Shakespeare and the Sixteenth Century

Judgment of the Cleopatra Story

by

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Perhaps the true extent of Cleopatra's charm is best indicated by the fact that her conquests did not cease with her singular victory over Antony but have continued century after century in a long and, as yet, unfinished denouement to her engaging story. In no case, however, has the seduction been more complete than with the vast army of critics who have paid tribute to her as she is portrayed in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*.

The curious victory which Shakespeare's Cleopatra has achieved with the critics began in the nineteenth century when the romantics of that period joined themselves into a volunteer battalion of loyal subjects and not only attributed to her all of the charm with which she was so well endowed by Shakespeare, but also graced her liberally with a virtue resembling that imputed to her by the medieval writers who had used her much earlier as a champion of the courtly love tradition. So readily protracted have been her seductive powers that even the realistic critics of the twentieth century, who effectively re-evaluated the romantic approach to such well-known figures as
Falstaff and Shylock, have tacitly assumed many of the basic premises of the romantic judgment of Cleopatra.

Several contributory causes may explain at least partially how it happened that the nineteenth century critics arose in a mass to adulate the "serpent of old Nile." To begin with, since it was generally agreed by all that Shakespeare was incapable of writing an inferior play, the romantics were inclined, in their study of Antony and Cleopatra, to reject at the outset the eighteenth century criticism of Johnson, who had scorned the work for being "produced without any art of connexion or care of disposition," had criticized it for its lack of well-developed characters, and had condemned Cleopatra for being distinguished by "the feminine arts, some of which are too low." In addition, that preoccupation with the foreign and the feminine which characterized the romantic period led them to discover in Antony and Cleopatra praiseworthy elements of romantic appeal. If there was to be any threat at all in the nineteenth century to the acceptance of the drama as a Shakespearean triumph, it now seems most likely that it would have arisen from the play's apparent conflict with the conventional system of

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morality which dominated the thinking of the romantic period. The precise terms of Victorian morality did, in fact, war with the natural inclination of Victorian critics to praise the play's sentimental aspects. Cleopatra's charm, however, was in most cases sufficiently subtle to draw a discreet curtain over the unseemly elements of her behaviour; and the critics yielded happily to the temptation to view the play as a drama of noble love and tragic sacrifice.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, for example, came to regard *Antony and Cleopatra* as the most "wonderful" work of Shakespeare. Though he felt that Cleopatra was inspired by a passion "which springs out of the habitual craving of a licentious nature," he nonetheless mitigated his criticism with the statement that the "criminality in her passion is lessened by our insight into its depth and energy."²

In this same process of somewhat inconsistent reasoning, William Hazlitt and H. W. Mabie also engaged. Hazlitt began by condemning Cleopatra for being "voluptuous, ostentatious, conscious, boastful of her charms, haughty, tyrannical, and

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fickle"; but he immediately weakened enough to admit that 
"Octavia is a dull foil to her," and that Fulvia by comparison is "a shrew and shrill-tongued." 3 By the final action of the play, Hazlitt's basic sense of morality had almost ceased to struggle with the more powerful charm of Cleopatra, and he concluded that, though she had "great and unpardonable faults," the grandeur of her death redeemed them. 4

Similarly, H. W. Mabie observed that Cleopatra was "consumed with love of pleasure"; he branded her as "imperious in her demands for that absolute homage which slays honour and saps manhood at the very springs of its power"; he condemned her for being "untouched by pity and untroubled by conscience." 5 Yet he, too, became a willing victim, and the woman whom he had labelled a "courtezan of genius" he finally enshrined as the "superb embodiment of femininity" whose "magnificence" invests even her "criminality with a kind of sublimity." 6

4 Ibid., p. 338.
6 Ibid., p. 338.
A. C. Bradley, who was perhaps the most perspicacious of the romantic critics, became also one of the most loyal slaves to the bewitching powers of the Queen. Initially assured of the deleterious nature of Cleopatra's charm, he wrote:

It is plain that the love of Antony and Cleopatra is destructive; that in some way it clashes with the nature of things; that, while they are sitting in their paradise like gods, its walls move inward and crush them at last to death. This is no invention of moralizing critics; it is in the play; and any one familiar with Shakespeare would expect to find it there. 7

Yet Bradley abandoned this original critical thesis; and after having been exposed himself to the sorceress, observed, "Many unpleasant things can be said of Cleopatra; and the more are said the more wonderful she appears." 8 Later, after carefully enumerating Cleopatra's more despicable qualities, he rhapsodized:

The marvellous thing is that the knowledge of all this makes hardly more difference to us than it did to Antony. It seems to us perfectly natural, nay, in a sense perfectly right, that her lover should be her slave; that her women should adore her and die with her; that Enobarbus, who foresaw what must happen, and opposes her wishes and braves her anger, should talk of her with rapture and feel no bitterness against her; that Dolabella, after a minute's conversation,  

8 ibid., p. 347.
should betray to her his master's intention and enable her to frustrate it. And when Octavius shows himself proof against her fascination, instead of admiring him, we turn from him with disgust and think him a disgrace to his species. 9

Even those critics who tended themselves to take a less adulatory view of Cleopatra, were nonetheless wont, seemingly because of their preoccupation with the morality of the tale, to assume that Shakespeare's intention had been to make of her a tragic heroine and to suggest that perhaps the poet had selected a subject basically unfit for the highest order of tragedy. Bernhard ten Brink considered Cleopatra to be perhaps a "masterpiece among Shakespeare's female characters." 10 But, observing in Cleopatra an evilness which resulted from her "alluring witchery," he sympathized with Shakespeare for having assigned himself in the first place the impossible task of creating an "irresistible woman" out of a pattern "devoid of the womanly graces." 11

Similarly Paul Stapfer assumed that Shakespeare meant to

9 ibid., p. 348.
11 ibid., p. 91.
transform Cleopatra into a woman of women. Stapfer stated that Shakespeare's purpose was to create, solely through the power of his poetry, a woman who could do anything and still command sympathy. Though Stapfer felt that Cleopatra was deeply stained, he also surmised that Shakespeare had intended to show his audience that before the onslaught of such charm nothing else mattered. Joining the ever-growing band of admirers, he wrote:

Shakespeare has not deemed it necessary to leave out any of the stains, big or little, in Cleopatra's character... and this, instead of depriving the lovely little monster of a single charm, only makes her the more irresistible.

F. J. Furnivall, by regarding the play as being remarkable primarily for its theme of lust and orgies, revealed the typical concern for morality and a general distrust of the subject matter. Finally, G. G. Gervinus found an "ethical objection" to the play on the ground that it necessitated the exalted treatment of a debased period in history. Apparently unable to find in *Antony and Cleopatra*

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13 ibid., p. 399.
14 *Shakespeare's Life and Work* (New York, 1908), p. 133.
so much as a glance at an acceptable state of human nature, he felt
that the whole play bespoke Shakespeare's failing years and lagging
spirits. 15

In some cases, the morality unconsciously predominant in
most Victorian writers won a strange victory by persuading the
critic to place the story without reservation into a framework of
nineteenth century mores and to endow Cleopatra with the whole
battery of womanly virtues. H. H. Furness, in the introduction
to his New Variorum Edition, finding it unthinkable to attribute to
Cleopatra any violation of prevailing standards, envisioned her
as a passionately loving wife bound to Antony by "the holiest of
bonds." 16 Her love, far from being destructive, "burned with
the unflickering flame of wifely devotion." 17

On the other hand, those critics who had themselves revolted
against the rigid patterns of the nineteenth century, approached
the play with open admiration for the freely sensuous nature of

15 Shakespeare Commentaries, tr. F. E. Bunnett (London,
1903), pp. 724-25.
16 The New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare (Philadelphia,
1907), p. xii.
17 ibid., p. xii.
the Queen. Such an approach resulted also in a pagan deification similar in many respects to the veneration accorded her by the moralist. William J. Rolfe, for example, differentiated between Cleopatra's charm and the sensuality of the usual wanton by observing that:

The wanton may have sensual charms and attractions in the highest degree, but men are soon sated with these, and tire of the charmer unless she have something of this versatility which continually offers fresh allurements and new forms of captivation. ... Cleopatra had this rare gift of her sex in utmost perfection. ... That which was at first an instinct or impulse had indeed become an art with her, an art of marvellous complexity, of indescribable subtlety. 18

Heinrich Heine acquiesced with Rolfe when he referred to Cleopatra as "a woman in the most lovely and the most cursed sense."

Linking Cleopatra's characteristics with the fickle nature of women in general, he stated, "She loves and betrays at the same time. We err in thinking that women cease to love us when they betray us." 19 Similarly, A. C. Swinburne joined with no hesitation the ranks of Cleopatra worshippers and celebrated her "infinite

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18 In his edition of Antony and Cleopatra (New York, 1898), p. 18 f.
variety" in all its full glory. For Swinburne there was no com-
pulsion to develop a proof of Cleopatra's wifely fidelity. Instead
he devoted himself simply to enthroning her as "the perfect and
the everlasting woman." 20

On this throne Cleopatra remained throughout the romantic
period, and, in fact, until in 1922 when Levin L. Schücking re-
opened the problem of interpreting her nature to the presumably
more sophisticated criticism of the twentieth century. 21 What
Schücking and the realists who followed after him attempted was
an examination of the structure of the play and its characteriza-
tion in the light of available information on the traditions and
exigencies of the dramatic form employed by Shakespeare. The
result of this examination was simply an additional statement by
Schücking of the basic problem: which had been noted previously
by the romantics: that is, the problem of reconciling the charm
of Cleopatra and the apparent repentance which occurs in the
last act with the passionate, heartless, essentially vulgar, and
totally immoral actions which are displayed in the first three acts.

20 A Study of Shakespeare (London, 1880), p. 188.
21 Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays (New York, 1922).
Just as the romantic critics could not successfully resolve this problem on moral grounds, Schücking was unable to resolve it on structural ones; instead he concluded that, according to his realistic interpretation, Cleopatra, the tragic queen, could not conceivably have evolved from Cleopatra, the harlot. On this theme he elaborated:

It cannot well be doubted that this woman (of the last act) has but little in common with the harlot of the first part. The Cleopatra whom we see in the time of Antony's good fortune gives us no indication of that moral substructure on which alone the fortitude she shows in adversity can rest. We know her well enough to foresee that she will vent her disappointment in endless and vociferous lamentations and, like old Capulet after receiving the news of Juliet's death, first of all and principally bewail her own sad lot. There was far too much calculation in her love to make it possible for her, at a moment when her own existence was in such imminent danger, to mourn so passionately and exclusively for another being. In her nature there was so much pettiness and vulgarity that she was quite unable to acknowledge and express in such sublime language the greatness of the fallen hero. 22

In short, Schücking concluded that "it is impossible to credit her with the behavior shown in the last two acts," and stated that this apparent inconsistency reveals a decided "falling off" in the

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ibid., p. 132.
workmanship of the author and a lack of careful digestion of the
historical source material for his play. 23

Hardin Craig answered Schücking's attack as follows:

Shakespeare found in his source two Cleopatras, the one licentious, self-willed, completely incorrigible; the other a perfect lover and a woman moved to heroic death by her love. Shakespeare told the tale as he found it, and some critics declare that these qualities could never co-exist in the same woman. Whether or not that is true does not concern us. Evidently Shakespeare thought they could, and it is perhaps best to accept what, in spite of some inconsistencies, seems to have been Shakespeare's simple intention. He was content to depict Cleopatra as utterly fickle, vain, unscrupulous, and sensual as far as the thirteenth scene of the third act; and beyond that point to show her possessed of womanly fidelity, steadfastness, and resolution. 24

Much more frequently, however, the twentieth century realists, in a manner strikingly reminiscent of the nineteenth century, managed to circumvent the conflicts which Schücking had found in Antony and Cleopatra. Once again this was accomplished by a glorious ritual of deification in which the realists used Schücking's

23 ibid., p. 132.
original hypothesis that Cleopatra did indeed attain a tragically heroic death as a springboard for demonstrating that in reality her virtues, as well as her magically charming qualities, were existent from the first act onwards. To this end E. E. Stoll took issue with Schücking and declared that Cleopatra's consistency clearly resides in the basic inconsistency of her feminine nature. He found a uniformity through all the vicissitudes of her tone and manner and asserted that "she changes as a vivacious, amorous, designing woman changes, not so as to lose her identity, like Proteus." 25 Later he wrote, "Caprice, conscious and unconscious, is her nature, as to be queen and coquette is her station in life. La donna e mobile, and she is quintessential woman." 26 It is true that Stoll carefully traced the development of Cleopatra's character from the beginning of the play with an eye for her lapses of virtue and with the intention of showing her to be consistently "the same old girl." But his enumeration of her faults was made with loving indulgence under the protective assurance that of such variety and bewitching imperfection is the quintessential woman composed.

