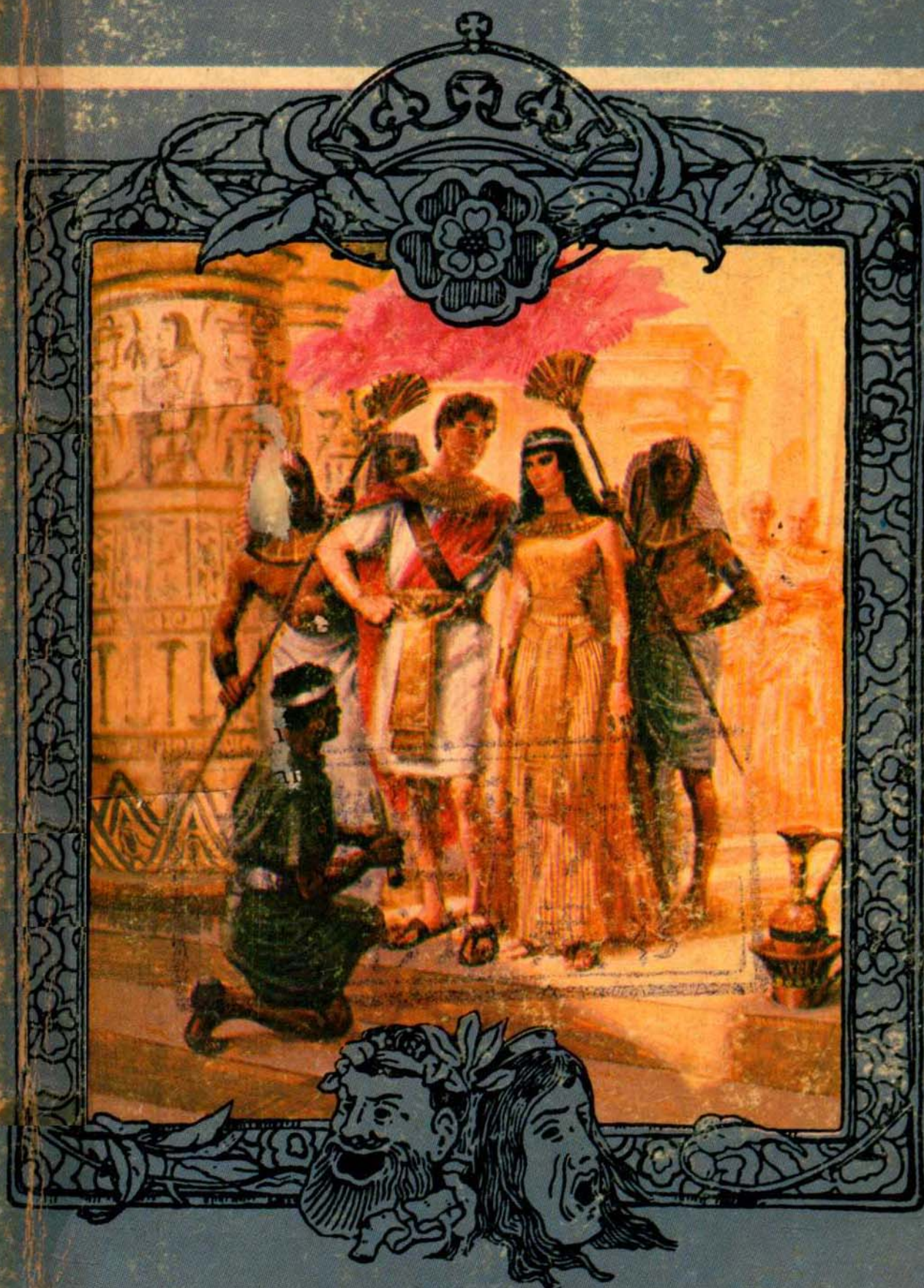


# William Shakespeare



## ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA



O. H. Rudzik, *Introduction*. / Lucy M. Fitzpatrick, *Notes*





# Antony and Cleopatra

ACT I



## ACT I

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ANTONY'S INFATUATION with the Queen of Egypt dismays and disgusts his soldiers. His revels with Cleopatra are interrupted by an embassy from Rome, much to Antony's annoyance. He dismisses it. But a second message arrives, this time to inform him that his wife is dead—and this gives him pause. He resolves to return to Rome to mend his political fences. The son of Pompey the Great has challenged Rome's leaders, controls the seas, and is making a rapid recovery of his father's former position. Cleopatra is disturbed by the prospect of Antony's going but cannot sway him from this despite her wiles. In Rome, Cæsar catalogues Antony's debauches and excesses to the third member of the triumvirate, Lepidus; but, despite all this, Antony is badly needed at this point to stand off Pompey. In Alexandria, Cleopatra frets impatiently at her lover's absence and sends a barrage of messengers after him.

