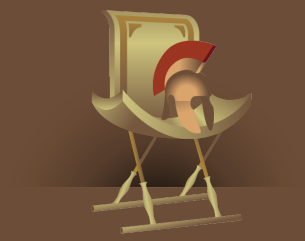


Antony and Cleopatra

Study Guide by Course Hero

What's Inside

Book Basics

AUTHOR
William Shakespeare

YEARS WRITTEN
1606–07

GENRE
History, Tragedy

ABOUT THE TITLE
When Antony, one of ancient Rome's three rulers, and Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, fall in love, their decade-long affair changes the course of Western history. The extended title *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra* previews the fate of this love affair.

In Context

Shakespeare's Audience

William Shakespeare wrote *Antony and Cleopatra* for an audience that was broadly familiar with the story of the two lovers. A classical education was fundamental in Shakespeare's era; Latin and Greek studies took primacy over other subjects. Even grammar-school students were expected to learn Latin and sometimes Greek. Many courses at 16th- and 17th-century European universities were conducted entirely in Latin; although Shakespeare did not attend university, much of his grammar-school education would also have been conducted in Latin. Because classical education emphasized Greek and Roman history and literature, students were steeped not only in classical history but also in Greek and Roman mythology. This is not to say every English schoolboy had an extensive grounding in the classics; most British boys of the period received little if any education. But classical subjects permeated 16th-century culture in the same way familiar fairy tales, for example, permeate contemporary culture.

Plutarch's *Lives*

In a 1623 poetic tribute to Shakespeare, the poet Ben Jonson wrote that the playwright knew "small Latin and less Greek." Fortunately Shakespeare did not need to draw on either language to write his dramas about ancient Rome. In 1579 Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* was published. The *Lives* is one of the

most important books in Western literature. In it Plutarch (c. 46 CE–c. 120 CE) wrote 50 biographies of famous people in classical history. Shakespeare relied heavily on four of these biographies when he wrote *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, and *Timon of Athens*. He surely drew on Plutarch's characterization of Cleopatra: "Cleopatra oftentimes unarmed Antonius, and intised [sic] him to her, making him lose matters of great importance." This idea—that love for Cleopatra led Antony to neglect his military and state duties—became an influential one in the literature of the period.

Shakespeare was not the only playwright to read Plutarch nor the only writer of his day to be fascinated by Antony and Cleopatra. In 1578 the Countess of Pembroke translated the French play *Marc Antoine* into English. Her translation was renamed *Antonius* and published in 1592. This version was meant not for professional performers but as a "closet drama" to be read rather than performed onstage. A second closet drama, *The Tragedy of Cleopatra*, was published in 1594 and went through several editions.

The Story of Cleopatra and Mark Antony

Cleopatra ascended to the throne of Egypt in 51 BCE and formed an alliance, both personal and political, with Julius Caesar, the Roman emperor, with whom she had a son, Caesarion. About three years after Caesar's assassination in 44 BCE, she met and began a passionate affair with Mark Antony, one of the three new rulers of Rome, the others being Octavius Caesar (Julius's nephew and heir) and Lepidus. Antony and Cleopatra had three children during their years together, a number of which were spent apart. However, when Antony did remain in Egypt for long periods of time, he neglected his duties and lived extravagantly, focusing his attentions on Cleopatra. Tensions continued to build among the three co-rulers of Rome, even though Antony, recently widowed, married Caesar's sister Octavia in 40 BCE. In 32 BCE Antony divorced Octavia.

In 34 BCE Cleopatra was deified together with Antony in Alexandria, and their children were made heirs, thus defying Roman law. The next year preparations began for a war between Caesar and Antony for supremacy. Caesar's forces defeated Antony and Cleopatra's at Actium in 31 BCE; famously, Cleopatra's ships suddenly turned and fled, and Antony left the battle to follow her. The next year after Caesar won a final naval battle at Alexandria, both Antony and Cleopatra died by their own hands. In 29 BCE Caesar returned to Rome and was crowned as Augustus Caesar by the Roman Senate in 27 BCE.

Antony and Cleopatra and Middle Age

Shakespeare wrote *Antony and Cleopatra* in 1606 or 1607—five years after *Hamlet*, about two years after *Othello*, and during the same period in which he wrote *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. Considered his greatest tragedies, these five works address challenges people face as they age. Shakespeare was in his early 40s around then, so it may not be surprising that *Antony and Cleopatra* treats the subject of midlife crisis. Both main characters cling to a vision of the fame and power they enjoyed in earlier days. The scenes in which they realize their former glory is gone forever are among the strongest in the play; that both arrive at a measure of mature acceptance before dying gives the ending a redemptive quality that is uncommon in tragedies.

Publication History

Antony and Cleopatra was entered into the *Stationers' Register*, an early form of copyright, in 1608, but there is no record that the play was staged during Shakespeare's lifetime. This does not mean it went unperformed; rather, records from the time are sometimes incomplete or absent and trying to piece together a play's history frequently requires some inference. The Folio edition of the play was published in 1623, after Shakespeare's death. Shakespeare's expensive and esteemed folios were large books produced by folding sheets of paper in half to produce four printed pages. In 1677 John Dryden's version of the story—a conscious Shakespeare imitation called *All for Love*—was performed by the King's Company in London. Dryden's play is set entirely in Alexandria and deals primarily with material from Act 5 of *Antony and Cleopatra*. As 19th-century author Sir Walter Scott wrote approvingly, Dryden left out "whatever in the original story is shocking and repulsive." It was not until the 20th century that relatively authentic versions were produced.

Author Biography

Childhood and Family Life

Very little is known about William Shakespeare's birth, education, or upbringing, and most of what scholars have gathered about his early life is extrapolated from local records. According to church records, he was baptized on April 26, 1564, in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, which leads scholars to the conclusion that he was born on April 23 of that year. Birth records were not usually kept in Shakespeare's time, although church records—baptisms, weddings, burials—were kept fastidiously by clergy.

Shakespeare's family was relatively prominent in its small community. His father was a glover and dealer in animal hides who held a series of public offices, including alderman, chief magistrate, and eventually high bailiff (the equivalent of a present-day mayor). Scholars have speculated that Shakespeare's father may eventually have fallen on hard times, perhaps because of trading failures or controversial Catholic sympathies, but this is not known for sure. Shakespeare's mother, Mary Arden, was the daughter of a distinguished family with some aristocratic connections. Shakespeare would most likely have had a typical education at the local grammar school, where education would have focused on the Latin language and authors. At age 18, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, a woman eight years his elder who was already pregnant with their daughter Susanna. Anne gave birth to twins—Judith and Hamnet—a few years later. Church records reveal Hamnet died in childhood.

Theatrical Life

Shakespeare moved to London to pursue a career as an actor and playwright, and over time, he achieved success. He became a shareholder in the open-air Globe Theatre in London and had widespread popularity as a playwright whose works included romantic and classically inspired comedies, histories, and tragedies. At the time, plays were considered a lower literary form than poetry, and Shakespeare's interest in the theater seems to have been largely commercial. He invested more in his poetry, which was published with flattering dedications to patrons and other front matter. By contrast, the plays published during his lifetime are printed in careless, error-filled quartos, with no sign that Shakespeare was involved in their production. He is credited with writing at least 37 plays, two narrative poems, and over 150 sonnets. He was financially successful enough to buy the most impressive house in Stratford-upon-Avon and to help his father purchase a coat of arms, making him legally a gentleman.

Throughout his career Shakespeare and his fellow actors were supported by the nation's royalty and nobility; during the reign of Elizabeth I (1533–1603), the Lord Chamberlain was the patron for Shakespeare's company, called The Lord Chamberlain's Men. When James I (1566–1625) assumed the throne in 1603, the company came under his patronage and was renamed The King's Men. Although many of Shakespeare's plays were written for performance at the Globe, the King's Men also performed at the nearby Blackfriars Theater, a smaller indoor space, after 1608.

Retirement and Legacy

In 1610 or 1611 Shakespeare retired, moving back to Stratford-upon-Avon. Despite his retirement from London life, the playwright continued to do some writing, contributing to *Henry VIII* and *Two Noble Kinsmen* as well as to another play, *Cardenio*, now lost. Scholars believe these final works to be collaborations with John Fletcher (1579–1625), another playwright.

Shakespeare most likely died on April 23, 1616, leading to the romantic notion he was born and died on the same date, although there are no records of the exact date of either event. He was 52 at his death and was buried on April 25 at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon. Over 400 years after his death, Shakespeare is still regarded as the greatest playwright of the English-speaking world.

Characters

Antony

Generous, likeable, and warm-hearted, Antony is one of the Roman Empire's three triumvirs. When the play begins, he has been living with Cleopatra and has fathered three children with

her. He is a celebrated soldier who has somewhat outlived his reputation; during his time in Egypt he has been living what the Romans consider a degenerate life. His love for Cleopatra outweighs his Roman sense of duty, and he is well aware of avoiding his responsibilities as a triumvir. Indeed his love for Cleopatra is the driving force in his life. Considerably older than Caesar, Antony is touchy when he senses the younger man is trying to dominate him. His insistence on taking a dare of Caesar's—or what he perceives as a dare—leads him to make a catastrophic decision at the Battle of Actium, for he is dangerously impetuous and quick to make judgments. When he realizes how far he has fallen, he is a beaten man.

Cleopatra

Cleopatra's highly charged sexuality and unpredictability are constants in her character; a deep-seated insecurity about Antony's love—he is married to someone else—underlies her every action with him. She is a woman with a past, having been mistress to both Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great, and she views her sexuality as one of her main political assets. She loves Antony but can't resist teasing him, especially about his Roman connections. Some of the teasing comes from her insatiable need to control him; that she cannot do so makes her even more insecure. But she is also an intelligent, effective ruler, and she is capable of being treacherous, even to Antony. Cleopatra's egotism and her need to upstage others (including Antony) can make her seem exasperating. She is quick to anger and tends to blame any bearer of bad news. But she's infinitely charming and has a good sense of humor. The adoration and devotion of her ladies-in-waiting are signs of her charm. When it becomes clear suicide is the only way to avoid the humiliation of being Caesar's captive, Cleopatra meets death with composure and shows herself resourceful in managing to kill herself while under Caesar's guard, whose purpose is to prevent her suicide.

Caesar

Octavius Caesar is an exemplar of Roman virtue—brave, stoic, temperate, correct—and he knows it. He finds Antony's defection from Rome intolerable, partly because he thinks Antony is avoiding his responsibilities and partly because Cleopatra disgusts him. He hates that she had an affair with his uncle, but he hates even more that she has taken Antony away from him. When Antony abandons Octavia, Caesar goes into a rage. Caesar is a rather dour sort. He disapproves of bodily appetites and stays sober when all his friends are drinking. He cannot understand people who don't put the Roman Empire above everything else. He is so competent he ends up doing more than his share of running the Roman Empire (which makes him even angrier at Antony). Not surprisingly, his battle plans are far more thorough and detailed than Antony's; not surprisingly, he is merciless in victory. But the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra soften him somewhat, and the play ends with a hint he may become more tolerant and less one-dimensional as he grows older.

Pompey

Pompey's driving characteristic is the desire to avenge his father, killed by Julius Caesar. Pompey is confident of victory and certain he is loved by the populace. The triumvirs view him as enough of a threat to sign a peace treaty with him, whereupon he cheerfully invites them to a banquet aboard his ship. Pompey's sense of honor is hard to discern. He believes his cause is just and wants to help the Roman people. But when Menas asks for permission to kill the triumvirate during the banquet, Pompey regretfully turns him down, saying If Menas had killed the three men without telling him, Pompey wouldn't have minded; that Menas raised the question makes the assassination of his guests impossible. Pompey seems more concerned with the appearance of honor than with the substance of it.

Lepidus

Lepidus is something of a laughing stock to almost everyone who knows him, certainly not someone to be feared or even taken seriously. Even servants mock him, and Caesar shows him little respect. Lepidus's function in the triumvirate seems to be to placate Caesar and Antony. He praises their suggestions but has no ideas of his own. Lepidus's only memorable act occurs when he gets impossibly drunk at Pompey's banquet and has to be carried away. Soon after that, Caesar comes up with a reason to boot him from the triumvirate.

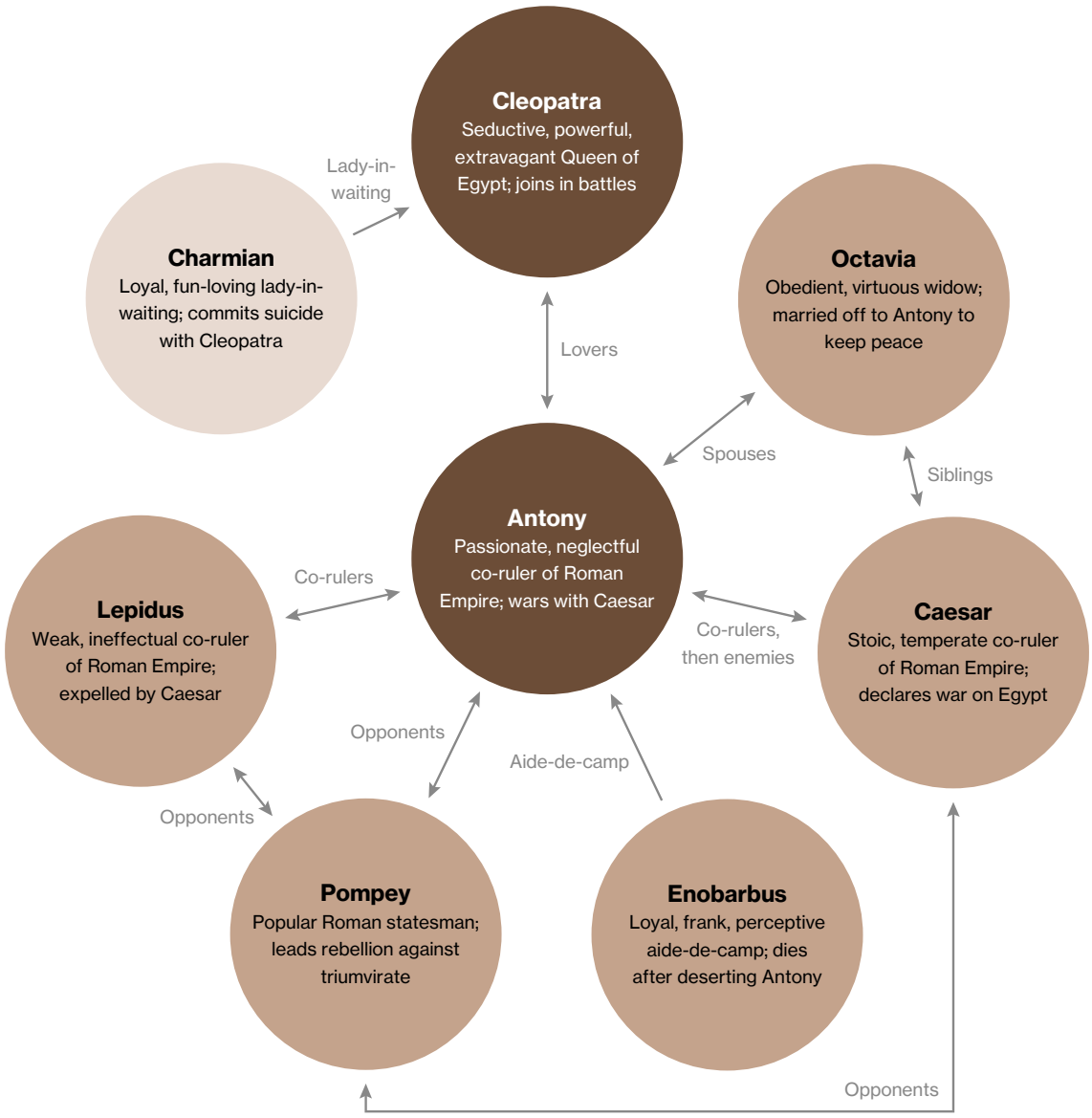
Enobarbus

Enobarbus has a great deal of integrity and the courage to speak his mind even to Cleopatra. He is perceptive about Antony and understands the strength of his attachment to Cleopatra. He feels comfortable enough around Antony to snap at him once or twice. Intensely loyal, he remains with Antony when other followers have deserted him. When Antony's behavior finally forces even Enobarbus to desert, he regrets his decision so much that he dies of grief.

Octavia

Octavia's demeanor is too reserved to give a good sense of her personality. She's a woman of virtue and is obedient to her brother, which is how she ends up marrying Antony. Though she can't see much in her new husband, she is a dutiful wife, as Roman ideals require, and she feels torn between him and her brother. She is so troubled by divided loyalties she travels to Rome to intercede for Antony where she learns he has returned to Cleopatra. After a few decorous words of grief, she disappears from the play.

Character Map



- Main Character
- Other Major Character
- Minor Character

Full Character List

Character	Description
Antony	One of the three co-rulers of the Roman Empire, the passionate and neglectful Mark Antony, or Marcus Antonius, lives in Egypt with Cleopatra.
Cleopatra	Powerful, politically savvy, seductive, and prone to excessive drama, Cleopatra is Queen of Egypt, where she lives with Mark Antony.
Caesar	The adopted nephew of Julius Caesar, Octavius Caesar is one of the three co-rulers of the Roman Empire. He lives in Rome.
Pompey	Son of the general who ruled with Julius Caesar, Pompey leads a revolt against the three co-rulers of the Roman Empire.
Lepidus	Marcus Aemilius Lepidus is the weakest of the three co-rulers of the Roman Empire.
Enobarbus	Courageous and loyal, Enobarbus is Antony's aide-de-camp and good friend.
Octavia	Octavia is Caesar's widowed 30-year-old sister whom Caesar marries off to Antony in a peacekeeping attempt.
Agrippa	An adviser to Caesar, Agrippa suggests Antony and Octavia should marry.
Alexas	Alexas is a servant of Cleopatra's; Caesar orders him hanged even though Alexas has done him a good turn.
Boy	An unnamed boy sings at Pompey's banquet.
Canidius	Canidius is a lieutenant-general who serves Antony.
Captain	An unnamed Captain reports to Antony about the weather.
Charmian	Fond of bawdy jokes, Charmian is Cleopatra's main lady-in-waiting.
Countryman	The countryman brings Cleopatra the basket of venomous snakes she uses to commit suicide.
Demetrius	Demetrius is a Roman and a newcomer to Egypt.
Dercetus	One of Antony's guards, Dercetus brings Antony's sword to Caesar with the hope of gaining favor.
Diomedes	Part of Cleopatra's retinue, Diomedes is sent to bring Antony the message Cleopatra is alive.
Dollabella	Dolabella is a member of Caesar's council of war.
Egyptian man	One of Cleopatra's servants, the Egyptian man is sent to ask Caesar how Cleopatra should prepare herself for captivity.
Eros	Eros is an attendant who serves Antony and refuses to kill him.
Fulvia	Antony's deceased wife, Fulvia and Antony's brother plotted unsuccessfully against Caesar, in Antony's name, causing Caesar to mistrust Antony, who was not involved. Fulvia never appears in the play.
Gallus	A member of Caesar's council of war, Gallus is sent to guard Cleopatra after Antony dies.
Guardsmen	Various guardsmen appear in battle scenes.
Iras	Iras is Cleopatra's second lady-in-waiting.
Maecenas	Maecenus is in Caesar's retinue.
Mardian	Mardian is a eunuch in Cleopatra's retinue.

