

# Martial Cleopatra and the remasculation of Antony

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Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra hold out the promise of androgyny, of two lovers who defy the straitjacketed gender expectations imposed by Roman masculinism. The lovers die for their temerity in preferring love to war, but their deaths resist all efforts of Roman triumphalism to co-opt them as trophies. Cleopatra's defiance of Caesar's masculinism finds its triumph in a phoenix-like self-immolation, by which desire renews itself and its object, impossibly, at the moment of death. Cleopatra is the outside-the-law that ruptures the Roman legal claim to sexual and juridical order, even as that claim seeks to secure its foundation in opposition to the likes of Cleopatra. Antony is caught in the middle between the laws of his Roman heritage and the Egyptian pleasure that offers to free him from historical embeddedness. The temptations of such pleasure, obsessively figured in this play in terms of dissolving the integral self in water (liquefaction), threaten the integrity of his proper name, 'Antony'. Cleopatra makes of 'Antony' something other than what it is, rending the name and dissolving its bearer, as Antony intuits and his Roman peers constantly taunt him for. But extraordinarily in the Shakespearean canon, Cleopatra makes a strong claim to restore Antony to life and integrity in her suicide-finale. She remembers and re-integrates the shambles of her lover, fractured in name but resurrected in body. Rendered dead for offences against the law of the fatherland, Antony is restored to legitimacy as the 'husband' of the woman whose maternal nurturance supersedes the law of the father and its exigencies of death.

*The primal scene*

Let us begin with the primal scene of love-making. To the extent that it is representable on stage, the bedroom is a liminal space between the private scene of lovers' intimacies and the public stage of martial display. It serves as an intimate space for the lovers to explore the dissolution of public roles and fixed boundaries, especially by means of sumptuary experimentation, as if changing costume in one's private theater effects a bodily change that is insulated from public disciplinary intervention. In the private bedroom space Cleopatra is pleased to subvert gender stereotypes, though to what ultimate effect in the public sphere remains unclear:

I drunk him to his bed,  
Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst  
I wore his sword Philippan. (2.5.21-3)<sup>1</sup>

As sole occupant of the subject position Cleopatra does all the work of vestimentary transformation for both parties. One consequence of the lovers' exchange of 'tires' is that Antony's sword is no longer in his own hands. Is this to say that he is unmanned, unfit for battle? Yes, if we judge by the standards of Actium; no, if by the later battle outside Alexandria for which Cleopatra arms him the morning after making love. In the latter scene Antony avers that his departure from Cleopatra's bed is sealed with 'a soldier's kiss' (4.4.30). Love is the servant of revived, remasculinized war. Antony sees in the Soldier who greets him a reflection of his own sense of the fusion of business and pleasure: 'To business that we love we rise betime / And go to't with delight' (4.4.20-1). Soldier Antony parts 'like a man of steel' (4.4.33), the sword Philippan securely his in a way that it was not at Actium.

At every turn, Shakespeare presses the question of whether love-making vitiates or potentiates martial valour. When

Cleopatra screws up her generosity to forgive momentarily Antony's just reported marriage to Octavia, she is both generous and jealous: 'Though he be painted one way like a Gorgon, / The other way's a Mars' (2.5.116-17). Antony's treacherousness is his Gorgon side of the perspective glass; Mars is his obverse, masculine, and loyal side.<sup>2</sup> The equation of male treachery with the female Gorgon, the castrating woman within the man, is symbolically complex because perspectively double. What makes the anamorphic icon so vexing to interpret is that the Gorgon's head is mounted with snakes, hence amalgamating female and male, castration and insemination, within the ostensibly female half of the emblematic perspective glass. The antithesis between Gorgon and Mars fails to be a useful instrument for characterizing either Antony or Cleopatra, however, because it ignores what Shakespeare emphasizes elsewhere in the play: women are fecundating, not castrating. Cleopatra inspires Antony's bounty. Moreover, bounty cannot be defined in the terms of restrictive accounting as non-recuperable loss, but instead must be seen as a giving that swells the resources of the very font that depletes itself.

Antony's bounty complements Cleopatra's infinite capacity to arouse desire and to receive its gifts. For Antony desire is circular, baseless, vertiginous, in consequence of its law of origin: a vacuum excites desire and desire rushes vainly to fill the vacuum. This vacuous regress or gap in nature is the exciting lack famously described by Enobarbus in his praise of Cleopatra's barge on the river Cydnus. In satisfying itself desire knows no extinction, only an acceleration that further attracts:

On each side her  
Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling cupids,  
With divers-coloured fans, whose wind did seem  
To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,  
And what they undid did. (2.2.211-15)

The fan image is of a bellows (1.1.9-10) that makes the cheeks rosier the more it feeds them air; the cooling air returns heated and so the fans must beat faster still, though still ineffectually.

The more Cleopatra satisfies her desire, the more it renews its emanations with added heat, like the ecstasy of Donne's lovers who prove 'the Phoenix riddle hath more wit / By us ... We die and rise the same' ('The Canonization', 23-26). As Antony whistles to the air, the air, indifferent to his attentions, 'but for vacancy, / Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too, / And made a gap in nature' (2.2.226-8). Not only do many airs wait upon her and do her service (insofar as vacuum-abhorring nature gives them leave), but Cleopatra herself is a source of inexhaustible, replenishing breath. Enobarbus observes that she gives as well as she gets:

I saw her once  
Hop forty paces through the public street  
And, having lost her breath, she spoke and panted,  
That she did make defect perfection,  
And, breathless, pour breath forth. (2.2.238-42)

Exhausted, she nonetheless fills the gap in nature, does what is undone, and like a goddess makes perfect the fallen world simply by breathing upon it. Her beauty, however, devours by increase of appetite whatever it nourishes or redeems from torpor:

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety. Other women cloy  
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry  
Where most she satisfies; for vilest things  
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests  
Bless her when she is riggish. (2.2.245-50)

That desire for Cleopatra will put Antony on a treadmill is painful only in part, for his ever-renewed appetite is transmuted from vileness to something becoming. Antony calls Cleopatra a 'wrangling queen, / Whom everything becomes' (1.1.49-50). The renewal of desire participates in the sacred mystery of riggish flesh made spirit, of death made condition of renewed life, as in gardens of Adonis. The pain of love finds some compensation in the process of becoming art that is becoming.<sup>3</sup>

