Individuation and Development of Character Through Language in
Antony and Cleopatra

ROBERT D. HUME

In some of Shakespeare's plays—Love's Labour's Lost, for example—a linguistic character-typology is quite plain. In others it is less evident. Few of us would say with Tolstoy that all of Shakespeare's characters sound alike, but neither would many say with Pope that we could properly assign all the speeches if the speakers were unidentified. Studies of Shakespeare's language have tended to be either technical and descriptive or devoted to the general poetic effect of the language, particularly the imagery. Here I wish to study not the general effect but the specific function of the language as it contributes to the dramatization of individual characters. I have selected Antony and Cleopatra as my example for a number of reasons. First, it exhibits Shakespeare's style in full maturity. Second, none of its characters (save the Clown) is sharply differentiated for satiric purposes or on social grounds. Third, the contribution of the characters' language to the impression they create seems to me striking, and it has been seriously underrated. S. L. Bethell has gone so far as to argue that "there is, in fact, no attempt to differentiate characters by the verse they speak, except to some extent with Octavius Caesar, whose verse is normally dull and flat and impersonal, or else staccato as he issues orders." I


2 Caroline Spurgeon long ago suggested that imagery could be used to trace the changes in Falstaff's character (Shakespeare's Imagery [Cambridge, Eng., 1965; orig. 1935], Appendix VII, pp. 377-80), and M. M. Morozov has demonstrated the consistency with which Shakespeare associated images with characters and the way in which shifts in "characteristic" imagery can reflect the development of a play ("The Individualization of Shakespeare's Characters Through Imagery," Shakespeare Survey 2 [1949], pp. 83-106).

When characters are satirized they are often set apart by their speech. For discussion of this technique see Arthur H. King, The Language of Satirized Characters in Poëtaster (Lund Studies in English X; Lund, 1941), and, more specifically, Leonard Prager, "The Language of Shakespeare's Low Characters: An Introductory Study," Unpubl. Diss. (Yale, 1957). Here, however, I am concerned with a less obvious kind of linguistic individualization. I am well aware that we tend to read speeches in accordance with our conception of the characters to whom they belong (see the caveat of James Sutherland, "How the Characters Talk," in Shakespeare's World, Sutherland and Hurstfield edd., [New York, 1964], p. 119); such a warning may serve to make us more critical of our impressions, but it should not rule out all attempts at this kind of investigation.

wish to show, on the contrary, that the characters are sharply differentiated by their language.

Explanation of my method is clearly in order. Two general points should be made clear. First, I am interested only in what seems to contribute significantly to the aesthetic impact of the play; that is, I am not using the work as a linguistic sample or document. Second, I am unwilling to depend on "orthographic" data. So the evidence I wish to consider can be described in the following three categories: sound, rhetoric, and personal habit.

I. Sound:

1. Words: different characters may use words which emphasize different consonant or vowel sounds.
2. Rhythm: regularity, irregularity, and length of sentence-span contribute to our reaction to a character.

II. Rhetoric:

1. The patterns of a character's thought may be an index to his ways of thinking.
2. The terms (including imagery) used by and about a person—his habitual language—help characterize him.

III. Deviations:

Certain personal habits or deviations from more normal usage—e.g., repetition, wordplay, ellipsis—contribute strikingly to the impression a character makes.

Having described such categories I wish to ignore them, as categories, as far as possible. To present evidence of this sort analytically by character or type of evidence is to oversimplify. Here I prefer to start by describing the basic structural contrasts in characteristic language, and then to proceed to show in further detail how they function within the pattern and context of the play. I offer this analysis not in the hope of finding evidence for a radical reinterpretation of Antony and Cleopatra, but simply to show in some detail how the distinctively personal speech of each individual contributes to our apprehension of his character.

In this section I wish to discuss the structural (as opposed to the atmospheric) significance of the language. Certainly recurrent images do help characterize a play, though as Wolfgang Clemen says, "we are generally quite unaware of the fact that they create atmosphere," since "such expressions appear to us entirely natural in their place." (Much the same thing, I believe, can be said of.

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4 On the questionable reliability of such evidence see A. C. Partridge, Orthography in Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama (London, 1964).
5 In connection with "sound" it should be recollected that Shakespeare probably wrote each part with a specific actor's voice in mind for it.
6 Clemen, p. 160.
their contribution to character.) Various sorts of imagery have been noted in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Caroline Spurgeon calls attention to images of grandeur; Clemen offers an excellent discussion of the significance of sea, astronomical, light-dark, and fortune imagery, while pointing out the duality of the descriptions of Cleopatra; two recent studies show how Shakespeare used death imagery to create anticipation of his conclusion.7

But here I am concerned with the relation of language to character, or, more specifically, with demonstrating the contribution of language to contrasts between characters. There are six characters in *Antony and Cleopatra* who by virtue of prominence or function are of particular significance. To lend substance to what can seem like insubstantial assertions of differences, I have worked from lists (appended in the footnotes) of what seems to me “striking” language. This procedure is necessarily somewhat subjective: I have simply listed for each character words and phrases which are repeated or somehow distinctive. Some phrases are too standard to attract such attention; others (Clemen’s sea-images, for instance) are evidently meant to characterize the play, but do not divide among individual characters. But though in their very nature these lists cannot be definitive, they can serve as a rough index to characteristic language.

Consider the basic conflicts of the play. Antony, Caesar, and Lepidus, the “triple pillars of the world,” are being challenged by Pompey. Antony and Caesar (as their language indicates) are by far the most powerful of the four. When they come into conflict Antony is torn between the appeals of Rome and Egypt. Structurally, Caesar is set against Cleopatra with Antony vacillating between the positions they represent. The Roman world is coldly rational and proper; the Egyptian is emotional, at once exalted and degraded. In Enobarbus we are shown in microcosm the dilemma of Antony’s followers, torn between personal loyalty and Roman rationality. These basic conflicts and contrasts are reinforced by parallel divisions in the characters’ language; what I wish to demonstrate initially is just how sharply Shakespeare individuated his characters.

To start with the most obvious example, consider Lepidus, who is allegedly coequal with Antony and Caesar.9 He says almost nothing, usually contenting himself with such interjections as “here’s more news” (I. iv. 33).10 What is remarkable is the concentration in so few lines of so many phrases like “beseech,” “entreat,” “let me,” and “pray you”; he is always begging in a bleating voice to which the sound of “beseech” and “entreat” seems very appropriate. He is obsequious even to Enobarbus:

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7 Spurgeon, pp. 349-54; Clemen, chap. 16; Katherine Vance Macmullan, “Death Imagery in *Antony and Cleopatra*,” *SQ* XIV (1963), 399-410; Sheila M. Smith, “‘This Great Solemnity’: A Study of the Presentation of Death in *Antony and Cleopatra*,” *ES*, XLV (1964), 163-76.
8 E.g., “fortunes proud” (II. v. 63); “vulgar fame” (III. xiii. 110); death’s “pestilent scythe” (III. xiii. 194); “like a man of steel” (IV. iv. 33); “hacked targets . . . brazen din” (IV. viii. 31, 36); “tearing groan” (IV. xiv. 31).
9 References are to the Pelican edition, ed. Maynard Mack (Baltimore, 1960).
10 *Lepidus*. For characteristic and striking words and phrases of Lepidus, see the following passages: I. iv. 12-13, 82, 83. II. ii. 1, 2, 3, 13, 14, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 83, 98, 102, 170. II. iv. 1, II. vi. 29. II. vii. 24, 26, 27, 40, 47. III. ii. 65-66.
Good Enobarbus, 'tis a worthy deed,
And shall become you well, to entreat your captain
To soft and gentle speech.

