The tragedy of anthony and cleopatra

History, Ancient History

The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra Introduction Octavius Caesar (later renamed to Augustus Caesar, son of the murdered Julius Caesar), Antony, and Lepidus form the Roman triumvirate that rules the Western world. Lepidus leaves the triumvirate, and Caesar and Antony are left to rule the world. Antony, though married to Fluvia, lives in Alexandria, Egypt with his mistress Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt. Fueled by a disgust at his lifestyle in Egypt and anger over the wars caused by Antony's relatives, Caesar calls Antony home to Rome. Antony agrees, but only after Fluvia dies of an illness. Once in Rome, Caesar and Antony try to make amends through the marriage of Antony to Caesar's sister Octavia. Antony soon deserts Octavia, however, and returns to live with Cleopatra. Caesar, enraged, vows to attack and regain control of Egypt from Antony and Cleopatra. Caesar's army is more powerful and more skillful, and soon approaches defeat of Antony. Enobarbus, Antony's best friend, deserts him and joins Caesar's army. However, Enobarbus becomes overcome with regret and remorse for leaving Antony, and kills himself near Caesar's headquarters. Antony, facing defeat, asks Eros (another friend) to kill him. Eros cannot, and instead kills himself. Antony then kills himself by falling on his sword. Cleopatra, in grief over Antony's death and determined never to fall under Caesar's command commits suicide by allowing poisonous asps to bite her. Cleopatra's main attendant (Charmian) dies in the same manner, while her second attendant (Iras) dies from stress and grief over Cleopatra's death. The Tragedy of Imagination: Shakespeare's " Antony and Cleopatra" Nature wants stuff To vie strange forms with fancy . . . —Antony and Cleopatra Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra shares with Troilus and Cressida the obsessive and

self-consuming rage of the tragic figure as he confronts and attempts to define " reality." But, more extravagantly than Troilus and Cressida, this reality is layered with masquerade; forms that are often as lyric as brutal shift and change and baffle expectation. The constant refinement of brute reality into lyric illusion is the work not simply of Antony, Shakespeare's hero, but the lifelong work of Shakespeare himself. Thus there is a curious, rather decadent air in this play of flamboyant desires having as much import - if not ultimately as much political strength - as events themselves. Among the characters of Hamlet there are four playwrights: Claudius, the Ghost, Polonius, and Hamlet. Among the characters of Antony and Cleopatra there is any number of mythologizing poets and/or playwrights, but the most important is Antony. Snared within the net of appearances and forced by politics to break free, Antony's agony is curiously muted for someone who has achieved and lost so much; but this fact can be better understood if we examine the basis of the play and its relationship to " tragedy." The movement of most works of literature is toward a dramatic confrontation with reality, with objective truth. The hero's downfall (or, in happier works, his conversion or enlighten-ment) is determined by the success with which reality overcomes appearances. If there is any great theme of literature this is it: the destruction of the faux-semblant and attendant illusions by the intervention, bitter or glorious, of reality. Tragedy works with this theme and is inseparable from it, and the problem of Antony and Cleopatra seems to be that the lovers either do not have illusions or, if they do, they never learn to substitute for them other visions of their predicament, in the way Othello and Macbeth do. Orthodox and recognizable tragedy necessarily involves a

process of learning and exorcism, which is manipulated by the tragic figure himself, as in Oedipus Rex, or by surrounding characters who may or may not be fragmented aspects of the hero himself, as in The Revenger's Tragedy, or by fate or external social forces, as in Ibsen's Ghosts. In Antony and Cleopatra all exorcism fails: just as Antony cannot rid himself of his obsession with Cleopatra, so Cleopatra cannot quite rid herself of the earth-bound and, in a crude sense, comic aspects of her own mortality. Exorcism works to dispel illusion, but the poetry of Antony and Cleopatra works to create illusion. The play is sustained by words alone, for its plot is certainly incidental; we are never interested in what a character does, but only in how he expresses his consciousness of what he has done, and what this evokes in the mirroring rhetoric of his witnesses. Here reality does not defeat appearances; appearances are made - through a pressure that approaches magic - to defeat reality or at least render it irrelevant. Comedy also traditionally penetrates illusions; it is the incongruity of what is supposed and what is that produces laughter. But Antony and Cleopatra relates most immediately and most helpfully to comedy, since its tragic dimensions are attained (in acts 4 and 5) by an excess and concentration of emotion that is not anticipated in the earlier acts. The first act is comic in intention: the lovers insist upon their love's hyperbole and most specifically upon Antony's rejection of his former life. In a pretense of negatives, he states his real concerns: 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. (1. 1. 33-36) At the end of the act he leaves for Rome to strengthen his hold on the empire and to escape Egyptian " dotage." The banter and

