FROM THE TIME of Antony's return from Egypt until the end of the play, Shakespeare elaborates the vision he had achieved in King Lear in the climactic action of Antony and Cleopatra. There are no villains here, no separate forces of evil in the world. Octavius and Cleopatra are not Antony's enemies in any usual sense but only, in their different ways, his occasions for becoming an enemy to himself. Good and evil are seen as related aspects of his undivided being, and their conflict with each other is endlessly renewed from moment to moment. The technique of discontinuity shapes the whole play, with its enormous number of separate "scenes," brought together only as a series and not as a linked chain of cause and effect. Now upon the slightest leverage Antony swings between the most distant polarities of conduct and attitude, from his honorable dare to Caesar to settle their differences in single combat to his shameful retreat at Actium in pursuit of the fleeing Cleopatra. And for every mistake he makes, we are told repeatedly by Antony as well as others, there is only one reason: Antony has violated his own identity. From moment to moment he gains and loses and regains himself, always wrestling with his own nature, full of unalterable propensities for folly as well as heroism.

Lear, for all his final contrition, cannot change himself; but after what he has suffered, he needs his walled prison to protect him from further incitements of his own nature as well as from the world. Antony takes the next step, and without such protection risks his equally human frailty amidst the uses of the
world, where he tries to make good his mistakes from moment to moment by becoming continuously responsible for his own nature. In this process Antony goes beyond contrition to magnanimity. He keeps giving of his treasure and his spirit, not in a grandiose gesture at the end but in repetitive discrete actions, to those who have no claim on him as well as to those whom his folly has hurt. Antony is spiritually elevated to a vision that is incomprehensible to the other characters, even while it continues to inspire, or to restore, their enormous loyalty to him. In the last half of the play we see Shakespeare moving toward that comprehension of life which is characteristic of his last plays; and we might say of the later Antony, changing only the sexual designation, what Florizel says to Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*:

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Each your doing,
So singular in each particular,
Crowns what you are doing in the present deed
That all your acts are queens. (IV.iv.143-46)
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To follow Antony here (and Cleopatra later), is to follow the moral process by which one outgrows the politics of order. After his return to Egypt and for the rest of his life, Antony is unable to pursue an outwardly consistent or a politically responsible line of conduct. Although the reason of mankind sits in the wind against him, at Actium he decides to fight Octavius at sea rather than on land where his forces are more experienced. When in the midst of that battle he is about to defy all prophecy and win, he turns and retreats to follow the frightened Cleopatra. Immediately he falls into violent recriminations over his cowardly act, first with himself and then with Cleopatra. But upon a hint from her, he refurbishes his limitless confidence and calls for wine once again. His poise is no sooner regained than it is freshly blasted by what he takes to be Cleopatra's flirtation with Thyreus. After he has Thyreus whipped and scolds Cleopatra, she charms him anew; and he orders a feast to celebrate their newly reassured love. The feast is followed by a great victory over Caesar by land, and
this is followed by another ignoble defeat at sea, where once again Cleopatra betrays him. Finally, when he is full of rage at his "Triple-turn'd whore," she sends the false report of her death and he kills himself.

As if the significance of these events for Antony's moral degeneration were not self-evident, his life is played out to the accompaniment of an eloquent chorus, whose chief voice is Enobarbus, explaining in minute detail the irrational effeminacy of Antony's every act. Maecenas and Caesar, the anonymous soldier who warns against fighting by sea, the once-loyal deserter Canidius, and the ever-loyal Scarus and Eros, all testify, step by step, to Antony's mounting folly. Enobarbus speaks for them all in those speeches by which he persuades himself to leave Antony:

Yes, like enough high-battled Caesar will
Unstate his happiness and be stag'd to th' show
Against a sworder! I see men's judgments are
A parcel of their fortunes, and things outward
Do draw the inward quality after them
To suffer all alike. That he should dream,
Knowing all measures, the full Caesar will
Answer his emptiness! Caesar, thou hast subdu'd
His judgment too. (III.xiii.29-37)

Now he'll outstare the lightning. To be furious
Is to be frightened out of fear, and in that mood
The dove will peck the estridge. I see still
A diminution in our captain's brain
Restores his heart. When valour preys on reason,
It eats the sword it fights with. I will seek
Some way to leave him. (III.xiii.195-201)

Yet there is something strained in the tone of this chorus, although it appears to speak the inescapable dictates of reason. Its voice is too pat, all too predictably eloquent; its opinions are so transparent, so neatly justified, that we cannot help feeling that Antony's critics protest too much. And we finally discover the meaning and relevance of all their choric commentary not in Antony's death but in that of Enobarbus. Enobarbus
has remained loyal to Antony longer than any of the principal spokesmen for reason and sound policy, and yet he discovers finally that his loyalty has been too short-lived. He voices at the end a choric commentary upon the chorus, which devalues entirely the kind of reason for which that chorus has consistently spoken.

It has been observed that the Fool in King Lear passes out of the play at the point where Lear enters a realm of experience that the Fool's mind and heart are not large enough to master. This also happens to Enobarbus. He has been all along the penetrating voice of reason, the hard-bitten realist who strips away the façade of hypocrisy, self-deception, and false appearance from the public world. But the reason on whose behalf he has spoken turns out to be mere timeserving policy designed to preserve the order of the state as this play conceives it by maintaining the existing balance of power between Antony and Octavius. Enobarbus now discovers that this reason must finally prey on itself, that Octavius, for all the worldly success of his shrewd policy, is a more erratic, irresponsible, and dishonorable master than Antony:

Alexas did revolt and went to Jewry on Affairs of Antony; there did dissuade Great Herod to incline himself to Caesar And leave his master Antony. For this pains Caesar hath hang'd him. Canidius and the rest That fell away have entertainment, but No honourable trust. I have done ill, Of which I do accuse myself so sorely That I will joy no more. (IV.vi.12-20)

Octavius is no villain but, like King Henry V, whom he so resembles in character, the agent of political order renewing itself. Sir Thomas North said it was "predestinated" that all the world should fall into his hands and a long period of calm and order be restored to Rome. But the morality of Octavius' world now resembles that of the villains in King Lear, under whose dominance humanity must prey upon itself. Enobarbus finally understands that the reason that had been his "safer
guide” is no longer relevant to his experience; and without a deeper vision of the world, he is lost. Enobarbus is re-enacting the experience of Octavia, who also had to fade out of the play, because her scope of vision permitted her only to flutter helplessly between her brother and her husband, like a straw in the wind.

