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The Cambridge Dover Wilson Shakespeare

VOLUME 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
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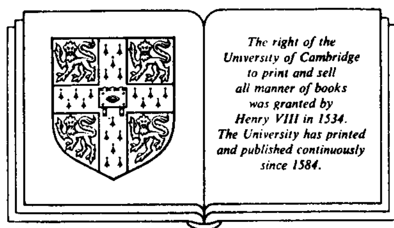

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INTRODUCTION

I

On 20 May 1608, the publisher Edward Blount entered for his copy in the Stationers' Register 'under thandes of Sir George Buck knight and Mr Warden Seton' two 'bookes', namely *Pericles, prince of Tyre* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Such entries normally imply publication shortly afterwards. But here we are in all probability confronted with a blocking entry,[1] in other words with an attempt on the part of Shakespeare's company to protect themselves against an anticipated piracy by employing a friendly publisher, who later shared with Jaggard the responsibility for the issue of the First Folio, to register his copyright in the plays named 'under the hands of' His Majesty's Censor of Plays and the Warden of the Stationers. That this precaution was justified, if inadequate, is proved by the appearance in 1609, without entry in the Register or printer's name on the title-page,[2] of an obviously 'stolen and surreptitious' text of *Pericles*. And if no similar 'bad quarto' of *Antony and Cleopatra* has come down to us, the blocking entry may have been more effective in this case. Or perhaps, inasmuch as such an entry suggests alarm, the pirates were detected at their little game before it was finished. Anyhow, the sole

[1] Alfred Pollard, *Shakespeare Folios and Quartos* (1909), p. 78.

[2] Henry Gosson, the publisher, was 'a purveyor chiefly of the more ephemeral types of popular literature' (W. W. Greg, Preface to *Pericles*, 1609, in the Shakespeare Quarto Facsimiles, issued by the Shakespeare Association).

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text an editor has to go upon is that printed in the Folio of 1623, which, as will be shown in the Note on the Copy, is, fortunately for him, of unimpeachable authority; being set up to all appearances direct from the author's manuscript.

Though this entry is the earliest direct reference we have to the existence of the play, *Antony and Cleopatra* had been known to London audiences for at least a year, if not sixteen months, before May 1608. When Macbeth says of Banquo

> under him
> My Genius is rebuked, as it is said
> Mark Antony's was by Caesar,[1]

the lines echo 2. 3. 18–23 below, or the passage in North's *Plutarch* from which that passage springs, while Banquo's allusion to 'the insane root that takes the reason prisoner'[2] likewise reflects Plutarch's *Life of Antony*, though a portion of it which Shakespeare put to no dramatic use. Thus it is scarcely open to doubt that he already had *Antony and Cleopatra* in mind, if not on hand, as he was composing or revising his Scottish masterpiece for the entertainment of King Christian of Denmark, upon that King's visit to England in July and August 1606.[3] And he cannot have completed and produced it much later than about the middle of 1607, seeing that two plays by other writers published during that year exhibit traces of its influence. He may himself conceivably owe a little to Samuel Daniel's *Cleopatra*, a stately, not to say frigid, Senecan drama, printed in 1594.[4] If so the debt was repaid in full measure; for

[1] *Macbeth*, 3. 1. 54–6. [2] *Ibid.* 1. 3. 84–5.
[3] See Introduction to *Macbeth* ('New Shakespeare'), pp. xxviii–xxxiii.
[4] See notes 1. 2. 118–9; 5. 2. 317. Shakespeare owed so much to Daniel's *Civil Wars* that he would naturally look at his *Cleopatra*.

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R. H. Case has clearly shown that Daniel remodelled his play in the light of Shakespeare's, and since this remodelled edition was published some time in 1607,[1] it follows that *Antony and Cleopatra* must have been first performed either towards the end of 1606 or early enough in 1607 to give Daniel time for the rewriting and printing involved. The other play of 1607 influenced by Shakespeare's was Barnabe Barnes's *The Devil's Charter*, one scene of which represents Alexander Borgia poisoning two boys by means of aspics. Without a doubt this was suggested by Act 5 of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Not only does the Pope speak of the asps as 'proud worms' and 'Cleopatra's birds', but he applies them, as in Shakespeare, to the breast and not, as three times in Plutarch, to the arm; bids them, as he does so, 'repast upon these princely paps', which reminds us of Cleopatra's question

> Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
> That sucks the nurse asleep?

and examines his victims' breasts later to see whether they reveal any 'token of the serpents' draught' such as Dolabella finds on the breast of Cleopatra.[2] Now *The Devil's Charter* was given at Court as early as 2 February 1607. If therefore we could be certain that the scene just described was performed on that date, January 1607 would be the latest possible date for *Antony and Cleopatra*. Unfortunately, however, Barnes's play was not entered in the Stationers' Register until 16 October, and when printed was found to bear on its title-page the words 'renewed, corrected, and augmented for the more profit of the reader', so that we

[1] The precise date is uncertain: the first edition having been registered, there was no need to register the second.

[2] *The Devil's Charter* (ed. by R. B. McKerrow; Bang's *Materialien*), ll. 2505–72.

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are unable to say anything positive about the text of the performance in February, or to define the date of Shakespeare's play more closely than some time during the latter half of 1606 or the first half of 1607. That puts it, at any rate, last of the tragedies except *Coriolanus*, which is where it belongs on the evidence of style.[1]

II

The story of Cleopatra and her Antony—for its interest has generally been that way round—was a favourite one with men of the Renaissance, especially in England, where Chaucer had already told it, after his fashion or that of his unknown medieval source, as oddly enough the first of his legends of 'good women'. To France, however, belongs the honour of first putting the Egyptian sorceress upon the stage; Etienne Jodelle's *Cléopâtre*, 1552, being the earliest of French tragedies, while Garnier's *Marc-Antoine*, another handling of the theme, published in 1585, was englished seven years later by Sidney's sister, the famous Countess of Pembroke, and so began the story's story in the history of English drama.[2] And a crowded story it is; for between that date and 1698, when Dryden produced *All for Love*, no fewer than eight different plays on the subject, including the closet drama by Daniel referred to above, were produced by English

[1] See Herford's Introduction to *Antony and Cleopatra* ('Eversley Shakespeare'), pp. 259–60; Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, pp. 88–9; Van Doren, *Shakespeare*, pp. 269 f.

[2] This play, which only deals with the situation after Actium, and presents a very different Cleopatra from Shakespeare's, nevertheless contains phrases so strikingly similar to his (v. notes below on 2. 2. 125–8; 3. 11. 35–40, 57–8; 3. 13. 17–27; 4. 15. 21–5; 5. 2. 80) that I find it difficult to believe he had not read it.

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writers, and the last of the Ptolemies became almost a stock heroine of the Stuart theatre. Nor has she since lost her fascination, which rivals indeed that of Helen of Troy and Mary Queen of Scots in its hold on the imagination of mankind. Even the least romantic of modern dramatists has paid tribute to her in the most brilliant of his 'Plays for Puritans'.

Inevitably then, at some time or other, she was bound to cast her spell upon Shakespeare. And though he did not succumb to it until 1606–7, he had had her in his mind's eye long before. Theseus alludes to her and perhaps to Antony when his frantic lover

> Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt;

and Romeo again, if Mercutio is to be trusted, calls her 'a gipsy' in comparison with his Rosaline. Both these references show too that from the beginning Shakespeare had thought of her as an African beauty. Nor was he the first to do so; Robert Greene was writing of 'the black Egyptian' in 1589.[1] In point of fact Shakespeare's age could hardly have helped believing in a 'gipsy' Cleopatra. For the word is simply a popular form of 'gyptian' or 'gypcyan' which was the name given to the tawny-skinned nomads, originally of Hindu stock, who began to wander about English lanes and commons early in the sixteenth century, and were supposed to have come from Egypt, a supposition still entertained by Sir Walter Scott.[2] Furthermore, these vagabonds being notorious tricksters, fortune-tellers, and dabblers in sorcery, 'gipsy' was an apt epithet for one who, even in history, was regarded by Rome as a witch, who had

[1] See below, note 1. 1. 10. W. W. Tarn (*Cambridge Ancient History*, x, p. 35) insists on her European stock, and she was accordingly, despite Shakespeare, played recently (at Stratford!) as a blonde (v. p. xlvi).

[2] See Introduction to *Guy Mannering*.

