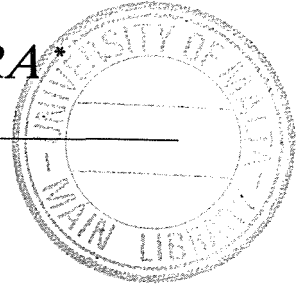


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# SHAKESPEARE'S NOTION OF MORALITY IN *ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA*\*

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I feel I ought to preface my lecture by stating that I shall focus in the main on *Antony and Cleopatra* as a specifically Roman play and that certain assumptions I shall make are implicit in the Roman plays as a whole and, to a certain extent, in Shakespeare's History plays. It is, indeed, in these plays that moral and political assumptions impinge on each other so that it sometimes happens that we gradually become aware that a political decision may be fraught with moral considerations and, vice-versa, a moral attitude, as I hope to demonstrate, may be harnessed to a political cause.

Shakespeare's interest in Roman history, or the great personages of Roman history, is something he imbibed with the prevalent spirit of the age and this was largely a matter of a conditioned response to history in general. The philosophical basis of the Elizabethan view of history encouraged by the propagators of the Tudor Myth was that set forth in Thomas Sackville's Induction to the *Mirror for Magistrates* (1559) as a process whereby discerning men could have a glimpse of the destiny of those who rose to fame or notoriety – a catalogue of Fate in which was reflected the rise and fall of Princes and States. The moral which was inculcated in the recording of history for the benefit of administrators (*magistrates*) was that they were expected to learn from the vicissitudes of those who were truly great by emulating their virtues and shunning their vices. This didactic attitude to history, or rather the exhortation to contemplate the lives of famous men by applying certain correspondences to their own times, is mostly evident in the interpolations in Sir Thomas North's fine translation of the French version (by Jacques Amyot) of Plutarch's *Lives*. This work

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entitled *The Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* was published in 1579. The subsequent editions in 1595, 1603 and 1612 were themselves evidence of the enormous popularity of this book with the Elizabethans. Shakespeare it seems owned his personal copy and used North's *Plutarch* as his prime source in *Julius Caesar*, *Timon of Athens*, *Coriolanus* and of course *Antony and Cleopatra*. The first question that comes to mind is: what was there in the matter of Rome the Great, as it was called, that was so appealing to Shakespeare and his contemporaries? To begin with, one would suggest that history was presented not as a series of facts somewhat loosely connected, but that the lives of the historical personages in this version of ancient history were dramatised and that the protagonists were given set speeches at a moment of importance or crisis. Secondly, a historian like Plutarch was not only concerned with writing historical biography: he did not hesitate to provide a moral running commentary on incident or situation, thereby endowing the behaviour of the protagonist with exemplary significance. A third reason was undoubtedly the interest generated by the chosen themes and subjects, which were largely of a political nature, and from which the Elizabethans themselves could derive moral edification. The most obvious instance here was that of the murder of Julius Caesar – with its moral ambiguity in relation to the justifiability or otherwise of Caesar's assassination. Added to all this was the implicit concept of *Romanitas* itself – the way a Roman of distinction was expected to behave in a set of circumstances and the correspondence between the nobility or otherwise of his behaviour which was often held as a paradigm for Elizabethan behavioural codes.

This code of honour or respectability is evident in Shakespeare's early and immature *Titus Andronicus* as well as in the mature *Coriolanus*. One aspect of *Romanitas* is portrayed in the Elizabethan refinement on the Senecan plays of Revenge, in the emergence of the Stoical avenger who in a difficult or impossible circumstance of adversity is obliged to take the law into his own hands and exact a kind of retribution after his own fashion. The focus in some of the Elizabethan versions of the popular Senecan plays (notably *Titus Andronicus*) is on grim endurance and a ruthless sweeping to one's revenge until that revenge eventually becomes more of an obsession than a code of honour. In the absence of human justice, the stoical avenger becomes a crazed justiciar.

