Skenè Studies I • 6

Shakespeare and the Mediterranean • 3

Antony and Cleopatra

Edited by Cristiano Ragni

Edizioni ETS

S K E N È *Texts and Studies*. Studies I

Executive Editor	Guido Avezzù.
General Editors	Guido Avezzù, Silvia Bigliazzi.
Editorial Board	Chiara Battisti, Simona Brunetti, Camilla Caporicci, Sidia Fiorato, Sotera Fornaro, Massimo Fusillo, Felice Gambin, Alessandro Grilli, Chiara Lombardi, Lorenzo Mancini, Michele Marrapodi, Stefania Onesti, Nicola Pasqualicchio, Antonietta Provenza, Susan Payne, Cristiano Ragni, Antonio Sánchez Jiménez, Alessandra Squeo, Emanuel Stelzer, Savina Stevanato, Martina Treu, Gherardo Ugolini, Antonio Ziosi.
Managing Editors	Valentina Adami, Cristiano Ragni.
Assistant Managing Editors	Marco Duranti, Roberta Zanoni.
Editorial Staff	Chiara Battisti, Petra Bjelica, Francesco Dall'Olio, Bianca Del Villano, Serena Demichelis, Carina Fernandes, Sidia Fiorato, Leonardo Mancini, Antonietta Provenza, Carla Suthren.
Typesetting	Lorenza Baglieri, Cristiano Ragni.
Advisory Board	Anna Maria Belardinelli, Anton Bierl, Enoch Brater, Jean-Christophe Cavallin, Richard Allen Cave, Rosy Colombo, Claudia Corti, Marco De Marinis, Tobias Döring, Pavel Drábek, Paul Edmondson, Keir Douglas Elam, Ewan Fernie, Patrick Finglass, Enrico Giaccherini, Mark Griffith, Daniela Guardamagna, Stephen Halliwell, Robert Henke, Pierre Judet de la Combe, Eric Nicholson, Guido Paduano, Franco Perrelli, Didier Plassard, Donna Shalev, Susanne Wofford.

SKENÈ. Texts and Studies (https://textsandstudies.skeneproject.it/index.php/TS)
Supplement to *SKENÈ. Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies*

Copyright ©August 2024 S K E N È. Texts and Studies
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

info@skeneproject.it
Edizioni ETS
Palazzo Roncioni - Lungarno Mediceo, 16, I-56127 Pisa
info@edizioniets.com
www.edizioniets.com
Distribuzione
Messaggerie Libri SPA
Sede legale: via G. Verdi 8 - 20090 Assago (MI)
Promozione
PDE PROMOZIONE SRL
via Zago 2/2 - 40128 Bologna

ISBN (pdf) 978-88467-6991-6
ISBN 978-88467-6992-3
ISSN 2464-9295

Shakespeare and the Mediterranean

This series collects selected contributions to the International Summer School annually organised by the Skenè Research Centre, Verona University (https://skene.dlls.univr.it/en/), as well as articles related to its activities.

Published volumes:

Bigliazzi, Silvia, and Emanuel Stelzer, eds. 2022. *Shakespeare and the Mediterranean • 1:* Romeo and Juliet (pp. 296)

Ciambella, Fabio, ed. 2023. *Shakespeare and the Mediterranean • 2:* The Tempest (pp. 200)

Contents

Contributors 9

Cristiano Ragni
Introduction 15

Prologue

1. Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells
Setting the Scene for *Antony and Cleopatra* 31

Part 1 – Performance and (Self-)Representation in *Antony and Cleopatra*

2. Pasquale Pagano
"This stinking puddle of whoredom": *Antony and Cleopatra* and the Performance of Adultery 55

3. Sina Will
Misremembering the Classics: Self-Representation through Mythological Language in *Antony and Cleopatra* 87

4. Rita De Carvalho Rodrigues
"Name Cleopatra as she is call'd in Rome". (Un)Hiding Cleopatra's Name in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* 109

Part 2 – Shakespeare and His Contemporaries

5. Jason Lawrence
"All the unlawful issue that their lust / Since then hath made between them": Children and Absent Motherhood in Early Modern English Cleopatra plays 127

6. Amelia Platt
Cleopatra, Motherhood, and the Mediterranean 151

7. Lisa Hopkins
"The sea is mine": Pompey the Pirate 183

The Actor's Point of View

8. Janet Suzman
Did Cleopatra Squeak? 207

Index 235

Contributors

Rita de Carvalho Rodrigues has completed her undergraduate degree in General Studies, majoring in North American Studies and minoring in Performing Arts and Mathematics at the University of Lisbon. She is a recent postgraduate student at Nova University of Lisbon in the Arts of Writing. Her study interests are mainly related to Literature, Theatre, and Cinema, although she is currently focused on Creative Writing.

Paul Edmondson is Head of Research for the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, an Honorary Fellow of The Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham, and a Visiting Professor in Human Rights, Birmingham City University. His publications include: *Shakespeare: Ideas in Profile*; *Twelfth Night: A Guide to the Text and Its Theatrical Life*; *Destination Shakespeare*; *Finding Shakespeare's New Place: an Archaeological Biography* (with Kevin Colls and William Mitchell); *New Places: Shakespeare and Civic Creativity* (with Ewan Fernie); *Shakespeare's Creative Legacies* (with Peter Holbrook); *A Year of Shakespeare: Re-living the World Shakespeare Festival* (with Paul Prescott and Erin Sullivan); and, in collaboration with Stanley Wells: *Shakespeare's Sonnets*; *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt: Evidence, Argument, Controversy*; *The Shakespeare Circle: An Alternative Biography*; and *All the Sonnets of Shakespeare*. He is a Trustee of the British Shakespeare Association, The Rose Theatre, and The Friends of Shakespeare's Church. He also turned his late friend Greg Wells's Ph.D. thesis into a book: *John Hall, Master of Physicke: A Casebook from Shakespeare's Stratford*. He is currently writing Shakespeare and Stratford-upon-Avon for the Oxford Shakespeare Topics series.