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ensnared three of Rome's leading men in succession, and whose wiles were as endless and ineluctable as her moods were changeable and fickle. Nor does Shakespeare hesitate to give the term a particular English twist.[1]

Many believe that Plutarch's tale of a fickle swarthy mistress, and an infatuated lover who finds it impossible to fling free, had a personal interest for the poet who was confessing, somewhere about 1594 apparently, that a woman 'as black as hell, as dark as night' left him 'past cure',

> And frantic-mad with evermore unrest.[2]

If so the emotion was now 'remembered in tranquillity', for he had freed himself from his former enchantment[3] as he had from the strain of sex-nausea which seems to run through the tragedies up to and including *King Lear*.[4] One indication of this enfranchisement of the spirit is the objective delineation of Cleopatra herself. Clearly Shakespeare went to work upon her characterization with keen zest quite uninfluenced by any but aesthetic feeling. The result was a portrait which seems nearer to the truth, as revealed by recent historians, than anything the world had yet known, and was certainly very different from that which Plutarch, and all the historians who followed him till yesterday, have led us to imagine.

Goebbels was not the first to invent propaganda as an instrument of warfare; and if we may credit Dr Tarn, to whom we owe in the main this rehabilitation,[5]

[1] See Glossary 'fast and loose'. [2] *Sonnet* 147.

[3] Cf. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, p. 281, and Ivor Brown, *Shakespeare*, 1949, chs. x and xi.

[4] See *The Essential Shakespeare*, pp. 118–19.

[5] *Cambridge Ancient History*, x, ch. 2. For another interesting treatment published two years earlier, see G. H. Macurdy, *Hellenistic Queens* (1932), pp. 184 ff.

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the battle of Actium meant not merely the defeat and death of Antony and his queen, but the blackening of their reputation for almost twenty centuries. We are here concerned with dramatic art, not history. But one of the most astonishing things about Shakespeare is that, through the penetrative power of his sympathetic imagination, he is often able to see the great figures of his history plays more truly than the historiographers themselves. I have attempted to show this in respect of Richard II and Julius Caesar; and it is even more evident in his representation of Cleopatra. His only source was Plutarch's *Life of Antony*, which he read in North's English translation of Amyot's French translation of the Greek original. Yet where Plutarch could only see a bad woman, he discovered and brought to life—the eternal life of art—one of the geniuses of all time, just such a genius as a handful of contemporary papyri, inscriptions and coins that have survived tell us was hers in fact. He even seems at times by some happy stroke to hit upon a particular attribute or quality of the real woman. Apart from the wonderful voice and strong sexual attraction which Plutarch admits, Dr Tarn tells us that 'she was intensely alive, tireless, and quite fearless', that 'her wretched coin-portraits have occasionally preserved traces of the eager vitality of her face', and that 'she was highly educated, interested in literary studies, conversant with many languages, and a skilled organiser and woman of business', but that 'the essence of her nature was the combination of the charm of a woman with the brain of a man, both remorselessly bent to the pursuit of one object, power'.[1] And if Shakespeare did not show us quite all this, it is implicit in the play, and is summed up in the tribute to her 'infinite variety'.

[1] Tarn, *op. cit.* p. 35.

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This penetration was the more remarkable in that Western Europe knew very little of Egypt, either ancient or contemporary, at that date, a fact that enhanced its attraction for Jacobeans, most of whom, despite Ben Jonson, would far rather read stories or hear plays dealing with remote events and surroundings than those mirroring their own lives,[1] but did little to help Shakespeare. The only deity he mentions is Isis, a name he finds in Plutarch, and it recurs so often that it is obvious he had no other to make play with. For the rest the atmosphere is evoked by references to the Nile, its overflowing, the mud of its banks, and the flies and snakes which the sun, according to the accepted notion, bred therefrom—all the merest commonplace. Only one scrap of knowledge does he seem to possess outside the pages of Plutarch, namely when Antony mentions 'certain scales i'th'pyramid'[2] by which the overflow of the Nile was measured; and even this might have been picked up by a glance into Leo's descriptive *History of Africa*, which was accessible in English translation after 1600. Some titbit of information was, indeed, almost essential at this point of the dialogue, which gives us the famous drinking-scene on board Pompey's galley. Antony is newly returned from Egypt and will be expected to furnish some account of the wonders in that land to his host and fellow-triumvirs. But there is no overflow in the stream of Shakespeare's knowledge. The piece of intelligence about measuring the Nile, for all its encouraging exactitude, is followed by nothing more illuminating than the humbugging of the tipsy Lepidus with the properties of the crocodile.

