CHAPTER TWO

THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE WORLDS
OF ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

Antony's Roman duty and his Egyptian appetite are represented as necessary alternatives in the beginning. Though Cleopatra is to be regarded neither as the object of a Wagnerian passion nor as a passing itch, she is placed clearly at the center of Antony's private life, which everywhere in the first act is weighed against his public commitments. Philo, Antony's friend, names the conflict in the opening speech of the play:

His captain's heart,
Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper
And is become the bellows and the fan
To cool a gypsy's lust. (I.i.6-10)

Octavius, Antony's arch competitor, echoes this when he complains that while Pompey threatens immediate danger to the state, Antony "fishes, drinks, and wastes/ The lamps of night in revel." And Pompey hopes that Cleopatra will continue to "Tie up the libertine in a field of feasts." However they may scramble among themselves to rule the world, all Romans are of one mind concerning the lapse of Antony in his relation with Cleopatra.

Cleopatra herself is really of their mind. Though later in the play Antony's death will teach her otherwise, now she agrees that he cannot hold up his head both in Rome and Egypt at once. She also would have him choose. But, of course, she does not share the Roman estimate of Egypt or herself; and she uses all her wiles to intensify Antony's awareness of the con-
flict and to make him choose her. She taunts him endlessly for all his Roman ties of loyalty and duty. When Antony refuses to hear the messengers from Rome, she teases him to give them audience and thus show his subservience to "the scarce-bearded Caesar." When he names his boundless love for her as a reason for ignoring the messengers, she asks why then is he married to Fulvia. When later he reassures her that Fulvia is dead, she pretends to discover in his cool response to Fulvia's death a forecast of his indifference to hers. She damns him if he loves Fulvia, and also if he doesn't. In crossing him at every turn, she is pursuing that feminine strategy which she thinks will best sustain his love; and her strategy assumes that Rome and Egypt are irreconcilable alternatives. Later in the play the strategy will prove ineffectual because its underlying assumption is inaccurate. But here it indicates the pervasiveness of that assumption early in the play.

Both the Roman leaders and Cleopatra, then, identify unmistakably the conflict of values that faces Antony. But Antony himself lives the conflict; in him it is internal. He begins by sharing the general opinion that he must choose between Rome and Egypt and by rejecting one for the other. At first he wants only "some pleasure now," and will not hear the news from Rome. Later, having heard the messengers, he decides he must break with Cleopatra "Or lose myself in dotage." Nothing shows better how deeply he is divided than the sharp contrast in style between the speech in which he refuses audience to the Roman messengers and the speech in which he later announces to Cleopatra his departure for Rome. I place the two speeches consecutively in order to dramatize the contrast.

Let Rome in Tiber melt and the wide arch
Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space.
Kingdoms are clay; our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man. The nobleness of life
Is to do thus [embracing]; when such a mutual pair
And such a twain can do't, in which I bind,
On pain of punishment, the world to weet
We stand up peerless. (I.i.33-40)
Hear me, Queen.
The strong necessity of time commands
Our services awhile; but my full heart
Remains in use with you. Our Italy
Shines o'er with civil swords. Sextus Pompeius
Makes his approaches to the port of Rome.
Equality of two domestic powers
Breeds scrupulous faction. The hated, grown to strength,
Are newly grown to love. The condemn'd Pompey,
Rich in his father's honour, creeps apace
Into the hearts of such as have not thriv'd
Upon the present state, whose numbers threaten;
And quietness, grown sick of rest, would purge
By any desperate change. My more particular,
And that which most with you should safe my going,
Is Fulvia's death. (I.iii.41-56)

A stranger could not easily guess that both these speeches
are by Antony. The first is personal and passionate, breathless
with the lover's intensity. Its words spill over into gestures,
as Antony embraces Cleopatra when he says, "the nobleness of
life/ Is to do thus." The diction is concrete, the imagery vivid
and vast. It has already that Brobdingnagian quality¹ characteristic of the whole play, in which language strains its limits in
order to encompass its subject. And the syntax is simple, swift,
and compact, with those quick transitions and elisions of thought
that attempt to embody Antony's passion even as they dilate it.

In contrast to the assurance and intensity of this opening
speech and his action following it, there is a defensive, measured
tone in the second speech and everything relating to Antony's
departure from Egypt. He has tried five times during the
conversation to explain his purpose, and each time Cleopatra
has interrupted and distracted him. Now at last he bursts out
in a highly wrought forensic style, verbose instead of breathless:
the passionless impersonal style of the public Roman. His
diction this time is abstract and his imagery is generalized.
His measured rhythm struts with dignity; and his syntax is
carefully articulated, replete with subordination, as if to support
by sentence structure that wide arch of the ranged empire that
he was ready to let fall before.

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The contrast between the speeches shows Antony caught between two values. I think it even hints at the incompleteness of one value without the other, for each speech in its own way is rhetorically overdone, as if to justify by the incantation of a style what cannot be defended by reason: Antony’s alarming indifference to the condition of Rome on the one hand, and on the other his frightening neglect of his full heart’s desire. In any case, believing with the others that a choice is required, Antony chooses Rome, and thus initiates a process whereby he is to master the Roman public world and encompass its values. Before following that process in detail, however, we must see in what respects the presentation of Antony in these opening scenes is symptomatic of the whole play. The contrast between the two speeches reveals Antony’s temperament, and shows the particular form in which he is to suffer his trial and his ecstasy. Antony is not in the condition that post-Freudian thought calls “conflicted.” He is not aware all at once of contradictory alternatives, then torn and weakened by the need to decide, and finally rendered impotent or else aloof, and in either case unready for action. Antony’s way is precisely not to weigh his alternatives and divide himself against himself, but to live each alternative in turn, and lift his whole self back and forth across the line that divides Rome from Egypt. He devotes himself wholly to each world in turn, at first dismissing the Roman messengers with “There’s not a minute of our lives should stretch/ Without some pleasure now”; and later dismissing himself from Egypt with “The strong necessity of time commands/ Our services awhile.” He lives for the moment, indeed; but he is to give himself just as fully to the Roman moment as to the Egyptian. In each place where he stands is obliterated every connection with another time, place, or value. This discontinuity in thought and action is distinctive of Antony’s character, and it is pervasive in the play, where character and conduct, motive and action, cause and effect, are everywhere forced apart and hidden from each other. On this score our perplexity only begins with Antony’s two speeches, which generate in turn a whole series of questions. When did he
change his mind and decide to hear the messengers after all? Why did he change his mind? And having heard the messengers, why did he decide to leave Cleopatra and return to Rome? Here it may seem obvious from the news the messengers have brought him that his presence in Rome is required immediately. But to Philo and Cleopatra that was obvious before the messengers had spoken. There were good reasons, they both knew, why Antony should be in Rome—unless he were indeed willing to see Rome fall. Our question is not whether the reasons he finally enumerates are sufficient to justify Antony's departure for Rome. Our question is rather when, where, how, and why did Antony decide not to "Let Rome in Tiber melt"? And on that question Antony, and behind him Shakespeare, is dazzlingly silent. Antony's last words before his exit at I.i.55 are these to the messengers: "Speak not to us." At his next entrance, at I.ii.85, he is accompanied by a messenger who is in the midst of giving him the news from Rome.