Menacrates	Menacrates is a pirate who joins forces with Pompey.
Menas	A pirate who joins forces with Pompey, Menas asks permission to kill the members of the triumvirate.
Messengers	Unnamed messengers travel back and forth throughout the play.
Philo	Philo, a soldier of Antony's, is the first speaker in the play.
Proculeius	Proculeius serves in Caesar's retinue; Antony mistakenly believes he is trustworthy.
Scarus	Scarus is a commander in Antony's army.
Schoolmaster	The schoolmaster to Antony's children is sent as an ambassador to Caesar.
Seleucus	Cleopatra's treasurer, Seleucus betrays her to Caesar by revealing the extent of her wealth.
Servants	Unnamed servants are featured in most scenes of the play.
Silius	A soldier in Antony's land army, Silius fights under Ventidius.
Soothsayer	The soothsayer serves at Cleopatra's court but travels to Rome with Antony. He warns Antony to leave Rome.
Taurus	Taurus is one of Caesar's lieutenants.
Thidias	Thidias is one of Caesar's servants and the messenger who kisses Cleopatra's hand.
Varrius	Varrius is in Caesar's retinue.
Ventidius	One of Antony's generals, Ventidius wins a major battle against the Parthians.

Plot Summary

Act 1

The play begins by showing the relationship of Antony and Cleopatra in Alexandria, Egypt. Antony is one of the three rulers of the Roman Empire; Cleopatra is Queen of Egypt. Antony has been neglecting important duties in Rome and his rule of one third of the Empire to remain with Cleopatra in a longstanding passionate and extravagant affair that provokes questions and criticism from his counterparts.

Antony and Cleopatra devote their time and energy to indulging themselves, but such indulgence and negligence can continue for only so long. When enemies threaten the rulers of the Empire in Rome, and his wife dies unexpectedly, Antony must force himself to break away from Cleopatra to attend to the situations at home. Together with his aide-de-camp, Enobarbus, Antony leaves an unhappy Cleopatra in Egypt and departs for Rome, where the other two triumvirs, Octavius Caesar and Lepidus, are increasingly impatient and critical of Antony, once Rome's greatest general. Their common enemy, Pompey, who controls the sea, is now threatening war.

Left in Alexandria, Cleopatra misses Antony deeply and remembers her previous affair with Julius Caesar in her "salad days" when she was young and had not developed the depth of passion she now feels for Antony.

Act 2

Antony meets with his co-rulers in Rome. Caesar is distant, for Antony's brother was causing troubles for Caesar by leading an insurrection against him. However, the immediate threat is from Pompey, and the triumvirs believe an alliance is necessary. Antony tries to readjust to his political role and responsibilities and agrees to marry Caesar's widowed sister Octavia to improve relations between the two men. Such a marriage should help ease the tensions and ally the families.

Enobarbus, however, is less hopeful about the union, knowing Antony will find it difficult, at best, to resist Cleopatra's allure. In a famous speech, Enobarbus describes the lovers' first meeting, as the glorious Cleopatra, aboard the golden-hued

royal barge with its silken sails and silver oars, sailed down the Nile and captured Antony's heart.

When Cleopatra, in Egypt, hears of the marriage, she is enraged and even tries to kill the messenger. Eventually she accepts what she hopes will be a loveless marriage of convenience and feels confident that Antony will return to her.

In Rome Caesar, Antony, and Lepidus face their common enemies, including Pompey who is tempted by Menas to kill all three that evening. However, in attempting to appear honorable, Pompey must refuse Menas's offer, which he would have gladly condoned had Menas done the deed and informed him later. Despite grudges and mistrust, Pompey and the triumvirs reach a truce agreement. Pompey then invites all to a party on his yacht. The men are shown carousing and drinking heavily. Lepidus, the weakest of the triumvirs and perpetual "peacemaker" gets very drunk; Caesar, the strongest triumvir at this time, conspicuously and disdainfully abstains.

Act 3

Political and personal relations are strained in Rome among the rulers, even after Antony marries Octavia. He and Caesar still distrust each other. Antony leaves with Octavia for Athens, where they remain for a time. Torn between her brother and her husband, Octavia returns to Rome to try to ease tensions. While she is in Rome, however, Antony returns to Cleopatra. Caesar and Lepidus have fought with Pompey, despite the truce; their fighting results in Pompey's death and Caesar's imprisonment of Lepidus, allegedly because Lepidus was too involved with Pompey. Tensions continue between Antony and Caesar, who becomes even angrier when he learns Antony has participated with Cleopatra in an elaborate deification ceremony, making their children heirs.

As preparations for a showdown between Caesar and Antony get underway, Antony is warned not to fight at sea because Caesar, having gained control of Pompey's defeated navy, is far stronger there than Antony. However, Cleopatra and he insist they can win with their combined forces and dare to take on the stronger foe. The sea battle goes badly for Antony and his men. Cleopatra retreats rather than fight, and Antony follows her, abandoning his forces, humiliating himself, and blaming Cleopatra for the defeat. Caesar accepts Cleopatra's surrender and wants her to reject Antony in favor of him, which she at first pretends to do. But she and Antony reconcile.

Act 4

The enemy forces of Caesar and Antony fight again, this time on land. Although many men have left Antony and defected to Caesar's side, Antony is victorious in this battle. Even Enobarbus at the end deserts Antony but leaves behind all his belongings. Antony nobly accepts the desertion and sends Enobarbus's possessions back to him. Wracked with remorse and guilt at having deserted his friend, Enobarbus dies from shame and grief.

Thinking Caesar will now want to fight at sea after losing on land, Antony prepares for a naval confrontation. Antony and Cleopatra's forces do well at first, but they are not strong enough. Caesar's forces conquer them all, and Cleopatra again retreats with her ships. Antony is defeated and angrily blames her again; he is so angry he wants to kill her.

Afraid, she runs from him and hides in her monumental tomb. She has Antony informed she has committed suicide from remorse so that she can judge his reaction. Believing her dead, he asks the loyal Eros to kill him. Eros cannot bring himself to act on Antony's order and instead kills himself. At this point Antony attempts suicide and wounds himself badly. When Diomedes arrives at the scene with the message that Cleopatra is alive, Antony asks his aides to bring him to Cleopatra in the tomb, where he dies in her arms.

Act 5

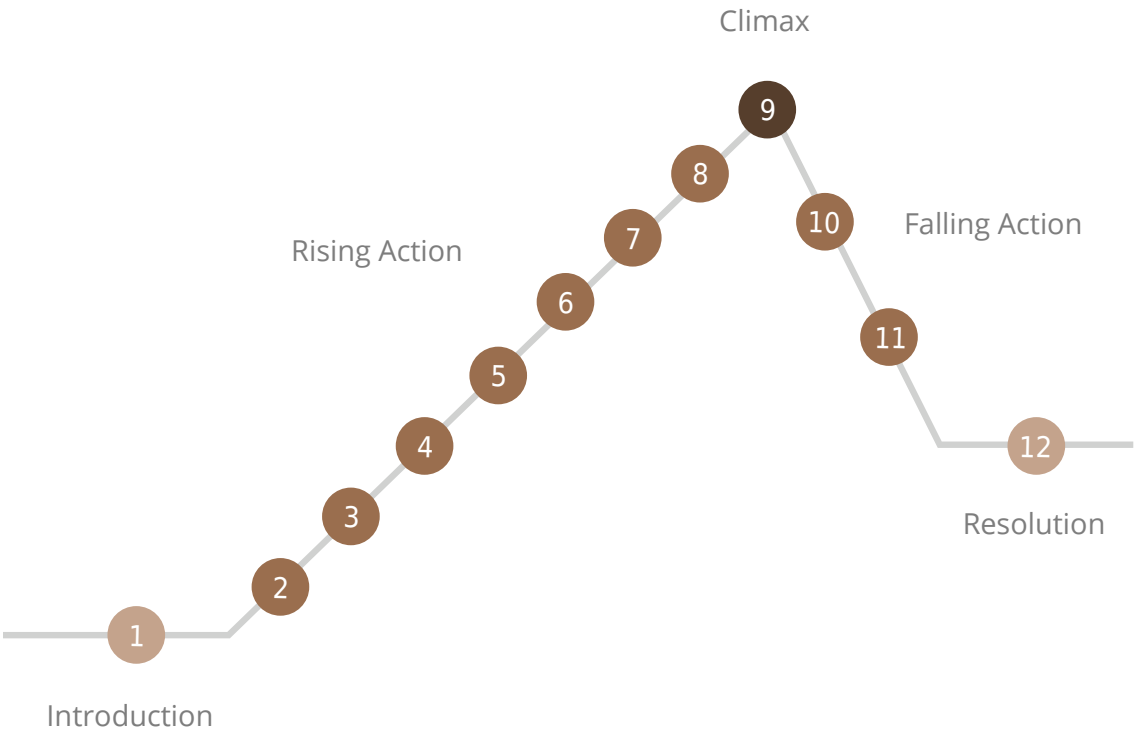
Caesar, whose earlier advances Cleopatra has rejected, now comes to the conquered Queen who must surrender. He pretends to make an agreement to appease her because he wants to take her alive as a captive to Rome to build his own image. On the pretense of protecting her, Caesar has her guarded to prevent her suicide, for he knows she is too proud to be humiliated by being paraded as a prisoner in Rome. Cleopatra does not trust Caesar, and her suspicions are confirmed by Dolabella, who reveals Caesar's intentions.

Despite the guards and the presence of Caesar himself, Cleopatra has arranged for a basket of figs to be delivered to her; inside the basket under the figs are asps. After Caesar leaves, she has her ladies-in-waiting dress her regally as she prepares to die. She then allows the snakes to bite her. Her loyal ladies-in-waiting die along with her—first Iras, from shock

and grief, and then Charmian, after Cleopatra and in the same manner.

Caesar returns to find them dead. Despite earlier threats, he softens and decrees Antony and Cleopatra will be buried together. Caesar praises them, ending the play with an acceptance that the fatal affair is over and it is time to return to Rome and consolidate power.

Plot Diagram



Introduction

1. Antony realizes he must leave Alexandria for Rome.

Rising Action

2. Antony marries Octavia to keep peace with Caesar.

3. Antony, Caesar, and Lepidus sign a treaty with Pompey.

4. Antony and Octavia move to Greece.

5. Antony returns to Egypt and Cleopatra.

6. Caesar declares war on Egypt.

7. Cleopatra's ship flees at the Battle of Actium.

8. Antony's ship follows Cleopatra's.

Climax

9. Caesar and Rome defeat Egypt and Antony.

Falling Action

10. Antony commits suicide when he believes Cleopatra is dead.

11. Cleopatra commits suicide rather than become a prisoner.

Resolution

12. Antony and Cleopatra are buried together.

Timeline of Events

c. 41 BCE

Antony and Cleopatra begin their affair, with Antony spending time in Alexandria.

Some years later

Antony reluctantly goes to Rome to deal with his wife's death, Caesar's scorn, and political unrest.

Soon after

For political expediency and Caesar's trust, newly widowed Antony marries Octavia.

Soon after

Antony and Octavia leave for Athens, where he will rule the eastern part of the Empire.

Some time later

Octavia returns to Rome to try easing tensions between Antony and Caesar.

About the same time

Breaking a recent treaty, Pompey and Caesar battle, ending with Pompey dead and Lepidus jailed.

About the same time

Antony has returned to Egypt and his old ways, abandoning Octavia and angering Caesar.

Not long after

With relations worsening, Antony decides, against advice, to confront Caesar at sea.

At the same time

Cleopatra encourages the sea battle, offering Antony her ships and her help.

Soon after, in 31 BCE

Overwhelmed in battle, Cleopatra retreats, with Antony following and abandoning his men.

Months later

As Antony and Caesar prepare for battle, Enobarbus regretfully deserts Antony.

That night

Antony misjudges and prepares for a battle at sea the next day.

After the battle

Puzzled by Antony's rage against her, Cleopatra hides in her mausoleum.

Moments later

Learning Cleopatra is alive, Antony, mortally wounded, is taken to her, where he dies in her arms.

That day after her death

Caesar arrives, somewhat moved, and decrees she and Antony will be buried together in Egypt.

After the battle

Cleopatra rejects Caesar's proposal she leave Antony for him.

Very soon after

Redeeming himself as a general, Antony wins a land battle against Caesar.

The next day, 30 BCE

Overconfident, Antony loses to Caesar at sea, believing Cleopatra has betrayed him.

That night

Antony mistakenly believes Cleopatra is dead and tries unsuccessfully to kill himself.

August, 30 BCE

Rather than be Caesar's prisoner, Cleopatra dresses regally and kills herself by snake bites.

Scene Summaries

Act 1, Scene 1

Summary

The play begins in a room in Cleopatra's palace in Alexandria, Egypt, in the middle of a conversation between two of Antony's companions, Philo and Demetrius. Philo explains that love for Cleopatra has addled Antony's thinking and weakened his courage. Previously Antony embodied Mars, god of war; now he seems more like a servant waiting on Cleopatra. Antony and Cleopatra enter. Philo murmurs that Antony, formerly "triple pillar of the world," has become a "strumpet's fool." Antony and Cleopatra, who don't see the two men, are deep in a laughing conversation about Antony's limitless love for Cleopatra. A messenger interrupts them, bringing news from Rome.

Cleopatra teasingly says maybe Fulvia, Antony's wife, is angry at him. Or—of lesser consequence—maybe Caesar has some instructions. After all, she hints, Antony is the servant of both Fulvia and Caesar. Ignoring the taunt, Antony replies he belongs where he is; the Empire is worthless clay compared to his love for Cleopatra. Lovers are the world's true nobility, and Antony and Cleopatra's love is the noblest of all.

Cleopatra persists in her teasing. If he loves her, Cleopatra, so much, why did he marry Fulvia? Again Antony refuses to take the bait, asking instead what they should do that evening. Though Cleopatra repeats he should listen to the messenger, Antony orders the man not to speak. He, Cleopatra, and their retinue exit, leaving Philo and Demetrius to shake their heads at Antony's folly.

Analysis

Though Scene 1 is brief, it pinpoints the play's essential conflicts. Philo's opening speech sets out the problems; the rest of the scene illustrates his words. He is acting as a mini-chorus, introducing the main characters and the conflict they embody. In a sense the real play begins after his introduction, but his words also affect the way the audience first encounters Antony: they are encouraged to see him as diminished and undignified in his devotion, not as the noble lover he thinks he is.

Antony has abandoned his responsibilities as both a leader and a soldier, but Philo and Demetrius know him to be a great man. They clearly feel no respect for Cleopatra, whom Philo dismisses as a lustful Egyptian. Antony's "dotage" may be mere silliness or folly, but it is not as bad as Cleopatra's lust. The word *dotage* suggests love has weakened Antony's brain. In using the word *lust* in describing Cleopatra, Philo implies her attraction to Antony is purely physical, not emotional.

Should the audience take Philo's word that Cleopatra is Antony's inferior? At this point it is too early to tell. Philo makes it clear he doesn't think she's worth Antony's adulation, but probably any loyal soldier would feel this way. Still, Cleopatra's first line is a demand Antony prove how much he loves her—not an expression of her love for him. This statement hints at her insecurity, as does her unreasonable jealousy of Fulvia, whom Antony met and married long before coming to Egypt.

Both Cleopatra and Antony use exaggerated rhetoric to discuss their love. Although imaginative and poetic, it suggests a certain self-consciousness—as well it might, since they are declaiming in front of several people. Not only do they consider themselves Heroic Beings In Love; they want everyone to know how they feel. This stagey, overwrought dialogue will be a frequent feature in the play.

Despite Cleopatra's fussing and measuring exactly how much Antony loves her, she seems to have a clearer sense of Antony's responsibilities than he does. Twice she urges him to listen to the news from Rome: "Your dismission is come from Caesar. Therefore hear it, Antony." Cleopatra is a queen, after all. She knows visitors from distant places deserve attention, although she is less interested in political instruction than in a possible message from her rival Fulvia.

For his part Antony is determined to ignore the messenger. He also seems to believe his and Cleopatra's love has colossal importance: "Kingdoms are clay ... we stand up peerless." The idea that lovers are greater than kings is typical in love poetry, but it is disconcerting to hear it in a conversation between two actual rulers. And there is a hint Antony suspects his time with Cleopatra is limited: "Let's not confound the time with conference harsh. / There's not a minute of our lives should stretch without some pleasure now." He might not speak this way if he thought he and Cleopatra had all the time in the world to enjoy themselves.

Shakespeare inserts a clever detail in lines 9 and 10. As Philo jeers that Antony has become "the fan to cool a gypsy's lust," Cleopatra immediately enters—fanned by eunuch slaves. Both Philo and Shakespeare may be implying that love has "unmanned" Antony, a theme that returns throughout the play.

Act 1, Scene 2

Summary

It is evening, and several of Cleopatra's attendants are gathered in another room of the palace. Charmian teasingly asks a soothsayer to tell her fortune. Scanning her palm, the soothsayer announces Charmian will "be yet far fairer than you are" and that she will outlive the lady she serves—that is, Cleopatra. Next the soothsayer reads Iras's palm and announces her fate will be the same as Charmian's.

As the courtiers laugh and joke, Cleopatra enters, looking for Antony. When Alexas points out the approaching Antony, Cleopatra commands her retinue to leave with her and exit as Antony and a messenger appear on stage.

The messenger has bad news. Fulvia and Antony's brother have joined forces against Caesar. Antony upbraids himself for having neglected his duty to be with Cleopatra. A second messenger arrives with the shocking news Fulvia has died. Antony informs Enobarbus, who at first cannot make sense of the words: "Fulvia is dead." "Sir?" "Fulvia is dead." "Fulvia?" "Dead." Then he shrugs off the news: "Your old smock brings forth a new petticoat"—in other words, the death of Antony's old love paves the way for this new one. Enobarbus adds that Cleopatra needs Antony too much for him to leave. But Antony is determined to return to Rome, where the situation is grave. He orders Enobarbus to prepare for the journey.

Analysis

Scene 2 mirrors the preceding scene in some ways. Charmian's mischievous banter calls to mind Cleopatra's teasing banter to Antony in Scene 1. Again there is the suggestion of important messages being ignored: Charmian and Iras both laugh at the soothsayer's predictions, and Enobarbus refuses to take seriously Antony's announcement that he must return to Rome. When Antony adds Fulvia is dead, Enobarbus is literally unable to take in the message. He even jokes about the death. In Scene 1 Cleopatra urges Antony to listen to the messenger; now Antony urges Enobarbus to take him seriously. "No more light answers," Antony says sternly.

To the modern reader the soothsayer's function may be ambiguous. He is, somehow, a disturbing character, and watching the attendants joke about him is vaguely unpleasant. He certainly is not trying to drum up business; when Iras urges him to be more specific about her future, he refuses. He is not there merely to give away the ending because Shakespeare's audience, familiar with Roman history, likely came to the theater knowing the play's end. For them the soothsayer's words add a frisson of dread to a comic scene. What matters is that the soothsayer's audience ignores his message.

Scene 1 sets up a contrast between the rigors and responsibilities of war and the pleasures of love. Scene 2 reveals greater contrast between these elements. Shakespeare is concerned with more than merely the difference between Antony and Cleopatra; each has been shaped by dramatically opposing cultures. When Antony says he must break the "strong Egyptian fetters" that bind him, he is referring not only to Cleopatra, whom he often calls "Egypt," but to Egypt itself. In the play, Rome represents gravity, purpose, and rigor—the traditional Western male culture of war and power—whereas Egypt embodies the traditionally female and also Eastern concepts of pleasure, luxury, and love. Scene 1 opens with Philo's solemn speech about the way Antony is neglecting his duties; Scene 2 opens with Cleopatra's retinue having fun with a fortune-teller. In this scene Antony struggles to recall himself to his Roman duties.

Act 1, Scene 3

Summary

Cleopatra fretfully dispatches Alexas to track Antony down, warning him not to tell Antony she sent him. "If you find him sad, / Say I am dancing." Charmian tells the Queen she should be more pliant, but Cleopatra scoffs at this advice. When Antony enters, she is petulant. He's unfaithful; she's always known he would betray her; why doesn't he go back to Rome, if he thinks so little of her?

