Cleopatra: Three visions of her infinite variety

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CLEOPATRA: THREE VISIONS OF HER

INFINITE VARIETY

by

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This examination is a study of the characterization of Cleopatra in three early modern English plays. The three plays are the following: Mary Sidney’s *The Tragedie of Antonie*, Samuel Daniel’s *The Tragedie of Cleopatra*, and William Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*. Although all three playwrights shared essentially the same cultural environment and historical context, they each created a different vision of the queen of the Nile. Cleopatra’s gender and race are the focus of this examination. Sidney presents us with a “white-washed” version of Cleopatra—in an effort to make her more acceptable to the Elizabethan audience. Daniel is sympathetic to Cleopatra, but does make her take responsibility for the disaster that befalls the couple. Shakespeare creates a Cleopatra that is perfect in her imperfection.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................ iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................ iv

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................... 1
• Review of Prior Criticism ................................................................. 5
• Traditional Criticism ................................................................. 7
• Feminist Criticism ................................................................. 8
• Postcolonial/Race Criticism .................................................... 9
• Methodology ........................................................................ 10
• Theoretical Framework ........................................................ 12
• Three Visions of the African Queen ........................................ 15

CHAPTER 2 MARY SIDNEY'S *TRAGEDIE OF ANTONIE* ....................................... 19

CHAPTER 3 SAMUEL DANIEL’S SLIGHTLY SYMPATHETIC VIEW OF CLEOPATRA: "A GLORIOUS AND MIGHTY QUEEN" ............................................................. 57

CHAPTER 4 SHAKESPEARE'S CLEOPATRA IN ALL HER INFINITE VARIETY ........... 108

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION: THREE VISIONS OF THE AFRICAN QUEEN ................. 162

WORKS CITED .............................................................................................................. 183

VITA ................................................................................................................................ 188
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale / Her infinite variety: other women cloy/
The appetites they feed; but she makes hungry / Where most she satisfies. For vilest
things / Become themselves in her” (2.2.240-244). Perhaps ever since her name came
to the world stage, people have attempted to define the essence of Cleopatra, as
Enobarbus does here. It seems the very inscrutability of her personality instills an almost
obsessive desire to define her appeal. What did this Queen of the Nile possess that caused
two great leaders of the known world to fall under her spell? Julius Caesar and Mark
Antony both succumbed to the personal magnetism and charm of Cleopatra. Despite her
obvious personal appeal and political power she was vilified and defamed by the Romans
and eventually her name became synonymous with the stereotype of a wonton seductress
who led men astray. Through the years since her death there have been many fictional
and artistic characterizations of the Queen of the Nile.

This dissertation is an examination of the various depictions of Cleopatra in
three early modern English dramas: Mary Sidney’s The Tragedie of Antonie, Samuel
Daniel’s The Tragedie of Cleopatra, and William Shakespeare’s Antony and Cleopatra.
Cleopatra—the broad recognition of her name suggests the fame, or infamy, of this
historical and fictional character. Most people know her name and possibly something
about her, but what about the constructions of her as a character? What traditions and
assumptions have influenced the literary characterizations of her? Although no tangible monument exists for Cleopatra, there are many works of art devoted to her. Painters and poets have found her enchanting, titillating and elusive as they try to depict her on canvas or on the stage.

Has it been assumed that she was a strumpet because she possessed such personal magnetism and sexual appeal? Is it possible that within the Roman patriarchal system and that of early modern England, a sexually active woman was to be feared? Was she denigrated and stereotyped because the male-dominated society found her threatening? My examination explores the uniquely different characterizations of Cleopatra in these three early modern English plays by Sidney, Daniel, and Shakespeare, in order to discover how each of them dealt with these and other questions in their constructs of the queen of the Nile.

The view of Cleopatra as a dark-skinned whore who led Mark Antony to his destruction seems to be so intrinsic to common knowledge that it is difficult to determine its historical origins. Numerous critics from a wide range of theoretical perspectives refer to this negative stereotype generally without any attempt to support it in context or history. Ania Loomba opens her chapter on “The Language of Patriarchy” with this assumption: “The figure of Cleopatra is the most celebrated stereotype of the goddess and whore and has accommodated and been shaped by centuries of myth-making and fantasy surrounding the historical figure” (75). Loomba goes on to delineate the various characteristics which set Cleopatra at odds with the culture of both imperial Rome and early modern England ending with the assertion that Cleopatra is the “white man’s ultimate other” since she “is dangerous and snake-like, ‘the old serpent of the Nile’
(I.iv.25), the ‘serpent of Egypt’ ”(II.vii.26). Clearly, Loomba sees Cleopatra’s association with serpents and Egypt throughout Shakespeare’s play as an inference that she was dark and mysterious like Egypt and evil, wicked, and deceptive, in keeping with the Christian symbolism attached to serpents. The fact that Loomba says Cleopatra was the “white-man’s” ultimate antithesis indirectly says she was black. Continuing the concept of the Other, Loomba alludes to Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism to explain the negative images that surround Cleopatra, “The images that cluster around Cleopatra are specifically Orientalist in nature: her waywardness, emotionality, unreliability and exotic appeal are derived from the stereotypes that Said identifies as recurrent in that discourse (Orientalism, p. 207). Once again the assumption is that the association with the Oriental world is sufficient foundation for the negative characteristic attached to Cleopatra. Neither Said nor Loomba seem compelled to historicize their assumptions.

The classics provide historical support for the stereotyping of Cleopatra as a dark-skinned whore. Virgil, Horace and Lucan all report Cleopatra’s behavior as criminal as Mary Morrison writes: “Lucan in Book x of Pharsalia gives a characteristically turgid description of the exotic and depraved mode of life at the Egyptian court and depicts Cleopatra as a painted, bejeweled siren” (113). Virgil apparently had intended to include the story of Antony and Cleopatra in his epic demonstrating the superiority of Roman-European “nobility and imperil fortitude over the temptations of the world,” but turned instead to the story of Aeneas and Dido. According to Imitaz Habib, “What necessitated the change to what became the substance of the Aeneid was a didactic improvement over history: the mythic demonstration of the ability of a European ruler (Aeneas) tempted by a seductive African female potentate (Dido) to uphold and return dutifully to his own
_world and lineage,” was preferable to the story of Antony and Cleopatra which demonstrated the inability of the Roman conqueror to abandon his “European/colored Egyptian” and return to his own world (166-167).

Morrison provides further historical support for the negative stereotyping of Cleopatra when she enumerates the many literary works of medieval times which included her. “Of these works the Roman attitude of hostility persists, chiefly on moral grounds. Dante places Cleopatra amongst those who sinned through lust (Inferno v) while Boccaccio is “even more hostile to Cleopatra in De claris mulieribus” (113). Habib also points to Dante and Boccaccio and adds in Spenser as writers who depicted Cleopatra as a sexual profligate.

Habib highlights the political aspects of the denigration of Cleopatra as a means of containing and diffusing her subversive potential as a non-European queen who defied Rome and enchanted one of its greatest generals. By denigrating Cleopatra “in terms of her sensual excess and in terms of the erotic passion that she comes to stand for Cleopatra’s power to subvert the political/social status quo is contained. While this particular political perspective is not always in the foreground of a literary work, according to Habib it is always present. He cites a series of early modern English works including Marlowe’s Dido, Fulke Greville’s self suppressed play, Elizabeth Cary’s The Tragedy of Mariam, Amelia Lanyer’s Salve Deux Judaerorum, and Robert Anton’s and Richard Reynold’s comments about “Cleopatra’s ‘horrible crimes’ and ‘murthers’ respectively, as “the moral-aesthetic marking down of Cleopatra is the vehicle of a visible English national-political self pointing” (167).
Sidney, Daniel and Shakespeare created their Cleopatras within this historical and literary context. Their deconstructions of her myth ultimately re-create her in three different images from the commonly held view of her as a seductress and whore.

All three treat Cleopatra's sexuality differently—I examine the effects of their different characterizations and discuss some of the possible reasons they emphasized, idealized, or ignored the African queen's sexuality. It may be that earlier writers and historians such as Plutarch were instrumental in establishing the construct of Cleopatra as a sex object and helped to create the stereotype of her as "the grand courtesan of all time." If we add the element of racial difference to the Roman patriarchal view of her as a sex object, we may get closer to understanding the degree of her alterity and the reasons for her vilification. Furthermore, is she stereotyped as a lascivious strumpet because she is dark, or is she described as dark in appearance to explain her unseemly sexual appetite? I believe there is an intersection of gender and race in the character of Cleopatra which impacts the images created of her. What kinds of Cleopatras do the three playwrights construct?

Review of Prior Criticism

The question that drives my examination of these three plays is—which has a greater impact on the negative stereotyping of Cleopatra, her gender or her color? I believe this is a question that needs to be considered. Adding to the challenge in researching opinion about the plays is the fact that while vast amounts of criticism exist about Shakespeare's play, Mary Sidney's play and Samuel Daniel's play have garnered the attention of only a small number of recent critics.
With the growing interest in the last few decades about female writers of the early modern period, there is some limited information and critical commentary about Mary Sidney’s body of work, including *The Tragedie of Antonie*. Margaret Hannay, Noel Kinnamon and Michael Brennan write an informative introduction to *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke*, which helps to clarify Sidney’s role in the drama of her time. This work also provides a refresher course on the elements and characteristics of Senecan and Neo-Senecan drama which is pertinent to the study of both the Sidney and Daniel plays. S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies also present an informative introduction to Mary Sidney’s play and her personal life. They discuss Mary Sidney’s stoic philosophy and its effect on the character of Cleopatra. Mary Ellen Lamb gives a contextual perspective on the curious importance of dying well to aristocratic early modern women which clarifies Sidney’s attention to the manner of Cleopatra’s suicide.

Although critical commentary on Daniel’s play is often combined with comments on the work of Sidney and Shakespeare, it is still valuable to this examination. In her essay about Shakespeare’s play, Adelman notes a similarity in the approach Garnier and Daniel take in their creation of Cleopatra. She writes that although Cleopatra is the recipient of public condemnation it is “tempered by her own grief for her vices, by her love for her children and by the nobility of her death” (57). Arthur Little presents an interesting discussion regarding Daniel’s omission of Cleopatra’s race—he takes the position that Daniel viewed Cleopatra as Greek. Little believes that Daniel follows the tradition of Horace “which at once praises and casts aspersions on his presumably Greek Cleopatra” (168).
Traditional Criticism

So much critical commentary exists on Shakespeare’s play and so little on the Sidney and Daniel’s play, that it is most logical to begin with a review of the predominant criticism. Although critics have commented on Shakespeare’s work since it first appeared on the stage, this brief review will begin with the “Egyptian” school of critics who generally were sympathetic to Cleopatra. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who wrote of her “the art displayed in the character of Cleopatra is profound” (Qtd. in Eastman 152), and A. C. Bradley, who wrote that Cleopatra had genius, are among those who considered the tragedies to express the titanic emotions of their larger-than-life protagonists and saw Cleopatra as a compelling character. Critics of the Romantic and Victorian period are more concerned with the inner psychological workings of the characters whom they perceive as “supermen moving in a poetic world” (Qtd. in Siegel 288), than with the military plot. G. Wilson Knight, a twentieth-century critic, agrees with Bradley in general and specifically on *Antony and Cleopatra*. Later, in the mid twentieth century, Maynard Mack wrote that unlike the other great tragedies, *Antony and Cleopatra*, was “a bright play” and that Cleopatra was not a “mere intriguing woman, but a kind of absolute oxymoron” (19). The opposing critics of the “Roman” school perceived her as a stereotypical whore and wanton. Bernard Beckerman, George Bernard Shaw, and Northrop Frye belong to the latter school of criticism which sees Cleopatra as leading Antony to his destruction.
Feminist Criticism

In the 1970s and 1980s, through the voices of feminist writers, the focus on the gender issues composing Cleopatra’s situation and character appears. The feminist critics typically take Cleopatra out of the sex object role and position her as a subject in her own right. According to Carolyn Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Thomas Neely, feminist critics are concerned with three issues: liberating Shakespeare’s female characters from “the stereotypes to which they have too often been confined,” examining female characters’ relations to each other, and analyzing “the nature and effects of patriarchal structures” (4). The tendency of the feminist approach is to view a character such as Cleopatra as an individual capable of taking action and determining her own destiny—in short, acting as a subject in the play.

Historians such as Natalie Zemon Davis consider the impact of gender on the historical period of early modern England and France and how the acquisition of power can subvert the patriarchal paradigm and create that unique character, the “woman on top” (124). Linda Woodbridge was the first to point out the gender bias of the preceding generations of critics when she wrote about the sexist attitudes of male reviewers toward Cleopatra. Carol Thomas Neely emphasizes the impact female characters have on the plays in an effort to move away from the male-centered interpretations of earlier criticism. Kim Hall, Evelyn Gajowski, and Janet Adelman all discuss the intersection of gender and race as it unfolds in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*. Hall specifically notes the “emerging female tradition of a dark Cleopatra” (155) amongst women writers. Adding in the postcolonial perception of “the Other,” Gajowski addresses Cleopatra’s appearance when she writes that the sexist/racist Philo reduces her whole body to focus only on her
“front.” Shakespeare has Philo use the term “tawny” to reduce her even further to “that of a particular hue” and shows the relationship to the Roman treatment of her as the reviled, colonized “Other” (87). And finally, Adelman devotes an entire appendix to the subject of Cleopatra’s color in which she takes the position that whether Cleopatra was racially black cannot be known but that Shakespeare “imagined Cleopatra as dark” (185) and that her darkness was an elemental part of her mystery.

Postcolonial/Race Criticism

Race and postcolonial critics generally bear a similarity in perspective because they are concerned with the “Other” in society as well as the defining characteristics of racial difference. While postcolonialists such as Edward Said emphasize the political dynamic of the colonizer and the colonized, or the oppressor to the oppressed, they still point out that the people who are the objects of a power struggle are considered as “Others.” Race critics and postcolonial critics merge because often those who are being colonized and oppressed are of another race than their tormentors. These critics often draw an analogy between the political relationship of Egypt and Rome, on the one hand, and the personal relationship of Cleopatra and Antony, on the other. These discussions point to the power struggle between the countries as comparable to the quixotic relationship between the two protagonists.

This is the newest school of criticism used in this examination. Postcolonial criticism was initially seen in the early 1980s; it focuses on historical fact and proof of colonization of third world countries by imperialistic countries. The critics of this group focus on the interpretation of literature as it demonstrates policies of colonization and
containment by one people over another. This critical approach is appropriate to the
examination of the character of Cleopatra because of the duality present in the Roman
and Egyptian worlds. Furthermore, Cleopatra was perceived as an object by imperialistic
Romans because she was an Egyptian and of a darker race. Gajowski’s work is
particularly applicable to this view because she applies Edward Said’s concept of
“Orientalism” to Antony and Cleopatra. Her clarification of the relationship between
colonization of the “Other” and the treatment of female characters by male characters in
the play establishes the connection between gender and race in Shakespeare’s play. Ania
Loomba, who specifically discusses Cleopatra, and bell hooks, who addresses the affects
of race and alterity in women of contemporary society, offer insightful perspectives
regarding the absence or presence of race in critical discussions of Cleopatra. Loomba
focuses on the fear early modern English males had about powerful females, providing a
postcolonial perspective regarding the impact of a colonizer on the colonized.
Postcolonialists emphasize the notion that Cleopatra’s color greatly adds to her alterity
not only as a female but also a racial “Other.”

**Methodology**

My own interrogation of the character, Cleopatra, attempts to avoid both the
denigrating of her that characterizes the “Roman” critics and the idealizing of her that
characterizes the “Egyptian” critics. Instead, I attempt to build upon the work of feminist
critics and postcolonial critics, showing the intersection or blending of gender and race as
they affect the construction of the character of Cleopatra. Just as Cleopatra would be
dramatically altered if her gender were suddenly changed, she would be significantly
changed without the presence of her racial color. As a result of this conviction, within the critical context of the perspectives on gender and race articulated by feminism and postcolonialism, I will explore the effect of her description as dark and tawny fronted for their significance to Cleopatra’s character and cultural constructs of her as the “Other.”

Her physical description is a topic on which the three playwrights differ dramatically—Sidney describes Cleopatra as white, Daniel ignores her skin color, and Shakespeare creates a Cleopatra whose skin is black from the love pinches of the sun god. These three different representations of her race are the primary focus of this examination.

The prevalent criticism among the feminists, race/ethnic critics, and postcolonialists supports an intersection of the issues of race and gender in the discussion of Cleopatra. Janet Adelman and Joyce MacDonald are two critics who analyze the play from the perspective of gender and race. Their discussion of the impact of Cleopatra’s color demonstrates the difference of opinion that still exists regarding this issue. MacDonald takes a somewhat equivocal position when she writes: “I believe the play is finally so convinced of the cosmic import of Cleopatra’s racial difference from the Romans that it cannot be bothered to be consistent about her skin color” (60). Adelman states a similar belief: while we may never know Cleopatra’s race, “to Shakespeare’s audience, what probably mattered is that she was darker than they were” (188).

MacDonald, however, calls Adelman’s lack of concern over whether Shakespeare intended Cleopatra to be black, “an apparent contradiction” (50), and goes on to point out: “while her sexuality would presumably be represented differently if she were white, Adelman also seems too hasty to refuse to ask what it might mean if Cleopatra and her sexuality were constructed as black” (50). Such a difference of opinion between two
well-respected critics supports the fact that this discourse is a new one and is still evolving. The intensity of emotion around the issue of Cleopatra’s color and race makes this a most interesting viewpoint from which to study her character. That she was different than her Roman lover cannot be disputed. That her difference in race and color created a foundation of negative and salacious stereotypes about her also seems to be evident and undeniable when we consider the text and its historical context. And yet, we find that the issue is not accepted but debated among critics.

In view of prior criticism and the existing debate about Cleopatra’s color, I intend to show that Cleopatra’s character is significantly impacted by the factor of her racial difference. I will discuss how the Sidney and Daniel plays by creating a white Cleopatra or omitting any reference to her race, are distinctly different characters than Shakespeare’s specifically black Cleopatra. In all three plays Cleopatra’s color, or lack of it, has a relationship to her behavior and her treatment by other characters in the play. Therefore, in this examination, Cleopatra’s race is seen as an integral part of her character and not to be ignored.

Theoretical Framework

With my emphasis on the gender and race aspects of Cleopatra’s characterization, I frequently use a number of specific terms throughout my examination. For clarification, it is appropriate here to define those terms as I employ them in the succeeding chapters. No discussion of the impact of gender can be complete without the terms: subject and object. For my examination I use the term subject to mean a character that directs one’s own actions in the play and places value or judgment upon others. The opposing term,
object, is used to mean the character that is acted upon or evaluated by others. In the culture of the imperial Roman and early modern English patriarchy, the subject role is allocated to the male character while the object role is assigned to the female character. These terms are important to my discussion since I propose that each of these writers constructs Cleopatras with characteristics typical of subjects not objects. In addition to the terms subject and object, any discourse relating to issues of gender must also include the terms, other and alterity. The second edition of The O.E.D. defines alterity this way: “The state of being other or different; diversity; otherness.” The O.E.D. also defines “Other” as: “5. Existing besides, or distinct from, that already mentioned or implied; not this, not the same, different in identity.” In keeping with the literary criticism of feminism, gender, and postcolonialism, I use these terms to mean a character that was perceived to be different from other characters within a dramatic world of the play and the early modern English audience. Within the paradigm of Roman and early modern English patriarchy, I propose that a black female character would exemplify the terms “alterity” and “Other” both for reasons of race and gender. In my examination I propose that Cleopatra is just exactly such a character.

The final term I use is fair. I use this word well aware of its possible multiple meanings—fair, as in honest, and fair as the Elizabethans and Jacobean would have said of a light skinned, light-haired, light-eyed woman who was therefore considered beautiful. The Elizabethans and Jacobean would also have implied that a fair woman was a chaste or virginal woman. Cleopatra, being a woman of color, would thus never be considered chaste since she did not fit the physical requirement which was to be fair. I propose that it is partly for this reason that Mary Sidney deconstructs her Cleopatra by making her
skin white as alabaster. She did not want her Cleopatra to assume the negative stereotypes that would have been automatically assigned at the time to a black character. Samuel Daniel purposely chose to avoid any negative associations of race by making no reference to Cleopatra’s ethnicity anywhere in his play. Of course we know that Shakespeare took a completely different approach by incorporating the traditional image of Cleopatra as being dark skinned, if not black, into consideration when constructing her character. I propose he further deconstructs the negative stereotype of her by having Cleopatra refer to herself as black; effectively taking control of what might have been an epithet were it spoken by another character. She says while in a reverie of remembrance of Antony: “Think on me, / That am with Phoebus’ amorous pinches black” (1.5.27-28). The fact that she delivers these lines with pride diminishes their ability to demean her.

Three writers—three plays—three Cleopatras. I present the constructions of her as deconstructions of previously held negative stereotypes of the Egyptian queen. For the purpose of my discussion the term *deconstruction* means to change the existing construction or stereotype, while *reconstruction* means the re-creating or rebuilding of a character beyond and without its limiting stereotypes. A formal definition is provided in the *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*: “a deconstruction involves inversion and reinscription of a traditional philosophical opposition. . . . To reinscribe the terms of the opposition, one must destabilize and transform—deconstruct—the usual understanding of the concepts” (22). I will unfold the complexities of each characterization and clarify how they diverge not only from the prevailing early modern representations of Cleopatra but from each other as well. My position differs from those of previous critics since I compare all three plays with one another and aim to show the importance of both gender
and race to the various constructions of Cleopatra in Sidney, Daniel, and Shakespeare. Just as we accept that it is impossible to remove gender from one’s identity, I believe it is equally impossible to ignore the impact of race from a viable discussion of the characters under examination.

Three Visions of The African Queen

In deference to chronology, I begin my examination with the earliest of the three plays, Mary Sidney’s *The Tragedy of Anonie*. Dated at 1595, the Countess of Pembroke’s loose translation (from the French) of Robert Garnier’s play was never intended for performance. A closet drama, it was a product of the era when aristocratic women were not to write for a public audience. Critical discussion about the degree of originality and creativity she employed has included scholars who denigrate her accomplishment as merely a translation, and scholars who believe she wrote what amounts to a new play. In spite of the controversy, it is generally accepted that she changed the rhyme scheme to the popular blank verse of the day and imbued the character of Cleopatra with devotion to her children and unwavering loyalty to the man she calls her husband—Antony. Sidney’s Cleopatra is different from the general stereotypes of her and also different from Shakespeare’s depiction of her in his more famous play. I contend that by taking away elements of her sexuality and quixotic personality, Sidney created a “white-washed” Cleopatra to offset the misogynistic attitudes of the time. In her effort to deconstruct the negative stereotypes of Cleopatra, Sidney specifically describes her as *white—her skin as white as alabaster*. I believe this whiteness is a significant feature of her deconstruction of Cleopatra and it differs from
the focus Shakespeare will give to Cleopatra’s dark skin color. Sidney’s characterization of Cleopatra is predominantly that of a wife and mother and only minimally as the ruler of Egypt. Her focus in this play is not the political maneuverings, the demonstration of absolute power or the grasping for future accomplishments; rather, she is concerned for the welfare of her children and the final repose of her lover and herself. Her last words to Antony before she dies clearly establish the sincerity of her devotion and her strength of purpose to follow through even to the “hellish plain” of death.

Samuel Daniel wrote *The Tragédie of Cleopatra* in 1599 reportedly as an answer, or companion piece, to Mary Sidney’s *The Tragédie of Antonie*. As a member of the Wilton House literary circle, Daniel was familiar with Mary Sidney’s play and considered her his patron. As the title implies, there is as at least one obvious difference between Daniel’s play and Sidney’s—*his* play focuses on Cleopatra. Is there any discernible impact on the play because it was written by a man? Would a male writer be more, or less, influenced by the stereotypes of Cleopatra as a sex object? In light of this difference, it is interesting that Daniel presents us generally with a Cleopatra who accepts responsibility for what has befallen the two lovers.

We see the complexity of Daniel’s Cleopatra because while she understands the world’s opinion of her, she still believes that her devotion and loyalty will ultimately be proof to the world of her true character. So although Daniel’s Cleopatra admits that her beauty and charm caused Antony’s demise and the loss of the Ptolemy dynasty, she does so all the while affirming her integrity and honor. This complexity of character would seem to be a suggestion of her “infinite variety” so fully presented in Shakespeare’s play.
Shakespeare gives Cleopatra some of the most powerful and beautiful lines in the play, *Antony and Cleopatra*, because he sees her as a powerful subject. I propose that Shakespeare clearly presents Cleopatra as a subject, not an object, throughout the entire play. I also suggest that Shakespeare devotes more attention to Cleopatra’s dark physical appearance than the other two playwrights do; I will explore the significance of this element throughout the play. Finally, it is my position that Shakespeare deconstructs the character of Cleopatra to reconstruct her as a woman who is perfect in her imperfections. He neither purifies her, nor idealizes her as the perfect woman; she is a character of “infinite variety” that everything becomes. Shakespeare purposely created a “tawny” fronted Cleopatra because he wanted her to take on the exotic qualities of people who looked different than the Roman characters in the play and the people in his audience. His construct of Cleopatra therefore has greater impact than that of the others because he pushed aside the acceptable social norms of Jacobean England and gave his audience a character that was different in a variety of ways—she controlled her own destiny, she chose her own lovers, she was unapologetically sexual, she was honorable—and, she was black.
Notes

1 This and all citations from Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* are from *The Pelican Shakespeare*, A. R. Braunmiller, Ed. (New York: Penguin, 1989).
Perhaps what is most interesting about Mary Sidney’s play is what she did not borrow from Robert Garnier’s *Marc Antoine*. In her translation Sidney translated Garnier’s alexandrines into the more popular English form of blank verse. The use of blank verse allowed for more natural dialogue between characters and strengthened the impact of the long speeches. Through this more natural means of speech, Cleopatra, especially, becomes more believable as a protagonist. I propose that Sidney deconstructs the stereotypical character of Cleopatra and reconstructs her into a loving wife while still a powerful woman who controls her own destiny. To combine these traits was to create a new, previously unseen type of female character. Sidney could have diminished Cleopatra’s power in favor of a more culturally acceptable characterization of a woman whose power emanates only from men, but she chose the historically accurate version of Cleopatra, thereby subverting the patriarchal tradition. Sidney’s Cleopatra is a woman in love, but she remains a politically powerful public figure who can efficiently run her country. Departing from early modern English misogyny, Sidney creates a woman who is powerful *in spite* of her man and, at least, at the end of their days seems more in command than he. In their Introduction to Mary Sidney’s works, Hannay, Kinnamon and Brennan speculate on some of the possible reasons for this unusual depiction of Cleopatra: it “may have appealed to the countess as a political statement on the dangers
of a ruler’s submission to passion and the cost of civil war, or as a meditation on the female heroism of dying well, or as the portrait of a strong woman as queen, as wife, and as mother” (146).

As a woman in early modern England, Mary Sidney would be predisposed to depict her female characters in a more favorable light than her male counterparts did. It would also be understandable that she would make her female characters more predominant than the male characters in her plays. Being an intelligent, educated woman herself could explain, at least in part, Sidney’s sympathetic characterization of Cleopatra. In their introduction to Mary Sidney’s play, The Tragedie of Antonie, S.P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies point to her sympathetic treatment of the female characters, especially Cleopatra, in her play:

Mary Sidney’s Cleopatra is a major alteration of the traditional Renaissance view of that character. Instead of being presented as an unscrupulous, selfish and domineering seductress, Cleopatra is transformed into an example of stoic female heroism: constant in her love for Antony, she exhibits a wifely faithfulness, being prepared to die with and for him. (17)

We understand Sidney’s white-washed version of Cleopatra when we consider the transformation Hannay points out. I believe that Sidney’s focus was to emphasize the positive effect of a stoic woman in the “man’s world” of imperial Rome (and even early modern England?). Her creation does not fit the stereotype of a dark, or even black, Cleopatra because Sidney was interested in gender issues, not racial ones. Sidney’s Cleopatra is definitely impacted by the fact that a woman created her. Sidney lived under the limiting constructions of the patriarchy as a female and a writer therefore it would be
understandable for her to create a character that transcended those limitations. I do not believe that Sidney's interest extended to a woman of color. It is likely too that Sidney was concerned with the social acceptance to which MacDonald alludes when she writes: "Pembroke gives the Cleopatra story a white heroine because the alternative would have been too threatening to the circumstances which allowed these women to write at all" (64).

Sidney's play begins after the debacle at Actium, which may explain why there is very little of the debauchery and passion of the couple's earlier years in evidence. As this play opens we find the lovers in the last year of their relationship. They have performed a public marriage ceremony and have had three children by this time, so theirs is not a new relationship in the first flush of passion but a mature relationship based on mutual love, family ties and political goals. Historically, we know they were a couple for approximately eleven years and their war with Caesar occurred in 31 B.C.E., the final year of their affair. We also know that both Antony and Cleopatra died prior to being captured by Octavius Caesar, and that most probably they orchestrated their own deaths rather than being taken in triumph by him. Much has been written and speculated about the details of their deaths, though little is actually known. It is generally believed that Cleopatra killed herself by applying asps to her bosom. As the modern historian Edith Flamarion notes, the Roman historian, Dio Cassius, wrote in the second century C.E.: "No one knew for sure how she died. They only found small pricks on her arm. Some said she brought an asp to her..." (Qtd. in Flamarion 2). In his Life of Antony, Plutarch wrote of Cleopatra's death:

And a country fellow brought her a little basket,
Which the guards intercepting and asking what it was, 
The fellow put the leaves which lay uppermost aside, 
And showed them it was full of figs; and on their admiring 
The figs, he laughed, and invited them to take some, which 
They refused, and bade him carry them in. Cleopatra… 
Putting everybody out of the monument but her two women, 
She shut the doors… The thing had been quickly done. 