play acting of the first scene show Antony and Cleopatra at their worst, and this self-caricaturing, since it cannot be so judged until much later, gives a credulity to the opening speech that would not ordinarily belong to it. This is Philo's judgment of Antony, which may be equated exactly with the judgment of the Roman world: Antony is the " triple pillar of the world transform'd/ Into a strumpet's fool" (1. 1. 12-13). The paradoxical nature of Antony's infatuation is vividly suggested by these lines: His captain's heart, Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper, And is become the bellows and the fan To cool a gipsy's lust. (1. 1. 6-10) The surrender of the militant must constitute for the Romans an unqualified surrender; the problem for the spectator or reader is the extent to which Roman judgment may be trusted. But the central image here works for the Antony of the entire play: what is unfor-gettable in this Antony is his " heart" on any level, the organ of courage, of magnanimity, of loyalty, of love, of hysterical valor possible only by a " diminution in [his] brain." Antony is his heart, as Caesar is his reason, and the heart, being blind, may understand the complexities of the " tawny front" (Philo's description of Cleopatra) by other means. The " front" has its obvious irony in that Antony is a military man; it has its obvious accusation in that it is but a mask, a facade; but not so obvious is the fact that, since it is a facade, there may be dimensions enjoyed by it that would baffle the Roman mind. The image works, then, in two directions, and the Roman Philo, speaking scornfully, is allowed to say more than he means. Antony's heart, apparently having met defeat on this battle front, has become a bellows, so retaining its pulsing, contracting and expanding motions, but having undergone a

metamorphosis that cannot be admired. The paradox is that the bellows and the fan which " cool a gipsy's lust" do not cool but enflame; their purpose, as instruments, is to do so. The image of the cyclical cooling and enflaming, then, can sug-gest that fluctuating course Antony will follow, and, in its apparent preoccupation with a single object, the man himself: a man of complexity, a colossus and a ruffian who con-sumes himself in the love that, by devouring him, transforms him into a being the military Antony, noble as he might be, could not imagine. The image suggests, further, a shame-ful helplessness; it suggests entrapment, the commitment of the passionate being to his passion, but never the commitment of the passive being to his " fate." Common judg-ments of Antony are perplexed, or at best mixed. He is not a tragic figure in any recogni-zable sense; he may yearn for " the love of Love, and her soft hours" in act 1, but in act 4, at death, he will not yearn for more than this. The bantering first scene is followed by an interlude of sophisticated joking among lesser people, Cleopatra's servants and the Roman friend of Antony, Enobarbus. The cliché of the anticipation of death in the midst of life, or luxurious gaiety, and the prophecies of the soothsayer are as close in Antony and Cleopatra as one comes to the conventionalities of tragedy. Does this argue for supernatural design or is it introduced to strengthen, structu-rally, the meandering energy of the play? Later Antony's god, Hercules, will desert him, but Antony registers no consciousness of this symbolic act. It does not work to relate directly to the hero's interpretation of his plight or to add to the audience's understanding of its dimensions. It is eerie; it is mystical; it is a possibility - just as anything in the en-chanted Egypt is a possibility - but its suggestion of divine force or fate is never taken

up by anyone in the play. Antony and Cleopatra is the most godless of Shakespeare's plays, because it is about human beings for whom anything less than self-divinity will be failure. It is not only Cleopatra who suggests a mysterious variety, but Antony as well. Much as he reveals himself in his words, his half-false sincerities and his half-truthful lies, there is mystery in him because he is in a process of change. His variety is suggested by the differ-ing men who see him, and, most famously, by Cleopatra after his death. To his officer, Ventidius, he is a captain generous only to those who keep themselves, cautiously and wisely, inferior to him (act 3, scene 1); to Enobarbus he is a " fool" (3. 11. 42) and yet a " mine of bounty" for whom one might give his life (4. 6. 32); to Caesar, the Antony of old was a great soldier who fought " with patience more/ Than savages could suffer" (1. 4. 60-61), but who is now " a man who is the abstract of all faults/ That all men follow" (1. 4. 9-10). Caesar might have gone on to see that Antony is not flawed by his faults but is his faults; in him, as in Cleopatra, the vilest things become themselves. Yet to Lepidus, there are not " evils enow to darken all his goodness;/ His faults in him seem as the spots of heaven,/ More fiery by night's blackness" (1. 4. 11-13). Antony is to be considered, frequently, in terms of light and dark imagery; what is perplexing is the ease with which the polar values of light and dark may be confused. Antony " is," in Cleopatra's famous speech, light itself: he is the sun and the moon and the heavens. Yet his faults in him seem as the spots (stars) of heaven, again light, and perhaps the same light. This cosmic light blinks good and evil; when one leaves the atmosphere of the human condition, the two become indistinguishable. But Caesar's point here is earthbound: If he fill'd His