But where Octavia left the play in ignorance, it is given to Enobarbus to discover before he dies the limits of his vision. In the speech I have quoted, he decides to make the best of his bad bargain and spend his remaining days in timeserving, even if it will bring him no joy. Then Antony sends back his treasure, apparently once again letting “valour” prey upon “reason”; this time Enobarbus understands that he has not simply made an error in judgment but that his very grounds of judgment have become dwarfed and irrelevant. He understands that there is something ultimate to choose between Antony and Octavius. If from the limited standpoint of that reason which he has served Antony has performed a gratuitous act, that act serves nevertheless a deeper rationality than he has known. Antony’s magnanimity reflects an unspoiled rectitude of private feeling insisting upon expression in public life, despite all embarrassments. No society, either in history or fiction, has been able to afford the luxury of generosity toward traitors; no private man who is ready to kiss away kingdoms and provinces may be expected to bother one way or another about the treasure of a single citizen. In sending back Enobarbus’ treasure, Antony had said, “Say that I wish he never find more cause/ To change a master,” with precise respect for Enobarbus’ desertion and with humble readiness to acknowledge his own lapse. But the very form of Antony’s acknowledgment, the return of the treasure, transforms his lapse into transcendent virtue. Enobarbus recognizes that Antony is not simply taking public occasion to indulge his sentimentality but that he is now observing a public honor inseparable from his personal morality. With this new measure of his own dishonor, Enobarbus will die of a broken heart; but first he rises to the occasion given him by Antony: he coins his own epitaph out of two words
that he wrenches into an equivalence of meaning that reflects in turn the synonymy of public and private judgments. He calls himself finally a "master-leaver and a fugitive."

The chorus thereby ends on a different note than that on which it began. It has come to perceive that Antony has entered a human condition invulnerable to judgment by the timeserving world of political order. We must now look directly at Antony's later career, beginning with his choice to fight at Actium by sea. It is a common assumption that Antony is misled by Cleopatra into making this decision. But Shakespeare takes considerable pains to exclude this possibility and to show that Antony makes up his mind without consulting Cleopatra.

Ant. Is it not strange, Canidius,
That from Tarentum and Brundusium
He could so quickly cut the Ionian sea
And take in Toryne?—You have heard on't, sweet?

Cleo. Celerity is never more admir'd
Than by the negligent.

Ant. A good rebuke,
Which might have well becom'd the best of men
To taunt at slackness. Canidius, we
Will fight with him by sea.

Cleo. By sea? What else?

Can. Why will my lord do so?

Ant. For that he dares us to't.

Eno. So hath my lord dar'd him to single fight.

Can. Ay, and to wage this battle at Pharsalia,
Where Caesar fought with Pompey. But these offers,
Which serve not for his vantage, he shakes off;
And so should you. (III.vii.21-35)

This passage marks the beginning of the end, and it captures in microcosm the essential quality and meaning of Antony's final realm of life. Cleopatra urges him to action, but she has been so little consulted that she is surprised to discover that Antony, unlike herself, did not take for granted a battle at sea. Far from influencing his decision, she is surprised that he still
needs to make a decision. The choice between land and sea simply is not real to her, and the fact that it remains a pressing choice for Antony indicates how little he is influenced by her judgment or caprice. It is part of Antony's manliness that he can accept with a whole and humble heart Cleopatra's criticism of his "slackness," and then turn in full authority to consult with Canidius about a problem of strategy that he does not regard as properly her concern.

There is no reason, then, to doubt the accuracy of Antony's own explanation of his decision to fight by sea: "For that he dares us to't." If he was eager to challenge Octavius to single combat in the knowledge that he is the better swordsman, it is only appropriate that he accept Octavius' dare and risk a fight at sea where he has reason to think his opponent the better naval tactician. Antony not only accepts in Egypt his continuing obligation of Roman honor, he enhances that honor by investing it with a final meaning. Shakespeare now develops his most elaborate contrast between the timeserving policy of Octavius, which is "predestinated" to preserve the order of the state because it is aimed carefully at his "vantage," and the timeless honor of Antony, which outstrips the requirements of any possible doctrine of order in the state. Antony, so to speak, platonizes the conflict between himself and Octavius. He projects intact their present balance of power upon a transcendental battleground of moral values: he will endure voluntarily the unpredictable blows of fortune, in the form of Octavius' navy, even if Octavius will not risk his sword. Though it makes no practical difference where their duel is held, Antony proposes to fight Octavius "at Pharsalia/ Where Caesar fought with Pompey," as if to achieve a symbolic revenge for the young Caesar's betrayal of the young Pompey. In his earlier peace negotiations with Pompey, Antony did not underestimate his opponent's prowess by sea but declared himself nevertheless ready to risk a sea battle. Then he went on to remind Pompey of the triumvirs' strength by land and to conclude a peace negotiated on the basis of each party's recognition of the other's position of superior strength. His effort to make war with
Octavius on the same basis constitutes the most scrupulous possible defense of that Roman honor which he earned in the negotiations with Pompey, and which Octavius betrayed by ruining Pompey in his grinding pursuit of power.