Lisa Hopkins is Professor Emerita of English at Sheffield Hallam University. She is a co-editor of *Journal of Marlowe Studies* and of *Shakespeare*, the journal of the British Shakespeare Association, and a series editor of Arden Critical Readers and Arden Studies in Early Modern Drama. Work resulting from her longstanding interest in Roman plays includes *The Cultural Uses of the Caesars on the English Renaissance Stage* (Ashgate, 2008), 'Beautiful Polecats: the Living and the Dead in Julius Caesar', *Shakespeare Survey* 72 (2019): 160-170, "'By Jupiter, forgot': Volscians and Scots in Shakespeare and Arbella Stuart", *SEDERI Yearbook* 31 (2021): 55-72, and "Titus Andronicus and the Wicked Streets of Rome", *Cahiers Elisabéthains* 113.1 (2024): 6-22. Her most recent publications are *The Edge of Christendom on the Early Modern English Stage* (De Gruyter, 2022) and *A Companion to the Cavendishes*, with Tom Rutter (ARC Humanities Press, 2020), and her edition of John Ford's *The Queen* is forthcoming from Manchester University Press in 2024. She also writes about detective fiction and her book *Ocular Proof and the Spectacled Detective in British Crime Fiction* was published by Palgrave in 2023.

Jason Lawrence is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Hull. His primary area of research interest is the literary and cultural relationships between Italy and England in the Renaissance period and beyond. His first monograph explored the relationship between methods of learning Italian in Renaissance England and techniques of imitation in response to popular Italian literary materials. His recent monograph focuses on the reception in England of the life and work of the great 16th century Italian poet Torquato Tasso, spanning literature, opera, and the visual arts from the late 16th to the late 19th centuries.

Pasquale Pagano has been teaching English Language at the University of Campania "L. Vanvitelli" (Department of Architecture) since November 2023 and has been a Teaching Assistant (Department of Economics) since February 2022. He graduated in English Literature *cum laude* from the University of Naples "L'Orientale" in 2006. He also got a degree in Religious Sciences from the "San Roberto Bellarmino" Higher Institute for Religious

Sciences in Capua (CE) in 2014. He has been teaching English in upper secondary schools since 2008. His main research interests focus on Shakespeare Studies, English Renaissance literature, and the history of English Reformation, as well as the broader relations between religious discourses and literature.

Amelia Platt recently graduated from the University of Cambridge with a degree in English. Her undergraduate final year dissertation explored the figure of the detective in 'Golden Age' crime fiction, focusing on the works of Ngaio Marsh and Dorothy L. Sayers. It explored how the detectives featured in these texts experience a 'crisis of authority' relating to their detecting, thus compromising the justice they seek to administer. She is due to begin a Masters in English Literary Studies at the University of York in September, where she hopes to continue her analysis of crime fiction.

Cristiano Ragni is Assistant Professor (RtdA) of English Literature at the University of Verona. After earning his Ph.D. in Comparative Literature at the University of Perugia and carrying out part of his research at the Warburg Institute in London, he was a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the Universities of Turin and Genoa. His main research interests lie in the relations between political thinking, theology, and theatre in the Elizabethan age, and in the receptions of classical antiquity in modern and contemporary literature. For the project *In the Margins of Theatre* (IMT) at the University of Verona, he is studying the *marginalia* that can be found in early printed English playbooks. Among his recent publications, besides essays in edited collections and peer-reviewed journals, are the book *La Nazione e il Teatro. Alberico Gentili, Shakespeare e l'Inghilterra elisabettiana* (2020), and the Italian editions of Christopher Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris* (2017), and *Hero and Leander* (2023). Dr Ragni is a member of the Editorial Board of *Skenè. Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies* and Managing Editor of the series *Skenè. Texts and Studies.*

Stanley Wells CBE, FRSL is one of the world's foremost Shakespearians, a former Life Trustee (1975-2017) and former Chairman of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (1991-2011), Emeritus

Professor of Shakespeare Studies of the University of Birmingham, and Honorary Emeritus Governor of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, of which he was for many years Vice-Chairman. He holds a Ph. D. of the University of Birmingham, is an Honorary Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford and of University College, London and holds honorary doctorates from Furman University, South Carolina, and from the Universities of Munich, Hull, Durham and Warwick, Marburg and Craiova. He also received a knighthood in the 2016 Queen's Birthday Honours in recognition of his services to Shakespeare scholarship. His books include *Literature and Drama*; *Royal Shakespeare: Studies of Four Major Productions at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre*; *Modernizing Shakespeare's Spelling*; *Re-editing Shakespeare for the Modern Reader*; and *Shakespeare: the Poet and his Plays*. He edited *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard II*, and *The Comedy of Errors* for the New Penguin Shakespeare and *King Lear* for the Oxford Shakespeare. He was for nearly twenty years the editor of the annual *Shakespeare Survey*, and writes for the *New York Review of Books* and many other publications. He has edited *The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies* and is General Editor (with Gary Taylor) of *The Complete Oxford Shakespeare*, co-author of *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* and General Editor of the *Penguin Shakespeare*. His most recent books are *Shakespeare in the Theatre: An Anthology of Criticism*; *The Oxford Dictionary of Shakespeare*; *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* (edited with Michael Dobson); *Shakespeare For All Time*; *Looking for Sex in Shakespeare*; *Shakespeare's Sonnets* and *Coffee with Shakespeare*, both co-authored with Paul Edmondson; *Shakespeare & Co.*; *Is It True What they Say About Shakespeare?*; *Shakespeare, Sex, and Love*; *Great Shakespeare Actors, and William Shakespeare: A Very Short Introduction*. Together with Paul Edmondson he has edited *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt* and *The Shakespeare Circle*, for Cambridge University Press. Stanley Wells was elected The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's first Honorary President in June 2011.

