

**LOVE IN “ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA”****Zayniyev Bakhridin Toshtemir son**

Antony and Cleopatra is one of the most mature of William Shakespeare's tragedies. As such, it is arguably one of his finest and deepest works. Pride, love, and the Fall all factor into the play as much as does the contest between temporal politics and eternal love. Antony and Cleopatra are passionate and energetic and are in full bloom beside each other; Octavius is cold and calculating and works through intermediaries throughout the play. But why is Antony and Cleopatra such a tragedy given the vanity that our titular protagonists display? It is, of course, nothing short of the fact that they were lovers in a world that cannot allow love to coexist alongside it.

Shakespeare's many tragedies have a common theme that is often missed at first glance. From Julius Caesar to King Lear, from Hamlet to Macbeth, from Othello to Antony and Cleopatra; all of Shakespeare's tragedies are deeply political plays. In fact, all of Shakespeare's grand tragedies have the political as the foundation of their tragic nature; it is as if Shakespeare is revealing his hand at the tragic nature of politics in having his tragedies be saturated in the muck and mud of politics.

Antony and Cleopatra, in this respect, doesn't stand out insofar that it is another tragedy set in the hell of the political. On another hand it does stand out—precisely because of its political nature. As stated, Antony and Cleopatra is one of Shakespeare's most mature works. Composed during the latter part of Shakespeare's life, Antony and Cleopatra contain Shakespeare's deepest thoughts about politics. Shakespeare's life of the mind, his wrestling with turbulence, change, and political revolution, all come to the fore in this most remarkable and appropriately passionate drama.

Love is natural. Love is pre-political. Love belongs to “Nature's infinite book of secrecy.” To live in the mystery of nature is to dwell in the timelessness of love. That is the sin of Antony and Cleopatra more than their lust and love for each other.

In fact, their first lines in the play deal with love. “If it be love indeed, tell me how much,” Cleopatra says to Antony in the first scene. “There's beggary in the love that can be reckoned,” Antony answers. “I'll set a bourn how far to be beloved,” Cleopatra responds. “Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth,” Antony concludes. In their dialogue on love

we also see the prefiguration of love's timelessness: "new heaven" and "new earth" are the product of love.

Whether Antony and Cleopatra love each other or simply indulge in their fantastical lusts is debatable. Shakespeare may have used Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's Lives as the basis of the basic historicity of the plot, but the play is not a historical drama as Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote in his laudatory reflection on the play. There is not a shred of cruelty in Shakespeare's Antony, though the historical Antony—if the primary documents are trustworthy—was something of a brute and callous individual. Likewise, Cleopatra is not portrayed as a seductive killer and schemer, though she was certainly that in real life. Nay, Shakespeare does what all great artists do—he takes historical characters and brings them to life, but in doing so, also communicates through them timeless truths and reflections which endure long after the death of the artist.

Shakespeare deliberately blurs the line between lust and love between the two eponymous characters. There is thrilling dialogue of sensualism between the two, the type of romantic dialogue that makes the heart flutter. In those dialogues, there are also displays of self-obsessed vanity and pride which make us wonder if the two do love each other or whether Antony is a mere prop for Cleopatra's sexual voraciousness and Cleopatra a mere plaything for Antony's libido. That is part of the genius of Shakespeare. He blurs that line to keep us guessing, but in doing so we also come to sympathize with Antony and Cleopatra in the face of the cold and calculating Octavius and his ambitions for "universal peace."

The contrasts between the main characters could not be starker. Antony and Cleopatra are introduced in a grand procession with exotic treasures surrounding them. They are surrounded by maidens and other ladies, along with eunuchs fanning Cleopatra as she sits enthroned on her chair. Their pride and personality, pompousness and pretentiousness, is fully displayed for all the world to see. They enter as king and queen of the world. On stage this would have been a spectacular and sublime entrance. But even in just reading the description of their entry, there can be no mistaking the pride and personality that accompanies the spirits of Antony and Cleopatra.

When Octavius is first introduced, he is a cold bureaucrat reading a letter. Lepidus enters with his train to discuss politics with Caesar's heir. Octavius enters the stage without a grand procession, without giggling girls and servile eunuchs, or without a memorable speech. He banally reads over a letter at a desk as Lepidus enters and they discuss the banality of politics.