Cydnus represents an ideal of desire not subject to the problems of evil or extinction or death. The rhetoric of Cydnus privileges resolvable paradox, whereas much of the play prefers instead a less sanguine ambiguity and a more antithetical sense of gender symbolism. The oscillating symbolic valences of serpents, for example, give rise to a version of desire that is androgynous, but not happily so. The oscillation in locating Antony between marble pillar and muddy ooze parallels that between strait-laced Roman morality and the sexual decadence that the Romans associate with Egypt's too great and perhaps malignant fertility, epitomized by the serpent, which Egypt's enemies find both enviable and threatening, fecundating and sterilizing. Serpents are bred spontaneously in the Nile as well as standing guard in the Gorgon's hair, to the same symbolic effect of blight and vengeance, as when Antony's tarnished reputation as a lover incites Cleopatra to hope that Egypt will melt into the Nile, 'and kindly creatures / Turn all to serpents!' (2.5.78-9). This is the serpent as destroyer of fertility, the identical ally that Cleopatra calls upon a few lines later to spite Antony: 'So half my Egypt were submerged and made / A cistern for scaled snakes!' (2.5.94-5). But Egypt aswarm with serpents is alternatively an image for the fertility of the land flooded by the Nile, the spontaneous generation of its female body. It is in this vein that Cleopatra imagines Antony addressing her as 'my serpent of old Nile' (1.5.26).<sup>4</sup> Antony's enemies in kind malign Cleopatra for being the overflowing measure of the Nile which has dissolved Antony's manhood and thus metamorphosed him into a strumpet's man. In what follows I will return to the representations of desire that straddle the extremes between Cydnus' infinitely happy replenishment of a vacuum and the both fertile and blighting serpent.

*The Name of Antony*

Shakespeare saddles Antony with associations of compromised masculinity from the beginning of the play. No sooner is Antony called ‘the bellows and the fan / To cool a gipsy’s lust’ (1.1.9-10) than the stage direction indicates the entrance of Antony and Cleopatra and her train ‘with Eunuchs fanning her’.<sup>5</sup> Antony is mocked because his army is said to be led by Cleopatra’s eunuch Photinus and her maids; the ships are not ‘well manned’ (3.7.34); Antony is no more manly than the ‘women’s men’ (3.3.70) whom he leads. Comments like these are balanced by the antithetical assertion of Cleopatra’s unwonted manliness:

*Cleopatra.* A charge we bear i’th’war,  
And, as president of my kingdom, will  
Appear there for a man. . . .

*Cleopatra.* Celerity is never more admired  
Than by the negligent.

*Antony.* A good rebuke,  
Which might have well becomeed the best of men,  
To taunt at slackness. (3.7.16-18, 24-7)

The gender complementarity of the two lovers sets a rhetorical promise that will not be realized militarily. Their ample leisure for amorous banter and playful role reversal forecloses valiant action for at least part of the play. Antony is left dangling in a rhetorical hole, the position of one slackened by talking with his beloved too much about his torpor.

If ‘Antony’ becomes a byword for the man like Hercules or Aeneas divided between love and duty, even between feminine and masculine sides of his own self,<sup>6</sup> ‘Caesar’ is the name that Shakespeare gives to the solid, the univocal, the one who needs no other. Octavius Caesar epitomizes traditional Roman *virtus*, the title to right that derives from manliness (the word *virtus* comprises both senses). In conversation with Agrippa about the great leaders of Rome, Enobarbus praises Caesar as ‘the Jupiter

of men', the 'nonpareil', the man whose absoluteness permits no relative comparison. Like God, Caesar's only equal, his sole similitude, is himself: 'Would you praise Caesar, say "Caesar". Go no further' (3.2.9-13). Agrippa praises Antony in exaggerated terms as well, but falls short of Enobarbus in making no claim that Antony enjoys the divine self-identity or that merely speaking his name performatively instantiates the law. The name 'Antony' is open to fracture, to wounding, to being made mortal by love and war, in ways that are remote from unbreachable 'Caesar'. 'If I lose mine honour, / I lose myself' (3.4.22-3), Antony confesses, and it is just such a name for honour that he fatally sacrifices for love, or so the victorious Caesareans will insist on seeing it.

Honour defines for Caesar the all-in-all of his masculinity, a code that swallows all resistance to its bias. Enobarbus describes the contest between Antony and Caesar in terms of vacuous versus full states:

That he should dream,  
Knowing all measures, the full Caesar will  
Answer his emptiness! . . .  
Sir, sir, thou art so leaky  
That we must leave thee to thy sinking, for  
Thy dearest quit thee. (3.13.34-6, 67-9)

Antony is a foundering vessel whose every leak Caesar and his 'tributaries' (3.13.101) will rush to fill. In regretting the defectors he sees in his midst, including perhaps Cleopatra, Antony cannot help but subscribe to the terms of the dominant aqueous metaphor:

Authority melts from me. Of late when I cried 'Ho!',  
Like boys unto a muss, kings would start forth  
And cry 'Your will?'

Antony yet. (3.13.95-8)

*Enter Servant[s]*  
Have you no ears

Antony's performative use of his proper name to claim that he is yet himself is rather desperate—it is so by his say-so, he hopes—and his claim is belied by the conspicuously divisive enjambement between subject and predicate nominative. Antony's doubts about the continuing power of his name to draw loyalty from subjects is inseparable from his impugning the good name of Cleopatra: 'what's her name / Since she was Cleopatra?' (3.13.103-4). He wonders whether the most damaging leaks that Caesar has capitalized on are just such wounds to his manhood. His dark fantasy that Cleopatra has changed name in going over to Caesar is the wound that will kill him.<sup>7</sup>

Knowing the whole range of liquid measures—from full to empty, from being Antony to not being Antony—is one of Shakespeare's key images for differentiating changing Antony from unchanging Caesar. Caesar is stoic, calculating, pragmatic; full, whole, solid. Thidias rests secure in following 'the bidding of the fullest man and worthiest / To have command obeyed' (3.13.92-3). Antony mocks Cleopatra with the 'boy' Caesar's capacity 'to fill thy wishes to the brim' (3.13.5). The surfeit of filling / fullness imagery in 3.13 forecasts Caesar's victory even as it reminds us that elsewhere in the play Antony's characteristic virtue, bounty, is described in terms of an emptying out in ample measures, an outflowing of largesse. In the zero-sum game of warring triumvirs the rise of Caesar's star necessitates that Antony's fortunate stars 'have empty left their orbs and shot their fires / Into th'abyss of hell' (3.13.151-2). Antony's self-emptying bounty thus plays into the hands of Caesar's characteristic appetite for dominion. Caesarean fullness can never entertain reciprocity or even tolerate dissent. It brooks no mutual flow of influence; it melts, inundates, floods all opposition. It excels in battle by sea.<sup>8</sup>

The catastrophe at Actium is the result of Antony's loss of self, described so typically in Roman terms as a loss of customary manhood. Canidius offers the tautological explanation: 'Had our general / Been what he knew—himself—it had gone well' (3.10.26-7).<sup>9</sup> Shakespeare takes from Plutarch

this notion that a woman is to blame for alienating the man from his customary masculine performance: ‘There 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 vaine love of this woman, as if he had been glued unto her, and that she could not have removed without moving of him also.’<sup>10</sup> By this logic the female body ensnares the male soul and so renders it unworthy of anything beyond the corporeal treadmill of constant love-making. This explanation of his defeat, ‘that he was not his owne man’, is one that Antony, himself again, accepts in retrospect:

I have fled myself and have instructed cowards  
To run and show their shoulders. Friends, be gone.  
I have myself resolved upon a course  
Which has no need of you. Be gone.  
My treasure’s in the harbour. Take it. Oh,  
I followed that I blush to look upon. . . .  
Pray you, look not sad  
Nor make replies of loathness; take the hint  
Which my despair proclaims. Let that be left  
Which leaves itself. (3.11.7-20)

In seeing clearly that he took leave of his senses in the heat of battle, Antony sets the precedent for his soldiers to abandon him in the martial scenes that follow, as he left himself. Such ‘manly’ resolve is premised less on taking responsibility for oneself than on blaming another; Antony’s distanced perspective of defeat is not so much clear-eyed as recriminatory. Coming to one’s senses in the sober self-analysis after defeat is achieved only through projecting fear of the male enemy onto the lover. The general finds an easy scapegoat in her whose strings led his rudder astray. But the scapegoated Cleopatra will insist on speaking the last word, taking the responsibility to sacrifice herself without resort to scapegoating others on her pyre.

Antony's loadstone is not the self-identical sun but the moon (Isis, Cleopatra), to whose flow and ebb he is subject and whose alternation of fullness and emptiness Caesar never suffers. Antony laments how the obscuring of the moon causes and signals a falling off from fullness: 'Alack, our terrene moon is now eclipsed / And it portends alone the fall of Antony' (3.13.158-9). The changeable Cleopatra is to blame for the waning of his fortunes, he opines, or at least for his rhetorical excesses in over swearing so. The 'fall' from fullness is the descriptive sign of someone whose military, amorous, and dramatic trajectory is as variable as the attractive moon is changeable. But true to fickle form, Antony lets Cleopatra inspire him to one last exercise of prowess. In response to her plea that she would rather melt poison hail in her mouth and retroactively abort 'the memory of my womb' (3.13.168) before she would ever turn cold to him, Antony pronounces that his sword is fit (3.13.180) and that there is ample 'sap' (3.13.197) coursing through his veins. The eclipsed moon waxes in the ascendant and the life fluids buoy both soldier and lover. A narrowly evaded abortion gives way to the womb militant. Cleopatra describes the mutuality of the lovers' new fortunes in terms that recall the interdependence of their vacillating identities up to this point:

It is my birthday.  
I had thought t'have held it poor, but since my lord  
Is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra. (3.13.190-2)

Being oneself again is contingent upon another. In Egypt, unlike Rome, one is not author of herself; no one stands alone. The inverse of projecting the male warrior's defeats on to the disintegrating influence of another is what Cleopatra here celebrates, a love that posits that a woman's ability to pronounce her name whole presupposes hearing that name called by her beloved. In what follows I will explore how the violation of this circuit of calling out the name of one's love brings about Antony's suicide in Act Four, and how in Act Five Cleopatra restores her lover by performing his rebirth.

Antony's abounding sap and amorous bounty fly in the face of the obligatory martial bias against emotional attachment and ignore as well the normative injunctions to confine one's goals to pragmatic self-interest, Caesar's forte. The assumption that the coursing that renews life in the soldier is identical to what makes the blood surge through the lover's veins is called into question in Enobarbus' last words in the scene, spoken in sceptical privacy:

Now he'll outstare the lightning. To be furious  
Is to be frighted out of fear, and in that mood  
The dove will peck the estridge; and I see still  
A diminution in our captain's brain  
Restores his heart. When valour preys on reason,  
It eats the sword it fights with. I will seek  
Some way to leave him. (3.13.200-6)

Although the soldier's discretion ('brain') may flatter itself in mistaking the swelling of the heart's blood for an increase in valour, in fact the sword is only self-consuming and deflating. Enobarbus, like Caesar, disavows the pretension that rekindled love will inspire the conquest of anything beyond the world of the lovers' bedroom (perhaps not even that). Lust is not prowess. The amorously charged body must prey on itself, like some voracious bird. Separation from the beloved, Enobarbus reasons, is the only way to keep from devouring oneself by recklessly venturing oneself. His reasoning necessarily absents him from Cleopatra's birthday party.

The flow of fortune to which Antony but not Caesar is subject necessarily oscillates, given its metaphorical terms, between increase and diminution, waxing and waning, fulfilment and evacuation. Antony's meditation on the vapoiousness of clouds in his penultimate scene on stage seeks to locate a reinforcing objective correlative for his wanton fortunes in the short duration and metamorphic fickleness of watery forms:

*Antony.* That which is now a horse, even with a thought  
The rack dislimns and makes it indistinct

As water is in water.

*Eros.* It does, my lord.

*Antony.* My good knave Eros, now thy captain is  
Even such a body. (4.14.9-13)

Reduced to the status of a body—now a bear or lion, next a citadel or mountain, finally a horse wryly insubstantial compared to the one that Cleopatra wished to ride upon (1.5)—Antony names himself as himself even as he recognizes the imminent indistinction or liquefaction of his life. The negative prefixes in ‘dislimns’ and ‘indistinct’ perform at the linguistic level what the cloud pageant paints in visual ‘signs’ (4.14.7). But there is a difference between the visual signs and the correlative linguistic commentary: the latter is self-conscious, aware of its own demise in a way that the non-conscious cloud world cannot be. Man alone of all creatures mocks himself with suicide; he alone is complicit in his own dislimning and dislimbing on the rack of cloud. Thus Antony will find no solace in the clouds that cannot return his gaze of recognition or share his sense of impending loss. His tragic anticipation condemns him to see the clouds as signs symbolic of precisely the loss that they cannot see reciprocally in him.

The immediate occasion of Antony’s attempted death is the false report of Cleopatra’s betrayal, which ruffles his interior sense of self, even though his visible form is no more secure than the cloud forms whose passing inspires his melancholy. Over against these toys of breath that change form instantaneously, Antony can claim to distinguish himself in being at least *nominally* self-identical: ‘Here I am Antony, / Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave’ (4.14.13-14). Here again one sees the contrast between name and vision. Antony goes on to denounce what he takes to be Cleopatra’s having ‘packed cards with Caesar’ (4.14.19), against which he shores himself up with another, desperate, version of the argument that he is yet identical to himself: ‘There is left us / Ourselves to end ourselves’ (4.14.21-2). At least the name of Antony, via (assisted) suicide, remains true to report and reputation for

integrity, whether or not the body passes away like water in water.

