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Review paper

SHAKESPEARE`S CLEOPATRA – THE VISCERAL AND THE RATIONAL

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Abstract: This paper's aim is to shed additional light on the multifaceted and complex character of Cleopatra, particularly whether she loves Antony, or merely lusts for him. Critics are sharply divided on the issue. Most critics view Cleopatra as lusting for Antony, although there are critics who argue in favor of her love towards Antony, a view held by Janet Adelman, Harold Bloom, Maurice Charney and Coppelia Kahn. Another aim of this paper is to establish whether her relationship with Antony serves to project her goal of a strong Egypt with a strong queen. This paper sides with the critics who view Cleopatra as lusting for Antony and at the same time trying to fulfill her vision of a strong Egypt. With regard to Antony, his role in the play is more straightforward, as most critics argue for love on his part.

Key words: Cleopatra, Antony, lust, love, Egypt, Rome

Introduction

Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*, is seen as lustful by a number of critics or poets. For example, Dante Alighieri places Cleopatra in the second circle of Hell in his Divine Comedy, the first being reserved for the virtuous pagans. In the tragedy *Antony and Cleopatra*, both characters were viewed by some critics as such, although there are critics who view Antony's love as true love rather than lust. With regard to Cleopatra, critics that have acknowledged her lustful behaviour include: William Hazlitt who states "Cleopatra's whole character is the triumph of the voluptuous, of the love of pleasure and the power of giving it, over every other consideration" (2008, p.63). Anna Murphy Brownell Jameson in Shakespeare's Heroines: Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical, & Historical writes about Cleopatra's

"oriental voluptuousness" (Jameson, 2008, p.68). A.C. Bradley states "the exercise of sexual attraction is the element of her life" (2008, p.105). Rosalie L. Colie in "The Significance of Style," from Shakespeare's Living Art points out the Roman view on the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra, and states that both protagonists might be lustful if we view them through Roman lenses: "There is more than the suggestion, then, that love is no more than appetite or a drive; if that were all there was to love, the Roman view of this affair would be correct, Cleopatra simply a whore and Antony besotted, 'ne'er lust-wearied'"(2008, p.214). There is a debate among the critics with regard to whether Antony is in love with Cleopatra or simply lusts after Cleopatra. Sara Munson Deats cites A.C. Bradley who views Antony simultaneously as "'strumpet's fool' and Cleopatra's 'peerless lover'" (Bradley, 2004, p.29), A.C. Bradley however seems to settle on Antony's love for Cleopatra as he writes "How pathetic and even sublime the completeness of his love for Cleopatra!" (as cited in Sara Munson Deats, 2004. p.103). The number of critics who suggest that Antony's feeling towards Cleopatra is one of love seems to outnumber the critics who claim the opposite. G. Wilson Knight also argues for love on the part of Antony "The strongest thing in Antony is his love for Cleopatra" (Knight, 2008, p.121). Northrop Frye is of the same opinion "The great romantic heroes are normally great lovers too, and Antony's love for Cleopatra gives him again a dimension that puts him beyond the usual human categories" (2008, p.239).

Augustus William Schlegel states that among other characteristics, Cleopatra is also proud and lustful. He states:

The seductive arts of Cleopatra are in no respect veiled over; she is an ambiguous being made up of royal pride, female vanity, luxury, inconstancy, and true attachment. Although the mutual passion of herself and Antony is without moral dignity, it still excites our sympathy as an insurmountable fascination—they seem formed for each other, and Cleopatra is as remarkable for her seductive charms as Antony for the splendour of his deeds. As they die for each other, we forgive them for having lived for each other.