(II. ii. 1-3)

The address "good Enobarbus" is characteristic of Lepidus almost to the point of caricature, though "noble" is his more usual form.\(^1\) The use of "your captain" makes it sound as though he thinks of Caesar as his own—which is substantially true. *Quiet* is another of his motifs (none of Antony's "thunder" for him); he dislikes "loud" dispute (l. 21) and is continually begging for "soft" and "gentle" speech, for he fears "passion" and wishes to "stir no embers up" (ll. 12-13). When, in a polite afterthought, Antony says "Let us, Lepidus,/ Not lack your company" (II. ii. 169-70), Lepidus replies: "Noble Antony,/ Not sickness should detain me" (ll. 170-71; my italics). Lepidus thinks in small, everyday terms; for him, sickness is as grand a thing as might oppose his going. Antony might have said: "the gods themselves shall not prevent me." Only twice does Lepidus' speech rise above the timid and pedestrian, and both times it is concerning Antony (I. iv. 10-15; III. iii. 65-66).\(^2\) Clearly Lepidus is not the man to stand his ground against Antony and Caesar.

In a similar way Pompey's relative ineffectuality is underscored.\(^3\) *Honor* and *justice* are his key concepts. For example, II. vi. 8-23 is on the theme of honor and justice to his father as a reason for his actions; ll. 26-29 are about Antony taking his father's house; in ll. 39-46 he objects to Antony's ingratitude; in ll. 53-56 he says that his heart will never be subject to fortune; that is, honor will direct him, not selfish motives. And indeed, on this ground, Pompey refuses Menas' offer to make him "the earthly Jove" by killing the others (II. vii. 72-79). Pompey claims equality with the "triple pillars," but linguistically he does not place himself on their level. Caesar and Antony are called (in play) "Jupiter" and "the god of Jupiter" (III. ii. 9-10), and Antony is regularly described in terms of the gods, but Pompey appeals to the gods as superior powers (II. i. 1-5; 50-52).\(^4\) And when a compromise is reached Pompey sounds like Lepidus when he says, "I crave our composition may be written" (II. vi. 58).

In the principal conflict of the play Antony and Caesar are opposed, with the views and demands of Rome and Egypt as a background. The characteristic Egyptian language of Cleopatra is utterly different from the speech of Caesar; there is no significant overlap whatever. It has long been recognized that

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\(^1\) Hence the ironic point of Agrippa's "noble Lepidus" (III. ii. 6).

\(^2\) The latter case (III. ii. 65-66) is debatable, for the whole passage is fraught with problems; but the remark is plainly addressed to Antony, Octavia, or both, and the astronomical reference does fit the pattern associated with Antony.

\(^3\) *Pompey* (characteristic words and phrases): II. i. 1, 2, 21, 22, 33, 24, 25, 26, 27, 33. II. vi. 10, 58. II. vii. 75, 76.

\(^4\) Pompey apparently once speaks of himself in the terms of astronomical self-reference we associate with Antony's grandeur ("My powers are crescent," II. i. 10), though he promptly undermines the effect by calling the threat he poses "petty" (l. 34), but on the evidence of the *OED* the astronomical connotation for "crescent" seems dubious at this date.
Antony and Cleopatra exhibit a striking duality in their imagery. The grand is set against the degraded. There is a soaring, often astronomical terminology which they use again and again: heaven, moon, sun, earth, stars, space, kingdom, wide arch of ranged empire, world, ocean, fire, air, tree imagery, great sphere, eternity, orb, thunder. Set against this imagery of transcendental grandeur are terms of degradation, poison, treachery, and decay: snakes, slime, poison, serpents, cistern, discandying, gnats, flies, sty, dung, mud, breeding serpent's poison, ooze, creeps, dungy earth. This combination of the high and low accurately mirrors the ambiguous nature of the protagonists, and it can be seen again in the terms used to describe them.

Caesar’s language is nothing like this. What is startling about it is its almost total lack of vivid terms or striking characteristics. When Caesar wishes to be vivid he speaks in terms of “hoop,” “fortress,” and “cement,” for he is an immensely practical man, but as a rule he is very sparing of images and descriptive terms. Even in his relatively higher flights Caesar remains pedestrian: he thinks of “an army for an usher,” or a “mate in empire.” And almost every instance of vivid speech or grand description from Caesar is occasioned by Antony. Caesar normally states matters of fact, occasionally marked by the intrusion of a moral stance: he disapproves of sex and revelry (e.g., I. iv. 16-33; 55-71; II. vii. 98-99; III. vi. 1-11). There is never any grandeur in Caesar’s speech, and never anything degraded. He speaks with contempt and loathing of the common people, but usually in such rather abstract terms as a “common body . . . lackingey the varying tide”; his strongest description of them is as “knaves that smell of sweat,” which is far less vivid than Cleopatra’s

mechanic slaves
With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers shall
Uplift us to the view. In their thick breaths,
Rank of gross diet, shall we be enclouded,
And forced to drink their vapor.

(V. ii. 209-13)

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20 Thus Antony is called “plated Mars” (I. i. 4), “Herculean Roman” (I. iii. 84), “demi-Atlas” (I. v. 23), “a Mars” (II. v. 117), “a Jove” (IV. vi. 29), a “star” (IV. xiv. 106), and “crown o’ th’ earth” (IV. xv. 63), but he can also be called “a strumpet’s fool” (I. i. 13), “a doting mallard” (III. x. 20), and “old ruffian” (IV. i. 4). Similarly Cleopatra, a “royal wench” (II. ii. 237) and “lass unparalleled” (V. iii. 315), is called “gypsy” (I. i. 10; IV. xii. 28), “Egyptian dish” (II. vi. 123), “ribauded nag of Egypt,” “cow in June” (III. x. 10, 14), and “triple-turned whore” (IV. xii. 13). She herself understands the Roman point of view (I. ii. 79), and can refer to herself in the Roman food imagery as “a morsel for a monarch” (I. v. 31).

