

## Mature Love: A Reading of *Antony and Cleopatra*

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The oppositions between love and reason, romance and reflection, passion and marriage, emotion and insight underlie many passages in Shakespeare. Such separations constitute a theme that should be all too familiar to contemporary ears, well versed in rhetoric espousing *carpe diem* as opposed to staleness, intensity as opposed to a blunt and indistinguishable experience. In contrast to this vision, Shakespeare tries in *Antony and Cleopatra* to capture the subtleties of a low-key mature love, its conduct and expression and the struggles these involve. The play attempts the difficult task of articulating something that is unmistakably a form of love and yet never overwhelms, something that is always only a part of a plurality of voices. Gaining a more specific understanding of the details that make up such love is the subject of the following reading.

My more general claim concerns the relations between Shakespeare and philosophy. Much work in the past two decades has sought to connect literature with philosophy in ways that do not repeat the mistakes of nineteenth-century moral readings. While some domains of literary studies have begun feeling the impact of work by authors such as Booth, Diamond, Nussbaum, Khuns, Eldridge, Falck, Novitz and numerous others, Shakespeare studies seem to remain untouched by these developments. Work by recent philosophically oriented critics such as Beauregard, Weitz or Cavell hardly appears to come into meaningful dialogue with mainstream Shakespearean criticism. In the absence of explicit attempts within Shakespeare scholarship to take up

the exciting possibilities that the new moral criticism opens up, one can only guess as to the grounds for this insulation.

My own guess is that this silence relates to the special popularity of interpretative approaches within early modern criticism that mostly refuse to speak of insight and knowledge. Such outlooks favor the local, historicized strand of meaning that is considered to be inseparably tied up with non-literary manifestations of power. The conceptual windings of a discursive fragment are preferred to conceptual truth-claims, which are suspected of being ahistorical and of inevitably involving some latent anachronistic projections. Connected with this is the distrust of readings that assume a closure of the text, coupled with faith in the transhistorical insight of the author, as these were notable in older attempts to connect Shakespeare with philosophy by critics such as Moulton, Richardson, the Romantics and the New Critics.

I shall avoid producing a general comparison of moral criticism with New Historicism and cultural materialism. It does not seem obvious to me that these outlooks are in fact opposed to moral criticism, at least to the moral criticism I shall practise here. While stressing otherness, New Historicism has never denied the possibility of cross-cultural dialogue. And while emphasizing connections between the literary and the non-literary, this cannot support (and in the careful versions of New Historicism never has supported) a crude denial of the possibility of reference to literary texts regardless of their interconnections with non-literary points of power.

But interpretative schemes are not initially tested by assessing the comparative merits and defensibility of their assumptions. What appears more relevant is exhibiting the fruitfulness of a critical stance through detailed applications. I shall therefore avoid further thematic generalizations and concentrate on showing that reading *Antony and Cleopatra* from the perspective of a philosophical concern with understanding love can open up further secrets of this work.

## Mature Love

A good way to begin seeing the sort of loving relations that Shakespeare is focusing on is to compare the love of Antony and Cleopatra with the youthful love of Romeo and Juliet. Romeo's love rhetoric works through hyperbole and a language of approximation that cannot quite capture his love. Such a rhetoric of transcendence coheres with the way Romeo pictures Juliet in angelic terms: she is a white, holy saint worthy of worship. Never, unless one rather strenuously reads such meanings into one or two lines, does he hint at sexual desire. For Romeo, the idea of Juliet overrides all other considerations, and there is no suggestion of his making any compromise between his love and his other obligations. Antony's feelings, on the other hand, while they are unmistakably love — love that, like Romeo's, eventually destroys Antony, costing him his life and his name — are never overriding.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the younger lover for whom love makes every other consideration petty, Antony *allows* his passion for Cleopatra to remain in disharmony with other things that are important for him. Romeo is overtaken by passion, suspending judgement and self-critique. Antony allows passion to overtake him completely only once, at the extremely important moment in which he goes after Cleopatra's ship and thereby loses the sea battle at Actium. At all other moments, passion lives in constant tension with his other obligations.

Sex, in *Romeo and Juliet*, is implied and is never openly discussed by the lovers. In opposition to the masked nature of passion in the younger couple, the sexual aspect of Antony's relationship with Cleopatra is explicit. He constantly talks of 'pleasure' (I.i.46-7; II.iii.39) and never employs the sorts of idealizations Romeo produces. Others continually refer to the lustful nature of his and Cleopatra's love (I.i.9; I.iv.26, 29; II.i.22-24; III.vi.94-5). Antony and Cleopatra eat. Romeo and Juliet never eat. In the latter pair, such abstinence is in keeping with the non-corporeal passion that possesses them. In opposition to this, Antony and Cleopatra's affair makes room for the sorts of activities

mature lovers share. There is continual reference to enormous feasts and feats of eating (II.i.12, 23-6; II.ii.179-183; II.vi.62; II.vii.94). As early as their very first encounter, they invite each other to supper. Enobarbus even refers to Cleopatra as Antony's 'dish', and this is not the only time Cleopatra is imaged as food (I.v.31; III.xiii.116-118).

Antony and Cleopatra talk. Already in Shakespeare's primary source, North's Plutarch, Cleopatra's greatest asset is not her looks but her sweet company and conversation. Shakespeare stresses this by having Enobarbus oppose the companionship offered by Cleopatra to Octavia's 'holy, cold, and still conversation'. They laugh together. An incident is recounted when Antony is fishing and Cleopatra sends a diver to attach a salt-fish to Antony's fishing rod 'which he / With fervency drew up'. Romeo and Juliet never laugh, suggesting an intense passion that can never transform into the fun and games that one senses underlie the affection Antony and Cleopatra share. Cleopatra's references to laughter—'O times! / I laugh'd him out of patience; and that night / I laugh'd him into patience' — convey a romance that, unlike that of the younger couple, does not work by transcending life, by perpetually setting its intensities at odds with what life is, but rather structures itself through life and the daily pleasures it can afford. We note Antony's suggestion to Cleopatra in the opening scene that they should go out and 'note the qualities of people'. Such gossiping, playing jokes on one another, laughing, eating, having sex, drinking, talking; these are the communicative acts that invest this affair with its meaning — a meaning that avoids the grander gestures of Romeo and Juliet.