The name is integral spirit, the body disintegrating flesh. This simple, highly orthodox formula is invoked often enough by the Stoic suicide.<sup>11</sup> But the analogy does not hold in *Antony and Cleopatra*, for the spirit of Antony is not inviolable. What breaks the integrity of his name is not any false rumor of Cleopatra's unchastity but rather Mardian's false report of his mistress's *death*, which the servant performs loyally according to his mistress's express instructions: 'Say that the last I spoke was "Antony", / And word it, prithee, piteously' (4.13.8-9).<sup>12</sup> Cleopatra perpetrates this falsehood in order to test by his reaction to her 'death' whether Antony has been false to her.<sup>13</sup> She anticipated two acts earlier, somewhat hypothetically, that news of a lover's death would spell death for his recipient partner:

*Cleopatra.* Ram thou thy fruitful tidings in mine ears,  
That long time have been barren!

*Messenger.* Madam, madam—

*Cleopatra.* Antonio's dead! If thou say so, villain,  
Thou kill'st thy mistress. (2.5.24-7)

Cleopatra's incisive anticipation—'Antonio's dead'—is a means of foreclosing upon a wrenching double death, Antony's and hers. The Messenger's forthcoming news of Antony's marriage to Octavia, though far from the promise to make the long-barren ear or womb bear fruit again,<sup>14</sup> is not fatal.

Cleopatra's hypothetical 'Antonio's dead' in Act Two is the type of utterance that she asks Mardian to replay in Act Four. The transfer of the phrase from the principal in Act Two to the messenger in Act Four corresponds to the change in its performative status from anticipatory, foreclosing hypothesis to consciously narrated fiction. Mardian's false witness unravels an act of death that sounds like an act of love. The name 'Antony' is fractured in erotically charged terms, as if the name, its signified, and its referent—all three—die when Cleopatra speaks and then again when Antony hears report of his lover's

dying word, his proper name. 'Antony' is ventriloquized, impersonated, rendered a redundant cipher:

Death of one person can be paid but once,  
And that she has discharged. What thou wouldst do  
Is done unto thy hand. The last she spake  
Was 'Antony! Most noble Antony!'  
Then, in the midst, a tearing groan did break  
The name of Antony; it was divided  
Between her heart and lips. She rendered life,  
Thy name so buried in her. (4.14. 27-34)

These extraordinary lines, some of the most moving in the play, lose none of their power for being utterly false. The name of Antony is broken across a rending groan, at once mortal and sexual—'death' in two senses—of lips and heart. The uniqueness of the death / debt that Cleopatra has paid and discharged by hand in the first three lines emphasizes the complete foreclosure of any possibility of seconding or ratification on Antony's part. He is supernumerary at once to her suicide and to her love-making, consigned to a position of superfluous belatedness. The last word spoken by Cleopatra in her ecstasy, the proper name of her lover, surprisingly establishes 'Antony' as the longed-for signifier of fatality, whereas Antony the person is shunted aside as a redundant and irrelevant signified. Cleopatra's doing the act alone marks the perfunctoriness and mere contingency of Antony as a presence of flesh and blood, and it anticipates the fact that her actual suicide in Act Five will indeed have no need of Antony as witness or auditor. He can be done without.<sup>15</sup>

North's Plutarch is Shakespeare's source for the symbolic disarming that results when Antony is deflated by Mardian's words: 'He went into a chamber and unarmed him selfe, and being naked said thus: O Cleopatra, it grieveth me not that I have lost thy companie, for I will not be long from thee: but I am sorry, that having bene so great a Captaine and Emperour, I am in deede condemned to be judged of lesse corage and noble minde, then a woman' (309). Pre-empted and embarrassed thus, Antony cannot help being upstaged by Cleopatra in their

respective death scenes to come. How can he kill himself with manly dignity when his name has already been 'divided' by his lover in her moment of climax? A solitary moment at that, as if her suicidal ecstasy surpasses any climax she knew with Antony in her arms. The messenger's theatrical representation of the act of death creates a more intense effect of love by fiction and absence than what the lovers together could have achieved. Hence Antony's disappointment and soon to follow suicidal dissolution. He is spent and dispensed with prematurely by a distant lover in an act at which he did not assist, as either spectator or participant.

It is small wonder that Antony's impending suicide will fall so far short of the mark since already 'she has robbed me of my sword' (4.14.23). The text of the lovers' discourse is laced with play upon the vacillations of 'sword' as instrument of martial honor versus manly love, the contesting poles for control of Antony's soul in the classic debate that informs *Antony and Cleopatra*. When he leaves Cleopatra for the first time and sets off for Rome, Antony appeals to the obligations attendant upon his 'sword' (1.3.83, 101) in the sense of military honor, though after Actium he laments that his 'sword, made weak by my affection' (3.11.67) inclined to Cleopatra at the moment most humiliating for his manhood.<sup>16</sup> The report of Cleopatra's own suicidal sword-play effects a double loss for Antony: of the lover's phallic potency and of the soldier's name for valour. Mardian's fictive word-picture of Cleopatra striking herself with the sword and uttering the name 'Antony' in his absence hollows out both 'sword' and the name 'Antony'. Any claim that relies on these words to secure an inalienable masculinity is rendered merely nominal.

In death Antony falls short of the high Roman ideal of suicide. In answer to Cleopatra's arming him before battle, Antony asks Eros to unarm him so that he may slough off martial and amorous roles: 'No more a soldier; bruised pieces go; / You have been nobly borne' (4.14.43-4). To divest himself of the livelihood-defining armour that he has borne and that has supported him in turn is tantamount to dying. His armour

removed, devoted at last to liquefaction, how can he hope to retrieve his prematurely spent valour one last time to commit the act of death? Antony's regret that Cleopatra has upstaged him as lover and as suicide resounds one last time the leitmotifs of unswording and unmanning:

Since Cleopatra died,  
I have lived in such dishonour that the gods  
Detest my baseness. I, that with my sword  
Quartered the world and o'er green Neptune's back  
With ships made cities, condemn myself to lack  
The courage of a woman; less noble mind  
Than she which, by her death, our Caesar tells  
'I am conqueror of myself.' (4.14.56-63)

The courage and the temper of the sword that the woman wields is what the man lacks, for whatever courage he musters is tainted by bad faith, by the jealousy that stems from his sense of belatedness with respect to her: in beating his sword to the mark, hers makes his superfluous and, worse, ineffectual.

