All For Love

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN DRYDEN

John Dryden was one of the most popular and influential literary figures of the mid-late 1600s in England. He worked for the republican government during the Interrengum (when England didn't have a king), but after the restoration of Charles II to the throne of England in 1660, Dryden became an outspoken supporter of the royalist cause. He also benefited professionally from the Restoration because the theaters were re-opened after decades of closure. Dryden began writing plays such as *Marriage à la Mode* (1673) and *All for Love* (1678), which were very popular with audiences. He was known as well for his literary criticism and satires, including *Mac Flecknoe* (1670) and *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681). A respected and renowned author by the time of his death, Dryden was also England's first poet laureate.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The English Civil War dominated political, religious, and cultural life in England in the middle of the seventeenth century. During the late 1630s and early 1640s, King Charles I experienced increasing tensions with his Parliament. In 1642, a republican Puritan faction in Parliament took power and banned theater on the grounds that it was immoral. In 1649, after years of fighting between republican and royalist forces, King Charles I was executed. Following eighteen years of republican rule, his son King Charles II returned to the throne in 1660. That same year, the theaters reopened. Thus, the "Restoration" of Charles II was also a restoration of English drama. Dryden became a fierce royalist after the Restoration, and for the rest of his life he remained wary of the dangers of rebellion, civil war, and threats to hierarchical authority—a political stance reflected in *All For Love*.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

All For Love is a play typical of the literary period known as "Restoration drama"—which is to say, plays written between 1660 and 1700. Restoration drama was notably different from earlier English drama in several important ways. For one, women were allowed to act on the English stage for the first time. The Restoration period also saw the rise of women playwrights like Aphra Behn, whose most celebrated play was *The Rover* (1677), a comedy of manners involving the sexual and romantic lives of a group of banished royalist noblemen. Her work is characteristic of the Restoration period in its emphasis on raunchy dialogue and sexually explicit content, themes that also typify other well-known Restoration plays like George Etherege's *The Man of Mode* (1676) and William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675). But if Restoration *comedy* frequently focused on rakes, virgins, unfaithful wives, and other stock types, Restoration *tragedy*—the sort of play that Dryden was writing—was serious and aimed to imitate European models. Dryden was very influenced by French tragedy, which he alternatively admired and rebelled against in his own writing. Jean Racine's *Phèdre* (1677) opened shortly before *All For Love* and has much in common with it: both plays are five-act tragedies set in the ancient world that feature a woman protagonist who dies by her own hand. Dryden implicitly aimed many critiques at Racine in his preface to his own play. He complained of "dull" French playwrights who are too careful not to offend anyone, and criticized the character of Hippolytus in *Phèdre*, who in Dryden's view is so concerned with "decorum" and good manners that he becomes ridiculous. Finally, *All For Love* is in many ways a self-conscious imitation of an older play: William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Dryden greatly admired Shakespeare, whom he called a genius. However, this didn't stop him from making significant changes to Shakespeare's version of the story. Unlike Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, *All For Love* is set entirely in Egypt rather than Rome and focuses narrowly on the romantic lives of its two protagonists, including an invented love triangle featuring a new character, Dollabella. In this sense, the play is much more a romantic tragedy than Shakespeare's political drama.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *All For Love*
- **When Written:** 1677
- **Where Written:** London, England
- **When Published:** 1678
- **Literary Period:** Restoration
- **Genre:** Drama, Tragedy
- **Setting:** Ancient Egypt
- **Climax:** Antony and Cleopatra commit suicide, thus inaugurating the beginning of the Roman Empire and the end of the Roman Republic.
- **Antagonist:** Octavius

EXTRA CREDIT

Celebrity Actors. The character list of *All For Love* features a list of the actors who played the roles in the original 1677 production. These included Charles Hart as Marc Antony and Elizabeth Boutell as Cleopatra; both were well-known in the Restoration period, which was the first historical moment

of "celebrity" actors who had mass name recognition among the population.

Revivals. The play was very popular and revived twice: at Lincoln's Inn Fields in February 1704, and at Drury Lane in December 1718.

PLOT SUMMARY

All For Love begins with John Dryden's dedication of the play to an aristocratic patron, Thomas Osborne. He praises Osborne for his loyalty to the crown during the English Civil War. This praise leads Dryden to a larger consideration of the merits of the English constitutional monarchy, which he calls the best form of government in the world. Dryden thinks that *all* attempts at "reform" are dangerous, since any rebellion strikes at "the root of power, which is obedience."

Dryden then writes a preface about the play itself. The story of Antony and Cleopatra has been "oft told," most famously by William Shakespeare, but Dryden has made some changes. For instance, he has invented new characters and scripted a fictional meeting between Cleopatra and Octavia, Antony's Roman wife. He explains that Antony and Cleopatra are appealing protagonists because they are neither wholly good nor evil.

Two priests of the Temple of Isis, Serapion and Myris, observe that there have been several frightening omens in Egypt recently. For instance, the **water** of the Nile overflowed and left behind monstrous sea creatures. They express their fears for the future of their kingdom, since Antony and Cleopatra have recently and disastrously lost the Battle of Actium to Antony's rival for power in Rome, Octavius. Antony has now locked himself away, hoping to cure himself of his love for Cleopatra. His old general Ventidius arrives to try to bring some hope. He tells Antony that he has an army in Lower Syria that is loyal to Antony's cause. However, the army will only fight for Antony if he comes to them—they do not want to fight for Cleopatra in Egypt. In order to claim his army, then, Antony will have to leave her.

Cleopatra is in despair when she hears that Antony plans to leave her. She sends her eunuch, Alexas, who gives Antony a **ruby bracelet** in the shape of bleeding hearts. Alexas petitions Antony to go see Cleopatra one last time, so that she can fasten the bracelet on his wrist, although Ventidius warns against this. When Cleopatra appears for her audience with Antony, she swoons and protests pathetically that she only wants to die. At this, Antony proclaims that will never abandon the woman who loves him, even if it costs him his life.

Several other visitors come to the Egyptian court: Antony's old friend Dollabella, who is in love with Cleopatra, and Antony's wife Octavia. Octavia has also brought their two daughters, Agrippina and Antonia. Octavia tells Antony that she is still loyal to him as a wife despite his abandonment of her. Ventidius and Dollabella urge Antony to abandon Cleopatra and take back Octavia. Octavia tells her daughters to go to their father. At their embrace, Antony is so moved that he tells Octavia he will leave Cleopatra.

Cleopatra again despairs at this news. She encounters Octavia in the palace and the two women exchange insults: Octavia accuses Cleopatra of stealing Antony's wife, children, power, and political standing. Cleopatra says that she has suffered more because Octavia has the name of wife to protect her, whereas Cleopatra has lost her crown and reputation for Antony. Meanwhile, Antony asks Dollabella to break the news of his departure to Cleopatra. When Dollabella arrives, Alexas urges Cleopatra to use Dollabella's feelings for her to make Antony jealous. Cleopatra begins flirting with Dollabella. Ultimately, Cleopatra is unable to go through with it and confesses that she still loves Antony. Dollabella admires her loyalty and constancy, but it is too late: Ventidius and Octavia observe Dollabella kissing Cleopatra's hand and plan to tell Antony, hoping that this will drive a wedge between the lovers for good.

Ventidius and Octavia bring the news of Cleopatra's infidelity to Antony. This backfires, since Antony becomes frantic with rage and distress. Coming to the realization that Antony still loves Cleopatra and will never love her, Octavia leaves the palace and returns to Octavius's camp. Meanwhile, Antony rages at Dollabella and banishes him from Egypt. He banishes Cleopatra as well, who begs his forgiveness and leaves proclaiming that she still loves him. Antony weeps as they part but orders that they never see each other again.

The battle with Octavius continues to go disastrously for the Egyptians. As Antony watches from the roof of the palace, the Egyptian navy surrenders without a fight and joins the Roman forces. Antony becomes convinced that Cleopatra has betrayed him to Octavius. Alexas comes up with another plot, recommending that Cleopatra hide in her monument, which she does. Alexas tells Antony that Cleopatra was so distressed at his suspicions of her that she killed herself. At this news, all the fight goes out of Antony. He explains that all he wants now is to die, since Cleopatra was the "jewel" that made his life worth living. All his conquests, glory, and honors were merely the ransom he used to buy her love.

Now, Antony says, is the time to give up his power struggle with Octavius and let the world "know whom to obey." Ventidius accepts Antony's desire to die and expresses his wish to go with him, since his own life is not worth living without Antony. Antony then asks Ventidius to kill him first, but Ventidius stabs himself instead. Antony then falls on his sword but misses his heart and begins bleeding profusely. Meanwhile, discovering Alexas's deception, Cleopatra rushes into the room and finds him on the ground. As Antony dies in her arms, he makes her

promise to join him soon in the afterlife.

Cleopatra dresses herself in her royal robes and sits herself on the throne beside Antony. Her maids, Iras and Charmian, bring her a poisoned asp that fatally stings her. Cleopatra proclaims that she will die with Antony as his wife, in a bond that no "Roman laws" will be able to break. As she dies, she challenges Octavius to ever separate them now. Iras and Charmian follow her example and also commit suicide. Serapion bursts into the throne room, leading Alexas in chains. When he sees the bodies, he remarks on how noble Antony and Cleopatra look, and expresses the hope that they will live a happier and freer life in heaven than they found on earth.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Antony – At the time of the events of *All For Love*, Antony is a renowned Roman general and political leader. Described as "emperor of half the world," he rules Rome with two other politicians, including Octavius. For all his power and prestige, however, he has a fatal weakness: his love for the Egyptian queen Cleopatra. Since first meeting Cleopatra ten years earlier, he has been living in Egypt as her lover and unofficial consort. This choice has involved many sacrifices: he abandoned his first wife Fulvia and his second wife Octavia, Octavius's sister, along with their children. It has also led to disastrous political consequences. Enraged at the insult to his sister, Octavius has brought an army to attack Antony and Cleopatra in Egypt. By the end of play, Antony has lost everything: his army, his power, and his throne. He is a tragic figure, described as a noble, honorable man undone by his fatal romantic passion. His friend Ventidius observes that Antony is naturally given to "virtue," but that he sometimes "bounds into a vice" (i.e. his love for Cleopatra) that draws him off course. For Dryden, Antony's mixed temperament—neither a model of "perfect virtue" nor "altogether wicked"—makes him a sympathetic figure. He is not flawless, but neither is he villainous. He is also a romantic hero because he allows himself to be ruled by his passions. Although Antony highly values his honor and reputation, he ultimately chooses his love for Cleopatra above all other considerations, deciding to die with her in Egypt—and thus giving up rule of half of the world for love.

Cleopatra – Cleopatra is the queen of Egypt and the lover of Antony. She is famously beautiful and charismatic, and by her own account has received many marriage proposals. But although she has been involved with other men before—most notably Julius Caesar, before the events of the play—she is unshakably loyal to Antony, whom she regards as her great love. For instance, although she toys with the possibility of flirting with Antony's friend Dollabella in order to make Antony jealous, she ultimately can't go through with it because she loves Antony too much. She is jealous of Antony's legal wife, Octavia, and frequently laments her socially degraded status as Antony's mistress. She is tempestuous, passionate, and self-dramatizing. For example, she alternatively rages and cries in order to stop Antony from leaving Egypt. And she is theatrical to the end of her life, when she commits suicide dressed in her crown and royal robes. She dies in order to avoid humiliating capture by Octavius, demonstrating her pride in her royal lineage as well as her romantic devotion to Antony. Seeing that he is dead, she declares that her life is no longer living. She hopes they will meet in heaven and be waited on by many loving couples—demonstrating that she sees herself as a great success as a romantic heroine, if not as a ruler.