### Love as Performance

I can now formulate the distinction that this essay aims to establish. Mature love is not predicated on the existence of a consistent, underlying and unmistakable affect of the *Romeo and Juliet* kind. Rather, Shakespeare presents an alternative in which love is mostly an *enactment* of a set of practices shared

by the couple. According to this vision, love is not something that one primarily feels but, rather, something that one does.<sup>2</sup>

Such a *performative* conception of love, in which the category is created in praxis, not manifested through it, is exhibited in the very first exchange we get between Antony and Cleopatra:

Cleo. If it be love indeed, tell me how much.

Ant. There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd.

Cleo. I'll set a bourn how far to be belov'd.

Ant. Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new  
earth.

(I.i.14-17)

The very first impression we receive of Antony is his reluctance to answer Cleopatra and tell her 'how much' he loves her. Compare this to the love rhetoric of Romeo and Juliet, in which reference is often made to the inability to count or measure one's love (II.ii.132-5; II.vi.33-4). Antony's disinclination to engage in such expressions, and their being immediately extracted from him by Cleopatra, could suggest that he is being untruthful in his love proclamations. But the expository lines, the way in which Antony is directly portrayed, and some other matter I shall discuss shortly, show that he is unmistakably in love. What is also apparent almost at once is Antony's preference for a love disclosed through actions rather than through oratorical performance. His decision not to hear the messengers and his embracing Cleopatra manifest an action-centered communication of love, rather than the grand love rhetoric she has asked him to produce.

In terms of mature love, the reluctance to engage in love talk seems natural when low-key love is experienced. In the romantic vision in which love is the manic state Plato's *Phaedrus* envisions it to be, the overwhelming nature of love turns hyperboles into the most fitting communicative vehicle. But language seems incapable of expressing non-overwhelming love without being offensive. Imagine, for example, that Antony replies to Cleopatra's need to 'have a bourn set' by saying that he loves her moderately; that, yes,

she is a source of happiness and delight for him but, no, he would not swim, like Romeo, to the 'farthest shore' for her. Antony does produce the required hyperbole with his 'new heaven, new earth'. Yet his initial reluctance is revealing. Antony's avoidance of love talk and preference for embracing is a feature one senses in many mature loves, in which loving hyperboles are gradually replaced by personal, idiosyncratic practices (he calls me 'my serpent of old Nile' says Cleopatra in I.v.25). In Cleopatra, such a performative model of love takes the form of theatrical displays of love (Cleopatra never conducts such exhibitions when Antony himself is there). It also involves creating confusion and conflict in Antony, thereby extracting performances from him. Common to these games is the fact that the feeling of being loved is made possible through moments in which something of importance needs to be given up by the lover, in which aspects of the self are relinquished and a willingness to be remoulded surfaces in him.

A love predicated on the other's willingness to 'decompose' — to fall from wisdom, status, manhood,<sup>3</sup> kingdom, reputation and all that Antony loses further on in the play (ultimately, his life) — is more than simply expressive of a domineering personality or of possessiveness. Love is not merely exhibited by the desire to intervene and reshape the lover's attachment to parts of himself and his reputation, or to cherished moments of his past. The purpose of these games seems rather to be creating and amplifying her presence in the mind of the lover. Unlike North's Plutarch, which refers to direct physical presence — 'never leaving him night or day, nor once letting him go out of her sight' — in Shakespeare, presence is created through more complicated mental manipulations: by obstructing the natural flow of Antony's thoughts, creating conflict within him, and changing his state of mind whatever it is ('If you find him sad, / Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report / That I am sudden sick'). Indeed, in their very first meeting, as reported by Enobarbus, Antony invites her to supper but 'she replied, / It should be better he became her guest'. Such a reversal of Antony's plans should not be taken lightly since, as

Enobarbus goes on to say, Antony had never 'the word of "No" heard woman speak'. Presence is also created by Cleopatra's sending messengers to Antony every day, to such an extent that she is willing to 'unpeople Egypt' (I.v.77-8). Love, for her, means never disappearing from the lover's mental arena.

As for seduction and what being a seductress may mean, Shakespeare does not employ the conventional conception of love-teasing as a future-directed fantasy that the seductress maintains and never satisfies. Cleopatra's games with Antony intensify passion through gratifying it (II.ii.236-8). Unlike heavenly Juliet, who is there only to be seen, Cleopatra comes across in the sounds of flutes and many scents. She is a total experience, there not simply to be gazed at in pure, holy, untouchable bliss but rather to be desired, felt, smelled, lived with. In opposition to the perfect Juliet, Cleopatra has many blemishes. She is neither young nor pure. Unlike the many references to her beauty in Plutarch (p. 246-7) and in another potential source, the Garnier-Pembroke *The Tragedie of Antonie*, in Shakespeare no one directly refers to her as beautiful and there is an explicit reference to her 'wan'd lip' (II.i.21).<sup>4</sup> Cleopatra's beauty is a recollected experience, pertaining to the past and the first impression she made. In fact, if beauty 'can settle the heart of Antony', says Maecenas, 'Octavia, rather than Cleopatra, should be Antony's choice' (II.ii.241-3). Yet it is Cleopatra and not Octavia who is loved by a man who has a third of the world at his feet.

### Maintaining Doubts

We may have our doubts about some of the games the lovers play as constituents of the loving relationship we may wish for ourselves. And yet, many of us would probably sympathize with such a humanly liveable vision of love. It is an attractive vision that, unlike the intensities of *Romeo and Juliet*, does not jeopardize or make stale the milder romances that most of us experience. It enables us to look for

achievable little moments and respect them as forms of genuine love. This comforting sense of becoming a legitimate liver and lover is created by the text's rhetoric and the way it deals with the love of such a grand pair. The god-like scale of Antony and Cleopatra manages to make any love that is worthy of them appropriate for us too.

