octavius proceeds methodically to effect the removal of his opponents/partners. He seals with Pompey, and in return for Sicily and Sardinia, Pompey will "Rid all the sea of pirates" (II.vi.36). Thus Pompey, who, because of his honour, refused an empire thrice offered by Menas, betrays his former allies and is, in turn, betrayed by Octavius who moves against him once Pompey's strength has been reduced to a mockery of what it had first been. Then Lepidus: and who is surprised that Octavius' wrath has been aroused by "letters he had formerly wrote to Pompey" (III.v.9-10)? It is not unreasonable to believe that Lepidus, ever the sycophant and pacifier, could have lackeyed--may even have been encouraged to lackey--to Pompey, and easy to see how he could have compromised himself in the process. But Octavius, who has learned to husband his resources, was not so eager to remove Lepidus prematurely: "having made use of him in the wars 'gainst Pompey, presently denied him rivalry" (III.v.6-7). Having removed both who had sealed with Antony as well as with himself, Octavius is ready to move against Antony, whose activities have provided Octavius with every justification he may need to explain such an action against a Triumvir.

Viewed from Octavius' perspective, the Egyptian crowning scene he reports is the basest betrayal: Antony has established an empire separate from and exclusive of Rome and Octavius, and has, apparently, given to

Cleopatra and their illegitimate children newly acquired lands and a part of the empire itself: "Unto her / He gave the stablishment of Egypt" (III.vi.8-9).¹¹ There Antony has made his headquarters and has done exactly what he had threatened: "I'll raise the preparation of a war" (III.vi.26). In Octavius' view, Cleopatra, the queen who harbours Antony, cohabits and coreigns with him, is as hateful and formidable a traitor to Rome as Antony. Moved by a sense of moral and political outrage, Octavius labels her "whore." If Antony has supporters in Rome to raise objections to Octavius' war against him, surely no one will object to a war against a provincial "whore" in possession of Roman territory--especially if the corruption of a proud Roman can be laid to her. Whatever Octavius' moral views on the subject--and I believe that he does think of Cleopatra as a "whore"--politically he can not lose by encouraging such a view of her. Indeed, if Antony is to be believed (III.iv), Octavius has been cultivating public opinion with great care, and certainly he has nurtured it assiduously in this affair, reporting every incident dredged up by his spy system: "I have eyes upon him, / And his affairs come to me on the wind" (III.vi.62-3). Apparently he has achieved considerable success, for Rome is "queasy with his [Antony's] insolence" (III.vi.20).

Octavia's arrival in Rome, unannounced and like a "market-maid," provokes Octavius' wrath. She has demeaned herself and her position as "Caesar's sister" and the "wife of Antony" (III.vi.43). Octavius' concern with waste (I.iv.5; IV.i.15-6) seems not to include expenditures necessary for appropriate public display to enhance the prestige and grandeur of Rome's first family.¹² Traversi notes that "her arrival strikes Caesar

less for the unhappiness it implies than for the outrage against his own indispensable dignity"13 Certainly Octavius dissociates himself from all responsibility for what has happened to her, and as Traversi points out, "there is a note of complacency mingled with contempt for his rival, in the way in which he produces the news that she has been irrevocably betrayed"14 His concern for her, "the high gods, / To do you justice, makes his ministers / Of us and those that love you" (III.vi.87-9), is ironic when placed against his earlier determination to enforce his will: "The power of Caesar, and / His power unto Octavia" (II.ii.42-3). Only the most naive and idealistic--and Octavius is neither--could possibly be surprised when the marriage ends so abruptly. I do not see Octavia as a decisive factor in the war; Octavius has other provocations of greater importance to him.¹⁵

In pitting himself against "the greatest soldier of the world" (I.iii.38) and against the impressive group of supporters that Antony has gathered in, Octavius has no misplaced confidence in or exaggerated opinion of his own warrior skills. Strategy is everything, and Octavius sets out to exploit Antony's weaknesses. Octavius is indeed a product of Rome which is, Nandy notes, "fever-wracked, corrupt,"¹⁶ for as MacCallum points out, Shakespeare "accentuates Octavius' unblushing knavery, by making him employ this provocation [his challenge to fight by sea] after he has twice rejected offers that do not suit himself . . . this appeal to audacity . . . determines Antony like a true knight-errant to the fatal course."¹⁷ Octavius wins easily, either by chance in that Antony flees the battle when, as Scarus claims, "vantage like a pair of twins appear'd / Both as

the same, or rather ours the elder" (III.x.12-3), or by design in that Octavius so manipulated events before the battle that Antony was betrayed by his own folly.

Octavius does not bear victory nobly, with magnanimity and generous forgiveness of past injuries. It is not that we are unable to appreciate the necessity of many of Octavius' decisions, but that we take exception to his cynicism, his duplicity, his contempt for the defeated, his callous treatment of the men who defect to him, and his base attempts to persuade Cleopatra to betray Antony. Octavius can see his own example in Julius Caesar whose clemency to Brutus was repaid by treachery. On every occasion, in one way or another, Octavius has been betrayed by Antony; Octavius knows that Antony's "oath" is worthless. It would be folly to allow such an opponent to live. Yet Octavius does toy with the idea: "Our will is Antony be took alive" (IV.vi.2), but this may be no more than a brief, unthinking self-indulgence, a sop to his vanity, and a desire to gloat in person over the "old ruffian." Octavius is probably too wily to forget his own words: "And the ebb'd man, ne'er lov'd till ne'er worth love, / Comes dear'd, by being lack'd" (I.iv.43-4). Antony in a triumph in Rome, with "pleach'd arms" and at his lowest ebb, may pose a risk that Octavius dare not chance.

Octavius is coldly impersonal, and unable to understand why an Antony who "mocks / The pauses that he makes" (V.i.2-3) would hold out against all "reason." And however relevant Antony's mental state may be to an Octavius who wishes to conclude this war with a decisively crushing defeat for Antony, his order is edged with callous vindictiveness: "Observe how Antony becomes his flaw" (III.xii.34). Octavius has neither sympathy nor pity for

the defeated. Octavius is spitefully practical in the use he makes of those who defect to him: "Plant those that have revolted in the vant, / That Antony may seem to spend his fury / Upon himself" (IV.vi.9-11). It is, of course, good strategy, intended to demoralize even further an Antony who, in his open quarrel with Cleopatra and his whipping of Thidias, has betrayed his loss of self-control and his mistrust of Cleopatra; but it is a self-defeating strategy in that Octavius will win neither the love nor the loyalty of his men. Enobarbus also notes the mistrust Octavius has of the men who have left Antony: Alexas has been hanged and "Candidius and the rest / That fell away have entertainment, but / No honourable trust" (IV.vi.16-8). Octavius has nothing but contempt for men who change sides, "lackeying the varying tide" (I.iv.46). In Octavius' judgement, such men act only to serve their own best interests, and he is entitled to use them as serves his interests. Thus, as Pompey discovered in dealing with Octavius, betrayal begets betrayal; Octavius is no better than those he holds in contempt.

In his attempts to separate Antony and Cleopatra, Octavius exceeds even his own crude limits. He first demands of her that she betray Antony, and for this "She shall not sue unheard" (III.xii.24). But even Octavius has second thoughts about this paltry offer, and in his choice of an envoy to her he reveals the contempt in which he holds her and his cynical view of all women: "women are not / In their best fortunes strong; but want will perjure / The ne'er touch'd vestal" (III.xii.29-31). Octavius seems to have few original thoughts; what served him so well with Antony should be equally effective with Cleopatra: surely the eloquent Thidias will as

easily persuade Cleopatra to Octavius as Octavius' offer of Octavia persuaded Antony to him. His duplicity is blatant: "promise, / And in our name, what she requires; add more, / From thine inventions, offers . . . try thy cunning" (III.xii.27-31). Octavius is convinced that if men proud of their honour have their price, the "whore" Cleopatra also has her price, and he has found it. Antony's interference (III.xiii) merely postpones Octavius' plans for Cleopatra.

Chance does seem to favour Octavius, for final victory falls to him when the Egyptian navy deserts Antony. Barroll, who commends Octavius' administrative abilities, comments that Octavius is "astounding master of the art of troop movement";¹⁸ there is, however, no hard evidence that in the actual conduct of war and battles Octavius has exceptional skills. In the land skirmish he allowed his troops to overextend themselves, and seems even to have underestimated the strength of the forces he needed (IV.vii. 1-3). As MacCallum points out, Octavius' victory is "due to cunning and chicane rather than to any wisdom or ability of a higher kind."¹⁹

Antony's death is another choice chance that falls to Octavius. Mason comments: "What puzzles me . . . is the deliberate insertion of a favourable epitaph for Anthony [sic] . . . we find the Romans uniting to lament Anthony as a fallen hero."²⁰ But "decorum" demands no less. Further, Octavius' words, "The death of Antony / Is not a single doom, in the name lay / A moiety of the world" (V.i.17-9), pay tribute to himself as much as to Antony. Antony and Octavius were equals in power; if Antony was great, Octavius is great; indeed, having defeated Antony, Octavius is greater. Octavius understands what Antony never could: reduce an enemy and you reduce

yourself. In its relative ease of accomplishment, Octavius' victory is not a great achievement. Elevate Antony and the victory and Octavius are similarly elevated. Having firmly impressed upon them the sense of his own greatness, Octavius then proceeds to undermine Antony's: Antony becomes a "disease" in the body politic, the "arm of mine own body," a mere appendage to Octavius. Even critics who credit Octavius with some depth of emotion and sincerity in his tribute to Antony comment upon the ease with which he dismisses the personal to turn to "business" once the messenger arrives. That Octavius' every word is carefully weighed for its political advantage is apparent in his return to the subject: having attributed everything that has happened to "our stars, / Unreconcilable" (V.i.46-7), Octavius elaborates upon his self-justification by inviting their inspection of his "writings," which offer incontrovertible proof of the propriety of all his actions (V.i.73-7).

When we apply to Octavius the criteria that Reese felt were the demands Shakespeare made of a good ruler, Octavius falls lamentably short. Just ambition has become ruthless ambition; Octavius craves power for the supremacy it gives him over all men. He is patriotic, but in his own mind Rome and Octavius are no longer distinct and separate entities, and his "service" is as much for himself as it is for Rome. He is dedicated to Octavius. His "reason" carries him to immoderate and irrational lengths; seeing in all men only evil and faithlessness, he views the willful destruction of "allies" as a practical and necessary precaution to safeguard his own position. He lacks self-awareness, humility, and humanity. He has sacrificed to political expediency every tender and human emotion within

him, and men have become the mere pawns whereby he achieves his own ends. Octavius cannot distinguish between the name and the quality: his arrogant use of the royal "we" shows that Octavius is convinced that he possesses that innate nobility which no amount of posturing can convince us is his. Octavius finds in virtues just what Machiavelli suggested:

they are useful when you appear to have them: as, to appear compassionate, faithful, humane, upright and religious--and indeed to be such, so long as you have a mind so constituted that, when it is necessary to be the opposite, you may be able to change it.²¹

As the play progresses, Octavius coarsens; his duplicity and hypocrisy becoming less well-guarded, less subtle, he directly instructs Thidias to practise deceit. Perhaps the traits that in Antony Lepidus claimed were "hereditary, / Rather than purchas'd; what he cannot change, / Than what he chooses" (I.iv.13-5) are in Octavius "purchas'd" and "what he chooses," and it is Octavius' fall into degeneracy as much as his rise to supreme power that we witness.

Footnotes: Octavius

¹ Cantor, p. 138.

² Julian Markels, The Pillar of the World: "Antony and Cleopatra" in Shakespeare's Development ([Columbus]: Ohio State University Press, 1968), p. 25.

³ Robin Lee, Shakespeare: Antony and Cleopatra (London: Edward Arnold, 1971), p. 38.

⁴ Dickey, p. 153.

⁵ Farnham, p. 188.

⁶ Markels, p. 43.

⁷ J. Leeds Barroll, "The Characterization of Octavius," Shakespeare Studies, 6 (1970), 253.