This refrain of "quintessential woman" indeed has linked together most of the familiar choruses of twentieth century scholarship on Antony and Cleopatra. Whereas the romantics had venerated the Queen on the basis of her apparent conversion and marvellous repentance in the last act, the realists glorified her as the "eternal woman" and saw in her "infinite variety" and fluidity of character those ingredients most usually recognized as feminine. For John Dover Wilson the death of Cleopatra became "the most wonderful movement of any of his great symphonies":

If Antony's supreme virtue is magnanimity, hers is vitality. And because she, "all fire and air," is also the genius of the play, vitality is its true theme; vitality as glorified in them both, and in the form which Shakespeare most admired: "the nobleness of life," the strength and majesty of human nature, its instincts of generosity, graciousness and large-heartedness; its gaiety of spirit, warmth of blood, "infinite variety" of mood. 27

The deification of Cleopatra has been carried to its most inspired extreme by several of the later critics who are as devoted as Stoll and Wilson without being nearly so self-restrained. Harley Granville-Barker, though flamboyant, nonetheless echoes Stoll in

his portrait of Cleopatra as "the woman herself, quick, flagrant, subtle; but a delicate creature, too, and the light, glib verse seems to set her on tiptoe." 28 Mark Van Doren is so completely entranced with Cleopatra that he can see no tragedy whatever in the fate of Antony and instead remarks: "A world is lost, but it is so well lost that it seems not to have been lost at all . . . ."29 Likewise, J. I. M. Stewart, basing his arguments on the superb poetry of the play, finds for Cleopatra a virtuous end:

Cleopatra has appeared a wanton, sunk beyond recall in a barren dream of sense; and only her poetry has spoken of something else. And yet this something else was the truth of her; through her sterile sensuality there has subterraneously run the quickening stream; and here at last is her monument, to our feeling vast and oppressive as the Ptolemies' pyramids, like water cleaving the rock, her womanhood discloses itself in a mature and final splendour:

Husband, I come...
Peace, peace.
Dost thou not see my Baby at my breast,
That suckles the Nurse asleep... 30

Finally, it remains to G. Wilson Knight to phrase most succinctly

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the deification of Cleopatra when he writes in The Imperial Theme.

"Cleopatra is divine by nature of her divine variety and profusion... ."31

The charm of Cleopatra indeed produced a final victory in his widely read apology:

Now since Cleopatra is so comprehensively conceived, it will be clear that the streak of serpentine evil in her is part of her complex fascination: and, though real and as truly part of her as any other quality, it will be found to melt into her whole personality, enriching rather than limiting her more positive attractions. A limited perfection is sand on which to build: thus Isabella was exposed to shame, her very virtue turned against her when it claimed all-importance. Troilus could not accept Cressid's faithlessness as hers; Desdemona's purity could not save her in a world where an Iago exists. In Cleopatra we find a personification blent of "good" and "evil," a Cordelia with a streak of Lady Macbeth. The perfection is one of totality, not exclusion. Thus, from a limited view, her treachery is nauseating; but, from the view of eternity, the whole and all its parts observed, the "evil" is seen otherwise as part of a wider pattern. 32

In the century and a half of scholarship pertaining to Antony and Cleopatra, scholars and audiences in general have been united in their admiration of Cleopatra as a fascinating creature

31 The Imperial Theme (London, 1951), p. 309.
32 ibid., p. 310.
and in their acceptance of her as the character most artistically defined in the play. Of this traditional judgment no one would expect a reversal. But on the subject of Cleopatra's role in the tragedy, of the nature of her involvement in the plot, and of the amount and kind of sympathy which properly should be afforded her, it may be justifiable to question the interpretation which has customarily been made. In reference to Cleopatra's position in the drama, the history of recent *Antony and Cleopatra* scholarship has become quite clearly a history of her glorification, for the twentieth century critics have joined with the romantic critics to place Cleopatra in a framework of noble and tragic love and to assign to her a miscellany of virtues which in all probability would have seemed to a sixteenth century audience quite foreign to the facts of the story.

Perhaps, therefore, the critical problems which scholars have found in the play can be traced to a fundamental misreading rather than to any structural or artistic defect on the part of Shakespeare. In a distinctly analogous situation, the twentieth century scholar has been sophisticated enough to recognize that *The Merchant of Venice* is a comedy and not a tragic plea for religious tolerance. Those romantic critics who saw in Shylock
a tragic hero and in Shakespeare a herald for more humane times have been soundly rejected by later-day readers who have observed the catastrophe which results when subsequent standards are superimposed upon those of an earlier period. But, significantly, this sort of enlightenment has failed to illumine Antony and Cleopatra, and scholars have continued to regard the play as a whole in the light of modern times. Perhaps if more were known about the sixteenth century conception of the place of Antony and of Cleopatra in history and about the stereotyped portraits of them which might have existed in the Elizabethan mind, it would be less difficult to comprehend both the purposes which Shakespeare meant the play to serve and the interpretation which the author himself would have expected his audience to give to the work. A popular audience, after all, dislikes the reversal of traditional judgments; and it has been successfully demonstrated that Shakespeare's accounts are uniformly faithful to the facts as they were understood in Elizabethan times. 33 It is the purpose of this thesis, therefore, to investigate what opinions pertaining to the Cleopatra story actually did prevail in the sixteenth century with the hope that such

an investigation might lead to a more accurate understanding of the play which Shakespeare wrote.
CHAPTER II
The Cleopatra Story in Renaissance Histories and Belles Lettres

It was the purpose of the preceding pages to suggest that Shakespearean scholars interested in Antony and Cleopatra could benefit from a more careful study of the sentiment which prevailed in the sixteenth century towards Cleopatra, Antony, and Octavius as characters in history. Inasmuch as the major problems which the play seems to afford to modern readers involve an interpretation of the subject matter presented in the story, perhaps the best way to study the tale which Shakespeare meant to dramatize is to investigate initially any other versions of the episode which can be found in the literature of the Renaissance. If it could be established that to the sixteenth century the story of Antony and Cleopatra was commonly interpreted both by authors and readers in a consistent fashion, then the knowledge of that characteristic sixteenth century interpretation would serve to define the framework within which Shakespeare's play must be read.

Much of the ability to read Antony and Cleopatra with something approaching a sixteenth century point of view involves an
understanding of the fact that the characters portrayed seem to have been already clearly stereotyped in the Elizabethan imagination. In the case of his chronicles, as in the case of Antony and Cleopatra, Shakespeare chose for his subject matter episodes from the lives of rulers who had already become archetypes and who had been used over and over again to demonstrate particular morals.\(^1\) Ample justification for viewing the story of Cleopatra as popular history can be found in the numerous widely-read works which issued from Shakespeare's time and which suggest that the story as Shakespeare told it existed in a standardized form as part of the general literary heritage.

In this regard, it has rarely been pointed out, and never very fully, that the Emperor Octavius, who as a character in the play has received no sympathy from critics of the last one hundred and fifty years, was highly familiar to the Renaissance and was regarded popularly as one of the most noble of the ancient rulers. The veneration accorded Virgil by Renaissance writers, together with Virgil's adulation of Augustus, may partially explain the Renaissance

\(^1\) Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's "Histories"* (San Marino, California, 1947), p. 125.
respect for the Emperor. In any case, his characteristic virtues of moderation and self-control distinguished him for citation as the foremost example of an ancient ruler who, by virtue of his ability to govern his own conduct, had proved himself worthy of the responsibility of leadership.

Tigurinus Chelidonius in his A Most Excellent Hystorie of the Institution and Firste Beginninge of Christian Princes cited the reign of Augustus as exemplary of the good effects which can come from wisdom and learning in rulers and insisted that the Emperor would always merit "perpetual memory." In a similar manner Chelidonius extolled Augustus in Chapter 4, which is subtitled:

How that those which shall commaund others, ought first to master them selves, and so suppresse and moderate their affections and passions, that by their good lives, they may induce those that be subject to them, to vertue and godlinesse.

Later the author devoted a lengthy chapter to the dangers of incontinence among princes and pointed out how that vice had been the cause of the ruin and destruction of many kingdoms.

\[\text{Institution and Firste Beginninge of Christian Princes, tr. James Chilleser (London, 1571), p. 60 f.}\]
Similarly George More, in his *Principles for Yong Princes: Collected Out of Sundry Authors*, used Octavius in a chapter on moderation as one of his princely paragons. He took care to remark that Octavius, unlike Antony, resisted the temptation to yield to the Queen even though he had Cleopatra in his power. On this subject, he continued, "And as it is hurtful for a Prince to be allured by a woman to folly, so is it not good for him to bee led by the counsell of a woman." Thus manliness as well as continence is extolled as a necessary concomitant of leadership, and Octavius is used as an exemplum for both such qualities. Antony, by implication, is conceived of as a counter-exemplum, a leader who failed both because he neglected to bring into rigid control crucial areas of his personal conduct and because he permitted himself to be led by a woman.

Richard Reynoldes, in his work, *A Chronicle of All the Noble Emperours of the Romaines*, does not deal at any length with Antony, since he is primarily concerned with those leaders who

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3 *Principles for Yong Princes* (London, 1611).
4 *ibid.*, p. 49 (Chap. 18).
ruled alone as Lords of the Empire. However, through Reynoldes' work considerable insight can be gathered into the Elizabethan regard for Octavius, whom the author used as his foremost example of the good Prince:

...to make a full discourse how, when, where, how happily he [Augustus] governed the most eloquent shall want means to utter, and set forth so worthy a Prince; so fortunate a Captayne, so wyse a counsellor, and so victorious an Emperour, not for lacke of matter but his worthines shall subvert the order, argument and disposition of the most eloquente...

Reynoldes' entire chapter on Octavius choruses the conviction that a monarchy is the most desirable form of government. Octavius is presented as taking the utmost care to preserve the commonwealth and to leave after him a government ruled by one Prince, for "such was the great care of the good Prince Octavius as it ought to be of all good Princes..."

Finally no work which deals as intimately as does Antony and Cleopatra with Elizabethan political and ethical ideals should be

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5 A Chronicle of All the Noble Emperours of the Romaines (London, 1571).
6 ibid., fol. 21 f.
7 ibid., fol. 20 f.
read in detachment from Sir Thomas Elyot's, *The Boke Named the Governour*. In Elyot's work, continence (the lack of which quality spelled Antony's downfall) is held up as being the most essential quality which a ruler must possess. Specifically Elyot praised Octavius as the emperor who at long last had restored order to Rome by terminating the series of civil disturbances which had characterized the triumvirate. In addition, Elyot enumerated the many qualities which he felt best characterized a good Prince, and in this regard concluded:

> Abstinencie and continencie be also companions of fortitude and be noble and excellent vertues. I can not tell whether there be any to be preferred before them especially in men havynge autoritie they being the brydles of two capitall vices: that is to say, Avarice and Lecherie.

Just as a reading of those histories available to the Elizabethan public serves to delineate the sixteenth century conception of the contrasting roles of Antony and Octavius, so can a similar reading illuminate the place which Cleopatra occupied in the minds of Shakespeare's audience. The several historical works which treat her story at any length together compel the reader to note that

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8 *The Boke Named the Governour* (London, 1531).
9 *ibid.*, fol. 11 (Book I).
10 *ibid.*, fol. 214v (Book III).
Cleopatra was popularly conceived neither as a tragic heroine who gave up her life in order to spend eternity with Antony, nor as a romantically beautiful temptress for whom Antony happily sacrificed the world. On the contrary, the reports tend to be uniformly derogatory.

Richard Reynoldes, who, in *A Chronicle of All the Noble Emperours of the Romaines*, had extolled so eloquently the virtues of Octavius, referred on the other hand to Cleopatra as "the concubynge of Antonius," and "Antonius' harlott." William Fulbecke branded her a "shamelesse curtizan" and spoke of Antony as being "vainely besotted" with the love of her. Similarly, Philemon Holland, in his 1606 translation of Suetonius' *History of the Twelve Caesars*, revealed that Cleopatra was mentioned only in that section of Suetonius' work devoted to Caesar's whoredom and adultery:

...but most especially hee [Caesar] fancied Cleopatra: for, with her, hee both sate up

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11 *op. cit.*, fol. 15v and fol. 17.
many times and feasted all night long even untill breake of day;...yea, and he suffered her to call the sonne she bare after his owne name.

Furthermore, Lucan, in his famous history of the civil wars had described her as "Cleopatra, the shame of Egypt, the fatal Fury of Latium, whose unchastity cost Rome dear." He also decried her for "hastening from one husband to another," and for "playing the harlot for Rome." 14

Concerning the effect of Cleopatra's sorcery upon Antony, in the book *Appian of Alexandria, An Auncient Historie and Exquisite Chronicle of the Romanes Warres*, the following excerpt is significant:

...they saye, that Cleopatra made [Antony] to come to little profite, for making haste to winter with hir, he tooke not due time for the warre, doing al things confusedly, not as one that had his wittes, but abused with sorceries and witchcrafts of hir, that he thought more to make haste to hir, than to get victorie of his enemies. 15


14 The Civil War, tr. J. D. Duff (New York, 1928). pp. 595, 617. Lucan's work was published in London in 1589.

Later, summarizing the situation, in the *Continuation of Appian* of Alexandria, the author reported again how Antony was "not in his right wits, beyng bewitched by hir." 16 Finally, regarding Cleopatra's suicide, William Fulbecke mentioned nothing of her "tragic repentance" and her grief for the dying Antony. Instead he reported simply that:

...when Cleopatra understode the minde of Octavius the Emperour, she thought it more honour and renowne to her to dye a queene though she killed herself, then to goe to Rome in triumphe at the will of another, a captive, a spectacle, a laughinge stocke to all the world, whereupon she sought the way to murther herselxe.... 17

Additional important insight into the Elizabethan regard for Cleopatra can be found in Henrich Kramer and James Sprenger's *Malleus Maleficarum* which was well-known to educated Englishmen. 18 In it the authors denounced all of womankind for her constant quest to gain dominion over man. Noting that many of the great kingdoms

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16 *ibid.*, p. 384 (The Continuation).
17 *op. cit.*, p. 149.
18 tr. and ed. Rev. Montague Sumners (London, 1951), *Rev. Sumners*, on page xiii f. of his introduction to this edition selects 1486 as the most probable year for the first edition of *Malleus*. He also reports that there were fourteen European editions between 1487 and 1520, and at least sixteen between 1574 and 1669.
of the world had been overthrown by women, Kramer and Sprenger recorded the following as a chief example of their thesis:

The kingdom of the Romans endured much evil through Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, that worst of women. 19

Pursuing their avowed purpose to prove by argumentation the existence of witches and witchcraft, the authors asserted that "all witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable." And they contended that "witches may injure humanity by inducing an evil love in a man for a woman." 20 The type of woman most often affected by witchcraft is then described and the portrait is immediately applicable to Cleopatra:

...it must be said, as was shown in the preceding inquiry, that three general vices appear to have special dominion over wicked women, namely, infidelity, ambition, and lust. Therefore they are more than others inclined towards witchcraft, who more than others are given to these vices. Again, since of these vices the last chiefly predominates, women being insatiable, etc., it follows that those among ambitious women are more deeply infected who are more hot to satisfy their filthy lusts; and such are adultresses, fornicatresses, and the concubines of the great. 21

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19 ibid., p. 46.
20 ibid., pp. 47 and 115.
21 ibid., p. 47.
Implied in Renaissance references to witchcraft is a pejorative view of the nature of women; and the significance of these several works on Cleopatra, which were regarded as standard treatises in the sixteenth century, is strongly underlined when they are considered in that light. In addition, the antifeminism of the period expressed itself in the prevalent belief that lust was the primary motivating force of women. Woman's inherent lack of resistance to the passions focused upon her a sort of original sin and caused her to be regarded rather universally as the means for subverting order in nature and society.