Yet we cannot but ask, is this love? Shakespeare does not simply present a monochromatic, comforting vision. The more one contemplates the subtleties of their relationship, the more the disturbing aspects of it surface. These relate to the inevitable anxieties that accompany low-key loving, as well as to the fear that performing and acting can drift into *play-acting*. For Antony, this takes the form of never knowing whether Cleopatra truly loves him, forever shifting between competing thoughts as to her true feelings. Cleopatra fears losing Antony and therefore needs to keep playing the shift games she devises. Dowden was right to note that, for all their magnificence and fun, Antony and Cleopatra torment one another in setting off these anxieties in each other.<sup>5</sup>

I want to avoid the question of whether such love is happy or not. When one goes beyond superficial impressions, probably all forms of love involve anxieties and are therefore not entirely happy. Instead, I wish to return to our primary task of looking for the insights Shakespeare's play yields when one seeks a detailed understanding of mature, non-overwhelming love. It is precisely here that we realize that the evaluative anxiety — the question of whether or not this is truly love — is an *intrinsic* component of the description of the relationship. Mature love is a relationship that is preoccupied with the question of its own existence. Such worry sets it apart from romantic love of the Romeo and Juliet kind, where sceptical voices within the couple are altogether avoided. Indeed, as I have argued previously in this journal regarding *Romeo and Juliet*, the latter sort of love seems to be predicated precisely on blindness to the possibility of doubt.<sup>6</sup>

In mature love, doubt seems to be an intrinsic component that can always resurface and constantly needs to be fought

off. Doubting the existence of the love also means that, although a mature love is one in which affect is distilled into practice, the idea of some clear cut separation between emotion and its expression remains in the background. When the separation surfaces, it prompts a questioning as to the status of loving actions, a questioning as to whether they are hollow rote or practices invested with meaning. Indeed, the only thing distinguishing genuine passion in the performative loving I am tracing is the need to repeat the practice. Wanting to eat together again, gossip again, have sex again — nothing stronger than the desire to recreate practices seems possible (unless one relies on several moments in which something like the romantic separation between affect and expression is glimpsed, and then the scarcity of these moments yields its own set of anxieties). Such problems with verification raise doubts.

A loving experience in which scepticism perpetually needs to be fought off also explains why both Antony and Cleopatra have something extreme and exhibitionist in their love talk.<sup>7</sup> The idea of love as other-oriented performance — this time in the histrionic sense — can be further understood when connected to another practice both Antony and Cleopatra engage in, that of moving into and out of names: 'what's her name, / Since she was Cleopatra?' (III.xiii.98-9); 'But since my lord / Is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra.' (III.xiii.186-7). Cleopatra conceives of the return to names after they argue as a return to positive love and a retreat from the accusations Antony levels at her. The practice of unnamng and renaming connects personal identity and love, suggesting that moving out of love — or, at the very least, allowing hostile feelings to surface and be directed at the lover — is experienced as a loss of identity. Names, for these two, function not simply as designators or descriptive words but as honorific terms. Being an 'Antony' or a 'Cleopatra' is a grandness they have to live up to. The names function as the couple's joint identity, and include a regulative element that perpetually points to what they *should* be.

The regulative role of names and the sense that one's love should be exhibited suggests that in mature love there is a story that a 'we' has to maintain.<sup>8</sup> In Antony and Cleopatra, the story is one of fun and endless banquet (the return to names signals a feast Cleopatra will organize for her birthday) and an exhibitionist awareness and manifestation of their non-human magnitude. But, like other narratives of identity, this one also necessitates suppressing subversive voices and, as time goes on, involves a growing awareness of their existence. In opposition, romantic love of the Romeo and Juliet kind can bear nothing more complicated than a single dimension of experience. One is blind to doubt. Self-critique of a certain kind becomes impossible. This may also explain why Antony and Cleopatra quarrel, whereas Romeo and Juliet never do.

### An Unseen Body

Given Antony's suspicions regarding Cleopatra's true feelings, and in the light of his believing that she betrayed him at Actium, we too have our doubts as to whether or not she loves him. These doubts cannot persist, however, because when he dies she says:

O, wither'd is the garland of the war,  
The soldier's pole is fall'n: young boys and girls  
Are level now with men; the odds is gone,  
And there is nothing left remarkable  
Beneath the visiting moon.

(IV.xv.64-68)

And later:

His legs bestride the ocean, his rear'd arm  
Crested the world; his voice was propertyed  
As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends:  
But when he meant to quail, and shake the orb,  
He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,  
There was no winter in't: an autumn 'twas

That grew the more by reaping: his delights  
 Were dolphin-like, they show'd his back above  
 The element they lived in: in his livery  
 Walk'd crowns and crownets: realms and islands were  
 As plates dropp'd from his pocket.

(V.ii.82-92)

And such accuracy in capturing one's sense of loss, an expression that J. M. Murry thought nobody could ever forget, is nothing but love.<sup>9</sup> But notice that even in the context of the clearest expression of her love, Shakespeare is careful to avoid presenting Cleopatra's feelings as something which they are not. For there is a sense in which these lines could have been voiced by a close friend (say, Enobarbus) and not necessarily by a lover. They express admiration of the highest sort, the loved one's uniqueness cast in terms of his relative value with respect to others. To be sure, this is admiration distilled into love. But missing here is the erotic element one expects in a lover and not in a friend. Compare this with Romeo's 'Eyes, look your last. / Arms, take your last embrace! And lips, O you / The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss / A dateless bargain to engrossing Death' (V.iii.112-5).

What we witness in Cleopatra is loneliness and a broken partnership, a sense of being left alone in a colourless, unremarkable world. But unlike the centrality and particularity of the body stressed so much in Romeo's lines, in Cleopatra the body becomes an abstract giant peeping dolphin-like above the element in which he used to live. Whereas Romeo is almost making love to what he believes to be Juliet's dead body — 'For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes / This vault a feasting presence, full of light . . . O my love, my wife, / Death that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath / Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty . . . Beauty ensign yet / Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks' — for Cleopatra, Antony's body becomes nothing more than a cold case in which his huge spirit used to live (IV.xv.89). Thus, Cleopatra either metaphorizes Antony's body or trivializes it, never relating to it as what it is. For Romeo, on the other

hand, there is nothing beyond present perception and its articulation. This is what establishes the non-erotic sense that Cleopatra's lament conveys.