ACT I. SCENE I.

*Alexandria. A room in CLEOPATRA's palace.*

*Enter DEMETRIUS and PHILO.*

PHILO.

Nay, but this dotage<sup>1</sup> of our general's  
O'erflows the measure: those his goodly eyes,  
That o'er the files and musters of the war<sup>2</sup>  
Have glow'd like plated Mars,<sup>3</sup> now bend, now turn,  
The office and devotion of their view<sup>4</sup>  
Upon a tawny front:<sup>5</sup> his captain's heart,  
Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst  
The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper,<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> dotage: doting fondness.

<sup>2</sup> files and musters of the war: ranks of soldiers drawn up for battle.

<sup>3</sup> like plated Mars: like an armored god of war.

<sup>4</sup> The office and devotion of their view: their devoted service.

<sup>5</sup> tawny front: dark-skinned face.

<sup>6</sup> reneges all temper: denies or renounces all qualities of nobility.

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### *William Shakespeare: His Life, Times, and Theatre*

#### HIS LIFE

The world's greatest poet and playwright, often called the greatest Englishman, was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire in the year 1564. An entry in the *Stratford Parish Register* gives his baptismal date as April 26. Since children were usually baptized two or three days after birth, it is reasonable to assume that he was born on or about April 23—an appropriate day, being the feast of St. George, the patron saint of England.

His father, John Shakespeare, was a glover and dealer in wool and farm products, who had moved to Stratford from Snitterfield, four miles distant, some time before 1552. During his early years in Stratford his business prospered, enabling him to acquire substantial property, and to take his place among the more considerable citizens of the town. In 1557 he married Mary, daughter of Robert Arden, a wealthy landowner of Wilmcote, not far from Stratford. Two daughters were born to them before William's birth, but both died in infancy. William was thus their third child, though the eldest of those who survived infancy. After him were born Gilbert, Joan, Anne, Richard, and Edmund.

Very little is positively known about Shakespeare's boyhood and education. We know that for some years after William's birth his father's rise in Stratford society and municipal affairs continued. Many local offices came to him in rapid succession: aletaster, burgess, assessor of fines, chamberlain, high bailiff, alderman, and chief alderman in 1571. As the son of a man of such eminence in Stratford, Shakespeare undoubtedly attended the local Grammar School. This he was entitled to do free of charge, his father being a town councilor. It is probable that he covered the usual Elizabethan curriculum: an "A B C book," the catechism in Latin and English, Latin grammar, the translation of Latin authors, and perhaps some Greek grammar and translation as well. But family circumstances appear to have curtailed his formal education before it was complete. About the year 1578, having gone heavily into debt, John Shakespeare lost two large farms inherited by his wife from her father. Thereafter, he was involved in a series of lawsuits, and lost his post on the Stratford town council. Matters got steadily worse for him, until finally, in 1586, he was declared a bankrupt. But by this time the future poet-dramatist was already a family man himself.

In 1582, in the midst of his father's legal and financial crises, Shakespeare married Anne, daughter of Richard Hathaway (recently deceased) of the village of Shottery near Stratford. The *Episcopal Register* for the Diocese of Worcester contains their marriage record, dated November 28, 1582; he was then in his eighteenth year, his wife in her twenty-sixth. On May 26 of the following year the *Stratford Parish Register* recorded the baptism of their first child, Susanna; and on February 2, 1585, the baptism of a twin son and daughter named Hamnet and Judith.



These facts are all that are known of Shakespeare's early life. How he supported his family, how long he continued to live in Stratford, we do not know for certain.

But however he may have occupied himself in the interim, we know that by 1592 he was already a budding actor and playwright in London. In that year Robert Greene in his autobiographical pamphlet *A Groatsworth of Wit*, referring to the young actors and menders of old plays who were, it seemed to him, gaining undeserved glory from the labours of their betters (both by acting their plays and by rewriting them), wrote as follows:

Yes trust them not: for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tygers heart, wrapt in a Players hyde, supposes he is as well able to bombast out blanke verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *Johannes factotum*, is in his owne conceit the onely Shakescene in a countrey.