Sina Will is an MA student in Comparative Literature at the University of Vienna. Enrolled in BA in Ancient Greek and Ancient History, her research interests lie mainly in the field of classical reception, specifically the translation and adaptation of Homer

and Greek tragedy. Her dissertation focuses on the phenomenon of feminist and postcolonial approaches to and rewritings of the classics in the 20th and 21st centuries while also examining the role that different translational approaches play in the contemporary reception of ancient literature in scholarship and popular discourse.

Prologue

1

Setting the Scene for *Antony and Cleopatra*

PAUL EDMONDSON AND STANLEY WELLS

Abstract

This essay is based on the opening, key-note talk, co-presented to the Verona "Shakespeare and the Mediterranean" Summer School in August 2023. It aims to introduce the play through responding to six questions. We are interested in how Shakespeare set about writing *Antony and Cleopatra*, his play in relation to his main source material, how the play was originally performed, how Shakespeare conveys the legendary status of the famous lovers, how his play relates to his other works, and how it presents sexuality. We discuss the final moments of the play and throughout draw attention to its poetic riches, and possible performance choices.

KEYWORDS: *Antony and Cleopatra*; identity; Plutarch; legendary status; sexuality

Throughout our collaboration on this introductory talk, we have appreciated time and again some of the many poetic riches of *Antony and Cleopatra*, its comedy as well as its tragedy, and we have thought about what we might see – and what we have seen – on stage when the play is performed. We have had in mind a number of questions. How did Shakespeare set about writing *Antony and Cleopatra*? How does Shakespeare's play relate to his main source material, and what might that reveal to us about his artistic project? How might the play have been performed in Shakespeare's own time? How does the play construct the identity of its legendary lovers? How might it be useful to relate the play to Shakespeare's other works? How does the play present sexuality? After focussing on these questions, this discussion will consider closely the play's final moments.

1. How Did Shakespeare Set About Writing *Antony and Cleopatra*?

All Shakespeare's plays have their own, strong, individuality. To that extent each play is an experiment, a fresh exercise of the creative imagination. At the same time, there are strong interrelationships among his plays which identify them as the products of a single mind. Shakespeare's imagination fed voraciously on books written by other people. One of his favourite sources was Sir Thomas North's translation, published in 1579, of *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* by the Greek historian Plutarch which, in the closing years of the sixteenth century, gave Shakespeare the basic material for *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*. A few years later, probably in 1605 or 1606, Shakespeare turned again to North's Plutarch for a new play centring on the life of Mark Antony, who figures prominently in *Julius Caesar*, and his mistress, Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt.

Although in narrative terms *Antony and Cleopatra* is a sequel to the earlier play, it is radically different in terms of structure, characterisation, poetic technique, and dramatic effect. The earlier play is self-consciously 'classical', linguistically austere, and compact in structure, to such an extent that its first three acts form a continuous stretch of action. By contrast, *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which the action shuttles constantly between Alexandria and Rome is romantic, sprawling, episodic, luxuriously poetic, and especially lyrical. It is also far more complex in its characterisation, and in its interest in the psychology of its leading characters.

The composition of the play presented Shakespeare with considerable and exceptional logistical challenges. He was working for a theatre company made up of about fourteen actors, all of them male. Yet the action of the play as he designed it involves over thirty named characters, along with an indeterminate number of extras in the form of courtiers, messengers, attendants, and servants. He knew as he plotted the play that he had only a limited number of boy actors – three or four at the most – so he had to lay out the action in such a way that no more than this number of female characters appeared on stage at the same time. In fact, the cast list of the complete play calls for adult actors in at least thirty-five roles, along with the four boy actors playing women: Cleopatra,

Octavia, Charmian, and Iras, as well as "a Boy who sings" (2.7.12-17)[1]. All this makes exceptional demands on the company, many of whom would have had to memorise and perform three or four different roles each. It meant that Shakespeare had to exercise great ingenuity in plotting the action so that no actor was required to be in two places at the same time. The potential for back-stage confusion was enormous.

2. How Does Shakespeare's Play Relate to His Main Source Material, And What Might That Reveal to Us About His Artistic Project?

When we look to Shakespeare's main source narrative in Plutarch's *Lives*, it is worth noting how the Greek historian understood his own mode of historical writing. "My aim", he declares:

> is not to write histories, but only lives. For the noble deeds do not always show men's virtues and vices; but oftentimes a light occasion, a word, or some sport, makes men's natural dispositions and manners appear more plain than the famous battles won wherein are slain ten thousand men, or the great armies, or cities won by siege or assault. (Plutarch 1964, 7-8)

It is easy to see how Plutarch's project and its resulting text would be attractive to a dramatist. Plutarch's emphasis on the way that character can be revealed by quirks of behaviour or idiosyncratic utterance must have made him especially congenial to Shakespeare, interested as he was in the psychology of individual characters. Plutarch delights in depicting intimate details of personal behaviour as well as historically significant action. His accounts of these historical "lives" are illuminated by lighter moments. The nineteenth-century poet and great critic of Shakespeare, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, admired the play's "numerous momentary flashes of nature countering the historic abstraction" (1960, 1.77), an effect of writing that Shakespeare already knew about – for example

1 Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from *Antony and Cleopatra* are cited from Neill 1994.

through his plays based on English history – and which would have resonated for him as he read his Plutarch.

