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Antony & Cleopatra: A Study in Polarities

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ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA: A STUDY IN POLARITIES

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In reading or seeing Antony and Cleopatra, several clear dualities emerge. The first is the polarity between Egypt and Rome as different settings for the action. Rome is cold, mechanical, rational, and business-like, whereas Egypt is lush, erotic, exotic, and langourous. Antony is torn between the two worlds, and this split of loyalty and interest helps to make the second duality of the play, that of the personalities and attitudes of the main characters. Antony and Cleopatra are both seen in double perspective--as lustful, self-gratifying sinners and as lovers in a truly transcendent sense of love. Both perspectives are important to the play, and the tension between them is never entirely resolved. Finally, the tone of the play is neither purely tragic nore purely comic, but is a mixture of both. Antony and Cleopatra was written just before the period of the great tragi-comic romances, and may be seen as the first of these, or a transition piece between tragedy and tragi-comedy, rather than as a pure tragedy.

These three polarities, Rome-Egypt, Antony and Cleopatra as lustful epicures vs. Antony and Cleopatra the world's greatest lovers, and the mixture of tragedy and comedy, form the framework of Antony and Cleopatra and make it one of the richest and most varied of plays.

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Introduction

Antony and Cleopatra is generally acknowledged to be one of the greatest of Shakespeare's plays. It is certainly the most magnificent in scope: its action covers a period of ten years beginning in approximately 40 B.C.[1] and its forty-two scenes sprawl all over the known world. It contains thirty-four named characters in addition to several officers, soldiers, and messengers. This play contains sharp contrasts and dualities in its scenes, its characters, and its tone. For instance, the world of Rome and the world of Egypt are sharply contrasted within a framework of "world" references that let us know we are dealing with the whole of the earth and its inhabitants when we are dealing with the actions of the two protagonists. Also, the character of Antony is divided between the "Roman" Antony and the "Egyptian" Antony, as that of Cleopatra is divided between Cleopatra the strumpet and Cleopatra the true lover. And the tone of the play is never given wholly to tragedy nor to comedy, but remains a mixture of both. It will be the purpose of this paper to explore these and related contrasts and dualities in the play, not with the purpose of casting any radical new light on the drama, but in order to more completely

appreciate the differing elements that Shakespeare has held in tension in creating Antony and Cleopatra. Surely a more varied drama does not exist; we may say of the play, as Enobarbus says of Cleopatra, that age "cannot wither" nor can "custom stale" its infinite variety.[2]

CHAPTER I. Rome-Egypt Polarity

The play contains the word "world" forty-seven times in its forty-two scenes. The main force of the use of the word acts on us to impress us that the world is truly the scene of involvement for the play, and that whether or not it is well lost, it is indeed the world that the two lovers lose. According to Maurice Charney, there are three distinct movements to the world imagery in the play.[3] First, there is the Roman Empire in which Antony lives and functions; the world of war, of conquest, and of "taking in this kingdom or enfranchising that" (2.1.23). Second, after Antony's fiasco at Actium, there is the world that is lost--Antony says, "I am so lated in the world that I/ Have lost my way forever" (3.11.3-4). The third and final movement in this imagery is the insistence of Cleopatra that this world which "did equal theirs [the gods]/ Till they had stolen our jewel" (4.15.77-78) is now "no better than a sty" (4.15.62) after Antony's death. Of supreme importance in understanding the play is that when Cleopatra rejects the world, she is not engaging in hyperbole; the world actually has been hers, through Antony.

Within the context of this imagery, the two worlds of Egypt and Rome stand opposed throughout the play as dramatic opposites. Egypt is lush, tropical, exotic, and erotic; Rome is time-bound, calculating, cold, and, by comparison, niggardly. Everything in Egypt, like the Nile itself, "o'erflows the measure" (1.1.2) and is immeasurable by Roman standards. Charney notes that Egypt is contrasted to Rome in images of eating and drinking, of the Nile and its serpents, hotness, and indolence (p. 95). Rome is seen partly in stated and partly in implied opposites of Egypt.

In Egypt, the night is often made light with feasting and drinking; Enobarbus regales his companions aboard Pompey's galley with tales of how much roast boar was consumed in a single meal. Of the festivities aboard the galley, Pompey says, "this is not yet an Alexandrian feast." (Antony replies, "It ripens toward it") (2.7.97-98). Association of feasting with sexual imagery occurs often: Of Egypt, Pompey says, "I have heard that Julius Caesar grew fat with feasting there." Antony replies, "You have heard much," and Pompey rejoints, "I have fair meanings, sir," (2.6.64-67). There is clearly here a veiled reference to Caesar's life with Cleopatra. More directly, Enobarbus refers to Cleopatra as Antony's "Egyptian dish" (2.7.123), Cleopatra says that she loved Caesar in her "salad days" (1.5.64), that then she was a "morsel for a

monarch" (1.5.23). Antony, in berating her after he surprises her flirting with Caesar's messenger Thyreus, says, "I found you as a morsel cold upon/ Dead Caesar's trencher; nay, you were a fragment/ Of Cneius Pompey's" (3.13.116-17). Antony treats his soldiers to feasting and drink often, whether to celebrate successful battle or to commiserate over a loss; Caesar feasts his troops only once, after his success at Actium, remarking, "We have store to do't/ And they have earned the waste" (4.1.15-16). Thus the image of Egypt is one of a continual round of feasting and drinking, with food imagery clustered around Cleopatra, while the imagery of Rome is that of sparing temperance in food and drink. Caesar praises Antony's former soldiership in terms of eating and drinking:

> thou didst drink
> the stale of horses and the gilded puddle
> Which beasts would cough at; thy palate then
> did deign
> The roughest berry on the rudest hedge;
> Yea, like the stag, when snow the pasture sheets,
> The barks of trees thou browsedst; on the Alps
> It is reported thou didst eat strange flesh,
> Which some did die to look on: and all this--
> It wounds thine honour that I speak it now--
> Was borne so like a soldier that thy cheek
> So much as lank'd not. (1.5.61-71)

It is clear from the contrast of the two attitudes toward food and drink, as it will be from other contrasts between the two worlds, that the clash is not between good and evil in this play, but between different kinds of

good. While the Egyptian way of pleasure could be called wasteful and over-luxurious, it could also be called bountiful. While the Roman way of temperance could be called stingy and niggardly, it could also be called commonsensical, and in some cases, necessary.

Images of the Nile and its serpents recur throughout the Egyptian scenes of the play. In the lighthearted scene with Cleopatra's servants and the soothsayer, Iras is told that her palm presages chastity, "E'en as the o'erflowing Nilus presageth famine" (1.2.44). Cleopatra says that the messenger who brings her news of Antony should come "like a fury crown'd with snakes" (2.5.40) if Antony is not well. When she hears that Antony has married Octavia, she says, "Melt Egypt into Nile! And kindly creatures/ Turn all to serpents!" (2.5.58-59). In the supremely comic scene aboard Pompey's galley, Antony describes the crocodile bred of the Nile by the operation of the sun:

> It is shaped, sir, like itself, and is as broad as
> it hath breadth; it is just so high as it is, and moves by its own organs; it lives by that which nourisheth it; and, the elements once out of it, it transmigrates. (2.7.42-46)

Then, of course, Cleopatra dies of the bite of the asp. It is significant, Charney notes, that the asp is brought in a basket of figs, creating a combined image of the fertile and the death-dealing powers of the Nile (p.102).