John Knox entuned this theme in his First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women:

Nature I say, doth paynt them furthe to be weake, fraile, impacient, feble and foolish: and experience hath declared them to be unconstant, variable, cruell and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment. And these notable faultes have men in all ages espied in that kinde, for the whiche not onlie they have removed women from rule and authoritie, but also some have thought that men subject to the counsel or empire of their wyves were un worthie of all publike office.


First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women (London, 1558), p. 10.
Though these comparatively casual references to the story indicate in their unanimity the view of the history of Cleopatra which the Renaissance regarded as factual, they must, even when considered collectively, assume a subordinate place in importance to Plutarch's version of the story as it came to the sixteenth century in the translation of Thomas North. The extent to which Shakespeare, and, indeed, most of the authors already cited, were indebted to Plutarch has been so well covered by critics of all ages that perhaps here no more should be done than simply to locate the *Lives* in the age and tradition now under discussion. But since the purpose of this chapter is to investigate all of the treatments of the story which contributed to the popular substructure upon which the sixteenth century legend was built, and since North's translation was, in the Elizabethan period, the most frequently read and most widely accepted version of all the many works on the subject, it would seem beneficial to examine briefly the tale as North transmitted it.

It is convenient initially to point out that the character portrayals mentioned in the numerous works cited above appear in essentially the same form in the pages of North's translations. Antony was presented in his characteristic habit of a noble general whose decline was a direct result of his generally weak nature and of his inability
to make his will lord of his reason. Octavius, on the other hand, Plutarch presented as the resolute and continent ruler who must triumph in order to bring the Roman Empire once more under the control of a monarch. Towards Cleopatra and her regrettable sorcery over Antony, Plutarch, like the minor authors already examined, was consistently unrelenting:

Antonius being thus inclined, the last and extremest mischief of all other (to wit, the love of Cleopatra) lighted on him, who did waken and stirre up many vices yet hidden in him, and were never seen to any: and if any sparke of goodnesse or hope of rising were left him, Cleopatra quenched it straight and made it worse than before. 24

In so far as the interpretation of Plutarch is concerned, the author has left little room for doubt; but one means of additional insight, which has been rather consistently overlooked by critics, might be mentioned. In the evaluation of Plutarch's work and its influence upon Shakespeare, there has been little cognizance taken upon the "Life of Demetrius," with which the "Life of Marcus Antonius" is compared, or upon the "Comparison" of the two lives which Plutarch himself left for the reader's benefit. That the purpose of Plutarch in recording the life of Antony was to portray the fall of a great

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leader plagued by the vice of lust and incontinency is manifest in his comparable life of Demetrius which is clearly the life of a man

"more wantonly given to follow any lust and pleasure than any king that ever was; yet always very careful and diligent in dispatching matters of importance." A leader of forlorn hopes and lewd masquerades, juggling with kingdoms as a mountebank with knives; the lover of innumerable queens and the taker of a thousand towns...  

Plutarch had no romantic sympathy for a passion so grand that a ruler could afford to lose the world for it. He presented Antony's tragedy as a "calamitous visitation" which worked its spell upon the dangerous weaknesses in the hero's nature. His avowed purpose was to reveal what the result of intemperance in rulers could be, and he chose both a Greek and a Roman example to illustrate his point. Referring to the famous metaphor in Plato's *Phaedrus*, Plutarch concluded:

In the ende, the horse of the minde as Plato termeth it, that is so hard of rayne (I meane the unreyned lust of concupiscence) did put out of Antonius head, all honest and commendable thoughtes... (p. 986)

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Regarding Cleopatra, Plutarch consistently portrayed her against a background of witchcraft and evil magic. He labelled Cleopatra's charm over Antony as a "pestilent plague and mischief."

Later he reported that Antony was:

so ravished and enchaunted with the sweete poyson of her love, that he had no other thought but of her, and how he might quickly returne againe: more then how he might overcome his enemies. (p. 987)

Comparing Cleopatra with Octavia, Plutarch left no question as to what his own moral judgment was:

Cleopatra knowing that Octavia would have Antonius from her, and fearing also that if with her vertue and honest behavior... she did adde thereunto her modest kind love to please her husband, that she would then be too stronge for her, and in the end winne him away: she suitelie seemed to languish for the love of Antonius, pyning her body for lacke of meat. Furthermore, she every way so framed her countenaunce, that when Antonius came to see her, she cast her eyes upon him, like a woman ravished for joy. (p. 995)

Plutarch then went on to describe in some detail the "tricks" which Cleopatra used to keep Antony in torment; while afterwards, in the "Comparison," he concluded:

Even so Cleopatra oftentimes unarmed Antonius, and intised him to her, making him lose matters of great importaunce, and verie needefull journeys, to come and be dandled with her, about the rivers of Canobus and Taphosiris. In the ende, as Paris
fledde from the battel, and went to hide him selfe in Helens armes: even so did he in Cleopatraes armes, or to speak more properlie, Paris hidde him selfe in Helens closet, but Antonius to follow Cleopatra, fledde and lost the victorie. (p. 1012)

It can readily be determined that Plutarch, in writing the story of Antony, was not concerned with the love affair as such, but rather with the effect of the infatuation upon Antony personally and upon the Roman Empire as a whole. The devastating nature of Cleopatra's sorcery, which is the heart of the tragedy itself, is well-described:

...Antonius shewed plainely, that he had not onely lost the corage and hart of an Emperor, but also of a valliant man, and that he was not his owne man: (proving that true which an old man spake in myrth, that the soule of a lover lived in another body, and not in his owne) he was so caried away with the veine love of this woman, as if he had bene glued unto her, and that she could not have removed without moving of him also. (p. 1001)

Whatever future historians might have revealed about Cleopatra, whatever opinion the critic might have of the Roman writers who were responsible for transmitting her story, Plutarch's version of the tale represented to Shakespeare and his contemporaries the facts as they were believed to exist. By continual re-telling, the story from which Shakespeare drew the plot for his drama, and the
interpretation of that story, were no longer subject to question. Along with the orthodox version certain stock characters were expected to be presented and a depth of meaning which reached beyond the mere sequence of events narrated in the tale was expected to be conveyed. 27 To this body of facts and to the traditions of the episode, Shakespeare can be shown to have been remarkably faithful, just as his audiences would have expected him to be.

Though the historical accounts of Antony and of Cleopatra appearing in the sixteenth century have been demonstrated to possess a significant uniformity, it is also necessary, in determining the place which the Queen and the other characters in her story occupied in the popular imagination, to investigate what form the tale assumed in the purely literary treatments which issued from the same period.

The Countess of Pembroke made her contribution to the perpetuation of the tale when in 1592 she published her famous

translation of a French play by Robert Garnier. It is entirely possible that Shakespeare read this translation; and the supposition that it was read by many others in the wide circle in which Mary Pembroke occupied an important position is supported by the fact that it reached two editions within three years. The literary merits of the work are not part of the province of this paper, but the Countess' transmission of the historical subject matter of the play provides us with considerable insight into the story of Cleopatra as it was known to the Elizabethan public.

The Tragedie of Antonie unfolds in painfully Senecan fashion. The first act, of over two hundred and thirty lines, is one monologue from Antony in which he denigrates Cleopatra and bemoans his own downfall. Insisting that for Cleopatra he has foregone his country and his virtuous wife, he describes himself as a slave before her beauty and a captive of her allurements. Regretting the loss of his honor, Antony vows that Caesar will never capture him alive or use him as a symbol of triumph. Instead he labels Cleopatra his sole conqueror:

The Tragedie of Antonie, tr. Countess of Pembroke (London, 1595). Miss Mary Luce, ed. The Countess of Pembroke's "Antonie" (Weimar, 1897), reports that the only copy of the 1592 edition known to exist is in the British Museum. The second edition was published in 1595.
Thou only Cleopatra triumph hast,
Thou only has my freedome servile made,
Thou only hast me vanquisht: not by force
(For forste I cannot be) but by sweete baites
Of thy eyes graces, which did gaine so fast
Upon my liberty that nought remain'd. (I, sig. A\textsuperscript{v})

When he comments upon the nature of Cleopatra's charm, Antony
is unable to describe it as the gentle sting of Cupid's arrow. To
Antony, his infatuation is the work of Megaera, one of the three
Furies who patrolled the world punishing evil-doers:

Poore Antonie! alas what was the day,
The daies of losse that gained thethy love!
Wretch Antonie! since Maegaera pale
With snakie haires enchain'd thy miserie.
The fire thee burnt was never Cupids fire
(For Cupid beares not such a mortall brand)
It was some furies torch... (I, sig. A\textsubscript{2} f.)

Antony described his passion as the product of the "poisned cuppes" of
a "faire Sorceres"; he is "encharm'd," and she is an "enchaunter."
He is "sunke in the foule sinke" of "wanton love." (I, sigs. A\textsubscript{3} and A\textsubscript{4}).

The whole of the third act in like manner is given over to Antony's
soliloquizing and to his eventual confession that he is powerless to
free himself from Cleopatra's grasp. He compares himself to a sick man
mad with fever:

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All quotations from The Tragedie of Antonie refer to the
1595 edition.
Like to the sicke whose throte the feavers fire
Hath vehemently with thirstie drought enflam'd,
Drinkes still, albee the drinke he still desires
Be nothing else but fewell to his flame.
He cannot rule himselfe: his health's respect
Yeldeth to his distempered stomackes heates.

(III, Sig. D₃ ⁴f.)

Antony cites examples of his former glory in arms and then compares this illustrious beginning with the lowliness of his final days. He recognizes that his defeat is in actuality the result of the defeat of his reason by the overpowering charm of Cleopatra:

Well ought I curse within my grieved soule,
Lamenting daie and night, this senceless love,
Whereby my faire entising foe entrap'd
My hedelesse Reason, could no more escape.

(III, sig. E)

Antony voices the belief that princes must have the ability to rule themselves before they can effectively rule others and cites specifically the love of pleasure as the immediate cause of his plunge from power:

Nay, as the fatted swine in filthy mire
With glutted heart I wallowed in delights,
All thoughts of honor troden under foote.
So I me lost: for finding this sweet cupp
Pleasing my tast, unwise I drunke my fill,
And through the sweetnes of that poisons power
By steps I drave my former witts astralie.

(III, sig. E⁵)

At the end of the act he summarizes his situation as follows:
The wolfe is not so hurtfull to the folde,
Frost to the grapes, to ripened frutes the raine:
As pleasure is to Princes full of paine.

(III, sig. E²v)

Realizing that a noble death alone can restore honor to him, Antony resolves at the end of the act to die by his own hand.

Octavius appears only occasionally in the play, but his brief speeches support the thesis that his traditional role was that of the deliverer of the Roman Empire from the civil chaos caused by the Triumvirate. In Act III, Lucilius points out that pleasure works its greatest outrage on kings and describes the disorder and rebellion which invariably result when a ruler allows the "hurtful workes of pleasure" to take hold. Octavius, of course, is impervious to temptation, and thus is an ideal monarch and the natural candidate for relieving Rome of the evils of multiple rule. The conviction that a monarchy is the most desirable form of government is clearly elucidated in Act IV when Agrippa remarks to Octavius:

Now as of heav'n one onely Lord we know:
One onely Lord should rule this earth below.
When one self pow're is common made to two,
Their duties they nor suffer will, nor doe.
In quarell still, in doubt, in hate, in feare;
Meane while the people all the smart do beare.

(IV, sig. F²)

In so far as Cleopatra is concerned, she occupies what is
definitely a subordinate role in the play, as the title, *The Tragedie of Antonie*, might lead one to expect. In the first four acts she appears in only one scene, where her monologues reveal her to be passionate in her love for Antony but, as Furness expressed it, "a little proud" of her ability to ensnare him:

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My face too lovely caus'd my wretched case.
My face hath so entrap'd, so cast us downe,
That for his conquest Caesar may it thanke,
Causing that Antony one army lost
The other wholly did to Caesar yeld,
For not induring (so his amorouse sprite
Was with my beautie fir'de) my shameful flight.