Assigned to take Antony's life, Eros demurs for sentiment. Thus Antony is robbed of his sword a second time, by his swordbearer no less, whose actions take their cue from the fictional representation of Cleopatra's suicide performance. When Eros shows more courage than his master, Antony rekindles his flame for death in the hyperbolic because belated metaphors of a lover's passion:

A bridegroom in my death and run into't  
As to a lover's bed. (4.14.100-2)

The metaphor of suicide as the bridegroom's performance on his wedding night is taken up by Cleopatra in her death / consummation scene in the last act, where the spectacle she presents is the more powerfully moving for its contrast to Antony's bathos.<sup>17</sup>

But I will be

*Cleopatra: martial and maternal*

In death Cleopatra seeks to fix her reputation for posterity as sole guardian of her image of romantic heroine. She insists on representing herself, not on being represented by Caesar as a trophy-woman pretending obeisance to her captor's magnanimity. She eschews being pantomimed by the 'Egyptian puppet' and 'mechanic slaves':

The quick comedians  
Extemporally will stage us and present  
Our Alexandrian revels; Antony  
Shall be brought drunken forth; and I shall see  
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness  
I'th' posture of a whore. (5.2.215-20)

Theatre is an alienating instrument in the service of colonialism, but Cleopatra's theatrical staging of her death forecloses upon the strong claim of colonialism to control representation. Under the Caesarean scenario, Cleopatra's voice will be emptied out in ventriloquized impersonation. The revels of the would-be usurping lovers will be reduced to so much non-subversive play, the mere traffic of the stage contained and defused within the walls of the Roman victor's theatre. The thought of the stage as vehicle of containment, discipline, and satire that mocks what it represents violates the integrity dear to Cleopatra. She refuses to see her private amorous play with Antony made public theatre, so much titillating spectacle for the jeering voyeuristic captors. To countervail the voyeurism she decries, Cleopatra practises a species of heroic exhibitionism that uncannily aspires to privacy. One private space that defies representation is the bedroom that she shares with Antony, where she arms him for battle, and another is the inner recess of the monument where she plans to die protected from Caesar's reach. These private spaces for death are nonetheless enfolded within a stage, albeit the inner one of the Globe,<sup>18</sup> and Cleopatra is played by a boy actor, to be sure, even as s/he disclaims all traffic with such stage conventions as boy actors playing

women's roles. Although foregrounding the oxymoronic character of Cleopatra's exhibitionistic quest for a private, non-representable theatricalness on the public stage, Shakespeare does not simply deflate his heroine with irony at her expense. The spectators, after all, forget that a boy actor is squeaking the part in Cleopatra's death scene, and we find Cleopatra's consciously theatrical self-representation disarmingly moving. Our defences are shattered, our sceptical inclination to disbelieve is suspended.<sup>19</sup>

Only the staging of a *Roman* suicide, ironically, will allow Cleopatra to remain intact and unstageable in the Roman theatre. Suicide vouchsafes Cleopatra her woman's identity, in opposition to the epheban squeaks and posturings that would betray it. To be a woman she must act the man in killing herself, securing her integrity at the expense of dissolving her being, and thus playing out the classic contest of tragedy. By outdoing the Romans at their game, by hoisting them on their own theatrical petard, Cleopatra undoes the power of Roman colonialism to fashion her on its terms:

My resolution's placed, and I have nothing  
Of woman in me. Now from head to foot  
I am marble-constant. Now the fleeting moon  
No planet is of mine. (5.2.237-40)

The heroine fixes herself as male soldier, marble Roman, Roman suicide. Yet she is also a mother and thus, her disclaimer notwithstanding, allied to the lunar Isis and even to Lucina, goddess of child bearing. Her child is the asp that brings her the erotic extinction of death.

It is especially in terms of resexualizing the dead that Cleopatra's abounding valour repays Antony's and even recompenses his lapses.<sup>20</sup> Cleopatra metamorphoses the end of the life cycle that autumn usually symbolizes into the ceaseless fertility of her lover, reminiscent of her own at Cydnus: 'For his bounty, / There was no winter in't; an autumn it was / That grew the more by reaping' (5.2.85-7).<sup>21</sup> The intensity of 'immortal longings' (5.2.280) for an autumn that ever revives

itself at climactic foison seems to *rouse* Antony to meet his bride:

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. Husband, I come!  
Now to that name my courage prove my title! (5.2.282-7)

The asp as substitute for the absent husband performs the act of death as the consummation of the wedding rite. Cleopatra's 'Husband, I come!' answers Antony's identical death climax, 'I come, my queen' (4.14.51).<sup>22</sup> The lovers transformed to spouses lie secure within the bounds of legitimacy, laying to rest once and for all any doubts about the beloved's faithfulness. Legitimacy and faithfulness in no way undercut eroticism, moreover; nor, I argue, does eroticism preclude that this union have a procreative or restorative aim.

Shakespeare read in North's Plutarch how Cleopatra aroused the asp to bite her more vehemently: she 'did pricke and thrust it with a spindell of golde' (p. 316). To rouse the asp thus is to court the sweet pain of death: 'The stroke of death is as a pinch / Which hurts and is desired' (5.2.294-5). This image recalls Cydnus and its exultation in death, remote indeed from the expected tone of dirge. Cleopatra addresses playfully the asp that pinches her as her 'poor venomous fool' (5.2.304), her baby that suckles life from and returns death to the nurturing breast.<sup>23</sup> The fluids exchanged between them are not merely poison, for the serpent's bite effects a wished-for, perhaps even fruitful union:

*Cleopatra.* Dost thou not see my baby at my breast  
That sucks the nurse asleep?  
*Charmian.* O break! O break!  
*Cleopatra.* As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle—  
O Antony!—Nay, I will take thee too.  
[Applies another asp to her arm.]

What should I stay—

*Dies.* (5.

The sensuous delicacy of Cleopatra's poetry befits a wife addressing her husband on their wedding night. If one referent of 'thee' is the asp as child sucking at the breast, another referent may be Antony himself, for whom the serpent stands in as a type of metonymic fetish. Cleopatra's vocative cry, 'O Antony!—Nay, I will take thee too', may be construed to mean that it is *Antony's* deadly but pleasing phallic bite that vouchsafes her the extinction 'sweet as balm'.<sup>24</sup> From the Roman epithet of 'strumpet's fool' (1.1.13) Cleopatra transforms Antony into an asp-like 'fool' of her own making and nurturing.<sup>25</sup>

As we have seen, Antony's desperately repeated cries in Act Three to be equal to himself by the performative utterance, 'I am Antony', were broken once for all by Mardian's fictitious report of Cleopatra's calling out his proper name in death. But Cleopatra proves as good as her mendaciously impersonated word: in real death she *does* cry out the name 'Antony'. Seen by hindsight, 'Antony' is the only lover's name that Cleopatra invokes at any point during the action of the play.<sup>26</sup> Whereas Mardian's citation of 'Antony' was a death blow to the referential Antony, is Cleopatra's direct vocative address able to restore this real Antony—the man of flesh, that is, not the nominal signifier? By speaking 'Antony' can Cleopatra revive Antony? Can she undo what Mardian's fatal 'Antony' did? Will she make Antony himself again?