Finally Antony explains that Pompey is raising an army against

the triumvirate and that he must return to Rome to sort things out with Caesar. Antony adds that a more important reason for his departure—a reason Cleopatra should approve of: Fulvia has died. At first Cleopatra affects not to believe this; then she rebukes Antony for not showing more grief at his wife's death. "Now I see, I see, / In Fulvia's death, how mine received shall be." Antony finally loses patience and announces he is leaving. Cleopatra swiftly calls him back to ask for his forgiveness—or semi-ask for it. "Your honor calls you hence," she admits, adding Antony should therefore be "deaf to my unpitied folly."

Analysis

Perhaps something in Antony's face warns her he has bad news, for she attacks him the moment he walks into the room—and Fulvia is the first verbal weapon she uses. In only 22 lines (24–46), she goes from petulance to rage to studied and conspicuous grief. Antony has barely been able to open his mouth when Cleopatra mourns, "Eternity was in our lips and eyes." *All is over*, she seems to be saying, in what seems to be artificially stagey and poetic language.

The signs are clear that both Antony and Cleopatra view themselves as heroes on the world's stage, players in a larger-than-life drama. And Cleopatra is a born actor. She seizes any chance to play a part: now the abandoned lover, now the teasing flirt, now the furious ruler of Egypt. It's not clear how seriously Cleopatra takes her own moods. As she tells Charmian, she would lose Antony if she gave in to him all the time.

What does Charmian mean when she warns Cleopatra not to tempt Antony "so too far"? Charmian is suddenly and atypically serious here. "In time we hate that which we often fear" is a reference to Antony. He is not afraid of Cleopatra, but he dreads her tantrums, and Charmian is worried he finally will lose patience.

Act 1, Scene 4

Summary

In Rome Caesar is reading a letter as he walks with Lepidus and their retinue. The letter's contents clearly irritate Caesar. Antony, he says, is wasting his time dallying with Cleopatra in Egypt; he has ignored Caesar's messengers; he is the epitome of a fault-filled man.

Lepidus, eager to keep peace among the triumvirs, answers Antony is not all bad. In fact, he says, Antony is so worthy his few faults serve only to enhance his greatness. Caesar replies although Antony's behavior is perhaps understandable, it is dangerous to Rome and the triumvirate.

A messenger enters to announce Pompey has raised a strong fleet of ships and is gaining support among some of Caesar's followers. Caesar is not surprised: potential leaders, he says, are always popular until they become actual leaders. A second messenger reports two of Pompey's men are attacking coastal regions and terrifying the people who live there. Caesar becomes even angrier at Antony, furious that such a tough and celebrated soldier should behave so shamefully now. "Let his shames quickly drive him to Rome." Meanwhile he and Lepidus must visit the battlefield and meet with their soldiers. Lepidus promises to help.

Analysis

A great distance separates Alexandria and Rome, both literally and symbolically. Throughout the play Shakespeare creates a fantasized, symbolic conflict between the strict, moralistic West, represented by Rome (and Antony), and the pleasure-seeking, luxury-loving East, represented by Egypt (and Cleopatra). This attitude is typical of the period: as Western Europe began to have more frequent contact with Asia and South Africa, Europeans began to develop a mythology of the East as a place of exoticism, luxury, and sensuality. Scene 4 is set in Rome, and Rome's ruler, Octavius Caesar, could not be more different from Cleopatra. Nor could he be more disapproving of her. She has transformed the formerly heroic general, Mark Antony, into what Caesar thinks is a lazy, thoughtless loser.

According to Caesar Cleopatra has also unmanned Antony. Antony's being "not more manlike than Cleopatra" is another way of saying "as womanlike as an actual woman," although it also draws attention to Cleopatra's remarkable power. Women in Caesar's Rome are wives and sisters, not rulers; indeed it is noteworthy how few women appear in the Roman scenes. In Egypt, by contrast, Cleopatra's courtiers are mostly women or eunuchs; very few soldierly men stride about the palace in Alexandria.

Caesar clearly feels wounded by what he sees as Antony's betrayal. His feelings of abandonment mirror the Queen's. Both Caesar and Cleopatra are rivals battling to control Antony, and while the battle is symbolic—between war and love—it is also literal. Both characters want Antony's loyalty, and each wants him to demonstrate that loyalty in a way totally opposite to what the other wants. Antony remains pulled between Rome and Egypt, and it remains to be seen how Roman Antony will become after he has left Alexandria.

Act 1, Scene 5

Summary

Back in Alexandria, Cleopatra is suffering without Antony. She wishes she could drink mandragora, a poison to make her sleep away the time. She calls her eunuch, Mardian, to her and asks whether he is able to still feel love (since he can no longer have sex). She wonders what Antony is doing at that moment. Riding a horse? Asking after Cleopatra, his "serpent of old Nile?" She reminds herself, and the audience, that Julius Caesar (the uncle of Octavius) and Pompey (the brother of the Pompey now attacking Rome) were both her lovers in the past: she is indeed a "morsel for a monarch."

Alexas enters with a pearl that Antony, "the firm Roman," commanded him to bring to "great Egypt," promising that he, Antony, will win so much territory for Cleopatra that "all the East shall call her mistress." Cleopatra wants to know whether Antony was happy or sad as he spoke those words; when Alexas says his master's mood was in the middle of both those extremes, the Queen exults that any mood suits Antony.

Calling for ink and paper to send Antony yet another message, Cleopatra asks, "Did I, Charmian, / Ever love [Julius] Caesar so?" Charmian provokes her by praising Caesar, pointing out Cleopatra used to do the same thing. Cleopatra retorts that those were "her salad days," before she had either judgment or experience.

Analysis

The names of the Caesars and Pompeys can be confusing unless readers know the naming customs practiced in ancient Rome. Males were traditionally given three names: a first name (*praenome*n), a clan name (*nomen*), and a third name representing the branch of the clan. The collection of first names from which to choose was limited; usually a first son would be given his father's first name, and often all the daughters in the family would be given the same feminized version of the father's first name. In Scene 5 the Caesar whom Charmian praises is Julius Caesar, great-uncle of the Octavius Caesar who is now one of the triumvirs; the Pompey Cleopatra mentions is the current Pompey's older brother. It is important to remember that these are also famous figures from Roman history, and they would have been familiar to Shakespeare's audience.

Scene 5 has a "meanwhile ... " quality. The little action going on functions as a check-in on Cleopatra while Antony is politicking in Rome. Cleopatra is feeling bored and idle without her lover. She can't think of a way to pass the time except by sleeping. Mandragora—the root of the mandrake plant—was believed to make people sleepy when it was eaten or made into tea, which is why Cleopatra wishes she had some. According to legend, mandragora also drove away demons, which might also suit Cleopatra's mood at this point!

It is significant Cleopatra strikes up a conversation with the eunuch Mardian, although she says she takes "no pleasure / In aught a eunuch has"—a reference to her own sexual appetite. Perhaps she identifies with him, as sexual pleasure is unavailable to her now. But her question "Hast thou affections?" seems cruel, especially since Mardian was probably castrated so that he could serve in her household. It suggests she barely thinks of Mardian as a human being. In any case she pays no attention to the honest and well-considered reply he gives her. Instead her thoughts flit back to Antony. Perhaps loneliness makes her feel undesirable: her memories of Caesar and Pompey seem to cheer her up.

Cleopatra is definitely cheered by Alexas's appearance. The audience has seen Cleopatra mock Antony to his face; without him, however, she is full of praise. She seizes on the mention that Antony's mood was neither good nor bad as proof of his good disposition. Indeed neutrality in describing Antony is a wise tactic to employ to avoid provoking Cleopatra, who might easily fly into a rage upon hearing he is in a good mood or into deeper dejection if he is in a bad mood. Cleopatra also scolds Charmian for teasing her about having once loved Julius Caesar—and indeed, Charmian's taunting does seem to come out of nowhere. But it sets up one of Cleopatra's most famous lines: "My salad days, / When I was green in judgment, cold in

blood, / To say as I said then." "My salad days" is a remarkable example of Shakespeare's gift for coining new expressions, and this one is still used widely today.

Act 2, Scene 1

Summary

In his house in Messina, Pompey is strategizing with Menas and Menecrates. If the gods are just, says Pompey, they'll reward a person whose cause is just. But Menas reminds Pompey even when the gods favor someone, they don't necessarily reward that person speedily; wise gods sometimes deny rewards to individuals for their own good. But Pompey is confident of victory. He is popular and controls a powerful navy at the same time as Antony is distracted by love, and Caesar is losing people's respect. Pompey adds that although Lepidus flatters both Antony and Caesar, he loves neither, "nor either cares for him."

When Menas says Caesar and Lepidus are "in the [battle] field," Pompey is unconcerned. The two men may *expect* Antony's arrival in Rome, but Antony is too besotted to leave his "field of feasts." In the middle of Pompey's speech, Varrius enters and confirms the rumor is true: Antony is en route to Rome. Though Pompey is surprised "this amorous surfeiter would have donned his helm[et] for such a petty war," he remains calm. After all, he points out, Antony's involvement could be interpreted as a sign he takes Pompey seriously. Menas does not think Caesar will welcome Antony. After all, Antony's late wife and his brother led an insurrection against Caesar. Pompey refuses to speculate about this.

Analysis

This brief scene introduces Pompey and provides an update on the progress of the battle. Pompey's first line concerns justice, so it may appear his cause is just. But the main characters are multidimensional, and Pompey will later be shown to care more about being perceived as a just ruler than about being one. Nevertheless at this point he seems confident he is in the right and confident he will win.

When Menas says Caesar and Lepidus are already on the battlefield, Pompey outright answers, "Tis false," a response in line with his boundless optimism about his prospects. He then treats himself to a description of Cleopatra in which he stresses her witchlike qualities more than her beauty. He suggests Antony is not so much a hedonist trapped by his own appetites as a prisoner under Cleopatra's spell. Antony's brain is "fuming"; he's being fed food that will never satiate him; he's in danger of falling into a Lethe-like sleep. (In Greek and Roman mythology drinking from the Lethe—a river in the underworld—caused people to forget the past.) Here is yet another male perspective in which a powerful female is thought dangerous.

Forced to accept the bad news that Antony actually is on his way to Rome, Pompey wonders if the reason for the journey is that members of the triumvirate fear him. This passage suggests Pompey is skilled at turning negatives into positives, but it is too early to know if the suggestion is true. He seems realistic as well as optimistic. "How the fear of us / May cement their divisions and bind up / The petty differences, we yet not know." Although he himself has just wondered if the members of the triumvirate fear him, he seems to say here, "Live in the present. We can't control the future." All they can do is fight their hardest.

Act 2, Scene 2

Summary

Lepidus is urging Enobarbus to ask Antony not to "stir up embers" by arguing with Caesar. Enobarbus replies he'll ask Antony only to be himself. If Caesar says something provoking, why shouldn't Antony fight back? But Lepidus wants to avoid trouble; for him it is more important the members of the triumvirate get along than Antony raise personal grudges.

Antony and Ventidius enter from one side of the stage; Caesar, Maecenas, and Agrippa enter from the other. Lepidus begs everyone to stay calm. Though Antony and Caesar keep their tempers, both clearly are angry. Antony begins the discussion by saying Caesar has been criticizing him over matters that are none of Caesar's business. Why does Caesar care whether Antony has been living in Egypt?

Caesar replies he wouldn't care except Antony has been plotting against him. Antony's wife and brother led the insurrection against Caesar and did so in Antony's name.

Anthony protests: his brother never asked him to take arms against Caesar, and Antony never supported the insurrection. If Caesar wants to quarrel, he'll have to come up with something worthier. Caesar reminds Antony of the messenger to whom he refused to listen. This charge, Antony admits, is true—but only because Antony had a hangover and explained his condition to the messenger the next day.

Now Caesar hits back with a substantial allegation: "You have broken the article of your oath." When Caesar needed help in battle, Antony refused it. Again Antony pleads his condition—constant revelry made him neglect his duty. With matters at a standstill, Agrippa proposes a solution: why shouldn't Antony marry Caesar's sister Octavia, making the two men brothers! Antony and Caesar approve and shake hands.

The three triumvirs and their followers exit; Enobarbus, Agrippa, and Maecenas remain. Enobarbus obliges the two other men with an extensive description of Cleopatra, painting a near-fantastic vision of beauty, wealth, and charm. When Maecenas mentions Antony must now leave Cleopatra, Enobarbus knows he will not.

Analysis

This scene focuses on the character and influence of the members of the triumvirate, Enobarbus, Agrippa, and Cleopatra. Lepidus, the triumvir with least power, acts as a peacemaker between Caesar and Antony, as well he should, for relations are strained between the two and with sufficient reason. While Lepidus lacks influence and persuasiveness, and others pay little attention to him, his perspective is actually valuable. Lepidus is concerned with the common good, not a wounded ego, and he is right that further squabbling over "trivial differences" creates further problems—"Murder in healing wounds."

The other two triumvirs are more powerful and less willing to appease one another. Caesar believes he has been wronged and presents three incidents of Antony's offenses. One involves Antony's wife and brother, but Antony claims not to be involved. Whether Caesar believes it or not, the insurrection they led has troubled Caesar, and he is reluctant to trust Antony. The second and third offenses are related; Antony dismisses one and admits fault for the other. However, his explanations—drunkenness, hangover, excessive revelry, preoccupation with Cleopatra—are seriously questionable. If Antony is above it all and dismissive of his duties as a ruler of the Roman Empire because he is too hung over to execute them, then Caesar is justifiably irritated and accusatory, although he is a stiffer, less sympathetic character. Although both may consider themselves political tacticians, neither is showing much diplomacy, but Caesar's suspicious nature will serve him well later on.

Indeed their subordinates show more insight and definitive action. Agrippa comes up with an actual plan, however seemingly random—the marriage of Antony and Octavia. It is a step toward establishing trust through shared family ties. Enobarbus, however, is more perceptive, for he knows Antony will never give up Cleopatra. He knows the depth of their commitment and the power she has over him. It would be hard to know whether this marriage is actually doomed before it begins, but Enobarbus's insights do not foreshadow a successful political union, which is, of course, what the marriage is intended to be.

Finally, there is the influence of Cleopatra, which for Antony is all encompassing. He is, and will be, unquestionably and unalterably committed to her, as Enobarbus knows and tries to explain. Indeed his description of Cleopatra is among the most famous of Shakespeare's scenes, although it is not seen on stage; in film it has inspired lavish production spectacles and captured the fantasies of artists and designers. He relates the first time Antony laid eyes on the Egyptian queen as she sailed along the water: "The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne, / Burned on the water … / Purple the sails, and so perfumed that / The winds were lovesick with them. The oars were / silver." But for Antony it is not merely a question of beauty; Antony is beguiled by her passion, her drama, her ambition, and her unpredictable nature, encapsulated in one of Shakespeare's best-known descriptions: "Age cannot wither her, not custom stale / Her infinite variety. Other women cloy / The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry / Where most she satisfies." In stark contrast, the "beauty, wisdom, modesty" Mecaenus attributes to Octavia—her traditional Roman virtues—will not hold Antony's attention for long.

Act 2, Scene 3

Summary

Antony and Caesar enter, Octavia walking between them. Antony and Octavia exchange a few words of decorous love, and Antony promises to be a model husband. Caesar leads his sister away, and the soothsayer first seen in Act 1 now enters and urges Antony to return to Egypt. "Thy daemon"—a modern term might be "guardian angel"—"becomes afeard, as being o'erpowered," whenever Antony comes into close contact with Caesar. "If thou does play with him at any game," says the soothsayer, "thou art sure to lose."

Antony angrily dismisses the soothsayer. But when alone, Antony admits to himself the fortune teller's words are true. Caesar beats him in every game of chance. "The very dice obey him." Although Antony is willing to marry Octavia to keep the peace, his happiness lies in Egypt with Cleopatra.

Analysis

It may be convenient for the alliance to have Antony marry Octavia, and Antony speaks warmly to his future wife, promising her a marriage "by the rule," but what does Octavia think of the arrangement? Her thoughts are not important to the men who strike the deal. For them Octavia is a piece to be moved around their game board.

Shakespeare chooses to keep Octavia in the background, so her emotions play no part in the story. Certainly arranged marriages were usual, especially for political or financial reasons, so this marriage is hardly shocking. For the brief time she is on stage in this scene, she seems content enough to marry Antony. She dutifully promises to pray for him while he is away in battle. If she has negative feelings, she keeps them hidden, suiting the modest, obedient ideal she represents.

But Octavia is more than a literary device; she was a real person in history, and her marriage to Antony actually took place. The real Octavia married the real Antony in 40 BCE, and had two daughters with him. For a while she did, in fact, keep the peace between her brother and her husband. Did she take an active role in smoothing over their conflicts, or was her presence enough to remind them to act as allies? The answer is unknown. Four years later, however, Antony returned to Cleopatra and refused to see Octavia even when she brought him troops and money in 35 BCE. In 32 BCE he divorced her. Even so, Octavia took Antony's and Cleopatra's children into her household after their parents died, and brought them up with her own children by Antony.

Octavia's plight was not uncommon. Women in ancient Rome were definitely second-class citizens. Even Octavia's name is telling, as a woman's first name was the feminine form of the family name (Octavia's brother is Octavius Caesar), plus an identifying number (prima, secunda, and so on) to distinguish among sisters. Before marriage women were expected to obey their fathers; after marriage they were expected to obey their husbands, who also had legal charge over any children of the marriage.

Act 2, Scene 4

Summary

Lepidus suggests Maecenas and Agrippa go on their way; battle calls. Agrippa answers they're waiting for Antony to say goodbye to Octavia before they set out themselves. Maecenas adds they're likely to reach Mount Misena before Lepidus, and Lepidus agrees: "My purposes do draw me much about." The men wish each other success and part.

Analysis

In films a quick cut is an abrupt change to another scene. On stage short transitional scenes take the place of quick cuts. This brief scene, one of several that act as transitions or updates, introduces the possibility of ensuing battle with Pompey, despite the festivities aboard his yacht and the signed treaty. The scene also reinforces Antony's conflicts in love, politics, and battle. Lepidus's comment reinforces the sense of his "busy-ness" in doing "tasks" and bustling about.

Act 2, Scene 5

Summary

Cleopatra finds herself at loose ends. First she demands to hear music; then changes her mind and wants to play billiards; then she changes her mind again, suggesting a walk to the

river. There she'll go fishing and pretend every fish she catches is Antony.

Charmian mentions a time when Cleopatra and Antony went fishing together and Cleopatra's diver secretly fastened a dried, salted fish onto Antony's line. Later they made love, and the next morning she out-drank Antony, who passed out. While he slept, Cleopatra dressed him in her clothes and put on his sword herself. Those were the days!

A messenger from Italy enters, and Cleopatra toys with him as if *he* were caught on her line. If the messenger can give her good news of Antony, she'll reward him. When the messenger answers Antony "is well," Cleopatra instantly assumes (or pretends to assume) her lover is actually dead. No reward, then! "The gold I give thee will I melt and pour down thy ill-uttering throat."

After Cleopatra interrupts him a few more times, the messenger reveals Antony has married Octavia. Cleopatra attacks the messenger in a rage. Charmian remonstrates that the messenger is innocent, but Cleopatra answers that innocent people don't always escape punishment. Then she reminds herself that as a queen, she shouldn't strike an inferior. Calling the messenger back, she half-apologizes—but flies into another rage when the messenger clings to the story of Antony's wedding. Once more the messenger leaves, and once more Cleopatra repents. She orders Alexas to follow the messenger and demands a description of Octavia. She tells Charmian to pity but not speak to her and then retires to her chamber.

Analysis

The scene provides insight into Cleopatra's emotional range, her sincere love for Antony, and her insecurity about their union. She is aware of the intensity of her emotions, and although she makes little attempt to control them, she does realize what her position allows her to do and what it does not.