"Shakescene" is clearly Shakespeare. The phrase "upstart Crow" probably refers to his country origins and his lack of university education. "Beautified with our feathers" probably means that he uses the older playwrights' words for his own aggrandisement either in plays in which he acts or in those he writes himself. "Tygers heart wrapt in a Players hyde" is a parody of a line in *III Henry VI*, one of the earliest plays ascribed to Shakespeare. And the Latin phrase *Johannes factotum*, meaning Jack-of-all-trades, suggests that he was at this time engaged in all sorts of theatrical jobs: actor, poet, playwright, and perhaps manager as well.

Greene died shortly after making this scurrilous attack on the young upstart from Stratford, and so escaped the resentment of those he had insulted. But Henry Chettle, himself a minor dramatist, who had prepared Greene's manuscript for the printer, in his *Kind-Harts Dreame* (1592), apologized to Shakespeare for his share in the offence:

I am as sory as if the originall fault had beene my fault, because my selfe have seene his demeanor no lesse civill, than he excelent in the qualitie he professes: Besides, divers of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing, which argues honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approoves his Art.

Thus, in a very indirect manner and because of an attack upon him by an irascible dying man, we learn that Shakespeare at this time was in fact held in high regard by "divers of worship," that is, by many of high birth, as an upright, honest young man of pleasant manners and manifest skill as actor, poet, and playwright.

Although Shakespeare by 1593 had written, or written parts of, some five or six plays, it was as a non-dramatic poet that he first appeared in print. *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, long narrative poems, both bearing Shakespeare's name, were published in 1593 and 1594 respectively. But thereafter for the next twenty years he wrote almost nothing but drama. Long before his death in 1616, his name held such magic for the public that merely to print it on the title page of any play assured its popular acclaim. The "upstart Crow" had come a long way since 1592.

He had come a long way, too, from the economic straits that

may well have driven him to London many years before. We know, for example, from the records of tax assessments that by 1596 Shakespeare was already fairly well-to-do. But his life during this time was not quite unclouded. His only son, Hamnet, died in 1596 at the age of eleven years, his father in 1601, and his mother in 1608. All three were buried in Stratford. More happily he saw, in 1607, the marriage of his daughter Susanna to Dr. John Hall, an eminent physician of Stratford, and, in the following year, the baptism of his granddaughter, Elizabeth Hall.

Shakespeare's retirement to Stratford appears to have been gradual, but by 1613, if not earlier, he seems to have settled there, though he still went up to London occasionally. On March 25, apparently already ill, Shakespeare revised and signed his will, among other bequests leaving to his wife his "second best bed with the furniture." A month later he was dead, dying on his fifty-second birthday, April 23, 1616. He was buried in the chancel of Holy Trinity Church, Stratford, on April 26.

### *HIS TIMES*

Shakespeare lived during the English Renaissance, that age of transition that links the Mediaeval and the Modern world. Inheriting the rich traditions of the Middle Ages in art, learning, religion, and politics, rediscovering the great legacies of classical culture, the men of the Renaissance went on to new and magnificent achievements in every phase of human endeavour. No other period in history saw such varied and prolific development and expansion. And the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603), Shakespeare's age, was the High Renaissance in England.

During the Middle Ages theology had dominated education, but now the language, literature, and philosophy of the ancient world, the practical arts of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, and training in morals, manners, and gymnastics assumed the major roles in both school and university—in other words, an education that fitted one for life in the world here and now replaced one that looked rather to the life hereafter. Not that the spiritual culture of man was neglected. Indeed, it took on a new significance, for as life in this world acquired new meaning and value, religion assumed new functions, and new vitality to perform them, as the bond between the Creator and a new kind of creation.

It was, of course, the old creation—man and nature—but it was undergoing great changes. The Mediaeval view of man was generally not an exalted one. It saw him as more or less depraved, fallen from Grace as a result of Adam's sin; and the things of this world, which was also "fallen," as of little value in terms of his salvation. Natural life was thought of mainly as a preparation for man's entry into Eternity. But Renaissance thought soon began to rehabilitate man, nature, and the things of this life. Without denying man's need for Grace and the value of the means of salvation provided by the Church, men came gradually to accept the idea that there were "goods," values, "innocent delights" to be had in the world here and now, and that God had given them for man to enjoy.



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## HIS THEATRE

There were many playhouses in Shakespeare's London. The first was built in 1576 by James Burbage and was called the *Theatre*. It was built like an arena, with a movable platform at one end, and had no seats in the pit, but had benches in the galleries that surrounded it. It was built of wood, and cost about £200. Other famous playhouses of Shakespeare's time included the Curtain, the Bull, the Rose, the Swan, the Fortune, and, most famous of them all, the Globe. It was built in 1599 by the sons of James Burbage, and it was here that most of Shakespeare's plays were performed. Since more is known about the Globe than most of the others, I shall use it as the basis of the brief account that follows of the Elizabethan playhouse.