⁸ Ibid., p. 260.

⁹ Dipak Nandy, "The Realism of Antony and Cleopatra," in Shakespeare in a Changing World, ed. Arnold Kettle (New York: International Publishers, 1964), p. 178.

¹⁰ Markels, p. 42.

¹¹ Gaius Suetonius, The Twelve Casesars, trans. Robert Graves (1957; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), speaks of Julius Caesar handing "over the government of Egypt to Cleopatra and her younger brother; fearing that, if made a Roman province, it might one day be held against his fellow-countrymen by some independent-minded governor-general" (p. 25). This seems to be exactly what Antony is doing.

¹² Perhaps nothing makes clearer the differences between Roman and Egyptian values than a contrast of the "arrivals" of Octavia and Cleopatra. As Octavius would have it, the odour of horses and of travel-stained troops, the harsh sounds of armour and of the neighs of horses, and the dust rising to the "roof of heaven"--and obscuring Octavia--all this would define Octavia's worth to an eagerly expectant public (III.vi.43-50). Aside from the protective function it serves--which is not entirely inappropriate for the "meek" Octavia--the "army as an usher" is a more accurate reflection of Octavius' character: his obsession with power and empire, and the unimaginative quality of his mind. In the barge scene, there is nothing of the commotion and crude size upon which Octavius relies to create an impression of magnificence. Cleopatra appears on the water, her country's life source. She is surrounded by softness--"cloth of gold, of tissue"--rich, royal colours, and the sparkle and ripple of quiet waters. Those around her are "like the Nereides." The gentle music from flutes provides the beat for the oars and this, in turn, is taken up by the "amorous water." Most informative is the almost complete silence, a tribute Cleopatra commands, rather than one she demands. The city cast her people out, not in a tumult of loud enthusiasm, but in worshipful awed silence to "gaze" upon Cleopatra. The barge scene is perhaps our earliest evidence of Cleopatra's abilities as a strategist and organizer: clearly, she has planned this event with meticulous attention to detail, and has executed her plan with flawless timing and to maximum effect (II.ii.191-219).

¹³ Derek Traversi, Shakespeare: The Roman Plays (1963; rpt. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), p. 134.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 135.

¹⁵ J.L. Simmons, Shakespeare's Pagan World: The Roman Tragedies (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1973), finds that "in the realm of political causes . . . Octavius seems unquestionably the aggressor" (p. 143). I am not entirely convinced--at least insofar as Antony is concerned--that Octavius is the aggressor. Shakespeare obscures the sequence of events, and while Antony appears to have a case (III.iv.) hostilities do not break out until Octavius sees a part of the empire being broken away and Antony gathering supporters to his side.

¹⁶ Nandy, p. 177.

¹⁷ MacCallum, pp. 386, 385.

¹⁸ Barroll, "Anthony," p. 175.

¹⁹ MacCallum, p. 383.

²⁰ H.A. Mason, Shakespeare's Tragedies of Love: An Examination of the Possibility of Common Readings of "Romeo and Juliet," "Othello," "King Lear," and "Antony and Cleopatra" (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1970), p. 268.

²¹ Quoted by Reese, p. 93. However, Bull translates "virtues" as "qualities," as Machiavelli discusses the merits of a prince's generosity as opposed to parsimony, cruelty as opposed to compassion, whether he should be loved or feared, and the extent to which he should honour his word (Niccolo Machiavelli, The Prince trans. and introd. George Bull [1961; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977], pp. 92-100).

Chapter Three: Cleopatra

The Prologue

In Cleopatra Shakespeare depicted a queen, a sovereign lady. In her he concentrated the attributes of a good ruler: patriotism, dedication, courage, loyalty, and self-mastery. Cleopatra thought of the crown as a sacred trust to be maintained and passed to her heirs; to it she owed all her devotion, energy, and intelligence; for it no self-sacrifice was too great. This is the reality of Cleopatra as Shakespeare portrayed her. It is directly opposed to the generally accepted view of Cleopatra, what I term the Roman myth of Cleopatra, that she was a flighty, self-indulgent queen. As I will demonstrate, the political issues that affected Cleopatra and Egypt allowed for neither the indifference to her royal duties nor the moral depravity of which she is accused. Although the play deals specifically with her time with Antony, there are explicit references to Caesar and Pompey; in the time between these men and Antony, Cleopatra obviously could not have permitted the affairs of state simply to drift along. That she survived at all in the world Shakespeare depicted informs us of the attention Cleopatra gave to her sovereign responsibilities, for nations were maintained by virtue of their military strength--and as Actium proved, Cleopatra was not a warrior queen--or by means of alliances with the strong and the powerful. Of necessity, then, diplomacy and politics were the inescapable facts of a ruler's life, and especially so for Cleopatra, a queen surrounded by aggressive and ambitious kings.

The Historical and Literary Background; Cleopatra and the Critics

Every decision of the historical Cleopatra's life was a political one, and an examination of her alternatives in each case shows that it was the only logical decision she could have made. She chose Caesar who returned her to her throne, and to whom she bore a son; her alternative was her brother and the malevolent eunuch, Pothinus, who had driven her from the court.¹ That she reigned successfully for a number of years was, in all probability, because she had the sympathetic ear of Rome. Caesar's assassination removed a protective shield upon which Cleopatra relied, if not for active military support, at least for the deterrent value that it held.² At Cydnus, she had to answer the allegation that she had supported Brutus and Cassius in their war against Antony and Octavius.³ The charge was probably true; by their assassination of Caesar, Brutus and Cassius became the heirs apparent of Rome. Cleopatra could await the onslaught of neighbouring kings or move to form a new alliance. Octavius was, at that time, weak and insignificant; Antony was not in the position of power he later consolidated by victory. Her strategy of aligning herself with Brutus and Cassius, however logical, proved a poor one: they lost the war. She was returned to her old position of vulnerability with the additional problem of having to explain a political blunder against the man whose support she desperately needed for national security.

An alternative strategy, which for sound reasons she dismissed, was that of aligning herself with one of--or even several of--the neighbouring kings. Tradition spoke against such a move, and politically it would have been a decision against which the disadvantages weighed heavily: none was

of sufficient power and prestige for her purpose; while none was in a favoured position, all could hope for the advantage; each was a political threat, but each served as jealous watchdog over the others.⁴ It was a balance of self-interests that she would be foolish to disturb, but it was also a situation that was highly unstable and unpredictable. Caution as well as precedents favoured an alliance with the most powerful, the Romans. Her mission to Cydnus, then, had a twofold purpose: to extricate herself from a delicate, politically embarrassing position, and to create a new alliance. Cleopatra wanted and needed Antony for Egypt. Her choice had been either Antony or Octavius: Octavius was distanced in Rome, still relatively weak, an unknown; as Caesar's nephew and legal heir, he would hardly close his eyes to the future potential threat to his own power that Caesar's and Cleopatra's son posed.⁵ The advantage of such an alliance was dubious at best, but in any event, it would be difficult to achieve. Antony shared power with Octavius, had the reputation of a great warrior, and had, moreover, summoned her to his presence. Given her alternative, prolonged and uncertain negotiation with Octavius, during which her vulnerability would be an open invitation to aggression, Cleopatra's choice of Antony was the correct one. Given Antony's character, it was a fatally poor choice.

I have placed considerable emphasis upon the political situation into which the historical Cleopatra was locked, for it is my conviction that Shakespeare's allusions to incidents and places of particular significance in the historical Cleopatra's life were not without purpose, and to this extent at least, the historical Cleopatra and Shakespeare's Cleopatra share identities. Shakespeare invites our inspection of the progression of her

relationship with the Romans. I agree with Williamson when she says that we should "cease to neglect the features of the play which relate to the historical narrative" and that "if we view Antony and Cleopatra as rulers as well as lovers, we shall gain an understanding of the play and insights into their characters we have missed hitherto."⁶

In general, Shakespeare has used the historical facts--with time compression and some alteration--outlined by Plutarch, who is usually accepted as his main source. But Plutarch was an historian only in the broadest interpretation of the word, working not from official and written documents, but from word of mouth.⁷ His characterization of Cleopatra is, then, as much a literary creation as that of any other of Shakespeare's sources, and a contrast of Plutarch's Cleopatra and Shakespeare's Cleopatra in their confrontations with Octavius shows a sharp distinction between the two. The play's Cleopatra is not simply a re-representation of Plutarch's Cleopatra. In depicting Cleopatra, Shakespeare could draw upon at least three traditional attitudes towards her: as a symbol of lust and treachery, as a great queen, and as a martyr to love. As Hamilton points out, Cleopatra had been the subject for earlier, influential writers, whose treatment of her was not necessarily condemnatory. Their attitude toward her was governed by context, the purpose for which their writing was intended. Thus Boccaccio treated her on one occasion as a figure of lust, on another as a symbol of faith and constancy, and Chaucer and Gower saw her as an example of faithfulness in love; Lydgate associated her with the pure Thisbe.⁸

Shakespeare's Cleopatra has not fared well with critics of the past century. Descriptions of her as "spiderlike" and as a "thoroughly unworthy

object" of Antony's love, and references to the "primal Eve in Cleopatra . . . a serpentine evil" reflect their acceptance of the play's Roman view of Cleopatra or their own particular biases, rather than a patient examination of what Shakespeare reveals of her character.⁹ I am not convinced that Shakespeare's Cleopatra fared as badly with audiences in Shakespeare's time. There is, of course, as much danger in attributing to them background knowledge of the historical and political milieu in which the events of the play took place as there is in assuming that they were uninformed upon such matters. But as Brown points out, the idea that in Shakespeare's time the population was illiterate "may well be an exaggeration, since in his plays the servants can read and write."¹⁰ The sources from which Shakespeare drew his material--historical and literary--were also available to and probably well known by many of his contemporaries. The perspective from which they viewed the play depended then largely upon the direction of their interests and their familiarity with the historical events depicted. Certainly interpretations other than the hostile attitudes I have mentioned above can be easily drawn from the play.

Undoubtedly many looked upon Antony and Cleopatra solely or mainly in terms of two famous lovers, and found the conflict of the play--as do many critics today--to lie in what they saw as Antony's dilemma of choice between two strongly demanding and opposing ways of life: that represented by honour and duty and that represented by pleasure, his submission to his love for Cleopatra and repudiation of world and empire. Certainly there is support for such a view in the play's references to Hercules and Aeneas, two other great figures faced with a similar choice, and in the association of Mars

with Antony and Venus with the Cleopatra of Enobarbus' description. Nor would the political and social implications of the events in the play pass without notice in a society deeply concerned with order. The conflict between Antony and Octavius was then a specific example of the dangers inherent in the disorder, widespread and debilitating, that affected Rome, a development more or less inevitable in a society demoralized by the assassination of the head of state and the subsequent struggle for power between two opposing factions; a state weakened by the lack of a strong, unified command and divided against itself as Roman turns upon Roman--"flush youth," Fulvia, Lucius, Pompey, and Menas. From this perspective, Octavius' desire for peace and unity and his victory over Antony represented an apparent resolution of many of Rome's difficulties. Either view, or even both together, severely limit our view of Cleopatra, in that they relegate her to the role of catalyst, central to Antony's repudiation of Rome, but peripheral to, even isolated from the political events that involved her so disastrously.

As I have mentioned, modern critics have, for the most part, adopted a negative view of Cleopatra. G. Wilson Knight speaks of Alexandria as a "paradise of feast, fun, and love . . . [which] calls Antony from imperial turbulence, would have him relinquish the childish all-too-serious quarrels of Rome and join in the glinting laughter of love." And Cleopatra, "woman-like, cannot admit an Antony's ambitions as all-worthy, would laugh at them" ¹¹ Mills sees her tragedy as a "distinctly different sort from Antony's. It cannot be considered a 'tragic fall,' for there is nothing for her to fall from." ¹² Critics have attributed to her an

acquisitiveness and ambition in pursuit of which, with careless disregard for the consequences--to Antony--she thoughtlessly urges on a pliant Antony. Stempel sees her as finally choosing death because she cannot rule.¹³ I do not believe that such views are an accurate reflection of the character of Shakespeare's Cleopatra or of the power she had over Antony. I do not see her as the precipitating force in Antony's ruin; rather, the evidence of the play is more suggestive of a Cleopatra brought to ruin through Antony's mismanagement and folly.