21 *Caesar* (characteristic words and phrases): I. iv. 17, 21, 43, 46. II. ii. 115-16. II. vii. 98-99. III. ii. 29-31. III. vi. 44. IV. i. 4. V. i. 15, 16, 19, 39-40, 43. V. ii. 183, 346.
Cleopatra feels intensely all that she describes. Caesar does not. His abstract and dispassionate speech gives the impression that he is a man of little feeling or imagination. Only Octavia seems to rouse any personal feeling in him (III. ii.; vi.).

Antony's vacillation between the Roman and Egyptian worlds is clearly reflected in his language. The bulk of his characteristic terms he shares with Cleopatra: astronomy, mud, melting, death. But when his dormant ambition is stirred he can take the Roman view, as in "These strong Egyptian fetters I must break/ Or lose myself in dotage" (I. ii. 112-13; cf. Philo, I. 1. 1-10). When Antony decides to return to Rome (I. ii.) and after he has suffered defeat (III. xii., xiii.; IV. xii.), he uses such terms as "Egyptian fetters," "dotage," "enchanting queen" (picking up the Roman view that Cleopatra was ensnaring him by witchcraft), "morsel cold...trencher," "foul Egyptian," "charm," "gypsy," "spell," "witch." As the scene by scene list shows, when in Rome Antony hardly ever uses "Egyptian" terms. In fact, he uses very little striking imagery at all; competing with Caesar, Antony adopts his language. Thus in II. ii, he uses horse-world imagery (cf. Caesar, V. i. 39-40), and in II. iii. building terms (I. 6; cf. Caesar, III. ii. 29-31).

Cleopatra's imagery is mostly of the dual Egyptian variety already mentioned. She also uses some of the widely prevalent sea-imagery (e.g., "anchor his aspect," I. v. 33). Her wiles and cunning charm appear in such expressions as "trade in love" (II. v. 2) or "amorous pinches" (I. v. 28), and particularly in her fishing imagery, the ambivalence in which is expressed by Caesar as he surveys her dead body: she looks "as she would catch another Antony/ In her strong toil of grave" (V. ii. 345-46). This peculiar ambivalence is found again and again. For instance, like Antony, Cleopatra uses "melting" to describe both death and the supremacy of love (a pointed coupling): compare "Let Rome in Tiber melt" (I. i. 33) with "the crown o' th' earth doth melt" (IV. xv. 63). And when Cleopatra threatens a messenger she proposes to melt gold and pour it down his throat (II. v. 34-35). But while there is a certain grandeur to these uses of "melt," both protagonists can also use "melt" and "discandy" in an unpleasant way when they refer to dissolution into formless stickiness (e.g., III. xiii. 165; IV. xii. 22).

In the range of the imagery we can see latent the development of the whole play. Caesar's language does not possess the grandeur which makes the protagonists tragic, but neither does it reflect the degradation which is their undoing. The play balances precariously between extremes. We do not have here a glorification of "all for love"; rather, as in Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, we are shown a tragic fall, though with a persuasive and sensitive presentation of the temptation. Caesar's condemnation of the lovers is far from being the whole story, but close study of characteristic language can serve to remind us not to overromanticize them. Antony and Cleopatra are grand, but they clearly suffer from folly and degradation, and this is unerringly reflected in the language used by and about them.

Perhaps our best perspective on Antony and Cleopatra is through Enobar-
bus. He alone of the other characters straddles the Roman and Egyptian worlds. He is equally at home among Roman soldiers (II. vi.) and in the seamy luxury of Cleopatra's court (I. ii.). He can call Cleopatra Antony's "Egyptian dish" (II. vi. 123), but understands very well her appeal. It is no accident that the "barge speech" is his, for though the hyperbolic language "belongs" to Cleopatra, the sensitivity and perceptive ness of the description are Enobarbus' own. Even when he is being sarcastic to Antony at her expense, his response to her charm is plain (e.g., I. ii. 143-48). Like Antony, Enobarbus would be quite incapable of walking into the presence of Cleopatra and her ladies, and enquiring, as Caesar does, "which is the Queen of Egypt?" (V. ii. 112).

Enobarbus' character is underscored by his language, which is plain, blunt, and down-to-earth. His imagery is concrete and earthy; he thinks naturally in everyday terms: food, drink, weather, and sex. For him gods are tailors, women clothes, fortune a sword cut, and onions the source of tears. Caesar too is a practical man, but his speech has nothing like the concreteness characteristic of Enobarbus, who draws easily on such common occupations as hunting and sailing for his metaphors (e.g., "the wounded chance of Antony," and "my reason sits in the wind against me," III. x. 36-37). In Enobarbus we can follow the reactions of a sturdy, sensible Roman who is bound by personal loyalty and some imaginative sympathy to Antony. Not surprisingly, since Enobarbus' ultimate commitment is to Antony, his characteristic imagery of food, drink, and water is given ambiguous connotations. What can seem merely blunt and convivial can become unpleasant, as in

Then, world, thou hast a pair of chaps, no more;  
And throw between them all the food thou hast,  
They'll grind the one the other.  
(III. v. 12-14)

and "Egyptian dish," or "valor preys on reason."  

What should be evident now—even from so cursory an inspection of "characteristic" language—is that there are strikingly personal linguistic characterizations and contrasts in Antony and Cleopatra. Two techniques are in evidence. When Shakespeare merely sketched in a character he strongly emphasized a few traits. Pompey's preoccupation with honor and justice (incongruous in these surroundings), and Lepidus' bleating "beseech" theme and soft-quiet-gentle motif are clear indications that they will not survive. Such a technique applied

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19 Enobarbus (characteristic words and phrases): I. i. 11-12, 44, 145, 146, 147, 158-60, 161, 163, 165, 166. II. ii. 5-8, 110, 179, 183, 191-206, 207-219, 221, 225, 227, 238. II. vi. 73, 84, 86, 92, 104, 117-119, 123, 124. II. vii. 93, 104, 112-17. III. ii. 5, 20, 51, 59. III. v. 12-14, 13. III. vii. 7. III. x. 36, 36-37. III. xiii. 35, 63, 64, 199. 200. IV. ii. 24, 34, 35. IV. vi. 38. IV. ix. 7, 13, 17.

20 Compare the similar way in which breeding imagery (often used by Antony and Cleopatra) is made ambiguous throughout the play. Idleness hatches ills (I. ii. 125-26); "breeding" may yield "a serpent's poison" (II. 188-90); "mud" breeds the "crocodile" (II. vii. 24-27); Enobarbus objects to serving "with horse and mares together" (III. vii. 7); Cleopatra is called "a cow in June" (III. x. 14); yet Antony and Cleopatra swear, rather grandly (irresponsibly?) by "the fire that quickens Nilus' slime" (e.g., I. iii. 68-69). In this play the usual connotations of birth and fertility are sharply modified: ought this to influence our reaction to Cleopatra's final "baby at my breast" (V. ii. 308), usually taken as a symbol of fertile married love? In view of the irony already inherent in the statement, I think so.
at greater length would quickly lead to gross caricature, but used in brief it is an economical way of indicating character. In the fuller presentation of the other four there is no need for such shorthand. Instead, each one is allowed to speak in appropriate, thoroughly individual terms.

