INTRODUCTION

Date and sources

The latest possible date for *Antony and Cleopatra* is 1608, when, on 20 May, 'A booke Called. Anthony. *and* Cleopatra' was entered in the Stationers' Register by Edward Blount, along with 'A booke called. *The booke of* Pericles *prynce of Tyre*'. Although this same Blount and the younger Jaggard received a licence in November 1623 to include *Antony and Cleopatra* in the Folio among sixteen plays 'not formerly entered to other men' – a licensing that would normally be unnecessary for a play already registered – scholars are generally satisfied that the 1608 entry refers to the play we know.[1] Blount was on friendly terms with Shakespeare's company, the King's Men, and may have undertaken a 'staying entry' in 1608 to prevent piracy by some other publisher. If so, the tactic failed with *Pericles* (which was issued in 1609 by another publisher). *Antony and Cleopatra* at all events remained unpublished until the Folio of 1623.

The earliest possible date for the composition of the play is less easy to determine. Samuel Daniel, who reprinted his *Cleopatra* (1594) for the fourth time in 1607 in a 'newly altered' version, seems to have been influenced by Shakespeare's newly produced play. Daniel alludes to Cydnus as the meeting-place of the lovers and rewrites other passages in which specific word choice seems to echo that of Shakespeare, such as Cleopatra's 'I have both hands and will, and I can die'; compare Shakespeare's 'My resolution and my hands I'll trust' (4.15.51).[2] Such details could have been found in some cases by a consulting of Plutarch or the Countess of Pembroke's *Antonie* (published 1592), but cumulatively they suggest that Daniel found a more immediate and current impetus. And if Daniel did profit from *Antony and Cleopatra* before the end of 1607, the play must have been performed some months earlier; the closing of the theatres on account of the plague in 1607 makes it unlikely that the play could have been performed before Easter of that year.[3]

Shakespeare's new play may also have influenced Barnabe Barnes's *The Devil's Charter*, registered on 16 October 1607 and produced by the King's Men at court on 2 February earlier that same year. Most telling is Barnes's reference to the use of aspics to kill two young princes as they sleep; the aspics are applied to their breasts and are referred to as 'Cleopatra's birds, / Fed fat and plump with proud Egyptian slime'.[4]

[1] See MacCallum, p. 301, Arden², p. xxvi.

[2] Arden², pp. xxvi–xxvii. Ernest Schanzer, 'Daniel's revision of his *Cleopatra*', *RES* ns 8 (1957), 375–81, asks sceptically whether most of the changes in Daniel cannot be attributed to his being influenced by the Countess of Pembroke's *Antonie*, but does agree that the verbal closeness of 'None about Caesar trust but Proculeius' (4.15.50) to Daniel argues for direct influence in one direction or the other.

[3] J. Leeds Barroll, 'The chronology of Shakespeare's Jacobean plays and the dating of *Antony and Cleopatra*', in Gordon Ross Smith (ed.), *Essays on Shakespeare*, 1965, pp. 115–62.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 149. Barnes may also have been familiar with a similar episode in George Peele's *Edward I*.

To be sure, the printed text claims to offer various corrections and augmentations incorporated in the text in the aftermath of court performance, but the weight of scholarly opinion favours the likelihood that Barnes's indebtedness predates the February performance.[1] If so, the likeliest date for *Antony and Cleopatra* is some time in 1606, probably late in the year.

This dating means that we should be cautious about speaking of *Antony and Cleopatra* as Shakespeare's triumphant emergence from the dark world of *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Lear*, and *Macbeth*. Even if *Hamlet* and *Othello* substantially predate it, *Lear* is very close though probably slightly earlier, whilst *Macbeth* may be contemporary. If *Pericles* belongs to this period, so too may *Coriolanus* – even *Timon*. There is no clear pattern of development towards a lighter spirit and vision in which to place *Antony and Cleopatra*.[2]

For his chief source Shakespeare turned to 'The Life of Marcus Antonius' in Plutarch's *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, as translated by Sir Thomas North from the French of Jacques Amyot and first published in 1579. There Shakespeare found substantially all the narrative content he needed for his play, and extensive portrayals of the major characters (excepting Enobarbus, who is mentioned by Plutarch only briefly).[3] The narrative indebtedness is particularly marked in the second half of the play.