It therefore seems that sex and food, the body-centred practices these older lovers share, do not really involve perceiving the somatic, but are mediated by it. The body is no longer something one *encounters*. But more than saying that young love is more erotic and body-centered than mature love, which is more tuned to companionship and admiration, Shakespeare enables a particularized understanding of the makeup of these conventional oppositions. For what are 'companionship' or 'admiration', and how do they differ in a lover from the companionship and admiration of a close friend? The answer to this begins with noting, in Cleopatra's bemoaning Antony's death above, a momentary willingness to endorse the other's ideal self-narrative, relate to him not just through any available perspective, but through the one that *he* would have chosen (IV.xv.51-4). This is a loving act conducted after the loved one's death. When Antony is alive, Cleopatra eschews direct love rhetoric to the extent that he (and we) distrust her feelings.

The avoidance of directness partly has to do with Cleopatra's explicit reference to the strategies and manipulations she thinks necessary in order to keep Antony. But on a deeper level, avoiding the expression of love is also related to the character of mature love itself, which is shown as a state in which passion is transformed from an engulfing affect into different modes of relating to the other. I am thinking here of Antony's protectiveness (going after her in the sea battle) and Cleopatra's possessiveness and jealousy (her talks with the messenger). My confidence in referring to the 'transformation' of passion stems from the way in which these moments in the play become so central in forming the impression that these people are, indeed, in love. Protectiveness leads Antony to perform an unreasonable action, needlessly costing him the battle and, later, his empire and life. The fact that his action is unnecessary (Cleopatra

being in no immediate danger when he follows her) is also significant since it, too, conveys one of the many insights the play affords into love. Protectiveness — or, for that matter, possessiveness and jealousy — as a part of love, is sometimes experienced as, and sometimes actually is, unnecessary in the sense that on examination they prove to be *disproportionate* responses to an external cause. In highlighting Antony's protectiveness in a moment which at least one commentator has experienced as 'one of the greatest proofs of love that he can offer',<sup>10</sup> the play suggests that this exaggerated response is precisely the sort of way in which love is manifested.

As for Cleopatra, we know that she is in love, not only through her laments and through the lines in which she envies Antony's horse, but also through a scene Shakespeare needed to add to what he found in his sources. Shakespeare there highlights Cleopatra's possessiveness through her violence to the unfortunate messenger bringing her news of Antony's marriage to Octavia:

Mess. Madam, he's married to Octavia.

Cleo. The most infectious pestilence upon thee!  
[Strikes him down]

Mess. Good madam, patience.

Cleo. What say you? Hence,  
[Strikes him]

Horrible villain, or I'll spurn thine eyes  
Like balls before me; I'll unhair thy head,  
[She hales him up and down]

Thou shalt be whipp'd with wire, and stew'd in  
brine,

Smarting in lingering pickle.

Mess. Gracious madam,  
I that do bring the news made not the match.  
(II.v.60-67)

This scene cannot be found in North's Plutarch, in Daniel's play, or in the Garnier-Pembroke work. When we ask for Shakespeare's motive in adding this specific scene to a work in which he was generally following his source, the answer is rather obvious. Nowhere in Shakespeare's play is the erotic

element in Cleopatra's love clearer to us than in these moments when she hauls the poor man up and down. Issuing one horrible threat after another — promising the panic-stricken messenger that she would melt gold and pour it down his throat, telling him that he has lived too long and drawing a knife — these cannot but dispel the image of the cynical manipulator, convincing even the most suspicious of audiences that this woman's love, while it cannot be intimated directly to Antony, is genuine.

### Response and Ambivalence

With this picture in mind, it is intriguing to note the subtle, *indirect* routes through which she does manifest her companionship and admiration for Antony when they communicate directly. This task first requires understanding something of the play's operations on (some) actual readers. Seeing what such responses involve enables one to see how mature love can be conveyed when it is not communicated directly.

It is a commonplace of this play's criticism that readers radically diverge in what it is they believe Antony and Cleopatra share. What some see as a celebration of love, others see as the story of a fool falling from power due to the operations of a crafty teaser. Usually the difference relates to how the critic regards Cleopatra. Some interpreters, while admiring her characterization, detest her, and these judgements then become the basis for an overall response to the affair. Such a conception has to be ruled out not only because it is one-sided, ignoring precisely the sort of qualities that make Cleopatra a fascinating 'piece of work', but also because of considerations having to do with Shakespeare's employment of his source. Shakespeare makes no mention of some of the cruelties she performs in Plutarch — most obviously, her trying poisons on convicted men and applying 'snakes and adders' to men 'in her sight' (Arden edition, p.268). In Josephus Flavius's *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Cleopatra is said to have poisoned her fifteen-year-old

brother and caused her sister to be slain in order to inherit the kingdom. If these unfavorable critics are right, it is puzzling that Shakespeare chose to eliminate such qualities.<sup>11</sup> Other readers adore Cleopatra. A third group opts for a middle way of one sort or another.<sup>12</sup>

Although in my reading above I take sides in this dispute, defending a position according to which what Antony and Cleopatra share is indeed love, I suggest that when moving to discussing reactions to this work we avoid any attempt to decide between these response patterns. Instead, we can begin by accepting the arguments put forth by Adelman, Charney, Traversi, and others who see the ambivalent, aporetic potential of the affair as part of the play's meaning.<sup>13</sup> We need to complicate this account somewhat, at least in one important way, but for the moment can perceive how such an interpretative stance tempts us to suppose that the actual response-pattern parallels the position of the lovers themselves. After all, like the lovers, we too cannot always tell whether what we are seeing is love. But it is precisely through the way in which the actual experience of readers *diverges* from that of the characters that this play imparts some of its deeper meanings.

I am thinking here first and foremost of ambivalence itself. Mature love is about the ability to come to terms with an ambivalent stance to the love itself, both to its existence and to its value. The persistence of doubt is in perpetual tension with the opposing need for certainty. 'Tell me how much you love' is the request in the play's opening, as if an assertion could dispel the anxiety that leads to the request in the first place. We thereby see that the need for certainty motivates the performance of certain rites: asking for oratorical performance from the lover, asking for promises, demanding prices.