In *King Lear*, I argued, the ability of the good characters to endure the ravages of fortune even unto death, although it answers Hamlet's question of what it means to really live, still does not comprise for Shakespeare the ultimate power or the human value of life. Now we begin to see why. Although the good characters of *King Lear* are active, not passive, their activity only goes to prove that life has meaning and is therefore possible. Antony's willingness to risk a sea battle is not merely for the sake of defending the order of the world, his own place in it, and thereby the minimal meaning of life. That kind of action is now seen as only the protection of fortuitous, and hence irrelevant, worldly advantages. Antony's action is more disinterested than that; it is action undertaken for the wholly gratuitous reason that Octavius dares him to it. This voluntary submission to the uncertainties of fortune transforms endurance into magnanimity and infuses all of life with the particular meaning of Antony's new honor. Antony's submission generates new possibilities for life, and then goes on to value these possibilities according to the most rigorous ethical standards. Where Cordelia's necessary endurance was conservative, Antony's voluntary submission is creative. It brings new dimensions of right conduct into the range of possibility and thereby offers man new chances to make his own world. Cleopatra said at the beginning that she would "set a bourn how far to be belov'd"; and Antony told her she would then have to find new heaven and new earth. Now, in his insistence on the inmost meaning of Roman honor as the basis for his Egyptian strategy, Antony is beginning the search himself.

He is not only submitting himself to the most disinterested standard of Roman virtue but, at the same time, is reversing the process and painfully incorporating his union with Cleopatra in his affirmation of public values. From the beginning, of course, these public and private considerations have been con-
nected for him: his liaison with Cleopatra has been the prox­
imate cause of the civil war. But during this last residence in
Egypt, just as in Rome before, he tries to outstrip the time­
serving world of proximate causes. A man of worldly discretion,
concerned immediately with his "vantage," would have listened
to the choric exponents of reason who warned against Cleo­
patra's participation in the war. He would have ordered her
to her boudoir to await the outcome in the company of a
eunuch. But for Antony now, war must be the immediate and
complete expression of his love as well as his honor. Just as
he needs to risk Octavius' navy, so he is ready to have Cleopatra
at his side in the sea battle; and later he will have her perform
Eros' function of buckling on his armor for the land battle.
Cleopatra is becoming a symbol for Antony in the same way
that Pharsalia is a symbol: he can avenge Pompey with nothing
less than a full public assertion of his love, and the assertion
of love will make the revenge providential. Antony is approach­
ing that heady vision in which his public and private lives are
necessary conditions for each other.

On the two occasions when Antony now loses his head, in
his shameful retreat at Actium and his shameless whipping of
Thyreus, he thinks Cleopatra has betrayed him, and immediately
he defaults. He rejects the obligation to finish a battle once
begun and the simple duty of courtesy toward a messenger.
But in neither case does he lose his head simply in order to
follow the dissolute promptings of his heart; it is rather as if
Cleopatra's defection has made his whole enterprise for the
moment irrelevant. His public aspirations, because he has puri­
fied them of mundane desires, are meaningless when they do
not include his affections; and if he cannot have both, he will
not have either.

When Antony scolds Cleopatra for leading him after her
retreating form at Actium, she apologizes and says she did not
think he would have followed. But she must have hoped so.
Her insistence first on participating and then on running from
the battle scene is of a piece with all her efforts to beguile
Antony by momentary reversals of mood and behavior. She is
always trying to keep him “uncaught” by “the world’s great snare.” That is after all what it means to be Cleopatra. Similarly, when Antony scolds her for flirting with Thyreus, she says, “Not know me yet?”, and launches into the great speech that shows her passion for Antony to be deeper than ever, precisely because she has manipulated Thyreus. Cleopatra betrays him, no doubt, according to the single standard of Rome, but only by insisting upon that other standard which has made Egypt a pre-eminent value for him. Antony recognizes this fact in both episodes, accepts Cleopatra’s explanations, and affirms for himself her Egyptian meaning by calling each time for wine and kisses.

But he does not go on to think himself released from the Roman standard to which he has now aspired, and he keeps taxing himself for his own action, “Stroy’d in dishonour.” Antony must have both worlds now, Rome and Egypt. Octavius, in refusing the duel, and Cleopatra, in running from the naval battle, both obstruct him, each one pursuing only the “vantage” of his single meaning and thereby challenging Antony constantly to choose either one or the other. But Antony keeps moving back and forth, even here in Egypt, trying to encompass both; and this oscillating action becomes the locus of his final suffering and glory. One source of his suffering is that Octavius and Cleopatra leave him no room even to articulate his deepening vision. Another is his inability to make good that vision in continuous action, and hence his moment-to-moment maiming of one part or the other of his emergent identity. Nevertheless, his glory arises from that courage to be himself and spend himself which results from this failure, and which produces finally, if impermanently, the dazzling success of the land battle, with its confirming unification of Antony’s manifold aspirations.

No major Shakespearean hero is so eloquent and severe in judging himself as the later Antony. Beside Antony’s self-recriminations, the lesson of Lear’s madness seems partial, and even Macbeth’s celebrated conscience looks incomplete. Antony reproves himself with a thoroughness and clarity that make the
later choric comments of Enobarbus and the others merely redundant:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Ant.} Hark! the land bids me tread no more upon’t!
It is ashamed to bear me! Friends, come hither.
I am so lated in the world that I
Have lost my way for ever. I have a ship
Laden with gold. Take that; divide it. Fly,
And make your peace with Caesar.

\textit{All.} Fly? not we!

\textit{Ant.} I have fled myself, and have instructed cowards
To run and show their shoulders. Friends, be gone.—
I have myself resolv’d upon a course
Which has no need of you. (III.xi.1-10)
\end{quote}

He goes on to rail against Octavius and Cleopatra, to be sure; but he comes back again and again to himself, subjecting his own conduct to the same criteria that prompted his offer to fight Octavius and his challenge to single combat. He never justifies his lapse at sea on the grounds that Octavius has refused the duel; and he never claims that the world is well lost for love, nor for the sake of that transcendental realm of experience which he does not know he has entered. Instead, he blames himself for “rashness” on the one hand and for “fear and doting” on the other, thus anticipating precisely Enobarbus’ later charge that his valor preys upon reason. He admits that his sword has been “made weak by my affection.” But he does not stop even with these concessions to the worldly wisdom of all who have warned and criticized him. He goes on to invest his self-reproval with the same final meaning that characterized his original aspirations. He repeats to his followers, “Let that be left/ Which leaves itself,” (III.xi.19-20) and to himself, “I have offended reputation—/ A most unnoble swerving.” (III.xi.49-50) In these remarks he is putting to its absolute test that whole vision by which he has taken the measure of Octavius’ and Cleopatra’s single halves: he is using it to measure himself.