(II, sig. B7)
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Throughout the drama, Cleopatra is portrayed as the direct source of Antony's overthrow. She is referred to as a "faire Sorceres," a "woman most unkinde," an "entising foe," and a "false she." Her skills are called "enchaunting," and her favors are described as being "wavering as the wind." Though she firmly resolves not to forsake Antony in his misfortune, she nonetheless clearly perceives of herself as the cause of his calamity. To the question from Eras, "Are you therefore cause of his overthrow?", Cleopatra responds, "I am sole cause: I did it, only I." In Act V, she makes a confession which expressly reveals her role in

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the tragedy:

Of you deare husband, whome my snares intrap'd:
Of you, whome I have plagu'd, whom I have made
With bloudy hand a guest of mouldie tombe:
Of you, whome I destroied, of you, deare Lord,
Whome I of Empire, honor, life have spoil'd.

(V, sig. G²)

In the fourth act the death of Antony is described by Dercetas, who reports the incident to Caesar. Caesar, with his customary wisdom, sees through to the heart of the problem:

I cannot but his tearefull chaunce lament,
Although not I, but his owne pride the cause,
And unchaste love of this Aegyptian.

(IV, sig. F³)

History has always proposed that Antony killed himself upon hearing the erroneous report of Cleopatra's death. However, Garnier had his own Antony reveal in advance his full intention to commit suicide by means of a dialogue in the third act through which Antony expressed long before Cleopatra's feigned death his firm intention to kill himself as a means of salvaging some remnant of his once glorious career. In the following lines it would be difficult to discover any suggestion from Antony of his willingness to give up the world for love:

Die, die I must: I must a noble death,
A glorious death unto my succour call:
I must deface the shame of time abus'd,
I must adorne the wanton loves I us'de,
With some courageous act: that my last day
By myne owne hand my spotts may wash away.

(III, sig. E$_{3}^{v}$)

The final act is devoted to Cleopatra, who continues to lament the results of her parasitic attachment to Antony while at the same time, with a spirit adumbrating Shakespeare's "serpent of old Nile," she curses fate for its cruel treatment of them all:

O cruell fortune! o accursed lot!
O plaguy love! o most detested brand!
O wretched joyes! o beauties miserable!
O deadly state! o deadly roialtie!
O hatefull life! o Queene most lamentable!
O Antony by my faulte buriable!
O hellish worke of heav'n! alas! the wrath
Of all the Gods at once on us is faine.

(V, sig. G$_{2}$)

Throughout the fifth act, Cleopatra asserts her intention to kill herself, but Garnier did not include in his story the actual death or describe the method in which she at last fulfills this promise. The feeling which a reader must infer from the play as it was written is that Cleopatra chose death as a final resort in her struggle to cling to the last vestige of her queenly pride. The peril of her position and her own fear of capture are underlined by the fact that she will not leave the monument to receive Antony's body because:

...she, who feared captive to be made,
And that she should to Rome in triumph goe,
Kept close the gate but from a window high
Cast downe a corde, wherein he was impackt.

(IV, Sig. F^6_V)

In the last analysis, though Antony has been her support and though, to her sincere sorrow, he is gone, it is the loss of her kingdom, and the fear of reprisal that cause Cleopatra to follow the example of her lover. Her death is not a purifying experience, or a supreme act of repentance, but rather the inevitable result of her witchcraft. In her final longings after Antony, strikingly similar in their general tone of sensuality to the end which Shakespeare accorded the Queen, there is no evidence of repentance or purification:

To die with thee, and dieng thee embrace:
My bodie joynde with thine, my mouth with thine,
My mouth, whose moisture burning sighes have dried
To be in one selfe tombe, and one selfe chest,
And wrapt with thee in one selfe sheete to rest.

(V, sig. G^{6 f.})

Much more significant as an indication of Garnier's own point of view and that which he expected spectators of the play to assume are the observations of the chorus as it appears from time to time in the drama. Through the chorus it can readily be determined that the theme of the play involves no glamorization of the love affair. After the first act, in which Antony delivers his long monologue regarding the overthrow of his greatness and the infidelity of Cleopatra, the
chorus bewails the destiny of men who are born to suffer. In the second act, after Philostratus has expounded upon the evils which love has brought upon Egypt, the chorus continues the same lament and completes the act with a description of the coming servitude of Egypt. In the third act, where Antony again laments Cleopatra's infidelity and resolves to die, the chorus praises voluntary death and reminds Antony that nothing except death alone can defend him from the exigencies of this life. And finally in the fourth act, after the messenger has announced the death of Antony, the chorus, composed of Roman soldiers, makes vows of peace and celebrates the beginning of the Augustan age in the Roman Empire. Certainly in Garnier's play, as the sixteenth century read it in translation by the Countess of Pembroke, the political theme is the major one and nowhere in it is Antony's downfall mollified by a romantic emphasis on the love affair. Cleopatra appears only as the beautiful but bewitching cause of Antony's catastrophe, the agent of imperfection because of whom, after the fashion of Hercules, his "conqu'ring clubbe at rest on wal did hang."

A sequel to the Countess' translation of *The Tragedie of Antonie* is the *Cleopatra* of Samuel Daniel, published about 1594. The play
begins at the point where Antonie ends and continues through the
death of Cleopatra. It appeared in numerous editions between 1594
and 1623, and the impressive number of reprints indicates a wide
circle of readers and makes feasible the supposition that Shakespeare
himself was familiar with the play. 31

The work by Daniel is similar, in its Senecan structure, to
the play by Garnier. No action takes place on stage, but instead
the plot unfolds through a series of monologues and dialogues de-
ivered by the principal characters. The entire first act is a
soliloquy by Cleopatra, and it is by means of this initial exposition that
her personality is revealed. First depicted after she learns of Antony's
death, she mourns her wretched lot, expresses a word or two of resi-
dual jealousy for Octavia, and bewails her poor children as the "luckles
issue of an wofull mother, the wretched pledges of a wanton bed
(I, sig. B\textsuperscript{4}v)." 32 Towards Antony she vows the most tender love,
though she also admits that she had never truly loved him before:

\begin{quote}
Now I protest I do, now am I taught
In death to love, in life that knew not how.
\textit{(I, sig. C\textsubscript{2})}
\end{quote}

31 The S. T. C. shows editions in the following years: 1594, 1595,
1599, 1601, 1602, 1605, 1607, 1609, 1611, 1623.
32 The Poetical Essays of Sam. Danyel, Newly Corrected and
Augmented (London, 1599). All quotations are from this edition.
Advancing the theme of pride which runs through the play, Cleopatra looks back upon Antony as the mainstay of her ambition:

While on his shoulders all my rest relide
On whom the burthen of m'ambition lay,
My Atlas, and supporter of my pride
That did the world of all my glory sway...

(I, sig. B3)

The chorus then comments upon the action in typically Senecan style.

The significance of the chorus in Daniel's play increases when it is pointed out that the chorus, usually composed of Romans, is in Daniel's play a group of Egyptians who comment upon the effect of Cleopatra's conduct upon the Egyptian people:

Behold what furies still
Torment their tortur'd brest,
Who by their doing ill,
Have wrought the worlds unrest.

And Cleopatra now
Well sees the dangerous way
She tooke, and car'd not how,
Which led her to decay.
And likewise makes us pay
For her disordred lust,
The int'rest of our blood:
Or live a servile pray,
Under a hand unjust,
As others shall thinke good,
This hath her riot wunne.
And thus she hath her state, herselene and us undunne.

The text is made most plaine
That flattry glos'd upon,
The bed of sinne reveal'd,
And all the luxurie that shame would have conceal'd. (I, sig. C3 f.)
Inasmuch as her faults have ruined Antony and have ended
the dynasty of the Ptolemies, Cleopatra feels that she must die in
order to express properly her shame. Death is considered not be-
cause her lover is dead but because there is no kingdom over which
she can hold sway:

Is th'honor, wonder, glory, pompe and all
Of Cleopatra dead, and she not dead?
(I, sig. B₃)

In addition, the fear of captivity is continually stressed and Cleo-
patra vows that Rome will never glory in her tears or see her
"scepter-bearing hands" bound up behind her. Many of her lamenta-
tions concern her state of captivity rather than the death of Antony:

Gone with the heate, of all, see what remaines,
This monument, two maides. and wretched I.
And I, t'adorne their triumphs am reserv'd
A captive, kept to honour others spoiles,
Whom Caesar labours so to have preserved...
(I, sig. B₄)

The obsession which Cleopatra feels toward her threatened captivity
is comparable to Shakespeare's treatment in Antony and Cleopatra
of the same part of the story. The theme of royal pride which is the
primary source of Cleopatra's motivation to join Antony in death is
readily discernible in Shakespeare as well as in Daniel and in most
other versions of the tale. Shakespeare's Cleopatra says:

Know, sir, that I
Will not wait pinion'd at your master's court;
Nor once be chastised with the sober eye
Of dull Octavia. Shall they hoist me up
And show me to the shouting varletry
Of censuring Rome: Rather a ditch in Egypt
Be gentle grave unto me! rather on Nilus' mud
Lay me stark naked, and let the water-flies
Blow me into abhorring! rather make
My country's high pyramids my gibbet,
And hang me up in chains! (V, ii, 52-62) 33

Finally, after pondering the situation in which she has propelled herself,
Cleopatra concludes in Daniel's play that "Tis sweet to die when we
are forc'd to live..." (I, sig. B 4  v). The loss of Antony is
not mentioned as the reason for her suicide; rather Cleopatra elects
to die because no sort of satisfactory life remains for her. As the
chorus indicates at the close of Act II, despair is the compelling agent
which drives Cleopatra to suicide. Despair is the source of that
courage which she must have to complete the act of suicide--
despair and a desire to die with the same flamboyance which has marked
her life:

Yet Opinion leaves not here,
But sticks to Cleopatra neere,
Perswading now, how she shall gaine
Honour by death, and fame attaine.
And what a shame it was to live,
Her kingdom lost, her Lover dead:

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33 Hardin Craig, Shakespeare (Dallas, 1931). All quotations
from Antony & Cleopatra refer to this edition.
And so with this persuasión led,
Dispaire doth such a courage give,
That nought else can her minde relieve...

(II, sig. D₄)

Caesar, typically, is presented as the saviour of the Roman Empire, though perhaps Daniel has portrayed him with slightly more coldness than is usually evident. Upon Cleopatra Caesar places the entire blame for the tragic happenings which have beset both of their nations:

Rise Queene, none but thy self is cause of all.
And yet, would all were but thine owne alone:
That others ruine had not with thy fall
Brought Rome her sorrowes, to my triumphs mone.
For breaking off the league of love and blood,
Thou mak'st my winning joy a gaine unpleasing:
Sith th'eye of greife must looke into our good,
Thorow the horror of our owne bloodshedding,
And all, we must attribute unto thee. (III, sig. E₃)

Dolabella, taking up the orthodox Roman distrust of the Queen, simply sees Cleopatra from the familiar viewpoint of the misogynist and attributes to her the common failings of womankind: "Take away weakenes, and take women too" (I, sig. F).  

The chorus further delineates wherein Cleopatra has failed by intoning the maxim, "kings' small faults be great offences," since these small openings grow into ever-widening passageways through which lust, license, and riot may enter. The large-scale faults of Antony and Cleopatra, therefore, because the heads of state committed
them, assume truly grandiose proportions and result in political upheavals of the greatest magnitude. Arius and Philostratus, the philosophers of the play, expound on the ruin which invariably follows after intemperance in rulers:

Who did not see we should be what we are,
When pride and ryot grew to such abounding.
When dissolute impietie possest
Th'unrespective mindes of Prince, and people:
When insolent Security found rest
In wanton thought, with lust and ease made feeble.
Then when unwary peace with fat-fed pleasure,
New-fresh invented ryots still detected,
Purchas'd with all the Ptolemies ritch treasure,
Our lawes, our gods, our mysteries neglected.
Who saw not how this confluence of vice,
This inundation of disorders, must
At length of force pay backe the bloody price
Of sad destruction, (a reward for lust.)

(III, sig. E\textsuperscript{v})

Having been convinced that there is, indeed, no way to escape the disgrace and humiliation of bondage, Cleopatra resolves to do away with herself:

When she perceiv'd all hope was cleane bereft her,
That Caesar meant to send her strait away,
And saw no meanses of reconcilement left her,
Worke what she could, she could not worke to stay.

(V, sig. I\textsuperscript{a})

How she accomplishes her death is reported by the Nuntius. At the end, the chorus summarizes the theme of the play by repeating the political implications of Cleopatra's fall; namely, the rise of Rome and
the fall of Egypt.

Daniel depicted the fall of Antony's leadership as resting upon the sins of lust. He depicted the fall of Cleopatra's empire as resting upon the sin of her ambition. The lovers' loss of each other is only an accessory pain, for clearly it is Antony's loss of power which causes him to commit suicide; and it is Cleopatra's failure to make satisfactory negotiations with Caesar which causes her to make final plans for death. The theme of this play is the direct opposite of "all for love and the world well lost." A world is lost; but Antony, Cleopatra's subjects, and the Queen herself mourn its passing.

Daniel's writings afford yet another opportunity to observe the Elizabethan regard for Cleopatra and also the Elizabethan opinion of Octavius, Antony, and Octavia as characters in the story. In Daniel's poem, A Letter Sent From Octavia to her Husband Marcus Antonius into Egypt, a commentary is found on the familiar cast of characters, and the famous romance on the Nile is seen through the eyes of Antony's rejected wife. 34 As one would expect, this portrayal

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34 In Certaine Small Workes... (London, 1607). All quotations refer to this edition.
of the Queen as an historical figure is anything but flattering to Cleopatra, "the staine of Egypt, and the shame of Rome." Addressing Antony, Octavia begins:

To thee (yet deere) though most disloiall Lord,  
Whom impious love keepe in a barbarous land,  
Thy wronged wife Octavia sendeth word  
Of th'unkind wounds received by thy hand,  
Grant Antony, o let thine eyes afford  
But to permit thy heart to understand  
The hurt thou dost, and do but read her teares  
That still is thine though thou wilt not be hers.