There are other striking reversals and discontinuities. When he hears from the messenger that Fulvia is dead, Antony says, "... she's good, being gone,/ The hand could pluck her back that shov'd her on." And now that Fulvia is gone, just when we might think that Antony is more free than ever to remain in Egypt, he decides to return to Rome. His apparently impulsive conduct is essentially like that which Cleopatra pursues as a deliberate policy:

See where he is, who's with him, what he does.
I did not send you. If you find him sad,
Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report
That I am sudden sick. Quick, and return!
(I.iii.2-5)

Nothing remains stable, predictable, "in character." Everywhere we see reversal and change, and nowhere are we permitted even to glimpse a reason for the change. Just as Antony weighs his alternatives only by living them, so his every living action seems uncaused, self-generated, a new creation whose spontaneity disarms our challenge.
There is no reason to doubt that Shakespeare is perfectly in control of himself in these opening scenes, and hence that the discontinuities I have noted are precisely what he wants. We have no warrant for improving upon his alleged carelessness and ignoring the discontinuities by inventing for Antony a familiar rationale: that the Antony who speaks “Let Rome in Tiber melt” is a reeling infatuate, wined, dined, and whored out of his senses; whereas the Antony who speaks “The strong necessity of time commands/ Our services awhile” is back in his right mind and a proper man again. This customary interpretation furnishes Antony with a conventional psychology and his several actions with sufficient causes. But it goes straight against the grain of Shakespeare's portrait. Shakespeare gives us no warrant for believing that the wooden, lifeless style of Antony's second speech is “in character” and that the vital, passionate utterance of his first speech is not. And unlike Plutarch, he makes no claim that the action contemplated by one speech is preferable to that contemplated by the other. For Shakespeare both sides of Antony are in character, and each side is integral, discontinuous from the other. This early in the play we can only accept the discontinuity, see where Shakespeare will lead us with it, and let it become meaningful, if it can, in its own terms.

At crucial moments later in the play—for example, in his decisions to return from Rome to Egypt, to fight at Actium by sea, and to follow Cleopatra when she deserts that battle—Antony acts again without visible premeditation, in the same discontinuous manner as in the opening scenes. Such episodes will invite tampering and misinterpretation unless we have let ourselves be prepared by the opening scenes to see that all the discontinuities, instead of needing to be “resolved” and explained away, are intrinsic to Shakespeare's construction, are in fact the distinctive materials in the play's tight and luminous fabric. Then we might see too that Antony's conflict throughout is truly an internal one, though he does not deliberate his choices in full torment as Hamlet does, because so continuous an alternation in his whole style as a person necessarily involves a series
of inner transformations. It is a characteristic and coherent response to experience and not an accidental or frivolous posture. His sudden and unexplained shifts throughout the play show the contour of Antony's mind, the quality of its anguish, and its continuing danger of being loosened from its moorings. Antony, like Lear, is not an introspective character; he is not divided up into direct discourse, soliloquy, and aside, so to speak, in order to give each part of his psyche its own distinct voice. He is just that man in whom there is no division between "inner" and "outer." But it does not follow that he is only a reprobate with no inner life at all. Although his inner life is less vivid and fractured than Hamlet's and Macbeth's, for example, I hope to show that it is equally intense; and I will argue later that it is no less humanly significant than theirs. Shakespeare's presentation of Antony in the opening scenes trains us in that awareness.

II

From the time Antony leaves Egypt, at the end of I.iii, until the time when his new wife Octavia leaves him at Athens, at the end of III.iv, Antony devotes himself to satisfying both in letter and in spirit his country's claim upon him. Back in Rome, confronted with the embarrassing fact that his wife Fulvia had made war upon his partner Caesar while he was fishing in the Nile, Antony begins by patching up his excuses to Caesar with whatever temporizing and self-deception are necessary. He argues that Fulvia's wars against Caesar were subtly directed against himself as well to get him away from Cleopatra, but that honor and good breeding required that he stay in Egypt and avoid meeting his own wife and brother in battle. Now he takes occasion to joke about Fulvia,

As for my wife,
I would you had her spirit in such another!
The third o' th' world is yours, which with a snaffle
You may pace easy, but not such a wife. (II.ii.61-64)
when a short time before, upon hearing of her death, he said
how dear she was now that she was gone. This expedient change
of attitude toward Fulvia is matched by an equally gross dis­
loyalty to Cleopatra. Having pleaded first that honor made
him stay there, soon Antony finds it convenient to regard his
sojourn in Egypt as a lapse. To the charge that he has denied
military aid to Caesar in those wars “Which fronted mine own
peace,” he replies:

Neglected rather;
And then when poisoned hours had bound me up
From mine own knowledge. As nearly as I may,
I’ll play the penitent to you; but mine honesty
Shall not make poor my greatness, nor my power
Work without it. Truth is, that Fulvia,
To have me out of Egypt, made wars here,
For which myself, the ignorant motive, do
So far ask pardon as befits mine honour
To stoop in such a case. (II.ii.89—98)

The more he attempts to justify himself, the more desperately
he fastens upon any argument that lies at hand, no matter how
incoherent or debasing to his manhood. He ends by abandoning
all pretense of argument, resorting to a compulsive assertion
of his honor independently of anything he has done to maintain
that honor. For as long as Antony is bent only upon making
peace with Octavius and renewing his credentials in the Roman
world, he has forfeited his only possible argument: that to him
Egypt and Cleopatra represent indispensable human values.
What Octavius has called his “lascivious wassails” Antony
described earlier as “the nobleness of life.” But now while
Antony chooses to share Octavius’ standards, his life in the
East is wholly vulnerable to Octavius’ criticism, and he is
barred from making a plausible defense of his conduct.

Ironically, Antony’s shabby rationalizations brilliantly serve
their immediate purpose of restoring his pre-eminence in the
Roman world, even to the point of making him an eligible
husband for Octavia. The essential Roman issue is not Antony’s
past conduct but his political reliability in the future. Octavius,
who needs Antony's strength and skill in the expected war with Pompey, is not eager to scruple nicely about honor at such a moment. He wants from Antony a quick sign of good intentions, some gesture of willingness that will justify him in binding his sister in marriage to Antony. Thus Antony's empty posturing is exquisitely matched by the ethical shallowness of Octavius' response, for Octavius is willing to respect a mere show of honor if it helps to consolidate his power.