To imitate is, to some extent, to admire. But there are moments when Shakespeare's dependency on North's translation of Plutarch is so close as to render Shakespeare open to the accusation of plagiarism. A conspicuous example is Enobarbus's famous description of Cleopatra which, as Michael Neill writes in his Oxford edition of the play, not only deepens our sense of the speaker's character but also "transforms the audience's sense of Cleopatra herself by her ability to evoke this response for Antony's normally sceptical and prosaic lieutenant" (1994, 191). Here is what Plutarch writes:

> Therefore when she was sent unto by diverse letters, both from Antonius himself and also from his friends, she made so light of it and mocked Antonius so much that 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, citherns, 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. Her ladies and gentlewomen also, the fairest of them were apparelled like the nymphs Nereides (which are the mermaids of the waters) and like the graces, some steering the helm, others tending the tackle and ropes of the barge, out of the which there came a wonderful passing, sweet savour of perfumes that perfumed the wharf's side, pestered with innumerable multitudes of people. Some of them followed the barge all alongst the river's side; others also ran out of the city to see her coming in; so that in the end there ran such multitudes of the people one after another to see her that Antonius was left post-alone in the market-place in his imperial seat to give audience. And there went a rumour in the people's mouths that the goddess Venus was come to play with the god Bacchus for the general good of all Asia. (Plutarch 1964, 200-2)

And this is how Shakespeare alchemises North's already fine prose translation into a blank-verse speech of transcendent beauty:

> ENOBARBUS 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,
> 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'er-picturing 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.
> AGRIPPA O, rare for Antony!
> ENOBARBUS Her gentlewomen, like the Nereides,
> So many mermaids, tended her i' th' eyes,
> And made their bends adornings. At the helm
> A seeming mermaid steers; the silken tackle
> Swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands,
> That yarely frame the office. From the barge
> A strange invisible perfume hits the sense
> Of the adjacent wharfs. The city cast
> Her people out upon her; and Antony,
> Enthroned i' th' market-place, did sit alone,
> Whistling to th' air; which but for vacancy
> Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,
> And made a gap in Nature.
> (2.2.198-225)

Shakespeare draws on Plutarch not just for material that is of major biographical significance but also for accounts of idiosyncratic behaviour on the part of Cleopatra that enrich our belief in her unique personality. An illuminating example of this is the episode early in 2.5 when Cleopatra expresses a wish to go fishing:

> Give me mine angle, we'll to the river; there,
> My music playing far off, I will betray
> Tawny-fine fishes, my bended hook shall pierce
> Their slimy jaws; and as I draw them up,
> I'll think them every one an Antony,
> And say 'Ah, ha! you're caught.'
> (2.5.10-15)

To which Charmian replies:

> 'Twas merry when
> You wagered on your angling, when your diver
> Did hang a salt fish on his hook which he
> With fervency drew up.
> (2.5.15-18).

This vividly told anecdote, which might strike us at first as being original to Shakespeare, in fact comes straight out of Plutarch, and illustrates the similar biographical modes of the two writers:

> Cleopatra straight commanded one of her men to dive under water before Antonius' men and to put some old salt fish upon his bait, like unto those that are brought out of the country of Pont. When he had hung the fish on his hook, Antonius, thinking he had taken a fish indeed, snatched up his line presently. Then they all fell a-laughing. Cleopatra, laughing also, said unto him: 'Leave us, my lord, Egyptians, which dwell in the country of Pharus and Canobus, your angling rod. This is not thy profession: thou must hunt after conquering of realms and countries.' (Plutarch 1964, 207-8)

But Shakespeare enhances the anecdote with his dramatising of Cleopatra's erotic imagination "Ah, ha! you're caught", and Charmian's witty response recalling Cleopatra's bait. Above all, the Cleopatra described by Plutarch is supremely confident of her power to captivate all who encounter her. "But yet", says Plutarch, "she carried nothing with her wherein she trusted more than in herself, and in the charms and enchantment of her passing beauty and grace" (1964, 201).

3. How Might the Play Have Been Performed in Shakespeare's Own Time?

To transfer so rich and complex a character as Plutarch's Cleopatra into a dramatic role to be played by a boy actor presented Shakespeare with an exceptional challenge which he accepted with such success that the role becomes the richest and most diverse piece of female characterisation in all his plays – perhaps in the whole of English drama – and the greatest challenge to its performer both in his time and in later ages.

Shakespeare was an immensely practical dramatist who was always conscious as he wrote of the needs of his theatre company and of the circumstances in which his plays would be performed. His company, originally the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which had become the King's Men in 1603 on the accession of James I, played in many different locations when on tour, and even in London, at the royal court in Whitehall, and at the inns of court, for the Gray's Inn and the Middle Temple where *The Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night, or what you will* were performed in 1594 and 1602 respectively. But its principal home from 1599 was The Globe, and it is clear that as he wrote *Antony and Cleopatra* Shakespeare had in mind its facilities, including the upper level where he locates Cleopatra's death scene, and even the area beneath the stage. He had used this in *Hamlet*, where the Ghost of Hamlet's father is heard in what is referred to as "the cellarage" (1.5.153)[2] and he uses it in the strange and enigmatic episode in *Antony and Cleopatra* – in act four scene three – in which soldiers hear 'strange music' on the night before the second battle. The scene has its origin in a passage from Plutarch which is rich in psychological suggestiveness. Here is what we read in Plutarch:

> Furthermore, the self-same night within little of midnight, when all the city was quiet, full of fear and sorrow, thinking what would be the issue and end of this war, it is said that suddenly they heard a marvellous, sweet harmony of sundry sorts of instruments of music, with the cry of a multitude of people, as they had been

2 Shakespearian quotations, apart from *Antony and Cleopatra*, are from Shakespeare 2005.

> dancing and had sung as they use in Bacchus' feasts, with movings and turnings after the manner of the satyrs. And it seemed that this dance went through the city unto the gate that opened to the enemies, and that all the troop that made this noise they heard went out of the city at that gate. Now such as in reason sought the depth of the interpretation of this wonder thought that it was the god, unto whom Antonius bears singular devotion to counterfeit and resemble him, that did forsake them. (Plutarch 1964, 274-5)

Now here is what Shakespeare makes of this episode:

FIRST SOLDIER Brother, good night – tomorrow is the day.
SECOND SOLDIER It will determine one way. Fare you well.
Heard you of nothing strange about the streets?
FIRST SOLDIER Nothing. What news?
SECOND SOLDIER Belike 'tis but a rumour, good night to you.
FIRST SOLDIER Well sir, good night.
Enter two other Soldiers meeting them.
SECOND SOLDIER Soldiers, have careful watch.
THIRD SOLDIER And you – good night, good night.
They place themselves in every corner of the stage.
FOURTH SOLDIER Here we. An if tomorrow
    Our navy thrive, I have an absolute hope
    Our landmen will stand up.
THIRD SOLDIER 'Tis a brave army,
    And full of purpose.
Music of the hautboys is under the stage.
FOURTH SOLDIER Peace, what noise?
FIRST SOLDIER List, list!
SECOND SOLDIER Hark!
FIRST SOLDIER Music i' the air.
THIRD SOLDIER Under the earth.
FOURTH SOLDIER It signs well, does it not?
THIRD SOLDIER No.
FIRST SOLDIER Peace, I say!
    What should this mean?
SECOND SOLDIER 'Tis the god Hercules, whom Antony loved,
    Now leaves him.
FIRST SOLDIER Walk – let's see if other watchmen
    Do hear what we do.

SECOND SOLDIER How now, masters!
ALL (*speaking together*) How now?
How now? Do you hear this?
FIRST SOLDIER Ay; is't not strange?
THIRD SOLDIER Do you hear, masters? Do you hear?
FIRST SOLDIER Follow the noise so far as we have quarter.
Let's see how it will give off.
ALL Content. 'Tis strange.
Exeunt.
(4.3.1-29)

This short scene is enigmatic and mysterious. Shakespeare alchemises the music for revelry and dance mentioned in Plutarch – to use words from one of Ariel's songs in *The Tempest* – "into something rich and strange" (1.2.403). The Shakespearian music we hear signals something fateful for Antony, and perhaps is even prescient of his death: "Tis the god Hercules, whom Antony loved, / Now leaves him". And, like the watchmen at the beginning of *Hamlet*, the soldiers seek comrades to confirm that they have encountered something ghostly, unnatural, "some strange eruption to our state" (1.1.68). The episode illustrates the tonal shift that the critic G. Wilson Knight described in 1931, from "the material and sensuous, through the grand and magnificent, to the more purely spiritual" (1931, 204). This short scene is also revealing of how Shakespeare bodied forth the drama by making full use of the spatial opportunities of the Globe Theatre: here the "cellarage", the under-stage area. He used the upper-playing space for Cleopatra's monument, as we shall see later.

4. How Does the Play Construct the Identity of Its Legendary Lovers?

Antony and Cleopatra's reputation precedes them. Audiences go to a production expecting to see the bodying forth of two legendary lovers, expectations that we no doubt have in common with audiences of Shakespeare's own time. Shakespeare deliberately and characteristically sets out to complicate our hopes. It is difficult, perhaps nigh on impossible, for any actor to perform a legend. In order to create a sense of their legendary status, Shakespeare

includes intermittent references to transcendence and eternity – "Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch / Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space" (1.1.35-6), says Antony, reaching for power and command both personally and publicly. But then Shakespeare almost immediately disrupts the effect he has just achieved. Cleopatra punctures any resonant confidence we might have seen developing in Antony's stature. Her response is immediate and delivered on the half-line: "Excellent falsehood!" (1.1.41). This sudden undercutting of ego is an important characteristic of Shakespeare's style in *Antony and Cleopatra.*

But he regularly takes us in the opposite direction, too. Time and again the dialogue departs from the language of politics, control, and censure, and into the transcendent language of love. Consider, for example, the moment when Antony goes to see Cleopatra with the news of his wife Fulvia's death. Cleopatra tries to prevent him from speaking, but he interrupts her four times – which might easily provoke laughter in performance – and she then says she feels betrayed or, at least, pretends to be so: "O, never was there queen / So mightily betrayed! Yet at the first / I saw the treasons planted" (1.3.24-6). We never really know when Cleopatra is being truthful, or when she's only pretending, in order to stay in control. Perhaps the actor playing her needs simply to portray everything authentically in the moment, and let the audience decide what is 'true' and what is not. But then the dramatic texture – even during one of Cleopatra's characteristic outbursts – suddenly reaches towards transcendence:

> ANTONY Most sweet Queen –
> CLEOPATRA Nay, pray you seek no colour for your going,
> But bid farewell, and go. When you sued staying,
> Then was the time for words – no going then:
> Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
> Bliss in our brow's bent; none our parts so poor,
> But was a race of heaven. They are so still,
> Or thou, the greatest soldier of the world,
> Art turned the greatest liar.
> (1.3.31-9)

Having established a critical perspective for the audience, who already know about Cleopatra's sudden changes of moods, Shakespeare then surprises us by illuminating Cleopatra's hidden, inner life. She is nostalgic and looks back on their love as something immortal. But soon after her passing mention of "eternity", Cleopatra's poetic flight becomes prosaic again and she names Antony "the greatest liar".

Critics and actors often identify inconsistency as one of Cleopatra's palpable, theatrical behaviours. Many of her speeches make this easily possible in performance, for example her compact two-and-half lines of direction and observation: "Cut my lace, Charmian, come – / But let that be. I am quickly ill, and well, / So Antony loves" (1.3.72-3) – a gift to an actor who can bring any degree of emphasis to this sudden change of mood. When we pause to examine the meaning of those eighteen words we've just heard, we realise they are dazzlingly multi-layered and multi-directional. The implied stage-direction calls for Charmian to start cutting Cleopatra's lace – presumably around her bodice – but then to stop cutting, or perhaps Charmian never actually starts. The primary meaning of these lines is that Antony is as changeable in his love as Cleopatra is in her illness. But in saying this, Cleopatra simultaneously demonstrates that she herself is only pretending to be ill, "So Antony loves". In performance the moment can be portrayed as humorously histrionic, but we might also perceive beneath Cleopatra's apparent anger and hurt, a subtex of a wounded woman. The influential Anna Jameson (1794-1860), writing in 1832 in her book *Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical and Historical*, called Cleopatra an "enigma', a "glorious puzzle", and referred to this characteristic as a "consistent inconsistency" (qtd in Bate 1992, 270). But then, if we were to judge him by similar criteria, so too is Antony.