As to hotness, Antony's heart has become the "bellows and the fan/ To cool a gypsy's lust" (1.1.9-10). The hotness referred to here is not a physical hotness, but an erotic heat. It is associated with Cleopatra, as in the scene of Antony's seeing her on the Cydnus for the first time:

> on each side her
> stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
> With divers-colour'd fans whose wind did seem
> To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool
> And what they undid did. (2.2.203-206)

Also, the images of idleness and indolence are associated with Cleopatra. She wants to drink mandragora, to "sleep out this great gap of time/ My Antony is away" (1.5.4-5). Antony says, "But that your royalty/ Holds idleness your subject, I should take you/ For idleness itself" (1.3.91-93). All the scenes in Egypt are scenes where nothing is happening except as news is brought from Rome.

Stanford Lyman has suggested that the world of Rome is devoid of Eros, and the Egypt is Eros unbridled. The play is then completely a tragedy, for as Antony and Cleopatra die, the world loses all it has of Eros and cold, calculating Roman values take over.[4] He also sees Rome as essentially Apollonian, and Egypt as essentially Dyonisiac in nature. For Lyman, Cleopatra <u>is</u> Egypt, and Octavius is Rome, with Antony caught between. He does

not mention Octavia, who seems to embody some Roman virtues herself: "[She] is of a holy, cold, and still conversation" (2.7.120). Although many critics consider Octavia to be a cardboard character next to Cleopatra, she is consistently modest, temperate, and loving. If Caesar embodies the force of Rome in Antony's life, Octavia must embody the attraction of Rome which does not prove sufficient to keep Antony from "his Egyptian dish."

Janet Adelman says that the real conflict is not between Egypt and Rome, but between generations. The old Rome had room for ties with Cleopatra's Egypt--both Caesar and Pompey were her lovers. It is the new Rome under the boy Octavius, political-minded, narrow, and realistic in his perceptions, who has no room for Antony and Cleopatra.[5] This interpretation assumes that Octavius had no motive other than politics for suggesting the marriage of Antony and Octavia, and fails to explain what seems to be his real consternation when Antony leaves Octavia for Cleopatra. Another interpretation of the atmosphere of the play, also slightly different from the most often mentioned Egypt-Rome polarity, is that Imperial Rome is a vitiated version politically of Republican Rome.[6] According to this interpretation, politics in Republican Rome was more involving in a direct way; the rulers and the ruled were involved with each other as they were not in Imperial Rome. By the time of Antony and Cleopatra, "Rome" has come to

mean the Empire, not the city, and the wars and conquests waged on behalf of Rome are far-flung and removed from actual direct connection to city government itself. From this point of view, Coriolanus was more of a ruler of men than Lepidus or Caesar ever were, and Antony as a leader of men is an anachronism. The advantage of looking at the play from this viewpoint is that it points up the distance of the rulers from those who are ruled. There is no populace in Egypt or Rome, except as curiosity and curiosity seekers: Antony will go through the streets of Rome with Cleopatra and "Note/ The qualities of people" (1.1.53-54), and Cleopatra will be exposed to the rabble of Rome if she is brought back there conquered by Caesar (Act 5). Throughout the play, although the world is the stage, the players are few and select. Most of the inhabitants count for nothing. This is irony in view of the fact that Caesar says,

> What was't
> That moved pale Cassius to conspire? And What
> Made the all hounour'd finest Roman, Brutus,
> With th'arm'd rest, courtiers of beauteous
> freedom
> To drench the capitol, but that they would
> Have one man but a man? (2.6.14-19)

Caesar is censuring Antony with this speech, for taking privilege that sets him above and apart from other men, but ironically he himself is set on world conquest. Having got rid of Pompey and Lepidus, he has only to do away with Antony to become master, "Through all the world" (5.2.134).

Our setting then, is the whole world, but our characters are only those in the world who are engaged in conquest. The ordinary populace has nothing to do with the story. Within this world setting, there are two poles: most critics see the polarity as existing between Egypt and Rome, but there are critics who see the gap as existing between the world as it was known a generation before the play and the world as it exists at the time of the play's action. In either case, the contrast is between abundant excess on the one hand and temperate, measuring, calculating rationality on the other. Neither is essentially more responsible than the other because neither Caesar nor Antony answers to any but himself.

CHAPTER II. Polarity and Contrast in Character

There are plenty of contrasts between characters in Antony and Cleopatra; obviously between Octavia and Cleopatra as women who are or are not worthy of love, between Antony and Octavius as men who choose love and conquest respectively, and between Enobarbus and Iras and Charmian as faithless and faithful servants.

Perhaps the most obvious and interesting contrast, implied in Chapter I, is that between Octavius and Cleopatra; they are the poles of Antony's existence and, as John Moore says, "between them Caesar and Cleopatra tear him apart".[7] Cleopatra is Egypt and Octavius is Rome. Antony says, "I am dying, Egypt, dying," twice to Cleopatra (4.15.18,41). Cleopatra is sensuous, capricious, full of feeling and intuition; Caesar is cold, mechanical, and calculating. Caesar's values are soldiership, statesmanship, and rule-keeping; Cleopatra's values are spontaniety, gaiety, and a lover's possession of his beloved. Both demand Antony's loyalty, and the two loyalties cannot be reconciled. Antony's honor is not necessarily bound with his loyalty to Caesar, any more than it is bound to his loyalty to Cleopatra. He says,

embracing her, "the nobleness of life/ is to do thus" (1.1.36-37). In seeking his "nobility" Antony dishonors himself at Actium, but not by his disloyalty to Caesar. The two opposing loyalties tear Antony apart, but he manages to hold himself together until he dishonors himself at Actium.

But in this play the most fascinating contrasts are within each of the main characters. Caesar is fairly constant in what he is--a warrior and politician who sees everything from a tactical standpoint and is willing to sell his sister into a politically arranged marriage to Antony, a marriage with dubious prospects of success; but even Caesar has surprising moments of sincerity. His obvious distress at his sister's abandonment is one; another is his reaction on hearing of Antony's death:

> The breaking of so great a thing should make
> A greater crack; the round world
> Should have shook lions into civil streets,
> And citizens to their dens. The death of Antony
> Is not a single doom; in the name lay
> A moiety of the world. (5.1.13-18).

But the greatest variety of character elements is to be found in Enobarbus and in the two protagonists. Enobarbus undergoes a tragic enlightenment followed by death. Throughout, until his desertion of Antony, he serves as a kind of common-sense chorus to the action. Although he is the one to offer the most elevated and

lyrical admiration for Cleopatra that is expressed anywhere in the play, he also takes the two lovers with a grain of salt. It is he who tries to dissuade Cleopatra from joining the naval battle at Actium and Antony from fighting by sea at all. He is the one who provides the audience with the certain knowledge that Antony's marriage to Octavia will not last:

> Maecenas: Now he must leave her utterly.
> Enobarbus: Never; he will not.
> Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
> Her infinite variety; other women cloy
> The appetities they feed, but she makes hungry
> where most she satisfies; for vilest things
> Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
> Bless her when she is riggish. (2.3.233-40)

(Notice the food association again with Cleopatra.) Enobarbus is amiable, ironic, almost on an equal footing with Antony in his freedom to offer advice (even though the advice is not taken). He loves the life in Egypt and loves Antony. He is caught up in the romance between Antony and Cleopatra, and does not desert Antony until it appears Cleopatra has betrayed him with Caesar's messenger Thyreus:

> Sir, sir, thou art so leaky
> That we must leave thee to thy sinking, for
> Thy dearest quit thee. (3.13.63-65)

When Antony sends his treasure after him to Caesar's camp, Enobarbus realizes too late that his heart is with Antony:

> O Antony,
> Thou mine of bounty, how wouldst thou have paid
> My better service, when my turpitude
> Thou dost so crown with gold!
>
> I will go seek
> Some ditch wherein to die; the foul'st best fits
> My latter part of life. (4.7.31-24, 37-39)
>
> O Antony,
> Nobler than my revolt is infamous,
> Forgive me in thine own particular;
> But let the world rank me in register
> A master-leaver and a fugitive.
> O Antony! O Antony! (Dies) (2.9.18-23)

Thus the jovial Enobarbus dies in ignominy and despair. According to J.L. Simmons, in a comedy, Enobarbus would be the comic "plain man" who celebrates at the end when everything turns out all right.[8] His role is comic in the first scenes of the play, and if any death in the play is purely tragic, it is his. If any character undergoes a tragic epiphany, it is Enobarbus. Any remarks about the comic nature of the play's ending must take into account this death.