If such shifting between ambivalence and the wish for certainty does indeed capture a fundamental tension in mature love, we are now in a position to take a step further towards the ambivalent *critical stance* to the work that I

mentioned above. While indecisiveness can be a justified critical stance in a reader, when it comes to the lovers themselves, ambivalence of the sort open to the critic is not really an option. One could guess that in some hypothetical moment of detached reflection the lovers can be brought to accept the validity of two competing visions regarding what it is that they share. But Antony and Cleopatra cannot really operate for long in such a dangerous polyphony. They avoid ambivalence not through some false certainty that they put on (this last seems to be a privilege of romantic love, in which scepticism can be put on hold). In mature lovers, the suspension of doubt cannot be maintained, but neither can ambivalence. The latter threatens the relationship with cynicism or a detached intellectualism in which competing perspectives are allowed to have too much say. For mature lovers (at least for these two), receding from ambivalence seems to be enabled by moving from expression and conceptualization — themselves predicated on the distinction between an emotion and its manifestations — into the sort of performance and praxis traced above. When love is channelled into action, when it becomes something one primarily does rather than feels, questions regarding inner truths are avoidable.

#### Indirect Love Communication

We can now return and connect all this to the indirect manifestation of love. The scene I am thinking of is the one where Cleopatra refrains from approaching Antony when he is in shame after losing Actium. Losing Actium because of what he considers foolish mistakes is the specific point of Antony's own tragedy. Connecting shame, loss of orientation and a sense of lateness — 'the land bids me tread no more upon't, / It is asham'd to bear me. Friends, come hither: / I am so lated in the world that I / Have lost my way for ever' — is the moment in which maintaining a self-image breaks down, letting in the weakness that has been perpetually fenced out as far back as the initiating scene of this play.<sup>14</sup> And it is precisely at a moment so pregnant with tragic

potential that Shakespeare opts for an effect not wholly tragic.

In fact, the numerous manifestations of Antony's weakness that begin to bombard the audience — his losing the sea battle because of vain and foolish considerations; his unstable shifting between despair and resolution; his unsuccessful suicide attempt; his being hauled up to Cleopatra's monument while she complains of his weight; his trouble with getting a word in when he is dying because she needs to talk (IV.xv.41-48) — have suggested to several readers an intended comic effect.<sup>15</sup> But the relation to weakness the text configures here seems to me more complicated, especially in relation to Cleopatra's acceptance of him and her perceiving his difficulty in accepting love at that stage. While some readers find cause for smiling, Cleopatra does not. And it is *through this discrepancy* between the possible perspectives an outsider can adopt, and the one a lover actually endorses, that yet another crucial insight into mature love is conveyed. Antony is experiencing a moment of weakness that he is not really prepared to accept as a possible state for himself. Comforting him, as Cleopatra realizes and her attendants do not, would offend him. Even approaching him would be to fail to respect his reluctance to expose or accept his own vulnerability. Indeed, when she does eventually approach him, Antony tells her that he is conveying his shame out of her eyes (III.xi.51). Only after his death wish — that she should not recall what he is now but what he was — do we realize what Cleopatra knew already: that somewhere along the line Antony relates to her as an admiring audience which should never see him in his shame. In not approaching him after Actium, Cleopatra shows that she realizes this. Such subtle moves, intended to enable Antony to continue regarding her as admiring him, are the sort of loving gestures we need to look for when mature lovers communicate directly.

Cleopatra's disorientation when they lose the battle further strengthens our sense of the consideration she here shows Antony. For Cleopatra, losing Actium has all the political and

personal consequences of a queen losing a battle. Her losing a sense of security is expressed through her language moving from assertions to questions. She becomes dependent on the opinions of her escorts and the judgement of Enobarbus. Moreover, since Cleopatra's love for Antony is a distilled form of admiration, a crisis in her emotional world is also to be expected when the great man fails. In Cleopatra's world, this 'soldier's pole' failing in the battle threatens to disrupt the projected elements that are regulative in her love story. Yet through this crisis she manages to think about choosing the course of action that would be most considerate to him.

Moreover, when she finally approaches him, not only does she diminish her presence, but she is also willing to accept responsibility for his mistake. Such willingness to accept blame is a loving act, which incidentally is one of Shakespeare's delicate additions to his sources. In Plutarch and Daniel, there is no mention of such acceptance on her part. In the Garnier-Pembroke play, she appears truly to believe she is the 'sole cause' of the loss at Actium. Only in Shakespeare is Cleopatra made to accept guilt that she knows she does not have to accept. In this loving gesture, she is responding to Antony's actions at Actium. She realizes that going after her ship was not only a military mistake (which is all that Enobarbus sees), but also a profound act of love. Her loving sacrifice is repaid immediately by Antony:

Cleo. Pardon, pardon!

Ant. Fall not a tear, I say, one of them rates  
All that is won and lost: give me a kiss,  
Even this repays me.

(III. ii. 68-71)

Through instances such as this, Cleopatra indirectly manifests her love. Finally, at the exact moment of Antony's dying, the play highlights the way in which mature love involves *re-choosing* a privileged perspective on the loved one:

Ant. I am dying, Egypt, dying.

Give me some wine, and let me speak a little.

Cleo. No, let me speak, and let me rail so high,

That the false huswife Fortune break her wheel,  
Provok'd by my offence.

Ant. One word, sweet queen:

Of Caesar seek your honour, with your safety. O!

Cleo. They do not go together.

Ant. Gentle, hear me . . .

\* \* \*

Ant. Now my spirit is going,

I can no more.

Cleo. Noblest of men, woo't die?

Hast thou no care of me, shall I abide

In this dull world, which in thy absence is

No better than a sty? O, see my women:

The crown o' the earth doth melt.