> *Lepidus*. What manner o'thing is your crocodile?
> *Antony*. It is shaped, sir, like itself; and it is as broad as

[1] Cf. *Othello*, 1. 3. 140 ff. [2] 2. 7. 18 (note).

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it hath breadth: it is just so high as it is, and moves with it own organs: it lives by that which nourisheth it, and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates.

Lepidus. What colour is it of?
Antony. Of it own colour too.
Lepidus. 'Tis a strange serpent.
Antony. 'Tis so, and the tears of it are wet.

Excellent fooling! and none the less so in that it serves to piece out the poverty of the dramatist's topical information. And yet, when all is said, no amount of learning could have given us more triumphantly a sense of Cleopatra's Egypt. Somehow Shakespeare without a straw for his brick (except the gorgeous episode, lifted like a lump of lapis lazuli straight out of North, of the barge on the river, which though not properly Egyptian contributes much to the oriental atmosphere) succeeded in building an imaginative monument for his pair of peerless lovers, more convincingly Egyptian than any Egyptologist could have compassed with a lifetime of study behind him.

III

Classing *Antony and Cleopatra* with *Richard II*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Coriolanus* as tragic history rather than pure tragedy, Bradley does not deal with it, except incidentally, in his *Shakespearean Tragedy*. It is certainly different in kind from *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, though I should trace the distinctive quality which marks it off equally from *Richard II* and *Julius Caesar*, to something more fundamental than a mere 'obligation' on the part of the author 'to follow his authority, even when that authority offered him an undramatic material'.[1] Indeed, I cannot think that Shakespeare found the stuff of

[1] *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 3.

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North's *Plutarch* any more intractable when he quarried in it for the making of this play than he had done at the making of *Julius Caesar.*[1] Never was his invention more fertile: and if his source offered anything 'un-dramatic' he either ignored it or reshaped it freely to his liking. This does not mean that the structure of these two Roman plays was not to a large extent determined by the character and course of the story each has to reproduce upon the stage. The fact, for example, that *Antony and Cleopatra* possesses, as Bradley points out, hardly any plot or even, up to the end of Act 3, any incident or action which an ordinary theatre-goer would call dramatic,[2] is undeniably due to the nature of the historical material. Yet Dr Johnson observes that the play 'keeps curiosity always busy and the passions always interested';[3] and it does this by means of the many entrancing scenes in which Cleopatra figures, scenes that Shakespeare was clearly compelled to invent in order to piece out the scarcity of appropriate incident and situation in the *Life of Antony*. In the same way, I hold, it was the shape of the story as related by Plutarch, especially the challenge presented in the double catastrophe at the end, that provoked Shakespeare to compose a tragedy of this unique quality, a quality which has puzzled all the critics to define, though they agree in pronouncing the effect transcendent; Coleridge going so far as to declare the play as perhaps of all Shakespeare's 'the most wonderful'.[4]

[1] See my Introduction to that play, § III. A delightful essay on Shakespeare's handling of North's *Plutarch* in the Monument scenes may be found on pp. 21–32 of Henry Newbolt's *Tide of Time* (1925).

[2] *Oxford Lectures*, pp. 283–4.

[3] Johnson's *Shakespeare* (1765), VII, p. 254.

[4] T. M. Raysor, *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism*, I, p. 86.

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Bradley atones for leaving *Antony and Cleopatra* out of his earlier volume by devoting to it the best of his *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*. He devotes also the best paragraphs therein to what he calls the 'courtesan of genius'. It took some pluck in 1905 for an elderly Victorian gentleman to echo with enthusiasm Dolabella's cry 'Most sovereign creature!' or to write: 'Many unpleasant things can be said of Cleopatra; and the more that are said the more wonderful she appears.' When, therefore, in the freer air of a generation later, Lord David Cecil dismisses the lecture with the remark that Bradley seems to find 'the moral atmosphere unpleasant', he seems a little unfair and more than a little misleading.[1] He refers, no doubt, to Bradley's confession that, although 'we close the book in a triumph which is more than reconciliation, this is mingled with a sadness...that the catastrophe saddens us so little', since

> with all our admiration and sympathy for the lovers we do not wish them to gain the world. It is better for the world's sake, and not less for their own, that they should fail and die.[2]

No doubt, too, when in another place Bradley speaks of them coming before us 'in a glory already tarnished, half-ruined by their past', he has moral considerations in mind. But then, so had Shakespeare, or he would not have underlined the facts that give rise to them; while it is a profound mistake to imagine that Shakespeare had not to reckon himself with a Mrs Grundy in Jacobean London. The story of the play needs, indeed, no underlining to secure the disapprobation of moralists, whether in the nineteenth or the seventeenth century.