As for Antony and Cleopatra themselves, the problem of interpreting their actions comes along with the problem of analyzing their characters. As Janet Adelman says, "We simply are not told the motives of the protagonists at the most critical points in the action" (p. 16). Depending on what we decide Cleopatra meant by going into battle at Actium, by entertaining Thyreus so hospitably, and by exercising cunning and lies from the very beginning to almost the very end, we have varying pictures of the

play and what it is about. Depending on whether we believe Antony to have been sincere in his marriage vows to Octavia and his simultaneous protestations of love to Cleopatra, we have different pictures of his character. Let us look at what some of the critics have said about the action of the play, and then try to arrive at the interpretation that best suits the facts.

First there is the theory that Antony was torn between Love and Honour, voiced by Curtis Brown Watson. He says, "Antony is torn by inner conflict because his involvement in licentious pleasure forces him to act against his keen sense of honor."[9] According to this theory, Antony is drawn virtually against his will into involvement with Cleopatra, and any ennobling of their love occurs at the very end of the play, when all else is lost. Buttressing this theory are lines spoken by Antony, "She is cunning past man's thought" (1.2.138), "These strong Egyptian fetters I must break/ Or lose myself in dotage" (1.2.110-11), and all the lines from the very opening of the play onward spoken by Romans regarding the love of Antony and Cleopatra. All we can say for certain is that by Roman standards Antony's involvement with Cleopatra is full of "poison'd hours" (2.2.90) that bind him up from his own knowledge, and when a Roman thought strikes Antony, he agrees. We can also be certain that for a good part of the play, Antony is of two natures;

whether they represent Honour and Love or simply the Egyptian Antony and the Roman Antony, they are irreconcilable for most of the play.

From one view Antony loses more than worldly fortune for Cleopatra; he loses honour and manhood as well. His revels with Cleopatra have had a touch of the perverse about them. Cleopatra says,

> That time--O times!--
> I laugh'd him out of patience; and that night
> I laugh'd him into patience: and next morn,
> Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed,
> Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst
> I wore his sword Phillippan.-- (2.5.18-23)

This is direct evidence of the charge of effeminancy that the Romans have made against Antony. Caesar has said,

> From Alexandria
> This is the news: he fishes, drinks, and wastes
> The lamps of night in revel; is not more manlike
> Than Cleopatra, not the queen of Ptolemy
> More womanly than he. (2.4.3-7)

The charge of Antony's assuming a woman's role and Cleopatra's assuming a man's comes to full fruition at the battle of Actium, where Cleopatra insists on going into battle for a man, then turns rudder and flies, while Antony follows her. There is something of "dotage" in love that allows itself to be dominated so completely by the actions of another.

Antony's sword is an image of his soldiership, and it is used repeatedly as an impotent image, particularly

as the play progresses and Antony gives himself over more and more completely to Cleopatra. When Antony has fought the disastrous battle at Actium and has charged Octavius unsuccessfully to single combat (Caesar says, "Let the old ruffian know/ I have many other ways to die, meantime/ Laugh at his challenge" (4.1.4-6). Enobarbus says, "When valor preys on reason,/ It eats the sword it fights with. I will seek/ Some way to leave him" (3.13.199-201). The impotence of Antony's sword is shown in full when he falls on the sword and does not die.

In addition to showing impotence, Antony is dishonored by the battle at Actium. Scarus says, "I never saw an action of such shame; Experience, manhood, honor, ne'er before did so violate itself" (3.11.21-23). His death scene is full of calm resignation and sweet solicitude for Cleopatra. His last words are of honor:

> I am dying, Egypt, dying--
> Give me some wine, and let me speak a little.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The miserable change now at my end
> Lament nor sorrow at, but please your thoughts
> In feeding them with those my former fortunes
> Wherein I live'd the greatest prince o' the world,
>
> The noblest, and now do not basely die;
> Nor cowardly put off my helmet to
> My countryman,--A Roman by a Roman
> Valiantly vanquish'd. Now my spirit is going;
> I can no more. (4.15.41-42, 51-59)

It remains for Cleopatra to unite the two themes of love and honor completely in her suicide, but only because

Antony was mistaken in thinking her dead. His desire to join Cleopatra in death was as strong as his sense of dying an honorable death when he believed her to be dead.

As to Antony's honor, Julian Markels believes Antony to have been perfectly candid in contracting the marriage to Octavia. He says, "Everything in Antony's utterance bespeaks the honor of his motives and the integrity of his love; and we can only conclude that if he said before that he makes this marriage for his peace, that is distinctly not what he is saying now.[10] Caesar and Antony have just made farewell speeches:

> Caes: Most Noble Antony,
> Let not the peace 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; for better might we
> Have love'd without this mean, if on both parts
> This be not cherished.
>
> Ant: Make me not offended
> in your distrust.
>
> Caes: I have said.
>
> Ant: You shall not find
> Though you be therein curious, the least cause
> For what you seem to fear. So the gods keep you
> And make the hearts of Romans serve your ends!
> We will here part. (3.2.32-38)

Markels' thesis is that Antony, torn between the Roman and the Egyptian worlds, chooses the values of both and seeks to incorporate them into his action. He keeps "to the square" in Rome as long as circumstances allow, and returns to Egypt only when it is obvious Caesar is not

keeping faith with him. Markels points out that Shakespeare varied his account from Plutarch's regarding Antony's behaviour after marrying Octavia:

> In Plutarch's account, after concluding the treaty with Pompey, Antony leaves hiw new wife and launches the Parthian campaign. During that campaign Cleopatra makes tempting gestures and Antony responds with what North calls his characteristic 'effeminacy' by pursuing Cleopatra. Meanwhile, Octavius tears up the treaty with Pompey and sets out to recapture Sicily, with Antony's full knowledge and even with warships supplied by Antony. Along the way Octavius deposes Lepidus. Antony goes to Egypt, and from a throne mounted in the marketplace parcels out the earth, the sun, and the moon among Cleopatra's children and some minor potentates. For this Octavius denounces him in Rome and only in self-defense does Antony make charges against Octavius. Then he complains not that Octavius has broken faith in ruining Pompey and Lepidus but that he has refused to share with his accomplice Antony the spoils of victory. (pp. 32-33)

In the account in the play, Caesar has already moved against Pompey and Lepidus and has made unfounded charges against Antony, and Octavia has left Antony to go to Caesar when Antony goes to Egypt. Markel interprets the difference to mean that Antony actually goes to Egypt and prepares for war in defense of his Roman honor. It seems that, for Antony and for Cleopatra, too, critics tend either to sympathize to the point of almost distorting the play to present every action in the most flattering possible light, or to criticize the character so that everything must be seen from the most unfavorable possible perspective. The truth is not between these extremes;

it is both extremes. For in Antony and Cleopatra Shakespeare has created characters of the most startling possible variety and scope. Janet Adelman says of Antony and Cleopatra, "Whore or goddess, strumpet's fool or colossus: the play allows us no midpoint" (p. 110). The answer is that from different perspectives--and the play contains these different perspectives--they are both.