Although perhaps, these my complaints may come  
Wilst thou in th'armes of that incestuous Queene  
The staine of Aegypt, and the shame of Rome  
Shalt dallying sit, and blush to have them seene:  
Whilst proud disdainfull she, gessing from whome  
The message came, and what the cause hath beeene,  
Wil skorning saie, faith, this comes from your Deere,  
Now sir you must be shent for staying heere.

(Stanzas 1 and 2)

Throughout the poem Cleopatra is referred to with such epithets as a "royall concubine" and a "queene of lust"; while Antony is reported as being ensnared by an "Inchanter" who steps lithely between his heart and Octavia's in order to intercept all thought that issues between them (Stanzas 3 and 35). Octavia is presented as a modest and virtuous wife with enough spirit to plead her own cause. As a character, Shakespeare's Octavia has been regarded unsympathetically by most modern readers and hailed as "a dull foil to
Cleopatra." 35 But in this work she represents that unwavering feminine fidelity which was so much admired and esteemed in the Renaissance:

These walles that here do keepe me out of sight,
Shall keepe me all unspotted unto thee,
And testifie that I will do thee right,
Hile never staine thy house, though thou shame me:
The now sad chamber of my once delight,
Shall be the temple of my pietie,
Sacred unto the faith I reverence,
Where I will pay my teares for thy offence.
(Stanza 11)

As for Antony, he is portrayed as a ruler fallen from his place of dignity because of unbridled lust. Octavia implores him to recall his worthy past and to disentangle himself from the "Syren" who seeks to make him the prey of luxury:

For I could never thinke th'aspiring mind
Of worthie and victorious Antonie
Could be by such a Syren so declind,
As to be traynd a pray to Luxury: (Stanza 6)

Octavia accuses Cleopatra and her court of assailing his weakest nature where his judgment stands "least fortified." She likens Antony's loss of reason to a dream she has had wherein a hippopotamus rises from the muddy Nile with a "wanton mermaid" on his

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back who "ruled his course, and steered his fate" (Stanzas 48 and 49). When another hippopotamus attacks, the mermaid abandons him; but the hippo is lost without his ruler and instead of fighting his attacker he swims madly off to find his maid.

Octavia, in the final stanza, begs Antony to break away and pledges to him undying love:

Come, come away from wrong, from craft, from toile,
Possesse thine owne with right, with truth, with peace;
Breake from these snares, thy judgement unbeguile,
Free thine owne torment, and my griefe release.
But whither am I caried all this while
Beyond my scope, and know not when to cease?
Words still with my increasing sorrowes grow;
I know t'have said too much, but not ynow.
Wherefore no more but only I commend
To thee the hart that's thine, and so I end.
(Stanza 51)

Though the poem is of decidedly inferior quality, it nonetheless reveals the extent to which Octavia, condemned by later centuries for her dullness, was able to inspire sympathetic treatment from the sixteenth century.

There is another literary work of the general Shakespearean period from which insight into the Renaissance idea of the Cleopatra
story can be gained. This drama, entitled The False One, is the product most probably of Fletcher and Massinger collaborating about 1620 or slightly earlier. Though the date of the drama precludes the possibility that it had any direct influence on Shakespeare, it seems worth while to investigate the work as a product of Shakespeare's times. Actually the play concerns the period of Cleopatra's life when Caesar was in Egypt and consequently does not touch upon the general portion of the history covered by Antony and Cleopatra. Nonetheless it can be profitably explored as an index to the current interpretation of Cleopatra's character.

Cleopatra first appears in the play in the second scene of Act I where she resolves to ensnare Caesar:

...though I purchase
His grace with loss of my virginity,
It skills not, if it bring home majesty.
(II, ii, 104-6)

Though The False One takes for its title a reference to Septimius, the one thoroughly detestable character in the plot, actually it deals

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primarily with Julius Cæsar and to a large extent, with his subjection to the charms of Cleopatra. Cleopatra's intentions are explicitly stated in Act II when she says:

He is my conquest now, and so I'll work him;  
The conqueror of the world will I lead captive.  
(II, iii, 170-1)

The whole portrayal of Cleopatra is characterized by slightly bawdy humor. Especially does the scene in which she is presented to Caesar rolled up in a mattress take on an air of rough comedy as the soldiers make crude jokes about her and warn Caesar of her wiles:

Thou damned woman,  
Dost thou come hither with thy flourishes,  
Thy flaunts, and faces, to abuse men's manner?  
And am I made the instrument of bawdry?  
I'll find a lover for ye, one shall hug ye.  
(II, iii, 30-4)

Some serious comments also are made, especially by Scaeva, who warns Caesar:

Sir, if you be a soldier, come no nearer;  
She is sent to dispossess you of your honour;  
A sponge, a sponge, to wipe away your victories:  
(II, iii, 35-8)

And Scaeva also accosts Cleopatra:

Thou melter of strong minds, dar'st thou presume to Smother all his triumphs with thy vanities?  
And tie him, like a slave, to thy proud beauties,  
To thy imperious looks, that kings have follow'd,
Proud of their chains, have waited on?....

(II, iii, 190-4)

As in Shakespeare's play various personages remark upon
the Queen's power over their leader and upon the witchlike nature
of her charm over men:

She is a witch, sure,
And works upon him with some damn'd enchantment.

(III, ii, 32-3)

And

Nay, there's no rousing him; he is bewitch'd, sure,
His noble blood crudled and cold within him;
Grown now a woman's warrior. (III, ii, 1-3)

And

How cunning she will carry her behaviours
And set her countenance in a thousand postures,
To catch her ends! (III, ii, 35-6)

In a tremendous apostrophe to Love, Cleopatra begs for power
to bring Caesar to submission so that she then may laugh at him:

I will go study mischief,
And put a look on, arm'd with all my cunnings,
Shall meet him like a basilisk, and strike him.
Love, put destroying flames into mine eyes,
Into my smiles deceits, that I may torture him,
That I may make him love to death, and laugh at him!

(IV, ii, 50-5)

Certainly the determination of Shakespeare's Queen is echoed in the
lines:

I love with as much ambition as a conqueror,
And where I love will triumph. (IV, i, 126-7)
And the pride of Daniel's presentation is echoed in her assertion:

I was born to command, and I will die so.

(V, iv, 134)

Perhaps even the "infinite variety" of Shakespeare's Cleopatra is
set to another more rollicking tune with the description of Scaeva:

She will be sick, well, sullen,
Merry, coy, over-joyed, and seem to die,
All in one half-an-hour, to make an ass of him.

(III, ii, 36-8)

Scaeva in The False One, as does Enobarbus in Antony and
Cleopatra, constantly serves as the interpreter of the action. When
Caesar is initially tempted by Cleopatra's charms, it is Scaeva who
warns that an emperor is "a man that first should rule himself, then
others" (II, iii, 180). And in a fine speech to Cleopatra and Caesar
he seems almost to predict the temptation to which Antony eventually
is to succumb when he berates the two:

...Hear me, thou tempter;
And hear thou, Caesar, too, for it concerns thee,
And if thy flesh be deaf, yet let thine honour,
The soul of a commander, give ear to me:
Thou wanton bane of war, thou gilded lethargy,
In whose embraces, ease (the rust of arms),
And pleasure (that makes soldiers poor), inhabits.

Thou melter of strong minds, dar'st thou presume
To smother all his triumphs with thy vanities?
And tie him, like a slave, to thy proud beauties,
To thy imperious looks, that kings have follow'd,
Proud of their chains, have waited on? (II, iii, 182 f)
It is evident that there is a strong basis for comparison between Cleopatra's characterization in *The False One* and her portrayal in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Her changing moods, her pride, her redoubtable courage in *The False One*, all form verbal echoes of Shakespeare's play. Perhaps it was with tongue in cheek that the authors of *The False One* show Antony to be the only one of Caesar's army who approves the love affair. But a commentary on Shakespeare's play and how it might have been interpreted by contemporary audiences may be constructed when, in the midst of a scathing attack on Cleopatra from the soldiers, Antony says:

> Be not angry;  
> For, by this light, the women's a rare woman,  
> A lady of that catching youth and beauty,  
> That unmatch'd sweetness...  
> And eyes that are the winning'est orators  
> A youth that opens like perpetual spring,  
> And, to all these, a tongue that can deliver  
> The oracles of love. . . . (III, ii, 6f.)

To which the level-headed Scaeva replies:

> I would you had her  
> With all her oracles and miracles!  
> She were fitter for your turn., (III, ii, 19-21)

Before concluding the investigation of the Elizabethan judgment of the story of Antony and Cleopatra, which is preparatory to an analysis of Shakespeare's play, it is necessary to take cognizance of the fact that the drama of Shakespeare belongs in that wave of historical-political works which all but inundated the Elizabethan
period. Just to what extent a modern critic is at liberty to consider *Antony and Cleopatra* an historical rather than a purely tragic drama is debatable, and the arguments related to the question lie beyond the province of this paper. However, it seems apparent that a proper reading of the play requires that it be considered as a part of the great history-writing movement which flourished in the sixteenth century. As M. W. MacCallum remarked about the work, "On the one hand there is no play that springs more spontaneously out of the heart of its author, and into which he has breathed a larger portion of his inspiration; and on the other there is none that is more purely historical... ." 38

Schlegel provided a key for the meaning of this body of historical-political works when he said that their purpose was to furnish "examples of the political course of the world, applicable to all times." 39 Regarding the purposes which Shakespeare might have had for choosing to dramatize the story of Cleopatra, it must be observed that whereas Shakespeare's writings are never properly viewed as moralistic or

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even instructional, he nonetheless wrote in an age when history was considered primarily as an educational tool. Concerning the role of historiography, Amyot had said in his preface to his translations of Plutarch's Lives:

> For it is a certaine rule and instruction, which by example past, teacheth us to judge of things present, and to foresee things to come: so as we may knowe what to like of, and what to follow, what to dislike, and what to eschew.  

Similarly, Thomas Heywood, in his Apology for Actors, remarked:

> ...playes have made the ignorant more apprehensive, taught the unlearned the knowledge of many famous histories, instructed such as cannot reade in the discovery of all our English Chronicles:... For, or because, playes are writ with this ayme, and carried with this methode, to teache the subjects obedience to their king, to show the people the untimely ends of such as have moved tumults, commotions, and insurrections, to present them with the flourishing estate of such as live in obedience, exhorting them to allegiance, dehorting them from all trayterous and fellonious strategems.  

And Heywood extended history beyond domestic history:

> If wee present a forreigne history, the subject is so intended, that in the lives of Romans, Grecians,
It is immediately apparent to anyone who reads the works of history which flowed from the printing presses of sixteenth century England that they brought with them in their prefaces and dedications a recognized educational purpose for history. By the time Shakespeare wrote *Antony and Cleopatra*, this purpose of edification had been accepted as a commonplace; and each of the Shakespearean histories in its broadest sense elucidates a political problem of Elizabeth's day and brings to bear upon this problem the accepted political philosophy of the Tudors.

J. E. Phillips, in his book, *The State in Shakespeare's Greek and Roman Plays*, has made an especially valuable inquiry into the political content of Antony and Cleopatra as a work especially illustrative of Renaissance political thinking on the nature and structure of states. He points out that "Renaissance thinkers concerned with the welfare of states were particularly insistent that in the head of
a body politic reason must always rule over passion." 43 Phillips suggests that no clearer exposition of the Renaissance political principle involved in Antony's downfall could be desired than that given by Enobarbus when he summarizes the situation after the battle of Actium. To Cleopatra's query, "Is Antony or we in fault for this?" Enobarbus replies:

Antony only, that would make his will
Lord of his reason.... (III, xiii, 3-4)

Phillips found that each step in Antony's downward plunge from political and military power is linked with his passion for Cleopatra and the effect of this thralldom on his character. Whatever Antony's other qualifications, regardless of his prowess in arms and his magnanimity of character, his inability to rule himself clearly portends his inability to rule others. To the end Antony's political failure is consistently described in terms of the Renaissance conviction that in princes reason must always prevail over passion. Erasmus had phrased it better:

But you cannot be a king unless reason controls you; that, unless under all circumstances you follow the course of advice and judgment, You
cannot rule over others until you yourself have obeyed the course of honor. 44

Hardin Craig also has underlined the importance of the doctrine of the ideal prince as a significant aspect in the greatest of Renaissance literature: in Sidney's Arcadia, Spenser's Faerie Queene, and in Shakespeare's histories. Mr. Craig writes:

It is formally exemplified in the figure of Henry V, it is basal in the conception of Hamlet, and there is hardly one of Shakespeare's major heroes who does not illustrate in success or failure the ancient figure of the well-rounded, well-bred, and well-balanced character..." 45

S. L. Bethell, furthermore, has stressed that Shakespeare's beliefs are the common beliefs of Tudor England: his reverence for monarchy, his horror of usurpation, his high regard for order, and distinct distrust of the common people combine to form a typically Renaissance philosophy of history. 46 Bethell feels that Shakespeare did not take stories from history and merely convert them into drama. He states that Shakespeare rather took stories from history and interpreted

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them in terms of the political philosophy of his own day. Consequently, in his historical plays, events and philosophical speculation on them were more important than questions of character. To conclude, *Antony and Cleopatra* must be read in the historical tradition in which it was written. About Shakespeare's later "histories," Oliver Ellis has said:

> His editors may bind up his Roman plays with the tragedies, but the inscription on the flysheet shows that he regarded them as histories, and histories in the English sense."^\textsuperscript{47}

From a reading of the works of history and literature pertaining to the Cleopatra story which were written or newly translated in the sixteenth century, it is apparent that many critics have chosen to disregard the general literary and historical traditions upon which *Antony and Cleopatra* was constructed. The Emperor Octavius, whose role in history came to symbolize the inevitability and justice of the monarchic form of the state, represented the very highest ideals of moral strength and political acumen; Antony was popularly pictured as that most impressive candidate for the imperial mantle whose voluptuous and sensuous nature negated the praiseworthy deeds

of his more rational self; and Cleopatra was consistently portrayed as the same harlot and witch "wrinkled deep in time" who represented to the Elizabethan mind the depth to which the sensual soul of man could sink.

