

Antony and Cleopatra, gladiator and the Statue of Liberty

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Antony and Cleopatra is based upon a dualistic vision of experience, the world of Rome pitted against the world of Egypt. Rome is associated with military glory, honor, and moral duty and this is clearly depicted by the imagery used throughout the play. Through Cleopatra's words in Act 1 Scene 1, the audience gets some insight into the Roman way even before Shakespeare introduces it on stage. "If the scarce bearded Caesar have not sent his powerful mandate to you, 'Do this, or this; Take in that kingdom and enfranchise that.

As she tries to predict the message from Rome, she creates an image of a powerful and commanding Caesar whose sole concern is to ensure the political superiority of the Triumvirate. Shakespeare uses the character of Caesar to represent Rome and therefore creates the idea of a politically-motivated nation. The news from the messenger in Act 1 Scene 2 also supports the political urgency of Rome as it creates images of war and conquest that is occurring back in Rome. He speaks of Fulvia coming into "the field" and the "conquering banner" of Labenius, who is an enemy of the Triumvirate.

However, the battle of Actium which occurs after the separation of the Triumvirate is where imagery truly serves to illustrate the military urgency that is associated with Rome as images of ships, sails, swords and battle give the audience a greater understanding of the emphasis they place on war and the preservation of power. This is obvious in Caesar's words as he delivers commands for war; "Strike not by land; keep whole. Provoke not battle till we have done at sea.

Caesar's words help to define the Roman vision of experience: militaristic and male, marked by heroic restraint in difficult circumstances, a willed ability to combat one's deepest feelings, a sustained composure when everyone else is falling apart. Egypt, on the other hand, presents a stark contrast to the political world of the Romans. Egypt represents instinctive passion, extravagant love, fertility, and magnanimity. Just as Caesar represents Rome, Cleopatra's character is used to represent Egypt as a whole. The extravagance of Egypt becomes immediately obvious as Cleopatra enters in Act 1 Scene 1.

She enters with a flourish of fanfare, a train of female servants and eunuchs fanning her which evokes an image of absolute comfort and relaxation.

There is no hint of political concern as she and Antony profess their love to each other in extravagant words which highlight their instinctive passion.

This is reflected in Antony's response to Cleopatra's question of the extent of his love; "Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth." There are also various references to food and drink in Cleopatra's words and these images serve to create a sense of pleasure which is associated with eating.

She refers to her 'salad days' as she speaks of her youth. She also requests "music and moody food" to quell her anxiety about Antony's return to her. The atmosphere of pleasure in Egypt is emphasized by Antony in Act 1 Scene 1 as he expresses his wishes to indulge in the gay abandon and revelry of Cleopatra's kingdom; "There's not a moment of our lives that should stretch without some pleasure now." Another important illustration of the contrast

between Rome and Egypt is the imagery that depicts the change in Antony's character.

Through the observations of other characters in the play, Shakespeare makes obvious the deterioration of Antony's political prowess and power. The description of this decline usually consists of a juxtaposition of imagery of strength and fortitude with that of weakness and submission. The strength of character is associated with the Antony in Rome who held his political duties in high regard. He deteriorates into a "doting mallow" of Cleopatra in Egypt where it appears that the atmosphere of abandon and relaxation has cast a spell over him, making him forget his duties as one of the most powerful men in the world.

He is described as "The triple pillar of the world transformed into a strumpet's fool." This creates the image of deterioration for one who held great power. The imagery of strength versus weakness used in Scarus' speech in Act 1 Scene 1 also portrays the decline in Antony; "His captain's heart which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst the buckles on his breast, reneges all temper and becomes the bellows and the fan to cool a gypsy's lust." The strength of Antony's character before his indulgence in the pleasure of the East is enforced by the imagery used in Caesar's tribute to Antony in Act 1 Scene 4.