Ventidius – Ventidius is a general in the Roman army and one of Antony's oldest and closest friends. He is fiercely proud, honorable, and eager to fight in war rather than remain in the palace. He is depicted as Antony's "other half" in the Platonic sense—which is to say, the classical ideal of friendship in the writings of Plato, in which friends are imagined as sharing the same soul. And indeed, in some ways, Ventidius does know Antony very well, having experienced many battles with him. But he also proves that he *doesn't* understand Antony in some fundamental ways. For instance, he is harshly critical of his love affair with Cleopatra, calling Antony her "slave" and a ruined man who has lost everything for "this toy," as he refers to Cleopatra. He thinks Cleopatra is a dangerous seductress and constantly works with her enemies (including Antony's abandoned wife Octavia) to try to turn Antony against her. In his hatred of Cleopatra, he misses the fact that she is not wholly responsible for the changes in Antony's fortunes—he made those choices himself. He also fails to understand the depth of the love Antony has for Cleopatra, such that Antony would prefer to die with her rather than make peace with Octavius. He only comes to realize this at the end of the play, when Antony asks him to help him commit suicide. Ventidius stabs himself instead, demonstrating his own love and loyalty to Antony. Although Ventidius is a flawed reader of people, then, he is unmistakably a constant friend to Antony.

Dollabella – Like Ventidius, Dollabella is another of Antony's close friends. Although he loves Antony and is very loyal to him as well, their friendship is tested by Dollabella's continuing passion for Cleopatra. When it seems as if Antony is going to leave the Egyptian court, Dollabella begins to contemplate trying to win Cleopatra from Antony. Cleopatra, for her part, thinks of flirting with Dollabella as a way to make Antony jealous and recapture his love. Seeing Dollabella and Cleopatra together, Octavia and Ventidius bring the news to Antony that the two are romantically involved, inciting Antony's rage. In fact, however, Cleopatra couldn't go through with the false romance, while Dollabella says that he admires Cleopatra's constancy to Antony and loves her "no more than friendship

will allow." Antony, however, is unforgiving and orders Dollabella out of his sight. In this way, Dollabella ultimately prioritizes his friendship with Antony above romantic love. This provides a point of contrast with Antony, who chooses Cleopatra over all his friendships.

Alexas – Alexas is Cleopatra's servant and one of her close advisors. He is a eunuch, meaning that he has been castrated—Alexas thus frequently laments that he has never experienced the joys of love and sex himself. He often acts as Cleopatra's messenger to Antony: for instance, he is the one who brings Antony **Cleopatra's ruby bracelet** and persuades him to see her one last time, thus preventing his departure from Egypt. At other times, however, his interventions are less helpful. He persuades Cleopatra to flirt with Dollabella in order to make Antony jealous, a decision that has disastrous consequences because it alienates the two lovers from each other. He also brings Antony the false news that Cleopatra is dead, thus throwing Antony into despair and causing his suicide. In these moments, Alexas is depicted as opportunist, unscrupulous, and self-interested. At the same time, however, he seems to genuinely care for Cleopatra and hope to help her. He is also, understandably, concerned for his own safety when the Roman troops arrive—a fear which turns out to be well-founded, since in the last scene Alexas is led off stage in chains.

Octavius – Octavius is a character who never appears on stage but who nonetheless casts a long shadow. He is Antony's rival for power in Rome and is described as young, ambitious, and strongly competitive in his quest for rule of "half the world." He is also proud and quick to take offense at perceived insults to his honor and his family—as indicated by his protectiveness of his sister, Octavia, Antony's wife. In response to Antony's abandonment of her, he brings an army against Antony and Cleopatra in Egypt. His ambition ultimately finds full space to flourish after Antony's suicide and military defeat, thus removing the last obstacle to Octavius's control of the Roman Empire, which he went on to rule for many decades.

Octavia – Octavia is Antony's wife and Octavius's sister. She is regarded as very beautiful and a model of virtuous Roman womanhood, but Antony nonetheless abandons her and their young children for his lover Cleopatra—a decision that sets off a power struggle between Antony and Octavius. However, Octavia is not merely a pawn in the conflict between her husband and brother. She is depicted as highly principled, honorable, and independent. For instance, she leaves the Roman camp without her brother's permission and travels to the Egyptian court with her daughters Agrippina and Antonia, in order to try to persuade Antony to return to her and make peace with Octavius. She tells Antony to take Octavius's terms, even if he later drops her again. Ventidius and Dollabella urge Antony to abandon Cleopatra and take back Octavia, pointing out her noble self-sacrifice: "you have ruined [her], / And yet she would preserve you." Octavia's position demonstrates her concern for her honor as a wife above all else. Although she knows that Antony doesn't love her, she is willing to live in a sham marriage for appearance's sake. Ultimately, however, this same concern with honor is what prevents her from tolerating Antony's continued passion for Cleopatra. Seeing that he is still obsessed with his former lover, Octavia tells Antony that she will leave him and go back to Octavius's camp, since her honor cannot bear to have only "half" of Antony. In contrast to Cleopatra, then, Octavia is consistently motivated, not by love, but by concern with her honor.

Charmion – Charmion is one of Cleopatra's maids. She is fiercely loyal to her mistress, as demonstrated at the end of the play, when she kills herself in solidarity with Cleopatra's suicide. Charmion is the only person left alive when Serapion bursts into the throne room to find their mistress dead. When he asks her "is this well done?", Charmion proclaims proudly that Cleopatra died honorably, as the last of a great line of monarchs, before sinking down and dying. Charmion is thus also, in a sense, the keeper of Cleopatra's legacy—as the last person to see her before she died.

Serapion – Serapion is one of the priests of the Temple of Isis and a figure of significant political influence at Cleopatra's court. He is gravely concerned about the Roman invasion and the future of Egypt as an independent kingdom. When Antony and Cleopatra's ships turn against them and side with Octavius, he advises Cleopatra to hide in her monument—where she later commits suicide. Serapion can be opportunist; for instance, he arrests Alexas and blames him for the ills in Egypt, hoping to use him as a bargaining chip to buy his freedom from the conqueror Octavius. However, he also seems to genuinely care for Antony and Cleopatra, as demonstrated by his speech when he views their bodies and hopes that they have ascended into heaven.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Iras – Iras is another one of Cleopatra's maids. Like Charmion, she is with Cleopatra in her final moments and also commits suicide with her. She smuggles in the "cure of all ills," a poisoned asp that will kill Cleopatra, demonstrating her unfailing loyalty to her mistress.

Myris – Myris is another priest of the Temple of Isis. Like Serapion, he is very concerned about Egypt's fate in the Roman invasion, and he spends much of the play's opening scene discussing a series of frightening omens that have appeared in Egypt recently, seeming to foretell a terrible fate.

Agrippina and Antonia – Agrippina and Antonia are Antony and Octavia's young daughters. Octavia brings them to Cleopatra's palace to see their father, whom they haven't seen for years. Antony clearly still loves them, as he is so moved by the sight of them that he temporarily pledges to return to his family.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

HONOR VS. LOVE

The doomed love story of Antony and Cleopatra dramatizes the conflict between an individual's personal desires and his or her public duties to the state, the community, and the greater good. This dichotomy between what Dryden calls "love" and "honor" is a rich source of dramatic tension in the play. It is the central conflict for the protagonist, Antony, who is torn between his love for Cleopatra and his obligations as a husband, father, and leader of Rome. Similarly, Cleopatra must decide whether to protect her kingdom or her lover. Ultimately, Antony and Cleopatra choose each other over these public duties—a decision foreshadowed in the play's title, *All for Love*, which refers to Antony and Cleopatra's choice to give up everything they have ("all") for "love." The play is a cautionary tale about the consequences of pursuing love at the expense of honor, though Dryden also somewhat contradictorily suggests that Antony and Cleopatra's willingness to die for love makes them admirable, if morally flawed, romantic heroes.

From the beginning, Antony and Cleopatra's love is "dishonorable" by society's standards, since they live together and are not married. Worse, Antony is in fact married to someone else for most of the duration of his relationship with Cleopatra. Ten years before the events of *All for Love*, Antony left his first wife, Fulvia, to be with Cleopatra in Egypt. After Fulvia's death, he became one of the three members of the triumvirate (counsel of three) who ruled Rome. Antony recognized that he needed to have good relations with his co-ruler, Octavius, so he married Octavius's sister Octavia. However, this ended disastrously when Antony left his second wife for Cleopatra as well. In this way, his bid to make an honorable marriage failed because of his love for Cleopatra.

Antony and Octavia also have two daughters, Agrippina and Antonia, who have not seen their father in years. Antony has undeniably dishonored Octavia by leaving her and their children to live with Cleopatra—his friend Ventidius says that "you have ruined her." When Octavia comes to Egypt, Antony is so moved by the sight of his two children that he pledges to return to his marriage, suggesting that he feels guilty for the dishonor he has inflicted on his family. Cleopatra also suffers from the dishonor and illegitimacy of her relationship with Antony. Although she has had many suitors, she turned down all their offers of "honorable" marriage to live with Antony. As a result, although she is faithful to Antony, the world thinks of her as a "faithless prostitute," as Octavia calls her.

Antony's personal romantic decisions also have disastrous consequences for his status as a military leader. First, he fatally insulted Octavius by abandoning his sister (and Antony's wife) Octavia, leading to a breakdown in diplomatic relations between the two men. Consequently, Octavius brings a powerful army to Egypt to fight against Antony and Cleopatra. Even in these dire straits, however, Antony admits that he has not done much for his army: "I have … disgraced / The name of soldier with inglorious ease." Although Antony was once a brilliant military leader, he is too infatuated with love for Cleopatra to win much honor in war.

During the Battle of Actium at **sea**, Cleopatra flees with her ships. Antony follows her in retreat, leading to his defeat. Antony calls this a "stain to honor" and a "lasting shame." But although he recognizes that this is a dereliction of his duty as a commander, he loves Cleopatra so much that he can't help following her and ensuring her safety rather than the welfare of the troops. Even after his dishonorable flight at the Battle of Actium, Ventidius tells Antony that not all is lost, since he has an army in Lower Syria that is loyal to Antony's cause. However, the army will only fight for Antony if he comes to them. They do not want to fight for Cleopatra in Egypt, since they think that Antony is her "slave." Antony is unable to leave Cleopatra to go lead them, even though it would save his honor and military standing. He ends up defeated by Octavius and committing suicide in the Egyptian palace, a humiliating end for a man who once ruled half the world.

Both Cleopatra and Antony are significant political figures with a great deal of power, which they both lose as a consequence of their love: Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, loses her kingdom, and Antony, one of the three rulers of Rome, loses his empire. Antony acknowledges that his decade in Egypt represented time away from "the business of the world" required of a leader. He gave "whole years" to Cleopatra instead of to the government of Rome, making him an ineffective politician. He would also never have begun the power struggle with Octavius if he hadn't gone away to Egypt. In this way, love was in direct conflict with his duties to his country.

The friends and servants around Antony and Cleopatra can't understand why they would throw away all their power and responsibilities for love. Ventidius accuses Antony of throwing away half the world's empire—"Europe, Africa, Asia"—all for "one light, worthless woman." Similarly, Cleopatra's eunuch Alexas encourages her to betray Antony to Octavius and thus save herself and her kingdom's independence. Although both consider the possibility of choosing honor over love—Antony considers returning to his marriage and leaving Cleopatra, and Cleopatra contemplates swearing loyalty to Octavius in a bid to preserve her freedom—they both ultimately decide to choose each other. As Antony observes, "we have loved each other /

Into our mutual ruin." Love leads to "ruin" because it draws down Octavius's wrath upon them, leading to the destruction of their army and their joint suicide.

Throughout *All for Love*, Antony is conflicted about whether he cares more for honor or love. At times, he thinks of leaving Cleopatra in order to preserve his honor as a husband, father, and political leader; he claims that he loves her beyond "life, conquest, empire" yet not beyond "honour." In reality, however, he can't go through with it, suggesting that he does not in fact value honor more than love. Ultimately, he decides that "the world" is "not worth my care" in comparison to Cleopatra, and chooses suicide and military defeat in order to be by her side. In this way, then, love turns out to outweigh all other considerations—an admirable romantic choice, if not necessarily a sound political or moral decision.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

All for Love is a play preoccupied with change. It asks how the sudden loss of power impacts two people, Antony and Cleopatra, whose sense of self been defined by their status as two of the ancient world's most powerful monarchs. Antony's response to the ruination of his fortunes is to constantly speculate about how his time in Egypt has changed him. Cleopatra, too, is obsessed with retaining her royal authority even as that power slips away from her. In a broader sense, *All for Love* is a play about change because it takes a very old story that has been often retold in literature—the decline and fall of the historical lovers Antony and Cleopatra—and offers a new, updated version for seventeenth-century English audiences that speaks to their own concerns. In the end, Dryden further subverts readers' expectations by arguing that love is more constant than politics, fame, or wealth.