How might we solve these "glorious puzzles", or make sense of these enigmas, if, indeed, we can, or it be worthwhile to do so? Well, we might try by posing another question as part of our discussion.

5. How Might It Be Useful to Relate the Play to Shakespeare's Other Works?

An intertextual reading of *Antony and Cleopatra* with one of Shakespeare's other plays and one of his *Sonnets* might be useful in

deepening our understanding of Shakespeare's depiction of these two legendary lovers.

In *As You Like It*, Rosalind disguises herself as Ganymede in the Forest of Arden and woos Orlando with whom she is in love. The exchange between her and Orlando in act four scene one strikes a tone similar in some ways to the dialogues of Antony and Cleopatra:

> ROSALIND Come, woo me, woo me, for now I am in a holiday humour, and like enough to consent. What would you say to me now an I were your very, very Rosalind?
> ORLANDO I would kiss before I spoke.
> ROSALIND Nay, you were better speak first, and when you were gravelled for lack of matter, you might take occasion to kiss. Very good orators, when they are out, they will spit; and for lovers lacking – God warr'nt us! – matter, the cleanliest shift is to kiss.
> (4.1.64-73)

Rosalind is playing the role of Ganymede. Orlando is taking upon himself the role of a patient in need of a cure, having to imagine that the young man before him is really Rosalind. What these two pastoral lovers have in common with the high-political romance of Antony and Cleopatra – apart from their propensity to flirt – is that both are having to act being in love, whilst at the same time really being in love.

Shakespeare's Sonnet 138 can also be read in relation to his depiction of Antony and Cleopatra. It is Shakespeare's meditation on his own beloved, but the imagined speaker might also be Antony himself:

> When my love swears that she is made of truth
> I do believe her though I know she lies,
> That she might think me some untutored youth
> Unlearnèd in the world's false subtleties.
> Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,
> Although she knows my days are past the best,
> Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue;
> On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed.
> But wherefore says she not she is unjust,
> And wherefore say not I that I am old?

O, love's best habit is in seeming trust,
And age in love loves not to have years told.
Therefore I lie with her, and she with me,
And in our faults by lies we flattered be.

The sonnet conveys a shared language of love, tried and tested in the enabling fictions of what seems like a long-established relationship. Each party knows the truth about their beloved, and about themselves; each knows about the pain, the secrets, the vulnerabilities, and perhaps even the infidelities. But both parties know that these things are not to be spoken of: "on both sides thus is simple truth suppressed". And through the suppression of "simple truth" – in "seeming trust" – the relationship is fed, both through love, and through sex. The final couplet uses one of Shakespeare's favourite puns – "lie" and "lies" – meaning both untruths, and the act of lovers lying down together and, in the sonnet, on each other, in bed: "Therefore I lie with her, and she with me, / And in our faults by lies we flattered be".

Physical consummation momentarily overwhelms the enabling fictions of this relationship – and even seems to be enabled by them – and the sonnet ends with a lying-down, with love-making, and with the likelihood that the lies we have just read about will continue.

6. How Does the Play Present Sexuality?

The Forest of Arden and Shakespeare's *Sonnets* crackle with the language of love and sexuality. *Antony and Cleopatra* is a play about love, a play about the nature of human identity in love, and a play about the nature of identity in relation to theatre and poetry. It is also – and perhaps most emphatically – a play about identity in relation to sexuality.

The love affair of Antony and Cleopatra, adulterous on Antony's side, is the stuff of legend, and was already so to the play's original audiences. Shakespeare presents it on the largest possible scale. The action moves back and forth between sensual Egypt and austere Rome. One of Shakespeare's great achievements in it is to see the action from multiple perspectives as if through a series of lenses. The pleasure-loving sensuality of Mark Antony is contrasted with

the inflexible caution of Octavius Caesar; the lavish and loquacious sexuality of Cleopatra is contrasted with the demure reticence of Octavia (Caesar's sister whom Antony understandably but regrettably marries). The pleasure-seeking in Egypt is often palpably physical in stage pictures: feasting and drinking, drapes and cushions, so that actors can lounge about more or less horizontally, portraying a latent eroticism, or even a physical longing for sex. Pleasure-seeking through alluding to sex contributes to some of the play's humour. Cleopatra's maids, Charmian and Iras, jest bawdily with the Soothsayer about the length of their lovers' penises: "if you were but an inch of fortune better than I, where would you choose it?" asks Charmian, to which Iras replies "Not in my husband's nose" (1.2.60-2). Language itself becomes sexually active. Cleopatra instructs the messenger to "Ram thou thy fruitful tidings in mine ears" (2.5.24; "ram" being slang in Shakespeare's period for sexual intercourse, Williams 2006, 254).

Sexuality in relationship to identity plays an important part in Shakespeare's depiction of Antony's bungled suicide. The episode, closely derived from Plutarch, is one of the play's theatrical highlights, not only because of the brave demands it makes of the actor, the acting company, and the performance space, but also because of its sexual nature. When Eros turns the sword upon himself, Antony describes his own intended suicide. He believes Cleopatra to be dead and sees his own death as a consummation of their marriage which will occur beyond the grave: "I will be / A bridegroom in my death, and run into't / As to a lover's bed" (4.15.99-101). Antony then falls on his sword, but not managing to die, only fatally wounds himself. He is carried out by four or five actors at the end of 4.14, and into 4.15, where the text requires us to see him hoisted aloft to Cleopatra in her monument. Their enabling and loving fictions, and flirtations, enhance their final dialogue:

> Antony O, quick, or I am gone.
> Cleopatra Here's sport indeed! How heavy weighs my lord!
> Our strength is all gone into heaviness –
> That makes the weight. Had I great Juno's power,
> The strong-winged Mercury should fetch thee up
> And set thee by Jove's side. Yet come a little –
> Wishes were ever fools – O, come, come, come,