[*Antony dies*]

(IV. xvi. 43-9; 60-4)

Something altogether different than a comic effect is intended when she avoids letting him speak in the first lines above. In another scene of separation, when Antony departs for Rome (I.iii), Cleopatra interrupts him six times giving him no chance to talk.<sup>16</sup> Drowning separation with talk seems to be her method of coping with such moments. The specific nature of her words in both scenes is similar. In the earlier scene, she accuses Antony of being untruthful and insincere. Here, too, he goes to his death hearing her loving accusation: 'Hast thou no care of me, / Shall I abide in this dull world, which in thy absence is / No better than a sty?' What is nearly her last thought is of her own loneliness and of his insensitivity in leaving her in this sty. But, then, note Shakespeare's touch in letting her say (and Antony hear) just one more line before he dies: 'O, see, my women: the crown o' the earth doth melt'. In moving from blaming him to imaging his dying as a decomposing crown of the earth, she finally lets herself recede into the adoring audience he always wanted her, as well as everyone else, to be.

## Philosophy and Literature

I shall close by turning to some of the more general considerations regarding the relations between literature and knowledge that this reading supports.<sup>17</sup> We can begin with the idea of contingency, with the fact that the conceptual connections emphasized in this reading are not necessary. This need not alarm philosophers. One cannot produce valid arguments proving that mature lovers tend to communicate through practices rather than by expressing an overwhelming affect. Yet limiting oneself to valid argument — 'valid' in the traditional sense of the impossibility of both affirming the premises and negating the conclusion — is to err not only by adopting a limited conception of rationality, but also by fallaciously identifying truth with necessary truth. Recognizing this leads to the requirement for non-valid argumentative routes that can yet rationally ground contingent claims.<sup>18</sup>

'Informal logic', 'rhetoric', and 'argumentation' are some of the fields that attempt to encompass these routes. One such informal move which is included in rhetoric and was often endorsed when considering the connection between literature and philosophy is Aristotle's idea of implication from example. Authors such as Sirridge, Pollard, Nussbaum and Eldridge argue that learning from the literary work — in our case, from the details of a relationship — can be regarded as a process in which knowledge claims are derived from complicated examples or counter-examples. Learning from the work is thus as rational as other non-inductive implications that can legitimately be derived from examples. The claim that this play yields knowledge would accordingly begin with the premise that, since Antony and Cleopatra exemplify something that pertains to mature lovers in general, one may cautiously generalize from them to others, or at least see that what is true of them can sometimes be reapplied.

The recognition that these lovers 'exemplify' something is not itself supported by the literary text, but is an articulation of something the reader has independently sensed. This is

how one arrives at another popular suggestion through which literature and knowledge have been linked: the idea that literature can articulate experiences similar to and sometimes identical with those that one has in life. Since even the more historically aware critics have never denied that Shakespeare articulates some of the deepest thoughts and sentiments that we entertain today, saying that a Renaissance play can provide the living experiences of twenty-first century playgoers with a local habitation and a name is not, in itself, anachronistic. Historical evidence as to early modern love conventions points to ambivalent and conflicting attitudes, some of which are certainly continuous with our own.<sup>19</sup> It therefore appears, at the very least, as plausible to suppose that Shakespeare's audience would have found the play to articulate some of their sentiments in much the same terms specified here, as to suppose that these reactions are peculiar to us. Admitting such points of contact need not entail a belief in ahistorical *veritates aeternae* (though beyond dogmatic dismissals, I know of no arguments that deny the possibility of these). Yet nothing here depends on assuming eternal truths but on a minimal assumption that has never been rejected: that texts written at different times and cultures have a remarkable capacity to come into suggestive, meaningful dialogue with contemporary minds.

The existence of non-literary examples and non-literary modalities of articulation means that relying on articulation and exemplification cannot be enough in the context of an argument aiming to establish philosophical gains through the aesthetic experience that literature creates. When we attempt to account for what such an 'experience' may mean, we reach a third conventional route through which literature and knowledge have been linked. Literature 'conveys' rather than simply 'describes' knowledge claims. 'Conveying' is a mode of imparting knowledge in which what is at stake is not only the claim intimated. Conveying is a mode of telling that also involves configuring the state of mind of recipients in highly specific ways. In literary texts, this is achieved through the suggestive capacities of the work. Suggestiveness is itself legitimate when something is needed to bridge the gap

between the rational support available and the stronger validation which one can never have. The argument above as to the logical status of the knowledge-claims that are conveyed and about the rhetorical distinction between conveying and describing are thus interwoven in the following way: the construction of a cognitive experience enables some contingent insights — themselves supported by the sort of rational, non-valid reasoning the work can provide — to be embedded within a structure that 'conveys' rather than simply 'describes' them.

The terminology of conveyance invites a variation on the charge of anachronism. The claim that the play creates certain responses that can be unpacked into particular reception patterns appears again to depend heavily on the sort of cultural sensitivities which different interpretative communities cultivate. Arguing that either Shakespeare or (to avoid intentional categories) his play 'conveys' certain claims through emplotting them within complicated experiences seems to assume that widely differing response patterns can be simply lumped together by an organizing perspective which is unaware of its own situated biases. However, the reference to 'experiences' above should not be understood as simple descriptive terminology that designates what actual present or past readers — or a 'we' — undergo or have undergone. The category of experience as used above is not a given but an invitation. Interpretations are *suggestions* as to ways through which one may fruitfully communicate with texts.

Such a meta-interpretative stance diminishes the threat of anachronism since nothing depends on whether or not the proposed experiences necessarily conform to what a contemporary of the author would have naturally envisioned. Having said this, I do think that something is gained by showing that proposed response patterns are or have been shared by other readers, which is one advantage of analyzing works that have been heavily commented on before. The uniquely philosophical element of the mode of commentary which is proposed here is not, however, in its simply

recording repetitive patterns of response, but in its reflecting on these in relation to the conceptual content the work exposes.

To stress again: such a vision regarding meaningful philosophical dialogue with the past does not imply some ahistorical intellectual stance in which all cultures and times are viewed from nowhere. It does not involve the threat of drifting 'back toward a conception of art as addressed to a timeless, cultureless, universal essence' of which Stephen Greenblatt warned us in the opening pages of *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. The past's otherness should be respected as itself a source of interest, one that is fruitful for people who are enmeshed in different conceptual nets. Otherness should not, however, turn into the means by which the past is progressively insulated, which is one — surely unintended — result of turning literary criticism into anthropology.