"Horizontally," the radical split in imagery between Rome and Egypt emphasizes the incommensurability of their standards. Antony wavers between them but must choose decisively, for they are mutually exclusive. Consequently Caesar, totally committed to Rome, can have no understanding of what motivates him. "Vertically," the extreme duality of the Egyptian imagery contains the essential paradox of the tragedy. The Egyptian way is base; it leads to ruin and death. Not surprisingly, both lovers are selfish and treacherous. Yet somehow there is something in their lives exalted beyond the comprehension of Caesar. That we feel their grandeur is largely a function of their imagery, for there is little in their self-indulgent folly to rouse esteem in us. It is the highest part of their feeling as it comes through the language which affects us and commands our admiration.

II

My object in this section is to analyze the linguistic contrasts as Shakespeare sets them up at the outset of the play; in the next I will follow their development. I do not wish to seem to over stress the first appearances of the characters. I am concentrating on them because it seems to me that Shakespeare went to some trouble to indicate immediately through language the nature of each person. Characteristic language may later be subordinated to the exigencies of plot, but at the outset it is emphasized in order to establish it firmly. We might say that Shakespeare started by offering a set of contrasts, some of whose components he later altered as the progression of the play demanded.

Antony's relation to Cleopatra is shown immediately in the first scene. He speaks of love in terms of heaven and earth (ll. 15, 17); the grandiosity of his declaration of love exceeds by far in its sweep and force anything Caesar will say in the course of the play:

Let Rome in Tiber melt and the wide arch
Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space,
Kingdoms are clay: our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man. The nobleness of life
Is to do thus; when such a mutual pair
And such a twain can do't, in which I bind,
On pain of punishment, the world to weet
We stand up peerless.

(I. i. 33-40)

Here at once we have the "Egyptian" combination of grand and base, empire versus dungy earth and feeding. Though the phrases are short, they lend themselves to forceful declamation (note the alliterations of the final lines). Antony's response to the arrival of messengers with news is "Grates me! The sum" (I. i. 18)—irresponsible, but very much the reply of a man utterly used to command.
For all this, it is Cleopatra who holds the initiative. Her fanciful speculation about the news (I.19-24) leaves Antony gasping, "How, my love?" (l.24). In I.iii. she again demonstrates her ability to keep him off balance, as his responses show: "Now, my dearest queen" (l.17); "What's the matter?" (l.18); "The gods best know" (l.24); "Cleopatra" (l.26); "Most sweet queen" (l.31); "How now, lady?" (l.39). Here it is only with the utmost trouble that Antony manages to assert his Roman ambition. Cleopatra is supposed to be a fascinating woman of infinite variety. Shakespeare could not describe her physical charms, and the first scene is as close as he dared come to a love scene with these slightly tawdry middle-aged lovers; so he had to find some other way of indicating Cleopatra's appeal. In large part he managed this by giving her varied rhythms and an unpredictable imagination which, as we have seen, leaves Antony's slower mind floundering far behind.

Cleo. Nay, hear them, Antony.
Fulvia perchance is angry; or who knows
If the scarce-bearded Caesar have not sent
His pow'rful mandate to you, 'Do this, or this;
Take in that kingdom, and enfranchise that.
Perform't, or else we damn thee.'

Antony How, my love?

Cleo. Perchance? Nay, and most like:
You must not stay here longer, your dismissal
Is come from Caesar; therefore hear it, Antony.
Where's Fulvia's process? Caesar's I would say? both?
Call in the messengers. As I am Egypt's Queen,
Thou bluesth, Antony, and that blood of thine
Is Caesar's homager: else so thy cheek pays shame
When shrill-tongued Fulvia scolds. The messengers!
(I.19-32)

Here Cleopatra stops and goes; she can pause quickly three times in succession and then pour out an unbroken line. The freedom of her verse helps convey, as no mere description could do, her infinite variety. Particularly early in the play, when she is rather skittish, the rhythm of her speech is highly variable.

No variety at all is Caesar's characteristic. His verse is clear and regular; it must be delivered at an even rate, for the regular pauses and the sameness of words adapted to crisp pronunciation make much variation impractical. All this contributes to the "flat" quality noted by Bethell. Cleopatra's verse, in a dramatic contrast of "Egyptian" versus "Roman," particularly lends itself to variation in speed and emphasis. The irregular pattern of her pauses practically demands a reading of irregular ebb and flow, so the reader can accelerate and slow down again without an awkward scramble. The result is a personal speaking voice quite distinct from Caesar's impersonal formality.

We meet Antony's fellow triumvirs as they are discussing his dereliction of duty. Caesar's first words are a self-justification, a particular habit of his (I.iv.1-10). Lepidus' response is revealing:

I must not think there are
Evils enow to darken all his goodness:
His faults, in him, seem as the spots of heaven,
More fiery by night's blackness; hereditary
Rather than purchased, what he cannot change
Than what he chooses.

(l. 10-15)

This reads quickly and lightly. It is the speech of a man habitually deferential; neither Antony nor Caesar would start a speech "I must not think..." The grand images of this speech "belong" to Antony. Compare Caesar's reply:

You are too indulgent. Let's grant it is not
Amiss to tumble on the bed of Ptolemy,
To give a kingdom for a mirth, to sit
And keep the turn of tippling with a slave,
To reel the streets at noon, and stand the buffet
With knaves that smell of sweat...

(ll. 16-21)

Here alliteration and plosive consonants create the dominant sound. "T," "d," "k," and "g" are prominent. Caesar's crisp consonants give a sense of hardness which Lepidus' milder speech does not convey—it is impossible to say "to tumble on the bed of Ptolemy" very mildly. Lepidus "must not think"; he is unwilling to render judgment. Caesar does so in four words: "You are too indulgent." In the discussion which ensues Caesar has about fifty lines, a nameless messenger fifteen, and Lepidus two interjections: "Here's more news" (33) and "'Tis pity of him" (71). At the end of the scene Lepidus' final comment underlines his subservient place:

Farewell, my lord. What you shall know meantime
Of stirs abroad, I shall beseech you, sir,
To let me be partaker.

(ll. 81-83; my italics)

No doubt should remain about the probability of Lepidus' deposition.

Our introduction to Pompey (II.i.) undercuts him less drastically than this, but nonetheless its import is clear-cut. His first words establish his "justice" motif: "If the great gods be just, they shall assist/ The deeds of justest men" (ll. 1-2). In his first extended speech Pompey muses on his position:

I shall do well:
The people love me, and the sea is mine;
My powers are crescent, and my auguring hope
Says it will come to th' full. Mark Antony
In Egypt sits at dinner, and will make
No wars without doors. Caesar gets money where
He loses hearts. Lepidus flatters both,
Of both is flattered; but he neither loves,
Nor either cares for him.

