

Antony and Cleopatra argumentative essay



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Power is used throughout “Antony and Cleopatra” in many different ways, it brings people together yet also pushes others apart and whilst power can be a useful thing, too much power or the abuse of power can lead to great confusion or greed between people. Power is one of the main themes in the play and controls not only the movement of the characters. For example Antony moving between Rome and Egypt to control his empire and meet with the Triumvirate, power also controls people’s relationships.

The power of love plays a strong part in the play, mainly between Antony and Cleopatra. From the opening lines of the play we get an impression of Cleopatra’s power as two of Antony’s soldiers are talking about how she has changed him, they refer to Antony saying he was a god like “Mars” until he met Cleopatra, but now his eyes “turn the office and devotion of their view” to everything that Cleopatra does. The power of love has always affected some part of Antony’s life; if it were not his love for Cleopatra it would be his love of soldiering.

In Act 1 Scene 4 we hear Caesar’s opinion of how Antony used to be, he describes Antony as a hero and has a lot of respect for him, he uses similes to describe his power as being “like the stag.” The power of Antony’s love for soldiering even made him do the strangest of things if called upon, for example “thou didst eat strange flesh” this just goes to show how much of an effect power can take on people. We do not only find that the power of love affects just Antony and Cleopatra, it can also take a hold of the most political and serious of people.

Take for example Caesar, although he appears to be a man of no feeling and he is very serious about his political position in Rome, the love he has for his sister is of great strength. He expresses this love through the language used by Caesar, for example "farewell, my dearest sister, fare thee well," this is an expression of how much Caesar cares for Octavia. Power also affects character's emotions, again mainly between Antony and Cleopatra.

In the first opening scenes of the play Shakespeare gives the audience an impression of Cleopatra's power over Antony in the way that she seems able to control him by changing his mood. In act 1 scene 1 Cleopatra is playing with Antony winding him up by saying "Fulvia perchance is angry," and "if the scarce bearded Caesar have not sent his mandate to you." This use of power over Antony's emotions brings out antithesis in the play as sometimes he feels Cleopatra is his "most sweet queen" and at others his "fiery wrangling queen."

Cleopatra's emotions and mood swings not only have power over Antony; they also control her to a certain extent. A more thoughtful and weak side to Cleopatra is evoked by her emotions take for example when Antony tells her he is leaving in act 1 scene 3, she gets quite emotional and the power of her emotions almost take control of her, bringing out a side to Cleopatra that we have not seen before, She is almost begging Antony to stay when she says to him "I should take you for idleness itself."

A more dramatized way in which Shakespeare uses power in the play is through the power of the supernatural; this use of an unreal and mystical type of power would have worked well at the time the play was written, as it

would play on the minds of Shakespeare's contemporary audience.

Shakespeare has made Cleopatra out to be a mystical "enchanted queen."

In act 2 scene 1 Pompey describes Cleopatra as being supernatural when he says "let witchcraft join with beauty," this makes us feel that although Cleopatra's beauty has an effect on people, there is something else about her that also has an influence.

Particularly in act 2 scene 2 Shakespeare uses this supernatural power in Cleopatra to have a great impact on his contemporary audience. Shakespeare has emphasised Cleopatra's power by having Enobarbus tell the tale, this emphasises the tale as the contemporary audience would have to use their imaginations to enhance their knowledge of Cleopatra as she was already a well known figure of power and beauty.

The idea that Cleopatra not only has power over people and great political power over Egypt but also seems to have some sort of power over nature itself is put across even more so in the language Shakespeare has used.

Enobarbus starts his description of Cleopatra by describing "the barge she sat in, like a burnished throne," this use of similes to describe Cleopatra's surrounding really makes her regal and powerfulness become apparent.