At times the verbal parallels are remarkably close. Shakespeare worked with North's Plutarch in front of him, adapting dialogue and vocabulary closely from what he found in many cases. Compare, for example, the following exchange in 5.2:

> 1 GUARD What work is here, Charmian? Is this well done?
> CHARMIAN It is well done, and fitting for a princess
> Descended of so many royal kings. (5.2.319–21)

with the original in North:

> One of the soldiers, seeing her, angrily said unto her: 'Is that well done, Charmian?' 'Very well', said she again, 'and meet for a princess descended from the race of so many noble kings.' (1009F–1010A)

There are many such passages,[4] the most famous of which is Enobarbus's narration of the first meeting of Antony and Cleopatra on the river of Cydnus. Here is Shakespeare:

> The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne
> Burned on the water. The poop was beaten gold;
> Purple the sails, and so perfumèd that
> The winds were lovesick with them. The oars were silver,
> Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
> The water which they beat to follow faster,

[1] E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, 1930, 1, 476–8.
[2] Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, 'The canon and chronology of Shakespeare's plays', in *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, 1987, pp. 129–30.
[3] Elkin Calhoun Wilson, 'Shakespeare's Enobarbus', in James G. McManaway *et al.* (eds.), *Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies*, 1948, pp. 391–408.
[4] See, for example, 3.6.70 ff., 3.13.150 ff., 2.2.251 ff., and 5.2.199 ff.

> As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
> It beggared all description: she did lie
> In her pavilion – cloth of gold, of tissue –
> O'erpicturing that Venus where we see
> The fancy outwork nature. 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. (2.2.201–15)

And here is North:

> She disdained to set forward otherwise but to take her barge in the river of Cydnus, the poop whereof was of gold, the sails of purple, and the oars of silver, which kept stroke in rowing after the sound of the music of flutes, hautboys, citterns, viols, and such other instruments as they played upon in the barge. And now for the person of herself: she was laid under a pavilion of cloth of gold of tissue, apparelled and attired like the goddess Venus commonly drawn in picture, and hard by her, on either hand of her, pretty fair boys apparelled as painters do set forth god Cupid, with little fans in their hands with the which they fanned wind upon her. (981E)

Many similarly close details follow in the rest of this speech. Yet this remarkable borrowing also illustrates the transforming power of Shakespeare's art, for he repeatedly adds touches of personification, and puts the whole into the mouth of Enobarbus, a wry, humorous Roman soldier whose sardonic perspective adds persuasiveness to the gruff but admiring portrait of the Egyptian queen. Shakespeare also gives Enobarbus an onstage audience for this speech, a pair of dutiful Romans whose curiosity to hear gossip is comically at odds with the normal severity of their lives. Plutarch, by contrast, describes the scene in his own person as narrator, so that the description is accordingly informed by his own outspoken views of the protagonists' behaviour.

On a larger scale, Shakespeare excerpts from his source in a way that gives it dramatic shape. He adapts a historical narrative beginning in 41 BC with the military activities of Lucius and Fulvia through the battle of Actium in 31 BC and down to the lovers' suicides in 30 BC. In contrast to Plutarch's spacious discursive narrative, Shakespeare's play moves with remarkable energy and a sense of the continuous onrush of events, even though it also allows for the passage of time and never loses the expansive sense of ancient history at its most eventful. Shakespeare condenses into Scenes 2 and 3 of Act 1 the news of Fulvia's warring against Lucius, their coming together against Caesar, Labienus's success with the Parthians against Antony in Syria and Lydia, Fulvia's death, and Pompey's threats against Rome, whereas in Plutarch these events are narrated in sequence over a period of time; Fulvia dies in 40 BC, and the meeting with Pompey at Misenum is not until 39 BC.