(Schlegel, 2008, p.61)

Main body

In order to better understand the emotions explored in the play, specifically the sin/emotion of lust in the Antony-Cleopatra relationship, I will look at it through the prism of love-lust dichotomy. In brief, according to the Bible, "Love is patient; lust requires immediate satisfaction. Love is kind; lust is harsh. Love does not demand its own way; lust does" (*New King James Version*, 1996, Corinthians. 13: 4-8). Although this definition mainly refers to the Christian notion of love (charity) or agape, there is striking similarity to current psychological views on love and lust. Although lust can lead to love, these are different emotions and the major difference seems to be whether you care about the person or you just need instant gratification. According

to Janet Brito, a psychologist at the Center for Sexual and Reproductive Health, the major difference between these two emotions is that: lust is impulsive and love takes time or as she is writes "Love is rooted in delayed gratification, while lust is rooted in instant pleasure. Lust feels like sprinting; love feels like a marathon. Love means acceptance; lust means indulgence" (Brito, 2018). Iris Krasnow's stance, author of Sex After: Women Share How Intimacy Changes as Life Changes, is summarized as: lust is short and sudden whereas, love is slow and steady or as she says:

Love means hanging on for the long-distance ride. When lust is the primary driver, partners can literally be in and out in one night. Love is rooted in a deep commitment and endurance. Lust is rooted in a longing of the loins and often results in unsatisfying hook-ups. Love is a comforting pilot light that, if fed properly, can fuel a couple for a lifetime. Lust can lead to a roaring bonfire of sex, but sex without a real relationship quickly turns to ashes. (Krasnow, 2018)

Shannon Chavez, who is a psychologist and sex therapist, makes the difference between love and lust which is summed up as: love increases with time, whereas lust decreases with time or in her words:

Love is rooted in attachment and bonding that grows over time. Lust is rooted in intense desire and fades over time. Lust feels like a rollercoaster of emotions driven by biological forces and activated by our reward centre, driven by desire for pleasure and connection. Love feels like the desire and need for attachment with biological sociocultural, and psychological factors that determine its development. (Chavez, 2018)

Perhaps the most relevant difference between these two emotions comes from Ryan Howes, which can be summed up as "lust is about you, whereas love is about them" or in his words: "When you lust for someone, you must have them. You need their body or presence in your life as if your life depends on it. Love is not possessive, though. You'll certainly want someone you love in your life, but if their best life is found apart from you, then you want that for them. When you find that their wellbeing is a higher priority than your cravings, you're in love." (Howes, 2018)

Being too selfish and not taking into consideration the needs of the others can be very harsh and harmful as humans are social beings. Love on the other hand, can be described as patient and kind, as it is not selfish it takes time, it is steady and it is about the care of the others.

Although modern psychological and Biblical interpretation of love and lust are similar, I will compare the relationship between Cleopatra and Antony using the New Testament passage. However, Antony is Roman and Cleopatra is Egyptian, so the question that arises is whether we can judge them using Christian standards. I will try to point out the similarities between the Christian view and how the notion of lust was regarded in Egypt's and Rome's societies. For example, it is assumed that one story from Egyptian literature was the inspiration for the Biblical story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39:7. The Egyptian story is called Tale of Two Brothers or The Fate of an Unfaithful Wife. In short, the story is about the detrimental and harsh consequences of unchecked lust caused specifically by the wife of Anpu. Anpu has a brother called Bata. Anpu's wife, while Anpu is away, comes to the house where he lives with his brother and his brother's wife and the latter tries to entice him into sexual intercourse. Bata rejects her advances and returns to the fields. His brother Anpu returns from the field and finds his wife "lying there and it seemed as if she had suffered violence from an evildoer" (Mark, 2016). Since Anpu's wife's sexual lust is not accepted, she falsely claims that Bata tried to rape her. As a consequence of her lust and accusation, Anpu and his brother fall out and Anpu's wife is killed. Another story from Egyptian mythology that points out the detrimental and harsh effects of lust is found in the story of Osiris, his wife Isis, Set and Set's wife Nephtys. In short, Nepthys assumes the likeness of Isis and tries to seduce Osiris. The result of Nepthys's lust and scheming are that Osiris is killed.

Romans also viewed lust as detrimental and harsh. For example, for Seneca libido or sexual desire is "destructive force (exitium) insidiously fixed in the innards" (2017, p.111). According to Seneca, unchecked sexual desire develops into lust. Gaca, paraphrases Seneca's view stating that: "the only way to stop this calamity is to act on one's sexual desires only for reproduction within marriage" (2017, p.111).