(Qtd. in Flamarion 1)

Plutarch, who wrote between the first and second centuries C.E., recounted the lives of famous Greeks and Romans and was a significant source of information for Shakespeare and other writers of the early modern period. Although he is considered an “historian” in more recent years he has been viewed as a writer who provided a frequently biased, even misogynistic view of historical persons and events. He was known for his personal comments on both famous people and events. As a Roman he certainly viewed Cleopatra as the ultimate “Other” and an anathema to imperial Roman values and goals. His somewhat lighthearted tone in his narrative about the details of Cleopatra’s suicide suggests a diminution of her importance to history. There is also no sense of honor attached to Cleopatra’s behavior at the moment of her death.

How their love affair actually began we do not know for sure, but there are historical reports of their first meeting after Julius Caesar’s assassination. We know that Cleopatra presented an opulent spectacle as she sailed into port on her magnificent ship, as Plutarch described in his “Life of Antony”;

a barge with gilded stern and outspread sails of purple
while oars of silver beat time to the music of flutes and fifes and harps. She herself lay all along under a canopy of cloth of gold, dressed as Venus in a picture, …

(Qtd. in Flamarion 62)

Her allure trapped him. Her intriguing face beguiled him. His speech which opens Act 1 clearly asserts Cleopatra’s culpability in his actions: “For her I have forgone / My country, Caesar unto war provoked / …For love of her, in her allurements caught, / Abandoned life. I honor have despised” (1.7-10). He bemoans the day he met Cleopatra: “Poor Antonie! Alas what was the day, / The days of loss, that gained thee thy love” (1.51-52). True to Senecan tradition, Mary Sidney has her Antonie invoke the classical Roman gods and beliefs. While he is regretting the fact that he ever entered into a relationship with Cleopatra, he also talks about Cupid exonerating him from causing the problem. No, Antonie asserts that Cupid’s fire is not of the destructive type rather this “fire” must have been the result of a fury’s torch. Even invoking the names of the gods, Antonie shows his inability to accept the responsibility of his actions. In his very first line, the opening line of the play, he accuses heaven of causing his destruction: “Since cruel heaven’s against me obstinate; / Since all mishaps of the round engine do / Conspire my harm; since men, since powers / Divine / Air, earth, and sea, are all injurious” (1.1-9).

Even with this reference to divine influence, Antonie still presents Cleopatra as the cause of all his woe. Antonie’s animosity toward Cleopatra may be extreme in this scene because he believes that she intends to betray him to Caesar in order to save her own life. This belief may explain his posturing as a slave to his lover unable to free himself from her grasp.
“A slave become unto her feeble face / O cruel traitress, woman most unkind / Thou dost, forsworn, my love and life betray / And give me up to rageful enemy” (1.15-20).

He sees Caesar’s fortunes as the antithesis of his own. Caesar has the gods as his friends; the sisters of fate have given him “the scepter of the earth.” To such a one has Cleopatra given over Antonie; so Antonie believes at the onset of the play but we learn differently.

Throughout the one hundred forty nine lines of Antonie’s opening speech, woven in amongst the whining and accusations, we begin to get a sense of Cleopatra’s appeal. It is an interesting way to present her; she is being described without being described. Indirectly, Antonie gives us a picture of a woman who is powerful, charismatic and sexual. We understand that she didn’t literally enslave Antonie. We also sense that her enchantment was not with vile purpose, though at the end of the affair, which is the beginning of the play, Antonie has false ideas about her motives. Antonie has told us much about this, as yet unseen, character. First of all, she was an idol in his heart. She was so alluring that he abandoned his honorable Roman lifestyle for her. He left his friends and his country and became a slave unto her mortal face. She has triumphed where Caesar could not; she has vanquished the noble Antonie. She did not need armies or weapons she overcame him with “sweet baits / Of thine eyes graces” (1.35-36). He runs from battle to be in her arms and hang about her neck. She is the enchanter, he the enchanted. How could he resist a Queen whose “looks, the grace, the / Words / Sweetness, Allurements, amorous delights” (1.101-103) entered his soul day and night?

Mary Sidney describes her pre-eminent character, Cleopatra, in several ways. As we have discussed, Antonie describes her in the opening act without actually giving a physical description of her. The emphasis of his descriptions is on her personal, sexual
magnetism rather than on her physical person. He alludes to the powerful draw of her ‘mortal face’ upon his decision to remain in Egypt, but he never specifically describes that face. Sidney leaves that task to Diomedes, who recalls the Queen at the height of her beauty:

Where are those sweet allurements, those sweet looks,
Which gods themselves right heart-sick would have made?
What doth that beauty, rarest gift of heaven
Wonder of earth?

(2.457-462)

By opening his comments on her beauty by inferring that some of the glory has faded, Diomedes is able to give us a contrast between the younger Cleopatra and the mature woman who is facing her death. He does not state that she is no longer beautiful, rather that she is still the fairest in the world. Perhaps we are given the sense that her desire to conquer the world with her physical charms is no longer her objective in life.

Nought lives so fair. Nature by such a work
Herself, should seem, in workmanship hath passed.
She is all heavenly; never any man
But seeing her was ravished with her sight.
The alabaster covering of her face,
The coral color of her two lips engrains,
Her beamy eyes two suns of this our world,
Of her fair hair the fine and flaming gold

(2.474-480)
In Petrarchan fashion, Diomedes presents us with a blazon of Cleopatra’s physical appearance. While we might easily drift off in a vision of Petrarchan beauty, we must pause a moment at a few of the specifics of this description. The first line begins with the idea that there is no one living who is as “fair” as Cleopatra. Looking at the sixth line of the quote (477) we might be surprised to see that Cleopatra’s skin is compared to alabaster. The *O.E.D.* defines alabaster as: “a translucent, whitish, fine grained variety of gypsum used for statues, vases, etc. adj.: of, or like, alabaster; hard, white.” In his metaphorical ecstasy Diomedes has just said that Cleopatra was white, not dark, not tawny fronted, but white as the stone of statues. If this departure from the stereotypical description of Cleopatra were not enough, he goes on to describe her as fair haired, specifically of the color; “fine and flaming gold.” The word “fair” and golden-haired, as in Petrarch’s description of Laura, is frequently used in early modern English drama when describing heroines and ladies of esteem so perhaps a definition would be helpful to our discussion. Turning again to the *O.E.D.* we find the following definition of “fair:”

“adj. (In all the older senses formerly used antithetically with foul. This is now obsolete or archaic.) 1. Beautiful. Beautiful to the eye; of pleasing form or appearance; good-looking. a. of persons; chiefly with reference to the face; almost exclusively of women. b. Applied to women, as expressing the quality characteristic of their sex. 9. Of character, conduct, reputation; free from moral stain, spotless.” With a clear understanding of the meaning of these key words so important to Diomedes’ description, we see that Mary Sidney presented us with a Cleopatra who was physically quite different from her fictional predecessors and successors. The commonly held stereotype was that Cleopatra was dark in appearance. Her dark hair, dark eyes and even dark skin were assumptions
made about her because she was an African queen. Augustus Caesar launched a powerful campaign of slander against Cleopatra as a part of his justification to the Roman people to start a war against Antony. A significant element of his attack on Cleopatra was to paint her as a luxurious dark-skinned seductress who emasculated Antony. Only twenty years later, Shakespeare would write his famous play about the two lovers describing Cleopatra as having a “tawny front” and describing her skin as “pinched black by Phoebus’ amorous kisses.” In a recent Hollywood film version of “Cleopatra” Elizabeth Taylor portrayed the famous Queen with very black hair and kohl rimmed eyes. In the early part of the twentieth century, Theda Bara, the silent film siren, played Cleopatra with dark hair and eyes as well. These and the many other depictions of Cleopatra support the idea that popular culture generally accepts Cleopatra as a dark lady.

So, what does Sidney’s description mean to the meaning of Cleopatra? What is the effect of skin like alabaster and fair golden hair on our assumptions about Cleopatra? Furthermore, what does “fair” possibly suggest beyond the mere physical limitations of that adjective? Joyce Green MacDonald proposes that Sidney created a white Cleopatra “because the alternative would have been too threatening to the circumstances which allowed these women to write at all. White heroines from early modern female authors emphasize the propriety of their authorship” (64). MacDonald’s view seems to emphasize the pragmatic social approach to Sidney’s “alabaster” Cleopatra. I also suggest that the physical descriptions of fictional characters provide us with a view of a playwright’s concept of their inner character. Within the cultural paradigm of early modern England, it was generally accepted that “fair” meant both the physical condition of being light in color and beautiful but also combined with the definition of fair as one
possessing integrity and honesty. Mary Sidney described her Cleopatra much as a high
born English lady of 1595 would have been idealized, fair of face and fair of character. I
believe she describes Cleopatra in this way for two reasons: first, fair was her cultural
notion of beauty, and second, she wanted to cleanse Cleopatra of her “foul” image of
seductress and home wrecker. The result is that the audience accepts this ‘white-washed’
version of Cleopatra as she presents herself: as a loyal and loving wife prepared to die for
love. There is no moral dilemma because the audience is not expected to accept the
ultimate Other, a dark woman of the mysterious East, as a woman so committed to the
love of one man that she will accept the responsibility for his destruction and die rather
than live without him. Instead of the Other, Cleopatra is shown to be a woman like the
women in the audience and therefore easier to accept as a respectable wife and mother.
In such a likeness, she is one to be empathized with rather than reviled.

By creating a “white-washed” Cleopatra, Mary Sidney was in opposition to most
of her play writing contemporaries, male, and especially, female. Kim Hall attempts to
explain this association when she writes: “there seems to be an emerging female tradition
of a dark Cleopatra. One most obvious reason for this phenomenon is that female writers
in various ways identify with the Roman Octavia” (155) Sidney appears to reject this
interpretation of Cleopatra by describing her skin as “alabaster” and her hair as fair and
golden. Furthermore, she provides no characterization of Octavia, therefore relegating
her to the status of a cipher. As such, she is hardly a woman with whom to identify.

The question of why there are so many depictions of Cleopatra as a dark
seductress may be answered when we consider bell hooks’s ideas on the subject of race.
She proposes that white males especially in the early modern period of colonization may
have engaged in sexual activity with dark-skinned women to demonstrate the supremacy of the white race over the "Other" colored races. While she is not denying the possibility of pleasure from the experience, hooks sees the motivation as being domination rather than enjoyment of an experience with someone who is different. She contrasts this type of sexual conquest with present day attitudes of young white males who purposely seek out dark-skinned "Others" to gain from their presumably greater sexual knowledge and ability. As such, contemporary young men are not engaging in sexual activity in order to show dominance but rather to gain what they believe will be a superior sexual experience because of the difference of the "Other." Certainly there are still some vestiges of the preconceived notions of the colonists of the seventeenth century that the "natives" they encountered in the new world were by definition more lascivious, sensual and sexually adventurous than their white European counterparts.

Cleopatra's unique appeal can be better understood when we consider hooks. I believe the stereotypical view of Cleopatra was informed by the attitudes of the British colonizers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who found themselves both drawn to, and repulsed by, the natives. Edward Said has written about this dualism in his work which explains Orientalism—the term he uses to describe "the construction of a colonized other, such as the Middle East, by an imperialistic culture, such as England, France, or the United States, to legitimize its own superiority" (Gajowski 134).

So, how does this relate to our discussion of Cleopatra? A few ways, it would seem. First, while there is some dispute over whether Cleopatra was black or white, dark or fair, we do not know for sure, but it is generally accepted that she is considered as synonymous with Egypt. She is therefore imbued with the characteristics of the
mysterious East, the luxurious Orient. Therefore, whether you believe she was dark or fair, unquestionably she was the “Other.” She was certainly the “Other” to the Romans. Mark Antony would have considered her as significantly different from his Roman wives, Fulvia, and later, Octavia. Antonie returned to Egypt shortly after his political marriage to Caesar’s sister and later repudiated their marriage in preference for his marriage to Cleopatra. The historical “facts” support the presumption that Mark Antony found Cleopatra preferable to his Roman wife.

Could it be that Mary Sidney wanted to relate to the Egyptian Queen who chooses her own lover instead of aligning herself with the stoic Roman wife who is served up as a commodity for the political advantage of two world conquerors? On a biographical note, we know that Mary Sidney was married off to the fifty-year-old Earl of Pembroke when she was fifteen. There is some information that the marriage was not a happy one, but it is well known that Mary Sidney retained her own family coat of arms and did not remarry when her husband died in 1601. The common knowledge of the day was that the Countess of Pembroke took a lover some years younger than herself and maintained the relationship fairly openly. Did she see herself as a kindred spirit to the inscrutable, much maligned Cleopatra? Was her flattering depiction of Cleopatra in part motivated by a preference for a strong woman who chooses for herself rather than a “contained” woman like Octavia? There is certainly much of the stoic philosophy present in the play, but Sidney’s re-constructing of the image and character of Cleopatra seems to suggest an affinity for her which the cipher Octavia could hardly approach.

Unlike other descriptions of Cleopatra at this time, Mary Sidney’s indirect description of Cleopatra’s charms and appeal are powerful in their effect on Antonie, but
are conspicuously not overtly sexual in nature. While it is true that at one point Antonie uses the word sorceress he puts “fair” before it. He also uses the word wanton, but applies it to the nature of his love for Cleopatra. I propose that Mary Sidney “white-washes” Cleopatra throughout her play. Patrick goes even farther by stating that Sidney “took care to remove all glamour from her” (69). While they agree that we have a different Cleopatra than the well-known stereotype, Hannay, Kinnamon and Brennan propose that *The Tragedie of Antonie* was “grounded in a Stoic ideal, emphasizing reason over emotion and public duty over private relationships” (142-143). Their implication may be that by contrast to the fates of the two lovers Stoicism represents the superior way to live, but Sidney’s characterization of Cleopatra is that of such a remarkably strong woman that we find it difficult to believe that her entire play is a denouncement of her central character. It may be true that Mary Sidney promoted the philosophy of Stoicism through the contrast of the fate of her characters; however, I don’t believe her characterization of Cleopatra was merely for didactic purposes. Mary Sidney was a woman living in a restrictive patriarchal society; it would have appealed to her to create a woman who controlled her own destiny but still had passion. Therefore, she deconstructs the old image of Cleopatra and re-creates her, or reconstructs her, if you will, as a new woman, sexual, but loyal.

Sidney has her characters talk about Cleopatra for all of Act 1 and 98 lines of Act 2 before she allows Cleopatra to speak for herself. I believe she constructs the play this way to recreate the notion that Cleopatra was the subject of much idle gossip and speculation in imperial Rome. The conspicuous absence of Cleopatra’s own voice also supports the underlying concept that women in imperial Rome and early modern England
did not have a “voice” in their own destinies. Therefore, it is revealing of the focus of her life that the first words Cleopatra does speak are about her relationship with Antony. Though he is not present, it is to Antonie that she speaks. She poses the question that Antonie has presumed to be true in his opening speech. “That I have thee betrayed, dear Antonie / My life, my soul, my sun? I, had such thoughts / That I have thee betrayed my lord, my king? / That I would break my vowed-faith to thee? / Leave thee? Deceive thee?” (2.99-103). Cleopatra is incredulous that her lover could believe her capable of betrayal. She calls him her life, her soul, the very sun of her universe—a dramatic contrast to the characterizations Antonie has just given her in his opening lines. We cannot forget that Cleopatra faces the same fate Antonie does; she has lost her kingdom and is in imminent peril of her life. It is not only Antonie’s life that has been destroyed; Cleopatra has risked everything too, and lost. In their mutual effort to establish their independence from Rome and reign as joint monarchs over Egypt and other eastern countries, Antonie and Cleopatra have lost their power play and face probable humiliation, and worse, at the hands of Octavius Caesar. It is revealing of her strength of character and her degree of commitment to Antonie that Cleopatra’s first thoughts are for him rather than preservation of her own skin. Antonie assumes the worst about Cleopatra perhaps because of his own weakness of character. Cleopatra, on the other hand, affirms her loyalty with a series of examples of extreme hardships she would endure “rather” than betray Antonie:

Rather sharp lightning ‘lighten on my head,

Rather may I to deepest mischief fall;

Rather the opened earth devour me;
Rather fierce tigers feed them on my flesh;
Rather, o rather let our Nilus send,
To swallow me quick, some weeping crocodile.

(2.157-162)

Cleopatra goes on to inventory all that she has lost—realm, liberty, tender offspring,—concluding that they all pale in comparison to the loss of his love! Her somewhat cavalier noting of all she has lost makes Antonie’s complaints seem all the more self-serving and egotistical by comparison. While he refers to their love affair as enchantment and himself a slave to it, Cleopatra emphatically says Antonie’s love is more important than all that she has lost: “More dear than scepter, children, freedom, light” (2.122).

Cleopatra’s only sadness is that the comfort of sharing the tomb with Antonie will be denied her; she does not speak of regret over her impending death. Clearly, Antonie does not perceive the depth of Cleopatra’s commitment to him since he can condemn her with all of her sex:

But ah, by nature women wavering are;
Each moment changing and rechanging minds;
Unwise who, blind in them, thinks loyalty
Ever to find in beauty’s company.

(1.145-148)

Here, in the conclusion of his first speech, Antonie is definitely speaking within the parameters of patriarchal misogyny. In his assessment, Cleopatra loses her identity and simply becomes one of the “women” to whom he refers. She is part of a collective which demonstrates wavering inconstant behavior for no other reason than that the members are
women. He adds the further codicil—that one is certainly unwise to believe beauty and
loyalty could be found in the same person. Cleopatra also addresses the topic of beauty
when she replies to Eras’s comments about her face in Act 2. At the height of
Cleopatra’s grief over the loss of Antonie, Eras chastises her for watering her alabaster
face with tears. She tries to encourage Cleopatra to resist her sorrow and says: “All
things do yield to force of lovely face” (2.193). This pronouncement sends Cleopatra
into a self-inflicted tirade against her beauty. Here, again very unlike Antonie, she
accepts the responsibility for what has happened. She doesn’t attempt to disengage
herself from her beauty, rather she accepts that it caused the disaster at Actium and the
ultimate demise of Antonie:

My face too lovely caused my wretched case.
My face hath so entrapped, to cast us down,
That for his conquest Caesar may it thank,
Causing that Antonie one army lost,
The other wholly did to Caesar yield;
For not enduring (so his amorous sprite
Was with my beauty fired) my shameful flight.

(2.199-200)

When Eras asks Cleopatra if she is the cause of Antonie’s overthrow, Cleopatra answers
unequivocally: “I am sole cause. I did it only I” (2.212). Eras continues to dispute with
Cleopatra about Antonie’s own complicity in his actions, but Cleopatra remains steadfast
in her belief that she caused Antonie to flee the scene of battle. She styles herself a
“fearful woman” and says she should have stayed far away from the hazards of war. I
believe that with this statement Mary Sidney gives Cleopatra a genuinely human characterization; she is not one dimensional, she is not a didactic teaching tool, she is not a strumpet. For this one moment she is just a frightened woman who follows her man into battle primarily so he would not run off and leave her for his wife. It is an unexpected characterization. Audiences have come to expect a woman of great personal magnetism who wielded her political power in masterful and masculine fashion despite her overt feminine appeal. In this scene with her devoted women, Cleopatra shows herself as a repentant, almost self effacing woman who does not believe the gods concern themselves with the daily affairs of men. Unlike Antonie, Cleopatra absolves the gods of any complicity in her personal and political situation. Of the gods she says: “They never bow so low as worldly cares / But leave mortal men to be disposed / Freely on earth, whatever mortal is” (2.236-238). She continues her argument unaware that she is in complete opposition to her lover’s opinion.

Of course, we are well aware of Antonie’s position regarding the gods and fate; he made it clear that he believes the gods meddled in his life and therefore brought on his current disastrous situation. (Their contrasting positions become dramatically polarized when they are considered in comparison with each other.) Charmion picks up the argument by focusing on “the sailess course of powerful destiny” (2.350), saying that no element of human behavior can prevail over destiny. It is interesting that Charmion ends this speech by saying we must hope for the best then encourages Cleopatra to leave Antonie and try to save herself and her crown by appealing to Caesar. The inference is clear: Charmion thinks Cleopatra should use her womanly charms to appeal to Caesar.
Cleopatra’s response is certainly not that of a self-serving strumpet when she dramatically replies:

Sooner shining light
Shall leave the day and darkness leave the night
Sooner moist currents of tempestuous seas
Shall wave in heaven and the nightly troops
Of stars shall shine within the foaming waves.
Than I thee Antonie, leave in deep distress

(2.294-300).

She will stay with Antonie whether he chooses to live or die. Though Charmion argues passionately, Cleopatra cannot be moved from her position of loyalty to Antonie. Alive or dead, she will stay with him. Charmion can’t believe what she is hearing and continues to dispute with her mistress in a dialogue structured after as stichomythia. In one line she admonishes Cleopatra to live for her children but Cleopatra’s reply is a steadfast: “Nay, for their father die” (2.318). Charmion accuses her of being a hardhearted mother, but Cleopatra’s response makes it clear where her priority lies: “Wife, kindhearted, I” (2.320). In this dialogue Cleopatra seems to show little concern for her children’s fates, ironically leaving them to destiny. Throughout the discussion her overriding concern is Antonie. His welfare and disposition is, in fact, of greater concern than her own safety. Such selflessness is understandable when we hear her say of Antonie: “He is my self” (2.352).

Charmion cannot accept that her mistress will die for her fallen lover and tries to remind her of other responsibilities—children, country, and friends. Cleopatra remains
implacable even to Charmion’s practical advice to have a wonderful tomb built for
Antonie and then to raise her children in Caesar’s grace. Mary Sidney’s Cleopatra is
shocked at such advice. She sees only shame and infamy in attempting to remain alive
under the aegis of Octavius Caesar. She is convinced that history would report that she
loved Antonie only for his empire and success, not for love. This Cleopatra is a woman
of virtue who sees herself as a wife who owes duty to her husband. It is not for any
personal gain or profit that she goes early to her grave, but rather out of a sense of duty to
her dead lord. She attempts to explain to her women: “My only end, my only duty is . . ./
On virtue it, the only good, is grounded” (2.406-408).

As in other plays about the couple, Sidney’s Cleopatra sends word to Antonie that
she is dead to see how he takes the news of her death. The significant difference in this
play is Cleopatra’s purpose: to learn if Antonie grieves for her. If so, then she will “with
more content depart this world” (2.450). She lives in the hope that Antonie will forgive
her so she may leave this life knowing he loved her.

Mary Sidney also emphasized Cleopatra’s skill in speech and her vast knowledge
of languages as other compelling attributes beyond her mere physical charm. As a
woman of learning herself, it would be reasonable for Sidney to extol the talents she
possessed and which were often denied women in her time. Although she gives
Diomedes the words, it is not difficult to hear Mary Sidney’s own voice saying of
Cleopatra:

Yet this is nothing to th’enchancing skills
Of her celestial spirit, her training speech,
Her grace, her majesty and forcing voice,
Whether she it with fingers’ speech consort,
Or hearing sceptred kings’ ambassadors
Answer to each in his own language make.

(2.484-488)

We know that Sidney used Plutarch as her primary source while translating the play. Though he was not a fan of Cleopatra, he did support what Diomedes said of her voice and rhetorical skills: “It was a pleasure merely to hear the sound of her voice,” as Flamarion points out, “with which, like an instrument of many strings, she could pass from one language to another” (34).

With so much beauty and intellectual magnetism, Diomedes says Cleopatra could still charm Caesar and save herself and her kingdom, as well as the lives of her family and friends. Cleopatra is not of a mind to save herself by using her charm despite Antonie’s belief that she is in the process of doing just that. Although he claims he loves her more than life itself, to Lucilius he readily accuses her of practicing with Caesar and transporting her love to him. Lucilius contradicts Antonie’s assumption telling him not to believe it and then goes on to commend her integrity: “Too high a heart she bears / Too princely thoughts” (3.18-19). By coming to Cleopatra’s defense, Lucilius displays a temporary break in the bond between men so typical to the Roman warrior and to patriarchal culture. He reverts to this well-established bond between men when he encourages Antonie to “leave of this love, that thus renews your woe” (3.67). Antonie has just exclaimed his irrational, undying love for Cleopatra despite his suspicions of her involvement with Caesar. Indirectly, we learn more of Cleopatra’s character and
personal power through Antonie’s impassioned expression of the hold she has on his heart and mind:

Well, be her love to me, or false, or true,
Once in my soul, a cureless wound I feel.
I love, my burn in fire of her love;
Each day, each night her image haunts my mind

(3.45-49)

His words speak of the degree of his love with Cleopatra, revealing a kind of obsession for the Queen. They also demonstrate something of her ability to ensnare such a powerful man as Antonie to her heart.

Antonie’s primary role in the play seems to be to lament his fate, to accuse Cleopatra of double dealing with Caesar, and to, in short, blame everyone else for his downfall. In true Stoic fashion Sidney has Antonie bemoan the disastrous effects of a life of pleasure and debauchery: “Pleasure, nought else, the plague of this our life, / Our life which will a thousand plagues pursue, / Alone hath me this strange disaster spun” (3.287-290). Lucilius continues the rhetoric against pleasure by invoking the goddess of love which would seem to be an allusion to Cleopatra when he says: “Enchanting pleasure, Venus sweet delights, / Weaken our bodies, over-cloud our / Spirts” (3.308-310). Antonie provides further support for what would seem the Stoic ideal of a hard-working, non-pleasure-seeking prince when he says: “The wolf is not so hurtful to the fold, / Forest to the grapes, to ripened fruits the rain, / As pleasure is to princes full of pain” (3.335-337). The two men seem to be feeding each other support for the disdain of pleasure, and by inference, Cleopatra, as they engage in this dialogue. But we can’t help but feel that
they may “protest too much” because they have such extensive experience from which to
draw their attacks. In the thrust and parry of their dialogue, we see Lucilius support
Antonie as he provides additional substance for his argument. For example, Lucilius
introduces the comparison of Antonie to his “patron” demi-god, Hercules, in order to
compare that god’s demise with Antonie’s fall into the grasp of Cleopatra: “Did he not
captive to this passion yield, / When by his captive, so he was inflamed, / As now
yourself in Cleopatra burn? / Slept in her lap, her bosom kissed and kissed, / With base
unseemly service bought her love” (3.355-359). The comparison is for us as well as for
Antonie. Operating under the belief that he was a descendent of Hercules, Antonie feels
the sting of the comparison and is driven to deal with the subject of his death. He knows
the end is near; Caesar is at the gates of Alexandria and will soon take him hostage. Like
Cleopatra, Antonie is desirous of an honorable death, a noble death. He too, wishes to
elude the humiliation capture by Caesar would undoubtedly bring. Antonie also believes
he must somehow cleanse away the shame he has brought down on his name. Not until
Act 4 do we learn the means of Antonie’s death. Directus tells Caesar of Antonie’s
suicide.

And taken up the bloody sword from ground,

But he his body pierced; and of red blood

A gushing fountain all the chamber filled.

He staggered at the blow, his face grew pale . . .

He prayed us all to haste his lingering death--

But no man willing, each himself withdrew.

(4.263-275)
It is ironic that the great general, Mark Antonie, is unable to carry out his noble death. When a messenger comes from Cleopatra with the news that she is alive and that he is commanded to bring Antony into the monument, Antonie is rapt with joy at the knowledge that his Queen is still alive. He is carried to the tomb since he is too weak to move. He must, instead, be dragged to Cleopatra's monument and pulled up by women into the tomb. There, finally, he dies in the arms of his lover. It is she who takes control of the situation and supervises the proper treatment of Antonie's body and the interment of his corpse. Equally concerned with escaping capture at the hands of Caesar, Cleopatra must now carry out her death alone. She is buoyed up by the knowledge that she will share the tomb with Antonie and that he awaits her in death.

Directus describes the entire event to Caesar in a tone filled with pathos for the lover's situation. He describes Cleopatra as one in traditional mourning:

The miserable lady with moist eyes,
With hair which careless on her forehead hung,
With breast which blows had bloodily benumbed,
With stooping head, and body downward bent.

(4.298-301)

Sidney's depiction of Cleopatra in the demeanor of mourning, her body displaying the effects of self-inflicted wounds, and her appearance disheveled, all reveal the image of a woman so despondent she no longer cares for the opinion of the world. Her life is over because her loved one is dead; all that remains is to end her life. This particular detail of Cleopatra's appearance is very significant to her character. If she were intending to seduce Caesar into saving her life she would not destroy her good looks in a rejection of
the living world for the anticipation of the next. If she were planning what Antonie originally accused her of she would be preparing herself to meet Caesar in all her finest splendor. But this is not the picture Directus paints for us and for Caesar; instead he shows us a woman no longer concerned with the political, material world.

In true Roman fashion, Caesar thinks not of Cleopatra first, but of Antonie. He laments for Antonie’s “cruel hap” but then goes on to absolve himself of any complicity, laying the blame on Antonie’s pride and love of Cleopatra: “I cannot but his tearful chance lament, / Although not I, but his own pride the cause, / And unchaste love of his Egyptian” (4.347-349). His attitude fits within the tradition of classical drama by referring to pride as the primary cause of the hero’s demise, but true to the stereotypical belief about Cleopatra he must blame her as well. Men must stick together against the intrusion of women. The inference is that Antonie couldn’t resist Cleopatra and their love is denigrated because it is a sexual, illicit love. With this opinion, Cleopatra is demeaned by implication as a home wrecker. Lest we think Caesar is paralyzed by his remorse over Antonie’s suicide, Sidney has him quickly move into a practical mode when Agrippa suggests that Cleopatra might destroy much of her treasure even as she immolates herself in her monument. Caesar directs his men to go to Cleopatra in an effort to reassure her and dupe her into delaying so that she may be taken into Caesar’s custody. His orders make it clear that Antonie and Cleopatra were right in their assumptions about Caesar’s plans for them.