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Antony's ability to subject himself to this kind of judgment shows another facet of Shakespeare's advance beyond *King Lear*. During the course of his life Lear undergoes a linear process of education, during which he learns through his madness the nature and consequences of his offense, and then acknowledges his lesson by kneeling to Cordelia. The process had a clearly marked beginning, and it has a visible ending, after which Lear is ready to give up the world for love, and live out his days with Cordelia in the transcendence of his walled prison. But when Antony says at Actium, "I have offended reputation—/ A most unnoble swerving," his education is finished, even though the play, and his life in the play, are still in medias res. He had achieved something comparable to Lear's knowledge by the time he left Rome to return to Egypt, where he has no pride to be chastened nor conduct to unlearn; the moment he gets back to Egypt, he is challenging Octavius to the duel and accepting the dare to a sea fight. He keeps making mistakes, but his mistakes are beyond regretting, and beyond any sort of final remorse that might be symbolized by kneeling or a bird cage, because they are themselves the ongoing consequences of his new aspirations. Antony is free, so to speak, to locate himself simultaneously in the timeserving world and the timeless cosmos, to go beyond Lear and expose himself directly to an ultimate judgment. Having done so, he does not need to reject the world as Lear does, to flatter the gods from a safe port. After his defeat at Actium, to be sure, he does once request of Caesar that he be released from this world and be allowed to live "A private man at Athens." But that is the lapse that proves the rule. Caesar rejects this request, and sends his messenger to "Observe how Antony becomes his flaw." Antony is projected back into the world, where we now see him repeat his challenge to a duel and then order the whipping of Thyreus, thus becoming his virtue and his flaw alternately and endlessly. He is held within the world to keep on daring life and suffering all, not in madness but in the bright daylight knowledge of himself alternately leaving himself and then returning. Antony must go on suffering, but he suffers whole
in the self-knowledge and self-reproval that lead to his final magnanimity and transfiguration.

There is also in the process of Antony’s passion something that looks like, and yet goes beyond, the self-deception that I have traced in Shakespeare's earlier protagonists. Amid his self-reproval, Antony keeps reminding himself and us of his former glory as “the greatest prince o' th' world.” He looks back nostalgically to the old Antony of reputation:

Look thou say
He makes me angry with him; for he seems
Proud and disdainful, harping on what I am,
Not what he knew I was. He makes me angry;
And at this time most easy 'tis to do 't,
When my good stars that were my former guides
Have empty left their orbs and shot their fires
Into th' abysm of hell. (III.xiii.140-47)

But in these consolatory references to his past, and there are many others, Antony does not evade the ethical demands of the present through a false image of himself. He knows that the past is indeed past, and he speaks repeatedly of the decline in his present fortunes. But even in the teeth of adverse fortune he tries to earn in the present the reputation of the past. His good stars may have shot their fires into hell, but in so doing they have left empty their orbs, which need to be refilled; he attempts to meet this need by his renewed challenge to Octavius for single combat and by his insistence upon coming back fighting, once Cleopatra has replenished him after the defeat at Actium. His consolatory speeches are not stages in the creation of a false image of himself that will enable him to ignore his debacle, like Richard II’s, for example, or Lear’s at the beginning; they are rather the final stages of recognition that began with self-reproval and that lead to that bounteous sharing of himself with others, both in strength and weakness, into which self-dramatization has now been transformed. From Actium onward Antony is unable to hide from himself. He has discovered the meeting ground between his two worlds; and if he is thwarted in his effort to occupy that ground, he is
nevertheless unable to return to that stage of circumscribed awareness whose sign is self-deception. He cannot cheer himself up, as the earlier protagonists managed to do, because his unfulfilled aspirations have been so much more inclusive than theirs. He has been willing to risk all the selfhood that they tried to protect by self-dramatization, and this now earns him that creative enlargement of selfhood in magnanimity which becomes his final identity.

That identity is achieved in the whole action surrounding Antony’s land victory that precedes his final defeat at sea. This begins with a last meal, where he shakes hands with all his servants and thinks to change places with them, like the dragonish cloud changing its visible shape:

\[\textit{Ant.} \quad \text{And thou art honest too.} \\
\text{I wish I could be made so many men,} \\
\text{And all of you clapp'd up together in} \\
\text{An Antony, that I might do you service} \\
\text{So good as you have done.} \]

\[\textit{All.} \quad \text{The gods forbid!} \]

\[\textit{Ant.} \quad \text{Well, my good fellows, wait on me to-night.} \\
\text{Scant not my cups, and make as much of me} \\
\text{As when my empire was your fellow too} \\
\text{And suffer'd my command.} \quad \text{(IV.ii.15-23)}\]

Cleopatra, observing this episode, is baffled by Antony’s conduct; Enobarbus explains, with his characteristic final irrelevance, that Antony’s motive is to make his followers weep. But at this point Antony is no more making a false appeal for sympathy than he is feeling sorry for himself. He is only voicing that same spirit in which, after Actium, he offered a treasure ship and safe-conduct to any soldiers who wished to leave him now that he had left himself. And his servants now, like his soldiers before, will not hear of any scheme to stifle their service or limit their devotion. Kent in \textit{King Lear} has the double office of trying to persuade Lear of his folly and yet to maintain his own perfect fealty no matter how Lear’s folly promotes the ruin of all men’s fortunes. Kent’s unshakable loyalty reflects
grandly upon Lear, but yet we give its full credit to Kent himself, whom we admire more lovingly than any other servant Shakespeare created. Antony's servants, on the other hand, have not needed to teach him his folly: he has seen it himself, and he has had the manliness to acknowledge it to them. The credit for his anonymous servants' devotion then goes to Antony: their perfect loyalty is only the reflection of Antony's self-knowledge and humility in all its creative power. As John Middleton Murry has said,

This is the point at which the superhuman becomes human. The royalty that draws loyalty to it, that compels loyalty indeed, but by an internal, not an external, compulsion, whereby the servant is at once the lover and the friend, and knows that he becomes his own true self only in serving his lord—this royalty is, in the lord himself, superhuman. It cannot be acquired by taking thought: it is. It expects allegiance, as the earth expects rain.