Just why the Romans, whose own morals in the play are hardly above reproach, should be so successful in persuading critics to their view of Cleopatra as the depraved and malign influence in Antony's life is difficult to determine. As Williamson points out, "The Romans, except for Caesar, are as drunken, divided, and careless as Antony himself";¹⁴ Markels finds a "degradation of Roman values," and agrees with Goddard's view that Octavius "is as quick to give up his sister for an empire as man ever was to give an empire for a whore."¹⁵ Yet for confirmation of their acceptance of the Romans' evaluation of Cleopatra, critics take refuge in Plutarch, referring most frequently to this particular passage:

Antonius being thus inclined, the last and extremest mischief of all other (to wit, the love of Cleopatra) lighted on him, who did waken and stir up many vices yet hidden in him, and never seen by any; and if any spark of goodness or hope of rising were left him, Cleopatra quenched it straight and made it worse than before.¹⁶

Plutarch's comments follow a detailed account of a past in which Antony had completely discredited himself. His own deeds condemn him: he is corrupt, licentious, oppressive, an irresponsible plunderer. Antony's vices had

worsened with time, and his headlong rush to ruin, irreversible and inevitable, needed no assistance from Cleopatra. Plutarch's "if" is speculative, attributing to Cleopatra the blame for Antony's failure to reform when nothing in his past life had indicated that he held even the slightest inclination towards reform. In the play, Shakespeare has not stressed Antony's disreputable past (and there is no chorus of indignant Egyptians to influence our judgement of him); neither is Cleopatra shown in control of Antony. Still play and source become intermingled, and Plutarch's characterization of Cleopatra, really irrelevant to the play's Cleopatra, is imposed by the critics upon Shakespeare's portrayal. Since many critics seem to feel that Plutarch's narrative carried so much weight in Shakespeare's portrayal of Cleopatra, why, then, do they not give similar weight to what Plutarch reports of Antony's character? Aside from a casual remark that Shakespeare has not referred to Antony's discreditable past, they ignore incidents that could be used--with equal distortion of the play's Antony as occurs when they confuse Plutarch's Cleopatra and Shakespeare's Cleopatra--to suggest the depths to which corruption had carried Antony. Such selectivity about what is or is not relevant in Plutarch's character portrayals suggests preformed ideas searching for reinforcement.

In Antony and Cleopatra the Roman myth of Cleopatra the harlot, suggesting as it does one sexual affair after another, simply will not stand the test of a close textual scrutiny. The question must be, with whom did Cleopatra have these affairs? Certainly not with neighbouring kings. Cleopatra could not afford a relationship of intimacy in which she appeared

either to grant equality or to be weakly submissive, an easy conquest. Rather, her strategy seems to have been one of aloof power, such as that suggested by Alexas' words, "Herod of Jewry dare not look upon you / But when you are well pleas'd" (III.iii.4). Further, Shakespeare's Cleopatra had an innate sense of "decorum," the behaviour becoming to a queen. We can dismiss as ridiculous the least suggestion that Shakespeare's Cleopatra would have demeaned herself by a series of sexual relationships with those she considered her inferiors. Not only would it have lowered her in her own eyes, but politically it would have been bad policy to nurture any suggestion that she was ruled, not by reason, but by weak passion. Shakespeare's play refers to Cleopatra's affairs with Caesar and Pompey, two men of power and prestige whom she admired tremendously--indeed, Plutarch's narrative confines itself to these two affairs. But two affairs--even three if we count Antony--do not constitute promiscuous behaviour, and the evidence of the text will not support the Roman view of Cleopatra's degeneracy. To push the political aspect of the relationship of Shakespeare's Cleopatra and Antony into the narrow confines defined by her desire to hold Antony to her merely for self-gratification--sex and vanity--is to accept an unrealistic view of Egypt as an island of "feast and fun" in the world Shakespeare depicted as savagely political and ruthlessly aggressive. Cleopatra's life, both as a woman and as a sovereign, was intimately and tragically touched by the political events of the play, and it is her struggle to deal with these forces that we witness in Shakespeare's play.

Cleopatra with Antony--before he goes

The play opens upon a relationship in which, Philo and Demetrius claim, Cleopatra has the ascendancy and Antony is "the bellows and the fan / To cool a gipsy's lust" (I.i.9). These two observers, of whom and from whom we hear nothing more during the play, have exerted an insidious and disproportionate influence upon critics' evaluations of Cleopatra's character. Even Antony's and Cleopatra's entrance onto the stage, "Cleopatra . . . with Eunuchs fanning her," critics have construed as symbolic, not of a different climate and culture, but of the impotence of Antony, a "strumpet's fool" (I.i.13).¹⁷ In Philo and Demetrius' charges against Cleopatra, critics find support for what is, in the play, Antony's and the Romans' creation, the myth of Cleopatra the harlot, the carelessly destructive force in Antony's life. The evidence of the play is to the contrary; Cleopatra's position has become complicated by the intrusion of the personal onto the political. She is insecure and fearful: uncertain of Antony's love, jealously mistrustful of Rome, of Octavius, and of Fulvia. She seeks reassurances of his love for her: "If it be love indeed, tell me how much" (I.i.14), but must content herself with a response, "There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd" (I.i.15), in which she recognizes, by its evasive generalization, the shallowness of his commitment to her. She recognizes too the casual, negligent attitude he brings to the affairs of state: despite her repeated urgings that he "Hear the ambassadors" (I.i.19, 27, 29, 32, 48) and her taunts of cowardice, she is powerless to move the stubborn Antony. Indeed Antony transforms that neglect into a proud disdain for the empire and the world which count as nothing:

The nobleness of life
 Is to do thus [embracing]--when such a mutual pair
 And such a twain can do't, in which I bind,
 On pain of punishment, the world to weet
 We stand up peerless. (I.i.36-40)

This is, in Cleopatra's view, unrealistic yet irrefutable, beyond a reminder that at one time Fulvia too must have drawn from him these same responses:

Excellent falsehood!
 Why did he marry Fulvia, and not love her?
 I'll seem the fool I am not. Antony
 Will be himself. (I.i.40-3)

To believe all this or to count on the constancy of his emotion would be folly; there is no changing the changeable Antony.

If this brief view of their relationship does not establish the fact that Cleopatra does not control Antony, certainly it must create doubts about her power to influence him. Even the night of pleasure, previously denied her (I.i.52-5), cannot be viewed as a victory for Cleopatra since it seems to be offered as much to appease her and to quiet her penetrating remarks as for the enjoyment Antony will derive from her company. Yet critics have taken quite different views of what has happened here: Payne finds that, like Juliet, Cleopatra has been her lover's tutor, and she "playfully has him recite what he has learned" and "prompted by Cleopatra Antony bursts out with his own condemnation of Rome [Let Rome in Tiber melt]." ¹⁸ Champion says that "She tauntingly persuades Antony to refuse a message from Rome as a token of his doting affection." ¹⁹ Markels claims that Cleopatra "uses all her wiles to intensify Antony's awareness of the conflict [between his private life with Cleopatra and his public commitments to Rome] and to make him choose her. She taunts him endlessly for all his Roman ties of loyalty and duty." ²⁰ Simmons' view more accurately reflects what happens:

From the general Roman point of view, the conflict is between honor and lust. With Antony's profession of contemptus mundi, the view begins to dissolve into a conflict between worldly power and eternal love But when Cleopatra in no way responds to Antony's appeal, his assertion becomes folly Cleopatra sees that Antony is not himself when he dismisses all concern for worldly kingdoms: in her wrangling she exhibits her awareness that Antony must maintain his honor as a soldier for them to "stand up peerless."²¹

But Simmons also finds that Cleopatra provokes Antony to make "an unsatisfying and temporary choice"--to return to Rome--a choice that places her desire to have him with her at odds with her desire to have him take his place in the soldier's world.²²

I do not see the "farewell scene" (I.iii) revealing such a conflict within Cleopatra. It is indeed a most disturbing farewell, one that begins to go awry the moment Antony makes his appearance before her; his demeanour, conveying to her what his words of regret express: "I am sorry to give breathing to my purpose--" (I.iii.14), arouses immediately her closest fears: that Antony will betray her love. For it is her belief that Antony intends to return to Fulvia--and not a belief that Antony intends to go to war or to attend to his administrative responsibilities--that provokes her quarrelsome and emotional outburst. Her jealousy and reproaches reflect her awareness that Antony has made no commitment to her: his emotions are facile and shallow. As her sarcastic references to Fulvia, "the married woman," suggest, part of her insecurity seems to stem from the fact that no formal bond unites them; this, despite the fact that she acknowledges that, even with the marriage contract, Fulvia has been as insecure in Antony's affections and loyalty as she herself is now. Her response to Fulvia's death is not, as some critics insist, to turn it to her own use:

Cleopatra is appalled that the woman who loved Antony and whom he must once have loved, Antony holds as not worth even a tear. Riemer finds that "Cleopatra's mock despair soon modulates into a real and deeply felt anguish as she realizes that her lover is determined to leave, and that his wife's death affects him exactly as an absence from her will."²³ But it is not my impression that Cleopatra is ever in "mock despair," for there is nothing of pretense in the weaknesses she reveals to him, weaknesses which, since Antony does not return her emotion with an equal intensity, can only place her at a disadvantage and reenforce his power over her. His words, "Quarrel no more, but be prepar'd to know / The purposes I bear; which are, or cease, / As you shall give the advice" (I.iii.66-8), either are patently insincere since they attribute to Cleopatra a control over his affairs which she clearly does not have and which he is not prepared to give (mobilization is already underway) or are his acknowledgement that he has every confidence that she approves and supports his time spent upon the business of state. Her love for him, tender, sincere, and deep, is evident in her very inability to express it easily:

Courteous lord, one word:
 Sir, you and I must part, but that's not it;
 Sir, you and I have lov'd, but there's not it;
 That you know well. Something it is I would--
 O, my oblivion is a very Antony,
 And I am all forgotten. (I.iii.86-91)

In Antony's response there is no trace of humility, no echo of proud happiness, no indication that he is touched by her love or pleased that the love he professes for her is returned; there is only biting sarcasm:

But that your royalty
 Holds idleness your subject, I should take you
 For idleness itself. (I.iii.91-3)

His departure, abrupt and cold, can only leave her with a feeling that he takes with him memories, not of a happiness shared, but of a quarrel that was quite unnecessary.

As critics have observed, in her quarrelling Cleopatra bears at times a strong resemblance to the "shrill-tongu'd" Fulvia. Rather than looking on these two women as the source of much of Antony's discomfiture, perhaps it is more to the point to determine what there is in Antony's character that elicits such strikingly similar behaviour, and what there is about him that fascinates them so. Presumably to have back a man who has deserted her and who is living with another woman, Fulvia waged war, apparently her final, desperate--and futile--attempt to demonstrate her love and to lure the unresponsive Antony from Egypt. And surely Cleopatra's shrill tongue could not have charmed Antony at Cydnus; whatever her motive there, Antony has not been an unwilling or captive participant in their relationship, as her words to him make clear: "When you sued staying" (I.iii.33). But in Antony's company, Cleopatra seems to have changed into a nagging scold. A queen, and reputedly a woman whose charms many men find desirable and pleasing, Cleopatra stoops to ploys, none of which the play demonstrates to be in the least effective, to attract, interest, and gain the attentions of the elusive Antony. Critics have responded to Cleopatra's shifts of mood as if they were events of major importance to Antony and as if, as a consequence, his life with her was one harassing crisis after another.