Articulation, exemplification and unique intellectual responses are familiar elements through which the links between knowledge and literature have been theorized, and connecting them in the above way covers most of the points argued for in this essay. A non-valid, yet rational move is embedded in an aesthetic context, enabling the formation of beliefs regarding contingent claims; claims, that is, which cannot be rigorously established through argumentative procedures alone. Some of the suggestive charm that constitutes this experience as an aesthetic one is due to its insights into love which consist of creating better formulations of the reader's erotic experiences.

Yet engaging with the details of some moments in this specific work enables us to go beyond such thematic and programmatic links, thereby achieving a more particularized understanding of the modalities of response. Such a move to detail is necessary for anyone interested in the highly specific ways in which responsive states of mind are created, as well as in the relations between such states and particular knowledge-claims. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the results of this particularized epistemological inquiry surface when readers allow the play to unsettle their reactions. Grasping the

disharmony between one's own response and the one the text portrays enables more hidden insights regarding mature love to emerge. Such divergences between actual response and fictional action enable the play to treat the problem of coming to terms with ambivalence as part of mature love. The play thus creates a gap between 'our' own ability to maintain an ambivalence towards what Antony and Cleopatra share and the inability of the lovers themselves to maintain it. The first person plural can be verified not only through the non-descriptive interpretative stance proposed above, but also through appealing to some of the readings previously mentioned, which testify precisely to this sort of ambivalent stance. This positioning of the reader enables experiencing — not merely intellectualizing — something that pertains to ambivalence: a state of mind readily accessible when analyzing other relationships, but threatening when it comes to one's own. This emphasis on undergoing experiences rather than having them described is also how one avoids paraphrasing either art or the aesthetic experience. These insights into mature love are revealed only after we actually react to the play in a certain way and then reflect on these, our reactions, in light of the fact that fictional reactions could have copied or anticipated these responses but did not.

But there is a further argument that should be considered when specifying philosophical gains, one that deepens our perspective regarding what our notion of erotic understanding should encompass. I have so far proceeded on the assumption that 'understanding' is a collection of propositions which, through various justifications, turn into beliefs. In Ryle's terms, I have assumed a 'knowing that' concept of understanding. Philosophy-literature theory has known one very important addition to Ryle's 'knowing that' / 'Knowing how' distinction: D. Walsh's 'knowing what it is like'. Writers who emphasize literature's ability to create empathy have appropriated Walsh's addition, arguing that empathic involvement enables us to experience what it is like to be in situations which tend to be altered by an 'external' perspective. But thinking of the way in which *Antony and Cleopatra* enlarges our understanding of love invites us to

think of a fourth kind of knowledge: knowing the shapes through which things may come.

Knowledge is not merely a specification of our true beliefs. Broadly conceived, knowledge is a way through which we connect with the world. To sort out reality is to create knowledge that boils down to sharpened recognition, to picking out an entity as one thing rather than another. Some such knowledge can be reduced to 'knowing that': we know *that* love can take the shape it has in this play. Since recognition is also an ability, some such knowledge can be reduced to 'knowing how': the play enables us to know *how* to recognize some complicated shapes love may take. Yet knowing the shapes that things may take is more than an improved recognition skill. Nor is it simply a growth in a body of beliefs. While these additions occur, an improvement of the knowledge of the shapes through which things may come primarily pertains to the scope and sensitivity of one's outlook, to the sharpness of one's response to vague and ambivalent inputs. We assess perceived inputs relative to some background that has now grown. The love of Antony and Cleopatra does not primarily boil down to more beliefs or enhanced capacities but becomes an additional coordinate through which we can compare other relationships.

Could such growth in understanding occur without literature — say, by reading this essay instead and avoiding the play? I think not. While some gains in understanding may be had by this method, the need to implant an additional coordinate means that it is not enough to grasp some themes as possibilities. One needs actually to make them internal, 'talking' parts of one's perspective. Such internalization partly requires thinking of the play as that which communicates with the philosophical concern to understand love. And yet the actual establishment of a living voice within one's world can hardly be achieved by paraphrase or through a description of experience. It requires undergoing the experience of reading created by the powerful rhetorical capacities of poetry. The sort of poetry that J. M. Murry thought no reader could ever forget.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>There is a critical tradition that denies that what Antony and Cleopatra share is love at all, and another equally likely to object to my characterization that interprets the play as not primarily 'about' love. According to such critics — who base their arguments on a supposedly informed historical assumption — the play is actually about the costs of vice. Now it may be true that, as Lawrence Babb says, 'Elizabethans' would 'necessarily' relate to any conflict between reason and love as one between virtue and vice — see his *The Elizabethan Malady* (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951), p. 150. But aside from the sweeping generalization, such observation tells us nothing about the sort of manipulation Shakespeare may have intended for his audience. Citing approvingly Babb's observation, Daniel Stempel makes the same mistake of inferring from the existence of a convention that Shakespeare must necessarily have conformed to it ('The Transmigration of the Crocodile', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 7 (1956), pp. 56-72). While heavily anti-Romantic in its orientation, Franklin M. Dickey's *Not Wisely But Too Well: Shakespeare's Love Tragedies* (California: Braun & Alhambra, 1966), on which Stempel relies, is much more balanced regarding the 'Elizabethan malady' and argues for the existence of two visions of love. For a richer understanding of what love meant for the Renaissance audience, see Mark Rose, *Heroic Love: Studies in Sidney and Spenser* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 1-24.

<sup>2</sup>The specific practices Shakespeare presents enable perceiving something altogether different from the sort of practices, policies, commitments and tacit contracts which philosophers have attributed to the action-oriented aspects of love. For these, see Vincent Brümmer's *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 153-4. Brümmer follows Van De Vate's *Romantic Love: A Philosophical Inquiry* as well as others that connect love with commitments and the expectations that these involve. The practices that Shakespeare presents in this play have nothing to do with commitments.