At the beginning of the scene it appears her highs and lows seem stuck in the middle ground, where she is not meant to be for long. She may be melancholy, but she is not one to sit around brooding. Instead, and in character, she keeps changing her mind about her next amusement—music, no music; billiards, no billiards; fishing is most appealing at the moment because she can talk about Antony and hooking him like a fish. In her description to Charmian, she sheds light on the nature of her "infinite variety," as Enobarbus has described what attracts and binds Antony to her. After she and Antony went fishing, Cleopatra relates, "I laughed him out of patience, and that night / I laughed him into patience. And next morn, / Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed, / Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst / I wore his sword." In describing their lovemaking—the games, the laughter, the drinking, and the games again—she reveals her inventiveness and the staying power of their relationship. Although the action doesn't occur on stage, Shakespeare nonetheless reveals Cleopatra in high spirits and provides the audience with a bit of bawdy humor. It also invokes the running issue of appropriate gender roles: Antony is symbolically effeminized by his love for Cleopatra, while Cleopatra's power and independence are, by Roman standards, unnaturally masculine. In Cleopatra's description, she is both physically stronger—she wins the drinking game—and ultimately masculine even in her appearance.

From high comedy the scene shifts to high drama with the arrival of the messenger. Cleopatra has been bored and looking for excitement; now a new outlet appears for her. The messenger is frightened of her but must reveal the news of Antony's marriage. Predictably this time, Cleopatra is enraged and releases her fury at the messenger: "Thou shalt be whipped with wire and stewed in brine." However, by sending Alexas to find out about Octavia, Cleopatra seems back on course. Her passion has overwhelmed her, and she knows it. In later regretting her behavior toward the messenger, she regains some emotional control, showing her awareness of the responsibilities of power, and admits to no justification for mistreating a person doing his duty and giving her news she prefers not to hear.

Act 2, Scene 6

Summary

In Italy Pompey and Caesar agree to a truce rather than go to battle. Grievances are aired and threats made. Pompey wants to avenge his father, who was killed in Egypt. He admits he is inclined to accept the triumvirate's terms—rule over Sicily and Sardinia in exchange for getting rid of pirates and sending wheat to Rome as a tax—but is nursing a grievance against

Antony. When Caesar was battling with Antony's brother, Antony's mother fled to Sicily where Pompey welcomed her. After Antony expresses gratitude for this gesture (he had not done so previously), the two men shake hands. Antony also thanks Pompey for (indirectly) bringing him back to Rome, where he belongs.

While the treaty is being drawn up, the four signers—Pompey, Caesar, Antony, and Lepidus—will take turns giving parties. The first will be on Pompey's yacht, and all set off to go aboard.

Enobarbus and Menas remain. Enobarbus mutters that Pompey the Great would never have signed such a treaty. He and Menas talk about the treaty before they, too, shake hands. Enobarbus tells Menas the group from Egypt expected to fight with Pompey, and Menas answers he wishes the battle hadn't become a party. Pompey, he says, has "laughed away" the fortune he would have made by beating the triumvirate in battle.

When Menas asks whether Antony is married to Cleopatra, Enobarbus says no. Enobarbus predicts Antony will return to Egypt and Cleopatra, making Octavia unhappy and Caesar angry. Menas and Enobarbus then head for the party.

Analysis

This scene reveals attitudes of characters toward each other and toward the events happening around them. For one, Pompey has been nursing a personal and seemingly insignificant grudge against what amounts to Antony's lack of good manners. This grudge seems to echo Caesar's previous grudges against Antony and may surprise some readers: it seems impossible that the rulers of empires would allow such petty grievances to influence their diplomacy or impact the future of their citizens. But broadmindedness and acceptance of others' flaws do not hold much sway in the minds of these men who seem better soldiers than diplomats.

Pompey also reveals his curiosity about things Egyptian, some details of which have been in the air but not clear to him and others. Pompey raises this topic with a certain superiority, implying he holds with Roman views on Eastern decadence and Western seriousness and righteousness. With his grudge against Julius Caesar for having killed Pompey the Great, Pompey refers to an incident in which Cleopatra was smuggled inside a mattress to Caesar, mentioning an event degrading to both.

The most revealing information, however, comes from the dialogue between Menas and Enobarbus, who function here as a mini-chorus commenting frankly on the characters and action. Unhappy about the treaty, Menas thinks Pompey has agreed to its terms too readily and is throwing away his future by entering into an alliance with those he has considered his enemies, showing that he's lacking some of his father's greatness . Menas, formerly a pirate, is a fierce fighter, prepared for action and disappointed in not having it. This isn't necessarily admirable: both men seem to feel that war is worth fighting for its own sake, and they're contemptuous of a peace that would actually make the empire more secure and stable.

Further commentary reveals the men's thoughts about Antony and about the influence of women. Enobarbus believes no pretty woman "has a true face," and Menas agrees. From there the discussion leads to Antony and Cleopatra, a relationship about which Romans are hazy and which arouses curiosity. Enobarbus, honest and perceptive as usual, predicts Antony's marriage to Octavia will not serve its purpose in keeping peace between Antony and Caesar. In fact, he believes "the band that seems to tie their friendship together" will be the ruin of the alliance. Octavia may be the perfect Roman wife—"holy, cold, and still"—but not the kind of woman Antony wants, and not one who can keep his attention.

Act 2, Scene 7

Summary

The banquet aboard Pompey's ship is under way. Servants enter carrying an abundance of wine and gossiping about the guests. Lepidus, the main topic of conversation, is drunk. The Second Servant comments Lepidus is nothing but a figurehead, powerful in name but nothing else. The First Servant answers that being part of a powerful group but wielding no power oneself is like being a pair of empty eye sockets in a face—useless and disfiguring.

Caesar, Antony, Pompey, Lepidus, and some of their retinue enter. Lepidus is listening to Antony's description of Egypt. He asks about crocodiles and seems not to understand Antony is teasing him with his answer. Meanwhile Menas is trying to get Pompey's attention. An irritated Pompey keeps trying to put

him off but finally listens. Menas offers Pompey the chance to become "lord of all the world" by offering to kill the three triumvirs.

Pompey gives a rueful answer. If Menas had gone ahead and killed the men without asking permission, then Pompey would have been happy to seize power. But honor demands he deny Menas the chance now that Menas has been clumsy enough to mention it. Furious, Menas decides to quit Pompey's service.

Meanwhile Lepidus has passed out and is being carried by a servant. Pompey, Antony, and Enobarbas are drunk, and Antony tries to get Caesar to loosen up. Caesar is disinclined to drink any more despite Antony's urging. Antony urges him to "be a child o' th' time"—i.e., live in the present and stop thinking about his responsibilities. The carousing has now reached the point at which the men are dancing in a circle, but Caesar remains stiff and censorious. Antony invites Pompey to continue the fun at his house. They stagger off the ship with everyone except Menas and Enobarbus, who continue the party in Menas's cabin.

Analysis

Two things are clear in this scene: Pompey's ship is nothing like Cleopatra's barge as it is described in Act 2, Scene 2, and Caesar is not much of a diplomat or drinker.

Barges and military ships have little in common, but the two vessels are closely linked in this act. Cleopatra's barge embodies all that is lush and beautiful about Shakespeare's Egypt; Pompey's naval ship, filled with drunken Romans, is almost a parody of a harsh, raucously "macho" setting.

With its perfumed purple sails, its "lovesick" winds, and its silver oars, the barge has no other purpose but to put a lolling Cleopatra on display. On Pompey's ship, by contrast, even a truce-signing party is interrupted by the casual suggestion the guests of honor have their throats cut. As Cleopatra's barge floats down the Nile, it seems sensually joined with the winds and the water, as if nature itself were in love with the Queen. On the ship Antony describes the Nile in terms of "slime and ooze." His nondescription of the crocodile is funny, but it also suggests that these men are not at one with nature. Cleopatra's barge is designed to appeal to every sense except taste; aboard the ship, on the other hand, Antony literally suggests the men drink themselves senseless.

There can be no doubt Cleopatra enjoys being rowed on her barge, but Caesar does not enjoy Pompey's party. If the other men weren't so drunk, they might point out Caesar is being a killjoy. He utters not a word until the scene is two-thirds over. Then, urged to further drinking by Antony, Caesar answers, "I had rather fast from all, four days, / Than drink so much in one." A few lines later, he adds, "Our graver business / frowns at this levity.—Gentle lords, let's part." His response is hardly a gracious acceptance of Pompey's hospitality and once again shows a lapse in diplomacy.

If Caesar overheard Menas's offer to kill the triumvirate, he'd have reason for wanting to leave the ship, but only Pompey hears him. His answer to Menas is striking. Not in the least disturbed at the idea of triple murder, he is visibly disappointed because Menas asked his permission to kill the guests of honor. "Ah, this thou shouldst have done / And not spoke on't!" If Menas had gone ahead and killed the triumvirate, says Pompey, "I should have found it afterwards well done"—but now that Menas has made the suggestion, Pompey has no choice but to condemn it. Pompey explains his honor is more important than gain; however, he is actually talking about his *perceived* honor, since an honorable man would never condone the murders themselves, whether or not he knew they were happening.

It is clear from the wild party aboard the ship that the Romans are as guilty of excess as they claim the Egyptians to be; the Roman guests will be no less drunk and indulged than their Egyptian counterparts, but there seem to be no women on board. Unlike his carousing colleagues, however, Caesar complains that wine makes his tongue "split what it speaks"—in other words, slur his words. He remains above such behavior and scorns it. Ruled by his ambition and seriousness, he seems never to let down his guard. As readers already know, and Shakespeare's audience knew, Caesar despises Cleopatra, "the serpent of the Nile," and snakes have forked, or split, tongues. Perhaps at some level Caesar is anxious that drunken carousing will make him more like Cleopatra.

It's worth noting that while the Romans are critical of what they see as Egyptian luxury and licentiousness, Shakespeare's representation doesn't really support Roman values. Roman society is unappealing whether it's sober—embodied by Caesar's stiffness and Octavia's "holy, cold, and still conversation"—or celebratory, as evidenced by the unpleasant, treacherous revelry in this scene.

Act 3, Scene 1

Summary

Ventidius, one of Antony's lieutenants, enters behind a procession of soldiers carrying the body of Pacorus of Parthia. His companion Silius is with him. Ventidius exults that by killing Pacorus, he has finally avenged the death of Marcus Crassus and beaten the Parthians. Silius urges him to continue fighting the fleeing Parthians; that way he'll earn even more respect from Antony.

Ventidius demurs, saying a soldier should not look as if he is trying to outdo his master. Appearing too ambitious is risky. "I could do more" to help Antony's cause," he says, but "'twould offend him." Silius says Ventidius possesses the wisdom that helps a soldier as much as a sword. But will he at least tell Antony about the death of Pacorus? Ventidius says he'll send the news but make it sound as though Antony deserves the credit for inspiring his men. Antony is about to leave for Athens, so with luck they'll be able to show him the body before he leaves.

Analysis

Once again characters ponder the question of what constitutes honor. Silius thinks the greater the success of Ventidius, the greater his glory, and killing Pacorus to avenge Crassus is a great achievement. (Crassus, a wealthy advisor to Julius Caesar, was killed by Orodes, king of the Parthians and father of Pacorus.) Ventidius answers in a way both tactful and canny. Yes, he could punish the Parthians further, but the act might backfire if Antony began to perceive him as a threat.

Taken at face value, this answer seems humbly respectful toward Antony, but for Ventidius it's a tactic, not a sign of real humility. Although Antony has not revealed himself a jealous leader, perhaps Ventidius has shared enough battles with him to know Antony could resent feeling outdone. What is certain is that Venditius judges his own actions partly by the effects they have on others; he is conscious of the effect he produces. Like several other characters in the play, Ventidius is a performer who is well aware he is performing, and perception is more important than substance, as the *perception* of being honorable rather than the *reality* of being honorable drives Pompey.

Messengers abound in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and the letter Ventidius plans to write is another form of message. Like others in the play, the letter will mean more than it says.

Act 3, Scene 2

Summary

Agrippa and Enobarbus enter separately. Enobarbus says Pompey has left already and the members of the triumvirate are signing and sealing official documents. Octavia is unhappy about leaving Rome, and Lepidus is feeling the aftereffects of Pompey's party. The two men grab the chance to make fun of Lepidus, slavishly eager to please (and placate) Antony and Caesar. As they joke, a trumpet sounds. Enobarbus and Agrippa bid each other farewell as the triumvirate and Octavia enter.

Caesar and Antony still don't trust each other. Caesar tells his new brother-in-law he hopes sharing Octavia will keep them friendly. Antony assures Caesar nothing further will test their alliance.

Caesar says a fond goodbye to Octavia, who is weeping. Referring to either Antony or her late first husband, she asks her brother to look after "my husband's house." She and Caesar walk a few steps away to say a private goodbye while Enobarbus quietly asks Agrippa whether Caesar will also start to cry. Agrippa reminds his friend that Antony cried over the deaths of both Julius Caesar and Brutus, and Enobarbus tartly replies Antony was quite willing to mourn the two men whose deaths he had helped bring about. Trumpets sound as Antony and Octavia depart.

Analysis

Pompey's servants have already made fun of Lepidus; now Agrippa and Enobarbus are mocking him; this treatment implies Lepidus may not be around much longer, for he serves little purpose other than to be the object of mockery. Nor does Antony and Caesar's relationship look promising, and despite Antony's slightly artificial-sounding comment about Octavia's tears being the showers that bring on "love's spring" there's

not much to show he and his bride are a happy pair.

For all Caesar's professed love for Octavia, when he speaks about her to Antony, he describes her as an inanimate object. She's a "piece of virtue," the "cement of our love" (that is, his and Antony's), and she'd better not be used as a battering ram to knock down the structure of the alliance. It's hard to imagine a more brutal image than a battering ram, and since Antony is a new husband (and one whose wife is standing right there), he might be expected to answer something like, "Of course I won't let my beloved wife be treated like that." But he doesn't even mention Octavia in his curt reply to Caesar. "You shall not find, / Though you be therein curious, the least cause / For what you seem to fear."

Octavia has good reason to cry. Her brother and her new husband have used her as a bargaining chip, and she's leaving her home. If she knew Antony in the past, she doesn't know him in the present; he has been living in Egypt for the past decade, so she has married someone she hasn't seen in at least 10 years. Caesar scorns Antony for his attachment to Cleopatra, but bartering away his own sister seems worse. Caesar bids his sister *adieu*—"farewell," rather than the more optimistic *au revoir*—"until we see each other again."

Act 3, Scene 3

Summary

In Alexandria Cleopatra asks her attendants, "Where is the fellow?" She is referring to the messenger she sent to get a good look at Octavia. In that meeting Cleopatra was so rough with the messenger that he is understandably afraid to see her now. But his message is unthreatening, even to someone as insecure as Cleopatra: Octavia is short and low-voiced. "Dull of tongue and dwarfish," comments Cleopatra approvingly. Octavia's gait is a "creep," she seems more like a statue than a real person, and "her forehead [is] as low as she would wish it."

"I find thee most fit for business," a relieved Cleopatra tells the messenger. When the messenger has left, Cleopatra confesses she's now sorry for her earlier behavior. Clearly Octavia isn't worth worrying about! Cleopatra adds she has one more question, but it can wait.

Analysis

Even when Cleopatra is behaving badly, it's hard not to enjoy her "infinite variety." In her conversation with the messenger about Octavia, she would sound like an insecure teenager except that she is funny. She must realize the messenger is so frightened he won't pay Octavia any compliments; moreover, she has no way of verifying anything the messenger says. But because she's in a merry mood, she twists his carefully innocuous report into a hideous caricature: "dull of tongue and dwarfish." This time—no doubt to the messenger's relief—she is enjoying his report. This exchange reinforces the idea that perception is what matters, as shown by Venditius and Pompey: Octavia is supposed to be beautiful and well-spoken, but what matters here is the report, not the reality.

Considering how Cleopatra behaved the last time he saw her, the messenger has good reason to be nervous. But clearly Cleopatra has already adjusted to the truth and has decided to be a good sport this time. On some level, she must still be jealous of Octavia, but she manages to make fun of her own jealousy. It is an admirable performance.

The messenger is lucky in one way. Octavia's calmly reserved demeanor may be the height of Roman respectability, but it is nothing Cleopatra would envy. Cleopatra *likes* being temperamental; she knows Antony loves her exhibitionism. And she's a savvy ruler who knows why an arranged marriage can be a political expedient.

When the messenger says Octavia's forehead is "as low as she would wish it," the line recalls Antony's description of the crocodile in Act 2, Scene 7: "It is shaped, sir, like itself, and it is as broad as it hath breadth." Both accounts seem to make sense but actually say nothing at all. The messenger is really just saying that Octavia wouldn't want her brow to be any lower than it is. But since a low brow was considered unattractive and a sign of poor intelligence, who would want a lower brow, regardless of what it looked like now?

Act 3, Scene 4

Summary

In Greece, Antony is complaining to Octavia about Caesar. Antony is convinced Caesar is plotting against him. Despite the truce, Caesar has again fought with Pompey; he has read his will in public; he has found countless occasions to denigrate Antony. A distraught Octavia begs Antony not to believe everything he's heard, or at least not to be so angry about it. Octavia is pinned between husband and brother, and if they break their alliance, what will be left of her, who has "no midway 'twixt these extremes?"

Somewhat calmer, Antony tells Octavia he'll allow her to return to Rome to try to reconcile him with Caesar. He'll draw up plans for fighting Pompey while Octavia is away. Octavia thanks him, observing that for her, a war between Antony and Caesar would be like having the world cut in two. Antony ominously remarks that once she's seen who began the hostilities (i.e., Caesar), Octavia will want to take his side. "Our faults can never be so equal that your love can equally move with them."

Analysis

It seems Antony is allowing Octavia to visit Caesar because she has asked him for permission, not because he and Caesar still have anything in common. It will become evident later in the play that Antony is right to suspect Caesar, who has begun systematically eliminating his former allies. Once again, the appearance of honor is different from the fact: despite his sobriety, seriousness, and self-righteous demeanor, Caesar is willing to betray his word and a signed treaty.

That Antony cares little for Octavia also is evident by the way he talks about Caesar and distrusts him. He seems to take little notice that he is talking about her brother. When Octavia explains the pain of being caught in the middle of the two men's hostilities, she is begging him to understand her problem, yet he brushes her off without a single kind word. He is uninterested in or does not understand the subtext of her words.

Act 3, Scene 5

Summary

Enobarbus and Eros discuss war news. Eros reports Caesar and Lepidus, who defeated Pompey together, have fallen out. Caesar has charged Lepidus with treason and jailed him. With Lepidus out of the picture, Enobarbus compares the situation to an empty pair of jaws: with no food between them, Antony and Caesar will keep grinding each other, unable to peaceably share power. Nevertheless, Antony's navy is about to sail for Rome.

Analysis

Lepidus is timid and ineffectual, he hates to see people get angry, and he can't hold his liquor. As he is portrayed in this play, it is hard to see how he could ever have become a triumvir. Because there was in fact a historical Lepidus, and because Caesar did break with him, Shakespeare had little choice but to include him. Because this play contains little humor, portraying Lepidus as a comic figure seems a good dramatic move on Shakespeare's part. It may seem harsh for this ineffectual nobody to end up in jail, but the fate of the historic Lepidus would have been dull on stage. He was stripped of his power in 36 BCE and gradually faded from public notice. His son tried to kill Octavius Caesar in 30 BCE, giving Lepidus the added shame of being a would-be assassin's father.

Act 3, Scene 6

Summary

In Rome, Caesar is railing against Antony's latest actions. Antony has established Cleopatra as absolute monarch of Egypt, lower Syria, Cyprus, and Lydia. He and Cleopatra sat enthroned on golden chairs for the ceremony, and Cleopatra was dressed like the goddess Isis. Caesarion, Cleopatra's son from her relationship with Julius Caesar, was also there. The current Caesar, who was adopted by Julius, refers sarcastically to "my father's son" by the queen.

Maecenas and Agrippa want the Roman people told about all this, but Caesar replies they already know. They know, too, that Antony is charging Caesar with theft and has publicly criticized Caesar for deposing Lepidus.