Act 5 is dominated by Cleopatra. She directs all the action and delegates tasks to her people even as she mentally prepares herself for death. Although she has lost her worldly political power, Sidney gives her complete absolute power inside the monument.
for the final hours of her life. Historically we know that Cleopatra’s death did not immediately follow Antonie’s, but for literary purposes Sidney abbreviates the time, having Cleopatra die shortly after Antonie. Cleopatra opens the act with expressions of sheer anguish which she catalogs in a list covering the first seven lines of her speech. Beginning each lament with “O,” she creates a sense of pathos and dejection that is overwhelming. By having Cleopatra repeat the “O” at the beginning of each line, Sidney gives us the impression of unutterable anguish. It is an expression without a corresponding word.

Cleopatra takes full responsibility for what has happened to them. She opens her speech with the classic reference to fortune. In this way she echoes Antonie’s opening speech by laying the blame outside herself. Her second line—“O accursed lot!” (5.1)—remains on the same theme: the things which happen to us are beyond our control. These are well established, almost clichéd, laments which are expressed by characters who are beset by tragic events. With this second statement Cleopatra continues to reflect Antonie’s feelings of being subjected to terrible situations by the intervention of the outside forces, of fate. The fact that one cannot control fate or fortune effectively removes one’s complicity in the events of her life. Antonie, as we saw, continues in that vein in his opening speech, while Cleopatra quickly moves away from that position. In her second line she starts to attack some reasons for her destruction. In the two parts of line two Cleopatra starts to speak of love. She is not speaking here as a lover might, but rather as one who has been in love, has loved, and now has felt the destruction love can bring. It is the dichotomy of love that Cleopatra talks of in this line: “O plaguey love! O most detested brand” (5.2). Love is desired but is also a sickness, a plague from which
one may not recover. We may be led to it by Cupid’s appealing torch of love but the ensuing heat of the flame might bring on our destruction. Therefore, while we might be drawn to Cupid’s flame we may come to detest the passion that led us astray.

While these lines could still be seen as somewhat commonplace, they do begin to move the argument closer to Cleopatra’s actual situation and its cause. Antonie blames Cleopatra for luring him into an unchaste love, but we see Cleopatra analyze the emotion that resulted in her downfall. In the following lines she seems to work through the results of this love on her life and that of Antonie. She speaks to the surprising paradoxes of a passionate love affair when she wails: “O wretched joys! O beauties miserable!” (5.3). Sidney’s use of these two oxymora demonstrates the extremes of Cleopatra’s life—she has had it all and lost it all. Perhaps the very bitter sweetness of her recollection causes us to feel the desperation of her current situation. With these lines she informs us that she has experienced the extreme opposites of these two conditions and she now understands their cost. She has had both joy and wretchedness; she has lived in beauty but now understands that it brought misery. The additional implication is that she has used her beauty to get what she wanted in life and it has ultimately brought misery to herself and others. Continuing in this introspective manner, Cleopatra now addresses the other significant part of her life, her political power: “O deadly state! O deadly royalty!” (5.4.). The state, Egypt, has proven to be a deadly place for her and her love. The secondary meaning may also refer to the condition Cleopatra now finds herself in; she has lost everything and knows she must die. Her royal status, though normally desirable, has proven to be her death sentence. There is an implied secondary meaning in “deadly royalty” that Kings, Queens and Emperors deliver a deadly power over those they have
conquered. And perhaps finally there is the inference of a member of royalty who will soon be dead— Cleopatra.

In line five, Cleopatra now starts speaking on a more personal level. While the previous lines could have referred to almost anyone who had fallen on hard times, lines five and six tell us what Cleopatra is feeling: “O hateful life! O queen most lamentable!” (5.5.). She is in ultimate despair: she hates her life and feels that she is the queen to be most pitied. She expresses this moment of self pity to give us an inward glimpse of the struggle she is waging within herself. We know that shortly after this speech, Cleopatra marshals her remaining people into helping her retrieve Antonie’s body and prepare her for death. With the statement, “O Antonie by my fault buriable” (5.6), we understand that she is taking full responsibility for Antonie’s death. She does not absolve herself, she does not blame others; she simply says it was because of her that Antonie is now dead. Following this admission of complicity, Cleopatra turns to a common plaint that human ills are caused by the gods intervening at a level beyond the control of human beings. While her words echo some of Antonie’s sentiments in his opening speech, they are placed within the context of a speech that acknowledges her own responsibility above all else. By invoking the gods Cleopatra gives her lament a more sweeping, dramatic and even universal scope.

She quickly turns from this stereotypical fist shaking at the gods to a pronouncement of her own participation in her destruction when she says: “I / The crown have lost my ancestors me left, / This realm I have to strangers subject made, / And robbed my children of their heritage” (5.11-14). The use of “I” here and throughout the balance of this speech imbues it with a powerful sense of personal culpability and
strength. Sidney’s Cleopatra reveals her constancy with the use of the personal pronoun so much more than Antonie who invokes the gods and Cleopatra as the cause of his destruction. In spite of all she has lost, she makes it clear that nothing compares to the loss of Antonie, whom she calls “dear husband.” The structure of the speech employs repetition of the personal pronoun “I” as the subject, and “you” as the object. In this way, Sidney is able to convey the sense of Cleopatra as the actor or subject and Antonie as the acted upon, or object. This is clearly a role reversal within the patriarchal paradigm of the early modern age. Cleopatra asserts that she “entrapped” Antonie with her “snares,” which we must assume are her womanly charms. This is such a harsh perspective on falling in love since it would seem to support the stereotypical view that Cleopatra seduced an unwilling Antonie. Sidney’s Cleopatra continues presenting proof of her responsibility for Antonie’s demise. She makes no excuses for her behavior, nor does she attempt to justify her reasons: if anything, she paints an extremely brutal picture of what she has done to Antonie:

Of you dear husband, whom my snares entrapped;

Of you, whom I have plagued, whom I have made

With bloody hand a guest of mouldy tomb;

Of you, whom I destroyed; of you, dear lord,

Whom I of empire, honour, life, have spoiled.

(5.15-20)

In these lines there is no hesitation, no reluctance, no shrinking from the responsibility for Antonie’s destruction. Something else is destroyed in this speech; the stereotype of
Cleopatra is deconstructed. Sidney removes the clichés that have been attached to Cleopatra’s name by means of this admission of culpability.

After her admission of guilt, Cleopatra then moves on to herself. She declares herself a “hurtful woman” (5.21) referring again to her ability to hurt others. We can read a double meaning in this adjective to be a suggestion of her own hurt, or pain. By employing this inverted sentence structure, Sidney allows Cleopatra to convey sentiments about other characters which also apply to herself, thus using the effective double entendre. Sidney frequently employs this type of sentence structure and double entendre which creates a greater depth to the character and the dialogue because of the effective economy of the vocabulary.

After pronouncing herself a “hurtful woman” (5.21), Cleopatra goes on to ask how it is possible that she should go on living. The theme of the next several lines is the question of how she can live after all that has happened; after all she has done and lost. While in some respects her rhetorical questions about her existence are a well-known litany of angst, they manage to stay above the trite because of Cleopatra’s insistence that she alone is responsible for everything. We sense that with these unanswerable questions, Cleopatra is essentially affirming her intention to commit suicide very soon. Though there are no answers posed to these questions, we know what she intends; her message is clear. She will die and at her own hands, under her control. Cleopatra will not be a victim. She will not be subjected to the will of a conqueror but will instead choose the place, time and means of her own death.

There existed in early modern England the notion that one of the few important, autonomous events a woman could control was, ironically, her own death. Margaret
Hannay comments on this: “Making a good death was a form of heroism open even to women, one that validates ‘passive endurance rather than heroic action’ (143). It was considered the greatest expression of one’s honor to die well. It was important for a woman to have a good death. Mary Sidney’s own mother reportedly had a “good death”: she had her family and friends about her and was said to have given out words of wisdom and grace to all who gathered around her. In return for her silence at her execution, Anne Boleyn, the second wife of Henry VIII, was promised the services of an adept swordsman from France as her deft executioner. Anne made no protestations before the block, but merely committed her soul to God and affirmed her love for Henry. In Elizabeth Carey’s play, The Tragedy of Mariam, the central female character essentially brings on her own execution, but will not speak a word to save herself or condemn her persecutor. Like Cleopatra, Mariam chooses the path that leads to her death and therefore becomes a subject rather than an object in the action. In early modern England real historical women had little control over their lives, a phenomenon that is often reflected in the fictional women on the stage. Like their real counterparts, the fictional women of drama often found the only part of their lives they could control was their death.

That Cleopatra will kill herself is obvious to us, but her people continue to attempt to mollify her and get her to reconsider her intentions. Euphron begs her to consider her children. In gory detail he anticipates what may happen to them when they are left as orphans under Caesar’s control. Although she is terribly moved by Euphron’s words, they do not have the effect he was hoping for. Rather than diverge from her plan of suicide, Cleopatra begs her servant to look after her children like a “good father.” She suggests he could spirit them away to another country where they would be safe. In her
farewell to them, she unquestionably loves them but is unable to go on: “Farewell, my
babes, farewell, my heart is closed / With pity and pain, myself with death enclosed / My
breath doth fail. Farewell for evermore; Your sire and me you shall see never more /
Farewell, sweet care, farewell” (5.73-77). Her parting words are filled with pathos in
their utter simplicity. We cannot choose but feel the sadness she feels even as we know
what she is about to do. Sidney is so moved by the farewell that she has Cleopatra swoon
at the moment when her children say “Adieu.” This little death is a foreshadowing of the
death which is to come, but we have one more brief moment with Cleopatra, as do her
women.

Charmion and Eras seem to bring Cleopatra back to life by encouraging her to
perform the burial rites for Antonie and to weep over his tomb. It is a dramatic moment
since just as the women have told her this she revives, emitting only the faint sound, “Ah,
ah!” To the reader it is as though only the name of Antonie can bring Cleopatra back
from death. In this brief action, Sidney is able to deftly reaffirm Cleopatra’s commitment
to Antonie through the subtle change in her physical condition. Upon awakening,
Cleopatra compares herself to the wretched Niobe of Greek legend who became
inconsolable at the loss of her children and so was turned into a weeping stone by the
gods. Yet she is not given the relief of being turned to stone; rather, she is made to weep
ceaselessly while heaven laughs at her tragedy and renews it, leaving only death as her
comfort. Cleopatra is aware of the dichotomy of her predicament; she understands that
death is not usually considered to be a comfort. By saying so, she makes it plain to us
that there is no comfort for her in this life; she must die, it is all that is left to her.
In neo-Senecan fashion Cleopatra continues to allude to classical mythology. Just as she declares she must die, she says that Antonie waits for her at the river Styx, that famous river that divides the living from the dead. It is a reiteration of her focus on Antonie; he was the center of her life and will now be the center of her death. If she were the strumpet the Romans believed her to be, could she give up her life to join her lover in death? Would she not use all her womanly powers to ensnare a new victim? Why would she not follow the advice of her people and try to seduce Caesar in order to save her life, her crown, her children? Sidney’s characterization remains consistent throughout the play; she has successfully deconstructed the traditional view of Cleopatra as the lascivious “Other” and re-constructed her into a devoted wife incapable of living without the man she loves.

Though her ladies, Charmion and Eras, are present with her in Act 5, it is Cleopatra who dominates the entire act. With this unusual approach, Sidney is the first of the three playwrights discussed here to empower Cleopatra with the control of the final act. This structure is especially interesting when we consider that Sidney titled her version of Garnier’s play The Tragedie of Antonie. Daniel names his play The Tragedie of Cleopatra, while Shakespeare goes even further to suggest an equality of his male and female protagonists with his title, Antony and Cleopatra.

Cleopatra speaks approximately 180 lines in Act 5. The number of lines alone reveals her domination of the action. Of these lines, the majority dwell on her feelings about Antonie and her own contribution to his demise. When her ladies talk about weeping at Antonie’s feet, Cleopatra agonizes over her loss of “liquor” to supply her tears. She has cried so much her “eyes quite drawn their conduits dry” (5.125). She will
not cease crying in spite of her loss of water for her tears for she says she will cry “vital blood” (5.128) “and never stop / All watering thee, while yet remains one drop” (5.131-132). There is nothing more she can give to Antonie; she has given her “vital moisture” (5.128) through her fallen tears and now will give her “vital blood” (5.128) to pay him homage in death.

From line 137 Cleopatra speaks first to the gods and then she addresses the dead Antonie, telling him of her misery at his loss. She invokes the gods as she has previously, as a part of a ritual; we do not believe she expects a response from them. Nor do we believe that she actually blames them for her agony. Here her words seem to be almost a question, about why Antonie’s goddess has abandoned him, seemingly gone over to his enemy’s side, and given Caesar her protection. She reminds the goddess that Antonie is her descendant and therefore should be protected by her. Through her aegis, Antonie might have ruled Rome. Cleopatra’s suppositions about the change in history serve to imbue Antonie with the heritage of the gods and immortality. She reminds us that he might have been the emperor of Rome had Actium only gone differently. By doing so, we see Antonie again as the “triple pillar of the world” and capable of great deeds. For a moment, we see Antonie through Cleopatra’s eyes and forget the besotted general who ran after his lover rather than stay in the field of battle. Sidney enables her character to reveal the admiration she and the rest of the world once held for Antonie. As she speaks the lines we know that Cleopatra is not affected by the world’s current opinion of her lover; she still sees him as a god. She praises Antonie in true Petrarchan style but this is unique to find a woman describing a man with this well known Renaissance technique. I see it as a subversion of the well established patriarchal view of women as
objects. Women were viewed as their parts, not so much as for their quality as a whole integrated person. Petrarchan poetic tradition established the technique known as “blazon” which literally anatomized women by extolling the perfection of their various body parts while never appreciating them as whole human beings. Through the device of blazon, Cleopatra subverts the tradition of man as subject and deconstructs Antonie into an object. “Thy eyes, two suns, the lodging place of love” (5.148) could easily be said of a woman in many a Renaissance poem, but is, instead, applied to the great Antonie’s eyes. She completes the line by alluding to Mars, the god of war: “Which yet for tents to warlike Mars did serve” (5.149), giving us once again the impression of Antonie as a god.

She leaves off the theme of praise to Antonie and turns to a plea to him to hear her. Cleopatra begs him to hear her beyond the grave:

Antonie by our true loves thee beseech --
And by our heart’ sweet sparks have set on fire
Our holy marriage and the tender ruth
Of our dear babes, knot of our amity --
My doleful voice thy ear let entertain,
And take me with thee to the hellish plain,
Thy wife, thy friend. Hear Antonie, o hear
My sobbing sighs, if here thou be, or there.

(5.153-160)

Although Antonie is dead to all the world, it is apparent through these lines that Cleopatra thinks of him as though alive. Could it be that because she still lives, she feels that
somehow he does too? If we believe the old adage said of couples that the “two shall become one,” it appears with this appeal to Antonie that Cleopatra believes the statement.

Finally she turns to herself, summarizing her life, with its success and conflicts. She remembers great happiness then the disaster that befell them when the ships came to Egypt. For the first time in all her lamenting she considers how posterity will view her: “And now of me an image great shall go / Under the earth to bury there my woe” (5.167-168). She also continues the concept of the two becoming one within the confines of death and the limitations of the tomb. She would die sooner, but she must give his body the obsequies due him, with no concern for who will bewail her when she is gone. Her selflessness pervades all her speeches but especially these last lines over Antonie’s body.

In one final moment, she refers to the insignificance of beauty and purposely disfigures her beautiful face. Though she yanks her hair and scratches her face as part of the traditional mourning behavior of the Greeks and Romans, we feel her observations about the unimportance of beauty, at such a time refers also to the destruction she believes her beauty has wrought. It is a subtle allusion but sufficient enough for us to comprehend its deeper meaning since Cleopatra had previously indicted her beauty as the cause of so much tragedy. With death at hand why indeed should one worry over beauty? Cleopatra displays her depth of character and her awareness of what is important in life when she says: “Alas, why should we seek / (Since now we die) our beauties more to keep?” (5.197-198). With this resolve we feel that Cleopatra has left off the concerns of this transitory world and moved on to eternity.

Her final words are a direct farewell to Antonie as she inventories his physical parts in a modified Petrarchan manner. While she does not compare his parts to anything
celestial or earthly, by the use of “O” before each she gives them a quality of superiority.

But kiss him now, what rests me more to do?

Then let me kiss you, you fair eyes, my light,

From seat of honour, face most fierce, most fair!

O neck, O arms, O hands, O breast where death

(O mischief) comes to choke up vital breath.

(5.200-204)

She ends her speech dramatically much as she lived her life. Her reference to thousands of kisses effectively conveys her sense of the grandeur of her love:

A thousand kisses, thousand, thousand more

Let you my mouth for honour’s farewell give,

That in this office weak my limbs may grow,

Fainting on you, and forth my soul may flow.

(5.205-208)

Although the subject is kisses, the love Cleopatra speaks of is one of honor and respect not of passion and sensuality. Her expression is what we would expect of a loving wife, not an illicit lover. Thus she dies, fainting on Antonie’s body, bringing her life and the play to an end.

With this dramatic ending, Sidney effectively completes the deconstruction of Cleopatra as lascivious strumpet and home wrecker and reconstructs her as a loving wife and a powerful woman who controls her own destiny. Sidney’s Cleopatra transcends the stereotypes so frequently assigned to her by the patriarchal culture of both Roman and
early modern English times. It is true that Sidney’s Cleopatra loses a considerable amount of her glamour and sex appeal but in return she receives loyalty and personal strength of character. She is reconstructed and therefore emerges as a new creation, a Cleopatra who does not allow the patriarchal dramatic world within which she exists to contain her.
Notes

1 All quotations from Mary Sidney *The Tragedie of Antonie* in *Renaissance Drama by Women*. Edited by S.P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies, New York: Rutledge, 1996.
CHAPTER 3

SAMUEL DANIEL’S SLIGHTLY SYMPATHETIC VIEW OF CLEOPATRA:
“A GLORIOUS AND MIGHTY QUEEN”

Samuel Daniel wrote his play, *The Tragedie of Cleopatra*, at the request of his mentor, Mary Sidney, the Countess of Pembroke. The idea was that Daniel’s play would be a companion piece to Sidney’s *The Tragedie of Antony*, which she translated from Garnier’s French play. Although Daniel owed much to Sidney as a member of her literary circle and one of her sponsored poets, his play is not merely a re-working of Sidney’s play; it is entirely his own creation.

Garnier’s play is apparently well represented by Sidney’s translation although there are some differences in characterization and descriptive details. Like the Sidney and Daniel plays, Garnier’s play is grounded in the philosophy of Stoicism. We see the emphasis on reason over emotion and public duty over private relationships in *Marc Antoine*. The content of the play focuses on the well known tropes of fate vs. free will, mercy over severity, and whether or not suicide is justifiable. Hannay summarizes the play in this way:

In the five acts of the drama Antony and Cleopatra are each given two acts to mediate on their actions, with the fourth act given to Caesar. The philosopher Philostrate speaks for Egypt and incorporates into the drama five choruses that give the view of the people, first Egyptians and after Roman soldiers. (144)
Although Antony avoids taking the responsibility for their downfall, Cleopatra accepts her responsibility for the destruction of Egypt in Garnier's play. This is consistent with both Sidney and Daniel. Garnier reinforces the notion that passion is a destructive force through the comments of Philostratus and Cleopatra's admission of culpability. Garnier emphasizes the enchantress in Cleopatra's character while Sidney and Daniel build on her qualities as a loyal wife and, at least in Daniel, the character of a devoted mother. Garnier does devote Act 5 to Cleopatra as do the later playwrights but he leaves the depiction of her suicide somewhat ambiguous—it is not completely clear that Cleopatra has applied the asps, so she does not die at the end of the play. Daniel reconstructs this non-ending by focusing on Cleopatra's final hours and dramatizing her death.

Daniel deconstructs Cleopatra's stereotypical image by adding qualities to her characterization, rather than taking things away as his patron Mary Sidney did. By adding to her character, he adds to the qualities of responsibility and introspection which Sidney provides, but still gives her physical beauty and personal magnetism. Furthermore, I propose that Daniel positions Cleopatra as a subject within the structure of the play. And finally, rather than de-glamorizing her, Daniel gives back to Cleopatra a certain degree of the sexual appeal which has so often been associated with her and which enchanted Caesar and Antony. I believe that Daniel created a sexually appealing Cleopatra in part because he was a man. It is highly possible that he was seduced by the stereotype of the enchanting queen who carried on love affairs with two of the most powerful men in the known world. Daniel points to Cleopatra's sexuality as a destructive
force in the play, so it makes sense that he would emphasize her overt sexual behavior. He does this in part by providing us with more information about the passionate and somewhat hedonistic lifestyle the couple led in the years before Actium.

The difference between Daniel’s portrayal of Cleopatra and that of his mentor’s characterization of her is noted by J.Max Patrick’s who writes:

The extensive revisions that Samuel Daniel made to his sequel to the Countess of Pembroke’s *Antonie* reveal that he reacted against her meanness to Cleopatra and against representing the Queen as abject, overlamenting, and unspirited in defeat. In his ultimate portrayal Daniel describes her as crushed in body but not in spirit and as healthy in repentance; thus her passion becomes heroic devotion and her pride becomes dignity (69).

And later Patrick adds “though intended as a vehicle for moralizing by the Neo-Senecan dramatists of the Renaissance, she (Cleopatra) grew into a splendid figure of repentance under Daniel’s pen” (75). I agree with Patrick that Daniel has been able to create a Cleopatra who, though repentant for her faults, remains a woman of engaging personality and glamor. While Daniel’s vision of Cleopatra may be seen as an empathetic one, it may also be viewed as more judgmental. It could be argued that Daniel imbues his Cleopatra with strong sexual appeal in order to use that very appeal against her as the cause of Antony’s downfall. The Cleopatra he presents us with takes full responsibility for the destruction of her lover and more specifically says that her beauty was the cause. Joyce MacDonald reinforces this view when she writes “Indeed, Daniel introduces his Cleopatra, who will insist that her hold on Antony has been entirely destructive” (38).
Sidney's Cleopatra is as white as alabaster but Daniel omits any discussion of Cleopatra's race or color. I propose that since Cleopatra's race and color are such significant parts of her stereotype that their omission makes them conspicuous in their absence in the Daniel play. It may be that for Daniel, the question of Cleopatra's alterity is sufficiently covered through the presentation of her obvious gender issues as a woman in a patriarchal society. Could it be that as a man he felt that her greatest difference was being a woman in a man's world? Joyce Green MacDonald discusses how the issue of Cleopatra's race actually merges with the issue of sexuality when she explains the fear the Romans would have about miscegenation. As a sexually active woman Cleopatra poses the greatest threat to Roman society by entering into a relationship with Antony. The fact that she bears his children is a physical manifestation of Antony's crossing of the racial lines between Roman and Other. McDonald compares Daniel to Sidney on this topic: "If Pembroke uses Cleopatra's sexuality to efface the existence of racial difference between Romans and Egyptians, Daniel uses it to proclaim and indict difference" (39). Here MacDonald forces us to remember that the Romans viewed the Egyptians (and probably anyone who was not a Roman) as another race, with the inference of being an inferior race. That Egyptians on the whole probably looked different than the patrician Romans was certainly true, but how Cleopatra actually looked is still a point of contention. Since we may never know for certain what Cleopatra looked like we can accept what Janet Adelman concluded: "to Shakespeare's audience, what probably mattered is that she was darker than they were" (188). If we consider these ideas together with the Cleopatra Daniel presents to us we come to understand that his omission of reference to her skin color forces us to look at the cultural and gender issues.
intrinsic to the character of Cleopatra. As MacDonald sees it, “the queen’s unbridled sexuality is centrally expressive of her country’s corruption and disorder. Her sexuality is thus acculturated and racialized”(42). If we accept the idea that Cleopatra’s sexuality is bound together with her race and culture then what Daniel is giving us is a character that cannot be assessed for her parts but must be viewed as a cohesive whole. Her sexuality, gender, culture and race are not pieces of her which can be studied in isolation; she must be viewed and considered as the sum of her parts. While such a construction might not be up to accepted contemporary standards regarding race and gender, I believe that Daniel was demonstrating an attempt to view his character in total rather than in the Petrarchan convention of evaluating a woman for her parts. Therefore, I believe Daniel purposely chose to not to address the issue of Cleopatra’s race thinking it would draw undue attention away from her personality and character.

In perhaps his most significant departure from Sidney, Daniel presents us with a focus on Cleopatra’s children and her relationship with them. Daniel’s play opens differently than both the other plays; Daniel has Caesario open the first act. This is a complete departure from the other two plays. By opening his play with Caesario’s words and his impending assassination, Daniel turns his focus to the fate of Cleopatra’s children but adds emphasis to their importance by having Caesario actually present in the play. He is present in Act 1 while his mother directs her “trusted servant” Rodan to take the boy out of the country and harms way. Standing by while others talk about you is not an active role, but by line 125, Caesario speaks to his mother. Neither of the other plays has such a scene. One play omits the children altogether while the Sidney play only invokes their presence through the discourse of other characters.
So, what is Daniel’s purpose with the inclusion of Caesario in his play? Consider the impact of his presence on the character of Cleopatra; first of all, we see her as a mother. Following one of the traditions of Neo-Senecan tradition, Daniel has very little staged drama, whenever possible events are reported on stage by a witness to them rather than acted out by the participants, therefore to see Cleopatra on stage talking with her son is a significant departure. Historically, we know that Cleopatra had three children, but in the other two plays they are merely ciphers, topics of dialogue. By creating a conversation and, more pathetically, the last conversation between Cleopatra and her son, Daniel gives us a glimpse of her in a way she is rarely seen. Not only is Caesario included in the play, but Cleopatra opens the play with her fears over his fate. She is, in fact, directing his tutor, Rodon, to take him out of the country and to safety. In the first ten lines Cleopatra expresses some hope that he should only be away until “better fortune call him backe from hence” (1.1.9). Then she attests to his right to the sovereignty over their world saying as the offspring of “Great Julius, he may come to guide the Empire of the World, as his by right” (1.1.19-20).

Act 1 certainly displays her quandary as a mother—should he stay or should he go? If he stays they are together, but if he goes she may save his life. Her agony is expressed through the dichotomy that she sees. We are made to feel her pain; she doesn’t know what choice to make because there is no good choice. In fact a few lines later she speaks to that very point: “When both are bad, how shall I know the best?” (1.1.107). Our understanding of her intolerable situation is enhanced by our knowledge of the historical fact; Caesario is murdered at around the time of Cleopatra’s suicide. Our knowledge makes the dialogue in Act 1 all the more emotional; we know her situation is hopeless,
her son will die and there is nothing she can do to prevent that. Cleopatra suspects that all may be pointless since she has a fearful premonition:

I know not what presaging thought
My spirit suggests of ominous event:
And yet perhaps my love doth make me dote
On idle shadowes, which my feares present
But yet the memorie of mine own fate,
Makes me feare his, and yet why should I feare?"

(1.1.77-82)

In this line Daniel actually describes Cleopatra as a doting mother because she loves her son so much. The words “doting mother” are rarely attached to any description of Cleopatra during the early modern era in England, nor can one imagine any Roman describing her as such in 31 B.C.!

Cleopatra continues her equivocation over sending Caesario away for over fifty lines. Interspersed with her indecision are thoughts about their fate and the fate of her royal line. She accepts the blame for the destruction of her dynasty: “Our blood must be extinct, in my disgrace, / And Egypt have no more kings of their owne” (1.1.87-8). With this statement Daniel introduces another of his characterizations of Cleopatra; she takes responsibility for the destruction that has befallen her. Daniel has Cleopatra invoke the gods, fate and the stars into her vocabulary, but her references seem to intertwine them with her own complicity in events. So it is understandable that she advises her son: “Let us divide our stars, go, go my son: / Let not the fate of Egypt find you here: / Trie if so by thy Destinie can shun / The common wrack of us, by being there” (1.1.93-6). She seems
to be thinking that perhaps destiny can be escaped; that it may only be the sad fate of Egypt he needs escape. It is a wishful expression which seems to carry little real weight even with Cleopatra for in her very next line she asks the rhetorical question: “But who is he found ever yet defence / Against the heavens, or hide him any where?” (1.1.97-8).

Cleopatra understands Fate; one cannot escape it. The next several lines are quite maudlin in nature as they are resplendent with the pathos of a mother who knows she will lose her son. If it is his fate to die soon, why should she attempt to change it? Intellectually she comprehends the situation, but emotionally she is unwilling to accept it. She poses the question:

> Then what need I to send thee so farre hence
> To seek thy death, that maiest as well die here?

> And here die with thy mother, die in rest . . .
> When Egypt may a tombe sufficient be?

(1.1.99-104)

These are lines filled with pathos. The tone of her lines is bittersweet--she knows he will die, so why send him away. Additionally bitter is the metaphor of Egypt being sufficient as a tomb. In terms of stereotyping this is a complete reversal of the image of Egypt as the source of life, home of the fruitful Nile. It is then a complete reversal of the world view of Egypt and even more shocking when we consider that it is Egypt’s famous Queen who says it. Clearly Daniel is also giving us a foreshadowing of the impending deaths of the principal characters with this metaphor of Egypt as a tomb.
Cleopatra utters a sorrowful lament acknowledging that she doesn’t know what to do; should she send him away, or keep him close to her? “O, my divided soule what shall I doe, / Whereon shall now my resolution rest?” (1.1.105-106). In the following several lines she verbally equivocates between telling her son to stay or go. It is a terribly poignant and effective speech which reinforces the image of Cleopatra as a loving mother. Daniel has given Cleopatra an element of humanity which deconstructs the generally accepted stereotype of her as a whore and rarely acknowledges her role as a mother.

Prophetically, Cleopatra tells her son that these may be the last words she may ever speak to him. In what will be her final words to him she reveals to us the depth of her motherhood; she acknowledges it as the tie that binds them together:

Ah no deare heart tis no such slender twine
Wherewith the knot is tide twixt me and thee
That blood within thy vaines came out of mine,
Parting from thee, I part from part of me.