(ll. i. 8-16)
He starts here with a firm declarative statement and adduces evidence in support of it. His self-applied, possibly astronomical image marks him as a leader of magnitude, which he is. The language is firm enough, though a little “soft” by Caesar’s consonantal standards. What is lacking are logical connectives: there is no proposition in this catalog of data and Pompey appears to be reassuring himself. This impression is strengthened by his reaction to the news that Caesar and Lepidus are in the field. First he denies it: “Where have you this? ’Tis false” (l. 18). Next he pooh-poohs the idea: “He dreams: I know they are in Rome together,/ Looking for Antony” (ll. 19-20; my italics). Finally, he goes into an elaborate invocation, asking that Antony may not be roused:

But all the charms of love,
Salt Cleopatra, soften thy waned lip!
Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both!
Tie up the libertine in a field of feasts,
Keep his brain fuming. Epicurean cooks
Sharpen with cloyless sauce his appetite,
That sleep and feeding may prorogue his honor
Even till a Lethe’d dulness—

(ll. 20-27; my italics)

The rhythm here is as dreamy as Pompey’s hope that Cleopatra will lull Antony into inaction. Notice that the speech is a denigration of the senses. Pompey’s overriding concerns are honor and justice, and in the design of the play these are set against the sensual life which Cleopatra represents. Though the contrast is less developed, Pompey is as far on one side of Caesar as Cleopatra is on the other. If Antony is torn between the sensual world of Cleopatra and the power politics of Caesar, so he has, as Caesar does not, some sense of the “honor” of which Pompey speaks (l. 26). Morally, Pompey takes much the view of Antony’s revels that Caesar does: compare his attitude toward the “amorous surfeiter” (l. 33) with Caesar’s condemnation of “lascivious wassails” (l. iv. 56). Faced with certain news of Antony’s arrival, Pompey reacts revealingly:

I could have given less matter
A better ear. Menas, I did not think
This amorous surfeiter would have donned his helm
For such a petty war. His soldieryship
Is twice the other twain. But let us rear
The higher opinion that our stirring
Can from the lap of Egypt’s widow pluck
The ne’er lust-wearied Antony.

(ll. 31-38)

The use of “petty war,” as has been noted, belies the grand imagery of his first speech. And as his first sentence indicates, Pompey rather flinches from the bad news. Compare Antony’s firm “Well, what worst?” (I. ii. 90). His first reaction is discouragement, but then he manages to interpret the news as testimony to his own importance. Again we may feel that Pompey is trying to reassure himself. He is honest enough to recognize that the triumvirs will probably
settle their own differences long enough to face him (ll. 42-49), but after this chain of clear reasoning he throws it all up: "Be't as our gods will have't. It only stands/ Our lives upon to use our strongest hands" (ll. 50-51). This is irrelevant to what has gone before. Pompey accepts the challenge and will fight as best he can, but with a feeling of fatalism which bodes his chances no good.

Pompey is noble, but less than logical (ellipsis is a characteristic of his—see ll. 16, 36, 49) as becomes strikingly apparent in his confrontation with the triumvirs (II. vii.). He opens with a disconcertingly disconnected sentence: "Your hostages I have, so have you mine; / And we shall talk before we fight" (ll. 1-2). The hostages are not, of course, the prime reason for the parley, as this implies. Caesar's characteristic reply is precise, logical, and utterly to the point:

Most meet
That first we come to words, and therefore have we
Our written purposes before us sent;
Which if thou hast considered, let us know
If 'twill tie up thy discontented sword . . .
(Il. 2-6; my italics)

Pompey's reply (ll. 8-23) is an elliptical harangue which does not answer Caesar's question. He grandly pictures his fleet as angering the ocean (ll. 20-21), but for all his blistering the tense of "meant" (l. 21) indicates clearly that he has already been stopped. Here again (as in II. i. 19-27) Pompey speaks with vigor and conviction about something which is wishful thinking; he is deriving satisfaction from thinking about his plans even after he knows he will not carry them through. Caesar's response to this diatribe is merely "Take your time" (l. 23), after which Pompey gets off onto the subject of his father's house (ll. 26-29).

Lepidus asks "from the present" (l. 30) how he takes their offer, and Caesar adds acidly "There's the point" (l. 31). But after repeating the terms (ll. 34-39) Pompey again digresses: "Know then/ I came before you here a man prepared to take this offer; but Mark Antony/ Put me to some impatience . . ." (l. 39ff.). Pompey never does state his acceptance (we may infer it from the handshake of l. 48) until he implies it by asking that the agreement be written (ll. 58-59). It comes as no surprise when we learn (III. v.) that Pompey has fared badly in this world of Realpolitik.

III

By III. vii. the final development of the play has begun. Briefly, we may consider what has changed. Pompey and Lepidus have been squeezed out and Antony has opted for Cleopatra and Egypt rather than Octavia and Rome. In Enobarbus' image the world has become a "pair of chaps" (Antony and Caesar) which can only "grind" each other. Here, all diversions past, we have the basic conflict of the play.

Caesar and Cleopatra remain essentially constant throughout; it is Antony who wobbles between the positions they represent. As we have seen, his "striking" imagery almost disappears while he is in Rome. We can follow the process of this change. In I. i. we have the Antony of "Let Rome in Tiber melt and the
wide arch/ Of the ranged empire fall!” (ll. 33-34). In I. ii. Cleopatra notes that “A Roman thought hath struck him” (l. 79); conscience striken, Antony adopts the Roman terminology as he exclaims “These strong Egyptian fetters I must break/ Or lose myself in dotage” (ll. 112-13). By I. iii. his voice is firm and commanding (ll. 41-56); the images of breeding and creeping make Antony’s speech here more vivid than Caesar’s, but it is rhythmically steady and controlled in a way that his initial speeches are not (cf. I. i. 48-55).

When we next see Antony (II. ii.) it is hard to distinguish his speech from Caesar’s. Roused and Roman, Antony is definitely a man to reckon with. His verse becomes, like Caesar’s, flat, his thought logical, precise, and reservedly argumentative.

You do mistake your business: my brother never
Did urge me in his act. I did inquire it
And have my learning from some true reports
That drew their swords with you. Did he not rather
Discredit my authority with yours,
And make the wars alike against my stomach,
Having alike your cause?

(II. 45-51)

There is very little striking imagery in this scene, though note that Antony and Caesar do employ a similar image of control. “The third o’ th’ world is yours, which with a snaffle/ You may pace easy, but not such a wife” (Ant. ll. 63-64); “Yet if I knew/ What hoop should hold us staunch, from edge to edge/ O’ th’ world I would pursue it” (Caes. ll. 114-16).