It is also apparent from even the briefest of glances into the historical and political literature of the period that Antony and Cleopatra must be considered as a part of the great history-writing movement which prevailed in Shakespeare's time. And if the methods and purposes of history are investigated, it must be noted that such works had for their primary purpose the edification of their readers through the events and personalities of ages past so that from the knowledge of former times they might better know how to conduct their own lives. According to the principles of Elizabethan historiography, past events have significance only to the extent that they serve as guides to the future. Shakespeare, in his many historical treatments, characteristically selected for dramatization events and lives which were well-known to his readers. As J. A. K. Thomson has pointed out:

A large proportion of the stories in Plutarch had, before he repeated them, passed through the popular imagination. The popular imagination is an unconscious dramatist, working on simple
traditional lines, turning fact not necessarily
into fiction but into something that often re¬
sembles a heroic legend. 48

A proper reading of Antony and Cleopatra, therefore, requires that it
be regarded from the outset as a part of popular history and that as
such it be recognized as illustrative of a theme applicable to modern
times. A proper interpretation, furthermore, requires that a reader
reconstruct the orthodox sixteenth century judgment of the characters
of the story. To do this he must divest himself of that natural repug¬
nance which the modern critic seems to feel toward Octavius and
his virtuous sister; he must understand that Antony's world, in the
estimation of the sixteenth century was not "well lost." Most vital
of all to the correct interpretation of the play, he must bring into
strict control that spontaneous inclination to adulate Cleopatra as
the "quintessential woman," and instead accept the conventional
sixteenth century judgment of her as "the staine of Egypt and the
shame of Rome."

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CHAPTER III

A Re-Evaluation of *Antony and Cleopatra*

The evidence which may be gathered from a study of the treatment of the Cleopatra story by writers of the sixteenth century bears testimony to the fact that the Renaissance did not admire Cleopatra. As unanimous as the judgment might seem in this respect, it would not alone outweigh any internal evidence which might be found in *Antony and Cleopatra* to support the thesis that Shakespeare had a clear intention to tell another version of the tale. Actually, however, when *Antony and Cleopatra* is read with a knowledge of the customary interpretation of the material clearly in mind, it becomes evident that there is no aspect of Shakespeare's story which was not adumbrated in the generally accepted Renaissance judgment of Cleopatra.

That Shakespeare portrayed essentially the same Cleopatra story which had become orthodox in the Renaissance is readily substantiated through a careful study of the play itself. It will be the purpose of this chapter to demonstrate that internal evidence supports the theory that Shakespeare's drama imparted to the tale an interpretation similar in all essential respects to that which it had received
by other Renaissance writers and translators. On the basis of this
evidence, certain problem areas of the play, which have proved
puzzling to critics, will be re-examined and clarified.

Of the many image themes which have been discovered by
critics, the ones which are most striking and which best direct the
course of the drama are associated with Cleopatra and fall under
two chief categories: references to magic and witchcraft, and re-
ferences to serpents and poisons.¹

The application of these particular image themes to the story
was not original with Shakespeare, though his imagination served to
intensify them and to increase their poetic effectiveness. Plutarch
had himself written that:

...Antonious was not Maister of him selfe, but
that Cleopatra had brought him beside
him selfe, by her charmes and amorous poysons:..."  
(p. 998)

Plutarch also referred to "the charmes and inchauntment of her passing
beautie and grace," to the "sweet poison of her love" which "enchanted"
Antony, and to her experiments with poisons which led to her selection

¹ For additional treatment of the imagery, see G. Wilson Knight,
The Imperial Theme (London, 1931), and Maurice B. Charney,
(April, 1957).
of the asp as the easiest way to die. Similarly, in Appian of Alexandria, Antony was described as being "abused" by the "sorceries and witchcrafts of hir;" and it will be recalled that Garnier in The Tragedie of Antonie referred to Cleopatra as a "faire sorceres" and an "entising foe." Daniel, in his Letter from Octavia, labelled Cleopatra an "Inchanter" and a "Syren" who sought to make Antony the prey of luxury. In the Fletcher-Massinger play, The False One, the picture persisted with the lines:

She is a witch, sure,
And works upon him with some damn'd enchantment.

Furthermore, in the Malleus Maleficarum, Cleopatra was not only used as a prime example of the existence of witchcraft in women, but her distinguishing characteristics were among those held up to scorn as being most often descriptive of women infected by a witch-like nature.

Since the witchcraft image was developed to some degree in every well-known Elizabethan treatment of the story, there was obviously a well-established precedent for portraying Cleopatra in magical terms. Shakespeare, following the precedent, developed the theme to its highest degree; and in Antony and Cleopatra references to witchcraft and magic are both general and specific. Egypt itself, since the
time of Exodus, had been regarded as a land of magicians. George Lyman Kittredge has observed that:

We note how Shakespeare, as is his wont, takes advantage of double meanings. Cleopatra was an Egyptian. Ay in very truth an Egyptian in every sense of the word: an Egyptian and a regular gypsy, Queen of Egypt and past-mistress of gypsy juggling! and these gypsies are not tricksters only; they are charmers in the literal sense. Magic is their trade.\(^2\)

John Dover Wilson also has pointed out that Shakespeare's age could hardly have helped believing in a "gipsy" Cleopatra. He remarks that the word is simply a popular form of "egyptian" or "gypcyan" and was applied to the nomads of Hindu stock who were supposedly from Egypt and who wandered about the English countryside early in the sixteenth century. Wilson concluded that:

...these vagabonds being notorious tricksters, fortune tellers, and dabblers in sorcery, "gipsy" was an apt epithet for one who, even in history, was regarded by Rome as a witch, who had ensnared three of Rome's leading men in succession, and whose wiles were as endless and ineluctable as her moods were changeable and fickle.\(^3\)

The N. E. D. supports the assertions of Wilson and Kittredge by

\(^2\) In his edition of *Antony and Cleopatra* (Dallas, 1941), p. xi.
\(^3\) In his introduction to the Cambridge edition of *Antony and Cleopatra* (Cambridge, 1950), p. xi.
listing the first meaning of "gypsy" as:

A member of a wandering race of Hindu origin, which first appeared in England about the beginning of the sixteenth century and was then believed to have come from Egypt. They have a dark tawny skin and black hair. They make a living by basket making, horse dealing, fortune-telling, etc.; and have been usually objects of suspicion from their nomadic life and habits.

In addition, the N. E. D. gives a secondary meaning as follows:

A contemptuous term for a woman, as being cunning, deceitful, fickle, or the like; a "baggage," "hussy," etc.

The term gyptian, then, connoted mystery, sorcery, and general distrust, as did its derivative form, "gypsy," both of which were applied freely to Cleopatra.

The supernatural and magical qualities which seem to distinguish both Cleopatra and Egypt itself are more fully delineated by specific references which occur through the entire play. At the very beginning of the drama, Philo condemns Antony for becoming the bellows and the fan to cool a gypsy's lust" (I, i, 9-10). Later in that same act, Antony pledges that he "must from this enchanting queen break off" (I, ii, 132); while Cleopatra, in a frank avowal of her policy of making him her prey, exclaims to Antony, "Ah, ha! you're caught" (II, v, 10). Pompey perpetuates the allusion in the second
act with one of the most unmistakable statements in the play:

But all the charms of love,
Salt Cleopatra, soften thy waned lip!
Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both!

(II, i, 20-2)

And, as if appealing to Cleopatra to use her magic potions, Pompey exhorts her to:

Tie up the libertine in a field of feasts,
Keep his brain fuming; Epicurean cooks
Sharpen with cloyless sauce his appetite;
That sleep and feeding may prorogue his honour
Even till a Lethe’d dulness! (II, i, 23-7)

After the battle of Actium, Scarus succinctly refers to Antony as "the noble ruin of her magic" (III, x, 19). In Act IV, ii, 37, Antony exclaims, "Now the witch take me"; and in various places addresses Cleopatra as a "great fairy" (IV, viii, 12), a "foul Egyptian" (IV, xii, 10), "a spell" (IV, x, 43), and a woman "most monster-like" (IV, xii, 36). When Cleopatra's treachery becomes obvious, Antony turns on her madly and unveils once again an unmistakable portrait:

O this false soul of Egypt! This grave charm,
Whose eye beck'd forth my wars, and call'd them home;
Whose bosom was my crownet, my chief end,
Like a right gipsy, hath, at fast and loose,
Beguiled me to the very heart of loss.

(IV, xii, 25-9)

When Cleopatra enters after the speech, Antony employs the formula of exorcism in his greeting, "Ah, thou spell! Avaunt!" (IV, xii, 30),
before he cries, "The witch shall die" (IV, xii, 47).

The whole treatment of Egypt and of things Egyptian imparts to the drama an aura of mystery and strangeness. The crocodile is a "strange serpent," observes Lepidus (II, vi, 54), and the description by Antony of those remarkable Egyptian crocodiles suggests the mystery which surrounds the foreign. "Rare," blending with "strange," is a typical word throughout the drama and is applied specifically to Cleopatra, that "rare Egyptian" (II, ii, 23). Consistently portrayed against a background of the unreal, Cleopatra is waited upon by mermaids and smiling dimpled Cupids. Comparable on the river Cydnus to Venus, she later appears "in the habiliments of the goddess Isis" (III, v, 17). She fascinates mysteriously though her lip is "waned" by years. She is "with Phoebus' amorous pinches black, and wrinkled deep in time" (I, v, 28). As G. S. Griffiths has pointed out,

Enobarbus, the best guide to Shakespeare's attitude to his creature, does not think of her as a person or a character at all; she is a phenomenon, "a wonderful piece of work." 4

The subtly evil effect which the witchcraft imagery

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affords is heightened by the related theme of serpents and poison.

Daniel Stempel, in an article published in the *Shakespeare Quarterly*,
writes that

The themes of poison and serpents are intertwined throughout the play, culminating in the final scene when the asp, a poisonous serpent, cuts the knot intricate and ends Cleopatra's career.⁵

Audry Yoder found that Shakespeare compared characters to animals most frequently with hostile intent and points out that "references to fierce, treacherous, cruel, and traditionally lustful animals intensify the audience's repugnance for the evil of individual characters." ⁶

G. Wilson Knight has written that serpents, of all beings, were the most remote from human understanding and that therefore their picturesque strangeness and dangerous unreality struck a particular fear. The name "Nile," he feels, brims with the "very emotional colour of the river itself sinuously winding through the rich desert ooze, and both suggest the serpent to which it gives birth, the 'serpent of old Nile,' the 'pretty worm of Nilus'." Knight found that since

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⁵ "The Transmigration of the Crocodile," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, VII, 68.

⁶ *Animal Analogy in Shakespeare's Character Portrayal* (New York, 1947), p. 34. After making the above statement, Yoder later realizes what such a proof does to the "serpent of old Nile" and quickly lists the application of the serpent theme to Cleopatra as an exception to Shakespeare's customary hostile use of animal imagery!
the image suggests sinuous grace and fascination joined to danger,
its appropriateness in connection with Cleopatra is evident. 7

Once again the general image pattern is supported by numerous
specific references. In the first act, Cleopatra by her own words iden-
tifies herself as a poisonous serpent:

He's speaking now,
Or murmuring 'Where's my serpent of Old Nile?'
For so he calls me: now I feed myself
With most delicious poison. (I, v, 24-7) 8

She rages at the messenger with a distinctly witchlike oath:
"The most infectious pestilence upon thee!" (II, v, 61). Twice she
employs serpents in curses which, in her jealous rages over Antony,
she flings upon Egypt:

Melt Egypt into Nile! and kindly creatures
Turn all to serpents! (II, v, 78-9)

And again:

So half my Egypt were submerged and made
A cistern for scaled snakes! (II, v, 94-5)

8 Daniel Stempel (see note 5) insists that emphasis in the
lines above should be placed on myself: "The implication of these
lines in Cleopatra's reverie is that hitherto she has been feeding
her delicious poison to Antony."
In the third act, Cleopatra invokes death by poison as her punishment if she has been unfaithful to Antony (III, xiii, 158-60). Finally, Antony, in his rebellion against Cleopatra, compares his fury to the pangs that issued from the poisoned shirt of Nessus which charmed Hercules:

'Tis well thou'rt gone,
If it be well to live: but better 'twere
Thou fell'st into my fury, for one death
Might have prevented many. Eros, ho!
The shirt of Nessus is upon me: teach me,
Alcides, thou mine ancestor, thy rage.
(IV, xii, 39-44)

Earlier in the play Antony had referred quite simply to his days in Egypt as the time when

poisoned hours had bound me up
From mine own knowledge. (II, ii, 90)

The themes of witchcraft and magic in combination with the imagery of serpents and poison produce an effect of evil which permeates the entire play. The depravity thus suggested is intensified by the continual references made to Cleopatra as a harlot. These references coincide with Cleopatra's sixteenth century reputation, as it is revealed in the various treatments of her story, and indicate that Shakespeare, along with his contemporaries, regarded the Queen as a witch of love who had transformed Antony into "the noble ruin of
her magic."