They heave Antony to Cleopatra.
And welcome, welcome! Die when thou hast lived!
Quicken with kissing! Had my lips that power,
Thus would I wear them out.
ALL THE LOOKERS ON A heavy sight!
ANTONY I am dying, Egypt, dying.
Give me some wine, and let me speak a little.
CLEOPATRA No, let me speak, and let me rail so high
That the false huswife Fortune break her wheel,
Provoked by my offence.
(4.16.33-47)

A fatally wounded man, whose phallic sword has not penetrated him quite fully enough to enable the death he seeks, is called to "come, come, come". As Cleopatra says, "Here's sport indeed!" At the same time, Shakespeare calls attention to the utterly real demands of having to lift the actor playing Antony up to Cleopatra. Her "How heavy weighs my lord!" might even be a phrase she has used in their love-making, perhaps jokingly calling attention to Antony's increasing, middle-aged, physical proportions. Antony's searing "I am dying, Egypt, dying. / Give me some wine, and let me speak a little" is undercut by Cleopatra's "No, let me speak". It is brave indeed of Shakespeare to admit such invitations for laughter as he does at this point. In his dying moments Antony begs Cleopatra to temporize with Caesar but she promises that "My resolution and my hands I'll trust – / None about Caesar" (4.16.51-2). Antony makes a final, heroic speech, but it is Cleopatra who is talking as he melts and fades away. She mourns Antony's dissolution as a melting of "the crown o' the earth". Though the notion of detumescence underlies Cleopatra's punning reaction – "the soldier's pole is fall'n" – with the dead Antony before her, any hint of sexual word-play fades in the poetry of her image. The mood shifts into one of the greatest, high-tragic outpourings in all of Shakespeare:

CLEOPATRA Noblest of men, woot die?
Hast thou no care of me – shall I abide
In this dull world, which in thy absence is
No better than a sty? O, see, my women,
The crown o' th' earth doth melt.

Antony dies.
My lord!
O, withered is the garland of the war,
The soldier's pole is fall'n – young boys and girls
Are level now with men, the odds is gone,
And there is nothing left remarkable
Beneath the visiting moon.
(4.16.61-70)

7. Identity and Theatre: Final Moments

When Dame Judi Dench played Cleopatra for Sir Peter Hall at the National Theatre (Sir Antony Hopkins was her Antony) she said she was surprised to have been invited simultaneously by Hall and Terry Hands to undertake the role, describing herself as "a menopausal dwarf", but what emerged was a magnificent and multi-faceted interpretation. She talked about her need to find "a fifth gear" for the fifth act. Everything we have learned about Cleopatra continues to develop, transform, and to find its own, new pace and tone into and through act five. As she approaches her suicide, Cleopatra is required to portray Antony through her grief and in her memory. Her language is self-consciously heroic. She becomes the playwright, momentarily bodying Antony forth in her mind's eye, her captivating poetic description quickens and stimulates our memories of him. Have we seen the Antony she is evoking, or are her words merely fantastic, even desperate?

Cleopatra I dreamt there was an Emperor Antony –
O, such another sleep, that I might see
But such another man!
Dolabella If it might please ye –
Cleopatra His face was as the heavens, and therein stuck
A sun and moon, which kept their course and lighted
The little O o' th' earth.
Dolabella Most sovereign creature –
Cleopatra His legs bestrid the ocean; his reared arm
Crested the world; his voice was propertied
As all the tunèd spheres – and that to friends –

> But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,
> He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,
> There was no winter in't – an autumn 'twas
> That grew the more by reaping. His delights
> Were dolphin-like; they showed his back above
> The element they lived in. In his livery
> Walked crowns and crownets; realms and islands were
> As plates dropped from his pocket.
>
> (5.2.76-92)

Through her words Antony becomes larger than life in her mind's eye and greater than any possible stage depiction of him. What matters most is that the audience believe in her vision of him. She presents herself with an Antony whose heroism is made ideal and even god-like. And yet there is still the possibility of slippage into sexual playfulness, part of the humanity of the moment. Jane Lapotaire, who played the role for BBC television, recalls realising that in describing Antony's delights as "dolphin-like", Cleopatra might be remembering his form riding up and down on her body during their love-making, his back looking like a dolphin diving up and down on the waves.[3]

In the last twenty minutes of the play, Shakespeare mingles political tensions with theatricality, sexuality, and indeed spirituality. Only through Cleopatra's carefully stage-managed suicide will a consummation with Antony and a politically expedient escape from being imprisoned by Caesar be achieved. As she approaches death, Shakespeare draws attention to the complicated cultural resonance of boy actors playing female roles. The information from Dolabella that Caesar plans to send Cleopatra and her children – whom of course we do not see, if only because of the limited number of boys in the acting company – ahead of him, and there to display them to public ignominy, provokes from her an outraged vision of a pageant in which she imagines "some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / In th'posture of a whore" (5.2.220-1). The irony would have been acute when the original boy actor spoke these lines. He would, we must hope, have been well experienced, able to flirt self-knowingly with the audience, as well as being talented

3 This was part of a personal communication.

enough to bring stature and nobility to his role. Cleopatra prepares for her suicide as if it were a wedding combined with a coronation. Characteristically, Shakespeare comically undercuts the episode. A Clown brings her the basket of asps, the instruments of her death. ("Clown" means a rustic figure rather than a court jester). Cleopatra refers to the asp as the "pretty worm", a phallic worm "that kills [i.e. that can stimulate orgasm] and pains not" (5.2.242-3). This short but important and memorable episode with the Clown is quintessentially Shakespearian. The master is at work again, achieving an intense, tragic effect through the mixing together of tragedy and comedy.