The actions of Antony throughout the play show that his love for Cleopatra is unconditional. Antony simply accepts Cleopatra for the person she is. Almost throughout the play Cleopatra fails to understand the notion of Roman honour and duty, the so-called concept of Romanitas (including pietas or dutifulness) that urge him to return to Rome. She is obsessed with Anthony: "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" (Act I, Scene 3, 297-300).

Cleopatra is immodest, urges her attendant Alexas to lie on her behalf and wants to seduce Antony. Being immodest with the intent to seduce is one way of describing the notion of lust. One may say that she is very vulnerable queen who only needs a powerful ally and that her main goal is to remain queen of Egypt. However, one may argue that she needs power, because, as H. Kissinger has stated in The New York Times (28 October 1973), power is the ultimate aphrodisiac. Thus, on one hand she uses her lust to remain in power, and on the other hand she needs power to goad and satisfy her lustful nature.

Cleopatra is inconstant and she explicitly says so: "But, sir, forgive me, since my becomings kill me when they do not Eye well to you" (Act I, Scene 3, 410-412). Her changes in behaviour are sign of inconstancy and inconstancy is one of the daughters of the sin/emotion of lust according to Thomas Aquinas. The reason for her inconstancy is that she can't stand the fact that Antony is leaving for Rome and provokes him, saying that he is the greatest liar and unfaithful lover. Although the following passage describes Biblical love or selfless love (agape), it is also valid for romantic love (eros) as Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical Deus Caritas est (Benedict XVI, 2005) argues that agape and eros are not different types of love, but distinct halves of complete love representing giving and receiving.

If we paraphrase the previously mentioned passage of Corinthians 13: 4-5: 'Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own" (New King James Version, 1996) and apply it to Cleopatra, one can see that she does not suffer all and is not kind, but provoking. Furthermore, she parades her love pretending that she would faint out of love for Antony. In addition, Cleopatra unconditionally seeks her own way, namely that Antony stays in Egypt, although he is a Roman general and is required elsewhere.

Another argument in support that she is lustful is present in Act I, Scene 5. She asks for mandragora, so that she can fall asleep. Mandragora has a long tradition of being associated with provoking lust. With regard to castrated men, or more particularly the eunuch Mardian, she states: "I take no pleasure in aught a eunuch has. 'Tis well for thee That, being unseminared, thy freer thoughts May not fly forth of Egypt" (533-536). In other words, she is interested only in sex as personal gratification, which is another way to describe lust.

In the next lines from the same scene, she openly envies, contrary to the Bible's description of love, the horse that Antony rides, an apparent allusion to sexual intercourse: "O Charmian, where think'st thou he is now? Stands he or sits he? Or does he walk? Or is he on his horse? O happy horse, to bear the weight of Antony!" (543-546)

Enobarbus, describes her as having infinite variety, which simply means mood swings, another term for inconstancy or another trait of the sin/emotion of lust. He further describes her as riggish, which means lustful or sexually unrestrained. For Cleopatra, the relationship between herself and Antony boils down to the relationship between an angler and a fish. She would imagine that every fish is: "an Antony and say, "Aha! You're caught." (1065-1066) True love doesn't boil down to a hunter-prey relationship. Love is kind, the hunter-prey relationship is a harsh relationship, and is closer to lust than to love. Furthermore, Cleopatra exhibits patterns of self-love, the latter being one of the daughters of lust according to Thomas Aquinas. Upon learning that Antony has married the sister of Octavian, Octavia, she immediately wants to know the traits of the latter. When the messenger comes, she immediately starts to compare Octavia's features to her own, as if she is the epitome for beauty and intelligence. Cleopatra starts asking the Messenger questions such as: "Is she as tall as me?" (Act III, Scene 3, line, 1700), "Didst hear her speak? (Act III, Scene 3, line, 1702), "Is she shrill-tongued or low?" (Act III, Scene 3, line, 1702), "What majesty is in her gait? Remember, If e'er thou looked'st on majesty" (Act III, Scene 3, line 1707-08), "Bear'st thou her face in mind? is't long or round?" (Act III, Scene 3, line, 1726), "Her hair, what colour?" (Act III, Scene 3, line, 1726). In the middle of the battle between Antony and Octavian Caesar, Cleopatra abandons Antony. Enobarbus