Caesar has already taken steps to deal with Antony. A messenger is on his way to say Lepidus had "grown too cruel" to remain in office and Antony may share in the spoils of the war against Pompey if Caesar gets some of the spoils from the kingdoms Antony has conquered. Maecenas says, "He'll never yield to that."

At this point Octavia arrives in Rome with her retinue. Caesar laments Antony has put his sister aside. Surprised, Octavia says Antony's done nothing of the kind. Caesar protests: how can Octavia have Antony's support if he allowed her to travel to Rome in such humble fashion? Where's the pomp and pageantry with which Octavia should be surrounded? Why hasn't Octavia even let Caesar know she was coming? He would have given her a welcome befitting her status!

Octavia explains she hasn't come because Antony has mistreated her; she's here hoping to establish peace between her husband and her brother. Caesar informs her Antony is no longer in Athens but back in Alexandria, has made Cleopatra absolute monarch of Egypt, and gathered a bevy of kings who are now assembling to battle the Roman Empire.

Octavia is devastated, although she seems less interested in Antony's desertion than in being caught between a brother and husband who can't get along. Caesar advises her to take heart and to patiently let fate take its course. Agrippa and Maecenas add "each heart in Rome doth love and pity" Octavia because Antony has abandoned her for a whore.

Analysis

Act 3, Scene 6 falls in the middle of the play. Until now the action has revolved around Antony's leaving Cleopatra and returning to Rome to restore his relationship with Caesar. From here on Antony and Cleopatra are back together, and Caesar is on his way to Egypt to destroy them. This is the last scene set in Rome.

True to his time and place, Caesar never wonders whether he might have contributed to Octavia's unhappiness. When she arrives without pageantry and fanfare, her brother is more troubled by the indirect assault on his own image than he is concerned for her welfare—once again perception becomes more important than reality. In letting Octavia travel so humbly—more like a "market maid" than a sister and wife of emperors—Antony isn't showing the proper respect for his brother-in-law. And another seemingly trivial grudge grows more serious and out of proportion.

Caesar is still fuming over Antony's most recent and more serious outrage: his brother-in-law's decision to legitimize Cleopatra's monarchy and make his children with the Egyptian queen legitimate heirs. According to Roman law the children of "mixed" marriages—Roman and non-Roman—could not inherit property.

Furthermore Caesar is right about Antony's irresponsibility: Antony has reverted to earlier behavior. For a while it seemed he might rein himself in and resume his role as co-emperor along with Caesar. But Enobarbus was right: Antony cannot let go of Cleopatra and his life with her. What seemed like self-*indulgence* in Act 1 now seems remarkably like self-*destruction*. Readers might question the speed with which he reverts to his former ways so soon after marrying Octavia and solidifying his relationship with Caesar. But Shakespeare is condensing 10 years of history into a 5-act play. The historical Antony lived in Rome for three years after marrying Octavia and before returning to Cleopatra.

Act 3, Scene 7

Summary

In Alexandria Cleopatra berates Enobarbus for having said she shouldn't join the war. She's the ruler and believes she should battle along with the men. Enobarbus, however, is trying to explain her presence would distract Antony when he enters along with Canidius. Marveling at how fast Caesar's navy has captured the Greek city of Toryne, Antony tells Canidius he, too, will fight by sea.

Enobarbus and Canidius do their best to dissuade Antony from this idea. His celebrated victories have always come from land battles. His naval force is largely rookies recently pressed into service, whereas Caesar's fleet is full of skillful mariners. Caesar's ships are also better than Antony's. On the other hand, Antony's army is second to none. He can be certain of winning on land.

But Antony has made up his mind—or he and Cleopatra have made up their minds together. Cleopatra says she has 60 ships as good as Caesar's. Besides, Antony adds, they can always fight by land if they fail at sea. After Antony puts Canidius in charge of their 19 land legions and their 12,000 horses, he and Cleopatra set off to sea.

A soldier begs Antony to reconsider, but Antony, Cleopatra, and Enobarbus are already on their way out. When the soldier says he's sure he's right, Canidius agrees Antony is making the wrong choice because he's allowing Cleopatra to lead him. "We are women's men." Meanwhile Caesar is moving unbelievably fast.

Analysis

At this point watching Antony and Cleopatra is unpleasant. In Scene 6 Antony's political choices seem head-shakingly bad, but Antony is still remembered as a great military leader. In Scene 7, however, Antony's military acumen seems to fly out of the window because of Cleopatra's wish to be at the center of the action.

Cleopatra sounds like a petulant child at the beginning of the scene. *I'll get even with you, Enobarbus*. What a way to talk to an experienced soldier and one of Antony's closest friends! When Enobarbus persists, telling Cleopatra the Romans are mocking Antony's mismanagement of this war, all Cleopatra can hear is that she is being shut out of something interesting and challenging. But her perspective is also understandable: she is a ruler in her own right, and it is insulting to suggest that she should not participate simply because she is Antony's lover and he'll be too worried about her welfare. This puts the onus for Antony's performance in battle completely on her, rather than on his own ability.

When writing this play, Shakespeare drew heavily on Plutarch's biography of Antony and Cleopatra. In Plutarch's account Cleopatra demands to lead her own ship because she fears if she leaves the scene, Antony will return to Octavia. Cleopatra's willful determination would be easier to tolerate if Shakespeare had given her a motive for it. Instead readers may cringe as Cleopatra pretends to know what she's talking about. When Antony announces the battle will take place at sea, Cleopatra instantly echoes, "By sea, what else?" How it must infuriate her that Canidius ignores her, instead asking, "Why will my lord so do?"

Antony answers almost as childishly as Cleopatra might. He wants to fight by sea "for that [Caesar] dares us to 't." When Enobarbus patiently reminds Antony his navy is far weaker than Caesar's, Antony's answer is just as unreasonable and stubborn as his previous one. "By sea, by sea," he insists. "Well, well, away" is all he says when one of his own soldiers begs him not to take on a naval battle.

At this point both Antony and Cleopatra are behaving unreasonably and incompetently. Losing this battle, an infamous and deeply symbolic one in Roman history, will change their perspective and restore their dignity.

Act 3, Scene 8

Summary

Caesar and his lieutenant, Taurus, march in with their army. Caesar orders Taurus not to strike by land before the navy has completed the battle at sea: "Provoke not battle / Till we have done at sea." This plan assures their best chance of winning.

Analysis

Caesar sees the advantage in the strength of his navy and wants to keep it engaged in battle. What he says in this scene indicates he plans to win first at sea, then by land if necessary, and he seems convinced of his strategy.

The quick parade of extremely short scenes that follow substitutes for battle action, keeping the tension high without having to resort to complex and messy battle scenes.

Act 3, Scene 9

Summary

Antony and Enobarbus enter. They are outside, presumably in a position from which they can view the harbor. Antony announces they will set squadrons (arrange their soldiers) on the hillside to keep track of how many ships Caesar has.

Analysis

In this mini-scene, Shakespeare provides another chance to let the audience know what is going on without having to show it. Antony's brief instructions to Enobarbus are less effective than Caesar's to Taurus. Antony seems not to have planned this part of the battle; he's gambling on knowing what to do once he sees how many ships Caesar has sent out. Antony's exit line, "And so proceed accordingly," sounds ominously vague compared with Caesar's "Our fortune lies / Upon this jump."

Act 3, Scene 10

Summary

Amid the sounds of a sea battle, Canidius and his ground forces leave the stage in one direction while Taurus and *his* forces march offstage in the opposite direction. Enobarbus enters, distraught. Antony's navy has been defeated. Scarus enters, equally distraught. "We have kissed away / Kingdoms and provinces," he mourns. Cleopatra's ship turned and fled, followed by the rest of her fleet. When he saw her go, Antony ordered his ship to follow, abandoning the battle at a crucial point.

Canidius now enters in despair, saying if Antony had remembered he was a great general, they would have won. Seeing Antony's cowardice, officers are fleeing; Canidius himself plans to turn over his legions and horses to Caesar, and six kings have surrendered. Enobarbus vows to stay with Antony though he realizes he's being irrational.

Analysis

Antony deserves a big "I told you so" from everyone who warned him against engaging in a battle by sea. In this scene the audience gets to see what Antony's men say when he cannot hear them; indeed they hold nothing back.

Cleopatra already has been the subject of many comparisons, but most of them have ascribed some aspect of power to her. Serpent, gypsy, sorceress, even whore—all of these have at least the ability to harm. When Scarus calls her an old horse ("nag") and a cow, the words are an insult as well as a dismissal. There is nothing to admire in a nag. His calling Antony a "doting mallard" is equally dismissive. Although mallards are wild (and are the ancestors of most domestic ducks), they prefer sheltered water and are easily tamed.

It also recalls the opening of the play: "Nay, but this dotage of our general's / O'erflows the measure." *Doting on someone* means "loving that person past the point of reason," and *dotage* is a time of old age, weakness, and possible senility.

Cleopatra's exit from the Battle of Actium, and Antony's ill-considered decision to follow her, was a symbolically resonant event for Shakespeare's audience. It was an infamous symbol of the distraction represented by women, love, and leisure. In this text, it is an excellent metonymy, or stand-in, for the play's larger theme of Rome versus Egypt and of the continual criticism that Antony has allowed his love for Cleopatra to distract him from his duties as ruler and soldier.

Images of disease in this scene add another layer of disgust. Scarus wishes Cleopatra would catch leprosy; Enobarbus says his eyes were "blasted," and he "sickened" at the sight of Antony's retreat. There is nothing noble about making other people sick! That the language has reached this level suggests nothing can restore Antony in their eyes.

The water imagery in this scene is particularly striking. Water flows through every act of the play, and often it is presented as something dangerous. "Our fortune on the sea is out of breath / And sinks most lamentably," Enobarbus bemoans. In the second half of the play, the sea is invariably portrayed as a threat to Antony's side.

Important, too, is the line "We have kissed away / Kingdoms and provinces." From here on, every kiss in the play will be significant.

Act 3, Scene 11

Summary

Deeply shamed, Antony enters with some of his attendants. The land, he says, "is ashamed to bear me." He urges them to take the gold from his ship and make their peace with Caesar. He will try to intervene with Caesar on their behalf. Meanwhile, he begs his followers to leave him; his actions have proved him

unfit to command.

Charmian, Iras, and Eros enter, leading Cleopatra. In his distress Antony doesn't notice them, and they urge Cleopatra to comfort him. Thinking aloud, Antony remembers how he defeated Cassius and Brutus while Caesar himself refused to fight. "Yet now—no matter."

While Eros tries to alert Antony that Cleopatra is in the room, Iras urges Cleopatra to speak to Antony, undone by shame. When Antony finally pays attention, he upbraids Cleopatra. "O, whither hast though led me, Egypt?" Cleopatra begs forgiveness, saying she never imagined Antony's ship would follow hers. Antony protests she knows the hold she has on him and *should* have known he would follow her even if the gods had ordered otherwise.

"O, my pardon!" begs Cleopatra again, but Antony isn't really listening. Cleopatra apologizes again, but Antony is thinking of how he—who once "with half the bulk o' th' world played as I pleased"—will now have to humiliate himself with Caesar. When Cleopatra asks a third time for forgiveness, Antony tells her not to cry; even a single one of her tears is worth more than everything he's won and lost. They kiss. As they leave, Antony calls for food and wine.

Analysis

Antony and Cleopatra have often used inflated rhetoric, so it's startling to see how plainly and directly they speak now that fortune has turned against them. Antony's two opening speeches are heartbreaking in their simplicity, especially his wrenching attempt to sound casual in "I'll see you by and by."

Antony has often referred, scornfully, to Caesar's extreme youth. Now, for the first time, he speaks of himself as old. "My very hairs do mutiny, for the white / Reprove the brown for rashness ... " But when he first sees Cleopatra, he babbles "No, no, no, no, no" like a baby. The two rulers' subordinates treat them not like royalty but more like children who have been hurt and do not know how to behave. "Go to him, madam, speak to him," coaxes Iras, since her mistress seems lost in the face of her lover's grief. Meanwhile, Eros must tell Antony five times that Cleopatra has come into the room.

Readers may wish Antony and Cleopatra would go back to being high-handed and imperious. Yes, they both deserve an "I told you so." However, it is disheartening to see this couple, who have called themselves gods, behave simultaneously like old people and young children.

Also painful is seeing Cleopatra so penitent. Like Antony she speaks plainly. At first she tries to excuse herself by saying she had no idea Antony would follow her. Maybe she expects Antony to comfort her, but instead he answers, "Egypt, thou knew'st too well / My heart was to thy rudder tied by th'strings, / And thou shouldst tow me after." After that, all Cleopatra can do is ask his pardon. There's no more self-justification. She has sometimes blamed others, especially messengers, for giving her bad news. Now, perhaps for the first time, she is accepting the blame for her own actions.

But is she entirely responsible? In effect, Antony is telling her he was powerless once she'd turned her ships around. "O'er my spirit / Thy full supremacy thou knew'st." Once again he is treating her like someone with magic powers, a sorceress whom he is helpless to resist. At this point it would be tactless for anyone to point out that Cleopatra does not actually have Antony under a spell. What "made" him leave the battle was his own impetuousness.

In fact, at this time more than any other, Antony should have stayed at his post. During a battle a commander's first responsibility is to protect those under his command. It doesn't work to stretch the point and say Cleopatra was under Antony's command during the battle. He would not have followed anyone else in his fleet and therefore should not have followed her.

To maintain his self-respect, Antony rallies at the end of the scene. He seems to shake himself out of his gloom. "Fall not a tear, I say ... Give me a kiss. / Even this repays me." This is another significant kiss. It is the first time in the play the pair have expressed their love without trying for effect.

Act 3, Scene 12

Summary

Caesar, Agrippa, Thidias, and Dolabella are waiting for Antony's ambassador. Dolabella comments on Antony's choice of the Schoolmaster to arrange terms, a sure sign he is beaten; in the past Antony could have commanded surplus kings to be his emissaries.

The Ambassador enters, greets Caesar humbly, and then offers Antony's petition. Antony wishes to be allowed to live in Egypt; if Caesar won't permit that, then in Athens. Cleopatra also surrenders to Caesar's power but wishes to have back her crown to leave for her heirs. Caesar replies curtly. He won't grant anything Antony asks. He'll think about granting Cleopatra's wish on the condition she either banish Antony or kill him.

The Ambassador wishes good fortune to Caesar, who promises him safe passage through the camp. Then Caesar turns to Thidias and orders him to try to win Cleopatra over, telling her she can have everything she's asked for and more. If Thidias succeeds, Caesar will give him anything he asks for. Caesar also wants Thidias to watch Antony closely. Antony's smallest action will reveal his feelings about having lost.

Analysis

Why does Antony send his children's schoolmaster to be his ambassador to Caesar? As Dolabella notes, many of Antony's influential supporters have abandoned him; perhaps he can't find anyone willing to go.

In any case, it is not surprising that Dolabella bristles at the gesture or that the Schoolmaster feels awkward in such a position. "I was of late as petty to his ends / As is the morn-dew on the myrtle-leaf / To his grand sea." Because Antony has just lost a great sea battle, the Schoolmaster's comparison is clumsy, but Caesar doesn't care. He now stands so high he doesn't need to listen to other people's oratory.

At this point Caesar's rigidity makes it hard for him to think of Antony as a human being. "For Antony, I have no ears to his request." His five-line answer to the Schoolmaster Ambassador sounds as though he is shrugging the whole matter off. After all, the Ambassador will report to Antony, and Caesar wants Antony to know how little he respects him.

What Caesar thinks of Cleopatra is less transparent. He has always shown icy hatred to her; why is he negotiating terms with her when he holds all the power? "From Antony win Cleopatra. Promise, / And in our name, what she requires." He may want to cause the lovers agony by forcibly separating them, or forcing Cleopatra to choose between her lover and her children's future; he may also want to pit the lovers against each other, since Cleopatra now has good reason to betray Antony. But he has a hidden motive as well, which will be revealed in the next act: he wants to exhibit Cleopatra as a prisoner, and he may be pretending to honor her to prevent her suicide. Audience members must make up their own minds; in this play, Shakespeare does not provide his main characters with obvious motives.

Act 3, Scene 13

Summary

A doleful and confused Cleopatra enters with Enobarbus, Charmian, and Iras. "What shall we do?" Cleopatra asks Enobarbus. "Think, and die," he answers. When Cleopatra asks whether she or Antony is responsible for the defeat, Enobarbus instantly answers that it is Antony. He didn't have to follow Cleopatra; that he did is as shameful as the loss of the battle.

The Ambassador and Antony enter. Antony is slowly taking in Caesar's message that Cleopatra will be treated respectfully if she gives Antony up. Turning to Cleopatra Antony explains all she has to do to get everything back is to send Antony's head to Caesar. Then he turns again to the Ambassador and says he'll write Caesar a message daring him to fight him (Antony) in single combat.

Enobarbus scoffs privately at the notion of Caesar's risking his success to duel with a defeated foe. Antony's misfortune must have impaired his judgment. Yet it would be dishonorable of Enobarbus to abandon Antony now.

Thidias enters. After some verbal jousting with Cleopatra and Enobarbus, he tells Cleopatra Caesar understands Cleopatra consorted with Antony only because she was afraid of him, not because she loved him. Caesar does not blame her for behaving dishonorably. Cleopatra's answer is meek. Caesar "is a god and knows what is most right." At this, Enobarbus leaves to find Antony. Thidias asks if he can bring back the message that Cleopatra has left Antony and placed herself under Caesar's protection. Absolutely, answers Cleopatra. "I kiss his conqu'ring hand." She then extends her own hand for Thidias to kiss.

Antony and Enobarbus enter. Enraged, Antony orders his servants to take Thidias away and beat him. He then

denounces Cleopatra: she's lower than a servant; she's a liar; when Antony picked her up, she was a scrap, a leftover of Julius Caesar's and Pompey's. Bewildered, Cleopatra asks why Antony is so angry. He says by allowing Thidias to kiss her hand—her hand that was Antony's "playfellow," she has cuckolded him.

Servants drag in the beaten Thidias. Antony orders him to return to Caesar and say exactly what Antony thinks of his emperor. Thidias leaves, and Cleopatra coldly asks Antony if he's done. In turn he asks if Cleopatra would abandon him to ally herself with Caesar.

Cleopatra answers Antony doesn't know her if he believes she would do what Caesar has requested. If she has betrayed Antony, let heaven rain down punishments on her, on her son Caesarion, indeed on all Egypt. Her words seem to revive Antony, who pledges to return to fight Caesar. Before Antony starts to fight again, he and Cleopatra will have one more "gaudy night" together. This time Antony vows to kill more people than Death itself. Everyone exits except Enobarbus, who has seen enough. "I will seek some way to leave him," he promises himself.

Analysis

Antony's treatment of Thidias is disgraceful. Usually genial, he's never been less likeable than in this scene: a bad sport, a blusterer, and a bully. However, his fury is aimed at Cleopatra, not Thidias, just as Cleopatra's is aimed at Antony when she "hales up and down" the messenger who brought the news about Octavia. The audience doesn't know how much of Cleopatra's speech Antony has heard, but it's safe to assume Enobarbus has given Antony the gist of the conversation. Whatever the circumstances, Antony is behaving badly.

Despite what she says, it is impossible to know what Cleopatra is thinking or planning; the audience is given no indication of her thought process. When she assures Thidias that Caesar "is a god and knows / What is most right," is she trying to buy time, or has she decided to put herself under Caesar's authority? What is the level of her calculation here? Enobarbus, who tolerates Cleopatra more than other Romans do, is convinced she's betraying Antony. If she is, then Antony's anger is easier to understand; nevertheless his treatment of Thidias is still out of line.

Cleopatra seems genuinely confused when Antony turns on Thidias. Her confusion suggests she doesn't believe she has betrayed her lover. Under normal circumstances, Antony's harsh words could never be taken back. But Cleopatra doesn't answer angrily or defensively, as she would be likely to do if she understood what he is talking about; she doesn't seem to register his taunts as insults. When Antony has finished ranting, Cleopatra coldly asks, "Have you done yet?"