The Banquet Scene (II. vii.), seemingly so inorganic, is actually an excellent index to character. It permits us to observe all of the major male characters under “Egyptian” circumstances. The odd discussion of Nile, slime, ooze, serpents, and crocodiles both reminds us of Cleopatra, Antony’s “serpent of old Nile,” and contributes to the atmosphere of Egyptian sensuality. Caesar does nothing but complain in terms of chilly disapproval, responding to a toast:

I could well forbear’t.
It’s monstrous labor when I wash my brain
And it grows fooler.

(II. 97-99)

Possess it, I’ll make answer;
But I had rather fast from all four days
Than drink so much in one.

(II. 100-102)

Antony’s reply is “Be a child o’ th’ time” (l. 99). Antony, Enobarbus, and even Pompey are all able to relax and enjoy themselves (Lepidus has been carried out); Caesar cannot, for “graver business” (l. 119) is always on his mind. It is Caesar’s impatient and disgusted speech starting “What would you more?” (l. 118; my italics) that breaks up the party.

The Banquet Scene marks the end of the initial development of the play; it is plain by then that Pompey and Lepidus will vanish, leaving Antony to
contend with Caesar. The party is also the last of a series of scenes designed to
keep in our minds a steady contrast of Rome and Egypt. (Cleopatra appears di-
rectly in I. v., II. v., and III. iii.; Enobarbus describes her at length in II. ii.) At
this point Antony is like—in the image he applies to Octavia—"the swan’s down
feather/ That stands upon the swell at full of tide,/ And neither way inclines" (III. ii. 48-50). Unfortunately, we are not shown the actual process of Antony’s
decision to return to Egypt; it would be interesting to study his language. Of
course we are never in much doubt about what he is going to do (see II. iii.
38-40, and Enobarbus, II. vi. 123). Presumably we are meant to realize that
Cleopatra is steadily on his mind, just as she is kept in ours, and her hold on
him is such that even Roman ambition cannot break it.

Definition of Cleopatra’s hold is beyond the scope of this essay, but we can
profitably enquire into the linguistic manifestations of her infinite variety and
fascination, particularly as she is contrasted with Caesar. In general the euphony
of Cleopatra’s assonance is set against the cacophony of Caesar’s alliteration.
Compare the sound of Cleopatra’s first speech (I. i. 19-24; quoted above) with
Caesar’s “to tumble on the bed of Ptolemy.” In the one there is a variety (subtly
varied) of “a” sounds; in the other it is clicking consonants which set the tone.
Cleopatra repeats two names over and over: “Antony,” and “Charmian,” which
have in common her typical elongated “a” sound. The names which Caesar uses
and re-uses all lend themselves well to his crisp pronunciation: Agrippa,
Thidias, Octavia, Dolabella. Indeed, though Caesar uses more polysyllabic
words than the others, he generally takes those which are easy to speak
quickly: e.g., “lascivious,” “contestation,” “contemning,” “publicly,” “establish-
ment,” “ostentation,” “habiliments.” Caesar’s characteristic speech is a combi-
nation of these crisp polysyllabic words and short ones, ordered to permit brisk,
steady delivery.

You may see, Lepidus, and henceforth know
It is not Caesar’s natural vice to hate
Our great competitor. From Alexandria
This is the news: he fishes, drinks, and wastes
The lamps of night in revel; is not more manlike
Than Cleopatra, nor the queen of Ptolemy
More womanly than he; hardly gave audience, or
Vouchsafed to think he had partners. You shall find there
A man who is the abstract of all faults
That all men follow.

(I. iv. 1-10)

Caesar uses words which can be got out quickly: he would not use a phrase
like Cleopatra’s “Tawny-finned fishes” (II. v. 12), for it would slow his delivery.

To discuss characteristic differences in the sound of the words is risky, for
our impressions are unavoidably subjective, but it seems worth hazarding some
cautious generalizations. In a sensitive, though very personal essay on Antony
and Cleopatra, G. Wilson Knight remarks on the “pre-eminence of thin or

21 That III. iii. follows II. v. without a break in time seems proof that Shakespeare was delib-
erately trying to keep Cleopatra in the forefront of the mind of his audience.
feminine vowel sounds, 'e' and 'i,' and he quotes some twenty-five prominent examples, including "by the fire that quickens Nilus' slime," "her infinite variety," "intrinsicate," "dislimns," "that great medicine hath with his tinct gilded thee" (I. v. 36-37), "discandying," "terrene." What Knight failed to note is that about three-quarters of these phrases are used by Antony and Cleopatra and include some of their most characteristic terms, while most of the rest are used about them. Knight goes on to suggest that the thin vowels and a light "ing" ending are set against the "rich, yet elongated" vowel sound of "sun," "moon," "burn," "world," and the like. Quite right, I think. From this I would conclude—or suggest at least—that Antony and Cleopatra share a characteristic vowel sound (thin "i" and "e" balanced against richer "o" and "a") in noticeable contrast to Caesar, whose characteristic sound is consonantal.

Consider also the difference between Caesar and Cleopatra in their patterns of thought. Caesar is relentlessly logical. His speeches move smoothly from premises or evidence to conclusion (e.g., V. ii. 179-88) without repetition, digression, or ellipsis. In a striking dramatic contrast, one of Cleopatra's prime characteristics is verbal repetition and parallelism.

O well-divided disposition! Note him,
Note him, good Charmian, 'tis the man; but note him.
He was not sad, for he would shine on those
That make their looks by his; he was not merry . . . .
(I. v. 53-56; my italics)

Such repetition occurs again and again throughout the play. Notice too Enobarbus' uncharacteristic repetitions as he argues with her: "But why, why, why?" (III. vii. 2); "is it, is it?" (l. 4). In the same scene we see Antony again firmly under Cleopatra's spell, and it is with a repetition that he reaffirms his disastrous decision: "By sea, by sea" (l. 40). It may be that the repetition is merely for emphasis, but is it just accident that the verbal habit is Cleopatra's and that the decision is essentially hers (l. 28)? And in IV. xv. Antony seems to reaffirm his commitment to Cleopatra as he repeats, "I am dying, Egypt, dying" (ll. 18, 41).