This royalty, as an existential fact that we have witnessed Antony bring into being irrespective of any particular doctrine of order, now becomes the single source and the only result of his victory on land. Shakespeare now takes pains, in the arrangement of his materials, to denude this victory of every temporal cause and result. The banquet scene from which I have quoted is followed immediately by that mystical night scene where Antony's soldiers hear the music of hautboys under the stage and realize that "the god Hercules, whom Antony lov'd,/ Now leaves him." The next morning, while preparing for battle, Antony hears of Enobarbus' desertion, which Shakespeare has put off until this moment—although Enobarbus had announced his intention before the previous night’s banquet—as if to double the effect of Antony’s desertion by his beloved god Hercules. Antony had said after Actium, "I am so lated in the world that I/ Have lost my way for ever." But in this final isolation that precedes the land battle, where he is thrown back only upon himself and Cleopatra, he finds his way at last. Cleopatra replaces Eros as his valet, and readies him in her boudoir, so to speak, for his "royal occupation." She buckles on
his armor better than Eros does, and yet he insists that her essential function is only to be the “armourer of my heart.” Not recklessly and yet joyously, he goes off to battle, where he hears of Enobarbus’ desertion, blames himself, and orders the return of Enobarbus’ treasure. Next comes Enobarbus’ acknowledgment of his mistake, and then, as if in answer to Enobarbus, Antony’s victory over Caesar’s land army.

Antony announces that victory with a speech in which he regards his soldiers’ triumph over the enemy as a result of their inner triumph over themselves, a transcendence of timeserving, in which public and private aspirations have been unified. The army itself has achieved for this moment what Antony aspired to by his challenge to single combat and his submission to a sea fight:

We have beat him to his camp. Run one before
And let the queen know of our gests. To-morrow,
Before the sun shall see’s, we’ll spill the blood
That has to-day escap’d. I thank you all;
For doughty-handed are you, and have fought
Not as you serv’d the cause, but as’st had been
Each man’s like mine. You have shown all Hectors.
Enter the city, clip your wives, your friends,
Tell them your feats, whilst they with joyful tears
Wash the congealment from your wounds and kiss
The honour’d gashes whole.

[To Scarus] Give me thy hand.—

To make this great fairy I’ll commend thy acts,
Make her thanks bless thee. [To Cleo.] O thou day o’th’ world,
Chain mine arm’d neck! Leap thou, attire and all,
Through proof of harness to my heart, and there
Ride on the pants triumphing! (IV.viii.1-16)

We are a long way now from King Henry V’s speech to his army at Harfleur, which came before the battle to inspire his troops rather than afterward to thank them, which asked them to “show us here/ The mettle of your pasture,” as if they were cows, not Hectors, and which finally asked them to serve the cause of “Harry, England, and St. George.” For Antony, nobody has served another’s cause. Each man has made the
public issue personal, and this fusion is projected into the future: a battle in which men have achieved their separate wholeness can leave no scars, and it takes only tears and kisses to restore health all round. Gashes are doubly honored when they are kissed whole. This equation between kisses and gashes, love and honor, culminates in Antony's final lines to Cleopatra. In the morning he had called her the armorer of his heart; now he invites her to achieve by her love what no man could do with a sword, to penetrate his armor and reach his heart, and yet not to displace the armor but to merge with it, and thus "ride on the pants triumphing." In that fabulous image Antony encompasses his whole range of experience and aspiration. Its obscenity reflects accurately one ingredient of his relation with Cleopatra, which must finally justify his approaching ruin. But its obscenity also becomes part of its exuberance, part of that enlargement by which naked privacy becomes a sign of public health and Antony's several parts of life are fused. For this moment Antony has made good in the world his greatest aspirations; he has become God's spy in the battle itself, not looking down from a protected viewpoint. This completes a process by which he has managed not to reject the world in its stale practice but to consume it, to use up and incarnate all its positive values. The seemingly erratic vacillations of conduct by which he moved back and forth from Egypt to Rome without denying either, and the suffering and self-reproval attendant upon that process, have enlarged him to a point where he is able to contain those public and private loyalties that were formerly opposed. He has achieved in his life, though only momentarily, the equation of love and honor, and he is ready to depart from the world leaving nothing wasted. He has earned the right to emerge on a plane of existence where "souls do couch on flowers," which does not compensate his loss of the world but reflects his absolute mastery of life. On the morning after his victory on land, Antony himself announces this emergence in a line deeply prophetic of Cleopatra's later symbolic transformation. Going forth to the battle that will end in his defeat and death, he is already no longer
a man but a spirit, ready not to give up the world but to fight for it in and through the very elements of which it is made:

I would they'd fight i' th' fire or i' th' air;
We'd fight there too. (IV.x.3-4)

II

The grand climax of the whole action is reserved for Cleopatra, who now learns the lesson of Antony's life, gives up her one-sided effort to bend the public world to her narrow purposes, and by her loyalty to him confirms Antony's achieved balance of public and private values. Until Actium, Cleopatra has tried to beguile Antony from his Roman thoughts and, in the process, has devoted her main energy to self-consciously primping herself up into an attractively elusive mistress. But with the defeat at Actium she begins to learn that the Roman honor that Antony now serves can never again be dismissed, evaded, or undermined. She has depended upon Antony either to ignore his public commitments in order to prove the measure of his love, as he was ready to do in the first scene of the play, or else to perform them in the perfunctory fashion of one who keeps his heart uncaught by the world and thus keeps himself worthy of her love. Much to her surprise, her expectations are continuously disappointed: Antony now insists upon a more rigorously defined honor than he had first gone to Rome to renew. That is why he is so violent in railing at himself and her, and Cleopatra is shocked and unprepared for his intensity. She recognizes after Actium that the elaborate stratagems by which she handled him earlier in the play can no longer be effective, but she does not know what alternatives to pursue, and she—Cleopatra!—is left speechless and nonplussed. She resorts to fragmentary, stuttering, disingenuous attempts to placate Antony and fend him off until she can gauge his mood and learn to respond accordingly. From the time of Actium until Antony's death, almost all of Cleopatra's speeches are attempts to defend herself against Antony's railing or to rein-
state herself in his pleasure, and most of them are little tongue-tied half- and one-line affairs designed to parry Antony while she regroups her wits:

O, my pardon! (III.xi.61)
That head, my lord? (III.xiii.19)
Good my lord— (III.xiii.109)
I must stay his time. (III.xiii.155)
That's my brave lord! (III.xiii.177)
Call all his noble captains to my lord. (III.xiii.189)

[aside to Eno.] What means this? (IV.ii.13)
Is not this buckled well? (IV.iv.11)
Why is my lord enrag'd against his love? (IV.xii.31)

It takes Antony's death to make her understand that he has passed as far beyond her Egyptian wiles as beyond the Roman reason of the unreconstructed Enobarbus; and even then, she only perceives the significance of Antony's final suffering and glory by having to re-enact it herself. Antony must be cleared out of the way, so to speak, before Cleopatra can recover her balance and her voice, for Antony, in his effort to connect his public and private interests, has in fact been protecting Cleopatra from any need to face the problem. Antony has been her buffer, and, in the paradoxical manner characteristic of tragedy, the price of Cleopatra's self-centeredness has been Antony's painful growth. Once Antony is dying, Cleopatra recovers her voice, and almost from her first words it is clear that she is approaching Antony's final vision. Having tricked Antony into killing himself by resorting to her old wiliness, she emerges with her faith in that wiliness fatally shattered and is on her way to becoming finally the lass unparalleled of her monument. When Antony is hoisted aloft to die in her arms, we see a new Cleopatra:

Ant. I am dying, Egypt, dying.
Give me some wine, and let me speak a little.
Cleo. No, let me speak; and let me rail so high
That the false huswife Fortune break her wheel,
Provok'd by my offence.

Ant. One word, sweet queen.
Of Caesar seek your honour, with your safety. O!

Cleo. They do not go together.

Ant. Gentle, hear me.
None about Caesar trust but Proculeius.

Cleo. My resolution and my hands I'll trust;
None about Caesar. (IV.xv.41-50)

She admits for the first time that she has committed an offense, about which she refuses to deceive herself now that it has cost her that love which all her strategy was intended to secure. Where Antony had momentarily blamed his decline upon Fortune's wheel, Cleopatra immediately, if indirectly, recognizes a causal connection between her offense and the wheel's turning. Above all, she now rejects a means of safety that is inconsistent with her honor, exhibiting for the first time a capacity to transcend, if only as yet verbally, the self-centeredness that has been her mainspring of conduct.

Of course, Cleopatra does not now discard her old cunning like an outworn garment. Until the very end she continues to bargain with Caesar for her safety, perhaps with greater subtlety than we have seen in her so far. But there is a new dimension to her strategy, which is not merely verbal. After Antony's death she is no longer willing to secure her safety at any price, and her negotiations with Caesar are designed to test how far her safety and her honor may in fact go together. She reserves an area of maneuver that cannot be reached by considerations of personal security. Her bid for safety is increasingly controlled by her loyalty to Antony's memory. Instead of becoming just another item in her list of sexual triumphs, like Pompey and Julius Caesar, Antony now becomes the very condition of her further existence; she is willing to bargain for her safety only if in spirit she can keep giving herself to
him. Just as Antony had been able to announce simultaneously yet without contradiction his intention to do all by the rule with Octavia and still to return to Egypt, so Cleopatra now achieves the moral elevation of discontinuity and is able to bargain with Caesar without betraying Antony.

We see her perform this magnificent feat mainly in her negotiations with Proculeius and Dolabella. First, Shakespeare shows us, out of Cleopatra's view, that Proculeius is another of Caesar's lackeys, wholly undeserving of the trust that Antony urged her to repose in him. This information not only arouses our anxiety for the outcome of Cleopatra's interview with Proculeius, but it enables us to maintain a detached and critical perspective upon Cleopatra. The odds are stacked against her in such a way that she will be doubly tempted to compromise herself and betray Antony's memory, and yet be all the more noble if she withstands the temptation. The interview with Proculeius, especially as it has been anticipated by the similar negotiation with Thyreus after Actium, becomes a crucial test of Cleopatra's integrity, and she passes it with incredible skill. Just as Shakespeare has given us crucial information about Proculeius out of Cleopatra's hearing, so he has Cleopatra voice her mood before Proculeius confronts her:

My desolation does begin to make
A better life. 'Tis paltry to be Caesar.
Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave,
A minister of her will. And it is great
To do that thing that ends all other deeds,
Which shackles accidents and bolts up change,
Which sleeps, and never palates more the dung,
The beggar's nurse and Caesar's. (V.ii.1-8)

Clearly this wins our approval. Her contempt for Caesar and her meditation upon suicide show her ready to forego her old wiliness and submit her personal interests to a higher discipline. Then Proculeius invites her "sweet dependency" upon Caesar, and she replies:
Pray you tell him
I am his fortune's vassal and I send him
The greatness he has got. I hourly learn
A doctrine of obedience, and would gladly
Look him i' th' face. (V.ii.28–32)

To read this speech in isolation is necessarily to conclude that Cleopatra is up to her old tricks and has remained unaffected by the death of Antony. But even Proculeius is not so short-sighted: he surprises and disarms Cleopatra, preventing her first attempt at the suicide foretold by her preceding speech. Read as it must be in the light of that earlier speech, Cleopatra's speech to Proculeius is heavily ironic and full of the most carefully premeditated ambiguities. Cleopatra calls herself the "vassal" of Caesar's fortune, but she has just called him "Fortune's knave,/ A minister of her will," so that her own slavery is equaled by his. She now sends him nigglingly "The greatness he has got," which she has already described as "paltry." And her "doctrine of obedience" involves simultaneously her submission to Caesar's political power and to Antony's example of suicide.