Other aspects of *Romanitas* are more central to my purpose and I shall dwell briefly on their manifestation in Shakespeare's plays. The main aspect of the Roman theme was its respect for order and stability in the state, and the sense of duty felt by the citizens to preserve this order from civil strife and personal ambition. The

Respublica was likened by Elizabethan statesmen to the Commonwealth which was the Elizabethan term for “common good”. The leading citizens of Rome were imbued with a sense of nobility and integrity coupled with *pietas* – a sense of duty and loyalty to one’s fathers and one’s traditions which was to prevail over self-interest. Thus, according to Virgil, *pious* Aeneas (from whom the Roman Emperors were alleged to have descended) deserts the beautiful Dido, Queen of Carthage, who has fallen in love with him in order to follow the instructions of the Gods to found the state of Rome. Aeneas’s rather shabby abandoning of Dido after making love to her was in Elizabethan times cited as the supreme case of the virtuous Roman’s placing of duty before pleasure in his scale of priorities. Nobility and a sense of decorum were to be shown even in adversity, and this often took the form of death by suicide rather than capture by the enemy. A certain magnanimity towards the defeated was expected, though not always shown. In *Julius Caesar*, Brutus the protagonist, defeated at Philippi, resorts to self-annihilation in the true Roman fashion and we are told “Brutus only overcame himself/And no man else hath honour by his death”; and Antony, who hounded Brutus to his death, feels justified in exclaiming, “This was the noblest Roman of them all”. The ethos of the Roman world is forever present as a backdrop to *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*. These plays are largely but not exclusively concerned with power and the maintaining of political stability and, together with the history plays (*Richard II* and *Henry IV* in particular), they constitute Shakespeare’s profound study of personal motivation in politics. In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare concentrates on the behaviour of men in politics who conspire to eliminate a tyrant – it is the way they feel and argue and the extent to which they delude themselves that interests the playwright, rather than any abstract political principles involved – the minds of men and the relationship which properly binds men in the natural bonds of society interested Shakespeare far more than political abstractions. The political man errs (as Brutus does) by endeavouring to impose upon events an interpretation dictated by the bias of passion. As Cicero puts it:

Men may construe things after their fashion  
Clean from the purpose of the things themselves  
(I.iii. 34–5)

Even the political realist, Shakespeare implies, is inevitably drawn to the world of illusion.

Shakespeare’s Roman plays, by the dramatic re-enacting of moments of political and personal crisis in the lives of the great Romans, must have had the effect of corroborating the Elizabethan concept of the didactic value of History. From *Titus Andronicus* to

*Coriolanus* we have an implicit warning of the dangers besetting the State when citizens attempt to overthrow constituted authority. When Romans of rank and esteem fall out among themselves or fail to cooperate in promoting the general good, the result is often the plunging of the state into anarchy and ruin. Shakespeare conveys this in an interesting metaphor which he borrows from Plutarch and which he develops in *Coriolanus* – the “body politic” is compared to the human body by the patrician Menenius:

There was a time when all the body's members  
Rebell'd against the belly; they accused it  
That only like a gulf it did remain  
In the midst of the body, idle and unactive,  
Still cupboarding the viand, never bearing  
Like labour with the rest.

(I.i. 101 – 6)

The idea of stagnation and mutual distrust is reflected in the public issues of *Coriolanus* but these lines could just as well have been spoken by Octavius Caesar when he accused Antony of indulging his sensual appetites at the cost of neglecting his duties to the state.

One other reason may be adduced in attempting to explain why, as far as the Elizabethan reading public was concerned, the history of Rome had achieved such widespread popularity. North's version of Plutarch's *Lives* must have enforced the view that History was in some mysterious way connected with the Divine patterning of the Destiny of man. From a moral and aesthetic point of view it was linked with the concept of Divine retribution of “poetic justice”. Richard III on the night before the decisive battle of Bosworth in which he was to be defeated by Henry Tudor is visited by the ghosts of this former victims who persistently remind him that the day of reckoning has come and that he will be requited for his villainy. Similarly in *Julius Caesar* the ghost of Caesar stalks the streets of Rome to remind Brutus and the conspirators that justice has caught up with them:

And Caesar's spirit ranging for revenge  
With Ate by his side come hot from hell  
Shall in these confines with a monarch's voice  
Cry “havoc” and let slip the dogs of war.