(1.1.120-124)

This is not the same Cleopatra who in Mary Sidney’s play left her children to whatever fate would befall them. Conspicuous in its absence is any mention here of Antony; Cleopatra’s sole focus is on her son and his welfare. Though she does allude to her possible disastrous fate, she seems unconcerned with her own welfare. Her lack of concern for her personal safety is in complete opposition to Antony’s suspicion that she was negotiating with Caesar to betray Antony and so save her own skin. How is it possible that Antony could have such a negative view of Cleopatra? Her son, Caesario,
shares no similar view, but rather sees her as a caring mother who is currently suffering because they are about to be parted. That he honors his mother is clear in his response to her pitiful speech. It is also obvious to us that, though a child, Caesario understands the breadth of their tragedy but still has enough youthful optimism to expect to change it. In a very moving reply he tries to console his mother, calm her fears and give her hope for his future reign:

Deare Soveraigne mother, sufer not your care
To tumult thus with th’honor of your state:
The windes may change...
I shall doe well, let not your griefe bereave
Your eies of seeing those comforts when they turne.

(1.1.126-149)

At these comforting words, Cleopatra wishes her son to “be gone” perhaps knowing that he cannot “fare well.” She then comments on the irony she sees in her situation when she observes: “To thinke, that by our meanes they are undone, / On whom we sought our glory to convoy” (1.1.162-63). We hear the hope and promise of a mother for her child in these words, but understand as she does that all is lost. If that were enough cause for despair, Cleopatra now returns to her sorrow over Antony’s death. The time of the action of this play being different from that of Mary Sidney’s, we learn that Antony died in her arms that morning and now she must bury him. She declares it is a “sad daies worke” that she started her day by holding the dying Antony in her arms and is now covered with the blood from his self inflicted wound. She sums up the doleful responsibilities of her day when she muses:
I come from out a tombe,
To send away this deerest part of me
Unto distresse, and now whilst time I have,
I got t'interre my spouse. So shall I see
My sonne dispatcht for death, my love t’his grave.

(1.1.171-174)

Although she ran away from the disastrous battle of Actium, Cleopatra is not running away from her responsibilities here. She seems, rather, to be running to her obligations with little or no concern for her own safety. In the next scene we will hear that, according to Dircetus, Antony’s last words to Cleopatra were to save her race: “T’was now in vaine for her to stand and mourne: / But rather ought she seeke her race to free, By all the meanes (her honor sav’d) she can” (1.2.277-279). Later, her loyal maid Charmion will attempt to persuade her to save herself by appealing to Caesar. There is even the suggestion that she use her womanly wiles to seduce him into sparing her life and her dignity. As in the Sidney play, Cleopatra is no longer interested in her own life and finds any suggestion of attempting to seduce Caesar dishonorable.

Staying true to Neo-Senecan tradition, Daniel has another character tell us about Antony’s last hours as well as his thoughts about Cleopatra. We never see Antony in the play; instead his portion of the story is related to us and Caesar by Dircetus. His extremely lengthy speech informs us that Antony believed Cleopatra had betrayed him: “Confounded with his fortunes, crying out, / That Cleopatra had betraid his trust” (1.2.197-98). There is little else said to support his belief but it was sufficient enough to cause him grief and to scare Cleopatra into running to her monument. After she has it
reported to Antony that she has killed herself, Dirceus reveals Antony’s respect for the Queen in spite of her supposed betrayal:

Which when Antonius heard, he straight burst forth
Into his passion: what? And hast thou then
Prevented me, brave Queene, by thy great worth
Hath Cleopatra taught the worke of men?
Hath shee out gone me in the greatest part
Of resolution to die worthily?

(1.1.205-210)

The fact that he calls her “brave Queen, hints to us that Antony still loves Cleopatra and that he can still be impressed by her “great worth.” As in Mary Sidney’s play, The Tragedie of Antonie, there is again a reference to the importance of dying a good death. Daniel’s Cleopatra has reminded Antony of the need for an honorable death; Antony believes she has subverted the traditional roles of men and women. He should have taught Cleopatra how to die by his example: “doth shee disappoint / Me, of th’example to teach her to die?” (1.2.211-212). Mary Ellen Lamb attempts to explain the Renaissance appeal to dying well for women when she writes: “The ars moriendi literature and to the heroics of constancy as these concerned women at the end of the sixteenth century. By exalting the ability to suffer without complaint, to endure any affliction with fortitude, Stoicism was consonant with other models in the Renaissance that recommended silence and obedience in the face of adversity as praiseworthy female behavior” (119). As a member of the Sidney Circle, Daniel would certainly have been aware of his mentor’s attitude toward the philosophy of Stoicism and may very well have incorporated it in his
own work. I believe that we see the influence of this idealization of dying well in Daniel’s treatment of Cleopatra’s suicide. Charmion is the last to comment on Cleopatra when she observes:

That all the world may see, shee di’d a queene.
O see this face the wonder of her life,
Retaines in death a grace, that graces death.
Colour so lively, cheere so lovely rife,
As none could think this bewty could want breath.
And in that cheere th’impression of a smile,
Doth seeme to shew shee scorns death & Caesar,
And glories that shee could them so beguile,
And here tells death, how well her death doth please.

(5.2.1756-1765)

Before she can accomplish her own death, Cleopatra must get Antony safely stowed in her monument. This is no small task, since Antony has mortally wounded himself and is unable to assist in the arduous procedure. Dircetus’ narrative continues giving a detailed description of how Cleopatra gets Antony into the monument. The events he describes are similar to those in other plays about Cleopatra but what is of interest to this discussion is Dircetus’ interpretation of Cleopatra’s behavior. He emphasizes the magnitude of the effort she exerts to get Antony into the monument. His description is an extremely flattering rendering of the events. For example, when he talks about how difficult it was for these weak women to pull Antony’s heavy body up the wall, he says: “And all the weight of her weake bodie laies, / whose surcharg’d heart more then her body wayes”
(1.2.261-262). It is just after this poignant description that Dircetus tells Caesar that Cleopatra calls Antony: “her Lord, her spouse, her Emperor” (1.2.267). Not stopping there, he adds that Cleopatra is unconcerned with her own safety but attends only to Antony: “Forgets her own distresse to comfort him, / And interpoints each comfort with a kisse” (1.2.268-9). The events themselves could have very simply and succinctly been reported without the embellishment of Cleopatra’s emotion and selflessness, but Daniel wants us to see Cleopatra in the warm glow of a sympathetic light.

It is interesting to see that after Dircetus’s lengthy and emotionally charged description of the events, Caesar’s only emotion is for Antony, not for Cleopatra. As he grieves for his former ally and recent enemy, Antony, he absolves himself of any responsibility in his suicide. In spite of Dircetus’ sympathetic portrayal of Cleopatra’s behavior, Caesar’s only concern for her is whether she will prevent him from capturing her and parading her in triumph. He shows no compunction at tricking her into thinking he will be merciful if it will serve his objectives. He ends the scene with his directive: “Supple her heart with hopes of kinde reliefe, / Give words of oyle, unto her wounds of griefe” (1.2.309-10). Caesar seems to be operating from the perspective of treating Cleopatra like a woman, rather than the Queen of a great country. In these last lines his reference to “her heart” suggests a view of her as merely an emotional woman, not a person of reason and intellect. His attitude here further supports his disapproval and dislike of the queen. Whether it is misogyny or Roman chauvinism that underlies Caesar’s denigration of Cleopatra we can see how the two issues of gender and race can manifest themselves simultaneously. It is doubtful that he would refer to Antony in the same manner had Antony lived.
The Chorus seems to be speaking for Daniel since they often comment on human nature in general and Cleopatra's behavior in specific. They begin their speech by asserting that man cannot hide from himself and that sin is ever present as is pain. They further declare that those who are impious and wanton will lose respect. It would seem that here the chorus is speaking of Cleopatra and, possibly, Antony. In the third stanza though they make it clear that their admonition is for Cleopatra; in an inversion of Caesar's last words, they ignore Antony and focus all their opinions on Cleopatra. If we look carefully we will see that it is not the chorus who blames Cleopatra, but rather Cleopatra herself. The chorus seems simply to be observing the position Cleopatra has assumed:

And Cleopatra now,
Well sees the dangerous way
She tooke, and car'd not how,
Which led her to decay

(1.2.336-339)

From these lines we know that Daniel's Cleopatra knows what she has done, understands that it was "disordered lust" that caused her to fall into decay. Morrison also sees that Daniel considers lust as the cause of the couple's disaster: "Daniel blames Cleopatra's "disordered lust" for the disastrous outcome: "This hath her riot wonne, / And thus she hath her state, herselfe and us undone" (1.231-232) (117). Cleopatra did not care at the time, but the inference is that now she cares deeply about the "dangerous way" she took.
Apparently, acting as citizens of Egypt, the chorus then explains what has befallen them because of Cleopatra’s actions. They blame her totally for what has happened; making no mention of Antony:

And likewise makes us pay
For her disordered lust,
The int’rest of our blood:
Or line a servile pray
Under a hand unjust,
And others shall thinke good.
This hath her riot wonne,
And thus she hath her state, herselse, and us undone.

(1.2.340-45)

The Chorus informs us indirectly that before this time no one said anything openly about Cleopatra’s activities, but now they can speak openly about what “close was muttered” (1.2.349). There are no more secrets, “Now every mouth can tell” (1.2.348). Their judgment is harsh on Cleopatra but we sense that they are also speaking for her, that she has somehow confessed and is searching for closure:

How that shee did not well,
To take the course shee did,
For now is nothing hid,
Of what feare did restraine . . .
The bed of sinne reveal’d
And all the luxurie that shame would leave conceal’d.
Here we clearly see the patriarchal position that woman is to blame for all of man’s ills. Here, and in other speeches, the Chorus provides the play with the view of the populace. As such, it is understandable that Daniel infuses the language of the Chorus with the accepted patriarchal philosophy that was prevalent in both imperial Rome and in early modern England. As has been discussed, references to Eve’s sin and the resultant expulsion from the Garden of Eden had been used since medieval times to support the belief that women were evil. Katherine Henderson and Barbara McManus write about the use of the biblical story as a major foundation of anti-female ideology: “The story of Eve . . . the presentation of woman as the channel through which evil, pain, and laborious work entered the world. Eve’s fall and consequent subjection to man was the word of God and had to be taken into account” (7). Thomas Aquinas also wrote about the moral weakness of women. John Knox attacked female monarchs and the general inferiority of women. The writings and opinions of these men would have been well known to Daniel. Furthermore, as a man, we have to wonder if he was not at least influenced by the fears of many of his contemporaries about the power of women. Henderson and McManus write: “the stereotype of the seductress represents an attempt to project disruptive sexual feelings and the responsibility for sexual conduct onto women” (62). Quite simply, men feared the sexual power women held over them and so exonerated themselves from moral depravity by blaming women for their sexuality. Ania Loomba sees the same situation from a post-colonialist perspective when she writes: “Cleopatra is more properly the Amazon who brings together patriarchal (and particularly Renaissance) fears of female government as well as sexual activity” (76). Loomba perceives the potent combination...
of a woman who has political power and sex appeal—Cleopatra is the antithesis of such a character. While Elizabeth I is mythologized as having the virtues of the “Virgin Queen,” Cleopatra “is the most celebrated stereotype of the goddess and whore and has accommodated and been shaped by centuries of myth-making and fantasy” (75), according to Loomba. I believe Loomba is convinced that Cleopatra was vilified because she had the audacity to be a sexually active woman and queen of Egypt. It was a dangerous and therefore untenable position for the imperial Roman and early modern English patriarchy to accept—no one woman, real or fictional, could be allowed to exert such power over men. Therefore, Daniel’s Cleopatra had to be admonished and had to express her guilt.

There is no mention of Antony in this admonition; rather, it only recognizes Cleopatra’s culpability in the riotous behavior which ultimately caused her to lose herself and her state. The reference to the “bed of sinne” would certainly suggest Antony’s presence and participation, but that is the most the Chorus is prepared to acknowledge. Though we know the history of the couple and their disastrous military campaign, it is only Cleopatra’s name that is specified. In this way, she seems to be alone in her downfall but also is shown to be one who accepts the responsibility for her actions. No such suggestion is given of Antony’s acknowledgment of his role in the couple’s demise.

We also see, albeit very subtly, that Cleopatra’s lifestyle was one of sensuality and sexuality. The use of descriptive words such as: “riot,” “disordered lust,” “bed of sinne,” and “luxurie,” when read together create a feeling of sensuality, sexuality and even lasciviousness. Putting these words in proximity to Cleopatra’s name causes the Chorus to imply a sense of depravity and sin in which Cleopatra participated. The
omission of any comments about Antony are revealing in their absence. The Chorus closes their comments with a bow to Stoicism when they admonish the couple with: “these momentary pleasures, fugitive delights” (1.2.371).

While this could be seen as a reinforcement of the patriarchal stereotypes common in early modern England, I believe it is important to take the comments of the Chorus in combination with the total characterization of Cleopatra. Daniel gives us a Cleopatra that acknowledges her weakness and the lascivious nature of her past. His depiction of her as repentant moves his characterization beyond the limits of negative patriarchal thinking. I suggest that as a part of his deconstruction of the stereotypical Cleopatra, Daniel wants to present us with a realistic character that is admirable despite her faults.

Cleopatra opens Act 2 and proceeds to dominate the first scene. The theme of her speech is how can she continue living after all that she has suffered? She points out that she was a woman who had everything, making it all the more surprising that she could fall so far, losing it all. She seems to have come to the understanding that material and earthly wealth and position cannot save you from yourself. Clearly, this speech indicates that Cleopatra has spent some time involved in self introspection. She expresses a sense of the surprise that the world might feel at the destruction of one who was so mighty and magnificent:

Now who would thinke that I were she who late
With all ornaments on earth inrich’d,
Environd with delights, ingyrt with state,
Glittering in pompe that hearts and eyes bewitch’
Should thus distrest cast downe from off the height,
Leveld with low disgrac’d calamitie.

(2.1.394-399)

She continues her examination of her life and its recent decline by turning to her own complicity in the tragedy. In this portion of the speech Daniel creates a Cleopatra who accepts the responsibility for her demise but also understands that her pride was the cause. Daniel follows neo-Senecan form by attributing the downfall of his protagonist to excessive pride. Once again he imbues his characterization of Cleopatra with qualities not typically ascribed to her. He shows her as a woman of introspection and awareness, not merely a seductress who was ruled by her emotions. Daniel goes even further in his deconstruction to assign to Cleopatra a quality normally reserved for male protagonists, the destructive quality of extreme pride. In a curious way by assigning the responsibility of the destruction of the couple to Cleopatra’s pride, Daniel further subverts the stereotype of Cleopatra because he affirms her position as subject rather than as object. Cleopatra acknowledges her pride as the cause of her downfall and Antony’s destruction:

    Am I the woman whose inventive pride
    Adorn’d like Isis skorn’d mortalitie?
    Ist I would have my frailtie so beli’d,
    That flatterie could perswade I was not I?
    Well, now I see they but delude that praise us,
    Greatness is mockt, prosperitie betraies us.

(2.1.402-407)
Line three can be seen as a subversion of the trope: “frailty thy name is woman,” since here it is the woman who is chastising her frailty, thereby becoming the accuser, not the accused. Her self awareness is heightened to allow her to accept her role in the couple’s destruction. We can not help but notice that all Cleopatra says of her culpability could easily be ascribed to Antony’s character as well. We know that he was flattered and praised. We know that he lived a life of incredible opulence and prosperity as the “triple pillar of the world” and Cleopatra’s consort. He assumed a position of royalty and engaged in magnificent shows of pomp to the Egyptian people, only to lose it all in the end and to be betrayed by many of his own men. These words could have been spoken by Antony, but it is significant that they were not. We never see Antony come to the same level of self awareness and self accusation that Cleopatra does in this speech. Of course, the primary reason for this omission is that this is Cleopatra’s play, not Antony’s. Unlike the other two plays under examination, Daniel’s play focuses solely on Cleopatra, relegating information about Antony to references or allusions made by others. Antony never speaks a word in Daniel’s play. He doesn’t need to.

Cleopatra ends her speech with a reference to Caesar’s intention to enslave her and march her in triumph through the streets of Rome. With her comments we understand that she knows Caesar’s intentions and has seen beyond the “oily” words of his emissaries. This would seem to support the idea that she is now beyond flattery. It is a challenge she launches at Caesar:

But Caesar it is more than thou canst doe,
Promise, flatter, threaten extreamities,
Imply thy wits, and all thy force thereto,
I have both hands and will, and I can die.

(2.2.420-423)

Is she hinting at Antony’s inept attempt at suicide when she informs Caesar that she has the will and the ability to die? We seem to have a reference to both the Roman ideal of honor in death, and the refusal to be captured, combined with the early modern admiration for dying well.

Unless we think she has lost all her pride, a few lines later in the scene Cleopatra refers to Octavia, Antony’s wife and Caesar’s sister, by saying that she will not be humiliated before her. Cleopatra understands the duality here because she accepts that she caused Octavia great misery by stealing Antony away. The subtext about these two female characters is that Octavia was ruled by the patriarchy since she was a commodity exchanged between two men; Antony and Caesar. Cleopatra, subversively refused to be commodified within the parameters of the patriarchy; she would choose her husband, and she would rule her country without the traditional brother/husband of the Ptolemaic dynasty. And we see through the lines Daniel gives her that she is still the proud Queen Cleopatra, she has not been reduced to a sniveling supplicant in hope of mercy:

No, I disdaine that head which wore a crowne
Should stoope to take up that which others give
I must not be, unlesse I be mine owne,
T’is sweet to die, when we are forc’d to live.

(2.1.438-441)

Although she accepts that her pride brought on her destruction, she still has the sense of self worth that made her the powerful woman she was. She will not stoop, cannot stoop
to be less than her own person. Her message is clear: she would rather die than live by
the mercy of others. These sentiments seem to be characteristically male rather than
female. Unless we lose sight of the fact that Cleopatra is a woman, Daniel has her refer
to her children in the next few lines of her speech. In fact, we learn that it is only for the
hope of saving her children’s lives that Cleopatra has not yet killed herself:

Nor had I staid behind my selfe this space,
Nor paid such interst for my borrowed breath,
But that hereby I seeke to purchase grace
For my distressed seed after my death.
Its that which doth my derest bloud controule,
That’s it alas detaines me fi’om my tombe.

(2.1.442-447)

That personal consideration dealt with, Cleopatra moves on to the rational part of her
speech which now addresses the public side of her life: the responsibility for the
destruction of Egypt and the Ptolemaic dynasty. Not being totally self effacing,
Cleopatra in true classical fashion does invoke the gods as possible participants in the fall
of Egypt while still placing herself as the “meanes” of the destruction:

But what know I if th’heavens have decreed,
And that the sinnes of Egypt have desp’rd
The Ptolemies should faile, and none succeed,
And that my weakness was thereto reserv’d
That I should bring confusion to my state,
And fill the measure of iniquitie:
And my luxuriousness should end the date
Of loose and ill-dispersed libertie.

Since I was made the meanes of miserie,
Why should I not but make my death my praise,
That had my life but for mine infamie?

(2.1.450-461)

We see that Cleopatra begins by saying that heaven might have had a hand in the events that destroyed Egypt but she doesn’t accuse the gods. Instead of accusing the heavens and railing at them with fists raised, Cleopatra moves on to quickly accept that at the very least, she was the vehicle, the “meanes” of the misery brought down on Egypt. She posits the solution: since her life was so infamous then her death should be her memorial. The importance to the Elizabethans of dying well or making a good death that Lamb points out (122) clearly seems present in this portion of Cleopatra’s speech. Her final words sound very much like a recommendation for all Princes, perhaps pointedly aimed at Elizabeth I: “And leave ingrav’d in letters of my blood, / A fit memorial for the times to come, / To be example for such princes good, / As please themselves, and care not what become” (2.1.463-465).

It is fittingly ironic that following her reference to her own memorial or tombstone, Charmion talks to Cleopatra about trying to “work out a meanes to live” (2.1.466) with Caesar. She goes further to very subtly suggest that Cleopatra could have “as great a part in Caesar’s grace, as Antony could give” (2.1.469). The innuendo is clearly that Charmion thinks Cleopatra could have a similar relationship with Caesar as the one she had with Antony. Daniel’s use of the words, “solicit” and “so disnatured a
man” would again imply something of a sexual nature between Caesar and Cleopatra. Cleopatra will have nothing to do with such a plan. Her focus is on what she believes to be the reality; she has lost her fortune, her beauty, and her youth so she is no longer capable of seducing anyone. Daniel could have merely left her with comments on that somewhat superficial level, but he gave her a greater depth of meaning than simply acknowledging the loss of her external beauty. Her first reply to Charmion is: “because that now I am not I” (2.1.475), this phrase suggests a level of introspection delving into the very character, the very identity, of her person. I believe here Daniel reinforces his sympathetic characterization of Cleopatra by showing her to be an intelligent, sensitive woman who is capable of seeing herself honestly and accepting who she is. Such a person is able to go beyond accusations and justification to accept her measure of responsibility for what befalls her.

Her statement, “My fortune, with my beauty, and my youth. / Hath left me unto misery and thrall” (2.1.475-476), addresses her understanding of her current situation and confirms the misery and sense of entrapment she feels because of all that she has lost. The fact that Daniel starts the series of losses with the reference to “fortune” suggests a double entendre on fortune: the first meaning referring to material wealth, the second, perhaps more significant meaning, referring to luck or even fate. That Cleopatra has lost her material possessions is somewhat true since Caesar will take all that she has, but more importantly her luck has definitely changed. As a young princess and later Queen of Egypt, she was characteristically able to turn a bad situation into a good one. She had successfully used her considerable charm to enlist the aid of both Julius Caesar and later Mark Antony when, in fact, they were both in a position of dominance over Egypt.
Charmion continues the effort with her mistress, pointing out that she has never dealt with Caesar so how does she know how he will behave? Cleopatra replies that it would be dishonorable to try to negotiate with Caesar. Relentless, Charmion reminds her that she dealt with Antony without knowing how he would respond. Cleopatra’s rejoinder is: “I wonne Antonius, Caesar hath me wonne” (2.1.484). Cleopatra understands the impossible position she is in; she has no power and cannot trust the man who has conquered her country to deal honestly with her. She agrees with Charmion that she could have held on to her country if she had given up Antony to Caesar. Ever the pragmatist, Charmion says, well since Antony is dead, why can’t you have what Caesar offered? But Cleopatra is not predisposed to beg Caesar or show fear of his power to him just to save her crown; she has moved beyond caring for worldly issues.

Daniel’s Cleopatra has now transcended concern for this earthly existence because she is ready for the release of death. In reality, her life is over as she once knew it; her power and position are gone, her lover is dead; she has no expectations of a future. She clarifies her perspective to Charmion: “I skorne to feare / Who now am got out of the reach of wrath, / Above the power of pride. What should I feare / The might of men, that am at one with death?” (2.1.497-500). Cleopatra is extremely articulate in these lines as she specifies the human conditions that no longer affect her. The pride she demonstrates here is conveyed as an admirable quality elemental to her honor and integrity, rather than as the foundation of her earlier downfall.

Cleopatra moves into a lengthy monologue detailing her part in Antony’s downfall and her own. She is very harsh and almost brutal in her self examination and self accusation. There is little of the self justification necessary to excuse oneself of
complicity, or culpability, in events. This is not to say that Cleopatra does not understand that a considerable amount of acrimony has been leveled in her direction creating an unfair impression of her culpability. While she acknowledges that she brought Antony to disaster, she does point out that not all of the blame should lie at her feet. She also reminds the listener that she loved Antony and only acted through that love for him.

No Antony, because the world takes note
That t’was my weakenesse that hath ruin’d thee. . .
My constancie shall undeceive their mindes,
And I will bring the witnesse of my bloud
To testifie my fortitude, that binds
My equall love, to fall with him I stood,
Though God thou knowt, this staine is wrongly laid
Upon my soule, whom ill successe makes ill

(2.1.505-514)

She makes it clear in this speech that she feels she has been unjustly accused as the cause of all of Antony’s problems. While she does not take all the blame for what has happened, she wants to atone for her “ambitious practices.” Apparently, she believes her atonement is to die; her only sorrow is that she could not die with Antony. She knows that she could try to excuse her actions and diminish her shame but her honor won’t let her do that. She is also afraid that by attempting to reduce her own role in the events she might in some way desecrate the love she had for Antony. She would like the world to have a better, or at least balanced, view of her but she is not prepared to demean herself or her love for Antony to obtain the world’s approval: “though I perhaps could lighten
mine owne side/ With some excuse of my constrained case... / To cleare me so, would shew my affections naught” (2.1.519-523). Daniel shows Cleopatra to be a person of integrity in these lines. She will not slight the love she had for Antony, and he for her, by groveling for popular approval or forgiveness. Her life is over; she will follow her husband in death.

Mary Morrison is convinced that Cleopatra believed she would be purified through death, but more importantly, would demonstrate the depth of her love for Antony by killing herself and joining him in death. She writes: “Daniel’s Cleopatra is the most interesting. Realizing too late that Antony’s love for her had been infinitely greater than hers for him she resolves to repay him this debt of honour by her death... and thus in Act 5 she takes up the asp her love is proved and purified by death: “That touch that tride the gold of her love, pure, / And hath confirmed her honour.... (5.159 ff., as cited by Morrison 121). Morrison’s ideas add support to Cleopatra’s commitment to killing herself—she wants to be with her beloved and atone for what she perceives was an imbalance in the love between them.

As her lengthy soliloquy continues, we understand the honor that Daniel sees in Cleopatra:

Since if I should our errors disunite,
I should confound afflictions onely rest,
That from sterne death even steales a sad delight
To die with friends, or with the like distrest.
And I confesse me bound to sacrifice
To death and thee the life that doth reprove me.
Our like distresse I feele doth sympathize
And now affliction makes me truly love thee.

(2.1.525-532)

I believe it is clear that Cleopatra is saying she loves Antony more now in their mutual affliction than she had before their demise. This declaration is not what we would expect of the sensuous, pleasure seeking Queen of the Nile; if she were true to her reputation would she not abandon her lover in his distress and seek out new pleasures and new companions to enjoy them? Daniel stays consistent in his deconstruction by showing us a Cleopatra who is loyal and self sacrificing in her love. She is a Cleopatra who is aware of the world’s opinion of her and openly says it is an unfair one, but is still proud enough of her relationship with Antony not to diminish it for the purpose of popular acclaim.

Morrison sees Cleopatra’s suicide as a victory in Daniel’s play. She calls it “a sort of triumph of love” and for that reason considers the act “romantically impressive” (123). Although materialist critics, such as Morrison, insist upon the irony of viewing characters’ deaths in triumphant terms, within the context of the drama and the construction of this character, I agree that Cleopatra is victorious because she takes action and control of her destiny.

Daniel does not purify Cleopatra; she is still the woman who roamed the streets of Alexandria with Antony in search of new pleasures. She is still the woman who dressed in Antony’s armor in a gender-bending romp in the palace. She speaks of some of their well-known activities when they were perhaps the most famous couple in the known world. While it is true that she sees these activities from the vantage point of maturity and the sobering effect of death and destruction, she still talks of them. I propose that
Daniel still sees his character as a woman of sensuality and love of life; he does not want us to forget that she was a vibrant, loving, sexual and sensual woman who loved her man. Therefore, while Cleopatra sees the destructive side of their behavior, by describing it to us, she reminds us of what she once was. She is a more vibrant Cleopatra by acknowledging her past:

When heretofore my vaine lascivious cort
Fertile in every fresh and new-choyce pleasure,
Afforded me so bountiful disport,
That I to stay on love, had never leisure.
My vagabound desires no limits found,
For lust is endless, pleasure hath no bound

(2.1.533-38)

Daniel’s Cleopatra actually uses the word, lust; we cannot imagine Mary Sidney’s desexualized Cleopatra using such language. Writing as a woman, Sidney may have been interested in deconstructing some of the negative stereotypes so prevalent about women in early modern England. As the patron to Daniel it is quite likely that she had considerable influence on his work in spite of their gender differences.

Unlike his patron, Daniel does not personally suffer from the stifling limitations of a patriarchal society so he experienced a freedom to create a Cleopatra without the burden of speaking for all womanhood. Daniel’s Cleopatra says pleasure has no bounds, and we believe that she knows this from personal experience. Rather than making Cleopatra into a lascivious strumpet with these reflections on her past, Daniel turns her into a believable character, not a one-dimensional object of male misogyny.

86

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Following her comments about pleasure-seeking monarchs, she moves on to a section of the speech which seems specifically directed at Antony. We have not been exposed in the previous play to any discussions regarding the equity of love between Antony and Cleopatra. In a less skilled writer it might be easy to depict the love affair as one driven by the emotional attachment of the woman in the couple. Stereotypically, since the middle ages women were considered to be governed by their emotions—a belief which was supported by the writings of Thomas Aquinas, in the Middle Ages and John Knox, as well as the often anonymous male writers of the misogynistic early modern English pamphlets including *The Schoolhouse of women, and later, John Swetman's Arraingment of Lewd, Idle,forward and Unconstant Women*. Conversely it was believed that men led their lives based on logic and rational thinking. Additionally, the imperial Roman view of the love affair was that Antony was ensnared, charmed, and bewitched by Cleopatra. Undoubtedly, it was much more palatable to believe Antony was overtaken by some mystical power than to consider that he might have chosen Cleopatra and Egypt over Octavia and Rome. Cleopatra is surprised that Antony continued to love her even in the later years when her beauty was fading. Therefore, what Cleopatra proposes is very new and surprising—Antony loved her more than she loved him. Because of this inequity in the scale of love, Cleopatra is compelled to atone for the disparity:

> Even in the confines of mine age, when I
> Fayling of what I was, and was but thus,
> When such as we doe deeme in jealousie,
> That men love for themselves, and not for us.
Then and but thus thou didst love most sincerely.