vacancy with his voluptuousness, Full surfeits and the dryness of his bones Call on him for 't; but to confound such time That drums him from his sport, and speaks as loud As his own state and ours, 'tis to be chid. (1. 4. 25-30) The tension in Antony and Cleopatra is, clearly, not between good and evil and not between appearances and reality. It is simply between two views of the world, the Roman and the Egyptian, the cold Machiavellianism of those who deal in lieutenantry (3. 9. 39) and the unfixed, pulsating, undignified voluptuousness of those to whom passion has become a world. We speak of tension, but really this contention between opposites counts for little more than the formal plot. There is never any doubt about the impending victory of reason: if it is a victory; the tension is not, as in Troilus and Cressida, exploited as mock tension and made to demonstrate the shabbiness of both love-worshiping Trojans and reason-worshiping Greeks. In Antony and Cleopatra both ways of viewing the world are given generous consideration, the final point being that they are simply different and that any one world threatens or suffers opposing worlds. The one necessarily moves out of itself, bent upon conquering; the other moves in upon itself and draws the world in after, so that to the great soldier Antony, the absurdity of challenging Caesar to a duel is never recognizable. The political must resist emotions, though they may trade upon them; the passionate recognize only emotions, though they may recognize at the same time their serious limitations. What is interesting is that for both species of man, faith in appearan-ces supercedes faith in reality, or it may be that, for both, appearances turn into reality. Thus the sacrifice of the limpid Octavia: Caesar and Antony cannot understand each other, and do not want to, but their accustomed faith in ceremony

meets in the proposal of the political marriage between Antony and Octavia. They are role-takers; therefore, we feel no distaste for Antony as he dismisses his love of Cleopatra as " poison'd hours," since we know he does not tell the truth but speaks only ceremonially. We take our cues in the play from Enobarbus, the plain dealer who is out of place in this meeting: . . . if you borrow one another's love for the instant, you may, when you hear no more words of Pompey, return it again: you shall have time to wrangle in when you have nothing else to do. (2. 2. 107-111) Enobarbus pretends not to understand the decorum of this world. Instead, the doomed Lepidus interprets it: " Her love to both/ Would each to other and all loves to both/ Draw after her" (2. 2. 141-143). History is too fraudulent to be telescoped into anything but comedy. So Antony, newly contracted to Caesar through the political marriage, recogni-zes no change in relationships but, inspired by the catalytic words of the soothsayer, fore-sees his doom in Caesar's alienness: The very dice obey him. And in our Sports my better cunning faints Under his chance. . . . . And though I make this marriage for my peace, I' the east my pleasure lies. (2. 3. 33-40) The relationship of Antony and Cleopatra is as apparently ignoble as nobility will allow. We see them as lovers in fragments: they wander through the streets and " note the qualities of people"; they lie brilliantly and passionately to each other; they swear their love in im-possibly exaggerated terms; they do not trust each other. Above all, they are not youthful lovers: Cleopatra sees herself as " with Phoebus' amorous pinches black,/ And wrinkled deep in time" (1. 5. 28-29); Antony speaks angrily of sending to " the boy Caesar . . . this grizzled head" (3. 11. 17). But in them surface