Another major condensation concerns the breakdown of Antony's marriage to Octavia. Shakespeare shows us a single attempt at mediation by Octavia and a scene of leave-taking between her and Antony at Athens, whereas in Plutarch the matter extends over eight years (from 40 to 32 BC), during which time we hear repeatedly of pregnancies, separations, attempts at reconciliation, and mutual accusations that finally go beyond the reach of compromise. Shakespeare suppresses the distasteful business

of the expulsion of Octavia from Antony's house in 33 BC, gives no report of Antony's disastrous campaign in Parthia that reflects such discredit on his soldiership, and leaves the impression that Antony has had no children at all by Octavia ('Have I my pillow left unpressed in Rome, / Forborne the getting of a lawful race', 3.13.108–9). Still further compression of events all but eliminates the interval of time (some months in Plutarch) between the battle of Actium and the death of Antony, and the days between Antony's suicide and that of Cleopatra.

On occasion, Shakespeare also rearranges the order of events. Antony hears the Soothsayer's warning to keep space between himself and Caesar (2.3) before the negotiations with Pompey, not afterwards as in Plutarch. The change makes little difference in the great sweep of events, but it does magnify a quality of rashness in Antony already evident elsewhere in Shakespeare's sources.[1] For the most part, however, Shakespeare is faithful not only to the historical facts but to the spirit of Plutarch's account.

In his presentation of character, Shakespeare goes beyond Plutarch in the direction of a multiplicity of points of view and a paradoxical complexity within the two protagonists. Plutarch views Antony as the victim of a tragic infatuation. Although he plentifully allows Antony to be brave, resourceful, munificent, frank, and charismatic, he makes no attempt to minimise the excesses of Antony's behaviour in Egypt, his financial dishonesty and exploitation of others in order to maintain an entourage of dissipated followers, his indifference to bloodshed, his mistrust of subordinates, his 'mocking and flouting of every man' (981A), his susceptibility to flattery, and his failures of generalship in the Parthian expedition. Similarly, in describing Cleopatra, Plutarch's admiration is real enough for the infinite charm, but the moral conclusion is no less firm and Roman in perspective. Cleopatra's main effect is to 'stir up many vices' as yet hidden in Antony; 'if any spark of goodness or hope of rising were left him, Cleopatra quenched it straight and made it worse than before' (981B). In Egypt, Antony 'spent and lost in childish sports (as a man might say) and idle pastimes the most precious thing a man can spend (as Antiphon saith), and that is, time' (982C–D). Plutarch is plainly distressed to see this great general 'made so subject to a woman's will' (999C). All this is of course in Shakespeare's play as well, but it is expressed by Roman commentators like Demetrius and Philo, or Caesar, or Antony himself when a 'Roman thought' has struck him, and is offset by a contrasting world of pleasure and imagination. Plutarch portrays that Egyptian world in all its exotic splendour, and makes plain his own fascination as well, but it is the fascination of one who disapproves of a surrender to pleasure of this kind.[2]

The difference is one of emphasis. Shakespeare found in Plutarch a rich complexity in both of his protagonists, one that gave him ample material for his portrayal of their relationship once he set aside the Graeco-Roman perspective of the narrator he found

[1] MacCallum, p. 334.

[2] Plutarch himself was a Greek who admired the Roman empire; he was, as T. McAlindon puts it, 'a Platonic transcendentalist with a Ciceronian devotion to morals and the golden mean, an historian who believed in the existence of demi-gods and held that the essentials of Western philosophy are to be found in Greek and Egyptian mythology' (*Shakespeare and Decorum*, 1973, p. 187).

in his original.[1] Plutarch speaks censoriously, and yet he lends support to the idea that Antony and Cleopatra are like demigods. Shakespeare retains much derogatory information not so much in what we see Antony actually do onstage as in what others say about him and what he admits about himself. Yet Shakespeare balances this picture of a tragic fall into enslavement in two ways: by ennobling the vision of love in a fashion that Plutarch could never have sanctioned, and conversely by exploring a darker side of Octavius Caesar's rise to empire than is evident in Plutarch.