Cleopatra may be surrendering to Caesar out of fear, not calculation. For all the audience knows, she falls apart if she feels trapped; she also has her children's welfare to consider. She may be pledging allegiance to Caesar because she has no idea what else to do. Even Antony should forgive her for that.

Act 4, Scene 1

Summary

Caesar, Agrippa, and Maecenas enter. Antony's letter has annoyed Caesar, partly because Antony treats him like a child and partly because Antony ordered Thidias to be whipped. Maecenas urges Caesar to calm down, saying anger impedes success. Antony's own anger shows how trapped he feels; Caesar will gain advantage by keeping him angry and distracted.

Caesar orders Maecenas and Agrippa to get the word out that tomorrow will be "the last of many battles we mean to fight." Antony's soldiers have defected to Caesar's side in such numbers to make Caesar confident of victory. He orders a feast for the army: his army is so well-stocked with provisions that they can afford the "waste" of a celebration. Caesar's last words, ending the scene, are "Poor Antony."

Analysis

Caesar, usually calm and detached, is quite worked up—for Caesar, that is. Antony's taunts sting, and they bother him more than expected. Calling Antony an "old ruffian" is out of character for a man who prides himself on restraint. But when Maecenas counsels him against anger, Caesar immediately regains his self-control and laughs at Antony's challenge of hand-to-hand combat. In calming down, Caesar is able to spare a moment of compassion for Antony, whom he knows he's

going to defeat.

This is another of the short scenes that function as battle scenes in which leaders reveal their thoughts, plans, or emotions and in which readers follow the course of the action. In this case it seems as though Caesar's definitive victory will occur the next day.

Act 4, Scene 2

Summary

Antony, Cleopatra, Enobarbus, Charmian, Iras, and "others" enter. When Antony asks why Caesar has refused to fight him, Enobarbus explains because Caesar has been so successful he believes the duel would be unsportsmanlike, given his greater power.

Antony vows to fight both by sea and by land the next day. Either he'll win and live or, in dying, he'll restore his honor by fighting bravely. He orders his household servants to prepare a bounteous meal and thanks them for their loyalty by shaking each man's hand. Puzzled by this gesture, Cleopatra asks Enobarbus what Antony's behavior means: he explains that the defeated man's sorrow makes him behave strangely.

Antony asks his servants to treat him at the feast as well as they've done in happier times, although Enobarbus quietly suggests that Antony is trying to make everyone weep. Perhaps tonight will be the last time they see him, and the gods will reward them. The servants are crying, and Enobarbus begs Antony to stop such talk. "Transform us not to women," he implores. Antony laughingly explains everyone's taking his words the wrong way. He just wants people to have a good time tonight. He expects to win the victory tomorrow, not to win honor by dying.

Analysis

Enobarbus is correct when he tells Cleopatra that Antony is trying to make his followers cry. So why does Antony pretend his mournful farewells are just a joke? Why cause sorrow rather than prepare for battle? Antony at least does snap out of his own doldrums even though he may be spreading sorrow throughout his household. These scenes seem to prepare for Antony's defeat—but will he be defeated in the next battle?

Ordering a feast parallels the previous scene in which Caesar does the same thing. Whereas Caesar seems sure of victory and may be trying to cement the loyalty of defectors from Antony's forces by offering a banquet, Antony is replicating a happy past with those who are still faithful to him. If Caesar's feast is a welcome, Antony's is a farewell. Despite his talk of winning, he knows his chances are slim.

Act 4, Scene 3

Summary

Some soldiers enter and settle themselves for the night watch. One asks another if he's heard a strange rumor but won't say aloud what it is.

As the soldiers discuss the next day's battle, they suddenly hear music that seems to be rising from underground. One of the soldiers asks if this is a good omen. No, answers another; it's a sign Hercules, Antony's constant inspiration, is abandoning him. The soldiers decide to find out whether other night watchmen hear the music and leave the stage, worried at this strange event.

Analysis

This is a mysterious scene, and it's hard to decipher Shakespeare's intent, other than strong foreboding before the final battle. If the soldiers hear the music, but the audience does not: is it real or not? And why should music signify the departure of Hercules? Is there a legend in which he is accompanied by music?

Perhaps the men are sharing a musical hallucination inspired by the rumors floating around the camp. Mass hysteria is often triggered by rumors. It seems more likely, though, that Shakespeare wrote this scene to give the audience a pleasant shiver and a break from the war. In addition, ghosts, omens, and eerie phenomena appealed to Elizabethan audiences, and Shakespeare uses them to set the stage for important scenes that determine what will happen to the characters or how the play will end.

Act 4, Scene 4

Summary

Early the next morning Antony calls for Eros to bring his armor. Cleopatra does her best to help Eros dress Antony for battle. An armed soldier arrives and tells Antony a thousand other armed men await him at the port. A captain arrives and says the weather is good. Antony, either cheerful or pretending to be, comments the morning looks fresh and promising, "like the spirit of a youth / That means to be of note."

Antony kisses Cleopatra goodbye, saying he's leaving her "like a man of steel." Urging his men to keep close, he leads them away.

Left alone with Charmian, Cleopatra says, "He goes forth gallantly." She adds if only the two generals were meeting in single combat, "then Antony—but now—." She breaks off, afraid to finish the sentence.

Analysis

This is a domestic scene with simple dialogue that could almost be spoken today. Cleopatra's cheerful clumsiness with Antony's armor is a gentle way of distracting them from the reality that the battle's outcome does not look hopeful. A few scenes ago Cleopatra was insisting she command her own fleet of ships; now she seems determined to play the loving wife who waits at home: Cleopatra is being a good sport. Yet the scene has its own dramatic irony: the two lovers are most likely pretending to be optimistic in order to cheer one another up. While their language is simpler, they are still performing, and this time, the performance prevents them from connecting or taking comfort from one another.

Shakespeare portrays Antony's nervousness in his actions. Although he tries to be patient with Cleopatra, his anxiety keeps bubbling over. "Ah, let be, let be!" he cries as she fumbles with his armor. "False, false. This, this!" On his way out the door, he's almost chattering. "So, so.—Come, give me that. This way. Well said."

Loyal Charmian is sensitive to her mistress's needs. "Please you retire to your chamber?" she asks, knowing Cleopatra probably wants nothing more than to collapse onto her bed. Portraying a bustling, optimistic wife would be a strain at any time for Cleopatra; it is far greater when little reason for optimism exists.

Act 4, Scene 5

Summary

As Antony and Eros head for the port, Antony admits regret over not having fought on land. A soldier meets them and breaks the news Enobarbus has left Antony's service for Caesar's. Hearing Enobarbus has left his possessions and treasure behind, Antony orders everything belonging to Enobarbus be sent to him, along with a letter containing "gentle adieus and greetings" and with the wish Enobarbus will never again feel the need to serve another master. Then he cries out his bad luck has corrupted even honorable men.

Analysis

Antony's change in demeanor makes him more sympathetic than he was in the last act. Coping with the loss at Actium has brought out unexpected grace and now shows him as a highly honorable individual and loyal friend despite the circumstances. The most well-adjusted general might be upset to learn his aide-de-camp has deserted. But Antony's instinctive reaction is to take care of his friend. "O, my fortunes have / Corrupted honest men," he sighs, holding himself responsible for the latest defection. This is the way a commander should act, and Antony's actions redeem him here, although they come too late to save him.

Act 4, Scene 6

Summary

Caesar orders Agrippa to begin the fight and to capture Antony alive if possible. As Agrippa leaves, Caesar exults, "The time of universal peace is near." When a messenger arrives to say Antony's army is on the field, Caesar tells Agrippa to position in the front lines all the soldiers who have deserted Antony. This placement will make Antony feel as though he is

fighting himself.

Everyone leaves but Enobarbus, feeling regret about both his safety and his honor. Antony's lieutenant Alexas has deserted and persuaded King Herod also to follow Caesar, and what happened? Caesar had Alexas hanged. Enobarbus knows he's done wrong in leaving Antony's service and feels even worse when one of Caesar's soldiers enters and tells him Antony has had Enobarbus's treasure shipped to him. Heartbroken Enobarbus knows he has deserted a great man. "I fight against thee [Antony]? No." Instead, he'll find a ditch to die in.

Analysis

Caesar's coldhearted plan to put Antony's deserters in the front lines forces Enobarbus to reflect on the bad choice he has made by leaving Antony. Not only has he let himself down, he's now serving a commander who welcomes deserters into his ranks and then uses them as metaphorical cannon fodder, as well as psychological torture for Antony. Enobarbus's statement "I will joy no more" and his exaggerated collapse into "I'm worthless" mode may seem generic, but Shakespeare needs to pave the way for a death scene. Enobarbus is a good character, but he has served his purpose. His remorse over a decision he considers wrong drives him to death rather than seeing it through and fighting.

Act 4, Scene 7

Summary

Against a background of battle noises, Agrippa enters with some of Caesar's soldiers and calls for retreat. Caesar is struggling; Antony's army is fiercer than expected. Caesar's men exit, replaced by Antony and Scarus. Though wounded, Scarus is elated. If they'd fought this way in the first battle against Caesar, they would have sent Caesar's men home in bandages.

Eros enters and announces Caesar's men are beaten for the moment, and Antony's chances look good. Scarus says Antony's men should follow them as they retire from the field. Antony promises to reward Scarus for his bravery and encouragement.

Analysis

In short scenes like this one, Shakespeare has made every word count. Caesar's army is in retreat; the fighters have overextended themselves; Caesar himself is struggling; and Antony's forces are stronger than expected. In his brief update—a scant 16 words—Agrippa manages to communicate so much that an actual scene of the two armies fighting is unnecessary. The battle sounds in the background create the illusion of battle taking place just outside the line of sight.

Scarus's mention of his H-shaped wound seems startling: it's almost childish, and perhaps even comical. But it is the kind of detail a wounded soldier would notice. And what a precise image it conveys! The audience is certain to understand the nature of the wound immediately. Once again, this economy of language and stagecraft spares the director the necessity of managing fake blood.

Act 4, Scene 8

Summary

Antony, Scarus, and some others enter. Antony's army has forced Caesar's to retreat to their camp. Antony orders a soldier to bear the good news to Cleopatra. Then he delivers a speech of praise to the soldiers, saying they've fought like Hector, leader of the Trojan army.

Cleopatra enters; she's heard the good news. Antony tells her to let Scarus, hero of the hour, kiss her hand. Cleopatra promises Scarus a suit of armor made of gold, and Antony says Scarus deserves gold armor studded with rubies. He orders his army to make as much noise as possible while they parade triumphantly through Alexandria.

Analysis

At this moment in Act 4, Antony's chances look good, but a 17th-century audience would be familiar with Roman history and thus would know the play's ending. No matter how much he draws out the suspense—and Act 4 is indeed suspenseful—Shakespeare had no need to fool the audience into thinking Antony would win. However, modern readers and

audiences might be less enlightened.

Antony's pride and excitement function almost like a scrim here, giving extra poignancy to what the audience knows is a foregone conclusion. Shakespeare's language also provides hints of the darker fate awaiting Antony.

- Antony promises the following morning, "we'll spill the blood that has today escaped." He's referring to the blood of the enemies who have managed to get away unscathed. But he is also unknowingly predicting the fate of his own army; the words "we'll spill all the blood" have a double meaning. Today Antony's soldiers, too, have escaped; tomorrow, it's the blood from their own bodies that will spill.
- Antony tells his men they have fought as bravely as Hector, the most famous warrior of the Trojan War described in *The Iliad*. But despite his military brilliance, Hector is killed, and his body suffers the shame of lying outside the gates of Troy for 12 days before it's allowed to be buried.
- Cleopatra tells brave Scarus she'll reward him with a suit of gold armor that belonged to a king. Can she be referring to her own brother, the boy-king Ptolemy who drowned in the Nile while wearing a golden suit of armor? Perhaps not—but Ptolemy's drowning, and that suit of armor, would likely come to mind for Shakespeare's audience.

Once again Antony reveals ambivalence about his age. Though his brown hair is mixed with gray, he says, his brain and experience outmatch those of a younger man. Simply mentioning his age at such a triumphant moment shows being old is never off his mind.

Antony all but commands Scarus to kiss Cleopatra's hand in this scene—an uncomfortable echo of the earlier scene in which he has Thidias flogged for doing the same thing. It's almost as if he's saying, "*I'm* the one who decides whether her hand gets kissed." Kissing the hand of the Queen doesn't necessarily bring good luck.

Act 4, Scene 9

Summary

A sentry from Caesar's army enters with other guards. Enobarbus follows them unnoticed. The sentry says that unless he and the other watchmen can be relieved within the hour, they'll have to return to the spot where the other guards are gathered. The next stage of battle is supposed to begin the next morning.

The sentry and his men are startled when Enobarbus suddenly speaks, asking the moon to witness his repentance for deserting Antony. If only the moon, "sovereign mistress of true melancholy," would send a poison through the air to kill him! If only Antony could forgive him! "O Antony! O Antony!" he cries out—and dies on the spot.

Thinking Enobarbus has only fainted—and wanting to hear anything he might say concerning Caesar—the guards try, unsuccessfully, to rouse him. The sentry announces the death, but another watchman thinks he may still be alive. They carry him off, planning to bring him to back to camp.

Analysis

Antony and Cleopatra features few soliloquies (and none by Cleopatra), but this scene does include a soliloquy from Enobarbus. For a modern reader, however, it may not have the dramatic effect Shakespeare intended.

Enobarbus is given to poetic language, so he is in character when he suddenly begins to address the moon—in character, but perhaps out of place in the scene. The sentry and his company have been talking in short, functional sentences about war logistics when they are interrupted by Enobarbus's poetic apostrophe: "O, bear me witness, night—." They are trying to decide whether to return to camp, and now here is Enobarbus declaiming to the moon. Contrasting prosaic characters with a poetic speech takes a lot of the dignity and dramatic effect away.

The modern reader may also doubt anyone could actually die of shame and grief, as Enobarbus appears to do. His death merits authorial attention—but if he is going to die, Shakespeare doesn't have much choice about how to kill him off. Enobarbus can't be killed in battle: he's a deserter, and it's too noble a death. He can't commit suicide; that's reserved for Antony and Cleopatra. Because he is not crucial to the action of the play, his death scene shouldn't be too long. And yet he's an important enough character that the scene needs a little something extra. Thus Shakespeare gives him a soliloquy in this slightly ridiculous setting.

Act 4, Scene 10

Summary

Antony, Scarus, and their army enter. Antony comments today's battle will be by sea because Caesar's army fared so poorly on land. He wishes the situation were otherwise, but the sea battle has already been ordered. Antony takes up a spot from which he'll be able to watch the ships.

Analysis

This very short scene contains an interesting reference to the four elements. Ancient Greeks believed all matter was composed of four elements: earth, water, fire, and air. This notion existed for centuries and was certainly still around in Shakespeare's time. When Antony says, "I would they'd fight i'th'fire or I'th'air," he is referring to the second pair of elements. He and Caesar have already fought by land and sea (earth and water); if their battle were to extend to fire and air, Antony would be glad to fight them there as well.

Antony's observation comes at a moment in which he may be worried about the upcoming sea battle. He knows all too well Caesar's navy is better than his. Perhaps his mind takes refuge in the idea of fighting in fantasy settings that would be new to both armies; perhaps he also wishes he could simply take refuge from the next few hours. "But this it is," he continues tersely. It's a 17th-century way of saying "It is what it is." Whether or not Antony's navy is at a disadvantage, the battle will be fought at sea.

Act 4, Scene 11

Summary

Caesar tells his army Antony expects a sea battle and has therefore manned his ships with his best fighters. It is unlikely Caesar's army will be attacked by land at all. "To the vales [valleys]," he orders his men. There the will find the best strategic spots they can.

Analysis

If anyone in the audience still thought Antony had a chance, this short scene makes it clear he is doomed. In Scene 10 Antony's prebattle speech is about wishing things were otherwise; then he settles down to observe the fight from afar.

By contrast, Caesar is practical and canny. He has already guessed Antony's battle strategy. More important, however, he is with his army—not watching them from afar. He will be on the spot if needed. He is thinking more clearly than Antony at this point and is fully engaged in the action.

Act 4, Scene 12

Summary

Antony and Scarus enter. Wondering why Caesar's navy hasn't begun fighting, Antony looks for a better vantage point. Left by himself Scarus worries about the swallow nests in the sails of Cleopatra's ships. Is it a lucky or unlucky sign the birds have built them there? The soothsayers aren't talking. Meanwhile, says Scarus, Antony alternates between courage and despair depending on how the battle is going.

Antony returns from his lookout point and announces all is lost. His fleet has surrendered, and are celebrating the battle's end. Cleopatra, "this foul Egyptian," must have betrayed him. He orders Scarus to tell the land army to retreat; once he has avenged his cause by killing Cleopatra, there will be nothing left for him to do.

Alone, Antony mourns he will never again see a sunrise. "Fortune and Antony part here." His followers have abandoned him, and Cleopatra has been false. How could Cleopatra do this to him? All he cared about was pleasing her!

Cleopatra enters, and Antony shouts at her to leave. Astonished, Cleopatra asks why. Antony orders her away unless she wants him to kill her. Caesar can have her! He can display her as a captive, and "patient Octavia" can tear Cleopatra's face with her fingernails.

Cleopatra flees, leaving Antony to rail against her. If only he had killed her earlier, these other deaths could have been prevented! But now, let his ancestor Alcides guide him in his

rage. "The witch shall die"—she's sold him to Caesar.

Analysis

Having ignored advice from loyal and experienced advisors, Antony must suffer the consequences of defeat. As his followers desert him, he must confront his fury and remorse alone. He is completely vanquished not only militarily but emotionally and personally as well. His humiliation brings him to the only end for a Roman in such a defeat: suicide.

He rages at Cleopatra for betraying him, "Triple-turned whore! Tis thou / Hast sold me to this novice, and my heart / Makes only wars on thee" and bitterly regrets having been so devoted to her. Having persisted with his ill-advised plans, he can direct his rage at Cleopatra, knowing he himself is most at fault. The dignity and self-awareness he displayed earlier are nowhere to be seen here.

Act 4, Scene 13

Summary

Cleopatra enters with her female attendants and Mardian. She begs their help against Antony's insane fury. Charmian suggests she hide in "the monument"—the tomb Cleopatra has already had built for herself. "There lock yourself," says Charmian, "and send him word you are dead." Cleopatra seizes on this suggestion. "To th'monument!—Mardian, go tell him I have slain myself. / Say that the last I spoke was 'Antony.'"

Analysis

Ancient Egyptian rulers built their tombs in advance of their deaths, but it is unclear what is meant by "monument" here. For staging purposes Cleopatra's monument must fulfil three dramatic requirements:

- Cleopatra and her attendants will be safe there;
- There's a window to which a dying Antony can be raised by three women without being further injured;
- Soldiers can enter without difficulty.

What kind of real-world structure could meet these conditions? Many imaginary images exist, but none seem to work in this play. Perhaps the monument's exterior is rarely shown onstage for this reason.

In earlier scenes Cleopatra has compared Antony to Hercules, the strongest man in mythological history. Here her two mythological references are more frightening. According to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Telamonian Ajax fought so valiantly in the Trojan War he expected the shield of Achilles as a reward. Denied it, and the accompanying honor, he used his sword to stab himself to death. Capturing the boar of Thessaly was one of the 12 labors of Hercules, who chased it through the snow before trapping it. In this allusion, Cleopatra compares Antony to an exhausted, cornered animal.

Cleopatra's situation is desperate, but even in the middle of her terror she manages one more typical Cleopatra performance: ordering Mardian to tell Antony she's dead "and bring me [news of] how he takes my death." It's not clear why she does this: she may be hoping that news of her death will calm Antony's rage, or she may simply relish the drama.

But even during a moment of supreme crisis, Cleopatra is interested in Antony's reaction to her performance. She wants Antony to believe she hasn't betrayed him, but this lie itself is a betrayal. By the time it occurs to Cleopatra the trick may be a bad idea, it will be too late.