Thus Cleopatra's repetition and parallelism are set against the logical progression of Caesar's speech. Where Caesar works out an idea, Cleopatra usually just sets one up. Very seldom does she work steadily toward a conclusion as he does; she either jumps to it immediately or has no interest in one. Her

23 Knight, pp. 202-203. I do not agree with Knight's general conclusion that this lack of "sonority" contributes to a "tragedy . . . taken lightly, almost playfully," though I feel that he is quite right when he notes that Othello, Lear, and Timon all have a deeper, richer note in their speech.
24 "Music, music" (II. v. 1); "But yet . . . but yet . . . but yet" (ll. 50-52); "thou say'st . . . thou say'st" (56); "majesty . . . majesty" (III. iii. 20-21); "my lord . . . my lord" (III. xi. 54); "pardon . . . pardon, pardon" (61, 68); "Antony, Antony, Antony"; "help . . . help . . . help. help" (IV. xv. 11-13); "I dare not, dear; dear . . . I dare not" (21-22); "come, come" (29); "come, come, come" (37); "welcome, welcome" (38); "what, what" (83); "women, women" (84; again 90); "he words me . . . he words me" (V. ii. 191); "yare, yare good Iras; quick" (282); "peace, peace" (307).
25 Antony's repetition as he justifies himself to Caesar ("not so, not so," II. ii. 56) I take as essentially just deprecatory.
refutation of coldheartedness, for instance (III. xiii. 158-67), is vivid but static. She builds on a single idea, but without extending it in a logical framework. She says merely: if I am so, then ... . In Caesar's characteristic pattern this would go: I would rather ... than be considered that, therefore I cannot be so. Cleopatra's speeches are displays of feeling or intuition which, unlike Caesar, she never troubles to justify. Thus she can reach a conclusion without preamble (V. ii. 191) or take four positions in as many speeches, jumping to the next as Antony opens his mouth to object to the last (I. iii. 19-39). Perhaps it is not merely fanciful to say that the static quality and emotional basis of her thought can be associated with the sloth and self-indulgence which the Romans find characteristic of "Egypt." But no mere description does justice to Cleopatra's feminine flip-flops of logic, scrambles of idiom, and mincing, mousing tones, and it is these characteristics, not her queenliness, that make her so fascinating a woman.

In the third and fourth acts Antony shifts back and forth between Roman and Egyptian language, just as he wavers between caring about the war and caring about Cleopatra. Immediately after his first defeat (III. xi.) Antony is so disgusted with himself that he is little inclined to reproach Cleopatra, though he has good cause to do so. His state of mind may be reflected and signalled by the spectacular incidence of verbal repetition in his speech.

After his final defeat (IV. xii.) Antony rails against Cleopatra in Roman terms, calling her "foul Egyptian," "triple turned whore," "charm," "gypsy," "spell," and "witch." At other times he alternates between manic exhilaration (IV. iv., viii.) and gloomy forebodings (IV. ii.). Only occasionally, as in his response to Enobarbus' defection (IV. v.), does his language seem to reflect genuine self-insight rather than a sophistc attempt to bolster his own morale.

III. xiii. displays the gamut of Antony's feelings. He can be both firm and noble ("Let her know't," 1.16), and foolishly assertive (II. 20-28). As he feels his authority "melt" from him (I. 90), he tries to reaffirm his identity: "I am Antony yet" (II. 92-93). Shakespeare played with this notion. Who is Antony? The Roman who snaps at Cleopatra with a contempt worthy of Caesar: "I found you as a morsel cold upon/ Dead Caesar's trencher" (II. 116-17)? Or is Antony "himself again" (as Cleopatra believes, II. 186-87) when he says "come,/ Let's have one other gaudy night" (II. 182-83)? But for all his wobbling Antony is a ruined man and he has already declared for "Egypt." When he is told that Cleopatra is dead (IV. xiv.) Antony considers his own life at an end: "Unarm, Eros. The long day's task is done,/ And we must sleep" (II. 35-36). With his death certain Antony's speech stabilizes as he regains his clear sense of purpose. Compare the hysterical imbalance of "Hence, saucy eunuch, peace!/ She hath betrayed me and shall die the death" (II. 25-26) with the firm assurance of:

Thrice-nobler than myself!
Thou teachest me, O valiant Eros, what
I should, and thou couldst not. My queen and Eros
Have by their brave instruction got upon me

26 "Be gone ... be gone ... be gone" (III. xi. 8, 10, 15); "pray you" four times: 17, 22, 24); the numerous "I have" constructions; "no, no, no, no", (29); "fie, fie, fie" (31); "yes... yes" (33).
A nobleness in record. But I will be
A bridegroom in my death, and run into'\i
As to a lover's bed.

(IV. xiv. 95-101)

We can trace a similar progression in Enobarbus' speech, and it is worth
doubling back to examine his development. Enobarbus is, as we have seen,
a blunt and down-to-earth character; Kent-like, he enjoys a "plainness"
which "nothing ill becomes" him (II. vi. 78-79). He serves as an observer
in the play. His perspective is basically Roman but he has become involved
in Egyptian corruption and seems perfectly at home amidst the lubrious
voluptuousness of Cleopatra's Court (I. ii. 70-73). Enobarbus' speech varies
from humorous and colloquial-sounding prose (e.g., I. ii. 130-41) to the extrava-
gantly elaborate "barge speech." His "Roman" speech is of two sorts.
Talking in prose with Menas he coldly and accurately assesses the state
of affairs, taking the "Roman" view of Cleopatra and all she represents: "He
will to his Egyptian dish again" (II. vi. 123). In verse Enobarbus is less
rough-sounding; nonetheless his speech remains vigorous and concrete. At his
most formal Enobarbus can speak with the sturdy logic and steady rhythm
of Caesar:

Most worthy sir, you therein throw away
The absolute soldiership you have by land,
Distract your army, which doth most consist
Of war-marked footmen, leave unexecuted
Your own renowned knowledge, quite forgo
The way which promises assurance, and
Give up yourself merely to chance and hazard
From firm security.

(III. vii. 41-48)

It is this Roman logic which makes Enobarbus question the wisdom of
staying with Antony (III. x. 35-37). In III. xiii. he coldly analyzes Antony's
downfall (II. 3-12, 29-37) and his logical condemnation of Antony's making
"his will/ Lord of his reason" (II. 3-4) leads him to an internal debate:

Mine honesty and I begin to square.
The loyalty well held to fools does make
Our faith mere folly: yet he that can endure
To follow with allegiance a fall'n lord
Does conquer him that did his master conquer
And earns a place i' th' story.

(III. xiii. 41-46)

Always before Enobarbus has, like Caesar, moved sturdily from evidence
to conclusion. Here, when he is perplexed, there is a rhetorical change: his

27 M. M. Mahood suggests in her Shakespeare's Wordplay (London, 1957), pp. 166-67, that it
is the role of involved observer which accounts for Enobarbus' frequent puns, which are certainly
a noticeable characteristic of his speech (see particularly IV. ii. 8).
thought breaks and he sets up a balanced contrast. Feeling and reason conflict and Enobarbus' puzzlement is reflected in his sentence structure. Throughout this key scene Enobarbus' debate serves as counterpoint to Antony's vacillations (note how skilfully Enobarbus' speeches are inserted along the way) and at the end of the scene Enobarbus' decision is a cutting commentary on Antony's apparent revival:

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; and I see still
A diminution in our captain's brain
Restores his heart. When valor preys on reason,
It eats the sword it fights with: I will seek
Some way to leave him.