But Antony does not continue merely to put on a show until he can return conveniently to Egypt. The unimproved flimsiness of his patched alliance with Octavius is not enough at best to maintain his restored status among the Romans. Nor can his large spirit have its measure taken by any form of abject timeserving. Once turned back toward Rome, Antony progresses from a mere posture to a committed pursuit of the inner spirit of Roman honor. Immediately after his marriage, he says:

My Octavia,
Read not my blemishes in the world's report.
I have not kept my square; but that to come
Shall all be done by th' rule. Good night, dear lady.
(II.iii.4-7)

This candid statement is accurate both about his past and his future. With Octavia he does not temporize as he did with her brother. He makes no excuses for his past; and the sincerity of his promise for the future is to be borne out by events.

Immediately after the speech quoted above, Octavia exits and Antony's Egyptian soothsayer enters. Antony, palpably satisfied by the progress of his affairs in Rome, asks the soothsayer: “Now, sirrah; you do wish yourself in Egypt?” The soothsayer wishes them both in Egypt, for, as he says, though Antony is a better man than Caesar—“Noble, courageous, high, unmatchable,”—Caesar has the better luck. Once near Caesar, Antony's good angel leaves him, so that Caesar invariably beats him against the odds. This reminder overturns Antony's high spirits, and after the soothsayer exits, Antony
confesses that what he said is right. Then, less than forty lines after he has promised Octavia to live by the rule, Antony says:

I will to Egypt;
And though I make this marriage for my peace,
I' th' East my pleasure lies. (II.iii.38-40)

These lines more than any other provide grounds for the customary interpretation of Antony's activity at Rome: that out of weakness or cynicism, no matter which, Antony is simply mending his political fences and watching hawk-eyed for the earliest opportunity to return to Egypt. There is a discontinuity indeed between Antony's promise to Octavia and his promise to himself; and this one surely lends color to the traditional view of Antony's dissolute character.

But here is just the moment when Antony stops vacillating between two worlds in Drydenesque fashion and begins to make each value, Rome and Egypt, relevant to the other. He means everything he says in both speeches, and neither one supersedes the other. What he calls his "pleasure" surely has its dissolute side; but it is neither dissolute nor contradictory to want to live by the rule and still to take pleasure in life. The soothsayer reminded him, after all, that he is overshadowed even in those pastimes that the austere Octavius allows himself; and it is a fair inference that his pain here lies in fully recognizing the circumscription of Roman values for the first time since his return. Antony's sudden depression of spirits after the soothsayer's speech suggests that his marriage to Octavia was neither desperate nor disingenuous. He took pleasure in his marriage, and his leading question to the soothsayer implies that he for one does not wish himself back in Egypt. When the soothsayer reminds him of his fainting luck in Caesar's presence, to be sure, he changes his mind with characteristic abruptness. But this time his newly aroused desire does not lead him to jump for Egypt at the first opportunity, or to break his promise to Octavia and stop living by the rule. Although he is still divided between Rome and Egypt, now for the first time he stops rejecting one for the other. In his remaining conduct throughout
the play, the two values gradually become coexistent in his mind and conditional upon each other. Antony comes slowly to realize that he cannot escape Caesar's better luck, but still must put his virtue and his honor in the scales against it. He comes to recognize that the Roman peace upon which his Egyptian pleasure depends can be achieved only by the fact and not the show of honor; that his aspirations must sustain each other rather than compete. If there is little doubt in his mind or in ours that he will return to Egypt, the crucial fact is that he does not take the opportunity until he has fulfilled himself as a Roman, until he has lived conscientiously "by th' rule" and found himself betrayed in that conduct by lucky Caesar himself. Only when he discovers what he could not have anticipated, that Octavius rather than he has acted unconscionably, does Antony turn back toward Cleopatra. By then he has become the best of Romans, and even then he does not permit his conduct back in Egypt to undermine his reinstated Roman honor.

The immediate task of the reunited triumvirs is to settle their business with Pompey. Antony had wished to avoid war with Pompey, if he could also avoid debasing his reputation into the bargain:

I did not think to draw my sword 'gainst Pompey;
For he hath laid strange courtesies and great
Of late upon me. I must thank him only,
Lest my remembrance suffer ill report;
At heel of that, defy him. (II.ii.156-60)

He had been unwilling to defy Octavius, and thus had lost his honor while protesting it. But now he takes the initiative in negotiating with Pompey an acceptable peace, which manifests simultaneously Antony's desire to avoid bloodshed, his uncertainty over the outcome of a possible battle, his personal regard for Pompey, and yet his readiness to defy Pompey and all these personal considerations for the sake of the public order at stake. Now for the first time we see him masterfully hinge together his public and private interests, and thereby displace Octavius in the seat of leadership. The episode needs to be quoted at
length, in order to show both the ease with which Antony is here in command and the striking contrast between his assured deployment of his honor here and his stammering rationalizations in his earlier peacemaking with Octavius.

_Ant._ Thou canst not fear us, Pompey, with thy sails. We'll speak with thee at sea. At land thou know'st How much we do o'ercount thee.

_Pom._ At land indeed Thou dost o'ercount me of my father's house! But since the cuckoo builds not for himself, Remain in't as thou mayst.

_Lep._ Be pleas'd to tell us (For this is from the present) how you take The offers we have sent you.

_Caes._ There's the point.

_Ant._ Which do not be entreated to, but weigh What it is worth embrac'd.

_Caes._ And what may follow, To try a larger fortune.

_Pom._ You have made me offer Of Sicily, Sardinia; and I must Rid all the sea of pirates; then, to send Measures of wheat to Rome; this 'greed upon, To part with unhack'd edges and bear back Our targes undinted.

_Omnes._ That's our offer.

_Pom._ Know then I came before you here a man prepar'd To take this offer; but Mark Antony Put me to some impatience. Though I lose The praise of it by telling, you must know, When Caesar and your brother were at blows, Your mother came to Sicily and did find Her welcome friendly.

_Ant._ I have heard it, Pompey, And am well studied for a liberal thanks, Which I do owe you.
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Pom. Let me have your hand.
I did not think, sir, to have met you here.