Appraisals of Caesar came down to the Renaissance in two contrasting traditions. As a ruler who became the Emperor Augustus after the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra, he offered a positive image of stable rule: he brought to a close a prolonged period of divided authority and ushered in a reign of peace in the Mediterranean world. The empire was thus a potential model for Tudor and Stuart rule in England after the protracted civil wars of the fifteenth century.[2] Ancient historians and poets such as Suetonius, Plutarch, Appian, Livy, Paterculus, Florus, Josephus, Dio Cassius, and Propertius generally concurred in praising Augustus even as they condemned Antony's liaison with Cleopatra.[3] In the medieval period, St Augustine lauded Augustan Rome for its heroism and self-denial, and noted that Augustus had been specially chosen by Providence to reign at the time of Christ's birth, even if Rome was the type of the worldly city as contrasted with the heavenly city of Jerusalem.[4] Dante placed Cleopatra in the second circle of hell among those in whose lives 'Reason by lust is swayed', while Antony became an example of enslavement to lust in Boccaccio and in subsequent stories of 'the Fall of Princes' written by John Lydgate and others.[5]

This tradition of praise for Augustus and blame for Antony was sustained and amplified in late medieval times and in the Renaissance by Ranulf Higden, Thomas Lanquet, Johannes Sleidanus, William Fulbeck, Jacques Amyot, Thomas North, Philemon Holland, Simon Goulart, Ben Jonson, and others.[6] Castiglione, Montaigne, and Robert

[1] Plutarch writes with a 'rare comprehensiveness of vision', says T. McAlindon, 'in which imagination and reason, sympathy and judicial detachment, often seem at odds' (*Shakespeare and Decorum*, p. 187). See also Barbara Bono, *Literary Transvaluation: From Vergilian Epic to Shakespearean Tragicomedy*, 1984, pp. 153 ff.

[2] James Emerson Phillips, Jr, *The State in Shakespeare's Greek and Roman Plays*, 1940, pp. 188–205.

[3] Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars*, Book II, chap. 17, trans. Philemon Holland as *The History of the Twelve Caesars*, 1606; Appian, *The Civil Wars*, Book V, chap. 1, para. 8 ff., trans. W. B. as *An Ancient History and Exquisite Chronicle of the Romans' Wars*, 1578; Livy, in a later epitome of his lost chapters (*periocha*), Books CXXX–CXXXIII; C. Velleius Paterculus, *The Roman History*, Book II, chaps. 82–7; Lucius Annaeus Florus, *Epitome of Roman History*, Book I, chap. 21; Josephus, *The Jewish History*, Book I, chap. 12, para. 5, trans. Thomas Lodge, 1602; Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, Book XLIX, chap. 32; Propertius, *Elegies*, Book III, Elegy 9. See J. Leeds Barroll, 'Shakespeare and Roman history', *MLR* 53 (1958), 327–43, and Marilyn L. Williamson, *Infinite Variety: Antony and Cleopatra in Renaissance Drama and Earlier Tradition*, 1974, pp. 19–43. Janet Adelman, *The Common Liar: An Essay on 'Antony and Cleopatra'*, 1973, pp. 54 ff., stresses more the ambivalence of these sources.

[4] St Augustine, *The City of God*, Book V, chaps. 12–21.

[5] Dante, *Inferno*, Canto V, line 63; Boccaccio, *De casibus virorum illustrium*, Book VI, and *De claris mulieribus*, chap. 86. See Franklin Dickey, *Not Wisely But Too Well: Shakespeare's Love Tragedies*, 1957, pp. 144–202.

[6] Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon*, 1527 (written in the fourteenth century); Thomas Lanquet, *Epitome of Chronicles*, 1549; Johannes Sleidanus (John Sleidan), *Brief Chronicle of the Four Principal Empires . . . Babylon, Persia, Grecia, and Rome*, trans. Stephan Wythers, 1563; William Fulbeck, *An Historical Collection of the Continual Factions, Tumults, and Massacres of the Romans and Italians*, 1601; 'Amyot to the Readers',

Burton refer to Antony and Cleopatra as examples of *Ate*, those whom the gods first make passionate before destroying them.[1] Shakespeare was doubtless aware of this historical judgement, and may even have seen an analogy between Augustus's *pax Romana* and the aspirations of King James I to be an influential peacemaker in Europe[2] – although whether Shakespeare endorsed this pro-Augustan viewpoint is an entirely different matter.