Dryden's verse prologue admits that the story of Antony and Cleopatra has been "oft told." However, his version is different from his predecessors'—most famously, William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. In this sense, Dryden sees the authority of antiquity and English literary history itself as subject to change and alteration. His willingness to innovate—inserting new characters, new verse styles, and unhistorical events—further implies his overarching interest in the theme of change and suggests the value of creating art that resonates with contemporary audiences. At the same time, however, his depiction of Antony and Cleopatra as constant in their love for one another also reveals his conservativism and investment in continuity. Although the political landscape of *All for Love* changes dramatically—not coincidentally, much like mid-late 1600s England, which had experienced a civil war and a consequent transformation in society and politics—Dryden's central protagonists fundamentally stay the same. As in all other versions of the story of Antony and Cleopatra, the lovers remain constant to each other and die tragically at the end of the play.

There is continuity to Dryden's version of Antony and Cleopatra in that, like other fictional depictions of the lovers, he has drawn heavily on classical sources (particularly Plutarch) in his generally positive depiction of the protagonists. However, his version is more contemporary in that it is written in a "neoclassical" style that was very popular in Dryden's time. For instance, he has observed the "unities" of time and place—which is to say, the convention in classical drama that all the action of a play should take place in the same place and within twenty-four hours. Unlike Shakespeare's play, *All for Love* is written exclusively in blank verse (non-rhyming poetry) rather than rhyme. In the 1600s, blank verse was a relatively new innovation and was associated with progress, as when John Milton claimed in *Paradise Lost* (1678) that he was restoring poetry to "liberty" by freeing it from the "bondage" of rhyme. Another major innovation is that Dryden uses artistic license in making Octavia, Antony's Roman wife, come to Egypt and meet Cleopatra. In the preface, he defends himself for creating this fictional meeting on the grounds that it is dramatically necessary. He also innovates by attacking the strict rules of French drama (which was very popular at the time), complaining that such inflexibility makes it difficult to try anything new.

Yet even as Dryden rejects conventions that would limit his freedom as a playwright, he seems to praise the virtue of constancy within the play itself. In the play, both Antony and Cleopatra place a great deal of emphasis on constancy in love in particular. As everything else crumbles around them, both become paranoid that their lovers might also make a change in their affections. Antony almost leaves Cleopatra to return to his wife Octavia, a decision that throws Cleopatra into despair. Ultimately, however, Antony decides to remain on the grounds that it is better to be constant and loyal, even in a technically illegitimate and illegal love affair. In this sense, Antony is paradoxically a disloyal and changeable husband to Octavia and a constant lover to Cleopatra. Cleopatra also toys with the idea of leaving Antony for his friend Dollabella, whom she tries to use to make Antony jealous. However, she is unable to go through with it, since she loves Antony too much. For Dryden, this constancy in love is what makes Antony and Cleopatra admirable. Although they may have neglected their public and political duties, they are models of loyal lovers.

While Antony and Cleopatra's love is ultimately presented as constant, Antony's other defining traits—his power, authority, and military might—are stripped away from him one by one, leaving him to wonder whether he is even the same person at all. Ventidius, Antony's old friend, claims that Antony is very changed from what he was before his affair. Where before he was "the lord of half mankind," now he is "altered" and "made a woman's toy." The implication is that Cleopatra has made Antony soft and effeminate—that now he is unfit for the

masculine pursuits of battle and governance because he has been spending all his time in sensual pleasures.

For Antony, change is also defined as cultural difference. He clearly sees himself as Roman still: for example, he declares that "I'm a Roman, / Bred to the rules of soft humanity." The present tense—"I *am* a Roman"—suggests that Antony thinks this aspect of his identity has remained constant, despite the ten years he has spent in Egypt. At the same time, however, Ventidius suggests that there is something about Antony that isn't quite Roman anymore: "Can any Roman see and know him now?" he asks. After spending such a long time away from Rome, a Roman might not be recognizable as a Roman anymore. This raises questions about what it means to be a Roman—does it require being in Rome, or is it a certain set of behaviors and values that can survive the loss of Rome itself? Similarly, Cleopatra tries to reassert her identity even when she has lost everything. Just before her suicide, Cleopatra dresses herself in her finest royal robes and seats herself beside Antony on the throne of Egypt. This is a reminder of their former greatness, demonstrating to the onlookers that she is *still* queen of Egypt, even if Octavius has conquered her country.

The conclusion of *All for Love* features a striking reversal to the conventional wisdom about continuity and change that has prevailed throughout the play. Antony ends up concluding that Cleopatra didn't represent the change that "altered" him, as Ventidius accused him—rather, she was the continuity, the constant source of love and inspiration in his life. After learning that Cleopatra has allegedly died, Antony says that he has no more desire for power and glory. He admits that "I was but great for her; my power, my empire / Were but my merchandise to buy her love." Throughout the play, people have accused Antony of losing his empire for love of Cleopatra. In this moment, however, Antony suggests that it is precisely the opposite: he only had an empire in the first place because of her. In this way, the real constant of *All for Love* turns out to be Antony and Cleopatra's love for each other, not the rise and fall in their political fortunes.

PASSION VS. REASON

All for Love might be regarded as one of the early texts of Romantic "sentimentalism"—a literary movement largely associated with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that emphasized passion, sentiment, and feeling over rational considerations. Dryden clearly hoped that his play would appeal to the finer feelings of audiences, particularly women, since he writes in his verse epilogue that he hopes that he will be judged by the "fair sex," who will enjoy the story of a man, Antony, who died "all for love." Ultimately, *All for Love* is the story of the tragic outcomes that result from choosing passion over reason. Yet the play also suggests that passion is "noble," admirable, and appealing as a character trait—and that however "unreasonable," Antony and Cleopatra are tragic heroes for choosing that passion over the cold-hearted logic that would see them separate.

Both Antony and Cleopatra constantly emphasize that their passion for each other is illogical. Reason would dictate that they prioritize their duties as rulers above their personal life, but their feelings for each other are so powerful that they cannot be controlled or contained. Cleopatra even calls her love a "noble madness." This emphasizes both the excessiveness of her love—it is "madness"—but also its associations with her nobility and royalty. Cleopatra says that only low-born people have "moderate sadness"; she has "transcendent passions" that "soar … quite out of reason's view." In this way, the "transcendence" of her passion is associated with the nobility of her social position as a queen. She is so greatly passionate, in other words, because of her "greatness." Similarly, Antony also claims that "I have lost my reason" because of his love. The love between Antony and Cleopatra is so world-defining and famous precisely because it is inordinate and unreasonable. No one who loved "reasonably" would be able to give up everything for love.

At the same, however, Dryden is careful to stipulate that Antony and Cleopatra have the capacity for both reason and passion—it's just that they *choose* to follow the latter course, which results in tragedy. In the preface to the play, Dryden explains that *All for Love* is not a tragedy in classical sense of a hero who is subject to a fate beyond his control. He argues that Antony and Cleopatra did not commit their "crimes of love" by any "necessity or fatal ignorance." Their choice was "wholly voluntary, since our passions are, or ought to be, within our power." In other words, they didn't *have* to choose to overrule their reason. In this sense, Dryden's version of the story depicts two people who deliberately allow their passions to rule them. For Dryden, this free choice is what makes Antony and Cleopatra such appealing tragic protagonists. They are neither pictures of "perfect virtue" nor "altogether wicked." This "middle course" in their characterization makes them sympathetic figures, since it makes their choice of passion over reason seem relatable and understandable.

The dichotomy between reason and passion is particularly stark in Antony's choice between Cleopatra and his wife Octavia. It is certainly the more reasonable choice for Antony to go back to Octavia, thus returning to his family and making peace with her brother Octavius. However, her reasonableness is precisely why he can't love her. Octavia makes good arguments for why he should return to her, Antony admits, but these will not persuade him to leave Cleopatra. "I can ne'er be conquered but by love, / And you do all for duty." Although Octavia is beautiful and virtuous, Antony can never love her because their relationship is bound by ties of duty, not passion and choice. For Antony, passion is what motivates romantic love—and by extension, the drama of his downfall.

Indeed, Antony's evident passion for Cleopatra leads to tragedy

because it causes Octavia to leave him again rather than making peace with Octavius. Thinking that Cleopatra is romantically involved with Dollabella, Antony becomes visibly enraged and devastated. Octavia complains that Antony should show so much distress at the loss of Cleopatra, coming to the conclusion that Antony will never truly love her—which is true. Cleopatra herself negatively compares Antony's duty to Octavia with his passion for her. When Antony says he "respects" her, Cleopatra says that she despises that word—"Is that a word / For Antony to use to Cleopatra?"—because it is emotionally "cold," fit for a wife like Octavia. Clearly the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra can never involve more moderate and temperate emotions like "respect." Their relationship is depicted as always passionate, which is precisely why it leads to their downfall—since their immoderate emotions lead them to make poor choices, like Antony failing to make peace with Octavia and Octavius.

Antony and Cleopatra allow their passions to rule them into what Antony calls their "mutual ruin." It is arguably not necessary for them to die: it would have been more reasonable to try to make peace with Octavius. Antony has the opportunity to reconcile with Octavius through the diplomatic efforts of his wife Octavia and his friend Ventidius. Cleopatra considers buying her freedom and the independence of her kingdom by betraying Antony. However, both come to the conclusion that their lives are not worth living without each other, and they prefer to die in a double suicide rather than compromise their convictions. In this way, their passion overrules their reason, leading them to choose death with each other rather than making a more rational choice.

AUTHORITY VS. FREEDOM

All for Love dramatizes the clash between the forces of authority in the world and the desire for personal freedom. The former is represented by Rome under the new emperor Octavius, with its strict laws, military power, and strong central government. The latter is represented by Egypt under Antony and Cleopatra, a kingdom outside the sway of the Roman Empire yet that values pleasure and personal choice. The clash between Octavius and Antony is particularly resonant for Dryden, who was writing in the aftermath of significant political upheaval. In the mid-1600s, a group of English Parliamentarians rebelled against King Charles I and executed him, setting up a republic to rule the kingdom. Dryden wrote *All for Love* after the English monarchy had been restored to the throne, but he was still very concerned with the proper relationship between authority and freedom in his own political context. Throughout the play, Dryden argues that authority and freedom should be mixed, though he particularly extols the value of authority in the form of a strong government. The fact that the play ends with Antony and Cleopatra's double suicide, the ascent of Octavius, and the end of the Roman Republic suggests that Dryden was strongly invested in the assertion of hierarchical political authority, even as he values the romantic freedom and passion of his central protagonists.

In a literal sense, the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra stages the clash between authority and freedom because it is illegal. Under Roman law, Antony is married to another woman, so the authority of social and legal sanction is on Octavia's side. Throughout the play, Cleopatra suggests that she would like to be married to Antony. She laments that her natural inclination is to be a "wife, a silly, harmless, household dove," but that instead she is forced to act the dishonorable role of the mistress. She is clearly jealous of Octavia and obsesses about the personal qualities and beauty of a woman positioned as model of virtuous Roman womanhood.

However, she ultimately suggests that there is a legitimacy to her relationship with Antony that transcends Roman laws. Anticipating their double suicide, Cleopatra implies that this will be a truer marriage between her and Antony than his legally sanctioned connection with "dull Octavia." She compares their deaths to "our spousals," which will bind them together with "a tie too strong / For Roman laws to break." By staging their deaths in this way, Cleopatra appeals to higher, divine laws that transcend human-made laws and conventions. Although Antony may be married to Octavia, she implies that she will be his true wife in a spiritual sense, when they ascend to heaven and are freed from "Roman laws." In other words, Cleopatra elevates the value of freedom over that of authority—a position Dryden criticizes as the play unfolds.