provides the information: "Naught, naught, all naught! I can behold no longer. Th' Antoniad, the Egyptian admiral, With all their sixty, fly and turn the rudder" (Act 3, Scene 10, 2062-2064). Her flight from the battle is even more aggravating due to the fact that in the particular moment of her flight, the odds were leaning in favour of Antony and it seemed that they had the advantage. On this occasion it is Scarus who provides the information: "Yon ribaudred nag of Egypt— Whom leprosy o'ertake! —i' th' midst o' th' fight, When vantage like a pair of twins appeared Both as the same, or rather ours the elder, The breeze upon her, like a cow in June, Hoists sails and flies" (Act 3, Scene 10, 2075-2080).

If Cleopatra had really loved Antony, she wouldn't have abandoned him when he had the upper hand. Love endures all and this is not Cleopatra reasoning. On the other hand, lust demands its own way and that is what Cleopatra did. In addition, after their defeat a messenger from Caesar arrives asking for Antony's head. He informs Cleopatra that Caesar is ready to pardon Cleopatra since Caesar knows that: "you embrace not Antony/As you did love, but as you feared him." Cleopatra full heartedly agrees: "He is a god and knows /What is most right. Mine honour was not yielded, But conquered merely" (Act 3, Scene 12, 2320-2322). Cleopatra goes even further and shows favour to the messenger and Caesar by stating: "Most kind messenger, / Say to great Caesar this in deputation: /I kiss his conqu'ring hand. Tell him I am prompt /To lay my crown at 's feet, and there to kneel" (Act 3, Scene 12, 2338-2341).

Again, Cleopatra is inconstant in her actions and in her "love". After Antony orders that the messenger is whipped, he states with regard to Cleopatra: "Were't twenty of the greatest tributaries /That do acknowledge Caesar, should I find them /So saucy with the hand of she here—what's her name /Since she was Cleopatra?" (Act III, Scene 13, 2371-2374)

Antony is implying that due to the fact that her behaviour has changed so drastically, her name must have also changed. Antony states that she has always been fickle and inconstant: "You have been a boggler ever" (Act 3, Scene 12, 2388). Antony further states that she went wantonly after and had been used in lustful moments by Julius Caesar, Gnaius Pompey and other men: "I found you as a morsel cold upon Dead Caesar's trencher. Nay, you were a fragment Of Gneius Pompey's, besides what hotter hours, Unregistered in vulgar fame, you have Luxuriously picked out" (Act 3, Scene 12, 2395-2399).

Antony loses the next battle also. For his defeat he holds Cleopatra accountable probably due to the fact that she had previously betrayed him and the fact that Caesar promised to leave her to be queen of Egypt if she banished or killed him. He exclaims: "All is lost! /This foul Egyptian hath betrayèd me. / My fleet hath yielded to the foe, and yonder /They cast their caps up and carouse together /Like friends long lost. Triple-turned whore!" (Act IV, Scene 12, 2914-2917)

Antony calls Cleopatra triple-turned whore, because he knows that she had previously betrayed Julius Caesar, Gnaius Pompey and now it was his turn.

He further exclaims: Betray'd I am: Oh, this false soul of Egypt! This grave charm, Whose eye becked forth my wars and called them home, Whose bosom was my crownet, my chief end, Like a right gypsy hath at fast and loose Beguiled me to the very heart of loss. (Act IV, Scene 12, lines 2930-35)

He believes that she is a seductress and that she doesn't love him, calling her deadly enchantress and that he was beguiled by a true Gypsy. Cleopatra continues to manipulate Antony seeking immediate satisfaction and exhibiting patterns of selflove. She orders Mardian to report to Antony that she had committed suicide, and that her last word was "Antony" with the disastrous result that Antony utters: "Since Cleopatra died/I have lived in such dishonour that the gods/ Detest my baseness" (Act IV, Scene 14, 3048-3050). He urges one of his attendants Eros, that "when the exigent should come which now Is come indeed, when I should see behind me Th' inevitable prosecution of Disgrace and horror, that on my command, Thou then wouldst kill me. Do 't. The time is come" (Act IV, Scene 12, 3056-3060). Eros commits suicide rather that killing Antony, and the latter attempts to kill himself by falling on his sword but fails and hurts himself deadly. On seeing Antony, Cleopatra proclaims: "If knife, drugs, serpents, have Edge, sting, or operation, I am safe." (Act IV, Scene 15, 3195-3197) In other words as long as she has the possibility to commit suicide, she will be safe from Octavian. After Antony has died, Cleopatra promised to make the "briefest end." (Act IV, Scene 15,3274)