Ant. The beds i' th' East are soft; and thanks to you,
That call'd me timelier than my purpose hither;
For I have gain'd by't. (II.vi.24-53)

Here Lepidus plays his usual role of herald, while Octavius merely seconds his colleagues with a polite form of browbeating. To Antony falls the most delicate part of the negotiation, especially in acquitting himself of Pompey's special grievance against him. Antony refuses to threaten or to distort the facts in order to gain a rhetorical advantage over Pompey, and in the process he gains the desired advantage. He does not deny Pompey's naval superiority; and whereas Octavius threatens Pompey with the dangers of refusing their offer, Antony invites him to consider the intrinsic value of that offer. Even his final indirect reference to Cleopatra bears a new significance, through which we see Rome and Egypt becoming simultaneous values for him. To Octavius he had apologized for his "poisoned hours" in Egypt and abased himself in the false confession implied by that metaphor. To Octavia he had spoken broadly of not having kept his square, but without embarrassing himself by specific admissions. Now to Pompey he says only that the beds in the East are soft, which sounds less like a confession of guilt than an estimate of value. In suavely thanking Pompey for taking him away from his soft bed, he begins to put his Egyptian idyll beyond the reach of Roman criticism; and then he turns discontinuously to the present and says he has gained by his return to Rome.

What he has gained is Octavia; and the play goes on to demonstrate the sincerity with which he values that gain. Caesar has doubts, understandably; and long after Antony has said that he makes this marriage only for his peace, Caesar presses him on just that point at the time of their farewell:

Caes. Most noble Antony,
Let not the piece of virtue which is set

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Betwixt us as the cement of our love
To keep it builded, be the ram to batter
The fortress of it; for better might we
Have lov’d without this mean, if on both parts
This be not cherish’d.

Ant. Make me not offended
In your distrust.

Caes. I have said.

Ant. You shall not find,
Though you be therein curious, the least cause
For what you seem to fear. So the gods keep you
And make the hearts of Romans serve your ends!
We will here part. (III.ii.27-38)

When Octavius and Octavia exchange farewells, Antony says of his wife "The April’s in her eyes. It is love’s spring,/ And these the showers to bring it on. Be cheerful." The episode is highly complex. On the one hand, Shakespeare has gone out of his way, in an already crowded plot, to conduct this test of Antony’s probity. But he offers no immediate evidence, either in the tone of Antony’s speeches or in the surrounding context, that Antony is guilty of duplicity. On the contrary, Antony’s beautiful description of Octavia, which continues throughout another speech beginning “Her tongue will not obey her heart” (III.ii.47-50), shows a true and eloquent lover. Yet we all heard Antony say before that he makes this marriage for his peace. If we confine our attention to this episode in context, then I do not see how we can believe that Antony’s speech hides a deliberate intention to return to Egypt. If Antony is dissembling here, then his cynicism is even greater than his most severe detractors have claimed, and the play itself becomes an incoherent babble in which we cannot trust what the poetry tells us. Everything in Antony’s utterance bespeaks the honor of his motives and the integrity of his love; and we can only conclude that if he said before that he makes this marriage for his peace, that is distinctly not what he is saying now. The two statements are simply discontinuous; and yet the action of the play does not permit either one to supersede the other.
Only in the light of the genuine honor won by his marriage to Octavia and his negotiation with Pompey may we discover the significance of Antony's departure for Egypt when it finally comes. In the scene of his farewell to Octavia, he begins by listing the grievances that have turned him against her brother:

Nay, nay, Octavia; not only that—
That were excusable, that and thousands more
Of semblable import—but he hath wag'd
New wars 'gainst Pompey; made his will, and read it
To public ear;
Spoke scantily of me: when perforce he could not
But pay me terms of honour, cold and sickly
He vented them, most narrow measure lent me;
When the best hint was given him, he not took't,
Or did it from his teeth. (III.iv.1-10)

He shows here that same jealous regard for his honor that lay behind his earlier temporizing with Octavius, and this might suggest that he is retreating into the old self-deception and paving the way for his long-intended return to Cleopatra. But this time he is not protesting too much, in view of his conduct since returning from Egypt. Shakespeare takes considerable pains to exclude the possibility that Antony is deceiving either himself or Octavia. In his familiar device of the "choric scene" (III.v), immediately following Antony's interview with Octavia, Shakespeare gives us Eros' independent, unprejudiced confirmation of Antony's case against Octavius. Instead of providing an ironic commentary on the pretentiousness or hypocrisy of the main characters, like the scene of Ventidius' victory in Parthia or the Fluellen episodes in Henry V, this choric scene provides information that amplifies and confirms Antony's argument. Eros reports that Caesar not only has made war on Pompey but has refused to share with Lepidus "the glory of the action"; that he has deposed Lepidus, and is about to have him executed. When Enobarbus asks him where Antony is at that moment, Eros replies:

Eros. He's walking in the garden thus, and spurns
The rush that lies before him; cries 'Fool Lepidus!'
Eros is reporting Antony's behavior after Octavia has left to join her brother, when Antony is under no pressure to practice duplicity or self-deception. He reports Antony's shame at his colleague's violation of their pact with Pompey, which had been negotiated in the light of "strange courtesies and great" that Pompey laid upon him. Eros is reporting as well Antony's unaffected sorrow over the plight of Lepidus. In *Julius Caesar* Antony called Lepidus "a slight unmeritable man,/ Meet to be sent on errands"; and in this play he has made a laughing stock of the drunken Lepidus at Pompey's banquet. But now in the privacy of his garden, where he does not need to maintain appearances, a transformed Antony laments and curses the fate of Lepidus. Finally Eros gives us the crucial information that even after Octavia's departure, Antony's navy is rigged "For Italy and Caesar" and not for Egypt and Cleopatra. The sole purpose of Eros' scene is to indicate that this time Antony's scruples are genuine because earned.

An examination of Plutarch's version of this part of the story suggests that Shakespeare intended that significance which I have attributed to Eros' scene. In Plutarch's account, after concluding the treaty with Pompey, Antony leaves his new wife and launches the Parthian campaign. During that campaign Cleopatra makes tempting gestures, and Antony responds with what North calls his characteristic "effeminacy" by pursuing Cleopatra. He is disloyal to Octavia almost from the moment he marries her. Meanwhile Octavius tears up the treaty with Pompey and sets out to recapture Sicily, with Antony's full knowledge and even with the help of warships supplied by Antony. Along the way Octavius deposes Lepidus. Antony goes to Egypt, and from a throne mounted in the market place parcels out the earth, the sun, and the moon among Cleopatra's children and some minor potentates. For this Octavius denounces him
in Rome, and only in self-defense does Antony make charges against Octavius. Then he complains not that Octavius has broken faith in ruining Pompey and Lepidus but that he has refused to share with his accomplice Antony the spoils of victory.²

In transmuting just this much of Plutarch’s narrative, Shakespeare improves Antony’s moral position beyond recognition. He removes Antony from any contact with Cleopatra on the one hand and absolves him of any prior knowledge of Octavius’ nefarious plans for Pompey and Lepidus on the other. He has Antony accuse Octavius first, in moral indignation rather than in self-defense: his charge is not that Octavius has denied him spoils but that Octavius has broken faith. And to forestall any suspicion that Antony is too prejudiced a spokesman in his own behalf, Shakespeare puts these accusations into the mouth of Eros. What Plutarch depicts as the sleazy conflict of two incompatibly rapacious appetites, in which “it was predestinated that the government of all the world should fall into Octavius Caesar’s hands,” Shakespeare purifies into a competition of honor won by Antony.