See where he is, who's with him, what he does.
 I did not send you. If you find him sad,
 Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report
 That I am sudden sick. (I.iii.2-5)

This is material for exasperation or amusement, certainly nothing to upset or disturb any man, but in any event, a ruse that would be successful no more than once or twice. It is folly on our part to attach to such incidents more importance than they held for the characters involved. Perhaps, in some odd way, all this manoeuvring offered Antony reassurances of her love, of her need for his company, of her inability to command him. Cleopatra has not yet come to terms with the reality of Antony. She challenges him, defies him, and speaks her mind to him. Like Fulvia, she has not resigned herself to the fact that Antony cannot be moved either to business or to pleasure unless the impetus to act originates with him. Both women seem to find him infuriatingly frustrating, yet both are constant in their love and admiration for him.

Antony's warrior skills seem to be a great part of the fascination he holds for Cleopatra. She has tremendous admiration and respect for his military expertise, speaks of him as "the greatest soldier of the world" (I.iii.38), and as a "Mars" (II.v.117). We cannot avoid associating her with Desdemona, of whom Othello said, "she wish'd / That heaven had made her such a man" and "She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd" (O I.iii.163, 167). Certainly Cleopatra's words, "I would I had thy inches, thou shouldst know / There was a heart in Egypt" (I.iii.40) and "I wore his sword Phillipian" (II.v.23) carry sexual connotations, but even more, I believe they express a desire within Cleopatra for the freedom, power, and strength she associates with the male role. For in both the political and personal aspects of her life, Cleopatra seems to have become dependent upon Antony; her faith in and reliance upon his military abilities are suggested

by her words: "That Herod's head / I'll have: but how, when Antony is gone, / Through whom I might command it?" (III.iii.4-6); and her loving commitment and surrender to him seem obvious, for as Traci points out: "She has already told us that her whole well-being depends upon Antony: 'I am quickly ill, and well, / So Antony loves' (I.iii.72-3)."²⁴

After Antony leaves for Rome, Cleopatra is lost and restless, her thoughts constantly upon him, as he had been, as he might be now; she remembers pleasures they have shared, is certain that he, too, must be remembering them and thinking of her. Her need and desire for him are obvious: she wishes to "sleep out this great gap of time / My Antony is away" (I.v.5); she teases herself with sexual imagery, "O happy horse to bear the weight of Antony!" (I.v.21), yet Shakespeare depicted no comforting lovers solacing her in her lonely hours of separation from Antony. There are none of the "hotter hours / Unregister'd in vulgar fame, you have / Luxuriously pick'd out" (III.xiii.118-20) of which Antony will later accuse her. Cleopatra's lust is an accepted fact among critics who support their convictions by referring to Enobarbus' "riggish" Cleopatra (II.ii.240), to Octavius' "whore" (III.vi.67), to Antony's bitter condemnation of her: "triple-turn'd whore!" (IV.xii.13), and to her own "O happy horse . . ." (I.v.21). But Enobarbus' views of women are strictly utilitarian: they are robes to be worn and discarded (I.ii.162-8), and for all his praise of Cleopatra she is, in his vulgar terms, an "Egyptian dish" (II.vi.123); Antony, jealously possessive, accuses her of behaviour which, as his faithlessness suggests, may more accurately describe his own moral standards. Critics rarely question these Roman evaluations of Cleopatra; she has been

prejudged. For example, both the lovely Juliet (R J IV.ii.1-20) and the pure Desdemona (O I.iii.248-50) express the same longings for consummation of their love (Juliet in the privacy of her room, Desdemona before the senate) as does Cleopatra, yet neither is accused of lust. Indeed, how public were Cleopatra's words, "O happy horse . . ." ? We must seriously question to what extent her royal presence acknowledges as entities outside herself her eunuch and her ladies who are with her almost constantly. The fact seems to be that Cleopatra remains true to Antony; a woman who is so open about her affairs with Caesar and Pompey can hardly be said to be concealing other affairs through a sense of maidenly modesty and reticence about such matters. If she were as morally depraved as the Romans insist, Antony's absence would not be the source of so much frustrated desire, such tormented longings for him. But it is all Antony, her love for him central to her every thought.

In her memories of him after his departure for Rome, she reveals a character quite different from the Cleopatra we have witnessed so far: this was a joyous, fun-filled Cleopatra who tolerated his drinking escapades with Enobarbus (II.ii.177-8), at times joined him in his sport, even outdrank him (II.v.21); a Cleopatra whose sense of humour could turn Antony's fishing "success" back upon him (II.v.17-8) and, quite a feat with the humourless, impatient, and self-pleasing Antony: "O times! / I laugh'd him out of patience; and that night / I laugh'd him into patience" (II.v.18-20); a Cleopatra who could "Hop forty paces through a public street" (II.ii.229). It was Cleopatra, it seems, who gave a zest and sparkle to their personal lives. And this is the point: Cleopatra's light-hearted behaviour in her

private life should not be mistaken for her attitude towards her sovereign role. L.J. Mills complains: "During Antony's absence Cleopatra's behaviour is self-characterizing. She evinces no interest in the business he is engaged in; she is concerned as to what he may be thinking of her"25

In spite of daily messengers Cleopatra sends out, we are aware only of Alexas from Antony and a messenger from Italy--presumably her own--ever actually bringing her news of Antony, and these she examines quite closely in her concern for the man who is, after all, her business of state as well as the centre of her personal life. There is a dreadful irony in observing her eagerness for news of him, her happiness that all was well with him (I.v.54-61), and knowing that even as the pearl and his felicitations reach her (I.v.40-7) Antony prepares to deny her and desert her for Octavia (II.ii.123-4). Unless we recognize the depth and intensity of her love for him, and unless we understand that Cleopatra sees Antony as the fortress that secures her nation, we cannot appreciate fully the sense of betrayal and anguish she feels when she hears that Antony has married Octavia. Both as a woman and as a sovereign Cleopatra needs and wants Antony. This is the "knot intricate," the tragic intertwining of her public and personal lives that deprives Cleopatra of any freedom of choice. For while she seems to react to the news of Antony's marriage more strongly on the personal level, the inexorable and bitter fact that must bear upon her with equal heaviness is the loss to her state of the support she needs to maintain it. Her "Do not speak to me" (II.v.120) conveys her feelings of inconsolable loss; her grief cannot be soothed or distracted by any comforting word. Nothing can explain away what has happened to her or restore her

former happiness. Her loving commitment to Antony has been scorned and discarded, and his vows, as she had claimed, "break themselves in the swearing!" (I.iii.31). Her savage attack on the hapless messenger, not comic but pathetic, reveals the extent to which her frustration and despair, her feelings of helplessness in the face of this betrayal, control her. And far from affording her relief, it shames her because it is behaviour unbecoming to a queen:

These hands do lack nobility that they strike
 A meaner than myself, since I myself
 Have given myself the cause (II.vi.82-4)

Whatever balm she extracts from the re-shaping of Octavia's character and appearance is meager substance indeed to soothe her fears and lift her hopes that another political plan has not miscarried.

Cleopatra with Antony--when he returns

To Cleopatra, Antony's marriage represents a political and personal loss, not because he reaffirms his Roman ties and allies himself even more strongly with Octavius--these ties have always been there--but because Antony has signalled to the world his break with Cleopatra; her political position is thereby weakened. On the personal level it is a devastating blow to her concept of self, a betrayal of her love. She has been humiliated before the world, a queen abandoned and repudiated, judged and found wanting: the kind of woman with whom a man takes his pleasure but, not being above reproach, the woman he rejects when he chooses a wife. It is an insult that Cleopatra cannot dismiss lightly; it scars her deeply and

instills in her a sense of unworthiness (as we see later in her death scene) that colours all her future dealings with him.

Yet she accepts him back. Her initial response to the news of Antony's marriage indicates the nature of her conflict:

Let him forever go, let him not--Charmian,
Though he be painted one way like a Gorgon,
The other way's a Mars. (II.v.116-8)

Her personal feelings are divided: torn between her love for him and the sense of hurt and shame she feels his monstrous betrayal has imposed upon her. But her sovereign need for the "Mars-like" Antony alters the balance. However much she may wish to repudiate him, the queen in her recognizes the truth: she cannot. Cleopatra is a politically astute woman, quite capable of analyzing her position and reconciling herself to the reality. First, her need for Antony still exists: the conditions that first motivated her to want him for Egypt are unchanged. Although she has already experienced his irresponsibility, his shallowness, and his indifference to any but his own desires, she knows that she has no one else to whom she can turn. Furthermore, and this is the most important point, Cleopatra has no choice but to accept his return. I agree with Lloyd: "Shakespeare shows the sequence of events leading to his return to depend not on passion but on policy."²⁶ If Antony wants Egypt as his headquarters, what power has Cleopatra to refuse him? She is Queen of Egypt by Rome's sufferance, not because Egypt is her birthright. A Roman enthroned her, a Roman can depose her. To oppose him will be to lose all. Politically, both Antony's needs (his separation from Octavius) and Cleopatra's needs (national security) can be served by his presence in Egypt. But the vulnerability of Cleopatra's

position must be recognized: at Cydnus she made a fatal choice, the only choice she could have made, but by it she has lost whatever power she might once have enjoyed; control of Egyptian affairs has passed to Antony, a man who, unable to rule himself, is a poor choice to rule a nation. Further, Antony brings with him a dangerously explosive situation in that he repudiates the empire, Octavius, and Octavia, and exacerbates that situation by the extravagant "crowning scene" publicly and provocatively staged in open defiance of a Rome that takes exception to kings. What appears to be the fulfillment of his promise to Cleopatra, "I will piece / Her opulent throne with kingdoms" (I.v.45-6), may be seen as something quite different when viewed with Antony's words in mind: "I'll raise the preparation of a war / Shall stain your brother" (III.iv.26-7). Now, the addition of conquered nations that are, even if Cleopatra is nominally their queen, subject to Antony's, not Rome's, will, and the ingathering of supporters that are Antony's men, all focus attention on Egypt as the centre for a dissident group that threatens to fragment the empire and poses a threat to the power of Rome--and Octavius. It is unrealistic to suppose that in the midst of all these political activities that involve her so intimately, Cleopatra merely concentrates upon her love affair with Antony or, conversely, that she manipulates his every act, unmindful of the fact that she and her state are being whirled headlong into a confrontation between the two giants of power. The experience common to everyone who relates to Antony on the personal or political level--Fulvia, Octavius, Octavia, and Cleopatra herself--is an Antony resistant to any commitment or agreement that does not originate with him or does not reflect his own inclinations, and Actium

will demonstrate this characteristic even more vividly and strongly on the military level. I am unable to credit Cleopatra as either the motivating force behind or the inspiration for all this political manoeuvring. Nor can I believe that Antony's contempt for Octavius effects a state of euphoria or complacent blindness in a Cleopatra who has learned by experience that nothing in life is secure and that all plans are subject to the unexpected.

What is most noticeable about the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra after his return to Egypt is the subtle change in Cleopatra's personality. He is back, but on his own terms. Just as politically she has no choice, Cleopatra is realist enough to understand that either she will reconcile herself to what is and try to influence affairs for the good of Egypt, or she will stand on injured pride, forfeit all, and leave Egypt completely to Antony's care. It has clearly been a time of soul-searching and resignation to the truth of her own words: "Antony / Will be himself" (I.i.42). The aggressive Fulvia had loved him, quarrelled with him, lost him; the meek Octavia, dutifully loving and obedient, could not hold him. Cleopatra loves him; in the past she defied and challenged him-- and lost him. He is back but she knows that she can easily lose him again; for Antony, it seems, removes himself from the presence of whatever appears to threaten him or fails to reflect his own intense self-esteem. With his return, the dynamic Cleopatra disappears; in her stead we have a Cleopatra who "In each thing give[s] him way, cross[es] him in nothing" (I.iii.9). To be worthy of Antony, Cleopatra tries to be everything she thinks he most admired in the other two women.