The conflict between Antony and Octavius is framed as a problem of authority for the world, not simply for these two men. The "triumvirate"—a council of three who briefly ruled Rome, consisting of Antony, Octavius, and a character who does not appear in *All for Love*, Lepidus—ultimately emerges, in Dryden's view, as an ineffective form of government. Dryden prefers a strong monarchy, a political position voiced by his characters in the play's conclusion. Antony himself admits that the world needs a single strong leader when he gives up the fight against Octavius. He argues that "'Tis time the world / Should have a lord, and know whom to obey." He acknowledges that the power struggle between the two of them has caused much war and death—the natural byproduct of divided leadership. By choosing to die, he cedes power to Octavius in order to facilitate political stability. Indeed, historically, the triumph of Octavius over Antony was the end of the Roman Republic and the beginning of the Roman Empire. Octavius became the emperor Augustus and led Rome through a so-called "golden age" of peace, flourishing, and great literary production. Dryden alludes to this in his citation of "golden age" classical poets like Virgil, implying that Antony's defeat was the necessary precondition of Rome's success as an authoritarian empire.

Antony's statement that "the world / Should have a lord, and know whom to obey" mirrors Dryden's own views about political authority. Dryden was a strong royalist who supported the centralized powers of the English monarch, a position he elaborates at length in his preface. At the same time, however, he suggests that authority should always be tempered with freedom, and vice versa. Dryden calls the English monarchy the best form of government in the world. He argues that the English have significant personal freedoms while still retaining the benefit of a strong monarchy—but a monarchy that is "without tyranny." For example, he points out that no one in England is actively persecuted for their religious faith or forced to pay taxes for foreign wars.

Although Dryden is in favor of some degree of personal freedom, when it comes to outright rebellion, he is stern. He thinks that *all* attempts at "reform" are dangerous, since any rebellion—even if it just claims to want to reform rather than take down the government—strikes at "the root of power, which is obedience." In other words, Dryden has little toleration for disobedience to the established political order. This real-world perspective on current events in England is expressed in *All for Love* when Antony cedes his authority to Octavius in order to avoid the dangers of rebellion and civil war. The fact Dryden had experienced the horrors of civil war firsthand in his own lifetime, may account for why he seems to support Octavius's authoritarian power over the freedom represented by Antony and Cleopatra.

Ultimately, then, while Dryden argues that authority should be mixed with freedom, he generally tends to come down on the side of authority. For instance, he writes in the preface that English citizens are already as free as they can be—any additional freedom would just be "license," or a pushing of boundaries beyond what is acceptable. Dryden is loyal to monarchical authority, above all else, and he doesn't seem to see the need to advocate for any additional freedoms that aren't currently permitted by the state. Similarly, while *All for Love* offers a sympathetic depiction of two lovers, Antony and Cleopatra, who rebel against forms of political and social authority, Dryden doesn't allow them to triumph. This suggests the play's fundamental political conservatism. In the end, Antony and Cleopatra commit suicide and Octavian takes power as sole emperor—thus teaching the world "whom to obey."

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

CLEOPATRA'S RUBY BRACELET

In despair at the prospect of Antony leaving her to reunite with his army in Lower Syria, Cleopatra sends him a final gift: a ruby bracelet in the shape of bleeding hearts. In the most obvious sense, the bleeding hearts symbolize Cleopatra's love for Antony and pain at his departure. However, this symbol of Cleopatra's love also contains another, subtler message. Cleopatra's servant Alexas, who delivers the bracelet, tells Antony that Cleopatra hopes the bracelet "may bind your arm." This may mean simply that the bracelet will literally encircle Antony's arm—but the word "bind" also carries connotations of restraint and imprisonment. The bracelet thus comes to symbolize the ways in which Antony is imprisoned by his love for Cleopatra. This is not the only time the metaphor of bonds is used to describe the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra. Antony's friend Ventidius, for instance, compares Cleopatra's love to "golden bands" that have captured Antony and led him to his "ruin." And indeed, like those "golden bands," the ruby bracelet is both a beautiful piece of jewelry and a symbol of bondage and imprisonment. This turns out to be an apt metaphor, for the bracelet does indeed "bind" Antony to Egypt and make it impossible for him to leave. Cleopatra begs to see him one last time to fasten the bracelet on his arm in person, and when they see each other, Antony is too overcome by love to leave her. In this sense, the bracelet symbolizes both Cleopatra's love and the powerful, unbreakable bonds that encircle Antony's heart.

WATER

All For Love begins with a series of dark omens. In the play's opening scene, two priests of the Temple of Isis, Serapion and Myris, recount the appearance of various frightening signs in nature that all seem to prophesy Egypt's doom. One of these omens involves water. Terrified, they discuss how the Nile overflowed and then suddenly retreated, leaving behind "monstrous" seals and sea-horses. From the play's first act, then, water symbolizes the unstoppable tide of fate. Despite their efforts to prevent it, Serapion and Myris fear that Egypt will be overcome by a dark destiny. And indeed, this does come to pass, since Antony and Cleopatra's love affair wreaks disaster on Egypt—which is conquered by Octavius and made into a province of the Roman Empire.

Later in the play, however, water also symbolizes renewal and rebirth. Devastated at his military defeat by Octavius, Antony expresses the wish that he could be a shepherd, not an emperor. He imagines himself leading a simple life, his "uncombed locks, matted like mistletoe" while "a murmuring brook / Runs at my foot." Here the "murmuring" water stands, not for the tide of fate, but for the calm passage of life away from the violence and frenzy that characterizes the lives of powerful monarchs. Unlike the devastating flood of the Nile, a

large river, this small brook merely "murmurs" softly. In Antony's fantasy of a shepherd's life, water brings renewal and tranquility, not destruction. Water thus symbolizes both the inevitability of Antony's tragic fate and the peace that he longs for in a simpler life.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Bloomsbury edition of *All For Love* published in 2004.

Epistle Dedicatory Quotes

We have already all the liberty which freeborn subjects can enjoy, and all beyond it is but license.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

In this statement in Dryden's dedicatory epistle—in which he dedicates the play to an aristocratic patron, Thomas Osborne—Dryden reveals his political philosophy. He uses the epistle to praise the system of government in 1600s England, which was a monarchy balanced by the power of a representative Parliament. King Charles II ruled, but his power was supposedly checked by the rival authority of the elected representatives. Dryden argues that this is the best form of government in the world because it balances the authority of a strong central monarchy with the freedom of a people's government. Dryden thinks that English people are "already" as free as they can be. Any additional freedom beyond this would be just "license"—which is to say, the anarchic disruption and breaking down of social and legal boundaries. In this sense, Dryden is fundamentally conservative because he equates more freedom with resistance to the established order of things. He believes in a certain degree of individual freedom, but he thinks that freedom should always be restrained and checked by authority.

Preface Quotes

[T]he crimes of love which they both committed were not occasioned by any necessity or fatal ignorance, but were wholly voluntary, since our passions are, or ought to be, within our power.

Related Characters: Cleopatra, Antony

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

Dryden explains that he has depicted Antony and Cleopatra in a sympathetic light in this play, highlighting their admirable qualities as well as their flaws. However, he stipulates that Antony and Cleopatra are not tragic protagonists in the sense that they have no control over their fate. Rather, they chose to let their passion for each other overrule their reason. In other words, it wasn't "necessity" or "fatal ignorance" that led to their tragic double suicides. No one forced them to choose their disastrous love affair over their political responsibilities. Rather, their decisions were "wholly voluntary." They knew right from wrong, but they chose to follow the dictates of their passions anyway—a choice that makes them sympathetic and tragic protagonists, if not good rulers.

Prologue Quotes

And brings a tale which often has been told,
As sad as Dido's, and almost as old.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

Dryden notes that the story of Antony and Cleopatra has "often…been told." In this he is acknowledging his debt to several other famous fictional versions of the story, most notably Shakespeare's play *Antony and Cleopatra*. He also calls the story "as sad as Dido's," a reference to the story of the doomed love affair of Aeneas and Dido in Virgil's *Aeneid*. In these moments, then, Dryden alludes to the classical past as well as more recent English literary history. However, even as he acknowledges the long history and prestige of the story and the continuity between his play and these past versions, he also announces his intention to put his own spin on it by changing certain details. He has written a version of the old story that incorporates new characters, new scenes, and a relatively new verse form, blank (unrhymed) verse. In this sense, *All for Love* both acknowledges and deviates from literary tradition.

Act 1 Quotes

Can any Roman see and know him now,

Thus altered from the lord of half mankind,
Unbent, unsinewed, made a woman's toy,
Shrunk from the vast extent of all his honours,
And cramped within a corner of the world?

Related Characters: Ventidius (speaker), Cleopatra, Antony

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

Ventidius, Antony's old friend and general, has known Antony for a long time. He sees a great change in Antony from what he was before, arguing that Antony has metaphorically "shrunk" from the great emperor and "lord of half mankind" that he was before. He attributes this change to Cleopatra, who he blames for Antony's dramatic personality change and loss of his military "honors" and glories. Before, Antony ruled half the world; now he's "cramped within a corner" of it, the kingdom of Egypt. This is because Antony prefers to spend his days with Cleopatra rather than ruling Rome. For Ventidius, the change in Antony is closely linked to his loss of honor: Antony has chosen to become "a woman's toy," as Ventidius derogatorily puts it, rather than take his rightful place on the battlefield or in Rome. Indeed, he asks whether "any Roman [can] see and know him now," implying that Antony's long time in Egypt has made him something less than Roman.

But I have lost my reason, have disgraced
The name of soldier with inglorious ease[.]

Related Characters: Antony (speaker), Ventidius, Octavius, Cleopatra

Related Themes:

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

Antony explains that his love for Cleopatra is so excessive that he has "lost [his] reason." He has no explanation for his seemingly irrational decisions except his all-consuming love for her, which causes him to lose his military power and position as ruler of Rome. For example, he explains to Ventidius here that he lost the Battle of Actium against Octavius's forces because he followed Cleopatra when she fled the battlefield. Unable to put aside personal considerations, he preferred to disgrace himself in battle rather than risk her safety. This is how he has "disgraced / The name of soldier," preferring the "inglorious ease" (i.e. rest) of Egypt with Cleopatra to fighting it out against Octavius on the battlefield.

And I will leave her; though, Heaven knows, I love
Beyond life, conquest, empire, all but honour;
But I will leave her.

Related Characters: Antony (speaker), Ventidius, Cleopatra

Related Themes:

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout *All for Love*, Antony wrestles with the question of whether he values love more than honor. Here he concedes that he loves Cleopatra more than anything else he has: his empire, his conquests in battle, and even his own life. However, he claims that he loves Cleopatra more than everything *but* honour. This is why he tells Ventidius that he will leave Cleopatra, in order to command his army in Lower Egypt (who will follow Antony but not Cleopatra). For Antony, a seasoned commander with many military victories, loss in battle would mean humiliation and loss of honor. He is thus willing to leave the woman he loves in order to obtain a military victory against Octavius. Later in the play, this turns out to be untrue: Antony never leaves Egypt to command the troops. In this sense, his claim that he loves Cleopatra above "all but honour" might be wishful thinking; in reality, Antony tends to act more by the dictates of love than honor.

Act 2 Quotes

Moderate sorrow
Fits vulgar love, and for a vulgar man;
But I have loved with such transcendent passion,
I soared at first quite out of reason's view.

Related Characters: Cleopatra (speaker), Antony

Related Themes:

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

Like Antony, Cleopatra describes their love as a passion that transcends and defies reason. Many might regard the choice of passion over reason as a moral failing. Cleopatra, however, sees her passionate nature as an indication of her nobility. She argues that her "transcendent passion" that "soar[s]...quite out of reason's view" is fitting for a great queen like herself. She says that only low-born (or "vulgar") people have "moderate sorrow," thus associating temperate, restrained emotions with people who have low stakes in their lives. By contrast, she regards the greatness of her passion as an index of the greatness of her position as Egypt's queen. This is an alternative, more positive view of passion in the passion vs. reason dichotomy, suggesting that if Cleopatra fails as a ruler who needs reason to survive, she at least succeeds as a passionate romantic heroine.

> [W]e have loved each other
> Into our mutual ruin.