(III.i. 271 – 4)

This notion of retributive justice extends to the tragedies, and in *Macbeth* the forces of retribution gather around Macduff and are poised to rid the land of the blood-thirsty tyrant Macbeth. It is, however, significantly absent in *King Lear* where Shakespeare adds a new dimension to the mysterious force of evil – a dimension which led Dr. Johnson to object to the play on the grounds that it lacked the

symmetry of “poetical justice”. Here Shakespeare’s insights into human nature and his understanding of human suffering made him transcend the confines imposed by historical patterning – as far as Shakespeare was concerned, it is the way of the world that the innocent must suffer with the guilty and that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children. Shakespeare instinctively must have realised that notions of poetic justice, while giving his plays a neat structure, tend to falsify life as he experienced it. The death of Cordelia, though cruel, was dramatically necessary.

Such observations are necessary, I believe, for our understanding of Shakespeare’s conception of the ancient world of Rome and his awareness of the moral edification most Elizabethans derived from the dramatic representation of the lives of famous men in antiquity. I now wish to focus on one of the most famous of his Roman plays – *Antony and Cleopatra*, written after *Julius Caesar* – and before *Coriolanus*. For the historical details of the play Shakespeare turned to Sir Thomas North’s translation of Plutarch’s collection of the Parallel Lives of the Greeks and the Romans which by Elizabethan standards was one of the great books of antiquity. Plutarch’s purpose in writing the Lives had been to put side by side parallel biographies of Greek and Roman men of eminence. Plutarch himself was actually a contemporary of the Emperor Nero (AD 54–68) and a Greek by birth. As a matter of fact, there seems to be quite a strong bias in favour of Greece in his juxtaposition of Greek and Roman Lives (for instance, Alexander of Macedonia is shown as a greater leader than Julius Caesar) and it is obvious from the frequent interpolations that he drew his ideals from Greece. North’s translation provided Shakespeare with an interesting historical perspective because both Plutarch and Shakespeare saw history in terms of human character and they both interpreted history (Ancient History) to Elizabethan society as a state of affairs in which outstanding men influenced and moulded events by their personal decisions based on traits in their own characters. There can be no doubt that North’s history influenced him deeply and that Shakespeare thought it fit to adopt some of the finest passages in North to his own purpose. One oft-cited example will serve to show how Shakespeare actually versified North’s vivid account of the tremendous impact of Cleopatra on Antony:

Therefore when she was sent unto by divers letters, both from Antonius himself and also from his friends, she made so light of it and mocked Antonius so much that she disdained to set forward otherwise but to take her barge in the river of Cydnus, the poop whereof was of gold, the sails of purple, and the oars of silver . . . And now for the person of herself: she was laid under a pavilion of cloth of gold of tissue, apparelled and attired like the goddess Venus commonly drawn in picture; and hard by her, on

either hand of her, pretty fair boys apparelled as painters do set forth god Cupid, with little fans in their hands with which they fanned wind upon her. Her ladies and gentlewomen also, the fairest of them were apparelled like the nymphs Nereides (which are the mermaids of the waters) and like the Graces, some steering the helm, others tending the tackle and ropes of the barge, out of the which there came a wonderful passing sweet savour of perfumes, that perfumed the wharf's side, pestered with innumerable multitudes of people.

The corresponding passage in *Antony and Cleopatra* is too well-known to quote but it is interesting to observe Shakespeare's method of collaborating with his sources. To begin with, he preserves the eloquence of his original, he condenses it and concentrates on the vacuum created by Cleopatra's extravagant presence. What is dramatically interesting is that Shakespeare puts this fine piece of poetry into the mouth of Enobarbus – a plain-speaking, hard-boiled and rather cynical Roman soldier who seems out of patience with his leader's infatuation with this Egyptian slut. Indeed the whole passage might appear incongruous when spoken by this rough and ready fellow, and we might reasonably expect it to be more appropriate if uttered by someone with finer feelings, someone like Demetrius or even Philo. But there seems to be an important and subtle reason for this – a reason in fact which lies at the very heart of Shakespeare's dramatic conception of the tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra as lovers who transcend the earthly confines of which they form part. Shakespeare was writing a play about love and power – about the fall of a great man ultimately descended from Hercules – ostensibly because he allowed himself to be enchanted by this sensual Egyptian “gypsy”. In Shakespeare's source Enobarbus is just a name, but in the play he is developed into a commentator on men and customs who provides a convenient point from which the tragedy of Antony is to be perceived. And yet for all Enobarbus's cynicism, there can be no denying the fact that Enobarbus too is fascinated by Cleopatra despite himself. It is precisely this fact that gives the play its moral ambivalence. Cleopatra does represent the antithesis of Roman values but there is no gainsaying her perennial fascination.