conventions and the reality of spirit are blurred, as the good and evil of Antony become one in the dazzling light he embodies. So Cleopatra, with " wann'd" lip, is still the queen of her exotic land, and is evoked in the famous set-piece in which Enobarbus describes her to an awe-stricken Roman as an impression rather than a reality, and it is the impression, finally, that matters. The scene upon the barge (the air love-sick with perfume, the rich imagery of gold and purple and silver, the transformation of attendants into cupids and mermaids, most of all the transformation of the perhaps desperate Cleopatra into Venus), may just miss being absurd; delivered by a Thersites, this would come to us differently. But Enobarbus? , whose sense of reality we are to trust, understands that she does " make defect perfection" and that, given this alchemy, the logical Roman world and its judgments are irrelevant. The paradox Cleopatra embodies is suggested most succinctly in Agrippa's exclamation, " Royal wench!" Cleopatra's majesty is such that so crude a comic scene as the one in which she assaults the messenger of ill news does not destroy it; she is described in terms of food and eating, and describes herself so, but this counts, ultimately, as one of the symptoms of her complexity and not simply of her baseness. Recurring in her, even at her death, is a propensity to view matters comically. History as possible comedy is one of the motifs of Antony and Cleopatra; it comes out most successfully abroad Pompey's galley (act 2, scene 7), where the pillars of the world end their banquet in a drunken communion that means, of course, nothing. The Roman disposition is more recognizably admirable than the Egyptian, because it is normally ambitious. But in the end it is no more meaningful, and its ceremonies, though usually sober, come to the same thing as the

illusion of the cupids and mermaids attending their scheming Venus. Antony and Cleopatra is as ceremonial a play as Richard II and Troilus and Cressida, but though all ceremonies come to nothing finally, the abandonment of these forms in Antony and Cleopatra does not constitute the education it does in the other plays; realizing the sham of ceremonies is quite equivalent to realizing the sham of one's self and the world. If there is a difference between what the world (at its crudest, biological) suggests and what ceremony demands, then it is clearly the world that must be abandoned, since it becomes " no better than a sty." This is the curious point: suicide here is an escape from the disappointing world, but not an escape from the self, whose nobility is never diminished. The people of both worlds, Roman and Egyptian, live according to ceremony. Enobarbus dies out of grief at the fulfillment of a ritual of friendship, when Antony sends his treasure and more after him; indeed, his death itself is ceremonial. Caesar, disgusted, may scorn Antony's vulgar performance when Antony at last flees back to Egypt: I' the market-place, on a tribunal silver'd, Cleopatra and himself in chairs of gold Were publicly enthron'd; at the feet sat Caesarion, whom they call my father's son, And all the unlawful issue that their lust Since then hath made between them. . . . . I' the common show-place, where they exercise. (3. 6. 3-12) But he will, minutes later, attack bitterly the manner of his sister's arrival because it has not enough of show in it: You come not Like Caesar's sister; the wife of Antony Should have an army for an usher, and The neighs of horse to tell of her approach Long ere she did appear; the trees by the way Should have borne men; and expectation fainted, Longing for what it had not. . . . .

But you are come A market-maid to Rome, and have prevented The ostentation of our love, which, left unshown, Is often left unlov'd. (3. 6. 42-53) There is no distinction on this level between the Roman and the Egyptian: reality loses itself in appearance. Later Antony, preparing for his suicide, will dream of his reunion with Cleopatra after death in terms of this " show." It is not enough for the lovers to dwell together in romantic bliss for eternity; their love exists, clearly enough, at least in part in the awe of witnesses: Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand, And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze; Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops, And all the haunt be ours. (4. 12. 51-54) This does not subtract from their love, but rather qualifies it as a particular sort of love that gives more of itself to supposed irrelevancies than romantic love can afford to surrender. This love is not orthodox, and so it is suspect; it has always been suspect in regard to Cleopatra. After the defeat at Actium, however, with their world shaken and its vastness for the first time questioned, Antony and Cleopatra become recognizably human. Ceremony is forgotten in the urgency of the moment, and they are reconciled, though the loyal Enobarbus, the spokesman or chorus for the action, has lost his faith in the world of passion and its excesses: one must simply " think, and die" (3. 11. 2). Enobarbus' reason tells him to abandon his failing master, envisioned as a dangerous, dying old lion, but if we have assumed Enobarbus' wisdom, we are forced at his death to assume also his guilt. He dies of disloyalty, and the fact of disloyalty is in itself sinful, despite the important fact that " loyalty well held to fools does make . . . faith mere folly" (3. 11. 42). The several climaxes of the play baffle expectation. If the processes of exorcism are to be completed,