He describes Antony with images of strength and resilience' "at thy heel did famine follow, whom thou fought against," "thou didst drink the stale of horses" The contrast between Rome and Egypt also highlights the underlying themes of masculine order versus feminine order as well as the role of the

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woman. In Rome the masculine ethos which, while having room to honour women in certain limited ways, has little place for them in public life, other than as useful political tools or upholders of very masculine ideals or as producers of soldiers.

There is little respect for them as is obvious in the imagery used by various Romans to describe Cleopatra. She is described as a lustful gypsy which is an image used to degrade her character. When Octavius thinks of how his sister should enter Rome in a manner fitting her importance, the only images he can reach for which might express his feelings are ones taken from the vocabulary of military triumphs: "The wife of Antony should have an army for an usher." It is significant that he can convey his high esteem and strong feelings for her only in images more appropriate to a returning triumphant general.

On the other hand, the woman holds a role of utmost importance in Egypt. Cleopatra's position as queen is the primary image of this. Enobarbus' tribute to her also creates an image of her infinite power and freedom as a woman, something entirely at odds with the Roman emphasis on predictable order, law, and consistency. "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety." In Cleopatra's palace, women talk openly about explicit sexuality. They are attended by men and this creates an image of female superiority. They express their sexual feelings, joke about sexual matters, and establish a close female community.

The image of the horse in relation to Antony and Cleopatra's sexual encounters is one of few images that used to express sexuality. This

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highlights the ability of the woman to be open and expressive as opposed to that of Rome who is expected to be reserved and serve their men. Another major theme of the play to which imagery gives great insight is that of the love between Antony and Cleopatra. They profess their love for each other in an exaggerated style, using images of vastness to describe the extent of their feelings.

In Act 1 Scene 1 when Cleopatra claims that she will set a limit (bound) on Antony's love, he responds " Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth. " This trend continues throughout the play. Even in death their love is made evident by the imagery used in their speech.

Cleopatra's motivation for suicide is her reunion with Antony in death; " I am again for Cyndus, to meet Marc Antony. " This creates the image of their first meeting and emphasizes the immortality of their love as she wishes to recreate that moment in the afterlife. Cleopatra herself finalizes this as she says " I have

Immortal longings in me. " Another main focus of the play is politics and the desire for power. This gives rise to 'worldliness' of the play as the Romans seek to preserve and expand their empire. The political strategies never remain confined to Rome and there is frequent mention of the capture of neighbouring countries. The imagery used reinforces the sense of grandeur and the huge scope of the drama.. It is seen from Act 1 Scene 2 when the messenger from Rome describes Labienus conquering lands from Asia, Euphrates, Syria, Lydia and Ionia.

There are also frequent images of the sea and the earth in relation to politics which give a sense of vastness and help to highlight the importance of politics and world conquest. This is illustrated by Cleopatra as she describes war as "the world's great snare." Some of the political imagery used to describe Antony also helps to reinforce the huge scope of the drama. He is called "the greatest prince of the world," "the demi-Atlas of the world," and "the crown o'th'earth." He is not only a strong leader in Rome but a "triple pillar of the world" as Rome's empire extends all over the globe.

In examining the imagery of love and politics in Antony and Cleopatra, the underlying theme of war versus love cannot be ignored. This is made evident in the imagery in Antony's words as he struggles to find a balance between upholding his political duty and indulging in passion with Cleopatra. A prime example of this is when Antony is about to leave for war in Act 4 Scene 4. As Cleopatra tries to lace his armour he calls her "the armourer of my heart." The image of armour gives a sense of impending war but Antony uses it to convey that Cleopatra has captured his heart.

This contrasting imagery occurs several other times in the play, even in the same scene when he gives her a "soldier's kiss." The juxtaposition of war and love illustrates Antony's conflict of choice between love and duty. It also helps to illustrate how he downplays the importance of war and politics in the face of love. Antony himself acknowledges this as he admits that he lost to Caesar at sea because he trusted Cleopatra's fleet to help him win the battle; "My sword made weak by my affection."