These different perspectives are provided by a host of minor characters as well as by the polarity of Octavius, Octavia, and Cleopatra. Adelman says,

> The most characteristic dramatic technique in Antony and Cleopatra is the discussion of one group of characters by another. In its purest form, it is strikingly simple: a group of minor characters who are alone on stage discuss the action that is about to take place among the protagonists; the protagonists then appear on stage, act, and disappear: a group of minor characters, frequently the same as the initial group, are left on stage to discuss the action. The scene is thus framed so that the characters become in effect actors and the minor characters their interpretive audience. The pattern appears with astonishing consistency throughout the play. (p. 31)

This framing device contributes to the opacity of the characters mentioned earlier. We never see through the eyes of Antony or Cleopatra until the very end; we continually see them through the eyes of others. Mark Rose also notices this framing device, particularly in the first scene of the play. We see Philo, a good soldier, commenting on this "dotage of our general's" which

o'erflows the measure," his heart "become a bellows and a fan/ To cool a gypsy's lust" (1.1.1-8). Then Antony and Cleopatra enter and we see them for ourselves. Antony says,

> Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
> Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space.
> Kingdoms are clay; our dungy earth alike
> Feeds beast as man: the nobleness of life
> Is to do thus; when such a mutual pair
> And such a twain can do't, in which I bind,
> On pain of punishment, the world to weet
> We stand up peerless. (1.1.33-39)

Of the sections of this scene, Rose says,

> Being irreconcilable, and equally convincing, the perspectives of the frame and centerpiece vibrate endlessly in our minds. The scene as a whole is contrived to provide a completely ambiguous view of Antony.[11]

Michael Payne's view of the same scene corroborates this idea of a double perspective: He says that though Philo ". . . bids us to 'take but good note,' what we do in fact see does not match Philo's description, for the dramatic presence of the lovers forces us to see them on their own terms as well as on Roman terms.[12] He says,

> Antony will soon realize that he cannot deny the part of himself that is Roman, but what he can do is precisely what Shakespeare has forced us to do by means of this first scene; he can come to see beyond the Roman perspective without rejecting it. To stay in Egypt is to reject the reality of Rome; to substitute private pleasure for public responsibility is to commit Lear's error all over again; to reject the world for love is simply not possible. (p. 268)

The ambiguity of perspective is central to the play, in the clash of Egypt with Rome, it is not good against evil, but one culture of good mixed with evil against another. By Roman standards, Antony's affair with Cleopatra is pure lasciviousness and lust; by Egyptian standards, Caesar's world conquest is pure mean-minded, self-serving egocentricity. By Egyptian standards, Antony's and Cleopatra's love affair is pure luxurious beauty, and by Roman standards, Octavius's conquests are honorable pursuits, bringing glory to himself and Rome. What Shakespeare asks us to accept is that all of these different viewpoints contain some truth, and that none of them is the whole story. He does not call his play The World Well Lost, and we are not encouraged to think that Antony and Cleopatra resolves itself with everyone dying happily ever after. What we do see is that the love of the two transcends even death, and that the world cannot conquer or subdue their love, no matter how much it endeavors to do so.

As to Cleopatra's character, she says of Antony, "Though he be painted one way like a Gorgon/ The other way's a Mars" (2.5.116-117). G. Wilson Knight says of Cleopatra, "She is one way a Medusa, the other way a Madonna of serenity and peace."[13] In her, he says, "every strong passion and violent emotion, with a varying seesaw motion returns . . . to pure femininity," (p. 301).

Cleopatra is a blend of opposites; she can be generous beyond measure and cruel to the same degree. She offers to shower with gold the messenger who brings her news of Antony, then threatens to melt it and pour it down his throat if the news is bad. She can be regal so that she "beggars all description," as in her meeting with Mark Antony on the Cydnus and in her death scene, but Enobarbus says of her,

> I saw her once
> Hop forty paces through the public street;
> And having lost her breath, she spoke, and panted,
> That she did make defect perfection,
> And, breathless, power breathe forth. (2.3.230-33)

She can engage in the most outrageous histrionics for Antony's benefit as in I.3, where he tries to explain to her that business and Fulvia's death call him to Rome--at first she berates him for going home at Fulvia's call, then when she finds out Fulvia is dead, she chides him for not weeping, saying, "Now I see, I see,/ In Fulvia's death, how mine receiv'd shall be" (1.3.63-64). But immediately she is all melting and apparently sincere femininity and woe:

> 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. (1.3.86-91)

And next she is womanly, loving, and dignified:

> Your honour calls you hence,
> Therefore be deaf to my unpitied folly,
> And the gods go with you! Upon your sword
> Sit laurel victory! And smooth success
> Be strew'd before your feet! (1.3.97-101)

She hales the messenger up and down who brings her news of Antony's marriage to Octavia, then remembers herself and says,

> These hands do lack nobility, that they strike
> A meaner than myself, since I myself
> Have given myself the cause. (2.5.83-84)

She then calls the messenger back and chats amiably with him, flattering herself, with his help, that she and Octavia do not compare.

As interesting as Cleopatra's swings of mood and behavior are, the unanswered questions about her motivation mentioned earlier Why did she insist on going into battle at Actium? Did she mean for Antony to follow her when she fled the battle? Did she mean by entertaining Thyreus so hospitably to ingratiate herself with Caesar at Antony's expense? Did she "pack cards" with Caesar to cost Antony his last battle? These questions cannot be finally and satisfactorily answered. It seems to be a part of the play's art to raise questions like these rather than answer them, and leave us with a fascination that a more pat, neat plot might not evoke.

Another theory of the play's action is that Antony and Cleopatra is an exemplum of what the life of pleasure, lust and license leads to. Franklin Dickey sees the play in this light.[14] But it seems that this view ignores some of the main passages of love poetry, and, in particular, ignores the manner in which the two die. It would be foolish to argue that the ending is a happy, celebrative one entirely; the love of Antony and Cleopatra costs them their lives. However, particularly in the stress that both go to death as to nuptials, there is an element of the positive that cannot be ignored in the ending of the play. Also, the lyrical descriptions of Antony and Cleopatra as more than merely mortal, Cleopatra's description by Enobarbus in 2.2., and Antony's description by Cleopatra in 5.2, are hardly the kind of material that would be included in a didactic tale of love out of hand. Since those two descriptions are crucial to the characterizations of the two protagonists, they are worth quoting here:

First, Enobarbus' description of Cleopatra:

> I will tell you.
> The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne
> Burn'd on the water; the poop was beaten gold;
> Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
> the winds were love-sick with them; the oars
> were silver,
> Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
> The water which they beat to follow faster,
> As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
> It beggar'd all description: she did lie