This brings me to a point central to *Antony and Cleopatra*: the problem of the play's moral ambivalence. Bernard Shaw put his finger on this issue in his rather facetious criticism of the play. His comments on Shakespeare, it is true, must always be taken with a pinch of salt since Shaw delighted in being deliberately perverse – but this critique of *Antony and Cleopatra*, in *Three Plays for Puritans* (1901), it must be admitted, has more than a grain of truth in that it is certainly perceptive:

Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* must needs be as intolerable to the true Puritan as

it is vaguely distressing to the ordinary healthy citizen, because after giving a faithful picture of the soldier broken down by debauchery, and the typical wanton in whose arms such men perish, Shakespeare finally strains all his huge command of rhetoric and stage pathos to give the theatrical sublimity to the wretched end of the business, and to persuade foolish spectators that the world was well lost by the twain.

Shaw's point, if we are to read between the lines, really is that Shakespeare seems to have lost his moral bearings somewhere in the play and that, realizing this, he suddenly attempts to endow Antony and Cleopatra with more dignity than they deserve and than the play should allow them. The operative word is *strains* in "Shakespeare finally strains all his huge command of rhetoric and stage pathos". But the fact remains that the play does achieve sublimity towards the end, and the latent feeling generated by the structure of the play really is that the world was well lost by the twain – to use Shaw's own words in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Shakespeare seems to suggest from the outset that there is no clear-cut moral stance from which we can judge the play. On the one hand Antony is to be rebuked for his "dotage"; that is, mindless infatuation – he is "fondly overcome by female charm" – and here Shaw's puritans would have pointed an accusing finger. On the the other hand there are definite hints in the play itself to the effect that Antony's feelings for Cleopatra really amount to a deep and ennobling love.

At this stage it would be illuminating to consider the way in which Shakespeare builds up the character of Antony's main antagonist, Octavius Caesar. On the political plane we have a clash of two personalities, each seeking to dominate the Roman Empire, and we are led to ask ourselves who is best suited to become sole ruler when the Triumvirate disintegrates, as it inevitably must. In Caesar's eyes, Antony is the abstract of all faults that all men follow – for Caesar, young in years, is old in wisdom and the wayward Antony in the play is old enough to be his father. Octavius Caesar at first sight might be taken for an embodiment of the cardinal virtue of right reason – a sort of youthful Palmer urging an older Sir Guyon to resist the snares of the enchantress in the Bower of Bliss. The situation really is that the eighteen-year-old heir to Julius Caesar feels morally justified in rebuking one of the finest generals of his day for his dalliance with this serpent of the Nile, urging him to be a good Roman – before the play is over Octavius has indeed become, it would seem, the quintessence of *Romanitas* in the play, an embodiment of those very qualities which Elizabethan moralists and statesmen revered. A closer look at the play should make us realise that instead Shakespeare portrays him as a cold and calculating young politician totally lacking in warmth and generosity. Antony, for all his folly and self-indulgence, emerges as

the better man. Caesar's greatness lies in his capacity to be successful in everything he does. Antony in fact comes close to the truth when he says of Octavius:

His coin, ships, legions,  
May be a coward's, whose ministers would prevail  
Under the service of a child as soon  
As in the command of Caesar

(III.xi. 22 – 5)

What Antony means of course is that Caesar's actual power lies in his ability to operate a smooth and efficient machine. Octavius Caesar's greatness is attributed to his lucky stars and not to his innate qualities – in Antony's words.

The very dice obey him  
And in our sports my better cunning faints  
Under his chance. If we draw lots, he speeds;  
His cocks do win the battle still of mine,  
When it is all to nought; and his quails ever beat mine . . .