One way to approach these questions about romance and revival is from the perspective of Plutarch's *Of Isis and Osiris*. The 'baby' / asp that Cleopatra nurses at her breast is functionally analogous to the prosthesis that Isis, whom Plutarch calls 'the nurse that suckleth and feedeth the whole world' (p. 1301), builds to restore part of her lost Osiris: 'in sted of that natural part, she made a counterfet one, called Phallus, which she consecrated: and in the honor thereof the Aegyptians hold a solemne feast' (p. 1294). Cleopatra's death performance is a defence against loss, like Isis' construction of the artificial member. Both serve to keep alive symbolically

what is dead and unrecoverable, substituting a symbolic remnant and ceremonial recuperation for the real thing that Isis has searched for in vain.<sup>27</sup> Erecting a phallus over the dead is both celebration and commemoration, both ecstasy and mourning: the two senses of 'death'. The deceased Antony is resurrected and re-eroticized as a potent part, a synecdochal concentration or reanimation of the Antony who was, his reduced body now continuous solely with the phallic worm that grants the pleasure of death. The Clown's many jokes on the phallic valences of worms in a basket of figs<sup>28</sup> immediately before the suicide insinuate themselves into an interpretive panoply: in addressing the worm Cleopatra is naming her husband, or her husband's penis—Call it 'Antony', as she does—or the phallus as symbol of the loss of 'Antony', or 'Antony' as nominal signifier of the lost signifieds in the metonymic chain: penis, body, life.

In Plutarch's account the deceased Osiris is nonetheless active at a distance, because as Nilus he is dispersed everywhere in liquid form. The priests designate by Osiris 'all vertue and power that produceth moisture and water, taking it to be the materiall cause of generation, and the nature generative of seed' (p. 1300). The fig resembles the dismembered organ, and its leaves are fetishes that recall what is lost: 'which fig leafe signifieth the imbibition and motion of all things: and besides, it seemeth naturally to resemble the member of generation' (p. 1301). In *Antony and Cleopatra* the fig leaves have tracks of 'slime upon them, such as th'aspic leaves / Upon the caves of Nile' (5.2.351-2). *Slime* is both semen (*OED* v. 2a) and the mud of the Nile (*OED* v. 1a), and the combination of the two to form the hermaphroditic bed of spontaneous generation, which Shakespeare describes thus:

*Antony.*                   The higher Nilus swells,  
The more it promises. As it ebbs, the seedsman  
Upon the slime and ooze scatters his grain,  
And shortly comes to harvest.  
*Lepidus.* You've strange serpents there?  
*Antony.* Ay, Lepidus

*Lepidus*. Your serpent of Egypt is bred, now, of your mud by  
the operation of your sun; so is your crocodile. (2.7.20-7)

No hint of death mars this communication upon breeding. The slimy serpent whose genealogy Antony and Lepidus discuss may be identical to the asp that Cleopatra attaches to her breast in the final scene.<sup>29</sup> The ‘slime’ in this instance, as opposed to the use of the same word at 5.2.351, is the feminine matter that the (also slimy) seed inseminates. That ‘slime’ indicates first female, then male, seed in its two occurrences in the text suggests the liquefaction of the distinction between the sexes, or the indistinction of the sexes in the muddy-aqueous breeding ground.<sup>30</sup> So too the distinction of the seasons collapses in the context of Nilus’ hermaphroditic breeding: it is a short and rather disjunctive transition from the grain harvest in line 23 to the autochthonous serpents in the next line. The harvest that arrives so suddenly is like the bounty of Cydnus that Cleopatra celebrates in Antony: a winterless autumn that grows the more by reaping. If the Nile is Antonian in its bounty, it is little surprise that Shakespeare holds out the possibility that Antony is like the Nile in its fecundating eternal return.

The phantasy that motivates *Antony and Cleopatra* is characteristic of the Romance mode: against the conventions of naturalism the woman is able symbolically to reanimate the body of her dead husband by calling out his name, as she did before in Mardian’s fatal fiction of their last act of love *de vivants*. Cleopatra simply rehearses her earlier death rehearsal, performing it the second time to undo the effect it had earlier: having killed Antony by uttering his name excruciatingly, repeating and reversing the same will return him to life. She takes as her model the mother leaning over her baby (asp) and calling passionately the name that she gave it originally, as if rehearsing the name opens the mother’s talismanic secret of secrets: birth, life, resurrection. The name is no longer only nominal, adrift in mere signifying, but instead is endowed with the metaphysical power to rouse both significant meaning and referent (body) in its wake. If ever one could imagine such a unity between name and body, it would be at the moment of

naming the child at birth, when the body of the child is still one with the mother-lover who calls it into being.

Cleopatra chooses a death that echoes but subverts the manly Roman fashion, and in doing so she explicitly denies the woman in her, as we have seen (5.2.237-40). But it is not exactly the Roman fashion of suicide, since it makes the key substitution of worm for sword. The worm defies the easy phallicism of the Roman sword that militates for female chastity and conventional male *virtus*. And the ‘fleeting moon’ of womanliness will not completely out: the woman breast-feeds her child as her last martial *and* maternal act, her defiance that clears a legacy for nurture. She dies a warrior *mother*, an altogether original position in Shakespeare’s canon. And the ‘fool’ suckling at her breast is in one sense Antony, whose bungled suicide she now recasts recuperatively in marble (or rather in a playtext whose lines will outlast even marble). Cleopatra out-romans the Romans by repeating and representing the Roman discipline of death, wielding the worm more pointedly than Antony did the sword. Marmoreal tragedy displaces the liquid languishing of Antony’s death, the effeminizing and self-defeating outflowing upon which the Romans heaped contempt. A woman remasculinizes posthumously the broken name ‘Antony’, remaking that name into the force which renders Cleopatra’s death orgasmic and parturitional, pleasurable and re-creative. Dead, Antony is made the inseminating inspiration for Cleopatra’s death art and act. The wife recoups the losses of her lover by giving him new life—her life—in her memorial representation of him as husband and child.

