

"a triple pillar of the world or a strumpet's fool?" – impressions of antony essa...

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“ A triple pillar of the world or a strumpet’s fool?” – Impressions of Antony Essay Sample

Antony and Cleopatra is a Shakespearian play that focuses on the events that take place whilst Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt and Antony, a member of the triumvirate in Italy, are conducting a highly visible love affair. Whilst Cleopatra is portrayed as a strong, manipulative and selfish woman, Antony is shown to be weak and easily influenced when with Cleopatra, but powerful and level-headed when running his country. However, it is hard to determine whether Antony is the “ strumpet’s fool” he appears to be when he is with Cleopatra, or the “ triple pillar of the world” he should be. After Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 BC, Antony joined Lepidus and Octavius Caesar to make up the triumvirate - the three leaders of Italy. Despite being criticised by many at the start of the play, he is also highly praised for being a dedicated and hard working leader. In Act One Scene One, Philo describes his heart as one “ which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst the buckles on his breast”, showing that he loved fighting for his country and was a proud and brave leader and warrior.

Philo also says that Antony has a “ great property” (Act One Scene One), meaning he has admirable qualities. The fact that someone who can condemn him in this way can also praise him highly shows just how respected and admired he was. Also, despite the fact that Antony is in Egypt, Octavius still keeps him informed of events in Rome by sending messengers, which shows that he does not disregard Antony because he is so far away, he still wants him to be part of the triumvirate. When with others, Antony is still bold and decisive. He won’t take any nonsense from people and makes

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sure he knows exactly what is going on, for example, in Act One Scene Two he tells the messenger to “ mince not the general tongue”, showing he would rather hear the truth than a sugar-coated response. During Act One Scene Two he even realises he must break “ these strong Egyptian fetters” and start being a responsible ruler and taking care of his own country.

Antony can easily still be referred to as “ a triple pillar of the world” because, regardless of being weaker around Cleopatra, he is still level-headed and strong-minded when in the company of those who have his best interests at heart. However, Antony can easily be called a “ strumpet’s fool”. He is easily manipulated by Cleopatra and treated quite badly by her. He takes their relationship extremely seriously, meaning he neglects his duties in Rome - which is selfish and irresponsible. He even says “ Let Rome in Tiber melt” - let Rome fall into the river, indicating he does not care about anything back in Italy as long as he is with Cleopatra. He believes they “ stand up peerless” - they are greater than anyone else. They unarguably have great power; both being rulers of powerful nations, and Antony seems to believe this makes them superior to everyone else. He is almost blinded by his love for Cleopatra, not being able to see the damage it is doing to everyone around them.

He rejects his duties as ruler of Italy, as a warrior and as a husband to his wife, Fulvia, back in Rome and even Cleopatra encourages him to be a little more concerned about the state of affairs in Rome (“ Hear the ambassadors” - Act One Scene One). Whether this is because she is honestly bothered about the trouble in Rome or just wants to make sure her lover continues to

be a powerful man remains to be seen. It is fair to assume that she agrees that herself and Antony "stand up peerless", but is likely to be worried that this will no longer be true if Antony does not start pulling his weight in Rome. Others even speak poorly of him. Philo believes he has become nothing more than "the fan to cool a gypsy's lust" - all he has become is a toy for Cleopatra to use as she pleases. Even Demetrius says "that he approves the common liar, who thus speaks of him in Rome", meaning that while he stays in Egypt, all Antony is achieving is fuelling the rumours being spread about him back in Rome. Despite this, Antony is still the same at heart. He behaves differently around Cleopatra sometimes but can be demanding when he needs to be.

In Act One Scene Three, when Antony goes to tell Cleopatra that he is leaving Egypt, Cleopatra starts playing games and being dismissive of him but Antony will not allow it. Despite being interrupted numerous times by her, he eventually tells her of his current situation. "Hear me, Queen" he says, with a rather firm tone. This shows he will not be pushed around by her and is not as weak as he first seemed. He even threatens to leave her when she continues to infuriate him. Yet, regardless of this, he still shows his caring side, by referring to her as his "precious queen". This does not make him spineless, but considerate as well as powerful. He also shows this by the way he reacts to Fulvia's death - feeling almost guilty. Antony is not just brave and strong, he is also thoughtful and understanding, which is what makes him such a popular and successful ruler. Although, in Act One Scene Four, Octavius condemns him, he also acknowledges what a good leader he is. He explains how Antony once "didst drink the stale of horses" and "did

deign the roughest berry on the rudest hedge" in order to survive. This illustrates Antony has a strong will and also good survival skills, making him such an excellent warrior.

Lepidus also praises Antony, calling his faults " the spots of heaven", meaning that even though he has weaknesses, they are insignificant in him. He refers to Antony's behaviour as a " pity of him", indicating that his time in Egypt is wasted when he could be in Rome making better use of his qualities. Although Octavius is angry at Antony for abandoning Rome just to be with Cleopatra, he obviously desperately wants him to return and continue to be a heroic soldier and leader, indicating that he is well thought of and respected. Nevertheless, Antony still behaves in a self-indulgent, irresponsible way. In Act One Scene Three when Cleopatra is pretending to be ill to irritate him, at first he allows her to do this, not complaining when she interrupts him continuously, allowing her to treat him like a little child. He even 'sucks up' to her at this point, calling her his " most sweet queen" and his " dearest queen", showing that she can manipulate and control him extremely easily.

Even when he finally starts threatening to leave her, the audience can easily assume that these threats are empty as the rest of the play is about their relationship, so they obviously stay together. Even Octavius, who is miles away, can see that Cleopatra is using him. He claims that Antony " is not more manlike than Cleopatra". He says that they (he and Lepidus) will " call on him for't", meaning that they will make him pay for the damage that his neglect has caused. This shows that Antony's absence has angered Octavius,

which will undoubtedly cause problems when Antony returns to Rome. He even says " I should have known no less", indicating that Antony was perhaps always weak when it came to women. Also, Octavius' adoptive father, Julius also had an affair with Cleopatra, so he probably feels he should have realised what would happen when Antony met with her.

Even Lepidus, who praises Antony quite a lot in this scene, thinks "'tis pity of him". This shows that Antony really is a weak and unreliable person who is neglecting his duties just to be with a woman. In conclusion, Antony is supposed to be a strong-willed, brave, honest and reliable warrior, but the Antony the audience sees in the first three scenes is extremely different. He is weak, easily manipulated, irresponsible and selfish and is really Cleopatra's lap-dog. Although he does sometimes stand his ground and stand up to her, most of the time Cleopatra had him under her control. I believe that, as Cleopatra is the ruler of Egypt, she is used to getting her own way, she is almost spoiled. This means she feels she can do as she pleases, be as promiscuous as she likes and treat people exactly how she wants. Antony is powerless compared to her - he is perhaps blinded by her beauty and personality and does not seem to mind her pushing him around. Although Antony does stand up for himself a little, at this point he is definitely more of a " strumpet's fool". However, this impression is only from the first four scenes of the play - Antony's character may change a lot more by the end.