Related Characters: Antony (speaker), Octavius, Cleopatra

Related Themes:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

After the Battle of Actium—when Antony and Cleopatra are decisively defeated at sea by Antony's rival, Octavius—Antony tells Cleopatra they have "loved each other" into their "mutual ruin." By this he means that their love for one another has been destructive to their lives, honor, and political fortunes. Had Antony not fled to Egypt to live with Cleopatra and insulted Octavius's sister Octavia, this battle would never have come to pass. For Cleopatra's part, her love affair has sacrificed the independence of Egypt, which has now been invaded by a foreign power and faces annexation to the Roman empire. The play's depiction of these disastrous consequences throws love and honor into opposition with one another. Love might be imagined as a positive good, but Dryden shows that it can be in conflict with other obligations: to one's country, to moral principles, and to the wellbeing of others.

Act 3 Quotes

> But yet the loss was private that I made;
> 'Twas but myself I lost: I lost no legions;
> I had no world to lose, no people's love.

Related Characters: Dollabella (speaker), Cleopatra, Antony

Related Themes:

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

Antony's old friend Dollabella is guilty of the same fault as Antony: he, too, has fallen in love with Cleopatra. However, he points out an important distinction between the two of them. Antony's love for Cleopatra has had disastrous consequences because Antony is a public figure, a ruler of Rome and a military commander. By loving Cleopatra and choosing to live in Egypt, Antony loses "legions" of his army, his "people's love," and even the "world"—which is to say, the "all" of the play's title, *All for Love*. Dollabella, by contrast, is a "private" figure, and so his losses are "private" as well. Dollabella argues that because he had no kingdom to lose by loving Cleopatra, then his fault is less severe. His point adds an important addendum to Dryden's views on the love versus honor debate in the play. "Honor" seems to be a property of people with elite class positions: kings, emperors, commanders. For Dollabella, a common soldier, love does not pose the same threat to honor that it does for Antony.

> For I can ne'er be conquered but by love,
> And you do all for duty.

Related Characters: Antony (speaker), Cleopatra, Octavia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

Antony admits many times throughout the play that the more reasonable choice for him to make would involve returning to his wife Octavia and their children. The dignified Octavia seems exceptionally generous, offering to return to marriage with him (a loveless marriage on Antony's part) in order to preserve the peace in Rome. This seems like a persuasive argument, but Antony is too infatuated with Cleopatra to take advantage of it. His

statement here provides some explanation for why Antony is unable to make the "rational choice." He explains that he can never love Octavia because she does everything for "duty," whereas he can only be "conquered" by "love." Although Antony claims to be aware of his duties to his family and his country, he is more swayed by romantic passion than anything else. Octavia's lack of passion, in comparison with Cleopatra's passionate nature, makes it impossible for Antony to love her. In this sense, although it is the more reasonable choice to return to Octavia, Octavia's rationality is precisely why Antony can't love her as he does Cleopatra.

Act 4 Quotes

Nature meant me
A wife, a silly, harmless, household dove,
Fond without art, and kind without deceit;
But Fortune, that has made a mistress of me,
Has thrust me out to the wide world.

Related Characters: Cleopatra (speaker), Octavia, Antony

Related Themes:

Page Number: 102-103

Explanation and Analysis

Cleopatra laments her degraded status as Antony's mistress rather than his wife. She is jealous of Octavia, recognizing that Octavia has the protection of Roman law and the socially-sanctioned status of Antony's wife. By contrast, without the authority and protection of marriage, Cleopatra is treated as an outcast. In this sense, she is quite literally choosing love over honor. Under Roman standards of propriety, it is honorable to be a wife and dishonorable to be a mistress. Cleopatra admits that she could have accepted proposals of marriage and become a wife, but seems to accept that "Fortune…has made a mistress of me." In a different world, she implies, she would able to be "kind" and "fond" without the "deceit" required of a mistress—like her flirtation with Dollabella, which she performs to try to recapture Antony's love. She attributes her dishonor to the oppression of Roman laws and authority, rather than any inherent failing in herself.

Act 5 Quotes

My Queen is dead.
I was but great for her; my power, my empire
Were but my merchandise to buy her love,
And conquered kings, my factors.

Related Characters: Antony (speaker), Ventidius, Cleopatra

Related Themes:

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

When Antony hears (falsely) that Cleopatra has committed suicide, he is devastated. He explains to Ventidius that he has nothing more to live or fight for, because Cleopatra inspired all of his conquests, glory, power, and even the founding of an empire. This is a striking revision of the depiction of Antony's character earlier in the play. Ventidius had argued that Antony was fatally changed from who he once was by his disastrous affair with Cleopatra. To Ventidius, Cleopatra was the cause of Antony's military defeat and humiliation. However, Antony offers a very different reading of what has changed and what has remained constant. He argues that Cleopatra was the real constant in his life, since all his empire was only the "merchandise" he used to "buy her love." In other words, Antony wasn't changed by Cleopatra; on the contrary, she made him who he was. This statement also has implications for the love versus honor dichotomy established early on in the play. It seems now as if love didn't ruin Antony's honor. Rather, all the trappings of Antony's honor—his "power," his "empire," his "conquered kings"—were gained *because* of his love for Cleopatra.

'Tis time the world
Should have a lord, and know whom to obey.

Related Characters: Antony (speaker), Octavius

Related Themes:

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

Antony decides to surrender to Octavius because he is devastated by Cleopatra's death, but also because he has decided to give up his power struggle with Octavius. He

acknowledges that their battle has split the world's allegiances and caused civil war and bloodshed. With him gone, Antony knows that much of the world will fall under one man's sway: Octavius. This did indeed come to pass, since the downfall of Antony and Cleopatra marked the end of the Roman Republic and the beginning of the Roman Empire under Octavius, who became the Emperor Augustus. In his statement that "the world / Should have a lord," Antony voices Dryden's own political philosophy. Dryden was fiercely loyal to King Charles II and was a strong supporter of monarchical authority. In his own lifetime, he had witnessed the sufferings of the English Civil War, which caused significant social unrest and turned family member against family member. Dryden associates political stability with the authority of a single strong leader, which is why Antony's death and the rise of Octavius is depicted as a positive development for the world. Dryden prefers the authority of monarchy to a world riven by civil war.

> Ten years' love,
> And not a moment lost, but all improved
> To th'utmost joys: what ages have we lived!
> And now to die each other's; and so dying,
> While hand in hand we walk in groves below,
> Whole troops of lovers' ghosts shall flock about us,
> And all the train be ours.

Related Characters: Antony (speaker), Cleopatra

Related Themes:

Page Number: 135

Explanation and Analysis

Just before Antony dies, he tells Cleopatra that he hopes she will meet him in the afterlife, where they will walk "hand in hand" and have "troops of lovers' ghosts" to wait on them. In many ways, Antony has died a failure: he has lost his army, his command, and his empire. However, he suggests that although he and Cleopatra are unsuccessful rulers, they will be held up as romantic models for ages to come. Although Antony has been harshly criticized for abandoning his role as ruler of Rome and wasting his time in Egypt, he points out that, in another sense, his time has been well-spent. When it comes to love, there has not been "a moment lost" in the ten years he spent there, since he and Cleopatra have "improved" their love to the "utmost," supreme joys. Although Antony may have been a changeable and fickle ruler and husband, he was a very constant lover to Cleopatra in those ten years. Similarly, the sin for which they have lost their kingdoms—the choice of passion over reason—is precisely what makes them models for lovers in heaven. Antony's vision of an afterlife in which he and Cleopatra will be together forever, attended by the ghosts of other lovers, suggests that he sees his love for Cleopatra as his most laudable and lasting legacy.

> Let dull Octavia
> Survive to mourn him dead; my nobler fate
> Shall knit our spousals with a tie too strong
> For Roman laws to break.

Related Characters: Cleopatra (speaker), Octavia, Antony

Related Themes:

Page Number: 136

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout *All for Love*, Cleopatra has been jealous of Antony's legally-wed wife Octavia and expressed her grief at her own status as mistress rather than wife. However, just before her suicide, Cleopatra increasingly confines those fears and jealousies to the earthly realm, where "dull Octavia" will mourn the now-dead Antony. With Antony dead, the world of the living seems to have little appeal for Cleopatra. Instead, her mind turns to her "nobler fate" in the world after death. She refers to her and Antony's joint suicide as their "spousals," suggesting that their death is a kind of wedding. Moreover, it is a wedding that is more profound and lasting than the earthly marriage between Antony and Octavia. Antony and Octavia are bound together by "Roman laws," but Cleopatra suggests that she Antony are linked by higher, heavenly laws. She compares their death to a marriage that will last forever, because it is entered into freely rather than compelled by the laws, social regulations, and authority of Rome. In this sense, she suggests that she will have a truer marriage and bond with Antony in death than was possible for them in life.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

EPISTLE DEDICATORY

John Dryden dedicates *All for Love* to an aristocratic patron: Thomas Osborne, Earl of Danby. Dryden claims that poets are less noble than politicians and public figures, since they can only *write about* "worthy actions," whereas others can actually do them. But he also argues that poets are important to a commonwealth because they chronicle the great deeds and history of their country. Kings and aristocrats should patronize poets, he suggests, because poets will preserve their reputation for future generations.

Here Dryden expresses conflicting views about the site of authority in 1600s England. On the one hand, he argues that politicians and aristocrats have the real power to perform "worthy actions." On the other hand, he suggests that it's poets who have the ultimate authority to preserve their deeds for future generations by writing about them.

Dryden praises Osborne—who served as Lord High Treasurer to King Charles II—for his good financial stewardship and leadership in the face of accusations of bribery. He points out that a king can often be judged by his choice of ministers, and he calls Osborne the perfect "copy" and "emanation" of King Charles's goodness.

Dryden praises Osborne for his constancy through the political upheavals of the period. Osborne headed off the political challenges of his enemies and remained loyal to King Charles II, even though the king had many enemies.

This praise of Osborne's virtues leads Dryden to a larger consideration of the merits of the English constitutional monarchy, which Dryden calls the best form of government in the world. He argues that the English have significant freedoms while still retaining the benefit of a monarchy—a monarchy that is "without tyranny." By contrast, Dryden calls a republic a "specious [i.e. false] name" that claims to offer liberty to its citizens but isn't actually free. He argues that a monarchy always has some checks on its power, while in a republic the elected representatives are free to oppress the very people they are supposed to be representing.

Dryden praises the English constitutional monarchy for what he sees as its perfect mix of authority and freedom. The English have a strong central government under a powerful monarch, but citizens also have liberty to make certain personal choices about, say, their religion. Dryden's problem with republics is that, according to him, they only claim *to be free—they actually are just as authoritative as monarchies, if not more so, but hypocritically claim to offer more liberty.*

Furthermore, Dryden argues that a constitutional monarchy is the ideal form of government for England, an island kingdom which he thinks is more fit for "commerce and defense" than invading and conquering other countries. It is difficult to gather taxes to support war overseas, so large overseas empires tend to require absolute government in order to force their citizens to pay taxes and press them into military service. But people are generally willing to pay taxes to support defense, so England's non-tyrannical form of monarchy is the best fit for its lack of imperial ambitions.

Here Dryden offers another series of justifications for England's mixture of authority and freedom. His reasons—which have to do with England's lack of interest in levying taxes to invade other countries—suggest that he does not see freedom as an absolute good. Rather, he thinks that the freedom afforded to English citizens is the right fit for the constitutional monarchy at this time. His reasons for supporting freedom are thus primarily pragmatic. Dryden's celebration of England's non-imperial ambitions is also ironic considering its later expansion into a global empire.

For all these benefits of England's current form of government, however, Dryden admits that there are some people who want a change. He thinks this is wrong, since English citizens are already as free as they can be—any additional freedom would just be "license," or a pushing of boundaries beyond what is acceptable. He also dismisses the argument that England needs more religious freedom, pointing out that no one in the country is actively persecuted for their beliefs. He thinks that *all* attempts at "reform" are dangerous, since any rebellion—even if it just claims to want to reform rather than take down the government—strikes at "the root of power, which is obedience."