[1] Lord David Cecil, *Antony and Cleopatra* (1944), p. 7.
[2] *Oxford Lectures*, p. 304.

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Yet nothing is more remarkable, as I have already suggested, about this play, in which an imperial courtesan is the central figure, than the sobriety and coolness of its atmosphere. There is plenty of frank speaking, some ribaldry, and not a little sexual imagery, but of sensuality not a note; and Shakespeare could be sensual enough when he chose; he wrote *Venus and Adonis*, for example, and *Sonnet* 151. It is true, as Granville-Barker points out, that of necessity he avoided scenes 'which a boy could not act without unpleasantness or in fear of ridicule'.[1] But had he desired to emphasize the physical side of the passion, he would have found a way round that obstacle as other dramatists of the age found theirs.[2] The two soldiers who introduce the protagonists to us at the opening of the play as a lustful 'gipsy' and 'a strumpet's fool', reveal what the prosaic and bawdy world thinks of the love that binds them. Nevertheless, when the lovers enter immediately after, we learn from their lips that this same love is more spacious than 'the wide arch of the ranged empire', more precious than kingdoms or the whole 'dungy earth', and so boundless that it requires 'new heaven, new earth' to contain it. And the initial contradiction, or antithesis, runs throughout: the comment of *l'homme moyen sensuel* is never silent, the amorous side of the passion never exhibited, and its illimitability and cosmic significance ever more strongly stressed. Compare Dryden's *All for Love*, which exalts the passions after the manner of the Cavalier and Restoration poets, and we perceive what *Antony and Cleopatra* is not. Donne and the 'metaphysicals' would seem to bring us nearer since, while treating love and sex realistically, they use

[1] *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, II, p. 126.

[2] E.g. see *Greene's Plays*, ed. Collins, I, pp. 189–91 (*A Looking Glasse for London*, 4. 3).

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them as the occasion, the take-off, for flights through infinities of space, eternities of time.

> But at my back I always hear
> Time's wingéd chariot hurrying near:
> And yonder all before us lie
> Deserts of vast eternity—

Marvell argues with a 'coy mistress'; and when Donne awakes his love to talk *à la* Hakluyt of 'sea-discoveries', 'maps', and 'hemispheres', he reminds us of Antony's 'new heaven, new earth'. Further, behind both Donne and this play may be felt the sudden lifting of the medieval horizon, revealing continents of unknown limits lying west and south of Europe, and a starry universe which the mathematicians of the early seventeenth century were only beginning to explore. Yet there is a profound difference. Whereas 'metaphysical' love poetry, as Sir Herbert Grierson puts it, is 'sensuality aerated by brilliant wit', in *Antony and Cleopatra* sensuality is not the main theme at all, but merely the medium through which Shakespeare conveys something different.

What this something else may be we shall inquire presently. For the moment, it is enough to point to it as the obvious source of that sense of 'triumph which is more than reconciliation' which Bradley speaks of. Note too that, while he remained beneath its spell, Bradley was as obviously untroubled by any other reflections. It was only after he had 'closed the book' and begun to 'look back on the story' (i.e. to forget the poetry and recall the 'facts'), that his 'sadness' came over him. And the trouble was, not so much the re-assertion of 'moral' considerations as the return to consciousness of the whole political and philosophical apparatus of Victorian thought, in which a rigid

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standard of sexual decorum was but part. In a word, he began to judge.[1] 'It is better for the world's sake... that they should fail and die' reveals the standpoint, words that Dr Arnold might have written, but that would have been quite incomprehensible to Shakespeare, in whose day the notion of 'progress' was unheard of, and to whose generation 'the world', perfect on the sabbath of creation, had been corrupted by the sin of Adam and his descendants; was falling more and more to decay; and would presently, no man could say how soon, like some

> insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind.