The Actium fiasco makes this point very well: there we find not Cleopatra, but a Cleopatra-Fulvia-Octavia. Her response to Enobarbus: "I will be even with thee, doubt it not" (III.vii.1) is the threat of the impotent. And however valid his objections to her presence in the battle, he is a "soldier only" who insolently takes a queen to task (III.vii.6-9); however defiant Cleopatra's "Sink Rome . . . I will not stay behind" (III.vii.15-9), she is a queen who stoops to explain her behaviour to him. She makes one biting comment upon Antony's slack preparations for the battle: "Celerity is never more admir'd / Than by the negligent" (III.vii.24) and then subsides. To equal or outdo Fulvia she will go into battle; this is a repudiation of her past acknowledgement, by means of her alliances, that she is not a warrior queen; it is a dangerous transference into actual practice of what, until now, has been a relatively harmless acting out of the male role. Like Octavia, she yields to his authority, echoes his decision to fight by sea, "By sea, what else?" (III.vii.28), is silent on his makeshift strategy by which a possible sea defeat will be offset by an easy land victory; she is, apparently, blind to the dangers inherent in a divided command. We can hardly fault her; Antony's male advisers, unable to influence him, also yield to his wishes.

Following Actium she weeps, begs his forgiveness, "Forgive my fearful sails! I little thought / You would have followed" (III.xi.55-6), accepts his censure and his transference to her of all responsibility for the loss they have suffered. Gone is the fiery Cleopatra who would have sharply reminded him that in his acceptance of Octavius' challenge to fight by sea he had lost through his own folly, and who would have rejected outright the

myth, "Thy beck might from the bidding of the gods / Command me" (III.xi.60), with which he deceives himself, assuages his guilty conscience and soothes his hurt pride.

We can understand the anger of Antony's followers: "You ribaudred nag of Egypt,-- / Whom leprosy o'ertake!" (III.x.10), but not Antony's accusation: "O, whither hast thou led me, Egypt?" (III.xi.51). Cleopatra has been betrayed by her fears, Antony by his impulsive and thoughtless act in following her. Although I am not sure Cleopatra herself does not see this as her failure to live up to Antony's expectations, surely we are stretching the point to see this as Cleopatra's betrayal of Antony. Barroll comments upon Antony's remarks about Fulvia's "spirit," her "shrewdness of policy," and her "garboils":

It is clear from such remarks, and especially in contrast with Anthony's [sic] attitude towards the meek Octavia, that he admires Fulvia for her aggressive qualities, for even a kind of martial intrepidity of the type that he respects in himself.²⁷

If Cleopatra's purpose at Actium was to gain for herself a like approval from Antony, she has failed miserably. MacCallum makes the point that "it is quite natural that Cleopatra, a queen and daughter of kings, should, in a presumptuous mood, insist on being present . . . on leading her own sixty ships . . . no less natural that amid the actual horrors of war . . . [she] should be seized with panic and take flight."²⁸ And although Enobarbus speaks of Antony as being "the mered question" (III.xiii.10), it is by no means clear that Cleopatra does not see herself as the focus of Octavius' wrath: "A charge we bear i' the war, / And as the president of my kingdom will / Appear there for a man" (III.vii.16-8). L.J. Mills' comments upon

what has happened at Actium are no less caustic and condemnatory for being posed as questions:

Is her leaving the battle at the critical point a test of Antony, to see whether the political leader or the lover is stronger in him? Does she fear that military success and political mastery would be a dangerous rival to her charms?²⁹

And Schwartz observes: "But that is a momentary lie [that she did not think Antony would follow her]. She wanted him to follow, perhaps without being fully aware of it. It is her way of keeping him from the world's great snare."³⁰ Both Mills and Schwartz seem to find a Cleopatra who is not only vain and selfish, but incredibly stupid as well. Are we seriously to believe that Cleopatra has some idiotic view of a war and a world that will simply disappear if only she can have Antony turn his back upon both? that Octavius and his forces will quietly return home if only Antony does not fight? or that she is unaware of what is at stake here--her own kingdom as well as Antony's power and prestige? Even if we ignore the queen in Cleopatra and concentrate upon the woman, there is no textual evidence to justify an assumption that she would have him renounce everything she most admires in him: "the greatest soldier of the world" (I.iii.38). Nor can I find support for Stampfer's view: "Without her, he would rule Rome; because of her, he will soon die."³¹

The Thidias incident (which I shall discuss later in more detail) is another example of a scene in which critics justify or excuse Antony's abuse of her by turning to his advantageous circumstantial evidence that is, at best, only marginally against her.³² Cleopatra is in no position to refuse admittance to this arrogant messenger or to treat him with the

contempt he deserves: he is an extension of Octavius from whom she wants "the circle of Ptolemies for her heirs" (III.xii.18). But Antony, insensitive to all but his own loss, his own desires, adds abuse to the insult she has already endured from the sleazy Thidias, by venting upon her all his pent-up anger and frustration. Emotionally and spiritually, Cleopatra is subjected to the whipping that is administered physically to Thidias. That Antony is distraught does not mean that he does not believe exactly what he says; indeed his abuse confirms all that his betrayal of her in Rome has already communicated to her as his opinion of her: she is a "boggler" and a "morsel, cold upon / Dead Caesar's trencher: nay, you were a fragment / Of Gnaeus Pompey's . . ." (III.xiii.110, 116-8).³³ Cleopatra submits quietly; there are no reproaches, no recriminations, no resort to crude and vulgar language in an attempt to wound him even as he wounds her. Riemer finds that she "casts aside any suggestion of her guilt with an extravagant oath . . ." (III.xiii.159-67). Her rhetoric has the desired effect on Antony, and once more he capitulates . . ."³⁴ Harley Granville-Barker asks: "Can we detect, though, a new contempt for Antony as she watches him, his fury glutted by the torment of the wretched envoy? She might respect him more had he flogged her! Is there . . . in her wealth of protests, something of the glib falsity of sated ardor?"³⁴ But Cleopatra has been flogged, and more savagely than by the physical "torment" poured upon Thidias: Antony's words have conveyed to her his feelings of contempt, his conviction of her unworthiness--which she had already accepted, despite all she knows of Antony's unfitness to pass such a judgement of her. G. Wilson Knight finds that "She is another Delilah to his Samson, man again is betrayed by woman's

cheating lure."³⁵ Traci's view is quite the opposite: "by this point in the play Antony is foolish not to know her better . . . than to think she would bow to Octavius, especially through 'one that ties his points' (1.157)."³⁶ Cantor finds that Cleopatra "has the opportunity of betraying him in order to win the favor of Octavius (III.xiii.), and her politic handling of the situation calls forth from Antony a jealous rage that exactly parallels hers [in the messenger scene] . . . the trouble with deeds is that they are ambiguous . . . open to being misinterpreted."³⁷ *

Cleopatra accepts defeat quietly; there are none of Antony's bitter outbursts of regret and anger. Perhaps this is what encourages critics to forget all that she has lost: her crown and her kingdom. Antony, in his concentration upon his own losses, offers neither comfort nor love. Yet she remains loyal and supportive; indeed, she is lovingly protective, cautioning Enobarbus to silence, "Prithee, peace," lest Antony overhear Enobarbus' outspoken condemnation of Antony's behaviour at Actium--although Enobarbus' judgement of where the fault for Actium lies exonerates her (III.xiii.3-12). Cleopatra has not been blind to Antony's faults; she loves him in spite of them. She has implicit faith in his warrior qualities, in his ability to conduct a war; in this she errs. Whatever she knows of his weaknesses pales to insignificance as she watches him in defeat; he does not bear it nobly. Even more degrading is the spectacle of Antony stooping to his serving men; for the sake of "one other gaudy night" (III.xii.183) he pleads for "two hours" of their service. It is a break with "decorum" that offends her royalty: "What means this?" and "What does he mean?" can only call into question Antony's behaviour, since his words can leave no doubt as to their

meaning. But as MacCallum points out, Cleopatra "clings to him, encourages him, arms him, is proud of him."³⁸ Occasionally the old, analytic Cleopatra surfaces: "Celerity is never more admir'd than by the negligent" and "that he and Caesar might / Determine this great war in a single fight! / Then Antony--; but now-- Well, on" (IV.iv.36-8), but her misgivings are never communicated to Antony. While there seems to be within her an inner strength that sustains her through Antony's mistrust and her defeat, she is also weak, submissive, and insecure. She seeks comfort from Enobarbus: "Is Antony, or we in fault for this?" (III.xiii.3); and fearful of the raging-mad Antony, turns to one whose advice she had previously scorned (I.iii) and obeys Charmian's "To the monument, / There lock yourself and send him word you are dead" (IV.xiii.3-4). From the time of Antony's return to her, Cleopatra seems to lose all power to resist, and control of her life passes to others while she meekly follows their lead.

Of Cleopatra we could say that she has been "more believing than belov'd" (I.ii.22). There can be no doubt of the desolation she feels at Antony's death: "Oh, Antony, / Antony, Antony!" (IV.xv.12). As I have pointed out, it is only through Cleopatra that Antony's death receives the royal touch; she is his final solace, confirming all that he believes of his past glory and his present valour. To Cleopatra, Antony is fit cohort for the gods. This is the image of Antony that she cherishes, now and later in speaking of him to Dollabella (V.ii.82-92). Never does Cleopatra reduce that image to the reality of Antony, the mean, small man that Shakespeare depicted. She loves her Antony; that he is, for the most part, an illusion she only obliquely admits: "Think you there was, or might be such a man /

As this I dreamt of?" (V.ii.93). Cleopatra's Antony was magnificent. Shakespeare's Antony reduced all men to his own dimensions; Cleopatra elevates him to hers.

Cleopatra with Octavius: a Preface

Critics have experienced difficulties with Act V of Antony and Cleopatra. Many have found the act an anomaly, superfluous, a final grand spectacle Shakespeare could not resist presenting. The more specific problems associated with the act are Cleopatra's death and the delay that preceded her death. Part of the problem lies in the fact that opinion has been so sharply divided about the play itself: is this tragedy? For those who answer that it is, there has never been the least doubt that it is the tragedy of Antony. The question then is: how tragic were the consequences of Antony's fall? His nobility is unquestionable only if we restrict the meaning of nobility to "one of high rank," but the unalterable fact is that Antony's was not a character of excellence corrupted and destroyed by his passion for Cleopatra. Antony's character was such that he must inevitably self-destruct, and Cleopatra was not the determining factor in that ruin. Shakespeare depicted an Antony who took his own measure when he insisted that he had lost to a "boy." The tragedy of Antony was not that he fell, but that he ever rose to so high a position that he could play "with the world as [he] pleas'd" (III.xi.64). His death released the Empire from a series of bitter struggles for power that had, after the assassination of Caesar, so divided it against itself, and signalled the restoration of order and unity. It is impossible, then, to feel that to either the world or the

Empire his death represented a tragic loss. But it is an inescapable fact that Antony mattered very much to Cleopatra: through arrogance and bungling, he brought her to ruin; his death, in and of itself not a loss of great significance, achieves tragic stature only in and through Cleopatra, for by it she was precipitated into Octavius' power. The point I wish to emphasize is that the tragedy is Cleopatra's, and Act V is neither an anomaly nor superfluous unless the Roman myth of Cleopatra has been confused with Shakespeare's reality. There is nothing in the Cleopatra of Act V that is directly opposed to the Cleopatra Shakespeare depicted at the beginning of the play. Freed from Antony's dominance, the efficient Cleopatra we had first known emerged to salvage what she could from the ruins of Antony's mismanagement. Cleopatra's kingdom, all she had, including her children, her right to govern and to designate a successor, passed to Octavius. To fault her for sins of omission--for example, for giving no thought to her children--either ones of which she was not guilty or ones over which she had no control, is unjust; to fault her for not following Antony immediately in death is to misunderstand her completely: she was queen first, woman second.