In her pavilion--cloth of gold tissue--
O'er picturing that Venus where we see
The fancy outwork nature; on each side her
Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
With divers-colour'd fans, whose wind did seem
To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
And what they undid did.
. . . . . .
Her gentlewomen, like the Nereides,
So many mermaids, tended her i' the eyes,
And made their bends adornings; at the helm
A seeming mermaid steers; the silken tackle
Swell with the touches of flower-soft hands,
That yarely frame the office. From the barge
A strange invisible perfume hits the sense
of the adjacent wharfs. The city cast
Her people out upon her, and Antony,
Enthron'd i' the marketplace, did sit alone
Whistling to the air; which, but for vacancy,
Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too
And made a gap in nature. (2.2.191-218)

Then Cleopatra's description of Antony:

His face was as the heavens, and therein stuck
A sun and moon, which kept their course and
lighted
The little O, the earth.
. . . . . .
His legs bestrid the ocean; his rear'd arm
Crested the world: His voice was propertied
As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends;
But when he meant to quail and shake the orb
He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,
There was no winter in't: an autumn 'twas
That grew the more by reaping: his delights
Were dolphin-like; they showed his back above
The element they liv'd in: in his livery
Walk'd crowns and crownets; realms and islands
were
As plates dropp'd from his pocket.
. . . . . .
if there ever be, or ever were, one such,
It's past the size of dreaming; nature wants stuff
To vie strange forms with fancy; yet, to imagine
An Antony, were nature's piece against fancy,
Condeming shadows quite. (5.2.79-99)

Here we have pictures of the lovers as more than mere mortals, and any interpretation we make of the play must take into account their stature as nearly demigods.

Janet Adelman claims that Cleopatra's character is a paradox--a blend of contradictions and opposites--and that Antony's characterization is a hyperbole (p. 115). Antony is larger than life--in his victories and his defeats, his love and his loathing, and his self-congratulation and self-criticism. He "o'erflows the measure" in all that he does: his celebration and his despair, his lovemaking and his warmaking. We are prepared by Antony himself for Cleopatra's assessment of him at his death. Along the lines of hyperbole, G. Wilson Knight says of the world imagery in the play, "Such images are used without any restraint: here mankind is all but deified" (p. 209). Surely about the play there is a larger-than-life quality that characterizes it just as much as evil characterizes Macbeth and introspection characterizes Hamlet. The two characters rise collossal from the "dungy earth" around them: they are Titans even or perhaps especially in defeat.

Joseph L. Simmons has a different theory of the conflict in the play. He says, "The ideals of love and honor do not conflict. But lust, as it conflicts with love, and political power, as it conflicts with honor, prove quite incompatible." (p. 124)

G. Wilson Knight also sees love and lust both in the relationship of Antony and Cleopatra, but he sees them as bound together in on complete relationship. He says,

> The vision is too crystal-clear to under emphasize the physical, yet also too spiritually and keenly awake to become subdued to what it works in. It is a chaste vision of unchastity: we feel the poet's mind alive before us, as, in exquisite purity and profound insight, it delights us in its creation of love and lust intrinsicate. (p. 225)

This seems to make more sense than the love-honor polarity idea; it is not honour but political expediency that prompts Antony's marriage to Octavia, and throughout his involvement with Cleopatra, love and lust seem to pull him in different directions until the final clarification of their love in his death. Cleopatra's involvement with Antony is also tainted by her continual practice of cunning and deceit, not usually considered marks of a true love relationship.

However, Leonora Leet Brodwin believes that Cleopatra was faithful from beginning to end, and that her exercise of trickery and histrionics was the only way she had of holding on to a volatile and unpredictable Antony.[15] She is borne out somewhat by the fact that Antony, once separated from Cleopatra, does not hesitate to violate their love pact by marrying Octavia. Once he returns to Cleopatra, he is fully committed to their love, and Ms. Brodwin believes that Cleopatra simply does not realize

this fact when she flees at Actium. She believes that Cleopatra does not mean to betray Antony when she is so kind to Thyreus, but that she is simply bargaining for time and advantage for both of them. She also believes, interestingly, that Cleopatra does not die for Antony but in order to escape being led in the streets of Rome by Caesar. For Ms. Brodwin, the play is an enactment of Worldly Love (p. 225), whose conventions are different from courtly love and do not require that lovers die for one another to reach full consummation. She believes that both Antony and Cleopatra exercised "personal sovereignty" in dying for the sake of honor (pp. 253-254), and that sovereighty, the possession of one's self and of that which is best in oneself, is the object of Worldly Love. Ms. Brodwin has much to say that throws light on the play, but her denial that the two died at least partly for love seems a little out of line with the play. Antony says, "I will be/ A bridegroom in my death, and run into 't/ As to a lover's bed" (4.14.98-100), and Cleopatra says, "Husband, I come!" (5.2.286). Surely these are not the words of two people dying solely for honor and "personal sovereignty." Moreover, both Antony and Cleopatra look forward to the next world as a place where they will be joined forever. Antony says, "Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,/ And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze;/ Dido and Aeneas shall want troops,/

And all the haunt be ours" (4.14.51-54). Cleopatra says, "I am again for Cydnus,/ To meet Mark Antony" (5.2.228-29). True, Caesar is defeated by the two of them, and for the first time in the play, love and honor are joined in a successful act.

Willard Farnham, too, is concerned with whether or not Cleopatra can be numbered among "Cupid's saints."[16] He believes that, finally, she can, but is disturbed by her deceit of Caesar's messenger with regard to the amount of treasure she has. If she truly intended to die, would it matter to her whether or not she retained her treasure?

That is another point in the play at which the motives of Cleopatra at a crucial time are opaque to the audience. She may be acting out of habit in refusing to disclose and turn over the correct amount of gold and silver and jewels; she may be deceiving Caesar into believing that she intends to live, and thereby gaining for herself the freedom necessary to commit suicide; or she may truly be thinking of living on, not sure that Caesar will take her to Rome and lead her in triumph. The play will bear out any of several opinions.

Joseph L. Simmons says, "We ask many questions in the final scene, but one that should never have been asked is, Does she kill herself to be with Antony or to escape Caesar?" (p. 157). He believes that because the answer is "both," the question is moot. Clearly, Cleopatra

chooses death rather than being paraded through the streets of Rome as Caesar's trophy. She tells Iras,

> Thou, an Egyptian puppet, shall be shown
> In Rome as well as I: mechanic slaves
> With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers shall
> Uplift us to the view; in their thick breaths
> Rank of gross diet, shall we be enclouded,
> And forc'd to drink their vapor.
> . . . . . .
> Antony
> Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
> Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
> I' the posture of a whore. (5.3.207-212, 227-230)

All this brings us to the question of whether or not the world is well lost for love. Antony and Cleopatra, who had the world at their feet, are reduced to war trophies at the hand of Caesar. It is impossible to view the play as if the reversal of their circumstances didn't matter; indeed it precipitates their deaths. The two of them cannot be Antony and Cleopatra on other than a world scale. When Cleopatra is forced to deal with Caesar's messengers, she says, "you must tell him/ That majesty, to keep decorum, must/ No less beg than a kingdom" (5.2.17-18). Throughout, the scale of their identities and love demands royal scope and the previously mentioned atmosphere of excess that prevails in Egypt. Suppose one assumes for a moment that they could personally have escaped Caesar and have founded private, anonymous lives somewhere in the Empire: it takes only imagining to realize how dependent their love is on his being Antony

the "triple pillar of the world" (1.1.12) and her being Cleopatra, Queen of the Nile. Those critics who say that all Antony and Cleopatra needed was their love do not seem to realize that love, on the magnificent scale they practiced it, could only be between master and mistress of the world.