There is no reason to suppose that Shakespeare did not share such views; and whether he did or not, he found it convenient for dramatic purposes to make use in this play of the attitude of mind they represent. Not that the atmosphere is in any way Christian. Antony's infatuation for Cleopatra is condemned by other characters as 'dotage', a grave error of judgement, extreme folly, or even dishonour and abomination in a general or ruler, never as 'sin' in the man. On the other hand, self-slaughter, from which Hamlet shrinks because the Everlasting had fixed his canon against it, and about which even Brutus has scruples, is glorified as the noblest act of both hero and heroine.[2] Finally,

[1] When Bradley, 'distinct with eyes', does err he often provides us elsewhere with a principle by which to define the error. Thus he explains on pp. 32–3 of *Shakespearean Tragedy* why we begin to judge.

[2] Sidney (*Arcadia*, 1590, p. 233) speaks of a woman meditating joining her dead lover by suicide as seeking 'to send her soule...to be maried in the eternall church with him'.

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death translates the lovers to the timeless Elysian fields where, Antony foretells,

we'll hand in hand,
And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze:
Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops,
And all the haunt be ours.

The religious and ethical tone is in fact pagan; and, though for the classical simplicity and restraint of *Julius Caesar* we have in this sequel a romantic richness of style and exuberance of form greater than are to be found in any other play of Shakespeare's, the universe in which Brutus and Cassius move is still post-medieval, while that of Antony and his mistress has become, with one exception, Roman; the exception being the aforesaid contempt they both express for this 'little O, the earth',[1] and even that Shakespeare might have explained, had Jonson taxed him with it, as a kind of stoicism. In any case, it constitutes one of the leitmotivs of the play.

Kingdoms are clay: our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man: the nobleness of life
Is to do thus.

So Antony announces it in the opening scene; and we hear it stated again in the last, as Cleopatra's prelude to the final catastrophe:

'Tis paltry to be Caesar;
Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave,
A minister of her will: and it is great
To do that thing that ends all other deeds;
Which shackles accidents and bolts up change;
Which sleeps, and never palates more the dung,
The beggar's nurse and Caesar's.

[1] See note 1. 1. 35.

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The two passages, echoing each other in the word 'dung',[1] span the play like an arch and are supported by much that lies between.

After condemning previous critics for attempting to fit the play into the traditional categories and pronouncing it 'the single unique example of its species', Lord David Cecil proceeds himself to try and fit it into the traditional category of historical drama with the interest 'largely political' that one would expect in a sequel to *Julius Caesar*.[2] This is surely to fly in the face of the general impression left upon the reader or spectator at the end of the play, which the critic expressly invokes as the final arbiter. Is it Politics that bears us 'steadily onwards at a height of unqualified delight'[3] or sheds forth that 'harmonious radiance in the light of which all the criticisms' of Lord David's predecessors 'appear off the point' to him? And is he not putting the cart before the horse when he declares that 'the love-story is seen always in its relation to the rivalry between Octavius and Antony', and departing from plain fact when he maintains that 'a large part of the play is concerned with this only, and not with the love-story at all'?[4] Turn to the text and it shows not a single scene laid outside Egypt (except the short episode of Ventidius returning from Parthia) in which Shakespeare does not keep Cleopatra before our mind's eye. Or hear Mackail, who sees the play in its whole extent and its true perspective:

[1] Warburton's emendation 'dug' in the second passage, to which Theobald succumbed, was an unhappy shot, though it finds stout adherents among some modern critics. See correspondence in the *Times Literary Supplement* for 28 October 1926, and following weeks.

[2] Cecil, *op. cit.* pp. 7–14.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 8.

[4] *Ibid.* p. 13.