Shakespeare alters Plutarch even further, in order to cleanse Antony of shame in his relation with Octavia. In Plutarch’s narrative Octavia mediates the differences that continually arise between Antony and Octavius, from the time of their renewed alliance against Pompey until the final outbreak of their civil war. She remains loyal to Antony despite his renewed liaison with Cleopatra and despite Octavius’ ordering her to leave Antony’s house. She exhibits the same solicitude for Fulvia’s children as for her own, and she often intercedes with her brother on behalf of her husband. Her conduct is so impeccable that it does Antony unintended harm: “For her honest love and regard to her husband made every man hate him, when they saw he did so unkindly use so noble a lady.” ³ Her loyalty is ended only when Antony himself sends word from Egypt that she is to leave his house.

In altering this part of Plutarch’s account, Shakespeare has Antony conduct the Parthian campaign entirely through the
agency of Ventidius, which leaves the impression that from the time of their marriage to the time of their parting at Athens, Antony and Octavia have never been separated. Despite Antony's earlier announcement that he made this marriage for his peace, the initiative and responsibility for their separation now fall upon Octavia, in typically ambiguous circumstances that nevertheless reflect no worse upon Antony than upon her. Informed of Antony's grievances against her brother, Octavia asks permission to go see Octavius and try to mend the quarrel. It is an admirable wish, but an untimely circumscription of her faith in Antony, since his grievances, if true, are not negotiable. At the time of their parting from Caesar, Antony had said of her,

> Her tongue will not obey her heart, nor can  
> Her heart inform her tongue—the swan’s down-feather  
> That stands upon the swell at full of tide,  
> And neither way inclines. (III.ii.47–50)

But now she inclines toward her brother willy-nilly, even if for an admirable purpose, out of the same statuesque hesitation between heart and tongue. Like Brutus' Portia, she exhibits a legalistic Roman impersonality just when it most behooves her as a wife to show a bit of Egyptian warmth. In effect if not in intention, she cannot credit Antony's grievances against Octavius until she can check up on them with Octavius himself; and it is not the least important function of Eros' choric scene to exhibit the shakiness of her position.

Antony's last words to Octavia, then, are those of a man who latterly has "kept his square" while everybody around him has been tracing hyperbolas:

> Gentle Octavia,  
> Let your best love draw to that point which seeks  
> Best to preserve it. If I lose mine honour,  
> I lose myself. Better I were not yours  
> Than yours so branchless. But, as you requested,  
> Yourself shall go between 's. The mean time, lady,

* 34 *
I'll raise the preparation of a war
Shall stain your brother. Make your soonest haste;
So your desires are yours. (III.iv.20-28)

And again:

When it appears to you where this begins,
Turn your displeasure that way, for our faults
Can never be so equal that your love
Can equally move with them. Provide your going;
Choose your own company, and command what cost
Your heart has mind to. (III.iv.33-38)

In the personal inflection of these lines there is nothing of the
forced declamation that characterized Antony's earlier parting
speech to Cleopatra or his reconciliation speech to Caesar. Here
as in those earlier speeches, he is attending to his Roman honor.
But this time his voice rings with conviction because this time
his honor has been earned; and with the peerless tact, modesty,
and confidence of a man who has had to undergo a reformation,
who can no longer afford to be righteous unless he is right, he
offers Octavia all possible help in making a journey that cannot
help being an effrontery to him.

That effrontery, for all its noble motive, frees Antony for
Egypt—not because it gives him a convenient excuse but because
it measures his inner fulfilment of Roman honor against the
external forms enacted by his wife and brother-in-law, and thus
challenges him to make viable his Roman honor in an Egyptian
life. Octavia here completes unwittingly what her brother began,
the shrinking and localizing of those public values that Antony
had come back to Rome in order to reconstruct and preserve.
That her brother hardly expected in Antony a genuine renewal
of honor is a less striking irony than that Octavia, the symbol
of that renewal, should find herself unable to incline consistently
toward Antony in his accomplishment. And the deepest irony is
that only at the moment of her failure is Antony first able to
voice the perception to which his conduct has led him, that it

* 35 *
was only worth purging his Egyptian “effeminacy” in order to achieve the fullness of his Roman manhood:

If I lose mine honour,
I lose myself. Better I were not yours
Than yours so branchless.

The “myself” to whom he refers is now the whole man acting out of conviction, not a self-deceived dotard rationalizing his honor. Antony’s lines reflect his outgrowing of a world that thrives upon such shows; for his honesty and rectitude in the affairs of that world have given him a larger scope than either of its two chief inhabitants, his wife and brother-in-law. Their blindness to his honesty has left him to “stand up peerless” among the Romans, but it has absolved him of nothing. The play now frees him for Egypt, not to relapse into a familiar luxury, but to achieve on condition of his earned Roman honor that further ripeness which only the Nile generates. He is not left free to exchange one world for another; but by winning one world, he is enabled to reach for the other, to redeem each world through the other and make each one relevant to the other’s glory.

III

Up through the end of Act III, scene v (Eros’ choric scene), Shakespeare has located in Rome and its various adjuncts a total of eleven scenes comprising 863 lines, and in Egypt a total of six scenes comprising 606 lines. After Antony’s departure from Egypt in I.iii, Shakespeare locates his remaining Egyptian scenes (I.v, II.vi, and III.iii) in places along the sequence that dramatize the contrast in tone, texture, and values between a Roman world whose ideal of rational, disinterested politics is uniquely capable of degenerating into the cynical bargaining of ward bosses, and an Egypt whose highest values of emotional fulfilment are equally capable of collapsing into mere willfulness and sybaritic vanity. This first half of the play,
while presenting Antony's character and conflict, provides us also with a comparative anthropology of these two worlds, a running critique of the criteria of civilization as they are hammered out in the confrontation of the two cultures. Although this geographic polarization of values is rare in Shakespeare, there is nothing unfamiliar in the particular values represented by Rome and Egypt, nor in the fact of their opposition. They are, broadly speaking, the values of public and private life, of the state and the person, of honor and love; and the opposition of these values, along with the possibility of reconciling them, was one of Shakespeare's deepest concerns throughout his career, from the parallel battle scenes in Henry VI of a father killing his son and a son killing his father, to that moment in The Tempest when division is at last resolved and Gonzago announces that, despite all obstacles, Claribel has found a husband, Ferdinand a wife, Prospero a dukedom, "...and all of us ourselves/When no man was his own."