Dryden's attitude toward reform reveals his fundamentally conservative political principles on the question of authority vs. freedom. He claims that English citizens have freedom, but seems hostile to the idea that they might try to change their government. This is because he had experienced the upheaval of civil war in his own lifetime, and so tends to see all rebellion as a form of "license." When people are given too much freedom, Dryden thinks, authority will crumble.

Dryden explains that he has addressed these thoughts on English politics to Osborne because the earl has a long history of loyalty to the English monarchy (Osborne's father fought for Charles II's father, Charles I, during the English Civil War). Dryden praises Osborne for sacrificing his private life and comfort in the name of public service. He apologizes for writing such a long dedication that doesn't even mention the poem he has written, but ends by admitting that he doesn't think Osborne will have the time to read it, given his busy schedule of public duties.

During times of political unrest, Dryden values continuity and loyalty. Osborne was rewarded for his family's constancy to Charles II after the Civil War. The fact that Dryden praises him for these virtues suggests that post-Civil War English elite society looked to the constants in life—like the loyalty of Osborne's family—in order to ensure against another disastrous change.

PREFACE

Dryden begins by acknowledging that many people before him—including William Shakespeare—have re-told the famous story of Antony and Cleopatra. He decided to write his own version, he explains, because he thinks the play offers an "excellent moral" in its depiction of the unfortunate consequences of "unlawful love." Antony and Cleopatra are the ideal tragic protagonists because they are neither pictures of "perfect virtue" nor "altogether wicked." This "middle course" in their characterization makes them sympathetic figures.

Dryden is not interested in villainizing Antony and Cleopatra, but nor is he interested in glossing over their flaws. Rather, he finds them compelling tragic protagonists because they have the capacity for virtue and for making rational decisions—they are not "altogether wicked." However, they allow their passion for each other to overrule their reason, with disastrous consequences.

Dryden has observed the "unities" of time and place—which is to say, the convention in classical drama that all the action of a play should take place in the same place and within twenty-four hours. As a result, he has used artistic license in making Octavia, Antony's Roman wife, come to Egypt and (unhistorically) meet Cleopatra. He defends himself for creating this fictional meeting on the grounds that it is dramatically necessary. He also argues that, although he has maintained the "modesty" of the women in their speech, he believes that Cleopatra and Octavia would have indeed exchanged harsh words with each other.

Dryden looks to the authority of the ancients and to the great writers who have come before him. This is why he feels the need to defend his choice to create a fictional meeting between Cleopatra and Octavia, although the two women never met in real life. He uses artistic license in writing in new scenes and characters that suit him, but he also feels the need to justify that creative freedom, suggesting his innate respect for authority.

Dryden then quotes the French essayist Michel de Montaigne on the need for people to make their own judgments about what is appropriate to be spoken. He complains of "dull" French playwrights who are too careful not to offend anyone. He is particularly critical of Jean Racine, a popular French playwright, and the character Hippolytus in Racine's *Phedre* (1677). In Dryden's view, Hippolytus is so concerned with good manners that he becomes a ridiculous and unbelievable character.

In the late 1600s, at the time Dryden was writing, people had a great deal of respect for French tragic playwrights like Jean Racine. French tragicomedy also had rigid rules of decorum that Dryden criticizes. By taking aim at Racine in his preface, Dryden shows an ability to change established literary forms and express disagreement with the critical authorities of his time.

After this critique of French poets and critics, Dryden states that he would rather be judged by the standards of his own country. He argues that poets are the best critics of their own work, since popular audiences have only a "gross instinct" for art. He also rails against the bad poetry and bad critiques of so-called "wits"—rich and powerful men who dabble in poetry and hope to increase their social prestige by proffering their opinions in public. Dryden gives the example of the ancient tyrant Nero, who longed to be a poet and made his subjects sit through his terrible plays. None of these people, however, will ever be "true" poets like Dryden.

Dryden draws a distinction between people who have real talent ("true poets") and people who use their wealth, political standing, and authority to make people think *they have talent. In this sense, despite his respect for political authority, Dryden doesn't seem to think that political authority and artistic authority—the ability to criticize a play—are the same thing. He argues for the right of artists to be judged by other poets, rather than by the authority of the powerful.*

Dryden reflects on the fate of great poets in antiquity. He notes that many of them had unfortunate fates: the poet Lucan was persecuted by Nero for his learning, for instance. Others, like Horace and Virgil, were persecuted in other ways, by bad imitators—he gives the example of Maecenas, a notoriously bad poet who followed Virgil and Horace's lead. Dryden critiques those modern "vile imitations" of good poetry by bad poets.

Dryden recognizes that the artistic authority of poets to speak their minds sometimes comes into conflict with political authority. Sometimes the needs of the state trump artistic freedom, as in the case of Lucan and Nero. Sometimes aristocrats also "persecute" poets by imitating their verse, even though they don't have the authority of true talent.

Dryden goes on the attack against one of his critics in particular—probably John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, although he doesn't mention him by name. He compares Rochester to the historical figure Crispinus, who foolishly challenged Horace to a writing competition, and to Demetrius, a satirical name for an ape who repeats the poetry of Catallus without knowing what it means. He complains that Rochester's satires reflect poorly on himself as well as his friends. Quoting Horace, Juvenal, and Lucretius, Dryden suggests that true friends wouldn't point out their faults in this way. He doesn't think that poets should actually lie, by, for instance, calling a "slow man hasty," but he thinks that poets can shield their friends' vices by calling it a "neighbor virtue" instead.

Although Dryden uses examples from antiquity in his mocking of bad poets, it seems clear that he's using this as a screen for commentary on his own political and cultural moment. In this way, he shows that there is continuity between, say, the historical figure Crispinus and the Earl of Rochester. But his statement about the duties of a poet to the truth also reveals his conflicting attitudes about continuity and change. Dryden doesn't think that poets should lie outright, but he thinks that cloaking vices in more charitable language is an acceptable change to make.

Throughout these arguments, Dryden has frequently cited classical writers like Horace and Virgil. He professes his belief that the ancients should always be the model of a modern poet. He also takes as his model "the divine Shakespeare," although his poetic practice is different in that he has forged his own way by, for example, abandoning rhyme. Dryden ends by noting that the scene between Antony and Ventidius is his favorite that he has written.

Dryden claims that he is a mere disciple of great poets like Horace, Virgil, and Shakespeare, and that he defers to their authority. However, this modest stance is belied by his claim that the scene between Antony and Ventidius is his favorite that he has ever written—since this scene is entirely Dryden's invention and doesn't exist in any other version of the play.

PROLOGUE

The prologue begins by observing that poets often have to fear the responses of critics, who wait like "vultures" for their prey. Dryden admits that he has come "unarmed" to the fight, since he has abandoned Shakespeare's rhyming scheme in his verse. He introduces the principal characters: Antony, a decent but "somewhat lewd" man, his wife Octavia, and his mistress Cleopatra.

Dryden describes himself as "unarmed" against his critics because he doesn't have the authority of tradition to shield him. For example, he has abandoned a rhyming scheme in favor of blank unrhymed verse. This decision to forge his own way is a declaration of creative freedom that also leaves him vulnerable.

Dryden wards off his critics by claiming that people who can only criticize art are low and simple minds. Anyone can observe errors on the surface; it takes greater depth to dive for the "pearls" below. However, he also modestly claims that his work is only a poor feast compared to the metaphorical rich meals of other poets. He calls *All for Love* the fruits of winter rather than the summer.

Dryden claims again that he is only a modest imitator of the great poets and has little authority or credibility on his own. However, this statement rings hollow when he describes his work as "pearls" beneath the surface, implying that only particularly intelligent and discerning people will appreciate this play.

ACT 1

Two priests of the Temple of Isis, Serapion and Myris, observe that there have been several frightening omens in Egypt recently. The **water** of the Nile overflowed and then suddenly retreated, leaving behind "monstrous" seals and sea-horses. When Serapion was walking in the temple of the Ptolemys, the dynasty that ruled Egypt for thousands of years, a great wind suddenly rushed in, broke open the tombs, and released the bodies of the old pharaohs. The last pharaoh, the "boy-king," cried out that "Egypt is no more!"

The play begins with omens that seem to presage a great change. Egypt was ruled by a powerful dynasty, the Ptolemys, for a thousand years. However, these omens suggest that their rule will soon come to an end. The rising waters of the Nile, for instance, symbolize the tide of fate, while the Ptolemy ancestors who rise from their graves foresee that their supremacy in Egypt will soon cease.

Suddenly Alexas, Queen Cleopatra's eunuch, appears and accuses Serapion of making up stories and drinking too much at the feasts. He says that Egypt can't bear for these stories to be true, given the current desperate state of affairs: Antony and Cleopatra have lost the Battle of Actium, and the palace is surrounded by a Roman army led by Octavius. Myris asks why Antony doesn't take action, and Alexas explains that Antony thinks all is lost. However, he also points out that neither side has been doing anything, although Antony's wife, Octavia, has come to take her revenge.

Alexas explains that Antony and Cleopatra are in dire straits. They've lost a decisive sea battle against Octavius, meaning that their only option now is to make peace with him. However, the fact that both Antony and Cleopatra have failed to take any action suggests that they are still allowing their passion for each other to rule them, rather than their reason. Making peace with Octavius requires giving each other up, and they don't seem ready to do that yet.

Meanwhile, Antony has locked himself in the temple and refuses to see Cleopatra, hoping to cure himself of his love for her. Serapion and Myris fear for Egypt's future as a Roman province if they are defeated and hope that Cleopatra might betray Antony to Octavius and thus save her country. However, they all know that Cleopatra still loves him.

Serapion and Myris know that Cleopatra faces a choice: she can betray Antony to Octavius and save her country, or she can remain loyal to Antony. Her impossible choice between her lover and her royal duty introduces the conflict between love and honor that will be central to the play.

Just then, Alexas, Serapion, and Myris witness the approach of Ventidius, one of Antony's top lieutenants. Alexas assures them that Ventidius is an impeccably honorable man, although he has been an enemy of Egypt's in the past. Ventidius demands that Antony's gentleman (i.e. servant) let him in to see Antony, claiming that he has news that will raise his spirits. The gentleman protests that Antony is in a bad state and won't see anyone. He swings wildly between cursing Octavius and seeming to contemplate suicide. Ventidius assures him that this is just Antony's nature, which tends to move between extremes.

Antony's extreme temperament provides another example of his lapse from reason into passion. Ventidius represents the rationality and discipline expected of a military commander, and he tries to see Antony in order to persuade him to take up arms as a soldier once again and fight for his honor. Antony, however, is emotionally extreme, swerving between depression and excessive passion for Cleopatra.

Alexas proclaims a birthday celebration for Antony, and the servants begin to prepare a feast. Ventidius protests at the Egyptians taking a holiday at this dire moment. Alexas protests that Cleopatra loves Antony and that Antony loves her in return. Ventidius agrees but compares Cleopatra to Antony's executioner who has led him into his death with "golden bonds," making his captivity seem pleasurable. He laments that Antony, a great general, has left his military post and become a "woman's toy." Ventidius thinks that Antony is now unrecognizable to his fellow Romans.

Ventidius has known Antony in his role as a military leader and commander of men. Thus, the version of Antony that he meets at Cleopatra's court is unrecognizable to him. He blames Cleopatra for this disastrous change in Antony, implying that she has turned him into a "woman's toy." By this Ventidius means that Antony now cares only for "feminine" pursuits and has neglected his military and political duties.


Antony comes out of his room and demands that everyone leave him alone. Ventidius hides in a corner to listen to his master speak. Pacing with a "disturbed motion," Antony speaks in despair about the decline of his fortunes since he came to Egypt, where he has become only "the shadow of an emperor." He predicts a future in which he will be soon be dead and comforts himself wishing that he could live as a simple countryman in the forest. He imagines himself leaning against a tree while the **water** of a "murmuring" brook runs at his feet, leading a peaceful and uncomplicated life. At this, Ventidius appears from his hiding place and demands "art thou Antony?" Antony tells him to leave, but Ventidius weeps and says that he wishes to stay, as his friend.