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Rome and Alexandria, or more largely, Italy and Egypt, are its two pivots, round which are grouped the occidental and the oriental world. But we find ourselves transported, in the sweep of the world-movement, to Greece, to Sicily, to Epirus, to a camp far out on the Syrian desert, to a galley on the Tyrrhene sea. Yet for the reader, and as much or more so for the spectator when the play is not presented (as it nearly always is) in a seriously mutilated form, the immensity of its stage, the clash of fleets and armies, the events which determined the history of civilisation for a thousand years, are felt to be in their place as a background; they do not blur or diminish, they actually bring out more intensely and vividly the two human figures after whom the drama is named. What confidence in his own mastery, what miraculous power, to have created this vast solidly constructed background and yet to have kept it as a background, with seemingly effortless ease! It is the tragedy not of the Roman world, but of Antony and Cleopatra: and of both of them equally.[1]

And, for all the splendour of this Roman world and the miracle of Shakespeare's presentation, a satirical light plays over it from first to last, as both Bradley and Cecil after him perceive, though neither, I think, has connected it with the theme of contempt for the world and the kingdoms thereof heard in the first and last scene. Bradley writes:

The spectacle which he portrays leaves Shakespeare quite undazzled; he even makes it appear inwardly small. The lordship of the world, we ask ourselves, what is it worth, and in what spirit do these 'world-sharers' contend for it? They are no champions of their country like Henry V. The conqueror knows not even the glory of battle. Their aims, for all we can see, are as personal as if they were captains of banditti; and they are followed merely from self-interest or private attachment. The scene on Pompey's

[1] J. W. Mackail, *The Approach to Shakespeare* (1930), p. 89.

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galley is full of this irony. One 'third part of the world' is carried drunk to bed....Later, a short scene, totally useless to the plot and purely satiric in its purpose, is slipped in to show how Ventidius fears to pursue his Parthian conquests because it is not safe for Antony's lieutenant to outdo his master.

This is Bradley at his most percipient. But when he concludes:

A painful sense of hollowness oppresses us. We know too well what must happen in a world so splendid, so false, and so petty. We turn for relief from the political game to those who are sure to lose it[1]—

both pain and relief clearly spring from the value he, not Shakespeare, puts upon the 'world'. *Antony and Cleopatra* is no tragedy of 'hollow men' in a 'waste land', but of a 'peerless pair' who 'stand up' against the widest and most splendid panorama Shakespeare, or I think any poet,[2] ever painted, and are magnified, not dwarfed, by it because it is represented as mere 'clay' or 'dung' in comparison with them.

It is the tragedy of them both equally, as Mackail insists. Cecil, intent on his 'political' solution, ignores Act 5, when the political plot is practically over and Cleopatra has the play all to herself. In the first four acts, it is true, we get something like the normal Shakespearian tragedy, with Antony as hero, whose soul is the scene of the inner conflict, with whom 'the passion that ruins' him 'also exalts him', since it is here that 'he touches the infinite',[3] and who comes to his

[1] *Oxford Lectures*, p. 291.

[2] 'Panorama' is perhaps a term better suited to Milton's vision of the ancient world in *Paradise Regained*, book iv; Shakespeare's is a 'moving picture', and Hardy's *Dynasts* a closer parallel.

[3] *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 83.

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catastrophe in the defeat, shame and suicide of the fourth act. Finally, his death in the arms of Cleopatra excites pity in the highest degree; and Aristotle has taught us to regard pity as one of the essentials of tragedy. Yet we should feel no pity for a man of little value in our eyes, a man, that is, whom we had not already learned to love, to admire, or at least to think of with awe, while to Shakespeare's tragic heroes death always comes as a relief, as the only escape from a life that has grown impossible or insufferable.

Jacobean spectators would not overlook, and would certainly sympathize with, the importance to Antony of his reputation as a soldier and a general, though I fancy it has been little observed by modern critics. A descendant of Hercules, bearded like him, and probably wearing the lion's skin on Shakespeare's stage,[1] he is proud of being 'the greatest soldier of the world'[2] and very sensitive to any threat or slur on that point. Quite as serious to him as Pompey's bid for world power is the news that he 'stands up for the main soldier',[3] while even Cleopatra, who well knows it as his tenderest spot, is not suffered to tease or rally him for long on the score of valour.[4] He finds it, therefore, particularly galling to be obliged to 'stall together' with Octavius, 'the boy'[5] as he calls him, or more slightingly 'the young Roman boy',[6] who had never

[1] Cf. the S.D. 'Hercules appeares in his Lions Skin' in 3. 2. of Greene's *Friar Bacon* (ed. Collins, ii, p. 51); and note 1. 3. 84 below. For 'bearded' see note 2. 2. 224.

[2] 1. 3. 38. The words are Cleopatra's but clearly Antony's due.