The motivations of the characters are not the only considerations to be made in looking at the contrasts in characterization. Ernest Schanzer says, "In no other play by Shakespeare do we meet characters with such persistent oscillations of feelings, such violent wavering between emotional extremes."[17] With Cleopatra, this swing of emotion is deliberate: when Antony is struck by a Roman thought and separates from her company momentarily, she says, "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: quick, and return" (1.3.2-5). Near the end of the play, she is still playing the same game: "Mardian, go tell him I have slain myself;/ Say that the last I spoke was 'Antony,'/ And word it prithee, piteously" (4.13.7-9). With Antony, it seems to be a case of his mounting desperation that throws him into fits of woe and false hope. He is alternately joyful and loving toward Cleopatra and full of loathing for her. He best describes his own condition:

> Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish
> A vapour sometime like a bear or lion,
> A tower'd citadel, a pendent rock,
> a fork'd mountain, or blue promontory
> With trees upon't, that nod unto the world
> And mock our eyes with air: Thou hast seen
> these signs;
> They are black vesper's pageants.
> . . . . . .
> That which is now a horse, even with a thought
> The rack dislimns and makes it indistinct
> As water is in water.
> . . . . . .
> My good knave Eros, now thy captain is
> Even such a body; here I am Antony
> Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave.
> (4.14.2-14)

Antony's swings in mood and motivation pick up in pace as the play progresses: immediately after his successful land battle, Cleopatra is "Thou day o' the world" (4.9.12), but after her fleet deserts the battle at sea, she is a "triple-turn'd whore." If the play contains the most lyrical of love poetry, it also contains the most scathing invective, all directed by Antony toward Cleopatra, and sometimes only a few lines apart.

These rapid changes of mood are countered by the stillness of both protagonists in facing death. Antony's rage is spent when he discovers that Cleopatra has lied another time, this time with fatal results. He goes to her and spends his last moments counseling her on how to bargain with Caesar in order to gain a life with honor. He dies loving Cleopatra, not in the hyperbolic, braggart like way that the play opens, but with calm resignation.

It is important that when Antony resolves on a death following what he believes to be Cleopatra's example he prepares himself to meet her in the afterlife. We have mentioned that both of them look at death as a nuptial rite, and this is important to an understanding of the play.

Cleopatra's death also marks a stopping of her crafty exercise of wile over Antony: she says, "My resolution's placed, and I have nothing/ Of woman in me: now from head to foot/ I am marble-constant; now the fleeting moon/ No planet is of mine" (5.2.238-241). However, she remains Cleopatra in loving to win the advantage over Caesar; as she is applying the asp, she says, "O couldst thou speak,/ That I might hear thee call great Caesar ass/ Unpolicied!" (5.2.304-306).

To summarize, we have the theories that Antony is town between love and honor; that he and Cleopatra are simply examples of life misspent; that Antony is divided between love and lust, honor and political gain; that love is the ideal of the play and that Cleopatra is faithful to love from the beginning to the end; and that both protagonists are given to shifts in mood and motivation up to the point of their deaths. Cleopatra's role is not satisfactorily defined--perhaps definition of her character would defy the quicksilver thing that she is. Antony's role comes into slightly sharper focus as he leaves

Cleopatra for the World of Rome and Roman conquest, only to be drawn back almost against his will, and as he oscillates between love and loathing for Cleopatra, depending on his changing fortunes in war.

In analyzing the characters of Antony and Cleopatra, Ernest Schanzer says that Antony and Cleopatra echo each other in sentiment and action from the opening of the play to its ending, binding them together as like characters, as well as lovers. Antony says, "Let Rome in Tiber melt" in scene 1.1., and Cleopatra echoes him in scene 2.5; "let Egypt melt in Nile!" Both punish messengers for bringing bad news. Schanzer says,

> The lovers' echoes of each other's words and sentiments, though found scattered throughout the play, increase greatly in the last two acts, at the very time when the other main element in the structural pattern, the contrast between Rome and Egypt, diminishes. (p. 134)

These echoes find full fruit in the dying words of Antony and Cleopatra: Antony will go to death "as to a lover's bed," and be "A bridegroom" in his death, (4.14.100-101). Cleopatra says, "Husband, I come," (5.2.290). This device of binding the lovers together with like sentiments helps to give unity to the play and stresses the depth of their relationship.

The thing we can be certain of is that death is the stopping point of the play's action and of all the

posturing and game-playing that leads to it. Also, and this will become more important in the succeeding chapter, death is not an ending or an act of defeat on the part of either Antony or Cleopatra; it is a beginning and an act of triumph.

D.A. Traversi talks of the two divergent interpretations of the play, that Antony and Cleopatra are examples of misspent love and that they are the love-god and goddess the end of the play makes them seem, and says,

> Both interpretations, as we have said, can be defended; but to give each its due, to see them less as contradictory than as complementary aspects of a unified artistic creation, is as difficult as it proves, in the long run, to be necessary for a proper understanding of the play.[18]

He mentions the corruption of Egypt as a society and emphasizes that the intrigue which characterizes Roman society is in its own way as corrupt. Unlike Markels, he does not see Antony as sincere in making a Roman marriage. Of Antony's attitude at the time, he says there is a "false dignity which fittingly crowns a false situation and leads to a transaction as cynical as it is clearly destined to be impermanent" (p. 520). This brings us back to the fact that we really do not know what motivates Antony at this or any other critical juncture in the play. Traversi concludes:

> It is the play's achievement to leave room for both estimates of the personal tragedy, the realistic as well as the lyrical; and if each has to be continually balanced against its opposite, so that the total impression can never, even at the last, rest upon one to the exclusion of the other, full understanding of what is intended depends on an appreciation of the poetic quality so marvelously, richly present throughout the play. The gap between what is clearly, from one point of view, a sordid infatuation, and the triumphant feeling which undoubtedly, though never exclusively, prevails in the final scene is bridged by a wonderful modification of connected imagery. Rottenness becomes the grounds for fertility, opulence becomes royalty, infatuation turns to transcendent passion, all by means of an organic process which ignores none of its earlier stages, which, while never denying the validity of the realistic estimation of the situations which accompany it to the last, integrates them in the more ample unity of its creative purpose. (p. 523)

Thus in Antony and Cleopatra we are given disparate pictures of the protagonists and their love. Antony is seen as a lascivious old ruffian and as a consummate lover, Cleopatra is seen as a "triple-turn'd whore" and as Antony's transcendently transfigured beloved. Both these views are contained in the play and constitute the central polarity out of which the others grow. It is tribute to Shakespeare's artistry that he can make two such opposing views work together for dramatic impact.

CHAPTER III. Tragedy and Comedy

The conflicts and polarities in the characters of Antony and Cleopatra resolve themselves in their deaths. There are other contrasts in the play that also are not resolved until the final curtain. Foremost of these is the tension between the tragic vision and the comic vision in the play.