As its name suggests, the Globe was a circular structure (the second Globe, built in 1614 after the first burned down, was octagonal). Open to the sky, somewhat like a modern football or baseball stadium, though much smaller, it had three tiers of galleries surrounding the central "yard" or pit, and a narrow roof over the top gallery. But most interesting from our viewpoint was the stage—or rather *stages*—which was very different from that of most modern theatres. These have the familiar "picture-frame" stage: a raised platform at one end of the auditorium, framed by curtains and footlights, and viewed only from the front like a picture. Shakespeare's stage was very different.

The main stage, or *apron* as it was called, jutted well out into the pit, and did not extend all the way across from side to side. There was an area on either side for patrons to sit or stand in, so that actors performing on the apron could be viewed from three sides instead of one. In addition, there was an inner stage, a narrow rectangular recess let into the wall behind the main stage. When not in use it could be closed by a curtain drawn across in front; when open it could be used for interior scenes, arbor scenes, tomb and anteroom scenes and the like. On either side of this inner stage were doors through which the main stage was entered. Besides the inner and outer stages, there were no fewer than four other areas where the action of the play, or parts of it, might be performed. Immediately above the inner stage, and corresponding to it in size and shape, was another room with its front exposed. This was used for upstairs scenes, or for storage when not otherwise in use. In front of this was a narrow railed gallery, which could be used for balcony scenes, or ones requiring the walls of a castle or the ramparts of a fortress. On either side of it and on the same level was a window-stage, so-called because it consisted of a small balcony enclosed by windows that opened on hinges. This permitted actors to stand inside and speak from the open windows to others on the main stage below. In all, it was a very versatile multiple stage and gave the dramatist and producer much more freedom in staging than most modern theatres afford. It is interesting to note that some of the new theatres today have revived certain of the features of the Elizabethan stage.

Very little in the way of scenery and backdrops was used. The dramatist's words and the imagination of the audience supplied



the lack of scenery. Usually a few standard stage props were on hand: trestles and boards to form a table, benches and chairs, flagons, an altar, artificial trees, weapons, a man's severed head, and a few other items. Costumes were usually elaborate, though no attempt was made to reproduce the dress of the time and place portrayed in the play.

Play production in Shakespeare's time was clearly very different from that of ours, but we need have no doubts about the audience's response to what they saw and heard on stage. They came, they saw, and the dramatist conquered, for they kept coming back for more and more. And despite the opposition that the theatre encountered from Puritans and others, who thought it the instrument of Satan, the theatre in Shakespeare's time flourished as one of the supreme glories of a glorious age.

—DAVID G. PITT

*Memorial University of Newfoundland*

## INTRODUCTION TO *Antony and Cleopatra*

### THE TEXT AND ITS SOURCE

Seven years after Shakespeare's death, two of his friends published a commemorative collected edition of his dramatic works. *Antony and Cleopatra* is one of the several plays that first appeared in published form in this First Folio. The text seems to have been set up directly from the author's manuscript; the printed version of the play is consequently a good one and close to what the Elizabethans must have seen when the play was first performed. A contemporary playwright, Daniel, had been influenced by Shakespeare's play to introduce some imitative changes into his rhymed tragedy of *Cleopatra*, published in this revised form in 1607. In the following year, an entry appeared in the Stationers' Register (a condition, then, for any publication) for the intended printing of "A booke Called Antony and Cleopatra." This may have been what is known as a blocking entry (to prevent anyone else from printing a profitable play when theatrical copyright was nonexistent), since such an edition has not been found. It does, however, give good evidence of the play's existence at this time, and, perhaps, of its popularity.

Shakespeare's original source stands unusually close to the play itself. Antony and Cleopatra were, by the time of the Renaissance, popular legendary figures—a pair of great lovers. This must have influenced Shakespeare's framing of the play, but its material—its political content and the point of departure for its characterizations—is not to be found in popular preconceptions. As in his other "Roman" plays, Shakespeare turned to one of the great literary achievements of his age, Sir Thomas North's translation, at several removes, of Plutarch's *Lives* of Greek and Roman political leaders. He had already used three of these lives as the raw material for his drama on the assassination of Julius Caesar; later, he was to use the history again for the pre-Caesarean figure of the Roman patrician, Coriolanus. But his most remarkable use of this classical text was in the transmutation of the later part of the Life of Antonius into the tragedy of *Antony and Cleopatra*. To

notice some of the important elements in this metamorphosis is a good way toward the recognition of one of Shakespeare's most puzzling dramatic statements, and an equally good way to avoid an over-hasty decision as to what sort of statement we can allow ourselves about it. Simply for the sake of convenience, let us work from the easily discerned to the more difficult, from the words to the several layers of function and meaning they set up.