At any rate, the pro-Augustan view was not the only interpretation available to Shakespeare. Even if Octavius Caesar was admired for his statesmanship once he had become emperor, he was frequently criticised (sometimes by the same historians who praised him) as a machiavel for his behaviour during the period of civil strife. Appian, Suetonius, Tacitus, Pedro Mexia, Peter Heylyn, and William Fulbeck all portray him as capable of treachery, callousness, narrow self-interest, and cruelty during his years as triumvir; for some writers, his succession to the imperial title spells the demise of Roman liberty.[3] Shakespeare found elements of this more critical evaluation in Robert Garnier's *Marc Antoine* (1578) and in Samuel Daniel's *Tragedy of Cleopatra* (1594), where Caesar is portrayed as ambitious and bloody even though capable at times of compassion.[4] The Augustus Caesar Shakespeare found in his sources was a complex figure, one that gave him ample evidence of a Rome in which kingdoms are clay.

The ennobling vision of love, generally lacking in Plutarch, came to Shakespeare not only through his imagination and experience but by way of a number of possible sources. Virgil's *Aeneid* exerts a palpable influence, whether directly or as embodied in Renaissance drama and poetry. Like Aeneas, Antony is pulled from erotic entanglement in Africa by the call of Roman destiny and the heroic code of the masculine world. The *pax Romana* established at the end of Shakespeare's play is the subject of Virgil's eulogy. Yet the achievement of the Roman ideal exacts its cost in both works; a drama of love is played out against the epic sweep of history. Like Dido, Cleopatra is a regal figure capable of jealousy and rage, and possesses a nobility equalling that of her lover. Both women bring an abiding interest in fame to their noble suicides.[5] Dido is a sympathetic model

in North's Plutarch, sig. v; Plutarch, *Moralia*, sig. Ggg 2; Simon Goulart, *Life of Octavius Caesar Augustus*, in the 1603 edition of North's Plutarch, pp. 1159–83; Ben Jonson, *The Poetaster*, 1601. See Barroll, 'Shakespeare and Roman history', pp. 338–9, and Howard Erskine-Hill, 'Antony and Octavius: the theme of temperance in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*', *RMS* 14 (1970), 26–47.

[1] *The Courtier of Count Baldesar Castilio, Divided into Four Books*, trans. Sir Thomas Hoby, 1588, Book III, sig. Bb6^{v}; Montaigne, *Essays*, II, 33, trans. Donald Frame, 1957, p. 554; Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Part 1, section 2, member 3, subsection 6, and elsewhere. See Dickey, *Not Wisely But Too Well*, pp. 158–9.

[2] H. Neville Davies, 'Jacobean *Antony and Cleopatra*', *S.St.* 17 (1985), 123–58, pushes this purported connection with King James to an extreme.

[3] Appian, *The Civil Wars*, Books III–V; Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars*, Book II, chaps. 13 ff.; Tacitus, *Annals*, Book I, chap. 2; Pedro Mexia, *The History of All the Roman Emperors*, trans. W. T., 1604, pp. 29–46; Peter Heylyn (H. Seile), *Augustus: or, an Essay of Those Means and Counsels whereby the Commonwealth of Rome was Altered and Reduced into a Monarchy*, 1632; Fulbeck, *An Historical Collection*, p. 17. See Robert P. Kalmey, 'Shakespeare's Octavius and Elizabethan Roman history', *SEL* 18 (1978), 275–87, and Adelman, *The Common Liar*, p. 55.

[4] Adelman, *The Common Liar*, p. 56.

[5] Reuben A. Brower, *Hero and Saint: Shakespeare and the Graeco-Roman Heroic Tradition*, 1971, pp. 317–53, esp. 319 and 351; Bono, *Literary Transvaluation*, p. 2.

for Cleopatra also in Ovid's *Heroides*, where she is the deserted victim; in Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women* (based on Ovid) and in *The House of Fame*, where Aeneas is condemned by Venus as a traitor in love; and in Marlowe and Nashe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (*c.* 1587–93), with its unique blend of the Ovidian and the Virgilian.[1]

Antony and Cleopatra themselves sometimes appear in a partly favourable light in ancient and medieval texts. Although Horace condemns Cleopatra for her wantonness, he does admire her queenly suicide and her proud resolve not to grace Caesar's triumph.[2] In Boccaccio and John Lydgate as well, denunciation is mixed with admiration for the constancy of her devotion. John Gower includes Antony and Cleopatra among a procession of faithful lovers in his *Confessio Amantis*.[3]