(O Antony that best deserv'd st it better)

(2.1.549-554)

Daniel presents us with a surprisingly insightful Cleopatra especially in her discussions of the mutability of her beauty. This image is in marked contrast to the imperial Roman stereotype of Cleopatra whom they supposed was a licentious seductress overly vain of her beauty. Cleopatra addresses in this speech the fears of many great beauties throughout the ages—what will happen when my beauty fades? She is surprised that Antony continued to love her despite her “appearing wrinckles.” We might expect to hear Sidney informing us that “men love for themselves, and not for us,” but instead it is Daniel providing this candid observation. The women of imperial Rome and even early modern England were primarily considered commodities to be exchanged between men. The agreement to marry Octavia to Antony is made without the participation, or even the presence, of the lady herself—her brother and Antony strike the bargain between them. The Jacobean audience would not have found this unusual since they were quite familiar with the political marriages of the last few hundred years of the English monarchy. Antony, it seems, transcended this loveless tradition in his relationship with Cleopatra—so she feels compelled to demonstrate that she was worthy of his sincere love.

Still not satisfied with the admission that Antony loved her more deeply, Cleopatra continues this theme but now with the emphasis on a reckoning of accounts in the world’s eyes as well. We almost feel that she is anxious that the world views Antony in a positive light, though she no longer cares for the approbation of the world when she declares: “As both our soules, and all the world shall find / All reckonings cleer’d betwixt
my love and thine” (2.1.559-560). She ends her lengthy speech to Antony by asserting that she “although unwise to live, had wit to die” (2.1.570).

Although she is not physically in the next scene, we feel her presence. She is not talking, but rather is being talked about, in a way, just as she always was. Octavius Caesar opens the scene pointing out that he has conquered kingdoms, but cannot seem to conquer this one woman. It is a testament to Cleopatra’s resolve and strength of purpose that she will not be vanquished by Caesar. There is nothing weak or timid about Daniel’s Cleopatra; she knows what Caesar intends and she will not go willingly to Rome. Caesar makes it clear that Cleopatra has lost everything when he says: “Only this Queene, that hath lost all this all, / To whom all is nothing left, except a mind / cannot into a thought of yielding fall, / To be dispos’d as chance hath her assign’d” (2.2.589-592). This statement by Caesar serves as a confirmation of Cleopatra’s integrity and steadfastness. He is amazed that Cleopatra is dedicated to an honorable end to her life and will not be swayed by promises of fair treatment. It is apparent that the negative image Caesar had of Cleopatra has now been deconstructed.

In this scene Proculeius reports to Caesar about his meeting with Cleopatra. In a very similar way as Dircetus described Antony’s last hours and words, Proculeius describes Cleopatra’s situation. Although Proculeius is a Roman, we must remember that he is the one person Antony told Cleopatra she could trust. This accolade lends Proculeius’ observations more credibility than they might have otherwise. Perhaps the most significant information he passes on to Caesar is that of Cleopatra’s concern for her children. He tells Caesar that the only reason Cleopatra is still alive is the hope that Caesar would show clemency and allow her children to inherit the throne of Egypt. For
herself, she only craved to die. As if to prove this statement true, the moment Proculeius is discovered by her maids, Cleopatra draws a knife and is about to stab herself when he stops her. It is at this very moment, with her life hanging by a thread, that Proculeius gives Caesar a revealing picture of the distraught Queen:

Twixt majestie confus’d, and miserie.
Her proud griev’d eyes, held sorrow and disdaine
State and distresse warring within her soule,
Dying ambition dispossest her raigne

(2.2.624-627)

It is a complex image which visually presents the dichotomy Cleopatra faces. Egypt is conquered but she remains proud. Her political majesty has been taken from her but she remains majestic even in grief. She remains in possession of who she is in spite of her distress; she is dispossessed of her reign but will give up nothing of herself.

According to Proculeius, Cleopatra is only concerned about two issues; she wants mercy for her children and she wishes to bury Antony with all due obsequies. This emphasis on the children is another departure by Daniel from the traditional negative stereotype of Cleopatra. Even Mary Sidney’s depiction of her, though sympathetic, did not present a worried, loving mother. In fact, when faced with the possible danger to her son, Sidney’s Cleopatra essentially leaves him to the whims of fate.

Octavius Caesar suspects that Cleopatra will not be taken in triumph because he understands how princes value honor. “Princes value honor more than blood” (2.2.698), so he will have her guarded though he agreed to her request to bury Antony. He seems to know Cleopatra’s resolve and the importance of honor to her when he remarks about all
princes: "Princes like Lyons never will be tam'd. / And sure I feel she will not condescend / To live to grace our spoiles with her disgrace" (2.2.704-708). Caesar's words sound as though he read Cleopatra's mind. By having Caesar attest to the importance of honor to all princes, he further substantiates Cleopatra's resolve and thereby adds to her characterization as a woman of honor. It is not only her devoted followers, but also her enemies who see the honorable depth of her character.

Unfortunately, not everyone is privy to Cleopatra's inner character, so the Chorus, speaking as the citizenry, is not as complimentary of Cleopatra's character as are Caesar and Proculeius. Their comments, though general in nature, are clearly directed at Cleopatra. They blame the vanity and pride of those raised up by the powers of heaven, for the problems of ordinary people. The opinion of the Chorus is fundamental to the traditions of classical Greek theatre and neo-Senecan theatre; tragedy is experienced by the entire community through the downfall of a larger than life character. The fall of that character is always brought on by the flaw of excessive pride. Cleopatra has already admitted that pride was the cause of her destruction, so the Chorus serves to support her confession. The philosopher, Arius, in Act 3, scene 1 supports the position of the Chorus by continuing the theme of the destruction of pride:

For never age could better testifie,

What feeble footing pride and greatness hath,

How soon improvident prosperitie,

Comes caught, and ruin'd in the day of wrath.  

(3.1.820-823)

The Chorus moves beyond the theme of the destructive nature of pride to presenting the position of Stoicism toward sensuality and lascivious behavior. I propose that Daniel
employs the indirect method of using the Chorus to essentially describe how Antony and Cleopatra behaved in the earlier days of their relationship. Knowing the admiration the Wilton Circle had for the philosophy of Stoicism, as Cerasano and Wynne-Davies have noted (p.15), it is not surprising that the Chorus seems to speak from that position. Their comments seem an admonition directed at Cleopatra:

For senslesse sensualitie doth ever
Accompanie our loose felicity,
A fatall which, whose charmes doth leave us never
Till we leave all confus’d with miserie.
When yet our selves must be the cause we fall,
Althought he same be first decreed on hie,
Our error still must beare the blame of all,
Thus must it be, earth aske not heaven why.

(3.1.860-867)

The accusation the Chorus so subtilely directs at Cleopatra works as an interesting segue to her discussion with Caesar in the very next scene. In Act 3, scene 2, Daniel presents the two characters in a conversation. Cleopatra and Caesar are actually in the same room accompanied by Dolabella and Seleucus. The scene is unique to Daniel's play for nothing comparable appears in Sidney or in Shakespeare. In spite of the "closet drama" designation for Daniel's play, this scene is surprisingly dramatic in nature, for it brings together two of the main characters. This could be seen as a departure from the neo-Senecan tradition of never having the antagonists, or protagonists, in the same room together. I believe this scene and its interaction between opponents, allows Cleopatra the
opportunity to present her case to Rome and to the audience. If Daniel wished to deconstruct the old stereotypes of Cleopatra and re-construct her into an appealing, intelligent and honorable woman, he needed to create a venue for her to reveal her true nature. What better person to reveal her honorable character to than to her enemy? Caesar will surely not be listening with a sympathetic ear, so if he can see the integrity and honesty with which she speaks, could not the whole world?

Caesar opens the scene telling Cleopatra to rise up and not hide her face before him. He cannot help himself; he must mention her offenses asking if she thinks they are beyond his grace to forgive. Cleopatra holds her ground and her pride when she tells Caesar that is not the reason she hides her face, the inference here is that she does not think that highly of him, nor is she intimidated by the power of Caesar. She then explains it is her grieved soul that causes her to shun the light of day. And then, although she acknowledges that he is the conqueror she points out that only a breath ago she stood where he now stands. Her reminder serves to suggest a subtext of the Elizabethan interest in mutability. By remembering that she was once a powerful monarch she insinuates to Caesar that his time may pass as well:

I thought not ever Roman should repaire
More, after him, who here distressed di’d.
Yet now here at thy conquering feete I lie,
A captive soule that never thought to bow,
Whose happy foote of rule and majestie,
Stood late on that same ground thou standst now.

(3.2.913-918)
Cleopatra expresses the pathos of her situation and the essence of her worldly pride and personality in her comments to Caesar—she never thought she would bow to any one. She was an absolute ruler and she took pride and identity from that fact.

Caesar responds to her by saying: “your selfe was cause of all” (3.2.919). He continues his assault by listing the many disasters she caused: “brought Rome her sorrowes, to my triumphs mone” (3.2.921), and ends his litany of her crimes by reiterating: “And all we must attribute unto you” (3.2.927). Such a confrontation charged with open animosity and accusation certainly comes across as dramatic and is, therefore, a distinct departure from other “closet drama” of the period. Daniel gives Caesar the words that all of Rome was thinking, but he puts them in a dramatic context since he attacks Cleopatra openly and in front of witnesses. His accusation makes it clear that they are still enemies; Cleopatra can have no doubt of that. Caesar also speaks for the patriarchy as he finds it so easy to blame Cleopatra for everything. In the patriarchal cultures of imperial Rome and early modern England, it is assumed that the woman is to blame; after all, one cannot be expected to accuse his brother, or shall we say, brother-in-law. Furthermore, Antony was a Roman and a third of the triumvirate; he shared many things with Caesar, including Octavia. The fact that Caesar makes no mention of Antony, is an omission which is conspicuous in its absence. We must remember that when he heard the report of Antony’s suicide he excused himself from any blame and named no one but Antony as the cause of his end: “And I protest / By all the gods, I am no cause of this, / He sought his ruine, wrought his owne unrest” (1.2.292-294). And yet, when he confronts Cleopatra for the first (and only) time, he accuses her of causing all the destruction. He clearly does not understand with whom he is dealing.
Cleopatra does not respond to Caesar as one who is a captive. As untenable as her position is, she will not acquiesce and play the role of supplicant. Instead of looking downward and scuffing the ground with her shoe, we see her stand fully erect, facing Caesar eye to eye when she challenges his accusation:

To me? What, Caesar, should a woman doe,
Opprest with greatnesse what was it for me
T' contradict my Lord, being bent thereto?
I was by love, by feare, by weakenesse, made
An instrument to every enterprise  (3.2.928-932)

It is a fascinating argument that Daniel provides his Cleopatra. Rather than openly challenge Caesar or blame Antony, Cleopatra cleverly defers to the philosophy of the patriarchy. Essentially, Cleopatra is using Caesar's own philosophy against him. She uses the patriarchal belief system to her own advantage throughout her rhetorical reply. She asks the question, what could a mere woman do when faced with the power and magnitude of the "Lord of all the orient?" Like a good wife, an obedient wife, Cleopatra followed her Lord's wishes. How could she, in all good obedience, deny Antony her help or "succouring hand?" She assures Caesar that she loved Antony so she could do nothing short of following his lead and helping him when he needed it. In this dramatic dialogue Daniel uses Cleopatra's response as a means of showing her devotion and loyalty to Antony.

Caesar does not accept Cleopatra's proof of her love. He denies that love was the motivation, but asserts that it was hatred instead. "Love, no alas, it was th'innated hatred, / That you and yours have ever borne our people" (3.2.939-940). In listening to Caesar's
speech we feel as though he is revealing *his own hatred* as the motivation to conquer Egypt. One particular accusation rings particularly characteristic of patriarchal mythology when he says Cleopatra wanted: “to disunite our strength and make us feeble” (3.2.942). Men of early modern England, supported by beliefs from the medieval church, feared a woman’s power over a man. They believed that the physical act of love could be construed as a woman taking control of a man. Added to that physiological situation, was the belief, also promoted by the Church, that all women were lascivious deviants who must be controlled. Ania Loomba alludes to this belief system in her comments on the characterization of Cleopatra: “the construction of Cleopatra draws upon the medieval notion of the sexual appetite of women as rampant and potentially criminal” (75). Caesar reverts to this belief system in his rejection of Cleopatra’s profession of love for Antony because he finds it more consoling to accept than to believe that Cleopatra truly loved Antony.

Cleopatra aptly replies to Caesar that it is easy for the conqueror to accuse the conquered saying that those who lose cannot refuse the reproach that is thrown in their direction. Cleopatra understands her predicament, but we will see that she no longer cares for the worldly life so Caesar has no power over her. She sees the politics of the life experience when she says: “The conquering cause hath right, wherein thou art, / The overthrowne must be the worser part / Which part is mine, because I lost my part” (3.2.951-953). She understands that might makes right in her world, and she no longer has the might; it is one of the many things she has lost.

Cleopatra lectures Caesar on his behavior as a monarch even though she has been conquered by him. By advising him on admirable behavior, she demonstrates her
resistance of his control. While her comments to him are also certainly her wish for his
treatment of her, they are openly delivered as from an experienced ruler to a novice. In
this way, Cleopatra maintains her dignity and demonstrates her knowledge and
experience:

\begin{quote}
Depresse not the afflicted overmuch;
Thy chiefest glorie is thy lenitie.
The inheritance of mercie from him take,
Of whom thou hast thy fortune, and thy name.
\end{quote}

\footnote{2.2.965-968}

Cleopatra uses her advice to Caesar as a clever way to ask for mercy without appearing to
beg. A few lines later she reminds Caesar of who she was and of her alliances with Julius
Caesar and Mark Antony. She employs the memory of Caesar to remind Octavius of his
inheritance but also as a pedigree of her powerful history. Then in the only moment she
does so, Cleopatra casually infers that she and Octavius might have shared a similar
relationship. "For looke what I have beene to Antony, / Thinke thou the same I might
have been to thee" (2.2.975-976). In saying this for the briefest second we see the old
Cleopatra, the woman whose loyal servant encouraged her to seduce Caesar and save
herself. Daniel makes it clear that Cleopatra is not propositioning Caesar since there is
no follow through of any kind on her part. In fact just as quickly as she introduced the
subject, she quickly abandoned it and continued with the business of handing over her
power and possessions. Caesar takes no note of her statement either, which perhaps
reinforces its insignificance. If Daniel had intended to vilify Cleopatra's character he
would have pursued the notion of seduction for self preservation, but Cleopatra never
alludes to it again. It does appear obvious that Caesar would disdain any such offer when at the end of the scene, he tells the love-smitten Dolabella:

Let others fresh examples charme this heate,,
Indeed I saw shee labour’d to impart,
Her sweetest graces in her saddest cheere,
Presuming on that face that knew the art
To move, with what respect soever t’were.
But all in vaine, shee takes her aime amisse,

(2.2.1033-1041)

Caesar’s views are in dramatic contrast to Dolabella’s praise of her only a few lines earlier:

If still, even in the midst of grief and horror
Such beautie shines, th’row clouds of age and sorrow,
If even those sweet decaiies seeme to pleade for her,
Which from affliction moving graces borrow:
If in calamitie she could thus move,
What could she do adorn’d with youth and love?

(3.2.1015-1020)

Dolabella is so clearly enamored of Cleopatra that he sees her as still beautiful despite her age and the tragedy that has befallen her. He ends his elegy by declaring: “I see then artlesse feature may content, / And that true bewtie needs no ornament” (3.2.1031-1032). Through Caesar’s eyes, biased with revulsion for an enemy, we are shown a Cleopatra
who has lost her sexual appeal and is no longer able to use her charms for her political advantage:

Time now hath altered all, for neither is
Shee as shee was nor we as shee conceives,
And therefore now tis fit shee were more sage,
Folly, in youth is sinne, madness in age.

(3.2.1043-1046)

Caesar is not only commenting on the change time has wrought in Cleopatra’s appearance but perhaps more importantly on the change in her status as absolute ruler of Egypt. He also points out that Cleopatra does not understand the position he now holds; the implication being that she does not comprehend the fact that he has power over her. He now gives her some advice in answer to the advice she gave him earlier in their meeting. Caesar informs Cleopatra (though she is not present) of what is most likely a Stoic ideal; she should use wisdom in her old age and shun the sins of her youth. It is ironic that Caesar takes such a lofty attitude, presumably from the position of one well ensconced on the moral high ground, when in the very next lines he declares his intention to dupe Cleopatra. Just as she has suspected, Caesar intends to trick her into trusting his mercy only to take her in triumph through the streets of Rome. Daniel allows us to see that Cleopatra is an insightful, intelligent woman who assessed Caesar’s character and knew all along the deceptive nature of his motives.

The Chorus, seemingly speaking as the voice of Stoicism, closes out Act 3 with commentary on the destructive life Antony and Cleopatra led. They conclude their comments by explaining Cleopatra’s intention to kill herself. While such commentary is
typical for the Chorus, it is unusual in this instance that they actually include Antony in their admonition. They cover the topics of lust, which is never satisfied, and of course, refer to the belief that ambition feeds on pride. The inference is clearly intended to accuse Antony and Cleopatra of these destructive vices which ultimately led to the downfall of their reign. The Chorus explains that public opinion sticks to Cleopatra, perhaps inferring that Antony is absolved since he is dead, persuading her that the only way she will attain honor is through death. In a line resonant with dichotomy they observe that despair gives Cleopatra the strength to die; it is a decision from which she cannot be dissuaded.

In Act 4 we learn that Seleucus, Cleopatra’s “loyal servant,” has divulged information to Caesar, but worse yet, Rodon, has betrayed Cesario and turned him over to Caesar. In the midst of the dramatic information Seleucus delivers, Daniel has him attest to the character of the Queen he has betrayed. In two separate instances, Seleucus takes the time to note the virtue of the Queen. He chastises himself for being: “false to such a worthy Queene as shee” (4.1.1159). One traitor not being enough, Daniel adds the betrayal of the tutor Rodon who explains the importance of the charge Cleopatra gave him when she: “did commit to me / The best and dearest treasure of her blood, / Her sonne Cesario, with a hope to free / Him from the danger wherein Egypt stood” (4.1.1182-1185).

Through Rodon’s story, Daniel is able to provide additional corroboration to his vision of Cleopatra as a loving, devoted mother. Unlike the other two playwrights under examination, Daniel pays considerable attention to Cleopatra’s motherhood. He opened the play with the scene between Cleopatra and Cesario and now gives us Rodon’s
monologue as a reminder of Cleopatra’s love for her son. Later in Act 4, Daniel devotes all but the Chorus in scene 3 to Cesario’s speech to his murderer. The presence of her son on stage and the intelligence and articulation he expresses in his speech, heighten our sense of sadness for the unknowing Cleopatra. Furthermore, the fact that Daniel reveals Cesario’s eminent death places the audience in the position of knowing what Cleopatra does not know, thereby adding to the pathos of her tragedy. Perhaps to underline the depth of her misery, Rodon describes her as the “woefull Queene,” when she comes into his view at the end of Act 4, scene 1. He and Seleucus are so despondent over their betrayal they steal away so as not to be seen.

The topic of Cleopatra’s appearance arises again in Act 4 scene 2, when Cleopatra, still fresh from the meeting with Caesar, is contemplating her beauty. She is surprised by the receipt of a letter from Dolabella that both reveals Caesar’s plot and Dolabella’s love. Cleopatra is in a very contemplative mood in this scene which is appropriate since we know she is preparing for death. Conspicuous in its absence is any mention of her color, in contrast to both Sidney and Shakespeare, who include it in their descriptions of Cleopatra. She addresses beauty as though it were a living thing separate, yet a part of her. She makes it clear in her contemplation that she is no longer concerned with worldly desires or conquests when she contemplates her beauty: “What hath my face yet power to win a lover, / . . . For now the time of death reveal’d thou hast, / Which in my life did’st serve but to undoe me” (4.2.120-1227). And a few lines later she concludes her comments on Dolabella’s letter and offer of love:

I thank the man, both for his love, and letter,

The one comes fit to warne me thus before,
But for the other, I must die his debtor,

For Cleopatra now can love no more.

(4.2.1234-1235)

Daniel confirms with these lines that Cleopatra is a loyal wife, and a devoted mother, there is no room in what little is left of her life for seduction or love.

Daniel continues to differ from Sidney and Shakespeare by having Cleopatra devote considerable attention to the details of her suicide. Cleopatra appears here with a commanding presence as she directs Diomedes, Charmion and Eras regarding the final details of her last hours of life. She demonstrates her capacity to plan and execute those plans, much as she must have in her earlier days as Queen of Egypt. Again Daniel is able to provide us with a different view of Cleopatra than that of the traditional negative stereotype. We do not see her as the Roman patriarchy would have; she is not paralyzed by emotion but is capable of cool logical thinking under pressure. Yet, he does not dehumanize her in his effort to present her sympathetically for we next see her at the foot of Antony’s tomb, mourning his loss and promising to join him soon.

Cleopatra’s farewell speech to Antony dominates scene 2 and reveals not only her feelings for Antony but also the guilt and responsibility she carries for his downfall. It is characteristic of tomb side farewells as it fits within the neo-Senecan tradition of lengthy speeches with moral messages. Cleopatra says: “Let Egypt now give peace unto you dead, / Who living, gave you trouble and turmoil” (4.2.1272-1273). The lines are certainly a reference not only to the country but to herself since Cleopatra was always considered synonymously with Egypt. She is certainly acknowledging that she caused Antony great pain; it is personal, not political culpability she accepts here. At a three
different times in the speech, Cleopatra refers to herself variously as “spouse” and “wife”. These titles definitively show that she does not see herself as a paramour, but as a legitimate wife to Antony.

The tone of Cleopatra’s speech is not totally formal, instead in many lines she seems to be talking to Antony as though he were there. She engages in a one-sided conversation with him at some moments asking his advice, while at others she is informing him of her plans. She pledges to him that she will join him in death as an acknowledgment of the depth of his love for her. It is almost as if Cleopatra feels compelled to make up for her own insufficient love when she vows so adamantly:

This sacrifice, to sacrifice my life,
Is that true incense that my love beseemes,
These rites may serve a life-desiring wife,
Who doing them, t’have done sufficient deemes.

(4.2.1328-1331)

Cleopatra’s speech is full of irony, particularly when she refers to death as an enjoyable state, and sees her soul as a prison rather than her spiritual essence. There is a dichotomy in the line that says the rites she will perform are appropriate to a wife who deserves to live, since we know she intends to die. She speaks in larger universal terms when she explains the mindset of one intent on suicide: “O death art thou so hard to come by now,/That we must pray, intreat, and seek thee thus? / But I will find, wherever thou dost lie,/For who can stay a mind resolved to die” (4.2.1342-1345). Although she is admittedly talking about herself, she has the intellectual capacity to see beyond her own predicament and make an apt observation about the human condition.
Eras is aware of Cleopatra’s intention to kill herself, but feels compelled to caution her that the general public might not understand the honor that motivates her. Eras seems to be the voice of reason which perceives the discrepancy between the public stereotype and the genuine individual. Eras has been privy to the private Cleopatra and she knows her to be a woman with a “worthy heart,” though she suspects the world does not share her opinion. Ever the loyal retainer, Eras must point out to her mistress that there may still be hope of a happier time if only she will wait and see.

Eras’s words fall on deaf ears. Cleopatra has made up her mind and sees her decision as the only honorable route left open to her. She is committed to living an honorable life even if it means she must take her own life:

So shall I shun disgrace, leave to be sorry
Fly to my love, scape my foe, free my soule,
So shall I act the last of life with glory,
Die like a Queen, & rest without control

(4.2.1382-1385)

Cleopatra will exert her free will by choosing the time and place of her death. We cannot help but feel that she must have lived her life with the same sense of honor and the same strength of will. Her strength of purpose is again displayed when she responds to Dolabella’s proffer of love by explaining that her heart has gone into the grave with Antony.

The love-smitten Dolabella upon hearing of Cleopatra’s rejection of his love, can only reply: “Ah sweet distressed Lady, what hard heart / could choose but pity thee and love thee too? / Thy worthinesse, the state werein thou art, / Requireth both, and both I
vow to do” (5.1.1586-1589). He loves her in spite of her age and reduced circumstances which he makes very clear when he refers to the beauty of her youth. Cleopatra has previously said that her beauty is gone, nor would she use it if she still had it. She has also adamantly said she would make no attempt to seduce Caesar to save herself. Here Dolabella echoes the sentiments of Charmion and Eras who earlier advised Cleopatra to use her charms to “negotiate” with Caesar. Dolabella seems to agree with their idea:

And now if she could but bring a view
Of that rare bettie shee in youth possest,
The argument wherewith shee overthrew
The wit of Julius Caesar and the rest
Then happily Augustus might relent

(5.1.1610-1614)

He closes out the scene with his sympathetic observation of her. We wonder—could this be Daniel’s view of the fallen Queen?

But being as shee is, yet doth shee merit,
To be respected for what shee hath beene.
The wonder of her kind of powerful spirit,
A glorious Lady, and a mighty Queen.

(5.1.1618)

Neither Dolabella nor Caesar knows how quickly Cleopatra intends to leave this world. Daniel presents her to us in the last scene as a woman fully in control of her last moments. She is, in fact, so anxious for death that she chastises the asp for being too slow to deliver the death bringing bite. There is no hesitation in her resolve for she sees
death as her honorable release from a life of disgrace. She departs her world of misery by saying:

Well, now this work of mine is done, here endes
This act of life, that part the fates assigned
What glory or disgrace this world could lend,
Both have I had, and both I leave behind,
And Egypt now the Theater where I
Have acted this, witness I die enforced,
Witness my soul parts free to Antony

(5.2.1733-1739)

Charmion makes the final comment on Cleopatra when she says she died as a Queen and that she retained in death, the grace she exhibited in life. Samuel Daniel’s reconstruction is complete; we have seen Cleopatra unfold before us as an admirable woman who loved her children and was devoted to her husband. He has created a new Cleopatra who remains in our minds not as a one-dimensional stereotype but as a fully developed character whose story was intensely dramatic, yet honorable. He created his Cleopatra as he saw her—“A glorious lady and a mighty Queen.” (5.1.1620).
Notes

1 All citations from Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* are from Kraus Reprints, 1963.
In the two previous chapters we have discussed a play dedicated to Antony and another devoted to Cleopatra. William Shakespeare brings both characters together in his play, aptly titled *Antony and Cleopatra*. Shakespeare’s title is only the most minor of the differences we see between his play and those of Mary Sidney and Samuel Daniel. Written in 1607, it is the latest of the three plays and may have benefited from both of its predecessors. Characteristic of Shakespeare, the play borrowed from numerous sources—but, also typical of Shakespeare, he took the raw material and reformed it into a brand new creation with fully developed characters and dramatic plots meant to unfold before the eyes of an audience. *Antony and Cleopatra* is as far from a “closet drama” and the traditions of neo-Senecan drama as live theatre could possibly be. Shakespeare’s play was written for live theatre; it was meant to be seen. In comparison to the previous “closet dramas,” which were not meant to be performed on a public stage, Shakespeare’s play is an exciting, dramatic, emotional, historical and tragic view of one of the most passionate couples of the ancient world. As half of that couple, Cleopatra is brought to life as she has not been in either play we previously discussed. The previous two plays have hinted at and teased us with glimpses of a Cleopatra who was not a “triple turned whore” (4.11.13), ¹ but a loving mother, and devoted wife who was also as Daniel said a “glorious and mighty Queen.” Shakespeare’s play is the fruition of all the seeds planted
by its predecessors. She is a sensual, sexual woman who loses her temper, teases her lover, cares for her people and still manages to run a country. She realizes tremendous political power, great love, and horrendous disaster, all in the same play. She is truly a character of “infinite variety” (2.2.237).

Shakespeare’s characterization of Cleopatra benefits from an expanded time frame when compared to the previous two plays. Both the Sidney and Daniel plays open after the disastrous battle of Actium. Antony is about to commit suicide as each play opens. Neither playwright places Antony and Cleopatra together in one scene because of the traditions of Senecan tragedy and the need for a cohesive plot. In Sidney’s play, The Tragedie o f Antonie, Antony does speak in the opening scene just as he is about to kill himself. We never hear a word directly from Antony in Daniel’s play because he uses a narrator to report Antony’s suicide to us. In fact, Antony never speaks in The Tragedie of Cleopatra, an omission that makes any passionate interchanges between the couple impossible. Shakespeare, though, chose to present us with his two main characters while they were still functioning as powerful figures in world events. When the play opens Antony is one of the triple pillars of the world as part of the triumvirate he shares with Caesar and Lepidus. Although his reputation has suffered from his lengthy stay in Alexandria, he is still admired and revered by his officers and Caesar. If he can “break his Egyptian fetters” (1.2.113) he will once again be an honorable Roman.

Cleopatra is also in the full flush of her political power when we first meet her. Her country’s great wealth and fecund resources cause her to be sought after by many of the leaders of the known world. She commands not only her household servants, as we see, but also the affairs of her entire realm. Cleopatra is the one who understands the
value of meeting with ambassadors from Rome if she is to negotiate successfully for her country. She is a “wrangling queen” (1.1.48) because she will not be silent; she will use her voice and other considerable skills to manipulate the outside world to meet her needs. One of those needs is to have Antony by her side.

Because Shakespeare allows us to see Antony and Cleopatra together playing out their love affair against the backdrop of the politics of the Roman Empire, we see them as significantly more dramatic, passionate, and complex characters than in the Sidney and Daniel plays. I have proposed that both Sidney and Daniel effectively deconstructed Cleopatra and reconstructed her into a more socially acceptable wife and mother than the pre-existing stereotypes of her. Shakespeare’s characterization transcend such limitations and creates a complex, fascinating woman who is not the perfect wife and doting mother but is perfect in her imperfection. Shakespeare’s Cleopatra is all the more interesting because of her imperfections; Enobarbus observes: “That she did make defect perfection” (2.2.232). Therefore, I propose that Shakespeare takes the deconstruction of Cleopatra’s stereotype to its ultimate expression. By neither sanitizing her, nor overstating her virtue, Shakespeare effectively created a more complex Cleopatra than Sidney’s or Daniel’s. The nuance Shakespeare establishes is that Cleopatra can still be an admirable and powerful woman even though she was playful, jealous, sensual, and sexual.