Antony as the deluded lover must collide with reality and must see his folly. But the movement toward tragic enlightenment is always thwarted, and Antony withdraws from these encounters with his faith in his condition untouched. So after the battle at Actium when Antony seems a defeated man - " I am so lated in the world that I/ Have lost my way for ever" (3. 9. 3), it is not the temptation of suicide that masters him but the totality of his commitment to Cleopatra. He is able to say: Fall not a tear, I say; one of them rates All that is won and lost. . . . . Love, I am full of lead. Some wine, within there, and our viands! Fortune knows, We scorn her most when most she offers blows. (3. 9. 69-74) So he makes his early speech about his indifference to worldly fortune come true. The next climax comes when Antony sees Caesar's messenger kissing Cleopatra's hand; he does not see that she is acting a part. His judgment on her turns back upon himself in a passage that should work as a catharsis of his love and his bondage: . . . when we in our viciousness grow hard, — O misery on't! —the wise gods seel our eyes; In our own filth drop our clear judgments; make us Adore our errors; laugh at's, while we strut To our confusion. (3. 11. 111-115) He is maddened by Caesar's " harping on what I am,/ Not what he knew I was" as if his life were over. But he is again reconciled to Cleopatra, whose dignity grows when his diminishes, and believes they will yet do well. Enobarbus sees Antony as so furious that he is " frighted out of fear," and consequently not the old Antony. His bravado has a new sound of hollowness: I will be treble-sinew'd, hearted, breath'd, And fight maliciously; for when mine hours Were nice and lucky, men did ransom lives Of me for jests; but now I'll set my teeth, And send to darkness all that stop me. Come,

Let's have one other gaudy night: call to me All my sad captains. (3. 11. 177-183) The apparent change of fortune that follows (they beat back Caesar's men) makes the final catastrophe the more complete. After the last defeat, when Cleopatra's men desert to the enemy, Antony is brought to a revelation of what reality is for him, but again this revelation is discarded. The apparent betrayal of Cleopatra constitutes a betrayal of all appearance: Sometimes we see a cloud that's dragonish; A vapour sometime like a bear or lion . . . . 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. (4. 12. 2-11) The protean condition of man and his world, a vision presented here with deadly vividness, is offset for Antony only by the false report that Cleopatra has killed herself. His commitment to love is again realized, and he prepares for death. It is the final restoration of faith in love that justifies the expenditure of passion the play has permitted. Death is neither escape nor self-punishment; it is, of course, a mistake, yet it is at the same time a willful surrender to something very like love. Eros is Antony's knave and Antony's god: Antony will " make death love me" and will " run into't/ As to a lover's bed." Brutus dies because he has awakened from delusion; Othello dies when freed from the delusion of what he is; Troilus, not a tragic figure, perhaps, nevertheless goes into battle to die when confronted with the prospect of a world totally corrupted. But Antony dies with his faith in love renewed. This long death scene avoids a ghastly sentimentality partially by Cleopatra's unromantic wariness (fearing capture, she will not leave the monument to come to the dying Antony), partially by the confidence with

which the lovers affirm themselves and their love, partially by the sheer hyperbolic force of the poetry itself. The play is conceived in hyperbole, the controlled hysteria of Renaissance language to which no world was ever equal. If the confines of this Roman-Egyptian world are not admittedly fake, then they are, by necessity, without limitation. The known world is collapsed into Antony, Cleopatra, and Caesar; nothing is missing from it, since they combine among them all its brilliance and its stupidity. Antony can say of himself that with his sword he " quarter'd the world" (4. 12. 58); Cleopatra can say of him—beginning the extended creation and re-creation of her lover that must be unmatched in literature for its audacity and beauty—that he destroys with himself all order in the world: " Young boys and girls/ Are level now with men; the odds is gone,/ And there is nothing left remarkable/ Beneath the visiting moon" (4. 13. 65-68). Even Caesar can say " the death of Antony/ Is not a single doom; in the name lay/ A moiety of the world" (5. 1. 16-18). The play is finally Antony's, for Cleopatra is priestess to his apotheosis in the speech toward which all earlier poetry moves: 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 show'd 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. (5. 2. 82-92) The wonder of these flights of poetry is that they seem to give nothing of their certainty to the ceremony of the earlier acts of the play. If it is not possible that Antony was as he is dreamed,