Sympathetic interpretations of the famous lovers were available to Shakespeare in the dramatic literature of his own generation. The Countess of Pembroke's *The Tragedy of Antonie* (translated from the French (1578) of Robert Garnier, finished in 1590, published 1592) and Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedy of Cleopatra* (1594) portray the lovers as heroic victims of their own passionate excesses and remorseless destiny, regretfully aware of their failures but ready to face death with resolution and the expectation of an afterlife together in the world of the dead. Even if these severely Senecan closet dramas offered Shakespeare little that he wished to use in the way of dramatic construction and sententious rhetoric, they helped redress the prevalence of condemnation found in some ancient writers, and Daniel's poetic sensitivity to language gave Shakespeare some hints for dialogue and characterisation.[4]

Shakespeare's complex and ennobling vision of love may have come to him ultimately in part from mythology. The stories of Venus and Mars, to which Mardian refers (1.5.19), or Venus and Bacchus (as in North's Plutarch, 981F–982A), were available to Shakespeare in Book VIII of Homer's *Odyssey*, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and, closer to his own theatre, in John Lyly's *Sappho and Phao* (1584), wherein Venus is presented as cunning, erotic, and richly deserving her overthrow by the virtuous Sappho. Yet Venus herself could paradoxically represent chaste love. In the Renaissance

[1] Brower, *Hero and Saint*, p. 352; Ernest Schanzer, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare*, 1963, p. 160; Harrison, pp. 57–63; J. B. Steane, *Marlowe: A Critical Study*, 1965, p. 30; Robert Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome*, 1983, p. 122; and Adelman, *The Common Liar*, pp. 177–83. Michael Shapiro, 'Boying her greatness: Shakespeare's use of coterie drama in *Antony and Cleopatra*', *MLR* 77 (1982), 1–15, also sees an indebtedness to other pathetic-heroine plays of the coterie drama like *Sophonisba*.

[2] Horace, *Odes*, Book I, Ode 37, and Epode 9. See, for contrasting views of Horace's complex interpretation of Cleopatra, Dickey, *Not Wisely But Too Well*, pp. 146–7; Adelman, *The Common Liar*, p. 56; Williamson, *Infinite Variety*, pp. 19–25; and Perry D. Westbrook, 'Horace's influence on Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*', *PMLA* 62 (1947), 392–8.

[3] Admiration for Cleopatra is expressed in Boccaccio's *Fiametta* (1343) and in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, Book VIII, 2751 ff. See Donna Hamilton, '*Antony and Cleopatra* and the tradition of noble lovers', *SQ* 24 (1973), 235–51, and Williamson, *Infinite Variety*, pp. 51–2.

[4] Other dramatisations of Antony and Cleopatra in this severely Senecan and 'classical' school of writing include Giambattista Giraldi Cinthio's *Cleopatra*, written *c.* 1543, Cesare di' Cesari's *Cleopatra*, 1552, Étienne Jodelle's *Cléopâtre captive*, 1552, a lost version by Fulke Greville (mentioned in Greville's *Life of Sidney*), and *The Virtuous Octavia* by Samuel Brandon, 1598. See Willard Farnham, *Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier*, 1950, pp. 149–50; A. P. Riemer, *A Reading of Shakespeare's 'Antony and Cleopatra'*, 1968, pp. 12–14; and Williamson, *Infinite Variety*, pp. 169–80.

allegorical traditions of the *Aphrodite Pandemos* of fruitful nature, or the *Venus armata*, the goddess's conquest of Mars was variously emblematised by Vincentio Cartari and other mythographers as the victory of chaste affection in love or the moral and cosmic triumph of the generative principle over rivalry between the sexes. Renaissance paintings of Mars and Venus exchanging clothing or of Venus and cupids playing with Mars's armour, so suggestive of key scenes in Shakespeare's play, were interpreted as signs of harmonious union.[1] These images were derived ultimately from Lucretius's great invocation to Venus as the goddess of love conquering strife, and from medieval and Renaissance writers like Bernard Silvestris, Alanus de Insulis, Lorenzo Valla, and Erasmus, who coupled Epicurean doctrines of contemplative indifference towards mundane human affairs, scorn for the vicissitudes of fate, and joy in a mortal felicity thus achieved through detachment, with a Christian neo-Platonic emphasis on happiness in this world as an anticipation of heavenly bliss.[2] When Enobarbus says of Cleopatra that 'vilest things / Become themselves in her, that the holy priests / Bless her when she is riggish' (2.2.248–50), he invokes the paradox of the 'Lucretian Venus'. The paradox is eloquently expressed also in the mythographic writings of Natale Conti, in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, and in Elizabethan love lyrics and poems – including Shakespeare's own early *Venus and Adonis* (1593), to which *Antony and Cleopatra* bears more than a passing resemblance.[3]