Antony seems to share Ventidius's fears about his transformation, remarking that he is now only a "shadow" of the emperor he once was and is unrecognizable even to himself. But whereas Ventidius plots to restore Antony to the emperor he was before, Antony begins imagining a different kind of metamorphosis. Having given up the role of emperor and commander, he imagines himself in another kind of life entirely: as a simple shepherd with no concerns except his flock. The softly murmuring waters in Antony's dream suggest his desire for the peace that such a transformation would ideally bring.

Moved by Ventidius's tears, Antony begins to share his grief at his loss at the Battle of Actium. Ventidius points out that Julius Caesar also lost battles, but Antony confesses that he is ashamed that he fled like a "coward" from the battlefield. Antony begins reproaching himself for losing his good name as a soldier and conqueror by spending his time instead in "inglorious ease." Ventidius refuses to join in, saying that Antony has already punished himself enough.

Antony's despair at the loss of a single battle suggests that honor is extremely important to his sense of self and his confidence in his place in the world. For Antony, a single action—retreat from the Battle of Actium—marks him as a "coward," associating military defeat with the loss of his good name as an upright person.


Ventidius tries to rouse Antony's spirits by telling him that there is still hope that they can win against Octavius, since Ventidius has an army in Lower Syria that is loyal to Antony's cause. However, the army will only fight for Antony if he comes to them. They do not want to fight for Cleopatra in Egypt, since they think that Antony is her "slave." Ventidius criticizes Antony for throwing away his kingdom on a "light, worthless woman."

Antony's army in Lower Syria presents a stark conflict between love and honor. If Antony goes to lead them, he has a chance to defeat Octavius and regain his honor on the battlefield. However, he would regain that honor at the cost of love, since the army won't follow Cleopatra—in order to command the army, he has to leave her.

Antony angrily calls Ventidius a traitor and threatens to kill him, but quickly apologizes. Ventidius says he would not be bold with any other ruler, but that Antony is virtuous enough to be able to hear these hard truths. Ventidius repeats that Antony must leave Cleopatra, and Antony agrees—although he says he loves her above all else, "all but honour." Although greatly pained at having to leave her, he agrees to leave with Ventidius to lead the army.

At this point in the play, although Antony professes his great love for Cleopatra, he claims that he still values his honor as a soldier and a leader above her. His seemingly counterintuitive statement that he would die for Cleopatra but would not dishonor himself for her suggests the high premium placed on honor in Roman culture, which Antony claims should outweigh even love.

ACT 2

Cleopatra is in despair at the news that Antony is leaving her. Alexas counsels her to calm down, but Cleopatra says that only low-born people have "moderate sadness." Cleopatra's maid Iras tells her to stop loving Antony, but Cleopatra says she can never forget him. Cleopatra's other maid, Charmion, comes in and reports her encounter with Antony. He had tears in his eyes when she said Cleopatra begged to see him one last time, but refused to see her, on the grounds that he can refuse her nothing and thus wouldn't be able to leave. However, he says that he "respects" her—a word which Cleopatra despises and calls "cold," fit for a wife. Alexas encourages Cleopatra to go to Antony one more time, in order to prevent him from leaving. He says that he will talk to Antony first, in order to make it easier for her to bend his will.

Antony doesn't want to see Cleopatra because he knows that he will be unable to make the "rational" choice—leaving her to lead his army—if he is in her physical presence. This suggests that both passion and reason are warring in Antony, pulling him in different directions. At this point, Antony is trying to let his reason prevail. Cleopatra, however, takes a different approach. She boasts to her servants that she is so passionate because she is noble, and that only low-born, vulgar people have moderate emotions. In this way, she suggests that her passionate nature is a merit in her personality, not a fault.

Antony enters with Ventidius. He reports that he challenged Octavius to hand-to-hand contact, but Octavius refused. Antony complains that Octavius is a coward who betrayed him after all his help and mentorship. Alexas arrives and delivers a message (supposedly) from Cleopatra to Antony: she loves him and commends him to the care of his soldiers. She sends jewels to the commanders, including Ventidius, but Ventidius scoffs and says he will not take bribes and values his honor more than "diamonds from the East."

Octavius's refusal of the invitation to hand-to-hand combat with Antony suggests that the two men have very different notions of honor. Antony thinks of honor as a personal quality that can be proved by, say, defeating someone in battle. Octavius, by contrast, has a more pragmatic view: he knows not to risk his life by fighting Antony face to face when he has a superior military force.

Cleopatra also sends Antony a **bracelet made of rubies** in the shape of bleeding hearts. Ventidius warns him not to take it, but Antony says that he doesn't think it can do him any harm. Alexas petitions Antony to go see Cleopatra one last time, so that she can fasten the bracelet on his wrist. Ventidius warns him that if he sees her all will be lost, but Antony protests that he is a "Roman, bred to the rules of soft humanity," and that it would be rude for a Roman guest to leave without thanking the host.

Cleopatra's parting gift to Antony is highly symbolic. The bleeding hearts symbolize her love for Antony, but her desire to fasten the bracelet on his wrist also conveys a less obvious message: it is a tie that binds him to her. Ventidius sees this tie as a form of bondage that imprisons Antony, making him a slave to his passion for Cleopatra.

Cleopatra enters with her maids. Antony tells her that they have "loved each other / Into our mutual ruin." Antony blames her for his decline in fortunes and asks her to be silent while he tells his side of the story. He recounts how he loved from when he first saw her (although she was the lover of Julius Caesar first), how he pardoned her rebellion against Rome, and how he left his first wife, Fulvia, to be with her in Egypt. After Fulvia's death, he married Octavius's sister Octavia and left her as well for Cleopatra. As a result, Octavius raised an army and defeated him in the disastrous Battle of Actium, where Antony fled the scene to follow Cleopatra's retreat.

The story of Antony and Cleopatra's love before the events of the play is characterized by the continual choice of love over honor. For instance, Antony pardoned Cleopatra's rebellion against Rome, thus choosing his feelings for her above his country. He also abandoned his first wife, Fulvia, just as he later abandons Octavia. Thus, Antony's statement that his love for Cleopatra has "ruined" him is well-founded in their shared history.

Cleopatra acknowledges that he is right to reproach her, but sorrowfully says that Antony must no longer love her, if he would say these things. She admits that she was Caesar's lover first, but claims that she always loved Antony. She also protests that she did not force Antony to leave Fulvia or Octavia, and that she fled from the battle out of fear, not because she was trying to betray him. Ventidius warns Antony not to believe her words. Cleopatra then shows them a piece of paper—an offer from Octavius to restore her kingdom, if only she will betray Antony. She says that she refused and desires only to die with Antony.

Cleopatra admits that her relationship with Antony has been detrimental to his honor, but she points out that she, too, has been loyal to him from the beginning. She has also consistently chosen love over honor—as she proves most recently by telling him that she has turned down a peace treaty with Octavius because she would never betray Antony. She therefore offers an emotional, passionate rebuttal to Antony's accusations.

Cleopatra swoons and protests pathetically that she only wants to die. At this, Antony embraces her, although Ventidius warns him not to weight this "toy" against his "honour, fortune, and fame." He asks once again whether Antony will go to lead his army. Antony refuses, saying that in fact honor forbids him from leaving the woman who loves him. He exclaims that he doesn't care whether Octavius conquers them in battle, since he prefers the pleasure of life with Cleopatra to anything else.

Ventidius views Cleopatra as a distracting "toy" who has dishonored Antony. Antony, on the other hand, voices a new and different assessment of honor. He points out that it would be dishonorable for him to abandon the woman who loves him. In Antony's framing, love and honor aren't necessarily opposed, and choosing love can in fact be the honorable thing to do.

ACT 3

Cleopatra's court performs an elaborate dance. Cleopatra crowns Antony and Antony reaffirms his love for her, saying that he doesn't care if the gods see them and envy their happiness. Ventidius stands aside, watching, and Antony admits that his presence makes him feel ashamed. Antony boasts to Ventidius that he has won a military victory against Octavius. Ventidius suggests that Antony try to make peace with Octavius, but Antony refuses, saying that Octavius hates him and that in any case he would prefer to defeat Octavius on the battlefield.

It is a testament to Antony and Cleopatra's extraordinary confidence in their love that they hold feasts and dances at this dire moment for Egypt, with a foreign army on their doorstep. Their triumphant rhetoric—suggesting that the gods envy their happiness— seems out of place, but it also indicates that they think their passion transcends earthly, rational considerations like war and politics.

Ventidius asks whether Antony has a friend on Octavius's side who might be able to advocate for him. Antony admits that he *used* to have a friend: Dollabella, a loyal soldier who was also in love with Cleopatra. Antony sent him away as a result, and now Dollabella fights for Octavius. Ventidius encourages Antony to speak to his friend, since it just so happens that Dollabella has come to the Egyptian court at this very moment.

Antony's sadness at remembering the friend that he lost suggests that his love for Cleopatra has often been isolating to him. He lost an old friend, Dollabella, because Dollabella also loved Cleopatra. This is one of the ways that Antony's relationship with Cleopatra has changed him and perhaps made him lose touch with the person he used to be.

Dollabella and Antony have an emotional reunion. Antony laments him that he is now "other than I am," having lost all his fortunes since Dollabella last saw him. Dollabella indignantly asks him what he has done to himself. Antony bristles at this, but Dollabella says that it is the duty of a friend to speak the truth. Antony retaliates by telling some truths of his own. He asks Dollabella to recall the first time he saw Cleopatra, sailing on an elaborately-decorated barge down the river. Although Cleopatra had collaborated in the murder of Dollabella's brother, Dollabella was so taken by her beauty that he instantly forgave her. Dollabella defends himself by saying that his fault for falling in love with Cleopatra was merely a "private" one, whereas Antony has lost the "world." Nevertheless, he tells them that he has negotiated talks with Octavius on Antony's behalf.

Because Dollabella is an old friend of Antony's, he provides an indicator of just how changed Antony is from the man he used to be. Dollabella blames this change in Antony on Cleopatra's influence. However, Antony points out his hypocrisy given that Dollabella, too, was in love with Cleopatra—but Dollabella defends himself on the grounds that he has not dishonored himself as Antony has. Dollabella argues that because he is not a commander or leader of Rome, his loss of honor was "private" rather than a matter of public interest. This suggests that Antony's notion of honor is different from others, given his class position.

Octavia, Antony's abandoned wife and Octavius's sister, enters with Antony's two small daughters. (Ventidius has smuggled them in past the Egyptian guards.) With a dignified air, she tells Antony that she is still loyal to him as a wife despite his abandonment of her. Ventidius praises her moderation and temperance. Antony accuses Octavia of having "begged" his case with Octavius, but Octavia denies that, saying that she would never demean his and her own honor in that way.

Octavia's loyalty to Antony seems hard to understand, since he abandoned her and their two young daughters. However, her willingness to take him back illustrates one of the fundamental traits of Octavia's character: her subordination of her personal passions to her dignity and reputation. This is in marked contrast to Antony and Cleopatra, who almost always let their passions rule them.

Octavia tells Antony to take Octavius's terms and drop her off in Athens. He is moved by her sacrifice but refuses, saying that he can never love her but also doesn't want to treat her dishonorably. Ventidius and Dollabella urge Antony to abandon Cleopatra and take back Octavia, pointing out that "you have ruined [her], / And yet she would preserve you." Octavia tells her daughters Aggripina and Antonia to go to their father. At their embrace, Antony is so moved that he tells Octavia he will leave Cleopatra and follow her back to Octavius's camp.

Octavia appeals to Antony's sense of honor by bringing his two daughters, with whom he has a moving reunion. This suggests that Antony is torn not only between different loves (for Cleopatra and for his children) but also between different notions of honor. It is dishonorable to leave the woman he loves, but he recognizes that it is also dishonorable to abandon his wife and children.

Seeing this, Alexas laments the fate of his mistress and his own castration—which has barred him from ever experiencing the joys of love and sex himself. Cleopatra enters and weeps at the news that Octavia has stolen Antony back. Alexas assures her that she is more beautiful than Octavia. She gives him a ring, although she accuses him of just flattering her.

Alexas's desire for a love affair of his own suggests the powerful appeal of Antony and Cleopatra's passion. Their relationship is politically disastrous but inspires admiration—at least in romantic, sentimental characters.