[3] 1. 2. 191–2. Cf. Pompey's tribute to Antony's 'soldiership' at 2. 1. 34–5.

[4] See 1. 3. 82–6 and note l. 86.

[5] 3. 13. 17. No doubt beardless.

[6] 4. 12. 48.

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ventured his person 'in the brave squares of war', and had even deputed his generalship to another at Philippi.[1] He does him honour, he thinks, to send him a personal challenge, but the sarcasm with which he offers it breathes the contempt he feels. 'To him again!' he bids Euphronius,

tell him he wears the rose
Of youth upon him; from which the world should note
Something particular: his coin, ships, legions,
May be a coward's, whose ministers would prevail
Under the service of a child as soon
As i'th'command of Caesar.[2]

And, though Enobarbus, who sees things as they are, comments chorus-like,

Yes, like enough, high-battled Caesar will
Unstate his happiness and be staged to'th'show
Against a sworder!—

we may guess that many military men in Shakespeare's audience took the challenge as an act of great condescension on the part of the veteran warrior and conqueror of half the world, to say nothing of his

captain's heart,
Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
The buckles on his breast,[3]

and that they resented the 'boy's' insolent dismissal:

let the old ruffian know
I have many other ways to die.[4]

I think Shakespeare meant us to resent it too. We can be sure at any rate that the shame which overwhelms

[1] 3. 11. 35–40.
[2] 3. 13. 20–5.
[3] 1. 1. 6–8.
[4] 4. 1. 4–5.

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one of the greatest soldiers in history at being twice defeated by this 'novice',[1] this cold-hearted youthful politician, who

kept
His sword e'en like a dancer,

was one of the dramatist's highest bids for our pity. Support for this view may be found in the pathetic use he makes of the contrast between the two combatants towards the end of the fourth act. 'Occasionally', Bradley notes, 'where we dread the catastrophe because we love the hero, a moment occurs, just before it, in which a gleam of false hope lights up the darkening scene; and, though we know it is false, it affects us.'[2] Plutarch's reference to a sally which Antony made from Alexandria, 'so that he drave Caesar's horsemen back ...even unto their camp', gave Shakespeare his opportunity, with a little magnifying of the success, for just such a 'gleam'; and so when Plutarch adds rather unsympathetically that Antony thereafter 'came again to the palace, greatly boasting of this victory', Shakespeare glorified it thus:

My nightingale,
We have beat them to their beds. What, girl! though grey
Do something mingle with our younger brown, yet ha' we
A brain that nourishes our nerves and can
Get goal for goal of youth.[3]

We have heard of that 'grizzled head' before,[4] always with a touch of pathos, and the allusion here is the more moving in that we know the 'goal' Antony will 'get' in the morrow's lists is death. Yet we welcome death when it comes as the only line of retreat left open from a life of shame and dishonour.

[1] 4. 12. 14.
[2] *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 63.
[3] 4. 8. 18–22 (cf. note l. 22).
[4] 3. 13. 17; cf. 3. 11. 13–15.

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But Antony possesses qualities finer than any of the military ones which brought him victory in the days of his greatest glory, otherwise we should never 'dread' the coming end. How is it that Shakespeare makes us love him; and not us readers and spectators only, but his followers also—Eros, his armour-bearer, who, first uttering the memorable lines

> Turn from me then that noble countenance,
> Wherein the worship of the whole world lies,[1]

chooses rather to slay himself than strike the sacrilegious stroke the 'great chief' orders; or the fascinating realist Enobarbus, one of the race of bluff humorous soldier-men that appear so often in earlier plays, who, swayed by what the Bastard in *King John* calls

> Commodity, the bias of the world,

decides to leave Antony to his sinking; but, having left him, is so overcome by the magnanimous attitude[2] of the master he still adores, that smitten with bitterest remorse he dies of a broken heart? When Antony hears he has gone over to Caesar, not a word of reproach falls from his lips:

> O, my fortunes have
> Corrupted honest men!

is all he says. That great spirit, piercing to the root of the matter, finds excuse, not blame, for his friend's treachery. He bids them also send after him the 'chests and treasure' he has left behind, together with 'gentle adieus and greetings' signed by himself. The same noble integrity is shown after another fashion in the second scene of the play. 'The nature of bad news infects the teller'

[1] 4. 14. 85–6.
[2] 4. 5. 12–7.

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