(II.iii. 33 – 7)

It might be argued that this is a rather unfair assessment of Caesar since it is coloured by Antony's prejudice and need for self-justification. However, Caesar as he emerges from the play is to my mind Shakespeare's profound study of the Machiavellian statesman – the Machiavel, that is, not in the popular Elizabethan misconception of Machiavelli's writings where he became synonymous with arch-villainy or devilry frankly proclaimed to the audience (setting "murderous Machiavel to school"): Shakespeare had fully exploited this aspect of the Machiavel in *Richard III*. No, here we have a more subtle and more sophisticated version of the Machiavel – closer to Machiavelli's own notion of the astute and calculating politician who has acquired the quality of *virtù* (a quality which is difficult to define but by which Machiavelli seems to mean that astuteness which enables a statesmen to turn unfavourable situations to his advantage). Caesar's "nobility" in wanting to make peace with Antony, thereby patching up their animosity, is suspect – instead of convincing us of the love for his sister Octavia, we are made to see the offer of his sister in marriage to Antony as a political ruse to bind Antony to his own concept of order and self-restraint. Enobarbus's wry comment is of course prophetic of the way things will work out, for Octavia's "holy, cold and still conversation" will certainly not restrain Antony from seeking his Egyptian dish again. There is, in fact, a hint that this political marriage has been engineered by Caesar in order to provide a pretext for a final showdown with Antony. The imagery he uses in recommending his sister's virtue to Antony suggests this, I think:



Let not the piece of virtue which is set  
 Betwixt us as the cement of our love,  
 To keep it builded, be the ram to batter the  
 Fortress of it.

(III.ii. 28 – 31)

Octavia is here referred to as a “piece of virtue” cementing a love which is non-existent. Is not this an unconscious admission of his own forebodings? In Caesar’s view it is merely expedient for them to be friends. Moral righteousness is to this Machiavel a convenient stick with which to beat his political rival.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the political world is juxtaposed with the world of love in a manner which sharpens the ambivalence of the play’s central theme into tacit ironical comment. The galley scene in the play is an interesting instance of this. T. S. Eliot called it a “prodigious piece of political satire” – for Shakespeare seems to enjoy reducing worldly power to a kind of burlesque. Caesar, Lepidus and Antony drink complacently to their own unsteady alliance and get drunk in the process. Lepidus is maudlin and “stupid drunk” – he is also dull when he is not drunk – Antony indulges in witty nonsense, wise inanities, and Caesar, himself tipsy, frowns on the proceedings and is angry with himself. But for all this artificial gaiety, Shakespeare reminds us that it is the cold world of ruthless politics that they inhabit (far away from the warm climate of love). During this feasting Menas, the friend of Pompey, suggests to him that he might cut the ship’s cable and then the throats of the Triumvirs. Pompey’s reply is revealing:

Ah! this thou shouldst have done,  
 And not have spoke on’t. It me ’tis villainy;  
 In thee ’t had been good service . . .

(II.vii. 75 – 7)

and Pompey goes on to talk about his honour coming before his profit – hollow words indeed as Shakespeare makes his audience realise. There is another instance in the play where Shakespeare builds up a scene in order to deflate Octavius Caesar. The country bumpkin who brings a basket of figs to the trapped Cleopatra is in his own way an essential cog in the wheel of history, because he is the ultimate agent whereby Cleopatra can outwit conquering Caesar – the queen of Egypt aided by a country yokel can turn Caesar into an “ass unpolicied”.

As Cleopatra says:

’Tis paltry to be Caesar.  
 Not being Fortune, he’s but Fortune’s knave –  
 A minister of her will.

(V.ii. 2 – 4)

The imagery of Shakespeare's tragedies, as many Shakespearean commentators have noted, provides a tacit comment on their central theme. In this play, I would suggest, Shakespeare subverts most of the values of *Romanitas* established in the Roman plays. Plutarch had shown how the great Antony lost his chance of becoming master of the Roman Empire because of his irrational and un-Roman infatuation with this Egyptian seductress. Shakespeare gives this well-known theme a new dimension by showing us how the source of Antony's weakness becomes his strength. Antony's "dotage" is in fact love – and history has celebrated Antony's love for perennially fascinating Cleopatra – for their love has eclipsed Caesar's unquestionable power. The imagery of the play buttresses this notion – the vastness of the imagery associated with Antony extends his personality to universal and cosmic range. The sweet carefree dalliance of love itself – the passion of this Roman Mars for the Egyptian Venus – and the sheer poetry this inspires, has the effect of sublimating their relationship into an intense passion which transcends this "dungy earth" – the Roman world of prudence, caution, temperance, strategy, tactics and expediency is utterly rejected.