It is the concentration upon Cleopatra the woman that is so misleading, so much a barrier to our understanding of Shakespeare's Cleopatra the sovereign. Antony is dead; to dwell upon this personal loss when the affairs of state--the fate of Egypt and of her children--press so urgently upon her, would be self-indulgent negligence. Yet critics propose explanations for her death that deny both her sense of duty to her office and her attempt to discharge her responsibilities faithfully. Nevo, who claims that

Cleopatra "caused everything," sees her death as a means "to vindicate the passion that ruined the triple pillar of the world," and finds it a "self-created spectacle" and "an apotheosis of sensuality."³⁹ Traversi finds that their life together, however discreditable, has become exalted in her memory, and Cleopatra's "decisions are directed to the assertion of that 'nobility' which is her only remaining refuge from the awareness of total ruin."⁴⁰ Both Bradley and MacCallum conclude that she is driven to death by thoughts of the triumph.⁴¹ Champion is but one of many critics who sense Antony's spirit pervading the final act, supporting and inspiring Cleopatra so that she will face death with "both courage and dignity."⁴² These explanations--and this is not to deny the tremendous influence that dread of the triumph exercised upon Cleopatra's thoughts--oversimplify or misrepresent what happens in Act. V.

Cleopatra with Octavius

With Antony's death, all is finished; the defeat is total and irreversible. Cleopatra's response to Antony's death, "shall I abide / In this dull world, which in thy absence is / No better than a sty?" (IV.xv.60-2), expresses both her feeling of deep loss and the intensity of her love for him. Then if her death were, as some critics insist, motivated entirely by her love for him and by her desire to be reunited with him, surely such motives will never carry a greater impetus to act than when she is most receptive to them: during her few moments of weak submission to her grief. But she does not choose to act. Indeed, in these moments she has been

No more but e'en a woman, and commanded
 By such poor passion as the maid that milks
 And does the meanest chares. (IV.xv.72-5)

This is behaviour unbecoming to a queen, and she reminds herself of what would have been more appropriate: "it were for me / To throw my sceptre at the injurious gods" (IV.xv.75-6). Cleopatra's impatience with and her contempt for her emotional weakness are evident in her immediate assertion of her strength and her royalty, her unwillingness to submit meekly even to the will of the gods. I can find no support, either in this or in anything else that follows, for Goddard's claim that Cleopatra divests herself of her royalty to become the humblest of women.⁴³ Bradley's view: "We should marvel at her less and love her more if she loved him more--loved him well enough to follow him at once to death . . . ," carries a punitive undertone towards this woman he sees as Antony's destroyer.⁴⁴ For surely Cleopatra's behaviour towards Antony has left her under no guilty compulsion to prove by death the love she has already demonstrated to the living Antony: both Hamilton and MacCallum comment upon her tenderness to Antony, her strength, and her love for and loyalty to him.⁴⁵ Rose speaks of Cleopatra's emotional view of the purpose of power as something that lends grandeur to the passions of kings and queens; it ennobles. "The loss of Antony strips her of this ennobling royalty."⁴⁶ This is a denial of the royalty that is an innate part of Cleopatra, independent of Antony and of power, asserted repeatedly throughout the play, but particularly in this final act after Antony's death. This quality is never more evident than in her re-emergence as the queen, in command of herself, pragmatic in her summary of their situation: "All's but naught" (IV.xv.78), decisive as to how she will resolve it: "we have no

friend / But resolution, and the briefest end" (IV.xv.90-1). What is of significance here is the disappearance of the Cleopatra who, in fear of the raging Antony, meekly obeyed Charmian's "To the monument," and who, while there, sought comfort:

Cleopatra: O Charmian, I will never go from hence.
 Charmian: Be comforted, dear madam. (IV.xv.1-2)

Now it is she who is the source of strength, she who offers solace: "Good sirs, take heart" (IV.xv.85).

Her long struggle to maintain her state has come to a close: "Our lamp is spent, it's out" (IV.xv.85); control of her life has passed from Antony to Octavius, "no friend" to her or to Egypt. It would be "sottish" to bear patiently whatever he will demand of her; death, "what's brave, what's noble" (IV.xv.86), is her only possible assertion of her nobility; over it, at least, she still has command. Her resolve to die is firm. Why then does she delay? Certainly it is not to follow Antony's advice: "Of Caesar seek your honour, with your safety" (IV.xv.46). Cleopatra has already sampled Octavius' concept of her honour: if, briefly, under the sway of Antony's expansive and misplaced self-confidence, she had forgotten the examples of Pompey and Lepidus, Octavius' demand that she "From Egypt drive her all-disgraced friend, / Or take his life there" (III.xii.22-3) served as a sharp reminder. Each in his turn had identified his interests with Octavius' interests, and each had done Octavius' work for him: Pompey to rid the sea of pirates, Lepidus to help defeat Pompey. Each in his turn had been stripped of all power by Octavius. And Antony, in attending to the Parthian menace, had also served Octavius' interests; now, his usefulness ended, Antony is the one remaining obstacle to Octavius' assumption of supreme

power. Cleopatra could hardly ignore that sequence of events or fail to note that, under the guise of serving her own interests, she is being called upon, in her turn, to service Octavius' interests. Cleopatra is not stupid. Of her Octavius demands the basest behaviour, to her he promises nothing: "This if she perform / She shall not sue unheard" (III.xii.23-4). If there are doubts about Cleopatra's integrity, surely there can be none about her sanity: to drive away or kill Antony, her only hope of reversing her losses, would be the act of a fool.

This is not simply conjecture; a review of her situation at that particular time could lead her to no other conclusion: it is one thing to sue for peace on honourable terms, Antony to live in Egypt or as a private man in Athens (III.xii.11, 15), and for Cleopatra "the circle of the Ptolemies for her heirs" (III.xii.18), quite another to capitulate on the most despicable terms. For one thing, Cleopatra loves Antony; but this personal consideration aside, a review of their political and military position will not convince her that she and Antony are entirely helpless. On the day of his victory, Antony will field troops of sufficient strength and mettle to rout Octavius' forces; even on the day of final defeat, Antony will still have at his command a land army (IV.x.4-6) and, until its desertion, the Egyptian navy. It is certainly doubtful that Cleopatra is aware of the full extent of their diminished strength--as I have said, Antony was conspicuously silent on his failure to "do't at land" and about his precipitate action in dismissing a large number of their supporters. And, while Cleopatra can understand the dangerously destructive consequences of Antony's intense and increasing submission to self-pity and bitterness and of his insistence upon

remembering the past rather than the present, in her view this initial reaction to shameful flight and defeat must surely yield to the greater force of necessity--and indeed it does in time, as Antony's victory demonstrates. Further, Cleopatra, contrary to her own common sense and to Enobarbus' candid opinion that the responsibility for Actium rests with Antony, "Antony only, that would make his will / Lord of his reason" (III.xiii.3-4), has been manoeuvred into accepting blame for what happened there: therefore, her faith in Antony's abilities to conduct a war is not completely shaken; that Antony may have briefly and disastrously abandoned his knowledge and experience does not mean that he has lost those strengths. Finally, Cleopatra knows that in her choice of Antony at Cydnus, and especially in Antony's return to Egypt, she has become identified with him; once the opposing sides were drawn, she as well as Antony became, in the view of the implacable Octavius, the enemy. Octavius does not intend to negotiate terms, he means to impose them; to yield to him would be as much a disservice to herself as it would be to Antony. *

Exactly what she could expect of Octavius was further reinforced by the "cunning" and unctuous Thidias: discourteous to her royal presence, speaking of betrayal of Antony, inquiring "Shall I say to Caesar / What you require of him?" (III.xiii.65-6), and intruding upon her "To give me grace to lay / My duty to your hand" (III.xiii.81). Only the fact that she is in the weakest possible position--defeat--from which to conduct the delicate negotiations she hopes to undertake with Octavius, and her concern not to alienate Octavius by way of his envoy, could possibly restrain Cleopatra's rage and disgust. For Thidias presumes too far; he set himself, not just

as the equal of a queen, but as someone above a queen in that he proceeds to instruct her in ready excuses: she has embraced Antony not "As you did love, but as you fear'd him" and he speaks of the "scars upon your honour" as "constrained blemishes" (III.xiii.57-9), thus clearly making a point of her "fallen state" and implying that betrayal of Antony is nothing more than a simple shift of landlords:

It much would please him,
That of his fortune you should make a staff
To lean upon. But it would warm his spirits
To hear from me you had left Antony,
And put yourself under his shroud,
The universal landlord. (III.xiii.67-72)

It is impossible to avoid a sense of Thidias acting in a double capacity: to serve his own interests sexually if events should so reward him, and at the same time to speak for Octavius as if Octavius sought her as mistress. There is nothing subtle about this "feeder," insolently insulting to her intelligence and to her person, gross in what he suggests of her "easy virtue" and, presumably, reflecting his master's view of Cleopatra: she has been treated, not like a queen, but like a whore. Cleopatra has no illusions about Octavius' intentions to negotiate for her "honour, with [her] safety" or for her retention of power. Yet, having lost the only thing (Antony) in which Octavius has expressed the least interest as a basis for discussion of her suit, she delays her suicide.

Lee finds that "Antony is still a determining force in Cleopatra's every living moment. She creates her own belief in a figure of her own imagination, and, holding to this, gains the strength to face death."⁴⁷ But as Ridley points out, after her "moment of exaltation" Cleopatra seems not to concentrate upon Antony: the triumph, "--not a word of Antony," is

her reason for her attempted suicide; "she pays tribute to Antony" in speaking of him to Dollabella, but makes no further mention of him until she describes to Iras "the degrading circumstances of Caesar's intended triumph" and this is after she has already despatched Charmian to arrange for the asp. ⁴⁸ This is hardly the image of a "determining force" in her life or of a means to her gaining "strength to face death." Her delay cannot be explained in this way. Nor is it, as Ribner suggests, to experience a spiritual regeneration in which she becomes aware of her "lust" and seeks in death an "expiation for her former sin."⁴⁹ Cleopatra never once suggests that she has regrets about her life with Antony; she has not been motivated by "lust" but by love for Antony and by political necessity; she wanted marriage with Antony, not to remove a blot of "sin" but because it would have been his formal acknowledgement, to her and to the world, of his love and respect for her. To Cleopatra Antony represented, in a very real sense, her self-sacrifice for Egypt: to accept back into her life the man who held her up to the scorn and ridicule of every petty ruler who ever aspired to her hand and her state, the man in whose view she was unworthy to be his wife, was a humbling experience in which only her love for Egypt and for Antony could have sustained her. The text offers no support for Ribner's view. Cleopatra's regeneration has been of quite a different kind: a reassertion of her old habits of analysis, decision, and determined action in a difficult situation. And significantly, as she assumes the royal manner of command, even her attitude towards Octavius' emissaries also undergoes a change: there is neither tolerance nor conciliation in the Cleopatra who greets Proculieus. She states her reservations about him,

asserts her royalty, and repeats the request she has already made of Octavius (III.xiii.18):

Antony

Did tell me of you, bade me trust you, but
 I do not greatly care to be deceiv'd
 That have no use for trusting. If your master
 Would have a queen his beggar, you must tell him,
 That majesty, to keep decorum, must
 No less beg than a kingdom: if he please
 To give me conquer'd Egypt for my son,
 He gives me so much of mine own, as I
 Will kneel to him with thanks. (V.ii.12-21)

Her rejection of Antony's advice, "None about Caesar trust but Proculius" (IV.xv.48), seems to be vindicated when, even as Proculius stands before her, protesting Octavius' "princely hand" and his grace that "flows over / On all that need" (V.ii.22-5), and speaking of Octavius' pity, she is taken captive. Her response to this perfidious act is an attempt to take her own life, which prevented, she determines to effect by other means: "I will eat no meat, I'll not drink . . . I'll not sleep neither. This mortal house I'll ruin" (V.ii.49-51). In her passionate appeal to death is another assertion of her royalty:

Where art thou, death?
 Come hither, come; come, come, and take a queen
 Worth many babes and beggars! (V.ii.46-8)

As her thoughts turn to the triumph, she states quite clearly the distinction she draws between debasement of her spirit and her royalty and debasement of her body:

Rather a ditch in Egypt
 Be gentle grave onto me, rather on Nilus' mud
 Lay me stark-nak'd, and let the water-flies
 Blow me into abhorring; rather make
 My country's high pyramides my gibbet,
 And hang me up in chains. (V.ii.57-62)

The triumph represents a vileness beyond the ignominy of death in a ditch, on a gibbet, or that conjured up by the ghastly imagery: "let the water-flies / Blow me into abhorring" (V.ii.59-60).