- <sup>3</sup>For Antony's receding from exemplary manhood, see for instance I. ii. 83; I.iv.4-7; III, vii.13-15, 69; III.x.23. I have argued elsewhere ('Upon One Bank and Shoal of Time: Literature, Nihilism and Moral Philosophy', *New Literary History* 3 (2000), pp. 529-552) that in *Macbeth* one can detect in a moment of immense grief at least one pattern of constitutive connections between emotion and a reshuffling of formative categories of the self. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, we perceive this movement magnified from an intense moment into a prolonged process.
- <sup>4</sup>Geoffrey Bullough argues the Garnier-Pembroke play to be a potential source in his edition of the *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Vol. V (London: Routledge and Paul; New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), p. 231. For Cleopatra's beauty in that play, see lines 430-6 in the text as supplied by Bullough. If Shakespeare was following a source with regard to Cleopatra, it is probably Daniel's *The Tragedy of Cleopatra* in which the Cleopatra is certainly not beautiful: 'What, hath my face yet powre to win a Lover? / Can this torne remnant serve to grace me so . . . ?' (lines 1070-1). All references to North's Plutarch are to the text as given in the Arden edition.
- <sup>5</sup>Edward Dowden, *Shakespeare: A Critical Study of his Mind and Art* (1875), cited in *Shakespeare, Antony and Cleopatra: A Casebook*, ed. J. R. Brown (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1968), p. 40.
- <sup>6</sup>See my 'Love Stories: A Reading of *Romeo and Juliet*', *Literature and Aesthetics* 9 (1999), pp. 71-92.
- <sup>7</sup>The exhibitionism is apparent when Antony embraces Cleopatra in the opening scene and also in the scene reported by Caesar, when Antony divides his empire in the 'market place' in 'the public eye' (III.vi). It is apparent in Cleopatra when she says to her escorts: 'O Charmian! / Where think'st thou he is now? Stands he, or sits he? / Or does he walk? Or is he on his horse? / O happy horse to bear the weight of Antony!' (I.v.18-21).
- <sup>8</sup>The idea of love as the creation of a 'we' is analyzed both in R. Solomon's *Love* (Garden City, N.Y: Anchor Books, 1981) and in R. Nozick's 'Love's Bonds', in *The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love*, ed. R. Solomon & K. Higgins Editors (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1991).

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<sup>9</sup>'Antony and Cleopatra', in his *Shakespeare* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1936).

<sup>10</sup>Dolores M. Burton, *Shakespeare's Grammatical Style* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), p. 263.

<sup>11</sup>Shakespeare also eliminated some of Antony's flaws. Though Antony's treatment of Octavia is surely cruel, in Shakespeare one gets no mention of the two children Octavia had by Antony or the fact that he made her take an unnecessary journey while pregnant. Nor does one get the favorable profile of Octavia, in which she remained a faithful cheated wife, refusing to leave his house in Rome, even though she knew of his life with Cleopatra, a virtuous choice that according to Plutarch made all in Rome hate Antony.

<sup>12</sup>Many studies give a comprehensive account of the diverging reactions to this play and I shall therefore avoid producing such a survey myself. For two such accounts, see Janet Adelman, *The Common Liar: An Essay on Antony and Cleopatra* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973) and the opening chapter of P. J. Tracy's *The Love Play of Antony and Cleopatra: A Critical Study of Shakespeare's Play* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1970). For some negative accounts and remarks regarding Cleopatra, see William Hazlitt's *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* [1817] (London: J. M. Dent & Co, 1926), p. 74; Richard Moulton, *The Moral System of Shakespeare: A Popular Illustration of Fiction as the Experimental Side of Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1903), pp. 129, 138; R. Ornstein, 'Love and Art in *Antony and Cleopatra*' in *Later Shakespeare*, ed. J. R. Brown & B. Harris, (London: Edward Arnold, 1966), p. 45 and Daniel Stempel, 'The Transmigration of the Crocodile' (1956) [see above, footnote 1]. For positive accounts and remarks, see A. C. Bradley, 'Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*', in his *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London, 1941), p. 300; G. Wilson Knight, *The Imperial Theme* (London, 1951), p. 310. For accounts which argue that Cleopatra incorporates both virtue and vice, see Wolfgang Clemen, *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery* (London, 1951), p. 167 and M. Charney, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961).

<sup>13</sup>For a most persuasive interpretation espousing the suspension of judgement as the reaction this play demands, see Adelman, *The*

*Common Liar*, especially the first part (e.g. p. 15). For similar views see D. Traversi, *Shakespeare: The Roman Plays* (London: Holis & Carter, 1963), p. 79, and Charney, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays*. L. J. Mills, in 'Cleopatra's Tragedy', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 11 (1960), pp. 147-162, lists the many central questions that are left unanswered by the play regarding Cleopatra and refers to Gamaliel Bradford, who as far back as 1898 suggested that it is sometimes useful to regard aporias in Shakespeare's plays as intentional choices.

<sup>14</sup>Fear of weakness can already be discerned in North's Plutarch, where Antony is presented as believing that he is a descendant of Hercules and as trying to live up to the hero in terms of deed and appearance: 'This opinion [that he was descended from Hercules] did Antonius seeke to confirme in all his doings: not onely resembling him in the likenes of his bodye, as we have sayd before, but also in the wearing of his garments' (Arden edition, p. 241). The preoccupation with adopting Hercules' appearance, one's own identity not being good enough, shows that the connections between the militant, the heroic and the fear of one's own weakness are constitutive of Antony already in Shakespeare's source.

<sup>15</sup>J. L. Simmons, *Shakespeare's Pagan World: The Roman Tragedie* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1973), pp. 149-152; D. Stempel, 'The Transmigration of the Crocodile'; A. P. Riemer, *A Reading of Shakespeare's 'Antony and Cleopatra'* (Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 1968) and Adelman, *The Common Lia*, pp. 50-52.

<sup>16</sup>For discussion see Mills, 'Cleopatra's Tragedy'.

<sup>17</sup>My article 'Upon One Bank and Shoal of Time: Literature, Nihilism and Moral Philosophy' contains a detailed argument regarding the connections between rhetoric, ethics, and poetics along with references to the relevant tendencies within theoretical work into the relations between philosophy and literature. A forthcoming article in *Metaphilosophy* contains my fullest theoretical position regarding these links.

<sup>18</sup>For detailed defenses of this point see Wayne C. Booth, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Chaïm Perelman, *The Realm of Rhetoric*, trans. W. Kluback (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press,

1982); Martin Warner, *Philosophical Finesse: Studies in the Art of Rational Persuasion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

<sup>19</sup> See note 1 above.