Regarding the nature of the infatuation which existed between the two lovers, the play abounds with statements made by numerous onlookers and by the principals themselves. In the first act, Caesar implores Antony to leave his "lascivious wassails" (I, iv, 56) and deplores the infatuation which causes him "to tumble on the bed of Ptolemy; to give a kingdom for a mirth" (I, iv, 17-18). The second act produces similar judgments from the Roman soldiers. Pompey reports that

Mark Antony
In Egypt sits at dinner, and will make
No wars without doors: (II, i, 11-13)

Pompey takes pride, moreover, in the fact that the uprisings which he has instigated have been sufficiently effective that they

Can from the lap of Egypt's widow pluck
The ne'er-lust-wearied Antony (II, i, 37-8)

Agrippa, in a conversation with Enobarbus, exclaims

Royal wench!
She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed:
He plough'd her and she cropp'd. (II, ii, 231-33)

to which Enobarbus replies

other women cloy
The appetites they feed; but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies; for vilest things
Become themselves in her; that the holy priests
Bless her when she is riggish. (II, ii, 241-45)

The Roman attack on Cleopatra's character continues in the third act when Caesar announces that Antony has "given his empire up to a whore" (III, vi, 66-7); and Scarus brands her as "yon ribaudred nag of Egypt" (III, x, 10).

Some of the most direct appraisals of the situation are made by Cleopatra and Antony themselves. In the last act Cleopatra refers to their escapades as "our Alexandrian revels" (V, ii, 218) and worries lest in Rome she might see on the stage "some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness in the posture of a whore" (V, ii, 219-21). Earlier in the play she has languourously demanded:

Give me some music; music, moody food
Of us that trade in love. (II, v, 11-12)

Antony, meanwhile, has labelled her a "triple-turn'd whore!" (IV, xii, 13), a "vile lady!" (IV, xiv, 22), "a boggler" (III, xiii, 110), and "the greatest spot of all thy sex" (IV, xii, 35-6). Upon her past deeds and present conduct, Antony delivers what is probably the most bitter statement in the play when he accosts her in Act III:

I found you as a morsel cold upon
Dead Caesar's trencher; nay, you were a fragment
Of Cneius Pompey's; besides what hotter hours,
Unregister'd in vulgar fame, you have
Luxuriously pick'd out: for, I am sure,
Though you can guess what temperance should be,
You know not what it is. (III, xiii, 116-22)

The key to a correct interpretation of Antony and Cleopatra seems to reside without doubt in the interpretation of the character of Cleopatra, who symbolizes the upheaval in the natural order of things, and in the character of Antony, upon whom Cleopatra's destructive powers work. It is evident that if Antony and Cleopatra is to be correctly appraised, the reader cannot substitute his own values for Renaissance values. Critics have been almost unanimous in their treatment of the work as an example of the triumph of love, but James E. Phillips has shown that Shakespeare's plays on classic themes are concerned with the restoration of health to a diseased state. Expressed in its broadest terms, the fundamental problem in these plays is the problem of order. If the political theme is indeed dominant, the entire play possesses a significance which has not been apparent to those who have followed the conventional romantic approach.

Since the paramount value in Shakespeare's classical plays

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is the stability of the state, the morality which would have been apparent to the sixteenth century becomes clear. To the Renaissance mind, microcosm and macrocosm -- nature, the state, and man -- existed and operated according to the same rules of order. In a cosmology such as this, the change of place involved a change of value which in turn constituted a subversion of order and introduced a disturbance which reverberated throughout the cosmos. The violation of order thus led to the creation of chaos.

Chaos on the political level was especially feared by men of the Renaissance, and Shakespeare's classical plays reflect this fear. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony's domination by Cleopatra is an unnatural reversal of the roles of man and woman, and thus it is a subversion of order. On the psychological level, this subversion of order results in the unnatural dominance of reason by will in Antony's character, and, on the political level, it results in the struggle for control of the Roman Empire. Cleopatra, as a symbol of unbridled desire, represents a revolt against the rule of reason. She is the agent of Antony's tragic fall. She preys upon his sensuous nature to the point that it defeats his reason. When the play ends, it is Octavius, his reason having shielded him against temptation, who triumphs and thus returns the state to order. Antony's conduct,
not being rational, brings about his inevitable fall. As Virgil K. Whitaker has suggested:

... The tragic action of the play is centered upon Antony, who has so yielded himself to the passion of love that it has possessed his will and dethroned his reason.
... In developing this interpretation, Shakespeare again built to a crucial choice.... It is obviously immoral for Antony to fail in his duties as ruler and to throw away the lives of his followers. Elizabethan drama from Gorboduc to Lear is clear on that point.

In the opening scene Antony subordinates the welfare of the state to the gratification of his own desires:

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch Of the ranged empire fall! (I, i, 33-4)

Later Cleopatra echoes him with her enraged "Melt Egypt into Nile!" (II, v, 78). This attitude of Antony's emanates from the destruction of his psychological balance. Antony gives vivid expression to the doctrine that "whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad. ": Enobarbus calls our attention to the fact that Antony "would make his will Lord of his reason" (III, xiii, 3-4); while in the third act Antony clearly perceives his own predicament:

10 Shakespeare's Use of Learning (San Marino, Cal., 1953), p. 315.
But when we in our viciousness grow hard—
O misery on't!—the wise gods seel our eyes;
In our own filth drop our clear judgments; make us
Adore our errors; laugh at's, while we strut
To our confusion... . (III, xiii, 111-15)

That Antony's reason has been overpowered is indicated by the fact
that he has interchanged roles with Cleopatra and thus has opened the
doors to the chaos which is invariably subsequent to such a violation
of order. Octavius describes him as

not more manlike
Than Cleopatra, nor the queen of Ptolemy
More womanly than he. (I, iv, 5-7)

Canidius also observes where the danger lies: "So our leader's led,
and we are women's men" (III, vii, 70-1).

Antony is able to read his own misfortune, but he proves
powerless to act upon the knowledge and avert tragedy:

I must from this enchanting queen break off:
Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know,
My idleness doth hatch. (I, ii, 132-4)

Later he laments to Cleopatra:

Egypt, thou knew'st too well
My heart was to thy rudder tied by the strings,
And thou shouldst tow me after: o'er my spirit
Thy full supremacy thou knew'st, and that
Thy beck might from the bidding of the gods
Command me. (III, xi, 56-61)

Octavius sums up the case against Antony by berating him for using
the times when there are great issues at stake:

'tis to be chid

As we rate boys, who, being mature in knowledge;
Pawn their experience to their present pleasure,
And so rebel to judgment... (I, iv. 30-3)

Finally, Enobarbus, noting Antony's ill-advised recoil to valor,
speaks of the "diminution in our captain's brain" (III, xiii, 198)
which has brought about the loss of reason and portends his certain downfall.

The relation of the role of Cleopatra to the tragedy of Antony
is made more understandable if it is considered in the light of the prevalent belief of the time that eroticism is the primary motivating force of women. Because of their inherent lack of resistance to the passions, women were regarded as the agents for subverting order in nature and society. When the play is read against this background, the imagery of the drama, especially those themes involving witchcraft, serpents, and poisons, clarify and support the many carnal references and the continually unfolding pattern of lust and physical gratification. Thus Cleopatra becomes a symbol of unbridled desire. Cleopatra was, in the Elizabethan mind, a sort of Circe figure. She was beautiful and alluring, but nonetheless a witch with magic power to destroy. In the end, like Circe, she fell in love with the man she meant to conquer. But she conquered him
nonetheless because her witchcraft warred a victorious battle with reason and balance in Nature.

If a correct reading of *Antony and Cleopatra* places the Queen in a framework of magic imagery and underscores the witch-like nature with which she has been endowed, then those "inconsistencies" of plot and characterization which have perplexed critics disappear, and it becomes apparent that Shakespeare underwent no violent reversal of intention as the drama unfolded.

It is not the purpose of this paper to present a critical analysis of the drama, but rather to suggest the proper historical background for the play. However, there are a few scenes in the drama which have caused such universal concern among critics that it would seem helpful to examine them briefly in the light of the historical findings of this paper. If a re-appraisal of the traditional romantic approach to *Antony and Cleopatra* is to have any good effects, it would seem likely that they would appear in the areas where the most heated debates have transpired regarding Shakespeare's intentions.

Cleopatra's dismissal of the messenger has elicited the concern of countless critics who have found in the lines (II, v, 23-74) strong evidence for her early shrewish ways, but who have been unable to
reconcile such inhuman conduct with her more appealing behavior in the last act. According to G. Wilson Knight, "she shows the most callous and inhuman cruelty," and, in this scene specifically, is "merciless, a Jezebel of wrath." 

L. L. Schücking also cited the scene as an example of the early conduct of Cleopatra, which he found to be utterly inconsistent with her later sublimity. 

There has, in addition, been a body of critics who have attempted to mitigate on a variety of editorial grounds Cleopatra's obviously heartless treatment of the messenger. Typical of this group of critics is Joseph S. Stull, who published an article dedicated to showing that a literal interpretation of the passage conflicts with the rest of the play. Therefore, he reasons, the play must have been transmitted with some important element, which would clarify the scene, missing. Stull writes:

That Cleopatra should exhibit, even momentarily, such cold-hearted malevolence violates the spirit of the play. ... No other incident in the play lends support to the charge that Cleopatra is heartless, merciless, or callously cruel.

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11 op. cit, pp. 290, 299.
But the arguments of Stull and those who have followed after him rest on their nineteenth and twentieth century convictions that Cleopatra is a tragic heroine. This reluctance to attribute to her those qualities which to the sixteenth century formed her essential character have led to their distrust of the play as it was written. If, however, the character of Cleopatra is seen in relation to the sixteenth century judgment of her; if she is viewed as a witch with magic power to destroy as well as to charm; then the messenger episode falls neatly into the pattern which Shakespeare was attempting to create. Sudden outbursts of temper would compliment the character of a Circe whose fits of anger had already become famous for being "greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report" (I, ii, 53-4). In fact, the whole episode is strongly witch-like in its basic presentation, the mental pictures conjured by it being almost tantamount to the witch scenes of fairy tale origin. When the messenger enters, Cleopatra assails him and the storm begins to brew:

...If Antony
Be free and healthful, --so tart a favour
To trumpet such good tidings! if not well,
Thou shouldst come like a Fury crown'd with snakes (II, v, 37-40)

After the messenger delivers his fateful news of Antony's marriage to Octavia, Cleopatra explodes with all of the fire and picturesque
wrath which a fairy tale witch could muster:

The most infectious pestilence upon thee!

(II, v, 61)

followed by:

Hence,
Horrible villain! or I’ll spurn thine eyes
Like balls before me; I'll unhair thy head;
Thou shalt be whipp'd with wire, and stew'd in brine,
Smarting in lingering pickle. (II, v, 62-6)

Her casual disconcern for her own power over others is illustrated in her comment after the women plead for the innocent man: "Some innocents 'scape not the thunderbolt" (VI, v, 77). Likewise, Cleopatra's change of heart towards the messenger near the end of the scene fits into the general portrait, for her quick changes of mood and violent reversals of emotion are part of her basic composition.

Another scene in Antony and Cleopatra which has proved disheartening to critics intent upon glorifying Cleopatra is the Seleucus episode (V, ii, 111-190). For those who regard Cleopatra's death as the attainment of a lofty nobility, the deceit involved in her making a false account of her possessions and her subsequent indignation at Seleucus provide a disturbing discrepancy of characterization. M. W. MacCallum believes that Shakespeare envisioned her as saving some
possessions so that she might depart to meet Antony in death with
due pomp and state. MacCallum expresses the opinion that she
saves her regalia for a "last display" and that she couldn't have
revealed this motive without divulging her secret plan for death.
MacCallum writes:

We can admire her "cunning past man's thought"
in turning the whole incident to account as proof
that she was willing to live on sufferance as
protegee of Caesar. 14

H. H. Furness, on the other hand, thinks there is really no explanation
for her flare-up with Seleucus. So contradictory does the scene seem
to be to his previous presentment of Cleopatra as a virtuous wife that
he is not able to work it into Shakespeare's scheme at all. Furness
writes:

That she should descend to low, unqueenly
dishonesty is sordid enough, but that she
should attempt, while showering opprobrious
epithets on her Treasurer, to scratch out
his very eyes with her nails is a lower depth
to which no admiration, however ardent, can
follow her. 15

As an excuse for her actions, Furness quotes the German critic,
Adolf Stahr, who adopted the popular apology that Cleopatra pre-
arranged with Seleucus to effect the scene in order to disguise fur-
ther her secret design to kill herself. L. L. Schücking finds the
episode utterly misplaced and out of keeping with the character of
the newly metamorphosed tragic heroine. "... After she has
solemnly announced her firm resolution to die we no longer under-
stand why she still wishes to conceal her jewels." 16 On the other
hand, E. E. Stoll, who has developed the argument that Cleopatra's
consistency resides in her feminine inconsistency, cites the scene
as simply another example of her winning unpredictability and a tribute
to her willingness to compete with Caesar strictly for the sake of
continuing the game. 17

If, however, it is accepted that Shakespeare adhered to the
traditional treatments of the story, the Seleucus episode becomes
merely another example of Cleopatra's scheming, another monument
erected to her volatile nature. Whether the view is taken that she
deliberately deceives Caesar in order to serve her own selfish ends,

16 op. cit, p. 144.
17 "Cleopatra," Modern Language Review, Vol. 23 (1928),
. 158.
or whether the traditional thought, based on Plutarch, is adopted that she deceived Caesar in order to safeguard her secret plans to die, the scene still must be regarded as another example of her cunning and violent temper. Once again her fearsome curses and demoniacal madness contribute to the witch-like atmosphere; while her self-conscious reference to "hired" love rings of a certain frantic insincerity:

O slave, of no more trust
Than love that's hired! What, goest thou back? thou shalt
Go back, I warrant thee; but I'll catch thine eyes,
Though they had wings: slave, soulless villain, dog!
O rarely base! (V, ii, 154-58)

The final episode which calls for especial attention is the fifth-act death of Cleopatra. The traditional romantic approach to this famous finale has been to regard Cleopatra in the role of a tragic heroine who meets death with a nobility, sublimity, and courage unparalleled in fiction; whereas Antony is envisioned as having lost the world for love and as having thereby gained more than he lost. It was A. C. Bradley who wrote:

The greatness of Antony and Cleopatra in their fall is so much heightened by contrast with the world they lose and the conqueror who wins it, that the positive element in the final tragic
impression, the element of reconciliation, is strongly emphasized. 18

R. H. Case, in the introduction to his edition of Antony and Cleopatra, acquiesces:

But this is all: the riotous life of pleasure betrays its charm beside its cost, and the ultimate effects of all the moralist would condemn are moral and not immoral. There is a temporary "diminution in our captain's brain" as a permanent one in his fortunes, but all that is great in him, his heart-winning magnanimity in its various manifestations, is conspicuous as ever... 19

It once again must be pointed out that the twentieth century critics have perpetuated the interpretation which the romantics had developed earlier. Schücking was so convinced of Cleopatra's inward conversion and of the sublimity of her death that he felt she had "but little in common with the harlot of the first part." 20 J. I. M. Stewart, though disagreeing with Schücking's analysis of the characterization of Cleopatra, concurs in Schücking's judgment that Cleopatra achieves

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20 op. cit, p. 132.
tragic dimensions in the last act:

If once more we are made aware that Cleopatra -- in the somewhat bald phrase of Professor Stoll -- is "still the same old girl" we are aware also of holding her in a new estimation, and one disconcerting to our traditional social judgments. In what she says there is a trick of the old rage -- but our preponderant impression is of a woman who has achieved an unexpected spiritual stature. 21

It is this firm intention on the part of critics to deify Cleopatra that has led to the critical complications concerning the play. The "inconsistencies" of characterization and structure which have been noted originate with the critics' failing to regard Cleopatra in the light of the Renaissance judgment of her and of her colleagues. The following quotation from S. L. Bethell exemplifies the sort of post-mortem criticism which has been applied to the play:

In Antony and Cleopatra, Shakespeare returns to the old problem: what are the positive bases of the good life? He finds them in the affections, and the affections as rooted deep in the sensual nature. Of these Cleopatra is the symbol, sensual even in death; for, paradoxically, it is these Egyptian values which must survive death. Caesar, the worldly wise, is "ass

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However shocking to the Nordic man, this position is theologically orthodox. Caesar's sins are deeper-seated and more deliberate than the sins of Antony and Cleopatra, and his heart is entirely set on the passing world.  

However reasonable this approach might seem to the twentieth century; however sympathetic the twentieth century might be to "Egypt" as opposed to "Rome," the fact is that the interpretation of Bethell and others who follow in his pattern is plainly not based on historical fact or fiction as it was known to the Elizabethan and is clearly dissimilar to the common interpretation of the tale which prevailed in Shakespeare's time.

The same judgment must be made of Eugene M. Waith's criticism of the play. Waith writes that Antony represented the complete man and that Cleopatra's hope for Antony's future was of the highest and most inclusive order. Caesar became the scheming Machiavellian whereas Antony's excesses, as seen through Cleopatra's eyes, became symbols of his great bounty and of his love. Though

this interpretation may seem sound to a twentieth century reader, and may well be the account which Shakespeare would have given had he written three hundred years later than he did, it is useless to superimpose upon the sixteenth century any political and moral beliefs which would have been heretical at the time.

In addition, John Dover Wilson indulges himself in a fond look at the play and in a bit of speculation as to the nature of the tragedy. It is curious that Wilson, who recognized Falstaff as a descendant of the Vice of the morality plays, should have failed to see that Cleopatra was (to Shakespeare) of the same diabolical ancestry.²⁴ Yet Wilson writes:

If Antony's supreme virtue is magnanimity, hers is vitality. And because she, "all fire and air," is also the genius of the play, vitality is its true theme; vitality as glorified in them both, and in the form which Shakespeare most admired: "The nobleness of life," the strength and majesty of human nature, its instincts of generosity, graciousness and large-heartedness; its gaiety of spirit, warmth of blood, "infinite variety" of mood. The play is, in short, its author's Hymn to Man...²⁵

Though such a purpose would be a lofty one for a playwright, and though

²⁴ The Fortunes of Falstaff (Cambridge, 1945), p. 22.
such a theme would be quite suitable for drama, it does not appear likely, in view of the history of the times and the literary tradition of which the play was a part, that Shakespeare shared Mr. Wilson's purpose or employed his theme.

Cleopatra's death in the fifth act has proved to most critics to be the most fascinating portion of the play. That Shakespeare graced Cleopatra's dying moments with courage and dignity would never be questioned by any reader. But it also seems apparent that Shakespeare's play is rooted deep in the beliefs and conventions of the century: An existing order is violated, the consequent conflict and turmoil are portrayed, and order is restored by the destruction of the force or forces that originally violated it. 26 Cleopatra represents the seat of the violation of order and therefore she must be destroyed, though to destroy her means to destroy "a wonderful piece of work." The story, the traditional treatment of it, and the nature of the historical literature of which Antony and Cleopatra was a part, preclude the possibility that Cleopatra assumes the role of co-protagonist and, by virtue of her suicide, achieves a tragic death.

26 Theodore Spencer, Shakespeare and the Nature of Man (New York, 1942), p. 73.
Though the title *Antony and Cleopatra* may be taken as a suggestion of parallelism, it may just as easily be interpreted as a description of two opposing forces. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to challenge the opinion of J. W. MacKail who asserts that the play represents the tragedy of "Antony and Cleopatra, and of both of them equally," or of G. S. Griffiths who writes:

> The conventional view of the play's structure is, I suppose, ... based on Plutarch, that it is Antony's tragedy. If my contention is right, Cleopatra is even more important structurally and spiritually. Cleopatra, as Lady Macbeth does not, transcends the hero.  

Nor is it possible to agree with Willard Farnham, who, along with many others, expresses the conviction that

> Technically the protagonist of *Antony and Cleopatra* is Antony, but one finds it difficult to think of Cleopatra as the less important tragic figure of the play, and one finds it impossible, even if one is proof against her spell, to give less attention to her than to her "man of men." Both Antony and Cleopatra are finished studies in paradoxical nobility, and the title of their tragedy, pairing their names as it does, is appropriate.  

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In contrast with the points of view expressed above, it seems evident that if the political theme is given sufficient emphasis and if the traditional roles of Octavius and Antony are compared with the traditional roles of Cleopatra, then Cleopatra must be regarded not as the tragic protagonist but rather as the fatal agent of Antony's downfall.

When Cleopatra is regarded as a sorceress, her death takes on a mysterious quality which is well adapted to the play as a whole. The final magic begins when Dolabella confides to Cleopatra that Caesar will, indeed, parade her captive back to Rome. At this point Cleopatra concludes her plans to die. She has "immortal longings"; she speaks in terms of the satisfaction of desires. How conscious she is of the kind of life she is leaving behind: "No more the juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip" (V, ii, 284). But she can not think of life without the magic which she has known, without power, without her supernatural ability to bewitch. The scene then falls into the hands of the rustic clown who reminds the reader with jests of Cleopatra's basic nature:

You must not think I am so simple
but I know the devil himself will not
eat a woman; I know that a woman is a
dish for the gods, if the devil dress her not.
But, truly, these same whores_on devils do
the gods great harm in their women; for in every ten that they make, the devils mar five. (V, ii, 272-9)

Upon departing, the clown wishes Cleopatra "joy o' the worm" (V, ii, 281). She has already ascertained that this is "the pretty worm of Nilus there, the one that kills and pains not" (V, ii, 43-4). Then Cleopatra impatiently prepares for death. Some of the old wrath remains:

Methinks I hear Antony call; I see him rouse himself To praise my noble act; I hear him mock The luck of Caesar, which the gods give men To excuse their after wrath: (V, ii, 286-90)

A few lines later she herself will mock Caesar by begging the worm to speak out and call him "an ass unpolicied" (V, ii, 310). All of the images are sensual ones: "take the last warmth of my lips," she tells her girls. "The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch, which hurts, and is desired." She imagines herself meeting Antony, and she chafes under the thought that Iras may arrive there first and collect the kiss "which is my heaven to have." The last few lines are luxuriously sensual:

Cleo: Peace, peace! Dost thou not see my baby at my breast, That sucks the nurse asleep?

Charmian: O, break! O, break!
Cleo: As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle,—
O Antony! — Nay, I will take thee too:
What should I stay —. (V, ii, 311-16)

The tragic death of a noble woman has not taken place; rather the incomparable death of a "lass unparalleled" has occurred. The "gods themselves do weep" while death must rejoice at receiving a noteworthy addition, a shade who has left her baser elements behind and is "all fire and air." Charmian immediately summarizes the impression which the whole scene has conveyed:

Now boast thee, death, in thy possession lies
A lass unparalleled. Downy windows, close;
And golden Phoebus never be beheld
Of eyes again so royal! Your crown's awry:
I'll mend it, and then play. (V, ii, 317-22)
CHAPTER IV

Conclusion

In Chapter I, an attempt was made to review briefly the course of criticism on *Antony and Cleopatra* through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for the purpose of describing the process of glorification which has been applied to Cleopatra during that period. In the nineteenth century a body of romantic criticism arose in which conventional morality struggled for supremacy with the romantic elevation of woman, the net result being the adulation of Cleopatra.

Curiously, the twentieth century realists did not bring to the criticism of *Antony and Cleopatra* the sophistication which had induced them to re-evaluate effectively other favorite plays of the romantics, such as *Henry IV* and *The Merchant of Venice*. The realists did attack the play in terms of the development of character; but, just as the romantics had engaged in the glorification process as a means of justifying the loose morality of the two principals, the realists continued it as a means of reconciling apparent inconsistencies of characterization and structure. It was suggested in Chapter I that a closer scrutiny of the historical background might perhaps be
as valuable in the study of *Antony and Cleopatra* as it has been in the study of *The Merchant of Venice*.

In Chapter II an attempt was made to study the well-known sixteenth century works in which the story of the Cleopatra legend was told, as a means of discovering the contemporary judgment of the principal characters in this historical episode. A number of references to the story were found in historical works which had been either written in the sixteenth century or newly translated then. Invariably these references pointed to Cleopatra as a "shamelesse curtizan," as "Antonius' harlot," as "the shame of Egypt" who had played "the harlot for Rome." Equally predictable was Octavius' presentation as the "paragon of princes" whose continence, moderation, and ability to govern himself made him an ideal ruler over others. Antony, on the other hand, was commonly portrayed as the courageous ruler whose illustrious beginnings belied the fatal future which was to be the result of his inability to make his reason supreme over his will. That these characters were stereotyped in this mold was found to be demonstrated also in the purely literary treatments of the story. In the three plays and the one long poem which were examined, the stereotypes which had come down through history as orthodox were found to have been perpetuated in *belles lettres* as well.
The second Chapter also indicated that the play which Shakespeare wrote must be considered as part of the great history-writing movement which prevailed in Shakespeare's time, and as such had for its purpose the edification of its audience through the events and personalities of ages past. The political beliefs of Tudor England which are dominant in the play provide the story with a strongly predominant political theme.

From an investigation of the works of literature mentioned in Chapter II, it was apparent that Cleopatra emerged as a somewhat different person from the *femme fatale* romantically conceived in the nineteenth century and perpetuated in the twentieth. In addition, the roles of Antony and of Octavius in the tragedy seemed to take on increased significance when their historical importance in the minds of the Elizabethans was held up to scrutiny. The findings of Chapter II indicated a need for a re-evaluation of *Antony and Cleopatra*, in particular a re-evaluation of the character of Cleopatra and of her role in the dramatic structure.

An attempt has been made in Chapter III to investigate the internal evidence which the play affords, and the findings there indicate that the characteristic sixteenth century treatment of the story
existed in the Shakespearean version. Certain image themes which Shakespeare employed are especially dominant and therefore serve to direct the course of the drama. The images of witchcraft and magic, and of serpents and poison are noteworthy because they illuminate Cleopatra's character; and the evil undertones which these images convey are heightened by the continual and specific references to the harlotry of Cleopatra's conduct. The role of Antony and of Cleopatra in the tragedy is best understood if it is read in relation to the sixteenth century concept of order. Antony's domination by Cleopatra is an unnatural reversal of the roles of man and woman and thus represents a subversion of order which has tragic consequences both on the personal level, for Antony, and on the political level, for Rome. Cleopatra becomes a symbol of Antony's tragic flaw and her role in the drama becomes that of the agent for the implementation of the theme: the upheaval in the natural order of things.

If Cleopatra is viewed as an enchantress -- necessarily fascinating -- who ensnares Antony in an evil web, and if the political theme of the play is recognized as being dominant, then certain scenes which have been labelled "inconsistent" are clarified. The dismissal of the messenger and the Seleucus episode become logical vehicles for exposing the volatile nature of Cleopatra's
character; and the death of Cleopatra, instead of being seen as the
demise of the tragic heroine, assumes its proper role as the final
destruction of the threat to the state.

In conclusion, those critics who have invested Cleopatra
with tragic stature and who have found in the play the romantic
theme of "all for love and the world well lost" have disregarded the
purposes of historical writing and the political philosophy which
existed in the sixteenth century, and have ignored the traditional
Elizabethan treatment of the story.
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