When Dolabella comes to second Proculeius' efforts, Cleopatra's transformation has markedly progressed. She has a new certainty, a confidence in her intentions, which emboldens her to discard the protective device of ambiguous utterance and uses her most elaborate and impassioned eulogy for her dead lover in order to pry Caesar's secret from Dolabella. He is suave at first and even a little flirtatious, as if hoping like Thyreus for a hand to kiss:

*Dol.* Most noble Empress, you have heard of me?
*Cleo.* I cannot tell.
*Dol.* Assuredly you know me.

(V.ii.71–72)

But instead of playing games with Dolabella, Cleopatra breaks over his repeated half-line protests to tell him her dream of Antony. What fills her mind now is that magnanimity of spirit
which Antony achieved before his death, and which Cleopatra
did not understand in the banquet scene:

For his bounty,
There was no winter in't; an autumn 'twas
That grew the more by reaping. His delights
Were dolphin-like: they show'd his back above
The element they liv'd in. In his livery
Walk'd crowns and crownets. Realms and islands were
As plates dropp'd from his pocket. (V.ii.86-92)

With this speech, which makes Antony's transfiguration the
occasion for that of Cleopatra, she bewitches and enthralls
Dolabella, who can only respond with "Cleopatra!" The result,
to be sure, is that she pries from him the secret of Caesar's
intention to lead her through Rome in triumph. But it makes
all the difference that now she accomplishes this strategic end
by what for her are the wholly improbable means of denying
the blandishments of Dolabella and of refusing to indulge in
her old duplicity.

We can measure the change in Cleopatra by comparing her
response to Dolabella with her earlier response to Thyreus
when he represented Caesar on a similar mission after Antony's
defeat at Actium. With none of Dolabella's indirection, Thyreus
had asked to kiss her hand in Caesar's name, and Cleopatra
replied:

Your Caesar's father oft,
When he hath mus'd of taking kingdoms in,
Bestow'd his lips on that unworthy place
As it rain'd kisses. (III.xiii.83-86)

There was nothing absolutely disloyal to Antony in this; and
when Antony raged at her for flirting with Thyreus, she was
right to reply, "Not know me yet?". For she had made the
same offer of her "bluest veins to kiss; a hand that kings/
Have lipp'd, and trembled kissing" to her own messenger from
Rome in return for good news of Antony; and Antony him-
self was to request her hand for Scarus to kiss after the land

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battle. Passing her hands around to be kissed, like hopping forty paces through the street, was one of Cleopatra’s ways of maintaining that Egyptian value for which Antony was ready to live and die. But surely there was something disingenuous in a reply to Thyreus that managed to allude to Julius Caesar and keep strictly silent about her present lover Antony. Now with Dolabella she is unwilling to keep silent about Antony, and she is no longer concerned with making a public show of herself in hand-kissing. It was foreseeable that with Proculeius and Dolabella she might repeat the earlier maneuver with Thyreus. Instead, she discovers in herself what she had not been able to demonstrate before, the full depth and range of her passion for Antony, and this new clarity liberates her from her old wiliness. She has come finally to the point of disciplining her volatile private desires by honorable public commitments, and these public loyalties are thrust upon her by the intensity of her personal feelings. In Cleopatra as in Antony—and just because of Antony—the divergent aspects of life are being submitted to each other.

Cleopatra goes on bargaining with Caesar until the very end, reserving part of her treasure (until betrayed by her treasurer Seleucus), and continually probing to see whether she will be led through Rome in triumph. But here, too, she is following Antony, in refusing to choose between her safety and her honor. In her concern for safety, and especially in the importance she attaches to being humiliated in Caesar’s triumph, we see the old Cleopatra still intact, unable to tolerate anything less than the universal gaze formerly bestowed upon the burnished throne at Cydnus. But she has also been a creature of infinite variety. If she cannot now maintain her identity and yet submit herself to a wagon ride through jeering Rome, that is because a value beyond variety has become necessary to her. She was piqued at the beginning to discover in Antony that a Roman thought had struck him; but now she strives toward a constancy that will enable her to act according to what she calls the “high Roman fashion.” Cleopatra’s wiliness at the end of the play is directed not at ingratiating herself with Caesar by flattery but
IDEAL OF ORDER SURPASSED

at frustrating him by preserving a means to escape being led in triumph through the streets. When it becomes clear that her safety and her honor no longer can go together, when the world proves no more hospitable to her aspirations than it had been to Antony's, it turns out that she has used her cunning to prepare for the event. She has not merely used Dolabella to discover Caesar's plans for her and arranged to have the asps smuggled into her monument. In dealing with Caesar and his factors she has preserved her loyalty to Antony in such a fashion that her suicide can be a morally coherent event, the logical culmination of her life rather than an erratic, impulsive effort merely to rob death of its sting or to avoid embarrassment at Rome. Like Antony's, her suicide becomes a merging of safety and honor, private and public values. She has re-enacted Antony's experience, and thus has earned the right to platonize her aspirations and transform herself from a triple-turned whore into a true wife:

Husband, I come!
Now to that name my courage prove my title!
I am fire and air; my other elements
I give to baser life. (V.ii.290-93)