### *The Vehicle of Language*

The Elizabethan stage was bare and immediate. What went on did so literally projected into the audience, and though spectacle had its effect—costumes could cost more than the playwright—the drama consisted of its words. These had to be arresting in the first instance:

Nay, but this dotage of our general's  
O'erflows the measure . . .

But they also had to fall into their proper place, to carry the action forward, to fill out the frame of motive and behavior that create dramatic characterization; finally to leave a final impression of totality and an over-all achieved meaning:

. . . Come, Dolabella, see  
High order in this great solemnity.

In the particular case of *Antony and Cleopatra*, there are two points immediately to be made. The first involves Shakespeare's increasing abandoning of that final refuge of spectacle, the rhetorical spell of language itself. Nowhere in this play are there excisable portions which, although rich in their proper context, can be extracted to stand as independent pieces of verse. Few moments of soliloquy occur. Instead, the language and the characterizations are inescapably dramatic; each functions in its necessary context. The verbal texture is not barren, far from it. But it is always relevant and appropriate, highly charged when the emotional pressures increase, swift and sure otherwise; never there for its own allure.

This observation seems to lead to a paradox in raising the second point—what appears to be an unusual fidelity by the dramatist to the actual language of his source in North's *Plutarch*. As a famous example, there is the almost Oriental splendor to the words in which Enobarbus recalls how Cleopatra first met Antony on the Cydnus; by juxtaposing the play and the history, one seems to find a duplication. One almost seems to find it here, and generally throughout the play, and this is perhaps the temptation: to find in this apparent fidelity to the source a total correspondence. But if we take Enobarbus' address, we must notice immediately how the lushness is dramatically appropriate, its splendor all the brighter in the neutrally colored world of Rome and in its delivery by the normally self-possessed Roman officer. Clearly, Cleopatra's effect is theatrical even in reminiscence. The dramatic purpose is being served even in what seems transcription from North. But let us consider just how Shakespeare does transfer the account from the history into the play. The relevant passage in North begins:



She disdained to set forward otherwise, but to take her barge in the river of Cydnus, the poepe whereof was of gold, the sails of purple, and the owers of silver, which kept stroke in rowing after the sound of flutes, howboys, eythern, violls, and such other instruments as they played upon in the barge. . . .

What Shakespeare adds is the opulence, the sensual animation that provides the leading clue to Cleopatra's eternal fascination. In Enobarbus' opening words, the italicized words are the dramatist's, and it is these that re-create the famous journey for the soldiers and for us:

*The barge she sat in, like a burnisht throne,  
Burnt 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 . . .*

But even more than that: after a good beginning, there must come at least as good an ending. In North, the account ends simply, possibly with a touch of the comic:

Others also rann out of the city to see her coming in. So that in the end, there rann such multitudes of people one after another, that Antonius was left post alone in the market-place, in his Imperiall seate to give audience.

But notice how Shakespeare fixes the scene essentially so that the few simple words added point beyond the spectacle, whether visual or verbal. Just as in the historical account, the newly arrived conqueror has been abandoned for a better show going on around the corner. Cleopatra has upstaged the Roman; he, left to himself, is not so much one of the three imperial world-shakers but a man, bored and idly whistling to himself, whom the Egyptian queen is to capture that very night:

The city cast  
Her people out upon her; and Antony,  
Enthroned i' the market-place, did sit alone,  
*Whistling to the air; which, but for vacancy,  
Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too  
And made a gap in nature.*

In selecting a deliberately limited example, we have noticed how the given facts are changed into a new dramatic reality. In this case, it has been a sample of language. But the situation is equally true for the larger aspects of the play as well, and these must be examined to provide the very groundwork of the play's meaning. This involves considering Shakespeare's dramatic conversion of the story itself and of its political and its personal substance.

### *The "History" of Antony*

Plutarch set up a parallel series of lives, Greek against Roman. In this way, the course of Greek history could illuminate and, at

the same time, give anticipatory warnings for the course of Roman political development. Plutarch's history then is both biographically founded—it explains the flow of events through the men who make these events, men who win or lose by them—and it offers a moral evaluation through these biographies. Both these aspects are important and we shall consider them later, but there occurs a prior difficulty when we think of the drama that is to use such material. The very obvious problem is in the fact that the source is history, and history tells a story, no matter how sophisticatedly moral. A narrative with some dramatic possibilities has to be cast into a dramatic structure where narration must be kept to a minimum. There is only one description of Cleopatra's barge, we remember, for the theatre cannot exposit in place of demonstrating.