We'll bury him, and then, what's brave, what's noble, Let's do 't after the high Roman fashion And make death proud to take us. Come, away. This case of that huge spirit now is cold. Ah, women, women! Come. We have no friend But resolution, and the briefest end. (Act IV, Scene 15, 3268-74)

However, in Act V, the impression we get is that she is not opting for "the briefest end", but for obtaining favourable conditions from Caesar. She doesn't intend to commit suicide, but dreams of placing her son on the throne of Egypt. She states: "If he please /To give me conquered Egypt for my son, / He gives me so much of mine own as / I Will kneel to him with thanks" (Act V, Scene 2,3398-3401).

She had forgotten about Antony and her pledge to die. Instead, with regard to Caesar, she describes herself as "his fortune's vassal" (Act V, Scene 2, 3411), constantly learning "a doctrine of obedience" (Act V, Scene 2, 3413) and that she would be happy to meet him or in the original text "would gladly/Look him i' th' face." (Act V, Scene 2, 3413-14) Apparently, Cleopatra tries to stab herself, or more

precisely feigns to kill herself, but in her encounter with Caesar her mood changes and she lies that she gave over the entire treasure to the latter. In fact, Cleopatra has kept, in the words of Seleucos, "Enough to purchase what you have made known" (Act V, Scene 2, 3517). She intends to use that treasure and give it to Livia and Octavia and obtain intervention for her life. The fact that she oscillates between suicide and future life shows her inconstancy, and the fact that she intentionally keeps treasure so that she can buy her freedom, points to the fact that she has love for this world and abhorrence or despair of a future world. "Love of this world" refers to the pleasure which "a man desires to enjoy" and abhorrence or "despair of a future world" means that one is "held back by carnal pleasures" (Summa Theologica, p.2573) and as a consequence cannot obtain spiritual pleasures. This characteristic, alongside with inconstancy are two of the daughters of the sin/emotion of Lust according to Thomas Aquinas.

With regard to Cleopatra as a skilled and rational leader in the play *Antony and Cleopatra*, a number of critics have emphasized her political manoeuvring, military strategy, diplomacy, charismatic leadership, resourcefulness, decision making and emotional intelligence. For example, Janet Adelman in her book "The Common Liar: An Essay on Antony and Cleopatra" explores Cleopatra's complex character by emphasizing her influence over Antony. Marjorie Garber in her book "Shakespeare After All" explores Cleopatra's multifaceted character, emphasizing her diplomatic skills and political manoeuvring. Harold Bloom in his book "Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human" discuses Cleopatra's powerful character and her ability to shape events and Coppelia Kahn in her book "Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds and Women" explores Cleopatra's leadership as a female ruler in a maledominated world.

Concluding remarks

Although this paper has argued that Cleopatra is lustful, she cannot be represented as being only lustful, as there are critics who have argued in favor of her strong attachment and love of Antony. Cleopatra is a multifaceted character and as such requires a more nuanced view. Perhaps a good approach to describe her emotions and character is her quote "I am fire and air" (act V, scene 2, line 3747). According to the Elizabethan Theory of the Four Humors, namely: fire, air, blood and earth; fire was associated with the yellow bile which corresponds to the choleric type of person. This type has the following characteristics: ambitious, energetic and direct and when out of balance: violent, hot-tempered, unscrupulous and vengeful. Cleopatra is ambitious, but she is also violent and hot-tempered. With regard to her description that she is "air", this element was associated with the sanguine type of person who has the following characteristics: optimistic, cheerful, fun-loving, generous and amorous. When out of balance, this type has the following characteristics: irresponsible, gluttonous, inebriate and lusty. Cleopatra is fun-loving and amorous, but she can also be irresponsible and lusty.

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