then it is not the lapsed Antony this play is about. If their " strength is all gone into heaviness," this heaviness testifies simply for the magnitude of that former strength that has now destroyed itself. Antony's death teaches Cleopatra the vanity of life, subject to fortune; the betrayal of her treasurer renders this education immediately suspect, just as the knowledge that Caesar will lead her in triumph obscures forever Cleopatra's motives for dying. Shakespeare balances hyperbole with comic suggestion: the Antony as colossus and the Antony as ruffian, the Cleopatra equal to all visions of herself and the Cleopatra raging at the servant who has betrayed her. But the counterpoint does not work here to qualify the grandeur of these people and to cheat them of their incredible dignity. Instead, it works to suggest by contrast the range of behavior this dignity allows itself, and the heights to which it succeeds. Thus Cleopatra becomes unforgettable precisely because she is a woman, and at times a small woman; what is insisted upon is her humanity, the ascent of angels or demonic gods being too easy. The baseness of Cleopatra does not preclude her greatness but assures it, since without this her presence would be no more than a flight of words. This magic, admittedly, will not work for everyone. Though the modern temperament admires passion and individuality more than the older virtues of prudence, modesty, and chastity, Cleopatra may still be interpreted as Shakespeare's Romans see her, and Antony's death may be seen as simply the necessary result of his having surrendered his reason to immoral passion. But the magic works for Antony and Cleopatra, and it need not do more. The denial of prosaic reality and its metamorphosis into something rich and strange are possible through the language Shakespeare uses. Thus

the chilling vision Antony has of the cloud formations that baffle the eye and that extend, in their impermanence, into the lives of men is a vision that may be utilized profitably by the victims of this world of appearances. Antony dies with his belief in Cleopatra and himself secure (and it is surely Shakespeare's Antony that William Carlos Williams has in mind in his whimsical poem, " To Mark Anthony in Heaven," the sense of the poem being that Antony's experience and his commitment to love are " heaven," man's highest achievement). Cleopatra asks, after her envisioning of Antony as a colossus, whether there was such a man as that of whom she speaks; when told there was not, she replies: You lie, up to the hearing of the gods. But, if there 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 'gainst fancy, Condemning shadows quite. (5. 2. 94-99) This condemnation of " shadows" is the metaphorical basis upon which the entire play works. These lines propose a question they do not answer, since by the choice of words (nature " imagines") the meaning is made ambiguous. Clearly there has been an Antony, and there is doubt about his being past the size of dreaming, but - and this is the irony - if there has been this Antony, it is the highest achievement of nature's own imagining, or creating; it falls beyond man's capacity for understanding. At her own death Cleopatra is able to transform by her imagination the snake to a " baby asleep at my breast,/ That sucks the nurse asleep," this final alchemy no more wonderful than that which has lighted the entire play. We must turn to a Prospero to encounter equal omnipotence. It is reality that is defeated in this play, and its defeat goes unmourned. The uses of poetry are nowhere in Shakespeare so well

imagined as in this work about godly creatures who delight in their humanity, and who leave their traces upon all corners of their gigantic world. Illusion could not be sustained in Hamlet's gloomy Denmark, or on the wild fields of Scotland; it requires the light-drenched world of old Egypt, a world that exists nowhere except in this play and then only within its words, by the strenuous magic of its language. In Shakespeare's works after Antony and Cleopatra, language will expand its uses to become both " action" and " theme," moving toward the purely lyric. Conclusions There are a total of forty-two scenes in Antony and Cleopatra, far more than in any of Shakespeare's other plays. The impression that the audience receives is of historical events moving at a rapid pace and with a global scope as the action shifts from Egypt to Rome and to various battle places, including Actium off the coast of Greece. The final act, however, is comprised of only two scenes. The contrast lends a dignity to Cleopatra's assumption of her role as the fallen Antony's eternal lover and, hence, as a tragic heroine. At the very start of the play we are told by the Roman general's own men that Antony is " not himself" because he is under the influence of Cleopatra's " witchcraft." We are soon shown that Cleopatra can easily manipulate Antony, and even after his marriage to Caesar's sister, Antony feels the pull of Cleopatra and the pleasures of the East. But as for Antony's loving Cleopatra, his distrust of the Egyptian queen simply does not square with a traditional notion of romantic love. After the defeat of their allied forces, Antony naturally assumes that Cleopatra will enter into some type of deal with Augustus. Hoisted into her bedchamber with a mortal wound, Antony first gives Cleopatra advice on Roman politics, telling her to trust Procleus. This is

a gesture of concern but hardly a profession of enduring love. Antony's then directs Cleopatra to think of him as he was at the apex of his glory. His dying words have nothing whatsoever to do with his lover. Instead, Antony remarks that he has been " valiantly vanquished" by a fellow Roman. If anything, Antony moves from infatuation with Cleopatra toward self-absorption.

References o http://www. allshakespeare. com/plays/aandc/qa. php o http://www. field-of-themes. com/shakespeare/summaries/tragedies/Sa&c. htm