Such a challenge faces any dramatist who uses a story and tries to give it a dramatically convincing form. But what makes the task so very much more difficult here is the vastness of the narrative involved. The dimensions of time and space that frame Antony's story reveal the degree of concentration necessary to shrink all the years of Antony's rule and its extent from Rome to Alexandria into their imaginative equivalent on the stage. These dimensions have to be maintained constantly present, for they do much to make up Antony. Perhaps even more fundamental is the nature of the account of Antony, plainly visible in Plutarch's history—the decline of one man's fortunes and the rise of another's. Circumstances and situations help chronicle this downward progression for Antony and the corresponding consolidation of the empire under Octavius Caesar. It is all narrative, however, and the story has little dramatic meaning in the way of genuine moments of choice, decision, alteration. Where these seem to be found in the play, they owe their presence to the dramatist and not the historian.

Shakespeare's effective solution for this determinedly narrative and extendedly vast account was, however, brilliantly simple. He had to avoid complicated means, for the political struggles, the battles, the comings and goings were in themselves enough complication for any dramatic representation. But, at the same time, the patterning of all this bulk of events and places had to be integral; an externally imposed framework would add one further and dangerously extraneous complication to any possible final meaning. What the play then consists of, what in one real sense is the play, Shakespeare gave us in contrast. This ties in all the scenes, gives them a means of relating to each other, and, most importantly, provides a clear explanation of what it is that is constant under all the numerous changes of place and time. The contrast is between Rome and Alexandria and the empires each represents. The contrast is between Octavius Caesar and Cleopatra as each symbolizes his and her own world and its attitudes and ambitions. The contrast is, finally, Antony himself and the basic dramatic action, that of Antony's oscillation between the two. The separate elements, the cities, the years, that make up Antony's hesitations are the narrative as it is absorbed into the play. The motivation, presentation, and final resolution (or the impossibility of any such resolving) of this contrast in Antony is, in its sum, the drama. What remains is to define more closely the nature of this contrast and its consequences.



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*The Imperial Theme*

*Antony and Cleopatra* is a Roman play. In this light, it forms the conclusion to the events set in action at the murder of Julius Caesar, in the play named after him. There Antony was first met—more politically adroit than the republican Brutus, more capable of utilizing the social chaos consequent to the assassination than were the self-divided conspirators. His regret and sorrow for the murdered man were genuine but opportune as well to his own advancement. On the other hand, his military colleague, the young Octavius, was the truer embodiment of the new political age founded by Caesar's death; Octavius early gives signs of being even more efficient, more capable in questions of empire, chiefly, perhaps, because of his unswerving determination.

So far as Octavius is the symbolic center for this newly forming world, Antony stands in contrast to him, and does so in two distinct though significantly related ways. His is the failure as against the final and politically complete triumph of Caesar, but "failure" is ambivalent in the world set up in the play. Antony fails, and provides a foil to Caesar, both because he is less and more than his rival. We meet him at what is close to the nadir of his manhood: his soldiers find him besotted and Antony's high-flown addresses to his mistress only confirm the justice of their opinion. His marveling at Caesar's swiftness is the paralyzed fascination of a victim before the predator. In all this, his debauches, his military incapacities, his foolish rashness, he emphasizes his rival's efficiency and effectiveness.

Yet out of this very collapse of Antony's fortunes, out of the total humiliation he must face, emerges the paradoxical impression of his greater majesty, of his being more the imperial figure than Octavius could be. Antony is driven back upon himself, cut off as he is from victory, Cleopatra, from any possible escape. What he recovers in this forced self-confrontation is recognition of himself, but of a self to which his behavior all through the play has stood in contrast. The heroic Antony who shames Enobarbus into death and impresses his rival posthumously is just as far from the figure and attitudes of an Octavius as the aging rake was. But now it is Octavius who must be judged the less. Antony's offering to fight his opponent single-handed is overtly foolish, if not a shade bombastic as well. Yet the rhetoric of the act is what will help Antony regain a self-regard, a dignity he once possessed that now is in elegiac contrast to a world of political advantage and self-seeking. Antony's royalty is in external contrast to Octavius' sentimental solemnity. Even more, it is a contrast to Antony's own previous degradation and futility and a victory over these:

... I liv'd the greatest prince o' th' world,  
The noblest; and do now not basely die,  
Not cowardly put off my helmet to  
My countryman,—a Roman by a Roman  
Valiantly vanquisht. Now my spirit is going;  
I can no more.