III

When Cleopatra applies the asp to her breast, she says she wishes she could hear it speak and call Caesar "ass,/ Un-policied!" She had said of Caesar earlier that not being Fortune, he was but a minister of Fortune's will. On the Roman side there has been from the beginning the same intimate connection between the belief in Fortune and the belief in policy—or "vantage"—that characterized Shakespeare's Machiavels in the earlier plays. The word "Fortune" is highly prominent in Antony and Cleopatra, and always in Roman mouths it means either unruly chance or fixed destiny. Early in the play, Maecenas says that Octavia will be a "blessed lottery" to Antony; near the end, Caesar tells Cleopatra that the injuries she has done to him he will remember only "As things done
by chance.” When Caesar greets his sister after Antony has returned to Egypt, he says, “let determined things to destiny/ Hold unbewail’d their way”; and in his great speech upon the death of Antony he laments “that our stars,/ Unreconcilable, should divide/ Our equalness to this.” Now the belief in chance and the belief in fate are surely incompatible in some respects, but they have this in common: both deny man’s unaided power to shape himself and his world in morally stable and coherent forms. In *Antony and Cleopatra* Shakespeare makes the agent of political order, Octavius Caesar, also the symbol of this nihilism. The policy in pursuit of fortune that was attributed to the antagonists of order in *King Lear* is transferred to the preservers of order in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Then this policy itself is platonized and made an instrument of destiny. By making policy the medium of order, and by making the permanence of order an effect of destiny, Shakespeare irrevocably demotes the ideal of order from the high place it occupied in his earlier dramatic thought. He takes the last step in transforming that ideal from the *raison d’être* to the mere *donnée* of human action.

That is why, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the outfacing of a “Fortune” that has become “true” instead of “false,” because it is destined in any case to restore the order of the state, is no longer a static holding action on behalf of traditional forms of value. It has become a revolutionary act that creates new value in the world. Antony uses the word “fortune” as often as anybody in the play, but he uses it characteristically in the plural, as when he says that he once made and marred men’s “fortunes” (as if it did not matter which, so irrelevant are “fortunes”), or when he reminds Cleopatra of his former “fortunes” as the greatest prince of the world. He is not required, as Cordelia is, to face down an external power that threatens destruction to his world. Cordelia, whose whole character is encompassed in her granitic stability, needs to stand fast in order to draw the sting from fortune. But in Antony’s fortunate public world, the threatened harm is Antony’s internal failure to be his own
variegated self and keep transforming into each other a required public steadfastness and a gratuitous private magnanimity. Antony needs continually to affirm the best that is in him both of Egypt and Rome. So long as he has both the clarity to maintain his embattled adherence to his Roman honor and the generosity to change places with his servants, he draws the sting from his failed fortunes by accepting them as necessary conditions of life and going on from there. By this acceptance Antony is able to outrun the world’s flaws and to “become” his own, and thereby to win new honor for human life. He is able to create his place in a morally coherent universe without relying upon destiny and without the help of that shaping providence which vindicated Cordelia.

To affirm that providence, the play of King Lear had to end with the gratuitous deaths of Lear and Cordelia, which are no doubt the greatest example in Shakespeare of what we call “tragic waste.” Much of the pain we feel at the end of King Lear comes from the enormous disproportion between the catastrophe itself and the comparatively slight mistake that activated those forces that in turn made the catastrophe necessary. But in the world beyond providence of Antony and Cleopatra there is no tragic waste. The lovers’ lives have been gratuitous and self-defining, and therefore death comes full of reconciliation, bringing an increment of existence rather than a diminution. Death confers an earned immortality. Lear has suffered so much that we are ready to accept, with whatever regret, Kent’s admonition “Vex not his ghost,” and let him die; the truth affirmed by King Lear does barely enable us to accept the death of Cordelia. But for Antony and Cleopatra we do not accept death but desire it, as Cleopatra says, like a lover’s pinch. For them life has reached that brimful level where, as Antony says finally, “Now all labour/ Mars what it does: yea, very force entangles/ Itself with strength”; and therefore, as Cleopatra says to the asp, “Come, thou mortal wretch,/ With thy sharp teeth this knot intrinsicate/ Of life at once untie.” Life has been completed, used up; like the patriarchs of the Old
Testament, these lovers, whatever their age, are full of days. They are faced toward an immortal life that Antony imagines in highly specific terms:

Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand
And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze,
Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops,
And all the haunt be ours. (IV.xiv.51-54)

Here the ghosts are anything but vexed, and the lovers are again the objects of an admiration so universal that, like Cleopatra at Cydnus, it all but causes a gap in nature. Cleopatra’s final vision marvellously complements this of Antony’s, by connecting death with the beginning of life in an image of motherhood and nurture:

Peace, peace!
Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep? (V.ii.311-13)

In transforming Cleopatra’s whoredom into greatness, Shakespeare makes her first the wife of Antony and then the gentle mother of that death which will reunite her with her husband where souls do couch on flowers. Everything surrounding the lovers’ deaths—the voluntariness of their suicides, the supporting suicides of their servants, and the awed choric comments even of Octavius, “. . . she looks like sleep,/ As she would catch another Antony/ In her strong toil of grace”—serves to transform death itself into a symbolic renewal of existence on the level of those aspirations that motivated the lovers’ discontinuous conduct in the play.

I will be concerned in the next chapter with the way in which the style of the play shapes and reflects the whole process of the action as I have described it, and especially as that action culminates in the transfiguration of death. Here it remains to be said that the play’s symbolic treatment of death as apotheosis, poised against the usual dramatic significance of death as catastrophe, marks an important place in Shakespeare’s development. It looks backward to King Lear and Macbeth in that Shake-
Shakespeare is not yet willing to lighten the weight of suffering and death as the price of human frailty and therefore of life itself. Yet he has outgrown the earlier conception of death as the avenging instrument of a providential order, for he has discovered in life an element of reconciliation that cannot be rendered in a naturalistic treatment of death. His symbolic treatment of that powerful force in the final speeches of *Antony and Cleopatra* looks forward to *Cymbeline*, *The Winter’s Tale*, and *The Tempest*, plays on the theme of reconciliation that are uniformly symbolic in method. But where we may sometimes feel in those last plays that Shakespeare’s symbolic technique lightly veils the actual boundaries of life in order to avoid the inescapable significance of death, in *Antony and Cleopatra* his willingness to face up to death leaves no such evasive impression. *Antony and Cleopatra* encompasses both the naturalism of death in *King Lear* and the symbolism of reconciliation in *The Tempest*. That is why, in this play alone among Shakespeare’s works, death itself is exuberant. And that in turn is why *Antony and Cleopatra* may be placed alongside *King Lear* and *The Tempest* as one of Shakespeare’s supreme masterpieces.