There is no question that Shakespeare’s Cleopatra is depicted as a subject in this play. While clearly other characters do objectify her, Shakespeare does not. Even his title gives us some insight into his evaluation of Cleopatra; he calls it *The Tragedie of Antony*
and Cleopatra. Through his title Shakespeare seems to be declaring that the two characters are of equal importance as subjects of the action.

Much has been made of women in early modern English drama as objects, not subjects, of the action. Feminist critics have been the leaders in this discourse regarding the subjectivity of Shakespeare’s Cleopatra. While there are many who have engaged in the discussion, I have found Janet Adelman, Evelyn Gajowski, Kim Hall, Ania Loomba, Linda Bamber, and Linda Woodbridge most helpful to my study. These critics introduce the notion that Cleopatra, a female character in a tragedy, breaks with early modern dramatic tradition by functioning as a subject. Cleopatra stands out in contrast to the backdrop of myriad female characters that, often in spite of great personal qualities, are acted upon by the dominant male characters in the story. In Antony and Cleopatra, Cleopatra stands toe to toe with Antony in her role as subject, causing and directing actions throughout the entire play. Even in her final moments on stage, Cleopatra is presented as a woman in charge of her destiny. “There is no greater representation of female theatrical subjectivity in Shakespeare’s plays than Cleopatra, Gajowski contends (112).

Cleopatra refuses to be perceived as an object. Nowhere is this more evident than in contrast to Octavia. Octavia is the antithesis of Cleopatra because she accepts the role given her by men. The dramatic action clearly shows us that Octavia is the pawn of the men in her life. Octavia has no voice whatsoever in her fate—she does not speak until the commitment is made. She is not even present when her marriage is agreed upon between her brother and Antony. When we do see her after the agreement she is depicted as passively accepting the marriage thrust upon her by her brother. Octavia will not
impose her will on Antony. She is the very image of the woman as object. In fact, Antony can marry her because of her passivity: As Bamber says: "it is an alliance with a woman who accepts her role as a leisure-time activity," therefore, "in choosing Octavia over Cleopatra, Antony tries to choose a limited relationship with the Other. Unlike Cleopatra, Octavia offers no threat to the pre-existing integrity of the self" (51).

It is clear throughout Shakespeare's play that Cleopatra is a "wrangling queen" (1.1.48) because she will not submit to Roman constructs about her. One of her greatest reasons for committing suicide is to avoid capture and the humiliation of public display at the hands of Caesar. If she were taken in triumph through the streets of Rome, that would be a literal expression of a man's control over her; a complete presentation of her as an object on whom all could gaze.

Cleopatra's estimation of herself is independent of male estimations of her. She forever eludes and defies delimiting Roman constructions of her and Egypt-Petrarchism, Ovidianism, and Orientalism. It is Cleopatra's theatrical subjectivity—the complete independence of her self evaluation from their conflicting desire and repugnance for her—that accounts for her 'infinite variety.' Cleopatra is, literally, more than they can comprehend (118).

Perhaps it is the lack of comprehension to which Gajowski refers that explains Enobarbus' inability to describe Cleopatra. According to Stanley Wells, Cleopatra is "not a representative woman but one who is uniquely, unpredictably and gloriously herself" (306). These critics, and others, support the view of Cleopatra as a subject who has transcended the parameters imposed on women by the patriarchal cultures of imperial Rome and early modern England.
The existence of female monarchs and other politically influential women during the Tudor and Elizabethan eras in England caused a backlash of misogynistic sentiment and rhetoric. The most famous attack was by John Knox in his essay, “The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women” (1558). Spurred on by the reign of Mary Tudor, the vituperative Protestant launched his attack on women in positions of authority over men. He positioned his argument on a biblical foundation, most often citing Saint Paul and the Book of Genesis. Throughout his lengthy diatribe it is possible to sense what must have been the general attitude about all women. He opened his attack with this general censure and invocation of God’s name:

I am assured that God has revealed to some in this our age, that it is more than a monster in nature that a woman shall reign and have empire above men...And Therefore I say it is that this monstiferous empire of women (which amongst all Enormities that this day do abound upon the face of the whole earth, is most detestable and damnable) (part 4)

Although his focus is on female monarchs, he goes on to delineate the many frailties of the average woman as further proof of their inability to govern men. In the section entitled: “To Awaken Women Degenerate,” he wrote of all women: “Nature, I say, does paint them forth to be weak, frail, impatient, feeble and foolish; and experience has declared them to be inconstant, variable, cruel, lacking the spirit of counsel and Regiment” (www.swrb.com).

In a culture struggling with such a concept about women, it is no wonder that Cleopatra was the recipient of slanderous stereotyping and denigration. From John
Knox's position, she was repugnant to God because she was attempting to rule over men and as a woman she was vastly inferior to all men. According to Knox, Cleopatra's "greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man, not to rule and command him."

Caesar and Enobarbus speak from a perspective which seems almost drawn from Knox. Cleopatra defies their misogyny by operating outside the parameters of patriarchal control.

I believe it is in part this very sense of herself, and her complete uniqueness, that contributes to the generally harsh and unsympathetic treatment of Cleopatra in Shakespeare's time. This individuality created the perfect target for misogynists and supporters of the patriarchal ideology dominant at the time. As Ania Loomba writes: "Women were clearly excluded from the individualist ideas of personal fulfillment and were increasingly defined by their relationships to men" (70). Women were to be controlled and contained in marriage. Marriage was a business arrangement created for the advantage of the men involved in the agreement. In such an environment, women were commodities, to be exchanged for financial advancement of political power. Women were not to control their own destinies, to lead countries or choose their own husbands or, even worse, choose their own lovers. Cleopatra did.

Shakespeare adds one other element to his characterization of Cleopatra that is a distinction from the other two plays in this discussion; he describes Cleopatra as a woman of color. Mary Sidney takes away any hint of color, by referring to Cleopatra's alabaster skin. Samuel Daniel omits any reference to Cleopatra's color though he has several very flattering descriptions of her in his play. Only Shakespeare, of the three playwrights, ventures into the territory of color, giving us a "tawny fronted" Cleopatra. It seems as
though Sidney and Daniel purposely refrained from the description of Cleopatra as “dark” in order to avoid the negative stereotypes usually assigned to characters of dark complexion in early modern England.

Although vast amounts of literary criticism exist relating to Shakespeare’s works, until the later part of the previous century little was written about race. In recent decades some critical attention has been paid to the topic of Cleopatra’s race and her color. The critical environment for such discussions has been found primarily among feminist, postcolonial and race critics. Most important to my discussion are the ideas expressed by Kim Hall, Joyce McDonald, Janet Adelman and a recent work by Arthur Little. These critics support my belief that Cleopatra’s color, or race, had a very real impact on the stereotypical assumptions about her. In fact, the application of the term, Other, is doubly significant because Cleopatra is both a woman and black.

I maintain that the impact of Cleopatra’s dark color is just as intrinsic to her character and the play as is Othello’s complexion in his play. I do not believe that the story of Antony and Cleopatra would be the same if Cleopatra were not a woman of color. I propose that it is Cleopatra’s veritable "tawny front" which adds to her "infinite variety" and allows her to seduce Antony from his "purpose" in Egypt. Furthermore, because Cleopatra is a "dark lady" she is reviled by Rome and objectified as their moral enemy. Furthermore, as the "woman on top" described by Natalie Zemon Davis, Cleopatra exemplifies the disorderly female who is not ruled by men. To imperial Roman society Cleopatra would be an anathema that must be conquered.

Many earlier critical discussions of Cleopatra’s power and personality ignore her very recognizable difference from all the other major characters in the play.  

120
Allusions to Antony's comments about Cleopatra such as "serpent of old Nile" (1.5.25) and Lepidus' remark on Cleopatra's hold on Antony: "I must not think there are Evils enow to darken all his goodness: his faults, in him, seem as the spots of heaven, more firey by night's blackness;" (1.4.10-14) do suggest a darkness about Cleopatra. Cleopatra even refers to herself as black when she says to Mardian: "Think on me, that am with Phoebus' amorous pinches black" (1.5.27-28). Shakespeare's reference to the sun god, Phoebus, reflects the early modern English belief that certain races of men became black as a result of their exposure to the intense sun. It would also seem to suggest a relationship between the darkness of Cleopatra's skin and her sexual appeal. The reference also infers that even a god is inspired to amorous love pinches when beholding Cleopatra. Such descriptions, by other characters as well as Cleopatra herself do suggest that Shakespeare believed Cleopatra was a woman of color.

Janet Adelman proposes that there is no doubt that Shakespeare believed Cleopatra to be black or dark skinned. "Her darkness is traditionally part of her mystery" (185). In her essay, Adelman also includes Winthrop Jordan's view that African peoples were widely believed to be bestial and lecherous. Such a belief would add to the image of Cleopatra as a lascivious woman who had great sexual power over men.

When the element of Cleopatra's darkness is added to her distinctly un-lady-like, openly sexual behavior, it becomes evident that she is the quintessence of the "Other." Her "otherness" seems to be an amalgam of her open sexuality, her view of gender roles, and her refusal to accept men as the dominant force in her life and country. "As Ania Loomba states: Dominant notions about female identity, gender relations and imperial power are unsettled through the disorderly non-European woman" (78). Without doubt,
Cleopatra is the “disorderly non-European woman.” Loomba and Hall are convinced that Cleopatra is more than just non-European; she is black. Hall points to the language of the play saying of Shakespeare: “His language, typical of orientalist discourse, makes it clear that Shakespeare is at pains to have us see a black Cleopatra” (158).

Feminist critics often address the issue of Cleopatra as Other, which typically intersects with discussions of race as well. In early modern England, those who did not look like the typical white English citizen were considered “Others.” In her comments on the 1982 National Women’s Association Conference, Hall wrote on the existence of “othering.” While the report of the Conference addressed the social issues current in America in 1982, Ms. Hall explained that in the early modern period in England a similar paradigm of a gendered subject position was forming. Although European women were attempting to negotiate the established patriarchal discourse to allow for a subject position for themselves, they remained threatened not only by the white male patriarchy but by the “foreign women” they viewed as challengers to their already insecure secondary position in the paradigm.

Loomba echoes the view of Cleopatra as the “Other “Cleopatra is the non-European, the outsider, the white man’s ultimate ‘Other.’” Cleopatra embodies all the overlapping stereotypes of femininity and the non-European common in the language of colonialism” (78). The historical context may help us understand the reaction-formation principle which [is defined as THE PSYCHIATRIC DICTIONARY DEFINES AS “a form of defense against urges which are unacceptable to the ego” (629) as it relates to the reaction of early modern English people to those they encountered in the new world. The postcolonialists propose that England’s great age of colonization gave rise to the fear of
"foreign women" since they were being encountered on the islands and continents subjected to marauding English colonials. The insular nature of the island of England allowed the English people to maintain a fairly homogeneous racial environment before the explorations and conquests of the early modern pirates and adventurers. Sir Walter Raleigh was one of several courtiers sponsored by Elizabeth I to venture across the seas for treasure and new land. The famous pirate, and courtier, frequently included observations of beautiful exotic women in his notes. Although Raleigh is careful to point out that no inappropriate behavior occurred between the white English men and the exotic female natives, I suspect that Raleigh "doth protest too much." Apparently, her husband's observations had some impact on Lady Raleigh because she posed for a portrait as Cleopatra in very exotic and revealing dress at the time of her husband's exploration of the new world. Was she fearful of the power of "foreign women" on the security of her position in the patriarchy, or did she merely desire to take on the seductive appeal of the exotic "other" for herself? Perhaps reading her husband's report on the discovery of Guiana gave her cause for concern. In that report, which Hall includes in her book, Raleigh wrote:

But I protest before the Majestie of the living God, that I neither know or believe, that any of our company one or other, by violence or otherwise, ever knew any of their women, and yet we saw many hundreds, and had many in our power, and of those very young, and excellently favoured, Which came among us without deceit, stark naked.

(187)
While it was popularly accepted that Sir Walter Raleigh was a gentleman, we cannot ignore the extent to which he comments on the exotic beauty and accessibility of the women encountered by the English explorers and colonizers. I wonder whether his protests of abstinence were believed by the dutiful wives at home. Would this not provide further justification for the revulsion and vilification of those exotic “foreign women” who were not fair of face as were their British counterparts? Whether fear evolves from jealousy, or jealousy comes from fear, is hard to distinguish. We often fear that which is different and that which is unknown, so I believe the dark ladies of these foreign lands may well have been the recipients of fear and jealousy which manifested itself into discrimination against all dark women.

It would seem that the question of Cleopatra’s color is inherently tied to racial difference. Whether Cleopatra was actually black in color is not as important as the fact that the Romans and the early modern English considered her to be of another race, different from them, and therefore probably dark skinned in some degree. Janet Adelman seems to take this position when she notes that while we do not know for sure if Cleopatra was black we do know that she was different in appearance from the white audience. As she concludes: “Perhaps all we can conclude is that Cleopatra’s tawniness contributes to the sense of her ancient and mysterious sexuality, whether or not she is thought of as African; to Shakespeare’s audience, what probably mattered is that she was darker than they were” (188). It would seem that while Cleopatra’s blackness may be stereotypical and unknown, her racial otherness is significant enough to set her apart from the other characters and infer a set of negative perceptions to her character.
With the considerations of gender and race as the focus of this discussion, it is necessary to turn to the play for evidence of these themes. I propose that Shakespeare infused his play with attention to Cleopatra's racial/ethnic heritage and with awareness of the cultural implications of the patriarchal philosophy as it would affect the characters and the plot. The topic of gender is inherent in the play since Cleopatra is a female character; a fact that Shakespeare shares with Sidney and Daniel. The extent of the similarity between Shakespeare's play and those of Sidney and Daniel is limited to the historical events and the geographical locations; all else in Antony and Cleopatra represents a new play with a uniquely different deconstruction of Cleopatra. Unlike Sidney, who takes away from the unacceptable stereotype of Cleopatra, or Daniel, who embellishes Cleopatra with admirable qualities, Shakespeare creates a Cleopatra whose "infinite variety" contributes to both her success and her demise.

From the first speech of the opening scene of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra, we are given much information about Cleopatra and her effect on Antony. Philo chastises Antony for his recent behavior but seemingly lays the blame on the sexuality and dark power of Cleopatra when he says: Antony's eyes: "now bend, now turn / The office and devotion of their view / Upon a tawny front" (1.1.4-6) and ends by calling him "the fan / To cool a gypsy's lust" (1.1.10). Then, upon seeing Antony approach, Philo tells Demetrius that he shall see in Antony: "The triple pillar of the world transformed into a strumpet's fool" (1.1.12-13). In the very opening lines of the play we are made to understand that in the eyes of the Romans, Cleopatra, the Queen of the Nile, is merely a tawny fronted gypsy strumpet who has ensnared the great Antony into "dotage."
Immediately following this set of insults about Cleopatra, Shakespeare gives us a dialogue between the two lovers. The mere existence of such a dialogue already distinguishes this play from the previous two since neither of those included a conversation between the two lovers. Under closer scrutiny, we see that the deceptively simple dialogue is quite revealing of Cleopatra’s character and that of Antony, too. Cleopatra opens the 4 lines of dialogue by asking Antony to tell her how much he loves her, “if it be love indeed.” (1.1.14). Antony replies in a characteristically overblown dramatic fashion when he says: “There’s beggary in the love that can be reckoned” (1.1.15). Cleopatra, on the other hand, responds with a proposal to set a limitation on how much one can be loved. It is a surprising retort to Antony’s expansive declaration, and not what we would expect of the “strumpet” just described by Philo. Cleopatra is already moving outside of the delimiting constructs of patriarchal stereotypes of women; she is responding with reason to an emotional expression by a man. Cleopatra continues behaving as the rational one of the pair when the Messenger arrives from Rome. Antony does not want to be bothered, but Cleopatra tells him to listen to what the messenger has to say. She reminds him that she is Queen of Egypt, almost as though inferring that she is attending to the business of running a country, while Antony simply wants to play. He reiterates his desire for pleasure and sport but Cleopatra is unmoved and tells him again to “Hear the ambassadors” (1.1.48). After Cleopatra essentially admonishes Antony to attend the business of governing, he gives his first description of her: “Fie, wrangling queen! / Whom every thing becomes” (1.1.48-49). With this description, Shakespeare gives us our first glimpse of a character that defies description and lives outside the parameters of patriarchal traditions. She will not be confined to Roman, or early modern
English, notions of what is acceptable feminine behavior. Her behavior is all the more shocking, and subversive, because it "becomes" her, instead of demeans her. Throughout the play, Cleopatra's enigmatic personality is a recurrent theme. I propose that she is only inscrutable because the dominant ideology of the Imperial Roman patriarchy cannot understand her. They do not understand her because she operates outside of the established limits for good women.

Later, Antony is in a more serious mood when in an apparent emotional turn around he declares: "These strong Egyptian fetters I must break / Or lose myself in dotage" (1.2.113-114). A few lines later, after learning of the death of his wife, he chastises himself and identifies Cleopatra as an "enchanting queen," which is a double entendre meaning both a positive attribute, as in a charming queen, but also suggesting the negative association with things of black magic and enchantment; perhaps hinting that Cleopatra put a spell on him.

In spite of his misogynistic beliefs, Enobarbus is still able to praise Cleopatra's behavior, albeit begrudgingly. And he responds rather passionately when he tells Antony who has just wished he had never seen Cleopatra: "O, sir, you had then left unseen a wonderful / piece of work, which not to have been blest withal / would have discredited your travel" (1.2.150-152). As is typical to almost all of Enobarbus's comments, this line is interesting for its double meaning; it both compliments Cleopatra as a "wonderful piece of work," but does so at the expense of objectifying her as a "piece of work," rather than a human being.

In spite of her remarkable sexual appeal as a "wonderful piece of work" (1.2.151), Cleopatra still seems compelled to use play acting to control her lover. In a scene
unheard of in either Sidney or Daniel, Shakespeare gives us Cleopatra engaging in some
lighthearted “girl talk” with her maids about how to keep Antony in love with her.
Shakespeare reveals a very different side of Cleopatra’s personality than his predecessors
did in their characterizations. Although we have observed her in scene 1 as a working
Queen who tried to encourage Antony into attending to business, now she shows herself
to be capable of scheming and spying to keep her man under her control. The subtext of
her behavior is so subtle that her maid, Charmion, does not understand it:

Cleopatra: See where he is, who’s with him, what he does:
I did not send you. If you find him sad,
Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report
That I am sudden sick. Quick and return.

(1.3.3-6)

This directive allows us to hear Cleopatra as a woman in love, but who is still jealous and
insecure. If we consider the situation, we see that she has reason to be uncertain about
Antony. He is, after all, a married man. This fact seems ever present in her mind since
she refers to it often. When she admonishes Antony to “hear the ambassadors” because,
she gibes at him: “Perchance Fulvia is angry” (1.1.20). The phrasing of the line and the
choice of the word “perchance,” clearly impart a sarcastic tone. She also places this
domestic reason ahead of the political one: “or who knows / if the scarce bearded Caesar
have not sent / His powerful mandate to you” (1.1.20-22), implying that Fulvia has more
power over Antony than Caesar does. The order of her comments may suggest the
greater power of emotion over reason, but both demonstrate the two causes of Cleopatra’s
insecurity. Her need to spy on her lover and control him anticipates his intention to
return to Rome and even foreshadows his betrayal by marrying Octavia. She uses deception to relay an impression of lighthearted unconcern at Antony’s absence. With such dialogue Shakespeare provides us with some speculation as to the nature of Cleopatra’s charms, where Sidney and Daniel chose to ignore this aspect of her personality.

The moment Antony enters, Cleopatra begins to act out even as Enobarbus had described her and in keeping with her own directions to Charmion. She taunts Antony and chides him about his wife’s control over him and declares that she has no power “upon you.” Though she plainly states that Antony belongs to Fulvia; “hers you are” (1.3.23), we know it is just the contrary. Cleopatra builds on her theme of Antony’s betrayal which would be considered ironic since by all patriarchal traditions, Antony is betraying his wife, Fulvia, by his relationship with Cleopatra. But, just when we might think that Cleopatra is blind to the dichotomy, she uses its logic to her benefit by pointing out that she should never have trusted Antony since he was false to Fulvia. (No wonder Antony said “Fie, Wrangling Queen!”) And then, just at the height of her perplexing argument, she speaks some of the most beautiful lines in the play: “Eternity was in our lips and eyes, / Bliss in our brows’ bent: none our parts so poor / But was a race of heaven” (1.3.35-37). Clearly, she sees them as godlike in their love and power. It is a blissful and idyllic vision of their love affair which we know was not shared by the rest of the imperial Roman world. The lines are especially poignant placed as they are in such proximity to talk of Fulvia and her death. At first glance we may find Cleopatra’s response to the news as surprising, even irrational. As she explains her disappointment at Antony’s lack of sorrow, Shakespeare reveals the logical workings of Cleopatra’s mind.
Is it not a reasonable assumption that if Antony shows no remorse for the loss of his wife, he will be similarly lacking in sadness at Cleopatra’s demise? With such a perspective, Cleopatra’s attack on Antony suddenly makes sense: “O most false love! / Where be the sacred vials thou shouldst fill / With sorrowful water? Now I see, I see, / In Fulvia’s death, how mine received shall be” (1.3.63-66).

I suggest that with this early scene, Shakespeare creates a different view of the quality of Antony’s love than we found in the Sidney and Daniel play. In Sidney’s play, Antony is depicted as the true lover, while Cleopatra is shown to feel remorse over the lesser degree of her love for Antony. In Daniel’s play, Cleopatra makes lengthy speeches attesting to her desire to demonstrate her commitment to their love so all the world will know she loved Antony as he loved her. Shakespeare created an entirely new view of Cleopatra; she is no longer the faithless lover to Antony’s devout and honorable one; their roles have reversed. Cleopatra almost foretells of Antony’s betrayal and hints at the fact that he will throw his commitment to their love aside when it is to his benefit. He will become the dishonorable opportunist she hints at in this scene. Shakespeare allows her to predict the future when she tells Antony: “Good now, play one scene / Of excellent dissembling, and let it look / Like perfect honor” (1.3.78-80). Cleopatra knows Antony well, although she cannot anticipate the loss of honor he will eventually experience.

In scene five Shakespeare shows us the Roman perspective of the love affair with Caesar’s colorful description of their behavior: “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” (1.5.4-7). That Caesar is disgusted by Antony’s behavior is obvious in his tone and the types of details he chooses to mention. Beyond the hedonistic pursuits
Caesar so clearly demeans, there is the inclusion of Antony and Cleopatra switching gender roles. In line six and seven, Caesar suggests that the couple has traded roles; this would be repugnant to the patriarchal standards of Imperial Rome. Ania Loomba notes the political, postcolonial impact of gender role reversal in the play: "By feminizing Antony, Cleopatra threatens the hierarchy between imperial Rome and its dominion, Egypt" (120). I believe the reversal of gender roles is so distasteful to the Romans because it combines the political concern, noted by Loomba, with a deep-seated fear that if a woman is not controlled she will exert power over men causing the whole fabric of patriarchal society to disintegrate. Cleopatra is already reversing and subverting gender roles because she is the absolute ruler of a wealthy country. Furthermore, she is an unmarried woman, at least in the eyes of Rome, so she is not controlled by a husband. Caesar, and his Roman compatriots, would be convinced that it was Cleopatra's subversive behavior that turned Antony into a voluptuary who ignores his duty and dishonors his Roman heritage. Here again, Shakespeare diverges from Sidney and Daniel because he does assign some of the blame to Antony for his demise, in spite of the fact that Caesar and other Romans see Cleopatra as the major factor in his downfall.

Shakespeare contrasts the previous scene of military talks and plans for war with the next scene which depicts Cleopatra at her most charming and frivolous self. In this courtly scene, we see Cleopatra bantering with her eunuch, Mardian who asks her: "What's your Highness' pleasure?" to which Cleopatra humorously replies: "I take no pleasure in aught an eunuch has" (1.5.9). Such ribald talk cannot be imagined in either Sidney or Daniel, while clearly Shakespeare wants us to see Cleopatra as a healthy sexual woman with a sense of humor. As the conversation turns to affections, Cleopatra
wistfully wonders about the absent Antony: “Where think’st thou he is now? Stands he, or sits he? / Or does he walk? Or is he on his horse? / O happy horse, to bear the weight of Antony!” (1.5.19-21). Shakespeare’s character is not satisfied with romantic longing only but must add a bawdy undertone with her allusion to Antony’s horse. Showing the complexity and wit of her personality, Shakespeare has her observe so beautifully in the next few lines the beauty of Antony as a demi god. Her allusion supports the traditional Roman belief that Antony was a descendent of Atlas, but also reveals her admiration for her lover who is as a god to her.

Cleopatra then turns to a reminiscence of Antony’s pet name for her, which leads to some introspective thoughts about her aging and her former lovers:

He’s speaking now, or murmuring,

‘Where’s my serpent of old Nile?’

(For so he calls me). Now I feed myself

With most delicious poison. Think on me,

That am with Phoebus’ amorous pinches black

And wrinkled deep in time? Broad-fronted Caesar,

When thou wast here above the ground, I was

A morsel for a monarch

(1.5.25-30)

These lines are exceedingly full of significance for Shakespeare’s characterization of Cleopatra. First of all, they are extremely interesting because it is Cleopatra who delivers them; from another character they would seem to objectify Cleopatra. Because Cleopatra remembers that Antony calls her “serpent of old Nile,” she takes control of
the metaphor. In quick succession, she comments on her dark skin, saying that the love pinches of the sun god turned her black. Again, she subverts the traditional stereotype of dark-skinned women as evil and repulsive and changes the characteristic into a positive; the implication is that she was so desirable that a god loved her! Cleopatra is still in control of her person when she says metaphorically that she was “a morsel for a monarch” in reference to her love affair with Caesar. Within the parameters of the patriarchal discourse we would expect a man, possibly Enobarbus, to deliver such a comment, but by having Cleopatra observe this of her self, Shakespeare imbues her with all the properties of a subject, not an object. Could Shakespeare be showing us that his Cleopatra embraces all that she did and sees her sexuality as a natural and positive expression of her identity? As she delivers this speech we do not sense any remorse or guilt for what she has experienced, but rather an acceptance bordering on pride for who she is. The Cleopatra who delivers these lines bears little resemblance to the Cleopatra of Sidney or Daniel.

The scene finishes with the same sense of merriment and humor, having Charmian tease Cleopatra about the love she used to express for Caesar. When Charmian reminds Cleopatra that “I sing but after you” (1.5.74), Cleopatra famously replies: “My salad days / When I was green in judgment, cold in blood / To say as I did then” (1.5.73-75). Shakespeare shows his Cleopatra to be consistent even in her inconsistency, by revealing her ability to poke fun at herself even as she understands her limitations. He does not present her as perfect, and certainly not as a Stoic woman who could never make an error in judgment. Through the use of the metaphor “salad days”, he tells us that Cleopatra has grown and matured since her youthful love affair with Caesar.
In the continuing shift between Egypt and Rome, love and war, Shakespeare’s next scene returns to the world of men and the subject of war. In this atmosphere the conversation salaciously turns to the subject of Cleopatra and her hold on Antony. The contrast between the men’s view of Cleopatra and her own self revelations is marked: “But all the charms of love / Salt Cleopatra soften thy waned lip! / Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both!” (2.1.20-23). Pompey has a very different objective in his wish for Cleopatra’s charms; he wants Antony to continue in Egypt so that Pompey will only have to fight Caesar. Aside from the military reasons for his expression we see that Pompey accepts the Roman patriarchal view of Cleopatra; she is a witch who has charmed Antony. In spite of the negative inferences though, Pompey’s comments still serve as corroboration to Cleopatra’s beauty and personal magnetism. Since they are delivered by her enemy they may, in fact, be seen as a more powerful assessment of her beauty than compliments delivered by her admirers.

Agrippa proposes the political marriage between Antony and Caesar’s sister, Octavia. Perhaps to clarify the unemotional nature of the match, Shakespeare has an uninvolved third part propose the idea of a marriage to Antony and Caesar. When Agrippa introduces the idea, Caesar admonishes him with: “Say not so, Agrippa: / If Cleopatra heard you, your reproof / Were well received of rashness” (2.2.120-122). And yet, as if to support Cleopatra’s earlier accusation of his lack of commitment, Antony replies: “I am not married, Caesar: let me hear Agrippa further speak” (2.2.123-124). At this encouragement, Agrippa develops his idea of the classic political marriage between Antony and Octavia. His proposal follows all the oldest of patriarchal traditions which affirmed male ownership of the women in their families. “To hold you in perpetual amity,
To make you brothers, and to knit your hearts / With an unslipping knot, take Antony / Octavia to his wife” (2.2.125-128).

Agrippa continues the exposition of his idea by praising Octavia’s beauty and virtue, noting of Octavia: “Whose beauty claims / No worse husband than the best of men, / Whose virtue and whose general graces speak that which none else can utter” (2.2.128-131). Octavia is presented as the antithesis of Cleopatra; she is the Roman ideal of the perfect wife. There is little doubt that the words: That which none else can utter” are suggestive of Cleopatra. Octavia is not consulted about her feelings regarding the proposed marriage; the arrangement is strictly between the men, Antony and Caesar. Octavia is blatantly a commodity with no voice in her own destiny. It would be impossible for her to be more different from Cleopatra than she is.