The public values of Rome arise from the same source as always in Shakespeare: the ideal of order, harmony, and mutuality in the state. At the beginning of the play Antony's lapsed honor is inseparable from the failure of the Roman peace, like two sides of a coin. To Antony's question on his return to Rome, "My being in Egypt,/Caesar, what was't to you?", in effect Caesar had already given an answer:

> If he fill'd
> 
> His vacancy with his voluptuousness,
> Full surfeits and the dryness of his bones
> Call on him for't! But to confound such time
> That drums him from his sport and speaks as loud
> As his own state and ours—'tis to be chid
> As we rate boys who, being mature in knowledge,
> Pawn their experience to their present pleasure
> And so rebel to judgement. (I.iv.25-33)

These remarks could have been made about Richard II or about Prince Hal by his father. They remind us that this Roman tragedy, like Julius Caesar before it, is wrought from the same thematic materials as the cycle of chronicle plays from Richard II
to *Henry V*. For they imply that same intimate connection between disorders of character and of the state, between personal honor and the public peace, that is the grand subject of the history plays.

But the public world of Rome and the values that serve it are placed in a different perspective from that of the history plays; and this difference is an important measure of Shakespeare's development during the period of his greatest works. I propose to examine that development in some detail, beginning with the history plays, in Chapters III and IV. It is enough to say here that England herself, the health and destiny of the nation, is the subject of those plays; and that the personalities and activities of individuals—Richard, Bolingbroke, Hotspur, and Prince Hal—are judged according to their actual or potential relation to the condition of England. The careers of men are conceived as subordinate to the general welfare. From the dying Gaunt's great paean to "This blessed land, this earth, this realm, this England," in *Richard II*, to King Henry V's battle cry before Harfleur, "God for Harry! England and St. George!", the integrity and glory of the nation is everywhere the criterion of individual conduct.

But Octavius in his speech doesn't mention Rome, doesn't refer even to a single community of which he and Antony both are members. The threat of Pompey is not, like that of Bolingbroke, Hotspur, and Macbeth, to an organic political society whose wholeness must be sustained by love, justice, and truth. It is a threat merely to "his own state and ours," to an accidental sum of wealth and power that has passed from the hands of Julius Caesar through those of his assassins, and now has accrued, "Like to a vagabond flag upon the stream," to the present triumvirs. In the design of the play the condition of Rome is subordinated to, and frequently obscured by, the interests and intrigues of persons. Before we pursue the sordid political implications of this fact, we must recognize also that in the design of the play Rome's security is guaranteed, regardless of the conduct and character of her citizens. In *Antony and Cleopatra* as in *Julius Caesar*, no matter how much our atten-
tion is focused abstractly upon politics, we are not permitted to fear concretely for the survival of the state. The urgencies we feel are on behalf of particular characters, irrespective of what happens to Rome. For Shakespeare and his audience the story of Rome was comfortably finished history, not a piece of uncertain ongoing business; and its symbolic meaning as history had already begun to reside in the stability of Roman political institutions.

In a variety of ways the two plays present Rome herself as the *donnée* rather than the protagonist of the drama—for example, the comic reassurance of Casca's jokes about Caesar refusing the crown three times in *Julius Caesar*, as contrasted with Owen Glendower's ostensibly comic but ominously unsettling insistence upon his astrological potency in *I Henry IV*. But the chief evidence of Rome's security is in the language itself: in *Julius Caesar* the name "Rome" becomes a personification, a term of familiar address woven into her citizens' discourse, so that we cannot imagine any limit to her life. Instead of asking God's blessing for Rome, these characters keep referring to Rome as a familiar household god:

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Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods! (I.ii.151)
What trash is Rome,
What rubbish and what offal, when it serves
For the base matter to illuminate
So vile a thing as Caesar! (I.ii.108-11)
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By all the gods that Romans bow before,
I here discard my sickness! Soul of Rome!
Brave son, derived from honourable loins! (II.i.320-22)
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Are yet two Romans living such as these?
The last of all the Romans, fare thee well!
It is impossible that ever Rome
Should breed thy fellow. (V.iii.98–101)
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There is a certain easiness and relaxation of attitude toward a state that breeds and mourns, that alternately can be described as trash and given a soul. The multiplicity of forms and activi-
ties of which Rome is metaphorically capable makes it seem as continuous and indestructible as life itself. This personified conception of Rome is carried over into *Antony and Cleopatra*:

> He was dispos'd to mirth; but on the sudden
> A Roman thought hath struck him. (I.ii.86–87)

> . . . with which I meant
> To scourge th' ingratitude that despiteful Rome
> Cast on my noble father. (II.vi.21–23)

Contemning Rome, he has done all this and more
In Alexandria. (III.vi.1–2)

> Let Rome be thus
> Inform'd. (III.vi.19–20)

Sink Rome, and their tongues rot
That speak against us! (III.vii.16–17)

> We'll bury him; and then, what's brave, what's noble,
> Let's do it after the high Roman fashion
> And make death proud to take us. (IV.xv.86–88)

In the verbal texture of these plays Rome is truly an Eternal City. Its internal divisions and civil wars themselves are evidence of its durability. They even swell its fortunes. Though Shakespeare did not write the two plays consecutively, there are many internal signs that he meant the political history of *Antony and Cleopatra* to pick up where *Julius Caesar* left off; and a striking fact about this continuity is that conspiracy and civil war seem not to have weakened the state but to have strengthened and enlarged it, until the triumvirs of Rome have become the triple pillars of the world.4 The identification of Rome with the entire civilized world is pervasive in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and it frequently becomes explicit, as in Pompey's address to the triumvirs during the negotiations:

> To you all three,
> The senators alone of this great world,
> Chief factors for the gods. . . (II.vi.8–10)
Rome has achieved a cosmic identity. Her political foundations have become so secure that her imagined destiny transcends the timeserving deeds of men. For Shakespeare's dramatic purpose Rome now becomes an idea, an abstract value with an almost allegorical significance. Having certified imaginatively the permanence of Rome as a political institution, Shakespeare is free to scrutinize the idea of Rome and to treat it as only one item in a pluralistic world of values.

Once he can do that, he attributes to Rome—pre-eminently in the person of Octavius Caesar—a political opportunism and a human mediocrity that amply confirm Cleopatra's final judgment, "'Tis paltry to be Caesar." Octavius, a man essentially unmarked by malice or by love, is full of the cloistered virtue of the letter of the law. He is all but a cipher of the public world, a Roman Henry V, who, as the late Harold Goddard pointed out, is as quick to give up his sister for an empire as man ever was to give an empire for a whore. He violates the pact with Pompey, deposes and executes Lepidus, and seeks every means to ruin Antony and insure Cleopatra's public humiliation. After rejecting Antony's challenge to personal combat and defeating him at Actium, he sends Thyreus to prey upon Cleopatra,

From Antony win Cleopatra. Promise,
And in our name, what she requires; add more,
From thine invention, offers. Women are not
In their best fortunes strong, but want will perjure
The ne'er-touch'd Vestal. Try thy cunning, Thyreus.

