

Cleopatra and antony essay

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



In wearing Roman sandals, one would see Cleopatra as an exotic whore; nothing but a foreign delicacy that promises a myriad of desires for the craving palate but certainly nothing more than that. From a distant and narrow-minded perspective, she is merely a distraction for the great hero that Marc Antony is; offering ephemeral pleasures that cloud that possibility of perpetual glory. But to dismiss Cleopatra as such would be ridiculously undermining her capabilities and complexity as a character. Her exotic qualities that strike fear and irritation in the eyes of the Romans are what turn her into one of the most powerful female characters that Shakespeare has brought to life.

Her fundamental role is to serve as Marc Antony's mistress. This conventionally is a status of inferiority of women; that two cannot satisfy one. She stands as a violation of Antony's honor to his wife and country. But taking this at a different perspective, wouldn't it be a position of power? Holding Antony's heart in her firm grasp, she is able to strongly influence the political events that transpire from across the Mediterranean Sea without any of the responsibilities or obligations of a military officer. Wasn't the blame on her for Antony's extensive absence in Rome that eventually led to Pompey's uprising? Such subtle but powerful clout is already a sign that she is not just a petulant wench. To have been able to captivate Antony, she could not just have batted her eyelids and pouted her lips. Her power lay in her exotic qualities: her beauty, wits and proclivity for theatrics. Even Enobarbus pointed out her effeminate prowess to seduce Marc Antony. This was seen in his affirmation that his marriage to Octavia would be a failure since the triumvir is incapable of leaving behind his Egyptian mistress. Her

enticing charms and charisma could turn black into white and could undo even the most celibate man. This kind of subtle influence that seeps through the chinks of the armors of military magnates such as Marc Antony is what grants the Egyptian queen power and clout.

How she treats Antony is also a testament to her power as a character. It is rather arguable to consider what she feels for him as love since it is really more of an attachment especially during the second act where she refers to him as a fish she has caught. Although she flew in rage when she was told that Antony was married to another—to the point that she flays the poor messenger—it seemed to be more of competition rather than jealousy.

Sending a servant to observe what kind of person Octavia was is reminiscent of a competitor who is insecure about her adversary. Instead of crumbling at the face of opposition, she rises to the challenge and insists on finding more about Octavia. The wild variants of her emotions lead her to be unpredictable and at times, confusing. First she showed grief over the death of Antony's Fulvia, then suddenly towering rage over his new marriage with Octavia. This lack of restraint in emotions shows her freedom to react however she pleases and how no one can tell her to rein them.

Following on the aspect of Cleopatra's political clout through her relationship with Marc Antony, the consequences of their relationship are what would make or break kingdoms and civilizations. By the third act, Antony instructs Octavia to return to Caesar to make peace while he heads off to Egypt where Cleopatra resides. Caesar is flabbergasted by Octavia's appearance; it was quite simple and rather bare for a woman of her status. As the wife of a

triumvir, he expects that she should enter with a grand entourage that would announce her arrival. Here it is evident that Antony is not at all interested in Caesar's sister as the Egyptian queen has already tucked his heart in her sleeve. This further enrages Caesar and assures Octavia that the Romans are with her in her grief of being left behind by her husband. It is quite interesting to note the staggering consequences of Marc Antony's actions whenever he returns to his beloved Cleopatra. Shaming his wife by leaving her behind and stirring the ire of her powerful brother and fellow triumvir—all this he triggers simply because his heart ached once more for his mistress. To drive a man senseless certainly places a woman such as Cleopatra in a pedestal of feminine power. These consequences are possible because of Antony's and Cleopatra's status of prestige. Had this been a quarrel between peasants, it would've gone by unnoticed. But since Antony is a triumvir (at least he still is at this point of the play) and Cleopatra is Egypt's queen, their actions are taken into account by all concerned and this leads to resounding political repercussions. Public figures take meticulous care of their images to the people and to their peers but it would seem Antony has neglected that. Cleopatra's theatric nature and inclination for drama would never drive her to hide her relationship with Antony. If she gives little consideration for what political rivals in Rome would think, then more so for the public.

Octavius Caesar then gives an ultimatum: that Cleopatra will give up Antony in exchange for his leniency. She contemplates betraying Antony which the latter found out quickly and sent him into a fit of rage. And yet again, she is able to cool his head off and convince him that she will never betray him. Upon Antony's choice to attack Caesar once more, Enobarbus forsakes him.

By the fourth act, Antony notches a naval victory and celebrates. Soon after, during the second naval battle against Caesar, Cleopatra's fleet betrays him and sides with Caesar's fleet. Enraged, Antony confronts his lover. He blamed her for all the unfortunate events that happened in the latter part of his life and threatens to murder her on grounds of betrayal. Cleopatra leaves and pretends to commit suicide as advised by her counselor to calm Antony down. Once he receives word of Cleopatra's supposed suicide and final words (i. e. "Antony! Most noble Antony!"), his temper quickly evaporates and he resigns himself to join her in the afterlife. Here is another crux of Cleopatra's hold on Marc Antony. Even amidst her ostensible betrayal and his sworn vengeance through murdering her, the act of taking her own life was more than enough to turn him around. After losing his honor as a high-ranking military officer and losing the woman he gambled his entire life and career for, he no longer had the will to live. Although it was clear that Cleopatra held Antony in her spell, it was also seen that he held a part of her. As he was about to die, he was brought up to Cleopatra's hiding place in the monument and she gives him a final kiss. She then realizes that once Antony passes away, life no longer held meaning for her. She now ran the risk of being captured by Caesar and immortalized as a whore through the streets of Rome. It would be unforgivable if she died leaving behind a legacy of a harlot that played around a triumvir of Rome and dragged him to his demise. Although once Caesar caught wind of Antony's suicide which he deemed proper to be mourned for, he sends Cleopatra kind word that he will not harm her but insists that she live in Rome as his perpetual victory: that he was able to conquer the rogue Egyptian queen. This by far is the supreme

form of conquest: to debase her and the memory of her to a mere wench. Her suicide is then her final and most salient act of defiance of Caesar, the Romans and anyone else who ever desired to subdue her. Her death immortalizes what she lived for and who she lived as—not as what anyone else made her out to be. Throughout her life and in her death, no one—not Antony or Caesar—was able to conquer her. Cleopatra stands as one of the most powerful and influential female characters of Shakespeare's plays by using her utterly complex character, dubious intentions and infinite charm and grace to woo even the most honored and respected generals.