*The Title*

In this important way, Antony's story is Roman in its contrast of the old and the new Rome and in its tragic confrontation of the two, where the heroic and the efficient cannot correspond. Not

for Brutus earlier, nor for Antony here and for Octavius any such correspondence is immaterial except as political strategy. But Antony's story, no matter how closely studied, will not give us the play. Indeed, when isolated, Antony's presence can become too emphatic, make the play too much a question of Rome and its empire. It is not the Life of Antonius that Shakespeare is presenting but the tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra. Now, to a certain extent, Cleopatra's role can be assimilated to the political structure we have been examining. Her Asiatic world, with its frivolity, sensuality, and self-indulgence, is the most forcible expression of Antony's separation from Rome and from that in him which once was valiantly Roman. Just as Brutus' idealism was too self-divided to withstand Antony's clever determination, so now Antony suffers the same suicidal division between his honor and his infatuation for the queen. Octavius wins if only on grounds of economy of aims and ambitions.

Still, there is Cleopatra. Cleopatra shares the title of the play with Antony—she equally shares the weight of the play's meaning. Politically, Cleopatra is what has helped Antony degrade himself and what stands as an obstacle in Caesar's way; in both cases, she is a contrast to Roman valor and achievement. Tragically, she is more important, for she is no longer a moral lesson—somebody for Romans to avoid if they are to make good and win empires. The problem, however, once we leave behind politics and its simplicities, is to avoid the equally misleading simplicities so tempting in the personal relation of Antony and Cleopatra. There are two easy extremes—to take Cleopatra as the accomplished courtesan finally hounded into death, once no other choice exists, or to indulge in an "all-for-love" sentimentality on behalf of the two dead lovers. The trouble is that, in a way, both are there and it is only by somehow accepting both that we can preserve the play's richness of meaning.

Antony in his death can recover his former honor, seal with it his personal heroism and calmly accept his fate. To him now, Cleopatra is no longer an excuse for passion but a happily accepted part of this fate. The tragedy one senses in this is, in a sense, almost external to Antony, and emerges from Antony's obsolescence in the new empire where the tragic and failure are to become synonymous. With Cleopatra, there is no question of recovery or of reconciliation with a code of honor alien to her. What she must do is to imitate Antony, but in terms true to herself. This is what justifies her act and prevents any sense of the anticlimactic, despite Antony's removal. For what we witness is the last contrast worked, and perhaps the most important. It is a rich one, for it comprehends the furthest separation of Octavius and Antony, who is now acted out in Cleopatra's death. She echoes Antony, in words and resolution, but these confirm, in all her deliberate separation from what she once was, the Cleopatra who fascinated Antony: she woos death, eludes Caesar, and escapes with her grace intact. Again there is not any real sense of waste and anguish in the presence of her death, not any more than in Antony's. Partly this is so because their deaths become them more than what had become of their lives; partly, perhaps, because of their deliberate choice of death and its pursuit even through the unpropitious. Antony's



bungled suicide, Cleopatra's dodges to escape Caesar carry the past traces of their degradation to the very threshold of escape.

There does remain, if not a tragic grief, certainly a quality of tragic sadness. This is perhaps the complex reward of the play, to offer not a political lesson, not a morality, but a presentation of a brightness that is not to be dismissed as illusion nor to be accepted as finally real. Antony and Cleopatra find their epitaph not so much in Caesar's solemnity as in the pity of:

Finish, good lady; the bright day is done,  
And we are for the dark.

The final tragic effect is possibly just this—the admission of the truth of illusion in the very recognition of its deception. Antony and Cleopatra deceive themselves in their dying; the wonder is that they also deceive an audience perfectly aware of this.

—O. H. Rudzik, Department of English  
University College, University of Toronto

## STUDY QUESTIONS

### Act I

1. Describe Antony as he is presented at the beginning of the drama, both directly and by report. Do the same for Cleopatra.

2. What is the political situation as the action of the play begins? Include the triumvirate, Fulvia, and Pompey in your consideration. Discuss how the contrast and antagonism of the Roman and the Egyptian worlds is developed dramatically.

3. Discuss the means by which Cleopatra manages to keep Antony by her side. Include in your discussion some indication of how Shakespeare converts the limitation of some Elizabethan theatrical conventions (boy actors, lack of scenic effects) to reinforce his conception of Cleopatra.

4. Describe fully the initial contrast established between Caesar and Antony. Amplify and/or modify this contrast as the play proceeds.