Act 4, Scene 14

Summary

Alone with Eros, Antony describes different cloud shapes. Sometimes they look like dragons, sometimes like rocks, sometimes like trees. They are like pageants put on by the evening sky.

Antony describes the way a cloud can look like a horse one moment and float away until it cannot be seen. "Eros, now thy captain is even such a body." He is still Antony, and yet he has become someone completely different. His reality has turned out as insubstantial as a cloud. He fought these battles for Cleopatra, and she has betrayed him. Now all Antony has left is the chance to take his own life.

Mardian enters, and Antony denounces his "vile lady." Mardian

says Antony is wrong: Cleopatra loved him totally. Antony snaps he'll have her put to death, but Mardian says she's already dead. What Antony wanted to do to her, she has done to herself, and her last words were of Antony.

Antony orders Eros to remove his armor. It has been a long day, and now they must sleep. He reminds his lieutenant he once promised to kill Antony if circumstances became desperate enough. That time has now come, and Eros must carry out his promise.

Eros draws back, but Antony insists. Surely Eros can't bear the thought of Antony being brought captive to Rome and being pulled behind triumphant Caesar's chariot? Killing him is the only way to prevent that disgrace. Now Eros seems to agree and asks for the chance to say farewell. Antony agrees almost impatiently. Eros responds, "Farewell, great chief"—and stabs himself to death.

Antony can only think, once again, he has been "out-nobled." Cleopatra and Eros have shown greater courage than he himself could muster. Now, though, he will follow their example. He stabs himself but doesn't succeed in dying. He calls for guards to finish him off, but they refuse. Dercetus, one of the guards, takes Antony's sword: if he brings it to Caesar, the Emperor will reward him.

Diomedes enters. Again Antony begs for death, but Diomedes tells him Cleopatra is alive and hiding in the monument. After sending Antony the false report of her death, Cleopatra suddenly realized the news might cause him to commit suicide. She sent Diomedes to tell Antony the truth, but he has arrived too late. "Too late," Antony agrees, and asks for guards to carry him to the monument. "I have led you oft; carry me now, good friends."

Analysis

By Roman standards of honor, Antony is doing the right thing in committing suicide. He is confident killing himself is the proper step to take and doesn't dread death. The notion of death, therefore, seems less tragic in this scene than does Antony's staggering loss of identity and his complete exhaustion.

Although he is not wounded physically, Anthony already seems at the point of death. "Eros, thou yet behold'st me?" he asks. So undone by his loss, Antony barely can believe he still has a discrete shape. To himself, he feels as "indistinct as water is in water"—a precise and striking image, especially because Antony's doom came by sea. His reference to "black vesper's pageants" is striking as well. Clouds are usually observed during daylight hours, but for Antony night is closing in fast.

Antony is too weak even to summon the energy to scold Mardian properly. To the messenger from the woman Antony believes betrayed him, all he can muster up is "Hence, saucy eunuch! Peace!" When Mardian reports Cleopatra has died, Antony's first thought is "The long day's task is done, And we must sleep." Of course he's speaking symbolically. By "sleep" he means "die." Yet the impression he gives is of a man so exhausted that only his armor keeps him upright.

Adding to the pathos in Antony's situation is the difficulty in arranging his next course of action. Although he is resolved to die, he feels unable to kill himself. Long ago, he reminds Eros, the lieutenant promised to kill Antony if he ever reached the point of "th'inevitable prosecution of disgrace and horror." But any soldier in ancient Rome would probably interpret these words to mean this terrible service would be required only if Antony were too impaired to kill himself. If he were on the point of certain capture or so gravely wounded to be unable to draw his own sword, *then* Eros would need to kill him. As matters now stand, Antony is perfectly able to manage the deed himself.

And when Eros's own suicide forces Antony to perform the act himself, he bungles the job. "O, make an end of what I have begun!" he implores his guards; when they refuse, he makes the same request of Diomedes. Only then does Antony learn he's made a botched attempt on behalf of a woman who isn't even dead herself and who has lied to him once again. He is in such pain it doesn't occur to him to wonder why Cleopatra pretended to be dead in the first place. The fumbling and awkwardness reinforce the pathos of the situation: here is a man who saw himself as godlike, unable even to die gracefully and well.

Antony's dialogue throughout this scene is so moving it may mask the highly punitive nature of the Roman concept of honor. Shakespeare makes Antony's point of view seem compelling and reasonable, but is he really called upon to kill himself because he lost the battle? According to Roman standards, yes: death is better than shame.

Act 4, Scene 15

Summary

Cleopatra and her retinue wait fearfully in the monument for Diomedes to return. When he arrives, he tells Cleopatra to look out of the other side of the monument: there she'll see Antony with his guards. "I am dying, Egypt, dying," says Antony, and asks her to come to him so he can kiss her one last time.

Cleopatra will not leave the building for fear of being captured. She'll never allow Caesar to claim her as an ornament to show off. Octavia will never have the chance to look at Cleopatra and gloat. Desperately she calls her ladies, and they begin to haul Antony up into the monument. "Quick," warns Antony, "or I am gone." Finally, and with great effort, they get Antony aloft to Cleopatra. She kisses him, saying that if kissing had the power to bring him back to life, she would kiss him until her lips wore out.

Antony asks for wine and the chance to "speak a little." He counsels Cleopatra to seek safety with Caesar and to trust none of Caesar's followers except Proculeius. Cleopatra answers she'll trust only her strength of will and her hands. Antony then asks her not to grieve over what he has become but to remember him when he was "the greatest prince o'th' world." Now he is dying honorably—"a Roman by a Roman valiantly vanquished."

Seeing her lover is dead, Cleopatra faints. When she revives, she tells her ladies she's no longer an empress but an ordinary woman. While Antony lived, Earth was as marvelous as the realm of the gods; now that the gods have "stolen our jewel," nothing is left. "Our lamp is spent; it's out." It's time to bury Antony and then die "after the high Roman fashion"—by suicide.

Analysis

One of Shakespeare's most famous lines, which he uses twice in this scene, is Antony's "I am dying, Egypt, dying." These five words, two of them the same, are among the most memorable in Shakespeare's works and reward close study.

For one thing, the message is direct and straightforward. Antony hasn't always been this blunt. Yet the phrasing of the sentence turns it into poetry. The line cannot be rephrased without losing its effectiveness. Consider how much weaker it becomes when the word *Cleopatra* replaces "Egypt" By composing the line this way and repeating the word *dying*, Shakespeare produces an almost songlike rhythm that twice stresses the word *die*.

When Antony asks Cleopatra to come down and kiss him, her reply (which features even more repetition) lacks the poetic precision. "I dare not, dear, / Dear my lord, pardon, I dare not, / Lest I be taken." Her words are equally direct. She's not putting on a performance—at least not with those lines. True, she follows them with a lofty speech about Caesar and Rome in which, once again, she becomes the center of attention. It's a short speech, though, and for the remainder of the scene, Cleopatra's attention is focused on Antony.

This scene between Antony and Cleopatra contrasts directly with the couple's first appearance in Act 1, Scene 1. Clearly conscious of their audience in Scene 1, they expressed their love in grand style. It was almost as if they were saying, "We hope someone is writing all this down." In this later scene Charmian and Iras are still in the room, yet Antony and Cleopatra seem unaware of their presence. They love each other, and both know this is their last conversation; they don't waste a word.

Just after Antony has died, Cleopatra stops thinking of herself as an empress. Within seconds she seems to transform into a new person, plain spoken and resolute. Her words to Charmian and Iras, "Our lamp is spent; it's out. Good sirs, take heart," make her sound as if she were putting on Roman armor and will die an honorable Roman death.

Act 5, Scene 1

Summary

Caesar, Agrippa, Dolabella, Maecenas, Gallus, and Proculeius are holding a war council when Dercetus arrives with Antony's sword. Dercetus tells them Antony is dead; if Caesar wishes, Dercetus will serve him as well as he once served Antony.

Caesar is appalled at the news. Antony was more than a person; he represented half the world! Although the world wasn't large enough to hold the two rivals, Antony nonetheless

was like a brother and "my mate in empire." Caesar's companions, too, are shocked and saddened.

An Egyptian man enters, sent by Cleopatra to ask Caesar how she should prepare herself to serve him. Caesar bids Proculeius visit the Queen and assure her they "purpose her no shame." Keep her calm, Caesar advises, and don't do anything that might cause her to kill herself! Being able to display the captive Cleopatra to the Romans would bring Caesar eternal triumph.

Analysis

This is the first time Caesar's shell of icy rectitude seems to crack. Caesar's words serve as a reminder of how great Antony once was. He is already a diminished figure by the time the play begins, so the emotions aroused by his death lie mostly in the suggestion that a broken man is finally going to rest. By the time Antony dies, it is hard to remember he was "one of the triple pillars of Rome," especially since, in the play, he spent little time governing or in Rome. But for Caesar, another of the triple pillars, Antony's passing is a striking blow not only to himself but to the entire world order. It would be impossible for *Antony and Cleopatra* to include scenes from Antony's earlier life during his years of glory; the play is sprawling enough as it is. But readers may feel a pang at never having seen the protagonist at his height.

An indication of Caesar's rattled state at hearing of Antony's death is his having forgotten he sent Dolabella to speak to Antony before he heard about it. When his staff calls for the lieutenant, Caesar suddenly remembers where Dolabella is.

Antony's death marks the first time Caesar shows even the slightest doubt he acted correctly. Until now he has been certain he was right. Now he suddenly seems to need to *prove* it. Caesar can think only of showing his followers the letters Antony has sent and trying to justify himself: "You shall see / How hardly I was drawn into this war, / How calm and gentle I proceeded still / In all my writings." He may be worried others will judge him harshly or troubled he might have been able to prevent the death of this former hero. Although there is no way to know the reasons, this stern man's sudden loss of confidence is striking.

Furthermore, no one in this play is all good or all bad. As Caesar reels from the news about Antony, his sudden vulnerability makes him seem more likable. At the same time, however, he does not waver from his plan to exhibit the captured Cleopatra in public. In addressing the Egyptian man, Caesar reveals nothing but tender concern for the Queen's welfare. He may fool the Egyptian; he may even fool the audience. But he still wants his allies and enemies to fear him.

Act 5, Scene 2

Summary

Inside the monument, Cleopatra tells Charmian and Iras Caesar has no control over their fate. True control of one's fortune lies in suicide, the deed "that ends all deeds."

Proculeius enters and says Caesar is waiting to hear legitimate requests she may have. Cleopatra asks that her son be allowed to rule the now-conquered Egypt. Proculeius, whom Antony advised Cleopatra to trust, assures her Caesar will gladly be merciful as long as Cleopatra accepts him as a leader. Cleopatra's reply is meek and chastened. Caesar is the master, and she's schooling herself in obedience to him. As Proculeius begins a kindly answer, Gallus and other soldiers rush in and seize Cleopatra, ordering she be held prisoner until Caesar arrives.

Cleopatra draws out a dagger and prepares to stab herself, but Proculeius grabs the weapon before she can use it. Cleopatra swears to him she'll do anything to "ruin this mortal house," her own body. She'll never allow herself to be kept captive for Romans to gawk at. It would be better to die stark naked in the mud of the Nile; it would be better to be hanged on one of the pyramids. Dolabella enters and says he'll take charge of Cleopatra. As Proculeius leaves, the Queen once more orders him to tell Caesar all she wants is death.

Dolabella and Cleopatra are alone now. Cleopatra asks him to interpret a dream she had about Antony. The man in her dream was all powerful; his legs straddled the ocean and his arm waved over the whole world. He was endlessly gracious to his friends, but to enemies his voice was like thunder. Whole kingdoms meant nothing more to him than coins falling out of someone's pocket. Does Dolabella believe there could ever be a man like that? But Dolabella isn't there to talk about Antony. Assuring Cleopatra he shares her grief, he confides Caesar does indeed plan to parade her through the streets of Rome.

Before Cleopatra can answer, Caesar and his lieutenants enter. Caesar (falsely) promises he has forgiven her offenses against him. If she will obey him, he will treat her kindly. But if she tries to kill herself, she will make Caesar look bad, and her children will suffer for it.

Still affecting meekness, Cleopatra gives Caesar a list of her possessions, saying they now belong to him. When her own treasurer tells Caesar Cleopatra is holding back a vast quantity of treasure, the Emperor claims to admire Cleopatra's canniness. Cleopatra feigns shame as she apologizes; all she wanted, she says, was to keep a few trinkets and some gifts for Caesar's wife and Octavia. Again Caesar pretends not to mind. She can keep everything of hers! He's going to treat her as a friend! She can settle her arrangements any way she likes!

On this note Caesar and his men leave—and Cleopatra stops pretending to grovel. She whispers something to Charmian and orders her to hurry. As Charmian exits, Dolabella returns. Caesar, he says, is going to send her and her children through Syria before three days have passed.

A Countryman suddenly appears and pesters the guards to let him deliver a basket of figs. Several poisonous asps are hidden under the fruit. Before he leaves, the Countryman and Cleopatra converse about snakes. Then Cleopatra orders her ladies to dress her in all her majesty. She is on her way to meet Antony. As happened with Enobarbus, Iras suddenly dies from overwhelming emotion. Cleopatra uses two of the snakes to kill herself, and Charmian follows with a third snake. When Caesar and his men arrive at the mausoleum, they find the three women dead. Shaken, Caesar promises that Antony and Cleopatra will be buried together amid great solemnity.

Analysis

The final scene of the play brings the characterization of Cleopatra to its highest point of eloquence and imagery. At the beginning of the play she entered on the arm of Antony as they spoke of their love and passion in terms special to them. Now at the end she must find a way to fulfill her own vision of unity and devotion to him while still controlling her destiny and the image others have of her.

Throughout the play Cleopatra has demonstrated contradictory qualities and impulses. She is unpredictable and fluid, loyal and treacherous; she has shown great heights and depths of passion and scorn, rarely the same woman from one minute to the next. And her greatness manifests in her last act: she will die with her loyal companions, finding a way to show dominance and selfhood in the face of the greatest loss. Her final role is one that she, not the conquering Caesar, chooses for her.

While Antony is in all ways memorable and affecting as a character lost in his own errors and weaknesses, Cleopatra's independence and dominance are more important than her life. Caesar will bring her back as a captive, foreign presence to Rome and parade her imprisoned in front of dirty smelly masses, as she disgustedly imagines them. Having lost on land and sea, she will find another element to join Antony outside of mortal time, she hopes. Her "immoral longings" serve her well in the final scene: she is able to preserve both her image and her liberty in her suicide.

The stolid figure of Caesar contrasts sharply with her. All he can do at the last pages of the play is to count and view the dead bodies, whose sacrifice he seems, at least in part, to admire. He rightly promises their funeral rites will be attended by the Roman soldiers, and afterward he must go back to lead the Empire, as is his destiny. He aspires to be a great Emperor, and Shakespeare knew he would become one. Antony and Cleopatra will not be forgotten, but their story is written, while Caesar's is not yet over.

“ Quotes

> *"And you shall see in him The triple pillar of the world transformed Into a strumpet's fool."*

— Philo, Act 1, Scene 1

A conversation between Philo and Demetrius, two men in Antony's retinue, begins this play. Philo is saying Antony's love for Cleopatra has turned him into a fool and stripped him of his martial dignity. Antony, says Philo, is one of the three most powerful men in the world, but he's given up everything to dally with a whore. This comment reflects the Romans' opinion of Antony's behavior.

"Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch Of the ranged empire fall; here is my space."

— Antony, Act 1, Scene 1

A Roman messenger has been trying to get Antony's attention, but Antony ignores him. Rome—indeed, the whole Roman Empire—means nothing to him now, he says. His place is here, with Cleopatra. Who cares about messengers? The attitude confirms Philo's observation that Antony cares for Cleopatra much more than for Rome.

"Eternity was in our lips and in our eyes."

— Cleopatra, Act 1, Scene 3

Cleopatra speaks this poignant line during a quarrel with Antony, who has just told her he must leave for Rome. She believes, or pretends to believe, his reason for the trip is to see his wife again. Here she reminds Antony of the blissful world they used to share before Antony turned into such a heartless deceiver.

"My salad days, When I was green in judgment, cold in blood."

— Cleopatra, Act 1, Scene 5

Cleopatra's maid has just reminded her she used to love Julius Caesar as much as she claims to love Antony now. Cleopatra scoffs at the comment, saying she was much too young to know what love was. "Salad days" is a wonderful example of Shakespeare's gift for coining new expressions.

"Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale Her infinite variety. Other women cloy The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry Where most she satisfies."

— Enobarbus, Act 2, Scene 2

Antony's aide, Enobarbus, is trying to explain what makes Cleopatra uniquely lovable and continually desirable. His tribute not only describes Cleopatra perfectly; it also shows how closely Enobarbus shares Antony's thoughts. Many Roman soldiers despise Cleopatra, but Enobarbus understands why Antony is obsessed with her. Her unpredictable nature makes her continually appealing and leaves her lovers wanting more, unlike other women who become boring.

"Ah, this thou shouldst have done And not have spoke on 't! In me 'tis villainy ... Being done unknown, I should have found it afterwards well done, But must condemn it now."

— Pompey, Act 2, Scene 7

Pompey must reject Menas's offer to kill Lepidus, Antony, and Caesar, not because he is appalled by it but because it would be dishonorable to condone it once he knows of it. Had Menas done the act, Pompey would have approved, but he is more concerned with the perception of honor than by the substance of it.

"Celerity is never more admired Than by the negligent."

— Cleopatra, Act 3, Scene 7

A barbed rebuke to the speed at which Caesar crossed the Ionian Sea and captured the Greek city of Toryne, Cleopatra

belittles Antony's enemies, also reflecting her own more Eastern inclinations that do not value hasty actions.

"Egypt, thou knew'st too well My heart was to thy rudder tied by th'strings And thou shouldst tow me after."

— Antony, Act 3, Scene 11

The battle is over, and Rome has won. When Cleopatra's ship fled the fighting, Antony went after her, throwing his navy into confusion. He is remonstrating with her here: she should have realized he had no choice but to follow her, such is her power over him.

"I found you as a morsel cold upon Dead Caesar's trencher."

— Antony, Act 3, Scene 13

These are the cruelest words Antony says to Cleopatra in the entire play. He has just found one of Caesar's messengers, Thidias, kissing Cleopatra's hand. Antony jumps to the conclusion Cleopatra has sold him out. Here he's calling her a leftover of Julius Caesar with whom she had a previous affair and a son.

"I am dying, Egypt, dying."

— Antony, Act 4, Scene 15

In trying to commit suicide, Antony has managed only to give himself a mortal wound. This at least gives him a few minutes to say goodbye to Cleopatra in one of the most memorable farewell lines Shakespeare ever wrote.

"The odds is gone, And there is nothing left remarkable Beneath the visiting moon."

— Cleopatra, Act 4, Scene 15

Antony has just died, and Cleopatra's world has been extinguished. Everything has become flat and ordinary, and every person is just like every other person—no one unique is left on Earth. The transience of the moon makes the world even more desolate.

"The breaking of so great a thing should make A greater crack."

— Caesar, Act 5, Scene 1

Caesar has just learned Antony has committed suicide. Although they have been enemies recently, he is shocked by the news; he is shocked, too, that the world seems untouched by Antony's death. Why hasn't such a devastating loss caused the earth to crack open? The statement reveals Caesar's respect for Antony—to some degree, he shares in the lovers' feeling that they are larger than life and their actions are of divine significance—and prepares for somewhat of a change in his attitude toward Antony and Cleopatra.

"Antony Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness I'th'posture of a whore."

— Cleopatra, Act 5, Scene 2

This is Cleopatra's terrible—and no doubt accurate—vision of what will happen if she stays alive. Caesar will bring her to Rome to show her off, and she'll be forced to watch as comic actors portray her and Antony for the delight of the crowds. "Boy my greatness" refers to the fact that in Shakespeare's day, boy actors were used to play women's parts; there were

no female actors.

