

Antony and cleopatra essay



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Shakespeare created Enobarbus in order to project our own judgmental dilemma onto a character whose very life depends on a comparable choice.

Enobarbus's speech being analysed shows how he responds, like Antony and his great predecessors, to Cleopatra's power to provoke desire and compel the imagination. Enobarbus is also often a chorus to the action, from time to time he voices that common-sense wisdom which is usually forgotten. His descriptions of Cleopatra's magic fascination; both appreciative and critical, which is why the reader believes and trusts what he says. As a result of this, with his commentary on Cleopatra he is able to lead the audience into believing the two are inseparable without the reader presuming exaggeration.

Firstly, in these speeches Cleopatra is described as irresistible and beautiful beyond belief, a view that is necessary for us to believe in order to buy the fact that a man with so much to lose would be willing to risk it all in order to win her love. Consequently Enobarbus is of great importance as Shakespeare fashioned the character as a means of relaying information to the audience that would otherwise be difficult or awkward to bring forth from other characters – Cleopatra's beauty. The picture of Cleopatra that emerges is not unlike the Roman view expressed by Pompey before the meeting, however, it is presented sympathetically and the fact that it comes from Enobarbus, who usually speaks plainly and in prose rather than verse, adds to its power and effect, 'The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne Burned on the water'. The use of this paradoxical metaphor employing the opposing elements of fire and water fuels the visual impact of this dramatic account. 'O'erpicturing that Venus where we see The fancy outwork nature', here it is

suggested that Cleopatra's beauty is pictured as almost super-natural and that nature has been perfected and even superseded. Her beauty transcends even the classic artistic representation of Venus.

The use of similes heightens and empowers the imagery; Cleopatra is likened to the goddess of love; the pretty, dimpled boys are like Cupid; and her gentlewomen are like Nereides, sea nymphs and daughters of the sea god Nereus; and this emphasises her beauty, power and control she can hold over a man. Enobarbus describes the boys as subordinate to Cleopatra; adoringly and watching her every move, bowing respectfully as they attend to her desires, 'with divers-coloured fans'. Her unquestioned status is clarified by this focus and the audience are aware she can capture anything or anyone under her spell. Therefore, it is no surprise Antony became besotted so easily, left 'Whistling to th'air' due to Cleopatra's magnetic presence. Completely juxtaposed to her magnificent arrival, Shakespeare crashes us back to an earthly reality by referring to their supper as 'ordinary', which highlights Cleopatra's magnificence.

The real feast for the evening is for Antony's eyes and the reader knows he has completely surrendered his power he had and is under her enchantment. Language is used very effectively in Enobarbus's speeches as already illustrated. The sentences in this passage start simply and there is an insistent use of sentences beginning with noun subjects, 'hop forty places'. Normally such repetition of the same pattern is avoided, but here a rather magnificent monotony is created with it. As the passage goes on, the placement of noun subjects remains essentially the same, giving the effect of rather direct affirmations, which need no logical or temporal connections.

This portrays Cleopatra as slightly unnatural, almost opulent and too much would become decadence, yet still however affirms Antony's desire for her. Enobarbus also introduces numerous 'wh' words which elaborate the picture in the manner of adjectives as they separate the words associated with Cleopatra, 'invisible perfume', 'enthroned' etc, giving each one more emphasis and prominence. The passage is one of such substance because Enobarbus usually sees events prosaically and rationally, yet when he tries to describe the image of Cleopatra he becomes a poet which shows her aura is one that cannot be uncommented on. He uses hyperboles, similes, and paradoxes. Enobarbus's language he uses to describe Cleopatra is obviously in a Roman style, realistic where the nouns march rhythmically, yet on the other hand, he also elaborates simplicity by the adjectives etc associated with the Egyptian style and his language portrays a golden world in which imagination outdoes nature. It is as though Enobarbus himself is transfigured, even feminized and emasculated, by remembering the sight of Cleopatra in her barge.