(ll. 195-201)

As he chooses the rational, "Roman" solution Enobarbus' speech reverts to its usual firm, logical progression, and it is in the same characteristic language that he recognizes his mistake (IV.vi.). In view of his final choice of feeling over reason it is worth noting that Enobarbus, like Cleopatra, thinks of death in terms of a ditch in which to die (IV.vi.38; cf. V.ii.57), refers to the "blessed moon," and calls death upon himself in the "Egyptian" image of "poisonous damp" (IV.ix.7,13). In Enobarbus' fate we can see that Antony and Cleopatra cannot be judged merely by the standards of common sense and Roman logic.

As the end of the play approaches, the language of the protagonists firms and broadens. Antony's speech, heretofore in alternating balance between the Roman and Egyptian, becomes rich and poetic, intensely imaginative:

Off, pluck off:
The sevenfold shield of Ajax cannot keep
The battery from my heart. O, cleave, my sides!
Heart, once be stronger than thy continent,
Crack thy frail case! Apace, Eros, apace . . . .

I will o'ertake thee, Cleopatra, and
Weep for my pardon. So it must be, for now
All length is torture: since the torch is out,
Lie down, and stray no farther. Now all labor
Mars what it does; yea, very force entangles
Itself with strength: seal then, and all is done.
Eros!—I come, my queen.—Eros!—Stay for me.
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 haunts be ours.—Come Eros, Eros!

(IV. xiv. 37-54)

Note here the repetitions—particularly of Eros; thus as Antony approaches his love-death he is continually calling on love—the grand imagery of Ajax
and continent, and the image of light extinguished (cf. Cleopatra, IV. xv. 85). The language reflects Antony's new firmness and clarity of purpose; no longer is he torn and uncertain. During the period of the battles Antony seems belittled or mocked by grand or astronomical references (e.g., III. xiii. 91-93), but now with his new resolution "sun," "world," "star," and "Jove" again seem natural comparisons for him. Cleopatra too begins to show a new firmness and purpose in her language. As she is increasingly committed to her relationship with Antony her rhythm smooths out and her verse lengthens. She gives full rein to a surging vitality which sweeps away the rhythmic stops and starts of her early speeches; her skittishness vanishes as her sense of commitment grows.

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 call: I see him rouse himself
To praise my noble act . . .

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. 279-89)

How different this is from the early Cleopatra:

Give me mine angle, we'll to th' river: there,
My music playing far off, I will betray
Tawny-finned fishes. My bended hook shall pierce
Their slimy jaws; and as I draw them up,
I'll think them every one an Antony,
And say, 'Ah ha! y' are caught!'

(II. v. 10-15)

As their deaths approach, the language of the protagonists rises to the sublime. If it did not do so, the end of the tragedy would be flat indeed, for Shakespeare seems to have gone out of his way to surround the conclusion with unglamorous circumstances. Antony bungles even his own suicide (IV. xiv. 103), and we must not forget that despite her grand resolution (IV. xv. 86-88—in Roman terms) Cleopatra does explore the possibility of coming to terms with Caesar. Her deceit is ludicrously exposed by Seleucus (V. ii. 148), and her quibbling with the Clown (I. 249) makes us wonder whether she is really still much the same person who earlier trifled with Mardian (I. v.). Nonetheless, tragic grandeur remains. It is almost wholly a function of the language, for these aged and dissipated lovers are ambiguous figures at best.

The grandiosity of the death scenes is a result of intense concentration of the "high" Egyptian imagery and the exalted frame of mind which it reflects.
INDIVIDUATION AND DEVELOPMENT

O sun,
Burn the great sphere thou mov'st in, darkling stand
The varying shore o' th' world!

(IV. xv. 9-11)

O, see, my women,
The crown o' th' earth doth melt. My lord!
O, withered is the garland of the war,
The soldier's pole is fall'n: young boys and girls
Are level now with men. The odds is gone,
And there is nothing left remarkable
Beneath the visiting moon.

(ll. 62-68)

Granville-Barker correctly calls this "little better than ecstatic nonsense," but somehow it successfully conveys the highest part of the lovers' feelings. For all that their love has a tawdry side, in its highest part it is sublime and it carries them to heights undreamt of by Caesar, who is quite incapable of such feeling—or speeches. The sublimity of the love-deaths is emphasized by the dull flatness of the speech with which Caesar concludes the play.

Most probable
That so she died: for her physician tells me
She hath pursued conclusions infinite.
Of easy ways to die. Take up her bed,
And bear her women from the monument.
She shall be buried by her Antony.
No grave upon the earth shall clip in it
A pair so famous. High events as these
Strike those that make them; and their story is
No less in pity than his glory which
Brought them to be lamented. Our army shall
In solemn show attend this funeral,
And then to Rome. Come, Dolabella, see
High order in this great solemnity.

(V. ii. 351-64)

Caesar enters thirty-three lines from the end; it is his place to assert his authority and provide some sort of epitaph. It takes him twenty-three lines to satisfy his interest in "the manner" of Cleopatra's death. One can scarcely help feeling that his perfunctory compliment to the famous pair reveals his utter incomprehension of their complexity and sublimity.

I do not want to draw conclusions from all this, since only in a general way is this essay designed to prove anything beyond its specific observations. It is, indeed, doubly hard to substantiate generalizations convincingly in material of this sort because they must rest on cumulative impressions. So

29 Caesar shows more feeling at the news of Antony's death (V. i.), perhaps because, as Maccenas says, "when such a spacious mirror's set before him,/ He needs must see himself" (ll. 34-35). Caesar does see Antony's demise in earth-shaking terms (ll. 14-19), but his image of their conflict is of a pair of horses who "could not stall together/ In the whole world" (ll. 39-40), and he interrupts his disquisition upon Antony to speak to a messenger (ll. 49-51).
there is nothing definitive here. I have merely tried to point out what seem

to me striking contrasts in characteristic language, rhythm, and rhetorical

habit, hoping to contribute to an understanding of how character is embedded

in language. I do believe that in these terms we can better understand how

Shakespeare obtains his effects—and what these effects are meant to be. For

language is an index to character and it offers a valuable way of checking

our general impressions and letting us anchor them in the text of the play.

It should be plain that in *Antony and Cleopatra* language is not merely

the vehicle of the action; rather, it parallels and reinforces the conflicts of

the play, indicates what is going to happen and helps tell us why. We can,

laboriously, define analytically the various sorts of contrasts which are present—

in rhetoric, the logic of Caesar versus the ellipticity of Pompey; in sound,

the vowels of Cleopatra against the consonants of Caesar; in imagery, the

rich imaginativeness of Antony and Cleopatra versus the barrenness of

Caesar—but the significance of such linguistic typology lies in its cumulative

impact, an impact so subtly contrived in this play that the spectator is seldom

conscious of the artistry which moves him.

*Cornell University*