(III.xii.27-31)

and he repeatedly assures Cleopatra that he intends her no shame, only in order to preserve her from suicide so that he might lead her through Rome in triumph. "... feed, and sleep," he says to her at last, as if she were being fattened for lions. To be sure, Octavius is not so heartless as to remain untouched by the love and death of Antony and Cleopatra. When he hears of Antony's suicide, he says that "it is a tidings to wash the eyes of kings"; and when at last Cleopatra has frustrated
his designs by her suicide, nevertheless he orders her to be buried with Antony in full solemnity. "... their story is/ No less in pity than his glory which/ Brought them to be lamented," he says at the end. But these generous sentiments are never permitted to qualify his political opportunism, as when, his eyes freshly washed by the tidings of Antony's death, he renews his effort to deceive Cleopatra so that she may be led through Rome in triumph. He said of the dead Antony, "I must perforce/ Have shown thee such a declining day,/ Or look on thine," voicing a political theory that is conspicuous in Plutarch, but which the play has shown is not in the least shared by Antony. The ideological rigidity of his commitment to this theory is the principal source of Caesar's mischievous politics.

Octavius is only the play's most conspicuous example of Roman opportunism and duplicity. In Menas, Pompey, and in Antony himself, we have further evidence of degradation in the political values of Rome. To Menas' grotesque plan for cutting loose the ship on which the triumvirs are feasting and then cutting their throats, Pompey makes a hypocritical reply that is equally characteristic of Shakespeare's English and his Roman plays:

Ah, this thou should'st have done,  
And not have spoken on't! In me 'tis villany;  
In thee 't had been good service. Thou must know,  
'Tis not my profit that does lead mine honour;  
Mine honour, it. Repent that e'er thy tongue  
Hath so betray'd thine act. Being done unknown,  
I should have found if afterwards well done,  
But must condemn it now. Desist, and drink.  
(II.vii.79-86)

Antony's lieutenant Ventidius shows another facet of debased Roman honor when, after his victory in Parthia, he explains that although he can conquer still more territory for Antony, Antony would become jealous if he did. He makes in advance the necessary adjustment of Antony's profit to Antony's honor: "Better to leave undone, than by our deed/ Acquire too high a fame, when him we serve's away." (III.i.14-15)
This public world is naturally impatient of private feelings. Its calculating politics drain off the passions; and Octavius exemplifies its norm of temperament as well as its public practice. In his political efficiency he rejects everything personal, whether it is Antony's challenge to individual combat, or the reeling camaraderie of Pompey's banquet. Coupled with his devastating exposure of Roman pretensions in the banquet scene on Pompey's galley—both in the drunkenness of the celebrants and in Menas' plan for killing them—Shakespeare gives us a portrait of Octavius as nevertheless the most repellent Roman of them all. His superior restraint only enhances his unloveliness. This impersonality permeates his conduct throughout the play, from his reference to his sister as a "piece of virtue" that will "cement" him to Antony, to his desire to show his love for her publicly, "Which, left unknown,/ Is often left unlov'd," and finally to his effort to humiliate Cleopatra. Attempting to woo Cleopatra from Antony, Thyreus says of his master:

But it would warm his spirits
To hear from me you had left Antony
And put yourself under his shroud,
The universal landlord. (III.xiii.69-72)

The juxtaposition of "warm . . . spirits," "shroud," and "universal landlord" implies a fundamental inhumanity that is Caesar's private counterpart to his political practice.

In this respect Octavia is unhappily her brother's sister. To all Romans but Enobarbus—to Octavius, Agrippa, Maecenas, Menas, and Antony himself—she is an ideal woman; and all share Maecenas' hope that her "beauty, wisdom, modesty, can settle/ The heart of Antony." We come to perceive and admire these virtues, and so does Antony. But they cannot settle his heart, because Octavia appeals only to that forensic fragment of himself that found its halting voice in the overblown rhetoric of his farewell to Cleopatra. Enobarbus explains with customary accuracy her incompatibility with Antony: "Octavia is of a holy, cold, and still conversation"; and her attempt to reconcile
Antony and Octavius, although it is nobly aimed at preserving peace in the family and the world, is inadequately grounded in loyalty to Antony and justifies the description.

Shakespeare's image of Rome, then, is variegated and complex, yet coherent. I have spoken of the degradation of Roman values; but behind that lies a high ideal of selfless devotion to the public good, a belief that honor, honesty, and order come before profit and pleasure, and that men must be loyal above all to those public duties that guarantee the human community. This ideal brings Antony back to Rome and prompts his marriage to Octavia. But behind the idealized public values is the suppression of private feeling and the cold impersonality of the political leader. This human inadequacy of the Roman ideal leaves Antony's marriage spiritually unconsummated and frees him for Egypt. At its worst the Roman ideal is perverted into Octavius' systematic spoliation of the world. At its best it produces the holy coldness of Octavia, in whom the breath of life has been diminished almost to nothing.

Cleopatra is set in deliberate contrast to Octavia, and Cleopatra is nothing less than Egypt and human feeling. She is all heat and motion and immoderate overflowing; she can barely be contained in loving, teasing, and then missing Antony, and is overwhelmed into a kind of madness by her jealousy of Octavia. She is truly the incarnation of private life, and she begins by regarding all public loyalties as forms of timeserving. She resists totally Antony's efforts to subject his personal life to public standards: she assumes that his Roman obligations are distracting and irrelevant to his life with her, and she is merely impatient to discover that "A Roman thought hath struck him." Later she will be schooled to the importance of public values, so that after Antony's death she chooses to kill herself "after the high Roman fashion." But at the beginning she balances Octavius and his sister by showing us both the perversion and the human inadequacy of merely private values.

In one sense Cleopatra is committed to the public world from the start, simply as Queen of the Nile. Like Richard II, Prince
Hal, and Julius Caesar, she is a public figure whether she likes it or not; and like them, she takes a histrionic satisfaction in her role. But she refuses to honor by word or deed the expectations of the public world. She uses her public status simply as an instrument of her pleasure and an extension of her privacy. She is selfish and spoiled, and she overcomes all obstacles to her desire simply by making the world her oyster. For one thing, she needs the world as a large enough stage to support her Alexandrian revels. Nothing less than the public eye can do justice to the scope and vitality of her private life, and all her pleasures (or almost all) are had in the open. In the play’s first scene Antony proposes their evening’s sport, not by inviting her to bed, but by reminding her of her wish to “wander through the streets and note/ The qualities of people.” Later Enobarbus reports,

I saw her once
Hop forty paces through the public street;
And having lost her breath, she spoke, and panted,
That she did make defect perfection
And, breathless, pow’r breathe forth. (II.ii.233–37)

and we never think to ask what was the occasion for this performance, for in Enobarbus’ description the action justifies itself. Cleopatra and “the public street” are ornaments to each other, and they measure each other’s value. In the same way the grandeur of her appearance at Cydnus, in Enobarbus’ famous description, constitutes an autonomous value, since her perfumes and her fans and her mermaids command the homage of the city and of nature.