Octavius is a bureaucratic man through and through. So much so that as the play develops and he thrusts himself into the middle of the battle for the fate of the world, Octavius never gets his hands dirty like Antony (or Cleopatra). Instead, he always commands a lackey, a subordinate, a lieutenant, to execute his will. Whether Dolabella, Proculeius, or—as it often is—Agrippa, someone is always acting as the mediator between the managing manager Octavius and the completion of his will. Despite having lost his political and military reputation in abandoning his men and material in pursuit of Cleopatra, Antony is Antony in love. Despite having lost everything he finds himself and his joy in Cleopatra's embrace. Despite losing the world he has gained Cleopatra. "Come," he says, "let's have one other gaudy night: call to me all my sad captains; fill our bowls once more; let's mock the midnight bell." Cleopatra answers, "It is my birthday. I had thought t' have held it poor. But since my lord is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra."

As previously mentioned, Antony is Antony and Cleopatra is Cleopatra only in the embrace of love. It is when both are beside each other that the true Antony and true Cleopatra are born. Though the world may be burning and slipping out of their hands, it is in the embrace of their hands that they find the joy and meaning of life on earth.

The battle between Octavius and Antony (and Cleopatra) is not a battle between two men. The battle for the fate of the world that occurred at the mouth of Actium was the battle between the brave new world of cold and sterile politics against the lively and lovely world of Eros—of nature. In this battle between "Nature's book of infinite secrecy" embodied by Antony and Cleopatra and the cold and bureaucratic managerialism of the world of "wide arches" and "universal peace," only one could win. Love lost. Politics won. Hence the tragedy.

It is fitting, then, that as Antony moves closer to his death that his only companion by his side is Eros. This, I think, is deliberate on Shakespeare's part. Eros is one of Antony's trusted lieutenants. By the play's end—at least for Antony, Eros is the only "friend" he has left. As Antony speaks to Eros and pleads for him to kill him, Eros takes the sword and plunges it into himself. With Eros dead, Antony is also dead. For Antony dies soon after Eros' death.

The death of Eros also has consequences for Cleopatra. Because Cleopatra was Cleopatra when Antony was Antony, and with Antony now gone, Cleopatra can no longer be Cleopatra. So with Eros' death we rapidly move toward the death of Cleopatra. She cannot live in this world without Eros either.

As Cleopatra entered the world, she will also leave the world:  
Give me my robe, put on my crown, I have  
Immortal longings in me. Now no more  
The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip.  
Yare, yare, good Iras; quick: methinks I hear  
Antony's call: I see him rouse himself  
To praise my noble act. I hear him mock  
The luck of Caesar, which the gods give men  
To excuse their after wrath. Husband, I come:  
Now to that name my courage prove my title!

The heart surely does flutter as Cleopatra kisses Charmian and Iras and they all fall dead. Just as Cleopatra entered in crown and scepter at Antony's side, so she departs to join with Antony again with crown and scepter. Cleopatra was Queen of the World with Antony as her lover. For one is a queen when one has a lover. So to prove her title she returns to Antony in love as they cross over from this life to the next offered only in, and through, love.

Antony and Cleopatra is Shakespeare's most mature tragedy, dealing with the profound consequences that the politics of conquest have on the natural world—and the natural condition of the world is the world of love. Antony and Cleopatra must die because the world of love that they represent is being superseded by the world of bureaucratic managerial universalism represented by Octavius. After all, it is Octavius who utters those haunting words, "The time of universal peace draws near."

The pursuit of the politics of power under the guise of "universal peace" is nothing but a tragedy. Octavius is a slave in his victory. Antony and Cleopatra become one again and freed in their defeat. They are reunited again in that realm of abundant Love that never ends—Shakespeare reveals the Christian thematic symbolism of the play at the end, at least for those with the eyes to see and the ears to hear.

But the cold world of power politics is something to avoid. To be consumed with temporality of politics is to destroy Love. We can either be like Octavius and kill love in the name of politics and peace. Or we can be like Prospero and bless love, forsaking politics, and walk into an uncertain future—and perhaps, just perhaps, we might find something truly beautiful when the sun rises over the horizon.

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