Enobarbus introduces the idea of Cleopatra on a throne in the opening line, and ends with Antony 'enthron'd' which creates a link between the two, suggesting love and destiny. Therefore the reader can infer their relationship is special, yet the hyperbole language used to praise Cleopatra could in some lights also suggest she is too good to be true, and that she and the setting described as so opulent could be negative as if there is too much it becomes decadence. This has a foreboding sense and the fact that Antony is already under her spell connotes his vulnerability and lack of control and perhaps he has given up everything for simply an extravagant fantasy.

Enobarbus also enriches the scene by increasing the number of references to smell, temperature, and touch, the more immediate senses which associates intimacy and realism to Cleopatra. All these inanimate objects, barge, wind, oars, air, city etc are given actions and in the passage, these inanimate things are even given motivations or feelings, notably sexual feelings, 'the silken tackle Swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands The winds were love-sick.' There are also many references to metals, 'beaten gold', 'silver oars', 'cloth of gold' etc and Agrippa's 'O, rare for Antony', furthers the connotations of likening Cleopatra and Egypt in general to a precious metal.

Comparing Cleopatra to a precious metal connotes sensations of warmth and smell; of animating the inanimate, and that there is intense focus on Cleopatra as she the desired object about whom the 'dimpled boys' slave over. Moreover, it seems that the hidden image of a precious metal further sexualizes the scene, with implications of red-hot, smoky, metallic. Oddly however, the reader does not see Cleopatra directly and Enobarbus at other times has even associated her with things such as food and appetite. This could be because does not want to describe her in this idealized setting or because she can only be justified using beautiful poetry and images.

She is unseen, but surrounded and worked on but the reader is not allowed to see her, only indirectly through those around her. Another possible reading could be because Enobarbus is trying to protect the reader as to see her would be overpowering. Nevertheless he is willing a few lines later, when he is being more realistic, to describe her hopping in the street and this shows the humanness about her, but also how she is perfect, that even her

inability breath is perfection, ' she did make defect perfection And, breathless, power breathe forth. ' The passage proves Cleopatra was worshipped by whoever laid eyes on her, she could even persuade the ' holy priests' to bless what would certainly, in others condemn.

Although the plays structure defies the unifying traits of time and place, having several settings over several weeks, the play is closely held together by the central characters of Antony and Cleopatra. In the passage being analysed even though they do not appear on stage together, they are openly discussed. The structure revolves around the juxtaposition of Egypt and Rome. Enobarbus' mesmerising description of Cleopatra follows the tension of the triumvirs' meeting in Rome and Lepidus' attempts to keep the peace.

The harsh and unsettling dealings of their political world become momentarily infused with the colour, warmth and splendour of an alternative and enigmatic land. When discussing Egypt, the structure is in long, elegant, poetic prose, whereas Rome is short sharp sentences, direct and to the point. The passage and structure therefore inform the reader of the wonders of Egypt and the harsh and unsettling dealings of their political world in Rome become momentarily infused with the colour, warmth and splendour of an alternative and enigmatic land. In conclusion, throughout his speech, Enobarbus uses language, form and structure to create effect.

He sets up the metaphorical as the real and establishes its priority over the literal. ' The barge she sat in... burned on the water', the active verb ' burned' allows the metaphorical description to become extraordinarily

vibrant, leaping outside of the limiting simile that makes the barge simply ‘like a burnished throne’.

This metaphorical reality continues to dominate throughout, creating a picture of Cleopatra that makes men powerless at her feet. Enobarbus uses very beautiful, poetic language which the reader could assume he could only use if he was inspired or even lamenting his own passions vicariously through the eyes of Antony. Yet, the reader believes Enobarbus’ words to be the truth as he acts as a commentator throughout, truthful and cynical and therefore the reader trusts his description of Cleopatra and consequently how Antony has fallen so suddenly in love with her.