There is no doubt that thoughts of the triumph are insistently intrusive upon her mind, worsening with each recurrence, assaulting her spirit and nobility with visions of an infamy she knows she cannot summon the fortitude to bear. Certainly they convey to us her sense of desperate urgency and the conflict between her desire to escape such a degradation and her need to speak with Octavius, to "Look him i' the face" (V.ii.32). Battenhouse, who identifies Cleopatra with the Apocalyptic harlot of Revelation 17--she "has been mistress to three kings"--insists that she "ambiguously invite[s] him [Octavius] to 'force' her to be his mistress."⁵⁰ I cannot agree with this view, which is directly opposed to that of Ribner who also imposes Christian values on a Cleopatra who is, Shakespeare makes clear, part of a pagan world and culture. Concentration upon the Roman view of Cleopatra the harlot blurs our vision of Shakespeare's sovereign: it was one thing to submerge self completely in Antony's desires, Antony's needs, if by so doing she could preserve a nation; only her love for Antony made this tolerable. But without Octavius' assurance that the crown will pass to her heirs, it would be quite another matter to become the puppet plaything of the odious Octavius in order to preserve, not a nation, but an existence that could be maintained on the most degrading terms. Then the balance between approval and disapproval, precariously maintained with an Antony who "loved" her, could only become even more uncertain. For Cleopatra the succession is the issue, the reason, the compelling motive

for her delayed suicide. The crown has been lost to her forever, but to have it for her son she will "beg" (III.xii.18), "kneel to" (V.ii.21), and "obey" Octavius (V.ii.31). It is a comment upon Cleopatra's sense of responsibility that she will chance a degradation she fears so greatly in order to attend to what is clearly a matter of state and a concern for her son.

What an enigma Cleopatra, a queen he thought of as a depraved "whore" without scruple or honour, must have been to Octavius who had watched so many strong men yield their "honour" to his cajolery. The blind arrogance of this man has never been more apparent than in his crude, "Which is the Queen of Egypt?" (V.ii.112). In his vulgar eagerness to demean her, he betrays himself utterly, confirms all she has suspected of him, shatters her hopes for the crown, and destroys his own expectations for the triumph. He first impresses upon her the gravity of her offenses: the injuries she has inflicted upon him are "written in our flesh"; then his own forgiving generosity: he will remember them as "things but done by chance," and the nobility of his intentions, "Which towards you are most gentle" (V.ii.117-26). Having established his credentials, he holds out the lure: "you shall find / A benefit in this change" (V.ii.126-7). From what concept of "change" does Octavius trust she will draw hope? a change in political support--a new alliance? is this an oblique suggestion from the self-righteous Octavius that he sees himself as Antony's replacement, as her lover? or is it merely the reflection of Octavius' conviction that the "depraved" Cleopatra will so view it and from it gain a false sense of security? But from the moment of his victory his mind has been fixed upon

the triumph; in this manoeuvring with Cleopatra, then, Octavius is being deliberately and cruelly deceitful. For, as the surfacing of his ruthlessness and vindictiveness indicates, Octavius will remember nothing as "done by chance":

. . . but if you seek
To lay on me a cruelty, by taking
Antony's course, you shall bereave yourself
Of my good purposes, and put your children
To that destruction which I'll guard them from,
If thereon you rely (V.ii.127-32)

His threat to her children, including Caesar's son, hints at his desire to have an excuse to eliminate a potential future threat to his own power--not the choice of the "gentle" Octavius, but the painful necessity that Cleopatra's obstinacy thrust upon him. Critics have deplored Cleopatra's thoughtless disregard for her children, ignoring completely the fact that Cleopatra has control over nothing--except her own body, and that only briefly. But like everything else, her children have passed into the power of Octavius. They are really not negotiable; Octavius' record is one of betrayal of everyone who ever trusted him: even if he stays his hand before the triumph, her suffering and degradation are no guarantee that he will stay it indefinitely--especially if he is moved by fear of or malice towards them. Always they would be a club Octavius could hold over her, and she would be Octavius' means to control them; each would be a constant source of danger to and fearful mistrust of the other. But once she is dead, killing her children would be an act of senseless brutality that could offer Octavius nothing beyond personal satisfaction and the possibility of public opprobrium. I agree with Lloyd:

Her concern for maternity appears as early as the public recognition of her children in the market place to convince Antony of her even greater love for him, she wishes that her children may perish if she does not love him. The demonstration would have no significance were she offering to sacrifice anything less than her dearest. At this point her "brave Egyptians all" are associated with the "memory of my womb", so that the concept of her maternity seems enlarged to include all her subjects, and the concept of queen is merged in that of mother (III. xiii.159-64).⁵¹

Surely Cleopatra could never have submitted to--indeed would not have so urgently desired--this humiliating encounter unless driven by a desperate need to assure the future of her children and of Egypt.

The incident of the treasure she tries to withhold from Octavius--the Seleucus incident--has been variously interpreted. Some critics have viewed this as Cleopatra's attempt to deceive Octavius into believing that she intends to live. Battenhouse, whose views I do not share, asks: by keeping back the tokens to induce Livia and Octavia to mediate on her behalf, "Is she not implying that as Caesar's mistress she would know how to mollify his wife and sister?"⁵² Lloyd's point may be correct: "She will conceal her treasure for them [her children]; or so we presume."⁵³ Whatever her motive, we can be certain only that its effect upon Octavius is to confirm many of his preconceived notions about her: she is stupid, clumsily foolish in her attempt to deceive him, and unable to inspire loyalty in her own ministers.

Octavius brushes aside her tentative opening of a self-defense. It is hardly likely that her words, "Be it known, that we, the greatest, are mis-thought / For things that others do" (V.ii.175-6), are directed towards the Seleucus incident: Cleopatra has already stated specifically that Seleucus' fault was to "parcel the sum of my disgraces" (V.ii.162)--merely a matter

of his enumerating the treasure she held in reserve--and has already admitted her own guilt in having reserved "immoment toys, things of such dignity / As we greet modern friends withal" (V.ii.165-6). To seek exculpation by placing the blame--however deserving--upon Seleucus, a menial, would be a stooping act quite unlike Cleopatra. For her words, "when we fall," imply something of greater magnitude than a treasure withheld from a conquerer, and could be taken as her attempt to introduce the much more serious matter of just where responsibility for this war with Octavius lies; certainly Cleopatra has been left to answer for Antony's "merits." But this is a subject Octavius will avoid at all costs; he deliberately concentrates upon the Seleucus affair and practically gushes with understanding generosity: of the treasure reserved, "still be 't yours," and tender solicitude: "make not your thoughts your prisons," for this woman who is now a "dear queen" (V.ii.179-84). Cleopatra is prepared neither to plead uselessly nor to stoop to condemning Antony. In any event, Cleopatra could tell Octavius nothing he does not already know of Antony. He knows that he could not control Antony; no one could. He knows that Cleopatra did not. Octavius is not prepared to confuse or disturb the opinion he has of her, nor to allow anything to alter his plans for the triumph. Like Antony, he is impervious to all but his own desires. And there is about him the suggestion of a vision of self that is god-like in wisdom and in power: he will mete out just punishment to this degenerate queen, and exact revenge for Antony's cruel rejection of Octavia and his presumptuous challenge to his, Octavius', power.

It is a comment upon Cleopatra's nobility and self-mastery that she can so control herself as she listens to Octavius' accusations, his lies, his threats, his sly insinuations, and his insulting command that, like an animal, she content herself merely to "feed, and sleep" (V.ii.186). She contents herself with mockery: confesses--but does not repent or define what she views as feminine "frailties"--that "I have / Been laden with like frailties, which before / Have often sham'd our sex" (V.ii.121-3); notes the transience of power and reminds him that it is the office, not the man, that attracts followers: "How pomp is follow'd! mine will now be yours, / And should we shift estates, yours will be mine" (V.ii.150-1); points to the dual nature of command: in victory he achieves power and glory, "And may [take his leave] through all the world: 'tis yours, and we / Your scutcheons, and your signs of conquest shall / Hang in what place you please" (V.ii.133-5); but in defeat, he becomes the repository for all the nation's alleged offenses: "when we fall, / We answer others' merits in our name" (V.ii.177). With mock humility she instructs him, scorns him. He is indeed "Fortune's knave" for he has won, not through unique warrior qualities or personal valour, but purely by chance. It is a comment upon Octavius' complacent insensitivity and lack of nobility that she could treat him so. But feeding on the adulation she seems to offer him, he allows himself to be lulled into a false sense of her helplessness and of his own power of persuasion and command. Both Antony and Octavius have treated Cleopatra despicably; with the contempt that inferiors reserve for what they secretly envy and cannot understand, they destroy her. Octavius knows what Cleopatra represents: "for her life in Rome / Would be eternal to our triumph" (V.i.65).

It is finally over. Octavius' duplicity has removed any reservations Cleopatra may have had about her judgement of him. She has tried to fulfill her final obligation to Egypt, has "look[ed] him i' the face" and has found an Octavius swollen with pride and venom, in a mood of exultation, unwilling to admit to the merits of any cause but his own. Cleopatra could not make the plea which, in its refusal, could only afford Octavius that moment of supreme pleasure he seeks in her defeat.

In dying, the quality of her death matters very much to Cleopatra: to choose any lesser ceremony than the one of majesty and dignity with which she surrounds herself would be an admission that she accepts Octavius', not her own, evaluation of her worth. Nevertheless, there is within her still a sense of unworthiness that Antony has instilled, and she reaches out for his praise and his approval:

methinks I hear
Antony call, I see him rouse himself
To praise my noble act. (V.ii.282-4)

She has a need to prove the courage she had wanted so desperately to show him at Actium; and what Antony denied to her in life, she claims now:

Husband, I come:
Now to that name, my courage prove my title!
(V.ii.286-7)

And while it is the deadly asp to which she refers:

Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep? (V.ii.308-9)

the echo of Antony's words sets up an unavoidable parallel:

Betray'd I am.
O this false soul of Egypt! this grave charm
Whose eye beck'd forth my wars, and call'd them home;
Whose bosom was my crownet, my chief end,
Like a right gipsy, that at fast and loose
Beguil'd me, to the very heart of loss. (IV.xii.24-9)

But in clasping Antony to her breast, Cleopatra, "Whose bosom was [his] crownet, [his] chief end," has herself been beguiled to "the very heart of loss": her kingdom, her children, her life all forfeit to the fascinating Antony's game of "chance and hazard." After all she has suffered with and through Antony, she chooses to spend Eternity with him; this is the measure, not of Antony, but of the depth of Cleopatra's love and the totality of her commitment to him.

Octavius' return after such a brief passage of time suggests that, given time to ponder her words, he may have had doubts about his own powers of deception. Dollabella moves at once to flatter Octavius--and to turn from himself any possible suspicion that he has betrayed the plans for the triumph:

O sir, you are too sure an augurer;
That you did fear, is done. (V.ii.332-3)

Octavius' first brief tribute to her bravery and her nobility, "Bravest at the last . . . being royal / Took her own way" (V.ii.333-5), is, in Octavian fashion, undercut by his words soon after: "She hath pursued conclusions infinite / Of easy ways to die" (V.ii.353-4). As if death, that irrevocable act, is less final, less an act of courage, if it is not accompanied by terrible suffering. To Octavius' credit he does not bewail her loss to his triumph (or again, perhaps in Octavian fashion he does not waste time over what cannot be changed); nor does he neglect the proper ceremony due to the Queen of Egypt:

She shall be buried with her Antony.
No grave upon the earth shall clip in it
A pair so famous: high events as these
Strike those that make them: and their story is
No less in pity than his glory which

Brought them to be lamented. Our army shall
 In solemn show attend this funeral,
 And then to Rome. Come Dollabella, see
 High order, in this great solemnity. (V.ii.356-64)

Our sense of pity is for Antony who could not sustain his glory; our lament is for Cleopatra: she loved Antony, and Antony loved--Antony.