Cleopatra would not fit the ideal of a Roman wife of the patriarchy. She refuses to be controlled by men. She will follow her emotions and express her sexuality whether through the lovers she chooses or the behavior she exhibits. She will not wait patiently at home; instead she will carouse with Antony in the streets of Alexandria. She will beguile him wearing his warrior apparel and weapons of war. She will attend to him like a personal slave one moment, then ignore him or feign anger the next. She will drink with him, fish with him, make love with him; but she will certainly not remain obediently at home. We cannot imagine Cleopatra passively accepting a marriage whose purpose is to salve the open wounds of a political rift between two powerful leaders.

She will not sit idly by waiting for Antony to come home, no; Cleopatra will unpeople Egypt sending messengers every day with letters to her beloved. Nor, will Cleopatra allow a competitor, albeit a wife, to peacefully take Antony’s love away from
her. She rails, cries, and even attacks the unfortunate messenger who brings bad news of Antony’s marriage to Octavia. She need not have worried; Antony plainly tells us almost immediately after his marriage: “I will to Egypt / And though I make this marriage for my peace, / I’ th’ East my pleasure lies” (2.3.38-40).

Shakespeare makes it very clear to us why Antony is so enamored of Cleopatra when only a few lines later he has the misogynist, Enobarbus, deliver a description of her heavily borrowed from Plutarch. This description lasts more than twenty lines yet interestingly enough, it never physically describes Cleopatra! Enobarbus teases us by referring to “her own person,” but then declares: “It beggared all description,” (2.2.198-199) and returns to a description of everyone around Cleopatra, but not the person of Cleopatra herself. Apparently Cleopatra is beyond the descriptive power of mere words. Could it be that she is literally beyond the parameters of beauty as defined by the white male patriarchy? There is an inference in these lines that does provide a hint of description about Cleopatra herself. For example, the references to Venus and then to Cupids do cause an association with the goddess of Love and Cleopatra. And, Agrippa’s one line exclamations: “O, rare for Antony,” and “Rare Egyptian,” which punctuated each section of Enobarbus’ long description, also suggests that Cleopatra was a person of great physical appeal.

In another portion of his description, Shakespeare has Enobarbus describe Cleopatra again by circumstantial evidence rather than by specific details when he says:

\[\text{...The city cast} \]

\[\text{Her people out upon her; and Antony,} \]

\[\text{Enthroned I’th’ market place, did sit alone,} \]
Whistling to th’ air; which, but for vacancy,
Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,
And made a gap in nature.

(2.2.214-219)

Although we still do not have a physical description of Cleopatra with lines 217-219
Enobarbus makes it clear by inference that she is so captivating that even the air has gone
to view her, leaving Antony abandoned in the market place. Gajowski supports the view
that Enobarbus gives the most evocative description of Cleopatra in the play: “His set
piece on the lover’s meeting at Cydnus reveals and elicits--rather than Philo’s political
and sexual revulsion – fascination” (90). Enobarbus’ admiration for Cleopatra’s appeal
supports his later comment to Maecenas that Antony will never stay with Octavia.
Coming from the lips of a misogynist, his words carry a greater impact than would the
praises of one of Cleopatra’s admirers.

When Maecenas says the newly married Antony must leave Cleopatra, Enobarbus
replies: “Never, he will not: / Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale / Her infinite
variety; other women cloy / The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry / Where she
most satisfies…” (2.2.235-238). Maecenas’ reply is almost developed as a counter attack
using Octavia’s virtues as artillery: “If beauty, wisdom, modesty, can settle / The heart of
Antony, Octavia is / A blessed lottery to him” (2.2.242-244). Though his response is
genuine we are left with the feeling that Octavia’s virtues are no match for Cleopatra’s
“infinite variety.”

In a display of perfect dramatization, Shakespeare has Antony close scene 3 with
the line: “I will to Egypt: / And though I make this marriage for my peace, / I’ th’ East
my pleasure lies,” as the perfect segue to scene 5 where we see Cleopatra in pursuit of pleasure from music. “Give me some music, music, moody food / Of us that trade in love” (2.5.1-2). In dramatic contrast to Antony, who has just traded marriage for political advantage, Cleopatra declares her sphere to be that of love. For Cleopatra, love is an emotion, not a commodity. She does not accept her role as that of a valuable commodity in the marketplace controlled by men. In the next few lines as she banters with her courtiers, she uses the metaphor of fishing for her relationship with Antony: “I’ll think them every one an Antony, / And say, ‘Ah, ha! y ’ are caught!” (2.5.14-15). In a whimsical way, Shakespeare is telling us that Antony is definitely “caught,” and that no political marriage will get him off Cleopatra’s “bended hook.” I propose that Shakespeare gives these lines to Cleopatra as a show of her subjectivity; in this metaphor, Cleopatra is the fisherman, she hooks Antony. The simplest definition of a character who is a subject, is the one who performs the action. But, I also believe there is a duality expressed in this scene as well; Charmian remembers “…when your diver / Did hang a salt fish on his hook, which he / With fervency drew up” (2.5.16-18). Could Shakespeare be saying that Cleopatra was both the fisherman and the fish? To follow the metaphor, if we consider that the diver was Cleopatra’s slave and put the fish on the hook at her order, could not that fish represent Cleopatra? We know that she actively set about to catch Antony when he came to Egypt, but this symbolic representation could show that Cleopatra was still the actor of the action though the rest of the world probably viewed her as the sex object.

Much is also made of Cleopatra’s cross dressing escapades with Antony in many of the critics. Paula S. Berggren sees Cleopatra’s donning of Antony’s sword as a means
Berggren’s opinion supports the idea that the exchange of clothing is seen as an implication of gender switching but also as Cleopatra’s ability to unman men. This concern is supported in the play with references to Antony’s effeminate ways. Caesar observes that Antony, “is not more manlike / Than Cleopatra, nor the queen of Ptolemy / More womanly than he” (1.2.6.-7). Even Antony acknowledges his change in demeanor when he says he must break away from Cleopatra’s hold on him. Antony’s apparent emasculation is seemingly shared by his soldiers also as Canidius admits: “So our leader’s led / And we are women’s men” (3.7.69-70). Is part of the power of a sexually free woman her ability to emasculate the men under her spell? This concern would seem to be the fear of the men in the play.3

Cleopatra was created in this very culture. Shakespeare was most certainly aware of the existence of cross dressers and the controversy that surrounded them. In her Introduction to The Roaring Girl, Elizabeth Cook discusses the existence of cross-dressing during the time of James I: “This play engages with a concern, voiced with increasing frequency in James’ England about the nature of masculine and feminine. Queen Elizabeth I, Amazonian in her strength and combativeness, had been succeeded in 1603 by James I with his pacifist ideology and his homoerotic milieu” (xxxi).

The inclusion of the cross dressing detail could be construed in a few ways: first, it could be to acknowledge the pervading attitude about Cleopatra by the Romans; second, it adds to the impression of a free-wheeling, pleasure-seeking lifestyle; and finally, it could also be seen as Shakespeare’s device to reveal Cleopatra in a leadership position. In Roman times, and in many quarters in early modern English times, it was still believed...
that a woman could not rule a country; audiences of the sixteenth century would have been well aware of the relationship between Cleopatra's role as an Egyptian queen and the warning of John Knox' essay attacking the "monstiferous" existence of a female monarch. Could it not be that by having Cleopatra take on the armor and sword of the great battle of Phillipi, that she also assumes the mantel of Antony's power? We have seen moments when Cleopatra has functioned more as a leader than Antony. She reminds him of his need to listen to the ambassadors from Rome. She advises him that she is the Queen of Egypt and encourages him to follow his duty and go to Rome. And it is ultimately she who shows him how to die honorably, as a man of honor should. As has been said, since Shakespeare has given Cleopatra equal billing with Antony, it seems likely that he considered her of equal importance. I propose that her donning of his "sword Phillipian" is a contributing piece to that characterization.

Cleopatra maintains a presence throughout the play; we sense her personality and impact even in scenes that do not physically include her. The early scenes of Act 3 exemplify this curiosity; for though they take place away from Egypt and do not include Cleopatra, her presence is felt. For example, in Act 3 Antony and Caesar are taking leave of each other. Octavia is present to bid farewell to her husband. Caesar focuses his comments on the recent marriage between his sister and Antony, displaying considerable insight and a foreshadowing of the problems that will arise between them:

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: for better might we
Have loved without this mean, if on both parts
This not be cherished.

(3.2.28-33)

Although Caesar never mentions Cleopatra, there is a subtle comparison to her when he comments on Octavia's virtue. Of course, Caesar speaks within the constructs of the patriarchal culture when he refers to Octavia as "the piece of virtue" that was supposed to "cement" the relationship of the two men. As the audience we know that Antony already intends to return to Egypt. Enobarbus has also observed that Antony; "will to his Egyptian dish again" (2.6.123). The impression is that everyone but Caesar knows that Antony will not honor his marriage contract, but will return to Cleopatra. The result of the scene is that Cleopatra's presence is called up through Caesar's praise of Octavia and his guarded warning to Antony to cherish Octavia and their marriage. Additionally, we cannot help but feel that Antony appears as a dishonorable opportunist whose word is meaningless.

Octavia stands placidly by accepting her role as a pawn between two powerful men. Cleopatra, on the other hand, rails and strikes the messenger who brings the news of Antony's marriage; she remains as diametrically opposed to Octavia as she could possibly be. Octavia is totally objectified while Cleopatra refuses to be so. Although the scenes are not in immediate proximity to each other, we cannot help but compare Cleopatra's love sickness over the absent Antony in Act 2, scene 5, with Antony's bold-faced dissembling to Caesar and Octavia in Act 3. Is it not interesting that the stereotypical view of Cleopatra is that she is an immoral, sexually loose woman, when those characteristics might be more accurately ascribed to Antony? Within the
patriarchal constructs of Roman culture, Antony was seen as bewitched by Cleopatra and was, therefore absolved of any wrongdoing in his treatment of her. What man would not want a virtuous Roman wife who also happened to be Caesar’s sister? As Antony blankly declared, he was not married; therefore, why not establish a politically beneficial marriage?

Antony closes Act 3, scene 2, by kissing Octavia. The very next scene opens with Cleopatra’s line: “Where is the fellow?” (3.3.1); her relatively innocuous line can easily be construed as a double reference to both the messenger and Antony. In this way, Shakespeare brings both Antony and Octavia into the room with Cleopatra. The insinuation of Octavia’s presence heightens the interest in the conversation Cleopatra has with the messenger. Just as any woman might, Cleopatra asks about her rival; she wants to know the caliber of her competition. Through this dialogue, Shakespeare shows Cleopatra to be a woman as well as a Queen. Cleopatra is mollified by the messenger’s information and so closes the scene with the hopeful line: “All may be well enough” (3.3.50). This line may also suggest that Cleopatra knows Antony better than anyone else and knows that a passive woman such as Octavia cannot hold him. We agree with her.

Then in Rome we hear Antony and Octavia discussing Caesar’s recent actions. It is clear that Antony is furious with Caesar, who seems to be preparing for war against him. The balance of the scene reveals the impending break between Antony and Octavia since a war with Caesar would present an untenable situation for the newlyweds. Although Octavia pleads with Antony to allow her to go to Caesar on his behalf, the over-riding feeling is that the relationship is about to break down as war seems inevitable. If Cleopatra only knew how right she was and yet how wrong she was at the same time,
for all will be well since Antony will return to her, but all will not be well ultimately, since they will lose the war.

Octavia’s mission is doomed in part because Caesar perceives the truth about Antony’s commitment to the marriage. The insult to his sister, combined with Antony’s other insubordinate behavior; brings Caesar to an uncontrollable desire to conquer his former partner. He openly declares to Octavia that she is “wronged”: “Cleopatra has nodded him to her. He hath given his empire / Up to a whore, who now are levying / The kings o’ th’ earth for war” (3.6.65-68). Caesar speaks to the world’s perspective when he calls Cleopatra a whore, and yet in the purest sense of the word, Octavia was sold off to Antony.

The Romans continue to malign Cleopatra as Macenas tries to console Octavia by denouncing Antony and Cleopatra, when he says:

   Each heart in Rome does love and pity you.
   Only th’ adulterous Antony, most large
   In his abominations, turns you off
   And gives his potent regiment to a trull
   That noises it against us.

(3.6.92-96)

That is twice in one scene that Cleopatra is called a whore. At least Macenas does call Antony an adulterer so he is not left unscathed by the acrimony present in the room. Cleopatra, though, is given the added responsibility for noising it against the Romans; she is the one challenging us and bringing us to war. Consider the implications of such a statement; it suggests that Cleopatra is taking action against the Romans; such a role is
usually assigned to a subject and a man. Cleopatra was most certainly not a man, but I propose that she certainly does function as a subject throughout the play.

Shakespeare’s very next scene shows us a Cleopatra behaving again as a subject as she battles with Enobarbus regarding her presence during the upcoming battle at Actium. Enobarbus, not surprisingly, advises Cleopatra to stay away from the battle for fear she would “puzzle Antony” (3.7.10). Initially he attempts to explain his concern by use of a rude and bawdy metaphor: “If we should serve with horse and mares together / The horse were merely lost; the mares would bear / A soldier and his horse” (3.7.8-9). Cleopatra refuses to acknowledge his crude meaning, but the sexual allusion is unmistakable. Cleopatra presses on undaunted and powerfully declares: “A charge we bear I’ th’ war / and as the president of my kingdom will / Appear there for a man. Speak not against it / I will not stay behind” (3.7.16-19). She reminds him of who she is, as well as, how she perceives herself and her role in Egypt. She is the “president” of her country; a title that has no inherent gender. Could Shakespeare have been thinking of the speech Elizabeth I delivered at Tilbury on the eve of the battle with the Spanish Armada? In that famous speech, Elizabeth says “I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and a king of England, too” (Norton 597). Elizabeth referred to herself as a “king” and a “prince” purposely giving no gender designation to the title. Elizabeth I often referred to herself as a “Prince” perhaps because in her kingdom she was all; prince and princess, king and queen. Shakespeare’s Cleopatra may have been partially inspired by Elizabeth I. The popular queen had successfully reigned for forty five years and was the first woman in English history to rule alone. Elizabeth was an absolute ruler and we see some similarity in Cleopatra’s adamant
response here. She refuses to be categorized and objectified into a traditionally accepted female role. Titles and clothing will not limit Cleopatra’s activities. It is immaterial to her that because she is a woman she should not go into battle; she sees the rightness of being at Antony’s side and will not be dissuaded. Cleopatra effectively puts Enobarbus in his place and will have her way.

As in the first scene of the play, Cleopatra mildly rebukes Antony for negligence in attending to his duty. The discussion is of Caesar’s troop movements and Antony is commenting on the quickness of Caesar’s deployment when Cleopatra says: “Celerity is never more admired / Than by the negligent” (3.7.23-24). Antony acknowledges the chastisement and adds that her comments were like those of a man: “A good rebuke, / Which might have well becomed the best of men…” (3.7.25-26). Even Antony is aware that Cleopatra is behaving in a manlike fashion because she is engaging in activities normally reserved for men: leadership and warfare. Perhaps her quixotic behavior was an element of her “infinite variety,” but in the battle of Actium her suddenly fearful, typically female behavior added to the disaster. As told by Scarus, Cleopatra abandoned the scene of battle and sailed quickly away causing Antony to follow her: “Yon ribaudred nag of Egypt-- / Whom leprosy o’ertake!—I’ th’ midst o’ th’ fight, / The breese upon her, like a cow in June, / Hoists sails and flies” (3.9.10-15). In characteristic misogynistic fashion, Scarus casts a number of demeaning epithets at Cleopatra but his revulsion is understandable considering the situation. Shakespeare has Scarus retell the event as Plutarch recorded it in his history. There is quite a bit of discussion over the actual unfolding of Cleopatra’s departure and Antony’s pursuit of her. There is some historical support for the notion that Antony told Cleopatra to flee and save herself when it became
clear that the battle would be lost. It also makes some practical sense because Cleopatra's ship held much of the treasure and supplies the couple would need to continue their war against Caesar. If Cleopatra's ship were captured there would be no way for the pair to continue the war. Beyond these possible historical reasons for their departure from Actium, it still remains that Antony fled the battle to follow his beloved. If she were just a mere frightened woman, the world might excuse her flight, but Antony was a great warrior -- what was his excuse? Although Cleopatra is vilified for fleeing the scene Antony does not elude denunciation. It is Enobarbus, in a conversation with Cleopatra after the debacle, who condemns Antony for his dishonorable behavior.

It would be logical that Enobarbus would see that affection should take a back seat to reason and honor, but it is still a break in the brotherhood of men for Enobarbus to actually lay some blame at Antony's feet. Perhaps Antony's behavior represented such a severe breech with the code of honor and the abandonment of his cohorts in favor of his lover; it was simply too much for Enobarbus and Rome to accept. For, while Rome had never accepted Cleopatra, it had continued to view Antony as a citizen and a great warrior, albeit one who had been seduced away temporarily.

After the battle of Actium, however, we see a major shift in the Roman attitude toward Antony and Cleopatra. It may be due to Antony's fall from grace, but Cleopatra now moves into a different position with Caesar. Having lost her power and the beneficial aegis of Antony, Cleopatra is seen as a desirable acquisition to Caesar. In terms of gender roles and patriarchal culture, Cleopatra now becomes an object to Caesar. Such a position is a much more comfortable one to Caesar and to Rome. Therefore, treating Cleopatra like the object he believes her to be, Caesar attempts to seduce her,
through promises and deceit, into accepting his terms. Caesar is in for a surprise.

Cleopatra is a seasoned campaigner when it comes to negotiating with, or seducing, men. Shakespeare gives her the opportunity once more to demonstrate her skill in speech and subtlety as she encounters Caesar’s emissaries.

Thidias, Caesar’s emissary, attempts a deconstruction of Cleopatra when he says that Caesar now believes that Cleopatra clung to Antony out of fear, not out of love. He concludes that “the scars upon your honor therefore he / Does not pity, as constrained blemishes / Not as deserved” (3.13.39-41). Cleopatra, not even pausing to take a breath, responds enigmatically: “He is a god, and knows / What is most right. Mine honor was not yielded, / But conquered merely” (3.13.60-62). Here Shakespeare gives us a fine example of Cleopatra’s deft touch and agility with language. The meaning is clearly sarcastic, but as is often the case, the listener hears what he wants to hear. Thidias accepts that Caesar is a god, while Cleopatra who believes herself to be a god, does not accept Caesar as an immortal colleague. Her reference to the means by which she lost her honor is a mirror reflection of Caesar’s earlier message to her; she merely repeats his sentiments but with a subtlety suggestive of sexual encounters rather than political ones. In this way, Cleopatra momentarily slips out of the net Caesar is casting for her.

Unfortunately, Antony and Enobarbus enter the room after Cleopatra’s response so they allow their eyes to substantiate their suspicions. Antony is incensed that Thidias dares to kiss Cleopatra’s hand and roars out a command that he should be whipped. His frenzy regarding Thidias’s license with Cleopatra’s hand no doubt refers in part to the early modern English tradition regarding “hand fasting” as a means of establishing betrothal. The scene also reflects the fall from power of both Antony and Cleopatra. No messenger
would have ever deigned to kiss the hand of Cleopatra when she and Antony were in the height of their glory. Furthermore, in the full bloom of their love affair it would have been impossible to imagine that anyone, even Caesar, would suggest that Cleopatra betray Antony to save her own skin. Now they have fallen so far, both events happen in one small scene; it is no wonder Antony cries out “Authority melts from me . . . I am Antony yet” (3.13.90-93). How interesting that it is Antony, who seems to lose his identity and feels compelled to affirm who he is, while Cleopatra continues to function as Queen. It is at this point in the play that Antony accuses Cleopatra of double dealing, if not all out betrayal. He lays accusations at her feet: “You were half blasted ere I knew you” (3.13.105). He laments his lost opportunity for legitimate offspring from a “gem of a woman, “only to be abused by Cleopatra. Warming up to his tirade, he lets loose a characterization and history of Cleopatra which would be better expected from a woman hater like Enobarbus:

I found you as a morsel cold upon
Dead Caesar’s trencher: nay, you were a fragment
Of Gneius Pompey’s, besides what hotter hours,
Unregistered in vulgar fame, you have
Luxuriously picked out. For I am sure,
Though you can guess what temperance should be,
You know not what it is.

(3.13.116-122)

Antony’s speech is filled with rhetoric characteristic of the patriarchal view of women. Cleopatra is no longer a woman; she is reduced to being a piece of food for men. She is
physically demeaned into the smallest piece imaginable; she is a mere fragment, not a whole thing, and certainly not a person. And he concludes his litany with an accusation which could have been leveled by a medieval monk at the daughters of Eve—you are intemperate and vulgar.

Cleopatra is unable to respond to Antony's tirade for almost thirty lines until she is able to ask incredulously: “Not know me yet?” (3.13.158). She then calls up her skill with speech and delivers a series of pronouncements attesting to her loyalty to Antony. Finally satisfied of her fidelity, Antony turns his attention back to the war with Caesar. Gajowski considers Antony’s loss of trust in Cleopatra to be an expression of his loss of self confidence. She points out that: “The defeat at Actium and the Thidias episode suggest that military defeat profoundly undermines Antony’s confidence in love. Conversely, his only military victory is suffused in his confidence in love” (105). For a moment he boasts and blusters like the Antony of earlier, happier times and causes Cleopatra to declare: “Since my lord / Is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra” (3.13.186-187). We cannot lose sight of the fact that Cleopatra never stopped being herself; only Antony lost his focus, purpose, and his sense of self. As Gajowski observes: “Shakespeare presents male delusions about female betrayal in Antony and Cleopatra as in Othello only to accentuate the reality of female constancy and to expose male inconstancy” (107). Cleopatra remains constant and does so until the end of the play. It is a construction of her character which represents a deconstruction of previous stereotypes of Cleopatra.

As is evident, much of what we learn about Cleopatra is through comparison to Antony. Act 4 in particular offers up an Antony who has fallen so far from his previous
imperial self that he is almost unrecognizable. Cleopatra’s happy declaration: “My Lord is Antony again,” (3.13.186-187) clearly infers that he had not been behaving like the Antony she knew. Antony continues his political and moral downward spiral throughout Act 4 to the point where Cleopatra no longer understands his behavior. She asks Enobarbus to explain what Antony means when he addresses the servants at what will ultimately be his last meal. Enobarbus replies: “To make his followers weep” (4.2.25).

After Antony waxes on about the good service the followers have extended him and the hope that they will get a better master, Enobarbus exclaims: “Transform us not into women” (4.2.36). In contrast with Cleopatra’s behavior, this plea seems ironic at the very least. Cleopatra has not given up at this point as Antony has. Cleopatra is not bidding a maudlin farewell to her servants as Antony is. She is, instead, standing diligently by her man yet wondering at his self-deprecating behavior. Yet, Enobarbus must continue with the patriarchal stereotypes which assert that women are weak and inconstant while men remain strong and steadfast.

Although Cleopatra remains steadfast in her allegiance to Antony and their cause, she expresses a very subtle acknowledgment of the hopelessness of their war when she muses: “That he and Caesar might / Determine this great war in single fight! / Then Antony - but now – well, on” (4.4.36-38). As if to add more pathos to their predicament, Shakespeare gives Antony one small moment of victory late in Act four, only to have him declare five short scenes later: “All is lost” (4.12.9). In this dejected state Antony lashes out at his lover and assigns to her many of the epithets used earlier by her enemies:

[“This foul Egyptian hath betrayed me . . . Triple turned whore! . . . O this false soul of Egypt . . . Like a right gypsy hath at fast and loose / Beguiled me to the very heart of loss”]

150
Reading these slanderous lines we cannot help but hear Cleopatra’s dismayed: “Not know me yet?” How quickly Antony reverts to the stereotypical accusations of the Roman patriarchy when his fortune has abandoned him. As in the Sidney and Daniel plays, Antony shows himself to be unable to accept the responsibility for his own mistakes. He invokes the belief that Cleopatra bewitched him when he refers to “this grave charm,” and calls Cleopatra “a right gypsy” who “beguiled me.” At the heart of all this animus is the belief that Cleopatra has betrayed Antony to Caesar. Though Antony really has no proof of such a betrayal, we get the sense that he is simply grasping at straws, hoping to cast the blame for his total collapse on anyone other than himself.

Unfortunately, Cleopatra enters the room even as Antony’s speech is escalating in its fury and Antony; he therefore orders her to “vanish” (4.12.32) as he might fend off an evil spirit. This appearance causes him to think fondly on “patient Octavia” (4.12.38), imagining her scratching Cleopatra’s face with “her prepared nails” (4.12.39). As he builds his level of rage against Cleopatra, he eventually calls her a witch and vows: “The witch shall die. / To the young Roman boy she hath sold me, and I fall / Under this plot: she dies for’t” (4.12.47-49). It is an important inclusion of his intention to kill Cleopatra because it explains why she retreats to her monument and lets Antony believe she is dead. Without this element of the plot, Cleopatra’s deception about her death would be unconscionable, but with it Shakespeare provides her with the most basic of all justifications; self preservation.

Remaining true to her character, she does employ some manipulation of the facts in order to improve her position with Antony. With a last conniving, or romantic gesture,
she tells Mardian to report: “that the last I spoke was ‘Antony’ / And word it, prithee, piteously” (4.13.8-9). Then she wants Mardian to observe how Antony takes the news of her death and report it back to her. This tiny little scene is interesting because it reveals a Cleopatra who is still the woman of infinite variety; who even at the moment of impending doom demonstrates her desire to be prized by her lover. It also shows her ability at saving her reputation, a talent which she will employ in a different fashion in Act 5. Shakespeare’s complex character construction continues to represent a departure from the two earlier depictions of Cleopatra in spite of the fact that Sidney and Daniel had a sympathetic view of her.

Just as the events turn against Cleopatra, her speeches take on a different, generally more serious tone. Cleopatra opens scene 15 with a chilling pronouncement which will prove to be true: “I will never go from hence” (4.15.1). She refuses comfort from her maid, Charmian, and delivers a speech describing the nature of her sorrow. Her words are sweeping in their nature and encompass a couple whose stage had been the known world:

All strange and terrible events are welcome,
But comforts we despise. Our size of sorrow,
Proportioned to our cause, must be as great
As that which makes it.

(4.15.3-6)

As if to confirm what she has just said, events bring the nearly dead body of Antony to the foot of Cleopatra’s monument. In god-like fashion, Cleopatra calls upon the sun to stop shining so that she can bring Antony up into the monument under cover of darkness.
As the couple faces each other in their last moments we see them once again as larger-than-life immortals. Cleopatra is again synonymous with her country when Antony calls her “Egypt” (4.15.18). She wishes for “great Juno’s power” so “the strong winged Mercury should fetch thee up / And set thee by Jove’s side” (4.15.34-36). Both Antony and Cleopatra refer to the possible restorative power of kisses, making it impossible for us not to be reminded of another couple who meet a dramatic end: Romeo and Juliet.

Cleopatra says wistfully: “Quicken with kissing. Had my lips that power, / Thus would I wear them out with kissing” (4.15.38-39). But Cleopatra turns very quickly from this lovely notion, to rail at the “false huswife Fortune that was provoked by my offense” (4.15.43-44). Cleopatra does not blame the gods, but rather acknowledges that her behavior caused Fortune to turn her wheel against her. This element of Cleopatra’s character is consistent within all three plays; Cleopatra accepts the responsibility for the disaster that has befallen her.

Now Cleopatra demonstrates her political savvy and her insight into human behavior. While Antony surprisingly advises her to seek her honor and safety with Caesar, Cleopatra understands that the two things are mutually exclusive. She tells Antony quite simply: “They do not go together” (4.15.47). Cleopatra comprehends her situation and knows she can only trust “my resolution and my hands” (4.15.49).

It has been said that Shakespeare gave Cleopatra the most stunning and beautiful lines in the play: “Noblest of men, woo’t die? / The crown o’ th’ earth doth melt, / The odds is gone, / And there is nothing left remarkable / Beneath the visiting moon” (4.15.59-68). She begins these wonderful lines with a rhetorical question—can she live in the world without Antony? We know she cannot for there is nothing left of value in the
world if Antony is gone. So, in addition to the elegy on her dying lover, Cleopatra also
tells us that she intends to die. Shakespeare, like the other two playwrights, had to
conform to history so Cleopatra had to kill herself shortly after Antony’s death. Also in
keeping with Sidney and Daniel, Shakespeare shows us a Cleopatra who is single-minded
in her purpose once she knows all is lost and Antony is dead.

After Cleopatra revives from her swoon she refers to herself as: “No more but
e’en a woman” (4.15.73). Although on the face of such a comment the notion seems a bit
specious, we can see it as another element of her “infinite variety.” Yes, she is a Queen,
but she is a woman for all her worldly power and goods. The queen calls the gods
injurious for stealing the jewel, Antony. Though she wishes she could have thrown her
scepter at the gods, she admits that all is naught. Then Cleopatra turns away from her
thoughts of her own death and attends to the business at hand--she must bury Antony
with all due rights in the “high Roman fashion” (4.15.87). Her final words over Antony’s
dead body are filled with strength of character and pathos when she tells her women:
“Come; we have no friend / But resolution, and the briefest end” (4.15.90-91).

Cleopatra dominates Act 5, an interesting fact since the play is titled Antony and
Cleopatra. “In 1909 A.C. Bradley called the assignment of the entire fifth act to
Cleopatra, “the unique compliment.” A more recent critic of the play commented:
“Antony’s fourth act death brings to Cleopatra the heretofore masculine prerogatives of
the fifth” (Lenz 25). It is also fascinating to speculate on Shakespeare’s approach since
in the patriarchal culture of early modern England, one would expect the male character
to function as the subject of the play; as such, when he died, the play would end.
Shakespeare's play differs from the other two plays in this examination primarily in his complex characterization of Cleopatra. I propose that there is no doubt that she functions as an equal and a subject in Shakespeare's play. Therefore his play dispels much of the existing misogynistic tradition contributed to by Knox and Swetnam, who believed all women were inferior beings who could not function as effectively as men. In a further departure from the Sidney and Daniel plays, Shakespeare provides us with a dramatic presentation of the characters interacting with each other on stage! Act 5 of the previous plays discussed is not a dramatic unfolding of events and behaviors but in both cases is predominantly a narrative by a third party. Shakespeare allows his Cleopatra to dominate Act 5 with her commanding physical presence and her articulate speech.