<sup>1</sup> All quotations are from *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. John Wilders, Arden Shakespeare, Third Series (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Janet Adelman argues that *Antony and Cleopatra* is unique in Shakespeare’s canon in exposing its protagonists to the multiple and often critical perspectives of outside onlookers. As opposed to the earlier great tragic heroes, Antony and Cleopatra have scant opportunity to speak for themselves from a point of view not open to ironic commentary. *The Common Liar: An Essay on Antony*

- and Cleopatra (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 24-49.
- <sup>3</sup> Carol Cook rings many useful changes on the imagery of becoming in the text, which she allies to the thematics of melting. The beautiful or becoming is what eschews the solid state. 'The Fatal Cleopatra', in *Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender*, ed. Shirley Nelson Garner and Madelon Sprengnether (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).
- <sup>4</sup> The dizzying genealogy of the serpent and its many symbolisms is unveiled in Philip Slater, *The Glory of Hera: Greek Mythology and the Greek Family* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 75-122. In this psychoanalytic survey of classical literature the serpent is the maternal devourer more often than the phallic piercer. 'The serpent represents the oral-narcissistic dilemma because it is the most common symbol of boundary-ambiguity' (p. 91). Boundaries between life and death, male and female, are dissolved by Shakespeare's Nile and its serpents that are both sterile and dangerously fecund. See also Constance Brown Kuriyama, 'The Mother of the World: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*', *ELR* 7 (1977), 324-51.
- <sup>5</sup> The stage direction establishes a fundamental uncertainty, according to Donald Cheney, as to whether the Romans see Antony 'as cock of the walk and sole possessor of this queen, or as part of her feminized entourage' (18). "'A very Antony": Patterns of Antonomasia in Shakespeare', *Connotations* 4.1-2 (1994-95), 9-24.
- <sup>6</sup> In *Literary Transvaluation: From Vergilian Epic to Shakespearean Tragicomedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), Barbara Bono surveys Shakespeare's many debts to classical sources: the story of Aeneas' dilemma over whether to choose love for Dido or the exigent claims of empire; the tale of the adulterous love of Mars and Venus; and the allegory of Hercules' vexed choice between love and long life with Omphale, who dresses him in female clothing, on the one hand, and the short but virtuous life of the soldier whose name lives long in memory, on the other. Both the Aeneas and Hercules stories assume that a man's good name is inseparable from the memory in which it will be held and is incompatible with keeping a woman's company. The story of the love of Mars and Venus was allegorized in two contrary ways, either as the overcoming of war by love that gives

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- birth to peace, or as the unmanning of martial valour in succumbing to lust and luxury. See also the very extensive discussion of classical love myths in Adelman, *Common Liar*, pp. 53-101.
- <sup>7</sup> The security of the love affair depends on the lovers' good repute, the proverbial reputation that they must live up to. Once the repute encoded in a name is compromised, the name ceases to signify what it did in the eyes of the beloved. So Troilus comes to regard 'Cressida' as a byword for treachery—'This is, and is not, Cressid' (5.2.143)—because he has forced her to claim renown as a simile for falseness: 'Yea, let them say, to stick the heart of falsehood, "As false as Cressid"' (3.2.195-96).
- <sup>8</sup> A.A. Ansari surveys various liquid images—Cydnus, discandyng, clouds, Nilus—as metaphors for desire, fertility, and evanescence: 'Antony and Cleopatra: An Image of Liquefaction [*sic*]', *The Aligarh Journal of English Studies* 8.1 (1983), 79-93.
- <sup>9</sup> Antony uses a similar formulation to describe how Caesar must regard Antony's defeat at Actium: 'For he seems / Proud and disdainful, harping on what I am, / Not what he knew I was' (3.13.146-48). The contrast between the two Antonies presupposes the opening of a temporal discontinuity, which in turn predicates the sense of tragic retrospection.
- <sup>10</sup> Plutarch, *The Life of Marcus Antonius*, from *Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes*, trans. Thomas North (1579), in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, ed. Geoffrey Bullough (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957-66), v. 301. Subsequent references to North's Plutarch are cited by page number in Bullough's edition.
- <sup>11</sup> Coppélia Kahn traces the tension for Shakespeare's audience between Stoic and Christian arguments for and against suicide: *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 110-39.
- <sup>12</sup> Modern editors of Shakespeare introduce quotation marks to observe the distinction between use and mention of a name. To be mentioned, in quotation marks, is to be pricked out for the alienation of one's proper name.
- <sup>13</sup> Phyllis Rackin points out that Cleopatra's phrasing to 'word it, prithe, piteously' is incriminatingly close to her summary dismissal of Caesar's insincerity: 'He words me, girls, he words me, that I should not / Be noble to myself' (5.2.190-1): 'Shakespeare's Boy Cleopatra, the Decorum of Nature, and the

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Golden World of Poetry', in *New Casebooks: Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. John Drakakis (London: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 78-100 (p. 90).

- <sup>14</sup> 'The extraordinary vigour of the sexual imagery here calls to mind the Roman empress who is supposed to have lamented the fact that the female anatomy has only seven orifices': David Bevington, ed., *Antony and Cleopatra* New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 132.
- <sup>15</sup> Janet Adelman gives a powerful defence of the play's 'maternal matrix', including a redemptive reading of Mardian's description of Cleopatra's death. Adelman sees in the latter's final groan the hint of an abortive birth: 'But Cleopatra's monumental recreation of Antony rewrites this abortive birth: in the protected female space of her own monument, the memory of her womb can at last bring Antony forth whole and undivided, rendering him life' (*Common Liar*, p. 187). Cleopatra will indeed fantasize a resurrection of Antony in good time, in Act Five, but Mardian's lines in Act Four I read literally as death, not (yet) metaphorically as rebirth. Cleopatra rends life before she renders it to another. But Adelman cogently points out that Antony is relieved to meet his own death since it permits him to abandon the rigid and wearying Roman sword in favor of fluid dissolution and union with the beloved: *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest* (New York: Routledge, 1992). Rackin emphasizes the diminishment that Antony suffers in a suicide that is 'a messy affair' ('Shakespeare's Boy Cleopatra', p. 90), not the Stoic model of noble triumph over mortality. Cynthia Marshall sees an Antony fragmented, dispersed, and feminized in death. 'Wounded, bleeding, and lacking agency, Antony takes on a typically feminine position': 'Man of Steel Done Got the Blues: Melancholic Subversion of Presence in *Antony and Cleopatra*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 44 (1993), 385-408 (403). Although my approach in these pages seems to throw cold water on the romantic reading of the play, I embrace such a reading with a vengeance in discussing Act Five.
- <sup>16</sup> Madelon Gohlke derives the hero's anxiety about losing the mettle of his sword from his self-perception as womanish. The matriarchal vision in the play sees Cleopatra both in terms of witches and non-nurturing mothers like Circe, Acrasia, and Eve, and in terms of the swelling life-force whose 'conception' of Antony preserves him for celebration by future lovers. "'I wooed