Cleopatra was lover, companion, refuge and comforter, scapegoat, and even mother to the boyish Antony; the irritating and complaining voice of conscience that urged him to duty; the vibrant, life-filled voice that gave a flavour of joy to their personal lives. Cleopatra was a composite of co-existing opposites: frail, feminine, and vulnerable; strong, able, and dominant. She at once gloried in and deplored her femininity; tremendously admiring and adoring of the warrior, Antony, she also envied the independence, power and strength she associated with the male. If heaven had not made her such a man, then surely it had made such a man, Antony, for her. Confident of her charms and her ability to attract men, she had no faith in her ability to hold them; it is hardly surprising then, when we remember that both Caesar and Pompey loved her and left her (or used her and discarded her), that she was jealously insecure in her relationship with Antony, in constant fear of betrayal by this Roman whose commitment to her was as shallow as those of his predecessors. An Egyptian queen assured of the adoration and awe of a nation, she became the subject of the Roman Antony, enslaved by her love for him and by political necessity, convinced of her own unworthiness, humiliated before the world, and finally brought to ruin by his folly and mismanagement. The romantic view of Antony's return to Egypt and to a joy-filled Cleopatra is, I believe, false: Cleopatra had no choice but to accept Antony's return and he represented, as I have

said, her self-sacrifice for Egypt. There was within Cleopatra a resilience of spirit, a strength to reconcile herself to what she could not change. This is evident in her defeat: there were no reproaches, either of self or Antony, merely a recognition of what she now was not and a movement towards the future: the crown of Egypt must pass to her son. Cleopatra was constant in her love and devotion to Antony, loyal and supportive to the end. She gave no less to Egypt. I am convinced that had Cleopatra not been an able queen, concerned with her responsibilities to her office, Egypt could not have survived in the world that Shakespeare depicted. Cleopatra loved Egypt: her concern for her state and for her heirs at a time when she wished for the release that only Death could offer, makes this clear. If physical courage failed Cleopatra at Actium, moral courage, a sense of responsibility, and self-mastery supported her when she faced the vindictive Octavius. Her desire for physical courage was self-regarding in that she looked for Antony's approval of her bravery; the qualities of strength of character she revealed in her confrontation with Octavius were more admirable--other-regarding--for what she sought of Octavius was for Egypt and her children. If her role as sovereign becomes at times indistinct to us, it never did to Cleopatra: she had a sense of "decorum"--the behaviour becoming to a queen: "These hands do lack nobility that they strike / A meaner than myself" (II.v.82-3) and "What, no more ceremony?" (III.xiii.38). Her courteous patience with the garrulous "rural fellow" (she bids him farewell four times) when, if she is to effect her triumph over Octavius, she knows time to be her most precious gift, and her love and concern for Iras and Charmian, evident in her transformation of their deaths into something magnificent,

speak of an innate kindness and a deep sense of humanity. Even Fulvia, who had loved Antony so dearly, deserved a tear, a moment of tender farewell: in accepting her love Antony had an obligation to her that was quite aside from his feelings for Cleopatra. It was not from Cleopatra that we heard of Antony's flaws; nor were there words of denigration for Caesar and Pompey--only praise. In her view the magnificent Antony was incomparable and all men were diminished by his presence. Her struggle had been long and overpowering; it was natural that finally she should seek death:

. . . and it is great
 To do that thing that ends all other deeds,
 Which shackles accidents and bolts up change. (V.ii.4-6)

As Cleopatra said: "The odds is gone" (IV.xv.66); the tragedy for Cleopatra was that they had probably never been with her.

Footnotes: Cleopatra

¹ Plutarch, Shakespeare's Plutarch: The Lives of Julius Caesar, Brutus, Marcus Antonius, and Coriolanus in the Translation of Sir Thomas North, ed. T.J.B. Spencer (1964; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 68-71.

² Steffen Wenig, The Woman in Egyptian Art (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1969), pp. 34-5. In 46 B.C. Cleopatra travelled to Rome to sign a treaty with Caesar, and while there witnessed his assassination; "all her far-reaching plans and hopes collapsed" Wenig speaks of her as a courageous, clever, and energetic queen, a patriotic defender of her country.

³ Antony and Cleopatra (II.ii.186); according to Enobarbus, at Cydnus Cleopatra "first met Mark Antony"; presumably, it was not a lovers' assignation, but he makes no mention of the political implications; it is the magnificence of the event that he stresses. Plutarch describes the meeting as political: "to answer unto such accusations as were being laid against her, being this: that she had aided Cassius and Brutus in their war against him"; and Antony's messenger "bade her not to be afraid at all of Antonius, for he was a more courteous lord than any that she had ever seen" (pp. 199-200).

⁴ Wenig explains that it became customary for kings to marry foreign princesses for political reasons--to seal alliances and treaties (p. 36). On the other hand, when a queen was compelled to seek a husband in a land outside Egypt, she looked upon it in quite another light: "Had I a son, would I have written about my own and my country's shame to a foreign land?" (p. 34, referring to correspondence in the royal Hittite annals).

⁵ Suetonius writes that after Cleopatra's death, Octavius "sent a cavalry in pursuit of Caesarion, Julius Caesar's bastard son by Cleopatra; and killed him when captured" (p. 59). Both Plutarch and Wenig claim that Cleopatra had sent Caesarion to India, in an attempt to save his life. Plutarch tells of a traitorous governor persuading him to return to Egypt by telling him that "Caesar sent for him to give him his mother's kingdom." Caesar, guided by the advice, "Too many Caesars is not good," had Caesarion put to death (p. 285). Wenig comments: "After Caesarion's death, Rome's way in Egypt was clear" (p. 35).

⁶ Marilyn Williamson, "The Political Context in Antony and Cleopatra," Shakespeare Quarterly, 21 (1970), 241.

⁷ Plutarch: "as proof whereof, I have heard my grandfather Lampryas report that one Philotas [who] . . . having acquaintance with one of Antonius' cooks . . . told my grandfather this tale" (p. 204); in brief, much of what Plutarch reports comes to him fourth and fifth hand, and we have no way of knowing what elaboration it has undergone in the process.

⁸ Donna Hamilton, "Antony and Cleopatra and the Tradition of Noble Lovers," Shakespeare Quarterly, 24 (1973), 246.

⁹ "spiderlike," Granville-Barker, p. 376; "unworthy," Laurens J. Mills, The Tragedies of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), p. 35; "primal Eve," Knight, p. 304.

¹⁰ Ivor Brown, Shakespeare and His World (1964; rpt. New York: Henry Walck, Inc., 1965), p. 41. Brown points to the "big popular demand in the streets for ballads which were written to give news and views of big events

or of crimes and punishments" (pp. 41-2). "With the increase of printing, books became plentiful, and rich men had libraries well stored with books brought from Europe, as well as those coming off the English presses" (p. 44).

¹¹ Knight, p. 298.

¹² Mills, p. 39.

¹³ Daniel Stempel, "The Transmigration of the Crocodile," Shakespeare Quarterly, 7 (1956), 70.

¹⁴ Williamson, p. 243.

¹⁵ Markels, pp. 44, 41. Markels is quoting from Harold C. Goddard, The Meaning of Shakespeare (Chicago, 1951), p. 572.

¹⁶ Plutarch, p. 199. Plutarch mentions Cleopatra's affairs with Julius Caesar and Cneius Pompey--and Antony; he does not accuse her of sexual excesses. What seems to distress him most is the sumptuousness of Antony's and Cleopatra's life in Egypt, and he deplores the way they spent their time: "he spent and lost in childish sports (as a man might say) and idle pastimes the most precious thing a man can spend, as Antiphon saith: and that is, time" (p. 205). Antony's mismanagement of the Parthian campaign, poorly organized and even more disastrously led, Plutarch attributes to Antony's love-sick eagerness to return to Cleopatra (pp. 223-39).

¹⁷ Farnham, pp. 183-4; Granville-Barker, p. 372; Champion, p. 241.

¹⁸ Michael Payne, "Erotic Irony and Polarity in Antony and Cleopatra," Shakespeare Quarterly, 24 (1973), 267.

¹⁹ Champion, p. 242.

²⁰ Markels, pp. 14-5.

²¹ Simmons, p. 136.

²² Ibid., p. 137.

²³ A.P. Riemer, A Reading of Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra"
([Sydney]: Sydney University Press, 1968), p. 36.

²⁴ Philip J. Traci, The Love Play of Antony and Cleopatra: A Critical
Study of Shakespeare's Play (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), p. 28.

²⁵ Mills, p. 38.

²⁶ Lloyd, p. 88.

²⁷ Barroll, "Anthony," p. 183.

²⁸ MacCallum, p. 422.

²⁹ Mills, p. 40.

³⁰ Schwartz, p. 77.

³¹ Stampfer, p. 244.

³² Ribner finds that while Antony is "enthralled" by Cleopatra, he also sees her as a "scheming seducer": "in the face of his imminent defeat, he sees her treacherous dalliance with Caesar's lieutenant" (p. 174); Schwartz finds that in this instance Antony speaks with "the rational self reacting against the instinctive one which has deprived it of power and freedom" (p. 78).

³³ Riemer, pp. 51-2.

³⁴ Granville-Barker, p. 443.

³⁵ Knight, p. 303.

³⁶ Traci, p. 88.

³⁷ Cantor, p. 162.

³⁸ MacCallum, p. 424.

³⁹ Nevo, pp. 338, 354; Cantor finds that "Suicide promises to be the ultimate test of love, involving as it does the irrevocable sacrifice of everything for the beloved. Antony and Cleopatra each find no value in a world that does not contain the other" (p. 163); Janet Adelman, The Common Liar: An Essay on "Antony and Cleopatra" (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), states that "Cleopatra does kill herself for Antony" (p. 164); Markels claims that "Like Antony's, her suicide becomes a merging of safety and honor, private and public values. She has re-enacted Antony's experience, and thus has earned the right to platonize her aspirations and transform herself from a triple-turned whore into a true wife" (p. 147).

⁴⁰ Traversi, Shakespeare: The Roman Plays, p. 198.

⁴¹ MacCallum, p. 451; Bradley, p. 303; Mills concludes that she tries to captivate Octavius, fails, and then, incited by images of the triumph, falls back upon her "resolution" (p. 54); Knight sees her as attempting to add Octavius to her "triumphs of love" and, failing, being forced "to the final immolation on love's altar," whereby she avoids the triumph and achieves "a certain grandeur" (pp. 314-5); in Riemer's view, "her determination to die is . . . spurred on as much by these selfish considerations [the triumph and her "panic" that Iras will receive Antony's kiss] as by the magnificent other-worldliness of her state" (p. 74).

⁴² Champion, pp. 263-5; Charney claims that we feel the force of Antony working in Cleopatra (p. 122); Murry insists that when Antony "breathed out his soul, it found an abiding place in Cleopatra's body. There it needs must struggle, but it will prevail" (p. 129); Goddard sees her as "listening only to divine commands. She must obey her master and her lord, her Emperor

Antony" (p. 138); in Schwartz's view, Cleopatra "will seek to regain that world [with Antony]" (p. 81).

⁴³ Goddard, p. 136.

⁴⁴ Bradley, pp. 303, 297.

⁴⁵ Hamilton, pp. 245-51; MacCallum, p. 444.

⁴⁶ Paul Lawrence Rose, "The Politics of Antony and Cleopatra"

Shakespeare Quarterly, 20 (1969), 384.

⁴⁷ Lee, p. 53.

⁴⁸ Ridley, p. xlii.

⁴⁹ Ribner, p. 172.

⁵⁰ Battenhouse, pp. 177, 166.

⁵¹ Lloyd, p. 90.

⁵² Battenhouse, p. 166.

⁵³ Lloyd, p. 90.

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