Brents Stirling has suggested that perhaps the play is a satiric tragedy.[19] He points to such episodes as Cleopatra wrangling with Seleucus over the amount of gold in her treasury as she is supposedly planning suicide. He also cites elements of satire in the spectacle of the lords of the world drunk, singing a hymn to Bacchus, and at Antony's alternate braggadocio and angry ravings, as well as at the irony that Antony commits suicide over Cleopatra's supposed, but not actual, death. He also correctly notes that, with some lyrical and some raging exceptions, the tone of the play is ironic and at the same time often lighthearted, both marks of satire. He debates whether or not stature in defeat is a sine qua non of tragedy, since he sees in Antony none of the tragic stature that characterizes other Shakespearean tragic

heroes, such as Lear, Othello, and MacBeth (pp. 187-190). He believes that "tragic insight is a quality of the play, and only secondarily, although often, a quality of the protagonist" (p. 190), and that, therefore, Antony and Cleopatra can be called a satirical tragedy.

One technique of mixing comedy and tragedy that Shakespeare uses in Antony and Cleopatra is the comic foreshadowing of an event that is to have a tragic cast. This technique is used several times to advantage during the play. For instance, in the scene between Iras, Charmian, Alexas, and the soothsayer, when Iras and Charmian are teasing the soothsayer about their fortunes, he predicts that Charmian will outlive her mistress (he does not say that she will outlive her only by a matter of moments). Charmian says, "excellent! I love long life better than figs" (1.2.31). Ironically, it is in a basket of figs that the clown brings the asp that will kill her. Again, when Antony proposes to leave Cleopatra and go to Rome after he hears of Fulvia's death, Enobarbus says,

> Why then we kill our women. . . . Cleopatra, catching but the least noise of this, dies instantly; I have seen her die twenty times upon far poorer moment. I do think there is mettle in death, which commits some loving act upon her, she hath such a celerity in dying." (1.2.127,134-47).

Of course, Cleopatra will die for love of Antony, and

death will commit a "loving act upon her" before the play is ended, and Enobarbus's words will ring prophetic.

Another technique for mixing tragedy and comedy is the juxtaposing of matters of great weight with scenes of revelry and lightheartedness. In the second scene of Act I the soothsayer, Charmian, and the others exit, leaving Antony on stage to receive the news of Fulvia's death.

Another example is shown during the festivities aboard Pompey's galley, just after Antony's supremely comic description of the crocodile:

> It is shaped, sir, like itself, and it is as broad as it has breadth; it is just so high as it is, and moves with its own organs; it lives by that which nourisheth it; and, the elements once out of it, it transmigrates" (2.7.42-45).

Menas draws Pompey aside and offers to cut the cable and fall to the throats of the triumvirate, making Pompey master of the world.

Most important to the blending of comedy and tragedy are the final scenes of the play, in which Antony and Cleopatra die. Shakespeare has gained the advantage, by having Cleopatra send false word of her death, of showing each lover's reaction to the other's death. Antony has essentially a positive vision of death when he thinks he he is going to join Cleopatra, and it is only when he hears she is still alive that he dies with mere resignation.

Cleopatra, on the other hand, rises into death rather than falls to it, and she takes a vision of Antony with her. Michael Payne says, "Thus, like its thematic polarities, the play's structure is neither tragic nor comic, but both. The lovers' apotheosis is for them a comic resolution" (p. 279). G. Wilson Knight also sees that the play is comic in its ending. He says, "Without shirking any ugly facts or colorings of 'realism,' the poet expresses the finest delights of his vision. Within this whole vision the dualisms so starkly divergent in the sombre plays are resolved, dissolved, melted into a sublime unity (p. 248). Knight sees the whole play as a theme of melting and mating of elements and themes: earth-air, fire-water, life-death, masculine-feminine, tragic-comic. He says, "The finite and infinite are blended in these descriptions" (p. 261), referring to the long descriptions of Cleopatra and Antony quoted in Chapter II. He also says that all the characters who die do so at the height of loyalty or love, and that loyalty is one of the major themes of the play. He points out that there are no "bad" characters like Iago, Aaron the Moor, or Richard III in the play. Larry Champion notes that there are no "good" characters either: Antony has no correct course from which he deviates, because the world as it is presented in Antony and Cleopatra is tainted with selfishness, and all the characters to whom he might be loyal offer him no moral reason for loyalty

"Gone," says Champion, "is a clear distinction between virtue and vice, between material and spiritual choice."[20] This atmosphere of almost a moral vacuum helps set the tone for a play that is not purely tragic, since in a tragedy, it is almost always necessary to have the protagonist deviate from a right path.

Schanzer says, "Error and human frailty are shown to be the cause of Antony's defeat, not the workings of destiny. Indeed, a part of Antony's tragic suffering depends for its intensity on his recognition of his own authorship of his destruction" (p. 173). Thus the tragedy is not one of fate in any sense of the word. It is Antony's own nature that brings about his destruction, and it is his own nature that asserts itself in love and honor at the end of the play.

As to Cleopatra's death, Knight says it is "a soft melting, a dissolving, a blending of essence into essence" (p. 239). Cleopatra herself says, "I am fire and air; my other elements/ I give to baser life" (5.2.298-99). She sees herself as going to join Antony ("Husband, I come!" [5.2.286]), and Simmons has remarked that as comedy conventionally ends with marriage, so does Antony and Cleopatra end with a symbolic marriage. He says, "Cleopatra's snare is finally a 'toll of grace.' Her desire to call 'husband' is a reconciliation of flesh with spirit, and, though belatedly, of the lovers with the world" (p. 162).

Willard Farnham, in exploring possible sources for Antony and Cleopatra, says that Shakespeare was less kind than Plutarch to Cleopatra after the battle of Actium, but kinder to her before (p. 148). Plutarch has a picture of an absolutely changed woman going to meet death for Antony, whereas Shakespeare keeps her fairly consistent, willing to bargain with Caesar until it becomes apparent she has no position from which to bargain, and calling Caesar, "ass unpolicied" with practically her last breath. Apparently, Plutarch more or less "sanctified" Cleopatra in her death, whereas Shakespeare showed her as having a double motivation for suicide.

In short, there are several techniques employed in Antony and Cleopatra of mixing tragedy and comedy. One is comic foreshadowing of a tragic event; one is juxtaposing the tragic and the comic. By far the most important, however, is the mixing of the two visions in the fate of the protagonists. Antony's passion kills him, as Cleopatra's does her. Both are ennobled in death, however, to the point of an apotheosis. This transcendent vision of love for which the two die, particularly in its stress on marriage as a consummation of their love, achieved in death, is essentially comic; and although the play certainly contains elements of tragedy, the comic in its essential vision cannot be overlooked.

CONCLUSION

Harley Granville-Barker makes the point that Antony and Cleopatra, while its settings take us over the known world, is not really "set" anywhere; all the scene notations have been added by later editors. Its action is a montage of time and space encapsulation, and,

> In Antony and Cleopatra we find, except for the one episode of the sentries on guard listening to the mysterious music, no verbal scene painting of any sort, direct or implicit, nor as we have noted, more than the very minimum of reference to the locality of the scenes.[21]

He believes that Shakespeare was concentrating on giving "an imitation of an action" to the exclusion of extraneous elements like scenes. He points to the fact that the Elizabethan stage was not fitted for elaborate scenery and that the action would take place in the same location apparently on stage. This action in vacuuo tends, he thinks, to intensify our concentration on what is happening and what is being said, and to show Shakespeare at the height of his art in using the resources of the Elizabethan stage.