The story of Omphale and Hercules, in which the Amazonian queen subdues the hero and puts him to work spinning among her maids, was widely used in the Renaissance as a cautionary tale of male rationality overthrown by female will. We find it in Philemon Holland's translation (1603) of Plutarch's *Moralia*, in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, and in Sir Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*.[4] Shakespeare may well have the story in mind on those occasions when Cleopatra manages the war or drinks Antony to bed dressed in her 'tires and mantles' (2.5.22–3). Yet for all the customary emphasis on the horrors of emasculation by a controlling female, iconographical tradition also

[1] Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, 1968, pp. 75 ff. See also Rudolf Wittkower, 'Transformations of Minerva in Renaissance imagery', *JWCI* 2 (1938–9), 194–205, esp. pp. 202–3, on iconographical reconciliations between Minerva and Venus (*Castitas* and *Voluptas*), signifying the bringing into harmonious control of the lower instincts. Discussed in Adelman, *The Common Liar*, pp. 92–6.

[2] Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, Bernardus Sylvestris, *De mundi universitate*, Alain de Lille (Alanus de Insulis), *De planctu natura*. See Bono, *Literary Transvaluation*, pp. 168 ff., and Adelman, *The Common Liar*, pp. 84–5.

[3] Natale Conti, *Natalis Comitis Mythologiae*, 1581, Book II, chap. 7, pp. 107–8. In Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, IV, x, 44 ff., 'Great *Venus*, Queene of beautie and of grace' receives the tribute of 'aboundant flowres' out of the 'fruitfull lap' of the earth and inspires wild creatures to 'seeke to quench their inward fire' in 'generation'. See Adelman, *The Common Liar*, pp. 86–7, and Adrien Bonjour, 'From Shakespeare's Venus to Cleopatra's cupids', *S.Sur.* 15 (1962), 73–80, who observes that Cleopatra accomplishes what Venus of *Venus and Adonis* merely promises; both works employ the paradox of wind that cools even while it kindles, of art and myth that outdo nature, of amorous desire that tames military conquest, and the like. For the argument of this entire paragraph, see Bono, *Literary Transvaluation*, pp. 173–8.

[4] Plutarch, *Moralia*, *Whether an Aged Man Ought to Manage Public Affairs*, p. 386, lines 29–31; *The Faerie Queene*, V, v, 24 ff.; and Sidney, *Apology*, p. 200, where the story is cited as an example of an archetypal comic situation. See J. Leeds Barroll, 'Enobarbus' description of Cleopatra', *UTSE* 37 (1958), 61–78, esp. p. 71; Gordon P. Jones, 'The "strumpet's fool" in *Antony and Cleopatra*', *SQ* 34 (1983), 62–8, p. 65; Schanzer, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare*, p. 158; and Adelman, *The Common Liar*, p. 81.

offered a more positive image. Hercules was after all a demigod, one of those who, as Plutarch puts it, were 'far stronger than men, and that in puissance they much surmounted our nature, but that divinity which they had was not pure and simple, but they were compounded of a nature corporal and spiritual'.[1] As such, Hercules could be viewed as a creature of paradox, struggling to assert humanity's noble nature over its baser impulses.[2] A particularly revealing iconographical tradition, known as the choice of Hercules between Virtue and Vice, depicts an encounter between the hero and two women, one modest and one brazen. Even though the women appear to represent irreconcilably divergent paths, the point in some interpretations (in Cartari and Conti, for example) is not one of simple moral choice but of perceiving that human completeness requires both pleasure and virtue. Hercules' best choice, as in the parallel myth of the garden of the Hesperides, is to learn to harmonise the *vita activa* and the *vita voluptuosa*.[3] Antony's choice in Shakespeare's play may owe something to this tradition of complex moral evaluation.