Shakespeare's use of imagery is carried on throughout Enobarbus's speech mainly through his use of hyperbole, he compares Cleopatra to a goddess when Enobarbus says "O'er picturing that Venus" showing that his impression of Cleopatra conveys more power than that of a God. Also the use of paradox by Shakespeare in Enobarbus's speech makes the perfection

and power over life itself stand out more when he says that she “ did make defect perfection”

Cleopatra’s supernatural power is further emphasised with more use of hyperbole when Enobarbus says “ the winds were love sick,” although in modern day we see this as a simple exaggeration of her powerful effect on life to a contemporary audience when Enobarbus said this it would have had a great impact on them making them think that Cleopatra really did have effect and power over everything including nature itself making her seem even more god like. Shakespeare is using Enobarbus in this scene as a literary device in order to get the message across to the audience about the real or unreal power of Cleopatra.

Enobarbus’s speech in context within the play is his way of excusing Antony’s absence from his political affairs as prior to this he had been arguing with Caesar, Enobarbus is simply justifying how overpowering and “ enchanting” Cleopatra can be. The idea of Cleopatra having power over everything is also expressed in the way Shakespeare describes Cleopatra as Cleopatra being goddess like to Venus, the goddess of love and beauty in contrast to Antony being described as Mars the god of war.

The idea of Antony and Cleopatra’s god like powers being in contrast is linked also to the countries they rule over and also somewhat expressed within those countries. Egypt is a very peaceful country with a more relaxed and easy going attitude about it where as the country in which Antony helps rule over, Rome is far more ready for war and political, typically the war like

aspect of Rome is depicted in its people and those who run it, the Triumvirate.

The country of Rome being a more aggressive place is mainly controlled not only by politics but also the use of physical power, although in my opinion physical power does not have the main control over the characters' actions within the play as emotional and mental power does. I feel it still has a main part to play as a large part of the play is focused on war and physical conflict between Rome and Egypt and also the Triumvirate and Pompey.

A certain amount of antithesis is shown in the power between the Triumvirate and Pompey, basically the Triumvirate have power over the land and Pompey has power over the sea, making you think that they were equally matched, whereas actually the outcome of the battles was based purely upon intelligence and the mental power of the characters.

In Act Three, Scene Eleven, Shakespeare evokes the feeling that Antony is disgraced with himself at being defeated by Pompey at sea, showing Antony's mental weakness and is emphasised by Shakespeare in the hyperbole used when Antony says "it is ashamed to bear me," referring to the fact that even the land is ashamed to have Antony walk upon it, this metaphor is showing how badly Antony feels about his defeat.

The use of political power in the play is one of the main controlling factors over the background to the play and also the events that take place within it. Cleopatra, for example, is considered to be a god by the people of Egypt as that is what Egyptians thought of their kings and queens, whereas in Rome Cleopatra was thought of as simply the Queen of Egypt, this political status of

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Cleopatra is used by her throughout the play as she makes alliances with Rome in order to try and defeat Pompey.

The political bond between the Triumvirate itself has strong links to their physical power as when they are together they are a powerful force but when they are separated their strength and power is reduced as well as their size. Take for example earlier on in the play in act 2 scene 1 when Pompey is planning his attack on Rome he says “ Mark Antony In Egypt sits at dinner” showing that he as an enemy of the Triumvirate knows that when they are divided they are weak. This lack of power leaves them open for attack, both physically and mentally in Antony’s case.

He was physically attacked by Pompey and mentally attacked by Cleopatra in the way that she uses his weakness to regain his love for her and then in act 4 scene 13 she uses it when she sends a Mardian to Antony saying “ go tell him I have slain myself”, unfortunately for Cleopatra she did not realise how mentally weak Antony was and this led to his death. The language used in Antony’s final words show his weakness when he says “ Now my spirit is going” conveying that Antony has accepted his fate.

The concept of power interested me throughout the play as it can be used and interpreted in many different ways, it can be used for the good of some characters or manipulated by others in order to weaken or break up either a political or loving relationship. Power is described in many different ways throughout the play ranging from “ enchanting” to “ Like the stag. ” I feel that power was used as the main controlling factor throughout the play by

Shakespeare and controlled both the actions and in-actions of the characters.