But however much Cleopatra lives her intimate life in the open air, private and public values do not meet and merge in her. Her beauty and passion vanquish all other considerations, and the public world exists simply to show her off. Cleopatra recognizes as a condition of her grandeur that she must outwit the world and bend it to her purpose. She devotes her intelligence and energy to cultivating those wily arts by which she can
impose her interests upon the world and twist its great men around her fingers. The world must either be her plaything, as when she is ready to "unpeople" Egypt and fill the sea with messengers to express her passion for Antony, or it must be her enemy until it can be made her plaything.

From the beginning Egypt is her plaything, Rome her enemy. Whether the values of Rome are represented by Antony or Octavius, Enobarbus or Thyreus or Octavia, she deploys her cunning to subdue them to her will. When Antony has been struck by his "Roman thought" at the beginning of the play, she sets out to trick him in order to recapture his attention. At Actium she flees apparently out of fear; but her flight is also consistent with the strategy of beguilement by which she has ever tried to keep Antony from taking his honor too seriously. After the defeat at Actium she flirts with Thyreus, reminding him that she has had other lovers before Antony, and subtly implying that Caesar might be next. And she continues bargaining with Caesar, first through his underlings and then directly, even as she is tricking Antony into killing himself because of the false report of her death.

This wiliness of Cleopatra's is surely aimed at saving her own skin; but it has also a broader and more profound purpose. She is no less deceitful toward her lover than toward their common enemies, because she supposes that all public commitments, Antony's no less than Caesar's, threaten the integrity of her existence. She recognizes no distinction between the letter and the spirit of the Roman world, and until Antony's death she is blind to his growing difference from Octavius. At the beginning of the play she mocks Antony's Roman business, urging him to hear the messengers:

Nay, hear them, Antony.
Fulvia perchance is angry; or who knows
If the scarce-bearded Caesar have not sent
His pow'rful mandate to you: 'Do this, or this;
Take in that kingdom, and enfranchise that.
Perform't, or else we damn thee.' (I.i.19-24)
And near the end of the play, on the day of Antony's short-lived victory by land, she voices precisely the same attitude:

Lord of lords!
O infinite virtue, com'st thou smiling from
The world's great snare uncaught? (IV.viii.16-18)

There is something oddly inappropriate in this response to Antony's victory. Almost all critics of the play, whatever their disagreements about other matters, regard the land battle as a moral triumph for Antony. Win or lose, do or die, Antony has momentarily overcome his weakness and stood up to the mark. But what we regard as a triumph Cleopatra considers a lucky escape; what we think is Antony's true and proper business she calls "the world's great snare." His "infinite virtue," for her, is something more than his having come off with his life: he has been "uncaught" spiritually as well as physically. He is smilingly aloof from his own victory.

There is evidence that Cleopatra has always expected Antony to take for granted her unremitting contempt for public values that threaten her comfort. She not only keeps betraying him but seems to assume that he should have expected her to do so, and not have taken offense. At Actium she insists upon participating in the battle, against the advice of Enobarbus and others, "as the president of my kingdom." But it is clear from everything we have learned about her, and from her conduct at Actium, that the entire function of the president of her kingdom is to become the object of universal gaze and wonder. Actium, like Cydnus, is for her a parade ground; and after the debacle she is surprised to discover that Antony supposed differently: "O my lord, my lord,/ Forgive my fearful sails! I little thought/ You would have followed." Her business at Actium was to cavort upon that stage where Antony made war. After the defeat she flirts with Thyreus not with the desire to betray Antony but only because she is Cleopatra; and again she is genuinely surprised that Antony should suspect her
loyalty. To his charge that she has "mingled eyes" with Thyreus, she answers, "Not know me yet?"; and her magnificent speech that follows (III.xiii.158–67) indicates that this remark is in no way disingenuous.

Cleopatra dazzles us by her wild effort to personalize all of life and to vivify the world by her beauty and her passions. To our own time, which repeatedly compares itself regretfully to Rome, her celebration of the self, with all its recklessness, seems vastly preferable to all calculated claims to selfless public virtue. But her recklessness is finally self-destructive. It is not simply that in her antipathy to Rome she resorts to deceits and violence that subvert legitimate public values like honesty, loyalty, marriage, and public order, no less than Octavius ignores private values. Just as the ideal of Roman public life, carried far enough, becomes in Octavius the impersonal Machiavellian cynicism that is its opposite, so Cleopatra's persistence merely in private pleasure brings her to an inchoate restlessness where the self has no contour and therefore no substance. At the beginning of the play her quick shifts from mirth to sadness are designed to beguile only Antony. But in the three marvelous scenes where she is busy missing Antony, when she shifts from dreams of mandragora to dreams of former lovers, and from music to billiards to fishing, she is trying to beguile herself; and without the discipline of any commitment to those public values that have separated Antony from her, she is as unsuccessful with herself as she was with him. Her spirit can find no rest, and finally loses all coherence in venting itself upon the messenger who brings the news of Antony's marriage to Octavia. We find that outburst bewitching, perhaps, but only in the same uncomfortable way that we admire Octavius' sobriety at Pompey's banquet. For Cleopatra is doing violence not only to the messenger but to herself. In Cleopatra as in Octavius there is a surrender of human dignity, in him by an excessive self-control that stifles emotion, and in her by a failure of control that dissipates all emotion and causes Charmian to cry out, "Good madam, keep yourself within yourself,/ The man is innocent." Rome and Egypt truly require the discipline of each
other. As I have suggested, that is the discipline Antony pursues; and later I will show how at the end of the play Cleopatra gleans it from him.

But now we must leave Antony and Cleopatra and explore the significant history of Shakespeare's long concern with the conflict of public and private values. In order to appreciate fully the significance of Shakespeare's resolution of the conflict in Antony and Cleopatra, ideally one should trace the development of the theme throughout his earlier plays. But the firm contours of that development are capable of being identified more briefly and selectively; and in this time-bound world I will confine myself to the cycle of history plays from Richard II to Henry V, to Julius Caesar, and to Hamlet and King Lear, a group of plays in which I believe Shakespeare enacted the larger part of his development.