In her only reference to her son, Cleopatra tells Procleius that she will kneel down and thank Caesar if he will allow her son to have Egypt. The mention of her child, or children, is a major difference between Shakespeare's version and that of Sidney and Daniel. In both earlier plays, Cleopatra's children are referred to and, in Daniel, even appear on stage. Sidney presents Cleopatra as a loving devoted mother, while Daniel even has Caesarion speak with Cleopatra about his hope of escape and plans for the future of Egypt. In both plays, Cleopatra evinces concern and love for her children. Shakespeare has all but omitted Cleopatra's children from the plot. It may be that he did not want to detract from the relationship of the lovers by diluting it with the complication of motherly love. Shakespeare's Cleopatra has no divided loyalty—when she dies, it is only Antony to whom she calls. Perhaps it is the dominating nature of their relationship that precludes any necessity for Cleopatra to prove her love for Antony to the world, as she does in the Daniel play. In Shakespeare's play there is no question that Cleopatra
loved Antony; the question of equity of their love does not enter into any part of the play, especially Act 5.

Supporting the conviction that this Cleopatra loved her Antony, Shakespeare gives her some of the most beautiful descriptions of Antony in the second scene of Act 5. She seems almost to be of another world, when she tells Dolabella that she dreamt of Antony. Her description of her dead lover is both sweeping in its scope and revealing of the admiration she had for him:

His face was as the heav'ns, and therein stuck
A sun and moon, which kept their course and lighted
The little O, th' earth.

(5.2.79-81)

His legs bestrid the ocean: his reared arm
Crested the world: his voice was propertied
As all the tuned spheres and that to friends;
But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,
He was rattling thunder.

(5.2.83-86)

Her description also reveals her desire to enshrine her dead lover in a dream of god-like perfection which she creates. She essentially admits to Dolabella that her description is a work of her imagination, while acknowledging the need for humans to create perfection. Therefore, Cleopatra’s beautiful description reveals more to us about her than any reality about Antony.
There is further self revelation when Cleopatra admits to Caesar that she has suffered the frailty of women: “...but do confess, I have / Been laden with like frailties which before / Have often shamed our sex” (5.2.122-124). In spite of the fact that Cleopatra uses the word “confess,” we feel as though she is delivering this line more to appease Caesar’s traditional patriarchal views than to admit any genuine weakness.

She points out to Caesar that what is now his was hers only moments before, deftly acknowledging the ever shifting sands of political power. Clearly, Cleopatra understands the lessons of history and sees herself as an important political acquisition for Caesar. Consistent with the other two plays, Cleopatra will not be taken in triumph through the streets of Rome. Much of Act 5 is devoted to Cleopatra’s plans for her suicide and the destruction of Caesar’s plans for her. It is significant to her character development that she outsmarts the Emperor and brings her plans to fruition. Having a woman out-maneuver a man would seem to be a subversion of the patriarchal traditions.

Cleopatra begins her preparation for death, much like a bride might anticipate her wedding day: “Show me, my women, like a queen: go fetch / My best attires. I am again for Cydnus, / To meet Mark Antony” (5.2.227-229). Here we see Cleopatra the woman, but also the Queen. These two qualities have remained constant within the characterization of Cleopatra; they are not seen as mutually exclusive characteristics by Shakespeare. Sidney and Daniel both struggle with presenting a Cleopatra who was both a queen and a woman. Sidney felt compelled to purify Cleopatra of any taint of sexuality, while Daniel over-emphasized her loyalty to her children, thereby constructing a Cleopatra who was conventionally feminine. Shakespeare makes no apologies in his construction of his character. For when Cleopatra anticipates the arrival of the basket of
asps she declares: “My resolution’s placed, and I have nothing / Of woman in me now: now from head to foot / I am marble constant” (5.2.232-240). The dichotomy of her character is constant; she is both a woman in love and a statue which no emotion can pierce.

The dialogue between the Clown and Cleopatra is Shakespeare’s invention and not to be found in the other two plays. As is often the case with Shakespeare, the comic character delivers some salient and insightful ideas in his speech. He continues the food metaphor used throughout the play when he says: “I know that a woman is a dish for the gods” (5.2.273). This sounds quite complimentary until he adds: “if the devil dress her not” (5.2.274). So once again we hear the strains of the patriarchal stereotypes applied to Cleopatra and all women; they are fit for the gods if they are not taken over by evil.

Cleopatra is not interested in the aphorisms of the bearer of the asps; she is only interested in their ability to take her to Antony. In her last beautiful speech she directs her women one last time:

Give me my robe, put on my crown, I have
Immortal longings in me. . . . Methinks I hear
Antony call: I see him rouse himself
To praise my noble act . . .
Husband, I come!

(5.2.279-286)

For the first and only time, Cleopatra refers to Antony as her husband. Love is still on her mind when she attempts to describe death with the simile: “the stroke of death is as a lover’s pinch / Which hurts, and is desired” (5.2.294-295). Passion is also on her mind.
even as the asp is biting her breast, when she considers that Iras might meet Antony
before her and Cleopatra fears he would kiss her. How characteristic of Cleopatra that
she would have a jealous thought even at the moment of death! Hurrying death along,
she applies another asp to her arm and sighs: "As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle --
/ O Antony!, Nay, I will take thee too: [applies another asp to her arm] What should I
stay" (5.2.310-312). With nothing left to live for, her power lost and her lover dead,
Cleopatra has no reason to "stay" and so she rushes to meet her immortal partner, Antony.

Caesar, Dolabella and the guards come in to see all the women dead. Foiled of
his plans to take Cleopatra in triumph, Caesar is still able to objectively observe of her:
"...she looks like sleep, / As she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace"
(5.2.344-346). Even in death, her appeal remains evident. She is still the "Eastern Star!"
(5.2.307).

I have proposed that Shakespeare deconstructed the stereotypical character of
Cleopatra to create a totally new construction of her as a woman of "infinite variety." In
Shakespeare’s version, Cleopatra is neither cleansed of her sexuality, nor idealized into
the perfect example of a selfless wife and mother. As Linda Woodbridge says, many
critics misunderstand "...the individuality of Shakespeare’s Cleopatra, who is represented
not as Woman, but as a person, partly good and partly bad, like most persons" (299).
While we cannot know if Shakespeare approved of everything Cleopatra did, but we can
observe that he was true to the character he created. Linda Woodbridge takes the position
that Shakespeare disapproved of Cleopatra’s openly seductive behavior. She points to
the fact that none of his other heroines behave in such a way; but they prefer, rather, to
pursue their men in a straightforward fashion. Although she falls short of saying that
Shakespeare criticized Cleopatra for being seductive, she does say: “There is evidence in the play that Shakespeare sees such behavior as humanly undesirable: he has Cleopatra herself try, in the latter part of the play, to overcome her deliberately inconstant behavior” (300). As proof of her notion, Woodbridge refers to the lines where Cleopatra talks about her resolution and her marble-like constancy.

It is in her very multi-faceted personality that we find the true delight of Cleopatra as David Bevington points out: Cleopatra is a ‘lass unparalleled’ (5.2.316), whose greatness is elusive and all the more enthralling because it is so mysterious. She rises above her counterpart in Shakespeare’s source” (1333). As is typical of Shakespeare, he has taken an existing source, in this case, Plutarch’s *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, and developed a relatively one-dimensional character into a fascinating multi-dimensional one. He was not inclined to purify her of her sexuality or turn her into an idealized wife and mother; rather, Shakespeare wanted to present us a character whose “infinite variety” created the image of appealing imperfection. This is a major divergence from the notion at the time that a woman had to be controlled, demure, voiceless and powerless if she were to be admired. Cleopatra was the antithesis of this patriarchal Barbie doll. Shakespeare allowed us to see her and make our own judgment of her in all her complexity.
Notes

1. All quotations from Shakespeare's text are from The Pelican Shakespeare edited by A. R. Braunmiller, 1989, and are hereafter identified in the text of my chapter with parenthesized Act, Scene and Line references.

2. Without summarizing 400 years of Shakespearean criticism which ignores the issue of Cleopatra's race I note here a few of the significant critics of the twentieth century who did not address the issue: Northrop Frye: "Tragedy of Passion", Maynard Mack: "Mobility and Mutability," Harley Granville Barker focuses on Cleopatra's shrewlike behavior and unable to control her extreme's of behavior, Caroline Spurgeon, who focused on the imagery of grandeur in Antony and Cleopatra, but never considers Cleopatra's race.

3. Such a concern seemed to underlie misogynistic thinking in early modern England. The existence of cross-dressers in early modern England caused quite a controversy and led to a debate between proponents and opponents of the womanish man and the mannish woman, referred to as Hic Mulier and Hic Vir. Although the debate was not limited to cross dressing, the existence of a number of women in English society who refused to dress and behave like ladies fueled the discussion and established followers who either defended or attacked women who dressed in mannish clothes. Many plays of the early modern period included allusions to cross-dressing females, the most famous of which was The Roaring Girl by Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker. Aside from pure human curiosity there was a genuine concern that women who dressed, and behaved, like men were tearing down the very fabric of society. Women, like Moll Cutpurse of The Roaring Girl, were operating outside the control of any man so they did not fit the constructs of typical society. Perhaps these women gave rise to the term, "loose woman," because they were literally loose in the world, operating beyond any patriarchal control.

4. In Othello, we know that Othello is equally infuriated when he sees Cassio kiss Desdemona's hand. To modern audiences his fury seems overblown, but when we consider the tradition and add that Othello views the scene without benefit of the conversation that led to it, we understand.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

THREE VISIONS OF THE AFRICAN QUEEN

Cleopatra was more than the sum of all her parts. Academics, critics, audiences and readers have analyzed her for over 400 years—all in an effort to understand her “infinite variety” (2.2.237). While some degree of understanding may evolve from all this study, the dichotomy is that her very elusiveness is central to her character. She is quixotic, serious and statesman-like one minute then flirtatious and conniving the next. Since her historical namesake was alive there have been numerous representations of Cleopatra in the arts. The early modern English theatre produced the three plays under examination here. Although all three playwrights shared essentially the same cultural environment and historical context, they each created a different vision of the queen of the Nile.

All three playwrights were dealing with the same stereotype of Cleopatra. She was considered to be a seductress whose lascivious, and mysterious eastern ways lured Julius Caesar and then Mark Antony into politically damaging love affairs with her. Through her openly sexual behavior and political maneuverings she was an anomaly in the world of men. She threatened the status quo of Imperial Rome and challenged the patriarchal notions of acceptable female behavior. Through their creation of the inherently inferior,” Other,” imperialistic countries supported their belief in their own superiority. Therefore, within the constructs of both the imperial Roman and early modern English patriarchies
she was a subversive character. As a woman she was already considered the “Other” so Cleopatra’s gender was enough to qualify her as an example of “the Other,” but to exacerbate her position she was also a woman of color. I am convinced that the combination of these two characteristics made Cleopatra the ultimate “Other.”

Daniel’s Cleopatra accepts the responsibility for the disaster that has befallen Antony—but there is something more than admission of culpability in her attitude. We can hear Cleopatra’s sense of herself in these lines—she knows the world blames her but she still asserts her own innocence. She behaves like a subject in Daniel’s play because she will not take the submissive role of a woman contained within the constructs of the patriarchy. It is almost as though Daniel is comparing the fall of Eve and the resultant punishment for all of mankind with Cleopatra’s situation. The sense is that Cleopatra is prepared to accept responsibility only for what she has done but not for Antony’s weaknesses or perhaps for the weakness of mankind as Eve was forced to do according in Christian dogma. Is her refusal to be seen as the cause of all the couple’s faults, the reason she is called a “wrangling queen?”

Although all three plays depict a different interpretation of Cleopatra they are unanimous in the omission of any docility in Cleopatra’s character. She is many things, but docile and submissive she is not. Even in Sidney’s socially palatable version of Cleopatra we still observe a character that is politically and personally powerful. She is seen in strong contrast to the character of Octavia, who is the epitome of the long-suffering and docile wife. Shakespeare makes it very clear that such a passive character cannot hold the pleasure-seeking Antony. Antony may marry in Rome but his pleasure lies in Egypt. What is Shakespeare saying about the traditionally accepted version of a good wife if he
shows her inability to hold onto her man in spite of her social acceptability? I believe this is an element of his deconstruction of Cleopatra—she is shown as superior to the patriarchal concept of the paragon of a Roman wife because she has a voice and takes control of her destiny.

Cleopatra wins out over Octavia because of her openly sexual appeal. I believe Cleopatra’s sexuality is also a deconstruction of the stereotype in these three plays despite the fact that each writer deals with the topic differently. Within the limitations of Cleopatra’s history, each writer chose a unique depiction of Cleopatra’s sexuality that differs from the stereotypical conceptions of her. Sidney, Daniel and Shakespeare all present her as a sexual being to some degree.

In Sidney’s highly sanitized version of Cleopatra, we are shown a character that perceived herself as a wife and mother—these are stereotypically feminine roles rather than blatant manifestations of uncontrolled female sexuality. We feel that Sidney may have been driven to create a socially acceptable Cleopatra in part to improve society’s view of powerful women. As a woman writer Sidney would have been inspired to create a politically powerful female character that still fit within the parameters of patriarchal thinking. Sidney, therefore, deconstructs the stereotype of lustful whore and reconstructs her Cleopatra into a less threatening female character. The philosophy of Stoicism is also at least partly responsible for the creation of a Cleopatra that is chastised by society and her own conscience. Sidney’s Cleopatra accepts the responsibility for what has befallen the couple. “I did it, only I” (2.212) is the stoically characteristic reply Cleopatra invokes when struggling with the reason for Antony’s downfall and the destruction of the Ptolemy dynasty. Furthermore, instead of taking pride in her personal attractiveness, she accuses

170
her beauty as the cause of her destruction. "My face too lovely caused my wretched case" (2.195), is a major element of her acceptance of the blame for the disastrous state of her life.

Instead of describing their affair in sexual, hedonistic terms Sidney takes a more socially palatable position for their affair. The descriptive focus of Sidney's depiction of the couple is love, not lust. Cleopatra's parting words over Antonie's body exemplify the tone of romance rather than sex and remind us of another deathbed parting—Romeo and Juliet's.

Samuel Daniel preferred to construct his Cleopatra not by taking away her open sexuality but instead by showing her as repentant for her past. This repentant Cleopatra accepts the responsibility for what has befallen the couple. While it is true that Sidney's Cleopatra is aware of the world's disdain, her acceptance of the blame, "I did it, only I" (2.212), is devoid of any admission of overt licentiousness or sexual freedom. Daniel's character accepts the responsibility for the couple's disaster but she does so with awareness of the role her sexual past played in her destruction.

Daniel takes Cleopatra's responsibility further by specifically pointing to her licentious sexual behavior as the cause of her demise and that of Antony. MacDonald sees the emphasis Daniel places on the destructive force of sexuality: "Daniel's queen decries her sexual effect on Antony but more explicitly and at greater length assigns their joint downfall to her own beauty and lust" (39). Cleopatra exemplifies this sense of guilt when she admits to Charmion and Eras:

When heretofore my vaine lascivious Cort
Fertile in every fresh and new-choyce pleasure,
Afforded me so bountiful disport,
That I to stay on love had never leisure.
My vagabond desires no limits found,
For lust is endless, pleasure hath no bound

(2.1.534-538)

Not only is this an admission of her sexual behavior, it is also a description of her earlier life with Antony. Daniel's presentation of a repentant Cleopatra is founded in the principles of Stoicism which considered hedonistic lifestyle detrimental to sound leadership. It would be reasonable that Daniel would create a Cleopatra who would have to admit her guilt and accept the consequences of her actions. While it can be argued that Daniel chastises Cleopatra through the speeches of the Chorus and Philostratus, I propose that his total construction of his character is a testimony to a woman who lived a full life and now accepts the responsibility for her demise. While it is true that within Daniel's dramatic world Cleopatra admits that her beauty and her hedonistic lifestyle brought on the destruction of her Empire, her lover, and herself, she never regrets her past. I believe that Daniel allows his Cleopatra to retain her pride and even her dignity. She does not shrink from her position as queen even when facing a victorious Octavius Caesar, as Proculeius makes clear:

When all her hopes were now consum'd to naught,
Or once descend into a servile thought.
Th' imperious tongue unused to beseech,
Authoritie confounds with prayers so,
As words of rule, conjoined with humble speech

Shew'd she would live, yet skornd to pray her foe.

(2.2.35-40)

The Cleopatra described here is not a submissive, passionless character but rather one that in spite of the calamity around her maintains her dignity and her subjectivity.

Shakespeare takes his characterization of Cleopatra even beyond the complexity of Daniel’s creation. It is with Shakespeare’s version that we see the well-known Cleopatra of “infinite variety” (2.2.237). There can be no question of Cleopatra’s sexuality in Antony and Cleopatra—in this play everyone talks about it. Antony, his followers, Octavius Caesar and his followers, members of Cleopatra’s court and Cleopatra herself, all talk about her sexuality unceasingly. Unlike the other two plays in this examination, in Shakespeare’s play we actually have the opportunity to see some vestiges of dramatization of the couple’s love affair.

In Antony and Cleopatra, Cleopatra flirtatiously toys with her sexuality by use of double entendre and innuendo sprinkled throughout her speech in the early scenes of the play. She does not blush from allusions to her sexuality and I propose that her own references to it diminish any patriarchal effort to contain it and her. By giving Cleopatra the many references to her sexual life Shakespeare frees her from the containment so common to women of both imperial Rome and early modern England. In other words, because Cleopatra talks openly about her sexuality she takes back the ownership of it. Consider the effect of this line she delivers while separated from Antony: “Give me some music: music, moody food / Of us that trade in love” (2.5.1-2).
Shakespeare's Cleopatra never apologizes for her sexual behavior at any time in the play. Cleopatra does apologize once in the play—in Act 5 she demurs to Octavius Caesar: “do confess I have been laden / With like frailties which / Have often shamed our sex” (5.2.122-124). While she does use the word “confess,” the situation suggests that this is a token response in an effort to neutralize the tenuous situation of meeting her captor. This is the only time Cleopatra even acknowledges the possibility of shame or remorse for her past behavior. Her farewell to Antony is not replete with admissions of guilt over lascivious living but rather is splendid in its beautiful, even fanciful, language of praise for him.

As did her counterparts in Sidney and Daniel, Cleopatra goes to her death calling Antony her husband: “HUSBAND, I COME.” (5.2.286). I find it interesting that the character that stereotypically flouted convention reverts to assumption of a term which inherently presupposes containment of the female. Therefore with her last breath we see Cleopatra controlling the world's view of her status by identifying with the socially acceptable role of wife. The use of the title, husband, gives all three versions of the character a social respectability which she was generally denied in stereotypical constructs of her.

Characteristically, Shakespeare creates a different subtext in the final scene by omitting any reference to Cleopatra's motherhood. He intensifies the sense of physical desire between the couple when Cleopatra tells her ladies in waiting to bring her robes because she has “immortal longings” (5.2.280). In case there is any doubt about her meaning she then says she thinks she hears Antony call her and “rouse himself” (5.2.283) presumably to come to her. The tone is not repentant but larger than life and clearly sexual.
in implication. Shakespeare stays true to his complex construct of Cleopatra even with the use of the term “husband.” I have come to believe that Shakespeare feels the need to contain Cleopatra within the parameters of the accepted patriarchal structure for the same reasons that Sidney de-sexualizes her and Daniel idolizes her. So, whether it be socially controlled sexuality as in a wife and mother or, remorse over sexual freedom, or the open acceptance and revelry in a sexual life, Cleopatra’s image was impacted by sex.

Of course manifestation of sex is one’s gender. We have discussed the limitations and assumptions placed on women in a patriarchal society, and it is easy to accept that those traditions extended to fictional characters as well. In the patriarchal societies of imperial Rome and early modern England, females were perceived as “Others.” Since the majority of published writers at that time were men that fact reinforced the depiction of female characters as “Others” since they were of a different gender than their creators. Lest we automatically assume that women writers would not be impacted by the patriarchal stereotypes it is important to remember that many female authors have served to hold their fictional female counterparts to the patriarchal standards of the time. Mary Sidney may have been driven to create a female character that would be socially acceptable to her early modern English audience and the Queen. Although Sidney was certainly a woman of great intellect and personal charm, she may have decided that it might make her drama more palatable for her to create a character that was a powerful queen and a moral character. The blasts of John Knox’s trumpet were still resonating throughout England, so his treatise about the monstrousness of a female with power over men was probably well known in 1595.
To Daniel and Shakespeare, Cleopatra would be the “Other” for reasons of gender. Though simple in its concept, there are many permutations that come with the status of being perceived as the “Other.” Perhaps the most salient of these manifestations is the proclivity of the male “self” to blame the female “Other” for a myriad of sins. We know that religious dogma, particularly embraced in the Middle Ages, blamed Eve as the cause of all of mankind’s troubles. From that position it became almost natural to assume that all women were the cause of men’s woes. If we apply this ideology of misogyny to the plays under examination, we can see the rationale behind what may sometimes seem like irrational behavior on the part of the male characters in the play. It is impossible to ignore the fact that every time Antony has a serious defeat he turns on Cleopatra, often accosting her in a very vicious manner. His attack is demeaning because it not only assumes the worst about Cleopatra’s moral fiber but it takes away her very humanity—she is no longer a human being but in Act 3 he reduces her to a morsel of food. As a morsel of food on Caesar’s plate she exists only to satisfy his needs, not out of any fulfillment of her own identity.

Why does Antony get so furious and ready to accuse Cleopatra of moral depravity? According to Bamber, Shakespeare’s male characters always focus on the seamy side of their women’s behavior when they are suffering their own moral lapses or a setback in their fortunes. “It is only when his sense of his own identity is threatened that the hero projects onto women what he refuses to acknowledge in himself. Only when he finds himself cowardly, appetitive, shifty, and disloyal, does the sexuality of women disgust him” (14). While it is possible to see Bamber’s position as essentialist, I do not think we should discount the idea she proposes here. The concept is supported in modern
psychology in the principle of "projection." Projection is that psychological behavior that causes an individual to assign to another the very weaknesses one possesses oneself. Therefore, if we consider this idea and apply it to the many times that Antony verbally attacks Cleopatra, it becomes clear that Antony's viciousness is fueled by his own self-loathing at the loss of the key battle at Actium. Conversely, when his hopes are emboldened by the prospect of a new battle, he expresses affection toward Cleopatra and anticipates "one other gaudy night" (3.13.183) together.

Although we may never know for certain the color of Cleopatra's skin, I believe we can accept as Adelman does that whatever the shade of her skin, Cleopatra was depicted as different than the members of the audience. MacDonald is not quite comfortable with Adelman's casual acceptance but agrees that "it matters that she is, through her own declaration, physically different from her Roman lover" (59). The three playwrights whose work is under examination all saw Cleopatra differently, not only in a moral sense as I have shown, but also in a physical sense.

My query into Cleopatra's skin color, or race, was piqued by the fact that each of the writers depicted Cleopatra's physical appearance differently. They did not have a unified view of Cleopatra's looks and I wondered why. I believe that it is not just because they lacked specific information about Cleopatra's skin color, but rather that they each believed that the audience's perception of dark skin color would dramatically impact their response to Cleopatra as a character.

I now believe that it was Cleopatra's race more than any of her other differences that set her apart from the writers and their audience. While it is true that early modern English audiences may not have used the term race in the same way contemporary society
may, they were aware of groups of people who looked significantly different than they did. The information from explorers such as Drake and Raleigh helped educate the upper classes of the existence of dark skinned people in the new world. Yes, it is true that misogynistic thought was evident in early modern England just as it is present in various countries today, but just as in contemporary western society, not all people are in concert with misogynistic thought. Some people still operate from a position of the limiting patriarchal constructs so fundamental to misogyny but other people have transcended such limiting thought and see women as individuals not limited by their female physiology. In mid-eastern cultures such as Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia, there are still suffocating regimes and religious rules that prohibit the freedom of the women in their cultures. Women are made to wear voluminous garments which completely cover them and shield them from the public eye as well as effectively limit their mobility and activities. The stories of the dominance of these male-centered cultures are shocking to western ears but remain in place at least partly supported by older generations of women who have never known anything different. What is equally surprising to western society is to learn that often, when they are given the opportunity to shed their veils many of these women refuse. In a recent news story from France it was learned that Islamic school girls were going to be prohibited from wearing their head coverings in school. Their reaction was to protest and demonstrate their strong commitment to wear their veils as a physical manifestation of their religious beliefs. The French people were surprised—they thought they were liberating these school girls. I believe these examples demonstrate that patriarchal paradigms are still thriving in our world today.
Many other gender based issues remain in our world today. I am particularly appalled by the acid attacks on Indian and Pakistani women who refuse a suitor only to be attacked by their rejected suitors who disfigure them with acid. There are also the situations in these same countries where families are given the right to kill their daughters if they refuse a chosen spouse or engage in extra-marital affairs. In all of these cases there is very little government intervention to punish the perpetrators who maim or murder these women! While these are clearly extreme examples of misogynistic thinking within the protection of a patriarchal paradigm, they do give us some sense of the anti-female world in which many female characters were created during the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras in England. Cleopatra was the recipient of such misogynistic thought but under Shakespeare’s pen she was able to stretch the limitations of the patriarchy.

Armed with the accounts of dark-skinned natives that explorers were encountering in the New World, the early modern writers may have been sensitive to the negative stereotyping that would have been ascribed to a dark Cleopatra. They may have known about, or possibly seen, the captured natives brought to Elizabeth’s court and recognized the repulsion tinged with attraction that the citizens felt. Though they were several hundred years away from Freud’s principle of reaction formation (which has been previously defined in Chapter 4) they may have intuitively understood that as human beings we are capable of simultaneously being drawn to something even as we feel disgust or repulsion toward it. Therefore, to create a Cleopatra that was black would be to take a serious risk within the established order of a predominantly white England. As a result of the explorations into the new world, blacks and other natives had been brought to England. Their increasing numbers made the populace and even the queen uncomfortable. “By 1596,
blacks were numerous enough to generate alarm,” as Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin point out. “Elizabeth wrote to the Lord Mayor of London and observed ‘there are of late divers blackmoore brought into this realm, of which kinde of people there are already to manie” (Qtd. in Newman 148). Apparently, a week later Elizabeth wrote another letter to the Mayor suggesting that the “blackmoores” be transported out of the country—possibly to Spain or Portugal. Such was the discriminatory cultural environment of early modern England when each of the three playwrights was creating their Cleopatra.

I believe that Sidney and Daniel were not up to the challenge of creating a dark-skinned Cleopatra in such an environment, so they literally “white-washed” her in Sidney’s case and ignored her race in the Daniel play. Only Shakespeare took the road less traveled and purposely created a black Cleopatra. Why did he do so? Shakespeare wanted to depict a female character that could encompass the subject role but be more than a didactic personification. His creation would exemplify the “wrangling queen” (1.1.50) because she would not be contained within the patriarchal paradigm. Her very quixotic nature and open sexuality would free her from the limiting constructs of misogynistic stereotypes. I am not alone in this belief. Shakespeare can be seen as assigning previously male-subject qualities to his female characters, as Lenz, Greene, and Neely point out: “Like the male characters the women are complex and flawed, like them capable of passion and pain, growth and decay” (5). Gajowski sees this ability in a more positive light when she writes about Shakespeare’s ability to establish characters that defy traditional constructs: “Shakespeare’s female protagonists are remarkable for their totality of being that eludes and defies, disrupts and subverts male constructions of femininity” (126). Cleopatra
would be perfect in her imperfections. What better way to display those imperfections than to make her different, not only in gender, but in race too?

When I began my examination of these three plays, I wondered if I could definitively answer my question—how important are gender and race to discussions of Cleopatra’s character? Although there is no categorical means of determining which had the greater impact, I am convinced that Shakespeare’s play presents us with the most compelling Cleopatra of the three and she was black. Her “tawny front” sets her apart from the other two Cleopatra’s in this discussion. Shakespeare’s Cleopatra is stronger for her color difference—everything she does stands out dramatically against the backdrop of white characters. Her color is an element of her “infinite variety” (2.2.137) and helps explain why the white characters around her find her elusive to understand. We cannot imagine Octavia being referred to as a “royal wench” (2.2.227) or a “most triumphant lady” (2.2.185), partly because of her social acceptability. She is the ideal of the perfect wife—which inherently means a passive, supportive role to someone else’s star but never a star herself.

Within early modern England women were constrained and controlled by marriage and the patriarchy but they were still about half of the population. Women of color, on the other hand, were not half of the population of England, as Elizabeth’s note to the Lord Mayor makes very clear. We know that Elizabeth’s request was followed and a large number of blacks were removed from England. The very ease of identification of the racial Others clarifies the depth of the discrimination against them. As the Japanese came to learn during World War II in the United States, visual difference creates a state of alterity which is not to be matched by any other distinguishing feature. Consider that
while the United States was at war with both Japan and Germany, there were only
detainment camps for the Japanese!

So, between the two distinguishing features of gender and race, I am now
convinced that Cleopatra’s characterization was more heavily impacted by her race than by
her gender. There is no question that within the historical construct of early modern
England the fact that Cleopatra was female and a racial Other established her alterity as the
Other and Shakespeare’s dramatic dark lady. Furthermore, as an openly sexual woman
who exerted her power, personally and politically, she posed the ultimate threat to imperial
Roman patriarchal society. As such, Cleopatra was the ultimate “Other” and perhaps the
darkest lady of all.
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