Well may Antony exclaim:

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch  
Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space.  
Kingdoms are clay; our dungy earth alike  
Feeds beasts as man; the nobleness of life  
Is to do thus, when such a mutual pair  
And such a twain can do't.

(I.i. 33 – 8)

Indeed in their infatuation, love, lust, call it what you will, this "demi-Atlas" of the world and his Egyptian serpent stand up "peerless". The Roman Empire is cribbed and confined by comparison with the limitless sphere these lovers inhabit. There is surely no straining here after effect, as Bernard Shaw would have us believe – Shakespeare is not hard put to it to contrive a sublime and fitting ending. The play flows naturally to its appointed end, which is not the defeat of Antony but the outwitting of the pragmatic Caesar, circumscribed as he undoubtedly is by the very earth he has conquered, by luck, strategy and guile. And yet Shakespeare refuses to allow his audience to think of these lovers as an ideal couple perfectly suited to one another. In his rage Antony can be brutal and he can make his beloved recoil in horror – "I found you as a morsel cold upon Dead Caesar's trencher". Their quarrels and reproaches are terrestrial – there is violence and bitterness, but their passion burns too fiercely to be extinguished by their sensuality.

It is tempting to dwell at length on Shakespeare's supreme creation — Cleopatra herself. How well Shakespeare understood human nature and those attributes of femininity which play havoc with men's reason! Her passionate intensity vitalises the play and she dominates throughout. She is a amoral, loose, "cunning past men's thought", reproachful, amorous, mundane, sublime and after her own fashion falsely true to Antony. Equally charming when she slaps the messenger for bringing bad news, when she taunts Antony or when she wheedles the information about Octavia that she would like to hear. She is a flirt to the very end — she even flirts with death, seen as "a lover's pinch, Which hurts and is desired". In Cleopatra the sensual and immortal become one, for Death is an apotheosis, an exalted sphere whence the lovers can look down and mock the luck of Caesar. Her immortal longings make Cleopatra transcend the world of puny mortals. She may be an "incorrigible exhibitionist", as a critic put it, but the dignity and sublimity of her leave-taking frustrate the indignity that Caesar had planned for her:

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.  
 ..... Methinks I hear  
 Antony 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 . . .

(V.ii. 277–84)

And what a superb touch on Shakespeare's part to make her want to rush to the curled Antony, who will make demand of her servant Iras if she should reach him first. She is the divine Cleopatra to the very end, even when she performs a truly Roman deed by taking her life.

There is a point I wish to make about Shakespeare's attitude or dramatic stance in this play. In his brilliant study of Western drama entitled *The Birth of Tragedy*, the philosopher Nietzsche focused on the question of moral consciousness in relation to tragedy, especially the tension which Nietzsche thought existed between the equilibrium of moral order which underlies the tragedy and the blind dynamic urge to destroy that order and create afresh. The term Apollonian stands for the "rapt repose" in the presence of a visionary world — the world of desired structure and order. On the other hand, counteracting this force is a power equal and opposite which is inherent in the finer Greek tragedies, an element which Nietzsche calls the Dionysian strain — the artist shrugs off moral strictures and abandons himself to voluptuous creativity, thereby undermining this notion of order and

clarity by constructing and destroying. In Shakespearean tragedy the audience is given its moral bearings by the end of the first Act. In *Othello* and *Macbeth* the distinction between moral good and evil is clear-cut. Iago's manipulation of Othello is vile and Macbeth's murder of Duncan is a damnable act. But in *Antony and Cleopatra* the dramatist obviously does not mean the audience to share Philo's moral strictures on Antony, roundly expressed at the beginning of the play, that he has in effect been transformed into a "strumpet's fool". The Dionysian forces in the play seem to outweigh the Apollonian elements of clarity and moderation. There is a substratum of repressed anarchical forces which erupt in the form of fine poetry enhancing the carefree and amoral world of the lovers and indirectly accentuating the moral stuffiness of all things Roman. Perhaps as a dramatist Shakespeare may well have felt this tension within himself – and in this play he resists the tendency to allow moral attitudes to strait-jacket, as it were, the drift of the play. Shakespeare, I would suggest, was far too great a dramatist to allow an inhibiting moral structure to curb the autonomy of his artistic creativeness. In this sense, *Antony and Cleopatra* could be regarded as the most Dionysian of Shakespeare's plays.