> *"Give me my robe. Put on my crown. I have Immortal longings in me. Now no more The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip."*

— Cleopatra, Act 5, Scene 2

Cleopatra expresses her acceptance of and control over her death in a particularly lyrical way by dressing and readying herself for immortality, as she views the afterlife. As much as she has loved ruling Egypt and the life she has led, now her eye is on being with her beloved forever, as she expects will happen.

> *"Now boast thee, death, in thy possession lies A lass unparalleled."*

— Charmian, Act 5, Scene 2

The snakes' poison has done its work, and Cleopatra is reunited with Antony in death. As Charmian closes the eyes of her mistress, she tells the world of the dead it has just acquired one of the most remarkable women in history. Charmian's use of the informal "lass" shows how much she loves the Queen and how close they were in life.

Symbols

Swords

Unlike other Shakespeare plays in which a sword is a sword, in *Antony and Cleopatra* swords are symbols of martial power and male pride. After Egypt loses the Battle of Actium, Antony, the foremost soldier of his earlier days, is tortured by the memory of how poorly Caesar fought in earlier battles. "He at Philippi kept / His sword e'en like a dancer, while I struck / The lean and wrinkled Cassius" (Act 4, Scene 11). The younger man never unsheathed his sword, instead treating it like the ornamental swords worn to dances. Antony's misery at defeat is compounded by being beaten by a cowardly swordsman.

The memory of wearing Antony's sword still thrills Cleopatra. "Next morn, / Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed, / Then put my [clothes] and mantles on him, whilst I wore his sword Philippan" (Act 2, Scene 5). She tells the story to amuse her ladies-in-waiting but sees it as more than a joke. Cleopatra longs to control Antony and becomes enraged when she doesn't succeed. Of course it's funny that she dressed the passed-out Antony in women's clothes and then wielded his sword. More importantly, this was a moment when she dominated him totally. Asleep, he was under her control, and she made the most of her chance.

In Act 4 when Antony bungles his suicide, he begs the men around him to finish the job for him. Instead Dercetus grabs Antony's sword, the symbol of his power, and makes off with it. A soldier like Antony never parts with his sword, and thus there could be no clearer symbol of Antony's death than that stolen sword. Having betrayed Antony symbolically, Dercetus now betrays him literally when he offers to serve Caesar.

Snakes

Snakes symbolize treachery and death because of their slyness and venom. Antony famously calls Cleopatra his "serpent of old Nile," and the nickname is appropriate. There is more than a touch of venom in the way she sometimes treats him! When Antony tells Enobarbus they must leave Egypt for Rome, he compares the "breeding" political situation to a trough of water with a horse's hair in it—an image recalling the old superstition that horsehair could turn into a worm. Extending the metaphor, Antony adds the notion of the worm growing into a poisonous snake. Antony wants to get to Rome as soon as possible, before the worm gets too big.

Shakespeare conflates snakes and worms in an unsettling way in the last act as well: the countryman in Act 5 calls the asps he brings Cleopatra "worms." "I wish you joy of the worm," he

chillingly says as he leaves.

Clouds

Changeable and impermanent, clouds symbolize Antony's lost identity. In a poignant moment in Act 4, Scene 14 Antony, desolate at having lost to Caesar and even more desolate to think (mistakenly) Cleopatra has betrayed him, muses to Eros on the shapes of clouds. "Sometimes we see a cloud that's dragonish, / A vapor sometime like a bear or lion." These shapes, he says, "mock our eyes with air." They're so impermanent that they vanish "even with a thought" and become as "indistinct / As water is in water." In happier times Antony's strongest self-identification came from knowing he was a great soldier. Now, stripped of that knowledge, he feels himself to be floating wispily and about to dissolve, unable to hold onto any shape in the same way clouds shift easily from one form to another with no structure to keep their form.

Antony and Cleopatra features several images of metamorphosis. A horsehair can change into a snake; Cleopatra can wield Antony's sword and call herself a conqueror. But these are examples of matter's assuming another form. Antony's description of drifting into nothingness, in effect dematerializing, is one of the eeriest and most arresting passages in the play. Clouds are the closest representation of his transformation.

Themes

Honor

The main characters must decide what honor means and how one demonstrates or acquires it. In the play's opening words, Philo mourns the change that has come over Antony since meeting Cleopatra. "His captain's heart ... is become the bellows and the fan / To cool a gypsy's lust." For Romans, military glory, honor, and "behaving like a good Roman" are synonymous. Honor means courage, ruthlessness in battle, and holding onto power. A man behaving unlike a soldier—in Antony's case, an emperor—is a failure as a man.

In Cleopatra's world the Roman concept of honor as fulfillment of responsibility is incomplete and unsatisfying. People lucky enough to be rich should enjoy life, not behave as others would like or expect. Cleopatra is a powerful queen, but in Act 1, Scene 1, she mocks Antony's sense of duty. Urging him to listen to a messenger from Rome, she suggests, derisively, perhaps Caesar has a job for him to do: "Do this, or this; / Take in that kingdom, and enfranchise that. / Perform't, or otherwise we damn thee." The suggestion is clearly that all of this ambition for ambition's sake is silly, not honorable. Antony outdoes Cleopatra in his willingness to forget duty. "Let Rome in Tiber melt and the wide arch / of the ranged empire fall. Here is my space." Antony's irresponsibility here might trouble even someone without a strict Roman sense of virtue.

At the other extreme is Caesar, whose sense of honor dominates every aspect of his personality. In fact he barely seems to have a personality. As Cleopatra can't conceive of any reason to comport oneself like a Roman, Caesar is flummoxed by Antony's refusal to return to Rome and a proper way of life. Caesar says even if it were acceptable for Antony to fritter away his time in trivial pursuits during peaceful times, he's behaving inexcusably under current circumstances. There is no way to "excuse his foils when we do bear / So great weight in his lightness [absence]" (Act 1, Scene 4).

Enobarbus demonstrates the connection between loyalty and honor. Loyal to his leader, he defends Antony's conduct for most of the play. Indeed he seems to have internalized Antony's feelings about Cleopatra. When Antony brings news they must leave for Rome, Enobarbus jokes, "Why then, we kill all our women. We see / how mortal an unkindness is to them. If they suffer / Our departure, death's the word." When Antony reveals that Fulvia is dead and that he must deal with the resulting political mess, Enobarbus retorts, "And the business you have broached here cannot be without you, especially that of Cleopatra's, which / wholly depends on your abode" (Act 1, Scene 2). Later Enobarbus is so disgusted he deserts Antony, believing to remain loyal would be dishonorable

These characters' perceptions of honor undergo drastic changes.

Enobarbus

Enobarbus deserts Antony because he believes it the honorable thing to do. Almost immediately he regrets this action. When Antony sends on the treasure Enobarbus left behind, the kindness of the gesture undoes him. "O Antony, / Nobler than my revolt is infamous, / Forgive me in thine own particular" (Act 4, Scene 9). But his conflict brings attention to a tricky element of honor: is it honorable to be loyal to a dishonorable ruler? Since the audience empathizes with Antony, the answer might clearly seem to be "yes," but if the play were written from another perspective, and Antony was represented as a shameful deserter, Enobarbus's loyalty to him might be interpreted as showing a lack of moral firmness.

Antony

Losing two crucial battles causes Antony to realize he has lost his self-image. "Here I am Antony, / Yet cannot hold this visible shape " (Act 4, Scene 14). With this loss he understands the value of the Roman ethos. Later he says, "Since Cleopatra died / I have lived in such dishonor that the gods / Detest my baseness" (Act 4, Scene 14). Not only has he been dishonored in battle, but Cleopatra (as he mistakenly believes) has been quicker to commit suicide than he. A good Roman prefers death to dishonor. But he has always claimed Cleopatra was more important than his honor. His tragedy is he doesn't quite die with honor. First he begs Eros to kill him; when Eros kills himself instead, Antony stabs himself and misses his aim. He accepts this failure with good grace, even though the undignified death highlights his overall diminishment. During his time with Cleopatra, Antony lets the honorable part of himself go; it has returned, but it does not give him a graceful death.

Cleopatra

Cleopatra can't bear the thought of Caesar's parading her as a captive through Rome for all to jeer at. This is ego talking, not honor: the Queen is unable to tolerate such a conspicuous loss of status. Putting on a performance is one thing; being displayed is another. But Cleopatra's determination to control her fate is honorable by any standards, not just Roman ones. Throughout the play Cleopatra has flown into rages whenever her will has been crossed. Now cornered, she becomes calm, brave, and accepting. "Look, / Our lamp is spent; it's out. Good sirs, take heart ... What's brave, what's noble / Let's do 't after the high Roman fashion / And make death proud to take us." Before poisoning herself, she dresses in her "best attires." This action is partly ego driven: she wants to look good when Caesar finds her (and she succeeds). More important, however, putting on full regalia underscores her refusal to cringe in the face of death. She meets her honorable end proudly, and with more dignity than does Antony.

Caesar

Caesar is the one character who believes he has behaved honorably, but his honor is questionable. He ignores the signed treaty, setting off a chain of disastrous events.

He has long disapproved of Antony and Cleopatra. He sees Antony as a weakling and Cleopatra as a whore. But when he hears Antony is dead, Caesar changes. He recalls the days when he and Antony shared power and friendship, as "mates in empire." With Antony dead Caesar's respect for him returns; he retroactively bestows on Antony the honor Antony lost in life.

Caesar's plans for disposing of Cleopatra may seem dishonorable. To Caesar, however, parading captured prisoners is one of the rewards of winning a war; it also may be a way to indicate to his people that the sensual, distracting threat of Egypt, represented by Cleopatra, has been tamed. In any case, pretending to be her protector is just good strategy. But when he views her corpse, Caesar softens as he did with Antony. He speaks admiringly of her: "Bravest at the last, / She leveled our purposes and, being royal, / Took her own way" (Act 5, Scene 2). Despite his plans being foiled by her death, he orders the lovers to be buried together. Caesar's concept of honor has broadened to include this famous pair.

Rome versus Egypt

Philo's opening speech sets the central conflict of the play: in turning toward Cleopatra, Antony has turned away from his Roman upbringing. Once, says Philo, Antony could be compared to Mars, the Roman god of war. Now his stern "captain's heart" has become "the bellows and the fan / To cool a gypsy's [Egyptian's] lust." One of the three emperors of Rome, a "triple pillar of the world," is now the plaything of a

whore.

In *Antony and Cleopatra* Rome and Egypt are irreconcilably different—at least in the opinion of everyone but the lovers themselves, whose cultural differences are attractions. But for other Romans in the play Egypt is overripe, overfertile; Cleopatra, the symbol of the country she rules, is overfond of pleasure. To Cleopatra, on the other hand, Rome is cold, strict, and reined in—all the traits she wishes Antony didn't have. Egyptians host grand parties: the Roman Maecenas drools at the thought of "Eight wild boars roasted whole at a breakfast, and but twelve persons there" (Act 2, Scene 2). Meanwhile at Pompey's banquet (which Antony brags doesn't come near the typical Egyptian party), abstemious Caesar looks on with disdain as everyone else on board has a grand, but inharmonious, time getting drunk.

In the West, Rome is ruled by men; even Octavia, Caesar's royal sister, is passively dutiful in her role as a bargaining chip. In the East, Cleopatra's court swarms with women and eunuchs. Because a stern, virtuous environment may be less appealing to describe than a lushly sensual one, Shakespeare is lavish with descriptions of Egypt and of Cleopatra. In describing Cleopatra on her barge, Shakespeare says she is more beautiful than Venus, the Roman goddess of beauty.

Both Antony and Cleopatra have internalized the idea that Egypt is Rome's opposite. After 10 years with Cleopatra, Antony has cast off much of the self-discipline he embraced in earlier days. In contrast with the "eight wild boars," Caesar speaks admiringly of Antony's years as a soldier, when he was forced to live on tree bark and horse urine. Cleopatra is furiously anxious at the idea of Antony's returning to Rome, while Antony feels guilty that "The beds i'the East are soft" (Act 2, Scene 6) and thinks Rome may be what he needs to regain the manly skills he has lost.

Antony feels torn, as Cleopatra and Caesar pull him in different directions. One reason the queen and Caesar dislike each other is that each wants dominance over Antony. His visit to Rome deeply disappoints Caesar, as does Antony's leaving Octavia to return to Egypt.

At this point Cleopatra and the East seem victorious—until Caesar's decisive victory sinks Egypt and Cleopatra with it. Rome has triumphed, at least politically. Strangely, East and West merge at the end of the play when Cleopatra commits suicide. She kills herself "after the high Roman fashion," magnificently dressed for the occasion, and wins even Caesar's reluctant approval.

Women with Power

Cleopatra makes most of the men in this play very nervous—even Antony. To the Romans she is an enticing strumpet with far too much power. As they see it, Cleopatra has lured Antony off the moral path into a bath of corruption. In Act 1, Scene 1 Philo speaks of Antony "when he is not Antony," the implication being Cleopatra has transformed him into a false version of himself. Antony himself calls Cleopatra a fairy; later, when he believes she has betrayed him, he growls, "The witch shall die" (Act 4, Scene 13).

Enobarbus is the one Roman who seems to respect Cleopatra, at least in the beginning. But he also believes she is literally irresistible to Antony. Her "infinite variety" is one reason Antony is in thrall to her, but Enobarbus believes there is another, less savory, reason. "Vilest things / Become themselves in her, that the holy priests / Bless her when she is riggish." If a loose woman can get even a priest to bless her, she must be an enchantress.

If any woman in the play is unthreatening, it's quiet, cool Octavia. No Roman thinks *she's* a witch. Caesar thinks of his sister as the "cement" that will keep him allied with Antony. But, the dutiful Octavia cannot control her new husband, and it is unfair to hang Rome's fate on her marriage. Perhaps Caesar already realizes this and is using Octavia to give himself another reason to war with Antony. Whether or not he expects the marriage to work, Caesar views his sister as a weapon, and Octavia couldn't be a worse choice for the task.

Cleopatra's feelings toward the extent of her power are hard to pin down, for her "infinite variety" makes her vacillate between insecurity and pride. Certainly she is obsessed with maintaining her power over Antony. When she decides to go fishing, she envisions herself "betraying" the fishes. "As I draw them up / I'll think them every one an Antony / And say "Aha! You're caught."

Motifs

Water

Antony and Cleopatra abounds in water imagery. The first image is Philo's metaphor describing Antony's lovesickness. "This dotage of our general's / O'erflows the measure." By Roman standards everything about Egypt is overflowing. The Nile floods its banks; Antony spends too much time fishing; there's too much drinking.

Water imagery appears several times in association with Cleopatra. She first meets Antony as she floats down the river Cydnus in a golden barge with silver oars. Her attendants are dressed like sea nymphs, and a servant in a mermaid costume steers the boat. The water of the river is "amorous" of the silver oars rowing through it (Act 2, Scene 2). Cleopatra is presenting herself as the goddess of the river, and Antony is suitably dazzled. Elsewhere Enobarbus says Cleopatra's sighs and tears are "greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report" (Act 1, Scene 2).

According to Caesar the Roman populace is as inconstant as water. "This common body, / Like to a vagabond flag upon the stream, / Goes to and back, lackeying the varying tide / To rot itself with motion." When Antony loses the Battle of Actium—on the water—he grieves his vanished identity is "Indistinct / As water is in water" (Act 4, Scene 14).

In such a dramatic story, there are many tears. In Act 1, Scene 3 Cleopatra depicts tears as tribute that can be quantified. "Where be the sacred vials thou shouldst fill / With sorrowful water?" she chides Anthony. A few lines later, she says, "I prithee turn aside and weep for [Fulvia], / Then bid adieu to me and say the tears / Belong to Egypt" (Act 1, Scene 3). Antony and Cleopatra both bid their servants not to cry over their deaths, and when Cleopatra weeps over the loss at Actium, Antony gallantly says, "Fall not a tear, I say; / one of them rates / All that is won and lost." He even remarks about Octavia's tears, comparing them to April rains—a much less startling or original image than other water images. And Caesar himself cries when he learns about Antony's death: "The gods rebuke me, but it is tidings / To wash the eyes of kings" (Act 5, Scene 1).

Finally, there is the sea, which in this play is associated with war. Pompey, says Antony "commands the empire of the sea" (Act 1, Scene 2), and Pompey's attack on Rome is one of the reasons Antony leaves Egypt. Pompey's lieutenants, Menecrates and Menas, "[Make] the sea serve them, which they ear and wound / With keels of every kind ... the borders maritime / Lack blood to think on't" (Act 1, Scene 4). Pompey himself exults, "The people love me, and the sea is mine" (Act 2, Scene 1).

Pompey is temporarily halted when he signs a treaty with the triumvirs, and for the second half of the play Caesar is master of the sea. In Act 4, Scene 7 Antony wonders how Caesar can have "so quickly cut [through] the Ionian Sea." Instead of taking this as a warning, Antony—the best land fighter in the Roman Empire—decides to fight Caesar by sea. By so doing he brings doom upon himself and Cleopatra. After his death Cleopatra is left to dream about a man whose "legs bestrid the ocean"—a sad wish things could have ended differently.

Messengers

In this play 35 messages are delivered—almost one per scene. The first one, in Act 1, Scene 1, sets the tone for all subsequent messages. The Messenger barges in on Antony's and Cleopatra's rapturous opening lines about their limitless love. Perhaps because he's irritated at being cut off in mid-speech, perhaps because he has lost his sense of responsibility, Antony refuses to listen to the message. Cleopatra repeatedly urges him to hear what the Messenger has to say, but not because she's appealing to his sense of duty. She wants to find out whether the message is about Antony's wife, Fulvia. But he can't avoid the second Messenger, who arrives soon after Antony has dismissed the first.

Cleopatra herself proves to be a feared recipient of messages she doesn't like. When a Roman Messenger tells her Antony has married Octavia, she strikes him repeatedly and then "hales him up and down." The Messenger pleads, "Gracious madam, / I that do bring the news made not the match" (Act 2, Scene 5). It doesn't work: Cleopatra pulls out a knife and announces, "Rogue, thou has lived too long," and the

Messenger promptly exits. Still Cleopatra can't resist knowing more about Antony's new bride. She orders the Messenger to go back to Rome, take a good look at Octavia, and return to her with the information. On his second visit, the Messenger knows how to keep Cleopatra from attacking him. Everything he says about Octavia can be interpreted as unflattering. He does make a mistake when he volunteers, "And I do believe she's thirty." Cleopatra is older than that but happy enough to ignore the remark.

One interesting feature about messages in this play: the majority convey information the audience already knows. By the time Cleopatra hears Antony is married, the audience has "met" Octavia and learned of the marriage. This device draws focus not on the message but on the way the hearer receives it. The way a character reacts to (usually bad) news reveals a great deal.

Ships

Enobarbus's famous description of Cleopatra portrays her on her beautiful barge on the Nile. The motif is one of overwhelming beauty and connection to nature. But scenes set on boats and the sea are, throughout the play, moments of crisis, uncertainty, and transition. Antony's army is weaker on sea than on land; agreeing to a confrontation on the sea is his undoing. Moreover, Cleopatra's flight from the Battle of Actium—also on a ship—is a distracting, devastating temptation; Antony complains that Cleopatra must have known that "[m]y heart was to thy rudder tied by th'strings, / And thou shouldst tow me after."

In the disturbing scene on Pompey's ship, an ostensible truce is undercut by tension and by the possibility of betrayal: the men are supposed to be carousing together, but Caesar refuses to participate and Menas casually suggests that he might cut the throats of Pompey's new allies.

Even Cleopatra's barge, which seems to stand at such a contrast to Roman warships, is problematic. While the image is a positive one for Enobarbus, the temptation that Cleopatra's appearance poses to Antony, and its role in his eventual diminishment and death, makes the image subversive and potentially sinister.

Suggested Reading

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