Shakespeare makes a repeated point, as does Plutarch, of the identification of Cleopatra with the goddess Isis of Egyptian mythology. Caesar complains, for example, of reports that Cleopatra has appeared in the market-place at Alexandria and has given audience 'In th'habiliments of the goddess Isis' (3.6.17). According to the myth, Isis, the consort of her brother Osiris, reassembled the parts of Osiris's body when he had been torn apart by his brother Typhon (or Set) and in doing so fashioned a new genital member to replace the one missing piece, thus enabling Osiris to gain immortality and reign as monarch of the underworld. Shakespeare may well have known the invocation at the end of Apuleius's *Golden Ass* in which Isis is identified with the 'celestial' Lucretian Venus, 'who in the beginning of the world didst couple together male and female with an engendered love', and is further identified with 'Dame Ceres, which art the original and motherly nurse of all fruitful things in the earth', as well as with Juno, Bellona, Proserpine, and Hecate.[4]

Isis is further to be identified with Io, whom Jove turned into a heifer in an unsuccessful attempt to evade the wrath of Juno (see 3.10.10–15 of Shakespeare's play).[5] Whether named Io or Isis, the powerful deity thus invoked is the goddess of agriculture, of the moon, of fertility, and of the Nile in its nurturing relation to Osiris, the ocean. Plutarch

[1] Plutarch, *Moralia*, *Of Isis and Osiris*, p. 1297 (lines 2–4).
[2] Eugene Waith, *The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare, and Dryden*, 1962, p. 18.
[3] John Coates, '"The choice of Hercules" in *Antony and Cleopatra*', *S.Sur.* 31 (1978), 45–52, citing Erwin Panofsky, *Herkules am Scheidewege*, 1930, and Xenophon, *Memorabilia of Socrates*, Book II, chap. 1, para. 21 ff. See also Schanzer, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare*, pp. 155–7; Wind, *Pagan Mysteries*, pp. 205–6; Douglas Bush, *Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry*, 1932, rev. edn, 1963, pp. 137–55; and Harry Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance*, 1969, p. 134. Ben Jonson's *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* (1619) is too late for *Antony and Cleopatra*, but it represents a tradition of harmonising opposites as found earlier in Cartari's *Imagines deorum* (1581) and Conti's *Mythologiae* (1581). Shakespeare shows in *LLL* 4.3.337–8 that he is familiar with popular mythological traditions about Hercules in love.
[4] Apuleius, *Golden Ass*, trans. W. Adlington, 1566, Book II. See Michael Lloyd, 'Cleopatra as Isis', *S.Sur.* 12 (1959), 88–94. Shakespeare may also have consulted Philemon Holland's translation (1603) of Plutarch's *Of Isis and Osiris* (in the *Moralia*); see Harold Fisch, '*Antony and Cleopatra*: the limits of mythology', *S.Sur.* 23 (1970), 59–67.
[5] Robert G. Hunter, 'Cleopatra and the "oestre junonicque"', *S.St.* 5 (1969), 236–8; see also 3.10.14 n. in the Commentary.

Vis Amoris.

ALCIDES heere, hath throwne his Clubbe away,
And weares a Mantle, for his Lions skinne,
Thus better liking for to paſſe the day,
With *Omphale*, and with her maides to ſpinne,
To card, to reele, and doe ſuch daily taske,
What ere it pleaſed, *Omphale* to aske.

Si temperata acceſſerit Venus nó alia Dea eſt adeo gratioſa. *Euripides in Medea.*

That all his conqueſts wonne him not ſuch Fame,
For which as God, the world did him adore,
As Loues affection, did diſgrace and ſhame
His virtues partes. How many are there more,
Who hauing Honor, and a worthy name,
By actions baſe, and lewdnes looſe the ſame.

Propert.

Quicquid amor iuſſit, non eſt contemnere tutum,
Regnat et in ſuperos ius habet ille Deos.

1 *Vis Amoris* (Love's Power): Hercules spinning at Omphale's behest. From Henry Peacham's *Minerva Britanna, or a Garden of Heroical Devices* (1612), p. 95