### Act II

1. Describe the details of the first encounter in the play between Caesar and Antony. How are the meeting and its consequences broadened in scope and implication by the officers of each leader?

2. Try to decide how honest are Caesar's motives and intentions in marrying his sister to Antony. Consider what we know of Caesar's character and actions and his later conduct in this matter (especially Act III, Scene ii).

3. Consider carefully the account of Antony's initial meeting with Cleopatra. Why is this extended description given to us by Enobarbus? Enumerate Shakespeare's departures from Plutarch and establish their dramatic effect.

4. What does Enobarbus offer as the explanation of Cleopatra's hold on Antony? Compare your answer to question three, Act I.

5. What is the dramatic purpose and effect of the soothsayer's words to Antony?

6. Discuss Cleopatra's scene with the messenger in terms of its dramatic purpose. What does it indicate about the Egyptian court (as against the Roman) and about Cleopatra herself? Consider in this regard Cleopatra's later encounter with this messenger in Act III, Scene iii.

7. What does the encounter with Pompey reveal about Antony, Pompey himself, and Roman political morality? Consider the first scene in the next act in the light of your answer.

### *Act III*

1. What are the first indications of the newly emerging rift between Caesar and Antony? Give Antony's grievances and Caesar's justifications and counter-accusations.

2. What are the signs of Antony's likely failure in the coming battles with Caesar? Consider the dramatic purpose and effectiveness of the unnamed soldier who offers unaccepted military advice to Antony.

3. How is the course of the battles and of the entire war handled in terms of Elizabethan dramatic conventions? How does this fit in with the over-all structure of the play's development? Discuss how Shakespeare compresses and shapes the long campaign between Rome and Egypt so as to create narrative straightforwardness and dramatic effectiveness.

4. Discuss the extremes of Antony's behavior in reaction to his first defeat—his anger, his desperation, his reckless determination. What are the conclusions drawn by Caesar, Cleopatra, and Enobarbus, and what does the reaction of each of these represent in the action of the play?

5. What is the effect, on the other characters and on the audience, of Antony's offering a personal challenge to Caesar?

6. What is the low point of the decline of Antony's character? the low point of his fortunes?

### *Act IV*

1. What use is made of the supernatural in this act? Describe its presentation in terms of the Elizabethan theatre.

2. Discuss the desertion of Enobarbus in regard to the light it throws on the characters and actions of Antony and Caesar. What do his remorse and death contribute to the mood and theme of the play at this point?

3. Describe the second battle as to:

- a) its dramatic presentation and positioning;
- b) Antony's reaction;
- c) its importance in the total war.



4. How is Antony finally defeated? Describe Antony's reaction, both immediately and afterwards, and Cleopatra's.

5. Describe carefully Antony's death. Consider particularly Antony's resignation and calm melancholy, his last humiliation, and the effect his death leaves on the audience. In the dialogue between Antony and Cleopatra, what insights are provided of each? Examine carefully Cleopatra's lament over the dead man to see what modifications are necessary to our understanding of her.

### Act V

1. What are Caesar's purposes as to Cleopatra? How does he attempt to insure the success of these? How does Cleopatra arrive at the full knowledge of these?

2. Compare Caesar's epitaph for Antony with Cleopatra's in the previous act. What do we learn of each speaker, and what insights are given to us of Antony by each speaker?

3. Discuss the dramatic role and your interpretation of Cleopatra's argument with Seleutus.

4. Through careful reading, indicate how Shakespeare unites the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra by means of:

- a) significant echoes of imagery and phrasing;
- b) a parallel preparation for the escape offered by death;
- c) Cleopatra's deliberate effort to imitate her lover's heroism.

5. Describe the metamorphosis that Cleopatra attempts before her death to prepare for Antony. Include both her attempt to recapture a splendid past and her anticipation of triumph. Does Cleopatra, in your opinion, achieve this tragic triumph? Indicate clearly the evidence for your opinion, including your evaluation of the total characterization of Cleopatra as the play presents her.

6. What is the dramatic effect of Caesar's last address over the dead Cleopatra? Consider this effect both from the political and from the personal or tragic point of view.

### General

1. Describe what you consider to be the significant elements comprising the dramatic structure of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Consider the relative importance of the narrative, expository, descriptive, and dramatic components of the play and their inter-relationships. Relate this structure to the relevant conventions and techniques of the Elizabethan theatre.

2. What aspects of the play can be considered political or public, and which ones personal or private? How do they interact and produce a unified impression? What is the contribution of each to the tragic effect?

3. What dramatic problem is indicated by the title of the