This view does not negate but heightens the Rome-Egypt contrast noted in Chapter I. Roman values,

attitudes, and even rhythms of speech are set at different poles that direct the course of the play. How important this polarity is, is expressed by Mark Rose, when he says, in analyzing the design of the play, that overall design (in terms of balanced scenes, or central scenes that strike at the "heart of the mystery") in Antony and Cleopatra is "vestigial." He says of the Rome-Egypt polarity,

> In no other tragedy does Shakespeare set up quite so emphatic a thematic opposition. It is the clarity and boldness of this opposition that makes it possible for him to de-emphasize overall design and yet multiply scenes at a dizzying rate to achieve epic effect. . . . (p. 168)

Rose says that Antony and Cleopatra makes a shift in Shakespeare's art toward a more episodic, "naive," not so tightly designed structure that will rule his later writing. At any rate, the necessity of the Rome-Egypt polarity in governing the structure of Antony and Cleopatra cannot be overstressed.

Another polarity, corollary to the first, is that of Octavius and Cleopatra as ruling stars in Antony's behavior. Antony is governed by honor and loyalty, and his opposing loyalties to Caesar and Cleopatra tear him apart. His loyalty to Cleopatra causes him to dishonor himself at Actium. He does not regain his honor, even though he fights a successful land battle on the second

day of the contest between himself and Caesar, until he kills himself.

Other dualities in the play are the contrasts in Antony's character and in Cleopatra's. Antony can be seen as the Roman Antony and the Egyptian Antony, and Cleopatra can be seen as Cleopatra the Queen of the Nile, true lover to Antony, or Cleopatra the "triple-turn'd whore," the temptress of Antony and self-centered strumpet. The interesting thing is that Shakespeare presents both and intends us to see both, as he intends us to see Antony as the triple pillar of the world and the old ruffian and libertine. This thematic polarity is woven into the Rome-Egypt theme and is as much a dichotomous intent as the first.

Finally, the play is both tragic and comic--comic in both the sense of being lighthearted and gay, and the sense of resolving itself in a union of lovers and reconciling the lovers with the world. That the world had no room for Antony and Cleopatra while they were alive is tragic; that they are among the most famous lovers ever to have lived is, in the broader sense mentioned above, comic. That the two lovers had to die is tragic; that they died going as to a lover's feast and a nuptial ceremony is comic. We are asked to see the play from both perspectives at once.

Antony and Cleopatra is thus one of the richest plays ever written. Michael Payne says,

> Throughout Antony and Cleopatra Shakespeare develops a series of interrelated polarities--Rome-Egypt, masculinity-femininity, space-time, boundary-space-time transcendence, death-love--which at first seem to be dualistic concepts but which are finally shown to be polar instead. (pp. 265-266)

These polarities constitute the framework of the play and make it so various and fascinating.

The three polarities explored in the study--the Rome-Egypt dichotomy, the duality in the characters of Antony and Cleopatra, and the blending of tragic and comic elements--make the play ambiguous and, compared to, say, Macbeth, opaque as to the motivations of the main characters. It would be wrong, however, to imply that the play is flawed to the extent that it is ambiguous. Much of the irony generated between the private and the public lives of these two lovers depends on this ambiguity of motivation; for instance, in Antony's contracting marriage to Octavia, his remark that all to come shall be done "by the book" follows fast on the heels of his saying that it is in the East his pleasure lies. We can interpret his intentions relative to his marriage in more than one way, depending on how far we consider him capable of duplicity--but regardless of the face we put on the matter, the two remarks stand juxtaposed. Similarly, we can interpret Cleopatra's conversation with Thyreus in more than one way; either she is making plans to placate

Caesar at Antony's expense or she is buying time for her and Antony both--but we are left with the rich irony of her saying to Thyreus that her honor was forced, not surrendered to Antony. By contrast with these ambiguities and ironies which are generated in three main ways (by juxtaposing the Egyptian and Roman worlds, by creating for Antony and Cleopatra characters which are open to multiple interpretations, and by mixing the tragic and the comic), the few certitudes in the play seem more certain. That both Antony and Cleopatra believe they will be united in death is the one outstanding certainty of the play. We are not given a choral or parenthetical author's comment on the validity of this belief. Caesar, visibly moved at finding Cleopatra has committed suicide, orders them to be placed side by side in the same tomb, and says that no tomb in the world shall "inclip" a pair so famous. If we cannot be certain--and who can?--of what happens to the lovers after they die, we are left with the certitude of their belief in a united afterlife. It is this belief that transforms the two once and for all from strumpet's fool and triple turn'd whore into the transcendent lovers of legend. It is essential that they be presented from both sides in order that the transformation mean something, and it is essential that comedy and tragedy be blended so that we see their loss as well as their gain. Dryden's All for Love eliminates some of the

ambiguities that prevail in Antony and Cleopatra, and most are agreed that his play is the lesser for it. The consummate skill of Antony and Cleopatra is at least partly that of bringing together disparate dramatic elements in setting, characterization and tone and letting each element have full weight in a complex and richly textured whole. Thus the ambiguities and dualities in the play add to it rather than detract from it and there are few purists who would have the play otherwise than it is.

Shakespeare was to explore the limits of tragi-comedy during the latter part of his career; it might be well to look at Antony and Cleopatra as his first tragi-comedy rather than as his last tragedy. At any rate, Antony and Cleopatra represents a departure from what Shakespeare was doing in either the comedies or the tragedies--a departure toward a texture more like that of real life, which is always a mixture of comedy and tragedy.

NOTES

[1]Herman Harrell Horne, Shakespeare's Philosophy of Love (Raleigh, N.C.: Edward and Broughton Company, 1945), p. 145.

[2]William Shakespeare, Antony and Cleopatra, ed. William J. Rolphe (New York: American Book Company, 1898); 2.3.236-37.

[3]Maurice Charney, Shakespeare's Roman Plays (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 80-81.

[4]Stanford Lyman, The Drama of Social Reality (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 98.

[5]Janet Adelman, The Common Liar (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 134.

[6]Paul A. Cantor, Shakespeare's Rome: Republic and Empire (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 134.

[7]John Moore, "Enemies of Love: The Example of Antony and Cleopatra," Kenyon Review, 31 (1969), 650.

[8]Joseph Larry Simmons, Shakespeare's Pagan World: The Roman Tragedies (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 1973), pp. 138.

[9]Curtis Brown Watson, Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 211.

[10]Julian Markels, The Pillar of the World (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1960), p. 30.

[11]Mark Rose, Shakespearean Design (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 164.

[12]Michael Payne, "Erotic Irony and Polarity in "Antony and Cleopatra," Shakespeare Quarterly, 24 (Winter 1973), 267.

[13]G. Wilson Knight, The Imperial Theme: Further Interpretation of Shakespeare's Tragedies, Including the Roman Plays (London: Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1965), p. 300.

[14]Franklin Dickey, Not Wisely But Too Well: Shakespeare's Love Tragedies (San Marion, Calif.: Huntington Library Publications, 1957), p. 201.

[15]Leonora Leet Brodwin, Elizabethan Love Tragedy (New York: New York University Press, 1971), p. 230.

[16]Willard Farnham, Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier (Berkley: University of California Press, 1950), p. 300.

[17]Ernest Schanzer, The Problem Plays of Shakespeare (New York Schocken Books, 1965, p. 743.

[18]D.A. Traversi, An Approach to Shakespeare (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday & Company, 1969), p. 512.

[19]Brents Stirling, Unity in Shakespearean Tragedy: The Interplay of Theme and Character (New York: Gordian Press, Inc. 1966), p. 192.

[20]Larry S. Champion, Shakespeare's Tragic Perspective (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1976), p. 240.

[21]Harley Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare, vol. I (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1947), pp. 385-386.

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