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- thee with my sword”: Shakespeare’s Tragic Paradigms’, in *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays*, ed. Murray M. Schwartz and Coppélia Kahn (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 170-87.
- <sup>17</sup> Anne Barton gives the classic statement of how Cleopatra’s death follows with such surprising redemptiveness upon the bungled death of Antony: “‘Nature’s Piece ’Gainst Fancy”: The Divided Catastrophe in *Antony and Cleopatra*’, *Essays, mainly Shakespearean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). In contrast to Barton and Cynthia Marshall, Coppélia Kahn argues on the basis of analogy to the bloody yet dignified suicide of Cato that Antony’s suicide is not ‘bungled’. Antony commits suicide not for love but to outdo Caesar in the contest for honour. Suicide ‘is the ultimate expression of homosocial rivalry. Through suicide, Antony will regain his sword’ (*Roman Shakespeare*, p. 130). Suicide grants him escape from ‘a feminizing shame and restoration of the honor that is a crucial component of his manhood’ (p. 131). Lorraine Helms puts the death scene of Cleopatra into the context of the violent endings in English Senecan plays. “‘The High Roman Fashion”: Sacrifice, Suicide, and the Shakespearean Stage’, *PMLA* 107 (1992), 554-565. See also Harry Levin, ‘Two Monumental Death Scenes: *Antony and Cleopatra*, 4.15; 5.2’, in *Shakespeare—Text, Language, Criticism: Essays in Honour of Marvin Spevack*, ed. Bernhard Fabian and Kurt Tetzeli von Rosador (Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 1987), pp. 147-63.
- <sup>18</sup> Andrew Gurr gives an exhaustive account of the uses of the inner stage in *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642*, 3rd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- <sup>19</sup> For a performance history that stresses Shakespeare’s debts to the private theatre, especially in the use of boy actors to play the roles of Cleopatra and her entourage, see Michael Shapiro, ‘Boying Her Greatness: Shakespeare’s Use of Coterie Drama in “Antony and Cleopatra”’, *Modern Language Review* 77 (1982), 1-15. Of the many critics who comment on Cleopatra’s desire not to have her greatness boyed in Rome, Rackin is especially adroit in teasing out the ironies.
- <sup>20</sup> Many images apart from those already cited suggest Antony’s impotence and exhaustion. His ‘soldier’s pole is fallen’ (4.15.67); his sword ‘robbed’ (4.14.23) first by Cleopatra, then ‘robbed’ from his ‘wound’ (5.1.25) by Dercetus; his ‘lamp is spent, it’s out’

- (4.15.89). Cleopatra's sigh, 'The crown o'th' earth doth melt', followed immediately by the stage direction, '[*Antony dies*]' (4.15.65), gives point to the many metaphors used to describe Antony's self-defeating expense of spirit.
- <sup>21</sup> Plutarch's *Of Isis and Osiris* describes Typhon the sea drying out Osiris the river Nile. The time of the river's flood is 'greene, fresh, pleasant, and generative: but the latter season of Autumne, for want of moisture, is an enemie to plants, and breedeth diseases in man and beast': *The Philosophie, commonlie called The Morals*, trans. Philemon Holland (London, 1603), p. 1300. Subsequent references to Holland's Plutarch are cited in the text by page number. In recreating Antony as an autumn that is never desiccated, Cleopatra-Isis restores Antony-Osiris from 'siccity' (dryness, impotence) at the hands of Caesar-Typhon. In other terms, against the inevitable seasonal cycle that ends in death, Antony-Osiris captures autumn from passing into the control of Caesar-Typhon. For a more complex and detailed elaboration upon this mythographic declension, see Bono, *Literary Transvaluation*, pp. 191-213. Michael Lloyd gives a compact and useful synopsis of the allegorical and symbolic motifs of the Isis and Osiris story in 'Cleopatra as Isis', *Shakespeare Survey* 12 (1959), 88-94.
- <sup>22</sup> Apropos of 5.2.286, even a conservative editor like Bevington comments that 'the word "come" often includes an erotic suggestion, especially in this play' (p. 254). A thorough tracing of the implications of 'come' and other bawdy terms can be found in Philip Traci, *The Love Play of Antony and Cleopatra* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970).
- <sup>23</sup> In Plutarch's account Cleopatra applies the asp to her arm. But Shakespeare was not the first author to have Cleopatra apply the asp to her breast. Marvin Spevack discusses the rival traditions in *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: Antony and Cleopatra* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1990), pp. 337-8.
- <sup>24</sup> The dashes and the bracketed stage direction are not in the Folio. Without the pointing that modern editions like the Arden give, the referent of 'thee' is indeed ambiguous.
- <sup>25</sup> Antony, or an associated part of him, is either symbolized by the asp or is its (pet) name. For the tradition of feminizing and babying the penis, see George Gascoigne's 'The Lullabie of a Lover', in which the aging poet lulls his penis to sleep. In *The Glory of Hera* Slater adduces the many ways in which the Greeks

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- gendered their serpents as feminine: curvaceous, devouring, nurturing. See especially his discussion of the opposition between the straightness of male erection and the feminine curves of serpents (pp. 80-3).
- <sup>26</sup> To say that Cleopatra speaks via direct address the name of no other lover but Antony is not to deny, however, her references in the third person to past lovers.
- <sup>27</sup> Peter Erickson makes use of the myth of Isis and Osiris to argue that the maternal in Antony helps create the maternal in Cleopatra, whereby she effects his restoration. 'He has disintegrated into Osiris-like fragments, and in grieving for him, Cleopatra reconstructs his image on a colossal scale': *Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare's Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 141.
- <sup>28</sup> Walter R. Coppedge discusses puns on *lie* and *die* in the Clown's remarks on worms and figs, as well as seminal images of water, melting, and seed, in 'The Joy of the Worm: Dying in *Antony and Cleopatra*', *Renaissance Papers 1998*, pp. 41-50. Interpretation of the sexual symbolism of the asp may, of course, yield to moral allegory, as in Richard Madelaine's reading of the asp as 'a tragic instrument of apotheosis: changeable lust (the serpent) becomes committed love (the baby), through the agency of ennobling death (the worm)': Madelaine, ed., *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare in Production (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 22.
- <sup>29</sup> A. M. Kinghorn sifts the herpetological clues in "'All Joy O' The Worm" Or, Death by Asp or Asps Unknown in Act V of *Antony and Cleopatra*', *English Studies 75* (1994), 104-9.
- <sup>30</sup> The *OED* cites the following well-known passage from Spenser's *Faerie Queene* for the use of *slime* in the sense of the hermaphroditic ooze whence creatures arise spontaneously:

As when old father *Nilus* gins to swell  
With timely pride above the *Aegyptian* vale,  
His fattie waves do fertile slime outwell,  
And overflow each plaine and lowly dale:  
But when his later spring gins to avale,  
Huge heapes of mudd he leaves, wherein there breed  
Ten thousand kindes of creatures, partly male  
And partly female of his fruitfull seed;  
Such ugly monstrous shapes elsewhere may no man reed.

(I.i.21)

Spenser's tone of moralistic disgust contrasts with Antony's fascination for the Nile's fecund mixing of the sexes. What Spenser sees as 'monstrous' Antony envies as nature's ingenious and effective short-circuiting of man's compulsion to labour in agricultural production and in sexual reproduction. The Nile, as if unfallen, simply gives life spontaneously.

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