The days of revelry are over. "Now no more / The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip", says Cleopatra (5.2.280-1). Imagining Antony waiting for her in Elysium, where, as he had said, "souls do couch on flowers", she addresses him for the first time as "husband", and – with obvious sexual word-play – "Husband, I come!" (5.2.286). Death is equated with love-making: "The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch / Which hurts, and is desired" (5.2.294-5). She is still capable of jealousy, fearing that if her maid Charmian dies first, Antony will "make demand of her". Caesar himself acknowledges Cleopatra's seductiveness even in death: "she looks like sleep, / As she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace" (5.2.344-6). This tragedy ends like a romantic comedy – and surreally – with the expectation of marriage beyond the grave.

Shakespeare had dramatised two love-death narratives by the time he came to write *Antony and Cleopatra*, his re-telling of the Ovidian story of the lovers Pyramus and Thisbe in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and his other pair of eponymous suicidal lovers, *Romeo and Juliet*. It is clear from his treatment of Plutarch that he was ready to break new ground in his adaptation of another love-death story. The deliberately mock-heroic tone of Pyramus and Thisbe – a tone unintended by its cast members, the tradesmen – makes it a highly comic contribution to the wedding celebrations of the Duke and Duchess of Athens. The bawdy humour within *Romeo and Juliet* ends with the death of Mercutio in act 3, and in the two final acts of the play Shakespeare dramatises the darkness closing-in on the two young lovers as time is running out. In contrast, he depicts the final moments of *Antony and Cleopatra*'s love-death story through multiple emotional and dramatic tones, and with a language which is

many-faceted in its resonance: rural comedy, spiritually transcendent, sexual, lyrical, romantic, and self-consciously theatrical.

In the depiction of Cleopatra's suicide, he changes a significant detail in Plutarch and emphasises another. In Plutarch, Cleopatra dies from the asp biting her on her arm. Shakespeare's Cleopatra holds the asp to her close against her heart, and asks: "Dost thou not see my baby at my breast, / That sucks the nurse asleep?" (5.2.308-9). It is possible that Shakespeare is consciously recalling his earlier love-death story, incidentally echoing something of the Capulets' Nurse feeding the baby Juliet. In the stage picture Shakespeare shows us Cleopatra demonstrating both a monstrous motherhood – her suckling child is a serpent – and the self-fulfilling prophecy we heard her make just after the death of Antony, in the same scenic location, when she says: "No more but e'en a woman, and commanded / By such poor passion as the maid that milks / And does the meanest chores" (4.16.74-6). Unlike Pyramus, Thisbe, Juliet, and Antony, Cleopatra does not die from being penetrated by a blade. But her death is linked linguistically in our memory to Antony's. And she, like him, expires – but in mid-sentence. Her words leading up to the moment of her death become breathy in scope, ending in open vowels, lingering and resonating, bearing comparison to the two elements which she has just claimed for herself: "I am fire and air – my other elements / I give to baser life" (5.2.288-9). The actor has ample freedom to speak her two-and-a-half lines in a variety of ways. The onomatopoeic language seems to imply that her breath is leaving her:

> CHARMIAN O, break! O, break!
> CLEOPATRA As sweet as balm, as soft as *air*, as gentle.
> O, Antony! *Nay*, I will take *thee too*.
> *She applies another aspic to her arm.*
> What should I *stay* –
> *She dies.*
> (5.2.310-12; our emphases indicate the breathiness of Shakespeare's long, open vowels).

Charmian is left alone for a few moments, referring to Cleopatra with intimate colloquialism as "a lass unparalleled" (5.2.314) and in

the same breath noting that Phoebus (the sun) shall never again see Cleopatra's eyes. She closes the Queen's eye-lids.

And then there is a final moment of tonal disruption. Following Plutarch closely, Shakespeare draws special attention to Cleopatra's crown slipping as, presumably, her head falls under the weight of it once she's dead. "Your crown's awry", says Charmian, "I'll mend it, and then play –" (5.2.316-17). A few lines later, during Caesar's post-mortem investigation, the First Guard says of Charmian, "I found her trimming up the diadem / On her dead mistress" (5.2.340-1). "Trimming" is straight out of North's translation of Plutarch, "Charmion half dead and trembling, trimming the diadem which Cleopatra ware upon her head" (1964, 292). In placing emphasis on this detail, Shakespeare seems to be seeking to illuminate the humanity in the moment. Cleopatra, in seeking to monumentalise herself in her death, to become "marble constant", does not quite achieve it. Her crown slips – as in Plutarch – and Shakespeare wants carefully to draw attention to that slippage.

In a drama that resembles a screenplay to our modern eyes in part because it contains more scenes than any other Shakespeare play, and because it moves effortlessly from Rome to Alexandria and back, from sea to land, from barge to monument, Shakespeare creates a rich and multi-tonal space in which to body forth Antony and Cleopatra and their legendary status. The language and theatrical attention he lavishes on them are, we would like to suggest, revealing of Shakespeare's own sensibilities as a playwright. It is at once both kaleidoscopic and magnifying, supple, fluid, and yet crystallising and particularised. To engage with *Antony and Cleopatra*, and to appreciate something of the play's multiple riches, is to respond to one of the greatest of Shakespeare's invitations to us to be touched, empowered, and enlarged by his genius.

Works Cited

Bate, Jonathan. 1992. *The Romantics on Shakespeare*. London: Penguin.
Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. 1960. *Shakespearean Criticism*, 2 vols. Edited by Thomas Middleton Raysor. London: J. M. Dent.
Knight, G. Wilson. 1958. *The Imperial Theme* (1930). London: Methuen.

Plutarch. 1964. *Shakespeare's Plutarch.* Edited by T. J. B. Spencer. London: Penguin.

Shakespeare, William. 1994. *Antony and Cleopatra.* Edited by Michael Neill. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

— 2005. *The Complete Works.* Edited by Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett, and William Montgomery. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Williams, Gordon. 2006. *Shakespeare's Sexual Language: A Glossary.* London: Continuum.