Octavia enters and meets with Cleopatra. Octavia brings up Cleopatra's sexual past with Caesar in order to insult her, and haughtily tells her that she has taken Antony back and restored him to his true nature as a Roman. Cleopatra retorts that Antony is hers by "love" rather than by "law." Octavia comes closer, saying that she wants to view the face that has stolen Antony from her. Cleopatra says that Octavia doesn't have half her charms, and Octavia agrees, saying that a "modest" Roman woman would be ashamed to act like a seductress.

The conversation between Octavia and Cleopatra represents the conflict between authority and freedom in the play. Octavia has the legal "right" to Antony as his wife, but Cleopatra argues that her claim on him is stronger because it is based on love rather than law. In this sense, she values a freely-chosen commitment more than the legal, official sanctions of marriage.

The two women begin competing to see who has suffered the most in their relationships with Antony. Octavia accuses Cleopatra of stealing Antony's wife, children, reputation, power, and political standing. Cleopatra says that she has suffered more because Octavia has the name of wife to protect her, whereas Cleopatra has lost her crown and reputation for Antony. She says that now all she wants to do is die. As a parting shot, Octavia sweeps off and tells her "be it so then." After Octavia leaves, Cleopatra collapses from the strain and is led away by Iras and Charmion.

Cleopatra and Octavia have both suffered a loss of honor as a result of their relationships with Antony. However, while Octavia has been dishonored by Antony's abandonment, Cleopatra points out that she has lost not only the legal protection of marriage but also her crown and political power. Unlike Octavia, Cleopatra's loss of honor is a result of a free choice: the decision to live with Antony outside of marriage, thus choosing love over honor.

ACT 4

Antony orders Dollabella to inform Cleopatra of his departure, since Ventidius would be too harsh with her. Dollabella begs Antony not to make him do this, protesting that he is too tender-hearted and won't be able to bear it. Antony is clearly conflicted too, because every time Dollabella tries to leave, he calls him back. First, he says that he will negotiate a peace with Rome for Egypt to keep Cleopatra on her throne. Second, he asks Dollabella to tell Cleopatra that he still loves her. Third and finally, he asks Dollabella to tell her that it would break his heart if she ever took another lover.

Antony's mixed messages to Cleopatra suggest that he is still deeply affected by his passion for her, even as he purports to leave her for the good of his reputation and country. But even though he *is the one choosing to leave her, he is clearly very distressed by the idea of a change in Cleopatra's affections. His statement that it would break his heart if she took another lover suggests that he expects Cleopatra to remain the same, even as he returns to his wife.*

After Antony leaves, Dollabella observes that men like Antony have appetites that are as changeable as that of children. Worse, their private desires and failings are always made open to "the world's open view." Dollabella begins to contemplate trying to win Cleopatra from Antony, since he is still in love with her. Overhearing this, Ventidius gleefully hopes this will lead to her ruin, since he hates Cleopatra.

Dollabella explains that Antony's choice of love over honor is particularly disastrous in his case because his private emotions have political consequences. Indeed, great rulers like Antony cannot afford to have a private life at all, since everything they do has public repercussions.

Meanwhile, Alexas urges Cleopatra to use Dollabella's feelings for her to make Antony jealous. Cleopatra protests at the idea of this disloyalty. She laments that her natural inclination is to be a "wife, a silly, harmless, household dove," but that instead she is forced to act the public and dishonorable role of the mistress. She reluctantly decides to try to make Antony love her again by flirting with Dollabella, who is talking to Iras and Charmion.

Although Cleopatra is depicted as a seductress and prostitute by her critics (most notably Octavia and Ventidius), she in fact seems to long for the social and legal protections of marriage. She laments that her love for Antony has caused her to "dishonor" herself by becoming the mistress of a married man, when she would prefer to be a wife.

Cleopatra asks Dollabella, Iras, and Charmion what they have been talking about. Dollabella claims that they have been discussing her beauty, assuring her that she is more beautiful than all the women in Rome. Cleopatra calls him a flatterer, like his master Antony. Dollabella delivers the heavy news: Antony is leaving, and she will soon lose her kingdom. Attempting to flirt with him, Cleopatra coyly tells him that "love may be expelled by other love." Dollabella assures her that "some men are constant," unlike Antony.

Although Cleopatra deeply loves Antony, she clearly has the capacity for more calculated behavior and less emotional, passionate motives. Her decision to flirt with Dollabella, for instance, is a ploy to try to recapture Antony's affections. For his part, Dollabella portrays himself as more constant than Antony—paradoxically, since he is trying to persuade Cleopatra to be inconstant.

Cleopatra asks whether Antony sent this news regretfully. Dollabella lies and says that Antony spoke harshly of her, calling her the "blot of my renown" [i.e. reputation] and the "poison" of his fortune. At this, Cleopatra swoons. Horrified, Dollabella reveals that what he spoke was false and that in fact Antony sent her words of love. He explains that he lied because he hoped that Cleopatra would fall in love with him instead. Cleopatra admits that her flirtations were false and only intended to regain Antony's love. Defeated, Dollabella admires Cleopatra's constancy, which has made her heart inaccessible to any others. Cleopatra begs him to let her see Antony one last time.

Cleopatra begins her flirtation with Dollabella as a sort of game, exchanging compliments and witty remarks. However, her genuine horror at the idea that Antony no longer loves her suggests the truth: she still loves Antony. Indeed, her passion is so unshakeable that even Dollabella sees that Cleopatra is inaccessible to him or to any others. Cleopatra's inability to keep up the deception suggests that she is a faultlessly (perhaps even fatefully) constant lover to Antony.

Ventidius and Octavia spy on Dollabella and Cleopatra. They misinterpret the gesture of Dollabella taking Cleopatra's hand, assuming that Cleopatra has abandoned Antony. Dollabella and Cleopatra leave. When Antony enters, he asks how Cleopatra took the news of his departure. Ventidius tells him that Cleopatra took it well—as well, in fact, as she took Caesar's departure, as if she were preparing to take another lover. Ventidius recounts how Dollabella kissed her hand, and how Cleopatra blushed and smiled on him. Octavia confirms the truth of everything Ventidius says. Antony defends Cleopatra's honor and calls them both liars, saying that he sees through the plot between them. Ventidius swears that Cleopatra is false.

Ventidius and Octavia try to turn Antony against Cleopatra by bringing up an old insecurity: the fact that Cleopatra was the lover of Julius Caesar before Antony. They hope Antony will take this as an indication of her inconstancy and promiscuity and proof that she has abandoned him for Dollabella. However, the fact that Antony at first refuses to believe them suggests his trust in Cleopatra and faith in her constancy, even when the world condemns her as flighty and untrustworthy.

Ventidius asks Alexas to confirm the report of Cleopatra's unchastity, calling him a pimp and accusing him of enabling the "nightly change" to a different lover in her bed. Alexas vigorously defends his queen, pointing out that she loves only Antony—and that she turned down the offers of "lawful love" [i.e. marriage] from many kings, just to be Antony's mistress. However, he argues that Cleopatra ought to go with Dollabella, since Antony has rejected her. At this, Antony is enraged and orders him from his sight.

Alexas admires Cleopatra's constancy in choosing love outside of marriage rather than marrying a man she doesn't love. In this sense, Cleopatra has sacrificed her honor for love. But Alexas also takes a more pragmatic, less passionate view than Cleopatra, arguing that she has the right to take up with Dollabella now that Antony has abandoned her.

Octavia complains that Antony should show so much distress at the loss of an "abandoned, faithless prostitute," suggesting that he still loves Cleopatra more. Ventidius begs her to retire, but the enraged Octavia tells Antony that she will leave him now and go back to Octavius's camp, since her honor cannot bear to have only "half" of Antony.

Octavia's statement that Antony has dishonored her by giving her only "half" of himself suggests that she is primarily motivated by the desire to preserve her good reputation. She leaves Antony not because she doesn't love him, but because she values her honor more.

Antony laments aloud that his "plain, honest heart" forces him to share his feelings openly to the world rather than concealing them. He calls Dollabella to him and asks how Cleopatra took the news of his departure. Dollabella says that Cleopatra still loves Antony, even to "madness." Antony wonders aloud how he could ever forsake such a woman, and Dollabella agrees that he could not, if she were his. He tells Antony that Cleopatra has come to claim one last word with him.

Throughout the play, Antony has been unable to conceal or suppress his passionate feelings. Despite the rational arguments for leaving Cleopatra, he still seems to find it an impossible task. He finds an unexpected ally in Dollabella, who concurs with his romantic sentiments. Whatever the cost, Dollabella agrees that he would not leave Cleopatra if she loved him.

When Cleopatra enters, Antony shouts at her and Dollabella, accusing them of betraying him. He demands that Dollabella tell him whether he loves Cleopatra, but Dollabella claims that he loves her "no more than friendship will allow." Antony counters that Octavia, Alexas, and Ventidius all saw them together and have confirmed that they were flirting. Cleopatra admits that she attempted to entice Dollabella, but only to try to make Antony jealous—and that she was unable to go through with it, since she loves Antony too much. For his part, Dollabella admits that he loves Cleopatra but that he "repents" of that love, asking Antony to forgive him.

Cleopatra admits to Antony that her deception failed because of her continuing passion for him. When presented with another option, Dollabella, she was still unable to leave Antony, thus choosing passion over reason. Dollabella, on the other hand, puts aside his romantic feelings for Cleopatra for the sake of his friendship with Antony. He thus shows the ability to control his passions—perhaps as Antony and Cleopatra cannot.

Antony points out that Cleopatra and Dollabella's only witnesses to prove that they're telling the truth are each other—and the guilty can't disprove guilt. He banishes both of them from his sight, saying that he can't bear to hurt them but can't bear to see them either. Cleopatra begs him not to send her away, since she has nowhere to go: she has lost her kingdom for him, and the Romans hate her. She protests that Alexas was lying and only hoped to help her regain Antony's love by making him jealous.

Cleopatra's desperate plea to Antony reveals the full extent of the cost of their love. She has sacrificed so much for Antony that she can now no longer govern effectively or live without him, since she has given up her kingdom for him. In this way, the choice of love over honor is a particularly isolating one, since it leaves Antony and Cleopatra dependent on each other.

Antony refuses to believe it. Cleopatra begs for one more look from him, protesting that he wouldn't even send away a slave without one drop of pity. As she goes, Cleopatra professes that she will love Antony forever and loves him more now, even though he is cruel to her. Antony weeps as they part but orders that they should never meet each other again.

Antony and Cleopatra still both seem unable to repress their passions. Cleopatra protests that she will love Antony forever, and Antony weeps even as he professes that he doesn't want to see her again. Clearly, then, their love persists despite the circumstances.

ACT 5

Cleopatra is in despair at Antony's abandonment. She tries to kill herself with a dagger, but Iras and Charmion prevent her. They call out against heaven for punishing such a virtuous woman, suggesting that her suffering shows that only "chance" rules above. Alexas enters and Cleopatra rails against him for persuading her to take the path of trying to make Antony jealous, forcing her "plain, direct, and open love" into the "crooked paths of jealousy." Alexas counters that ordinary subjects cannot be responsible for the flaws of monarchs.

Cleopatra blames Alexas for the failure of her strategy to recapture Antony's love. However, Alexas responds with a clever gambit: he claims that he doesn't have the authority to be blamed for anything, since he is only a slave and Cleopatra is a queen. One of the costs of absolute power is absolute responsibility, since Cleopatra is (in theory) accountable to no one else for her actions.

Alexas argues that there is still hope: Octavia is gone, Dollabella is banished, and thus the way is open for Cleopatra to make her way back into Antony's heart. Meanwhile, the Egyptian ships are in the middle of a battle against Octavius's fleet, which Antony is watching from the top of the Pharos. They hear a cry, and Serapion bursts in, shouting that everything is lost and Egypt is vanquished. Cleopatra assumes they have been defeated in battle, but Serapion explains that it's even worse. The Egyptian fleet surrendered without a fight, joined the Roman forces, and were "received like friends."

Even now, with Octavius's army attacking, Cleopatra seems more concerned about recapturing Antony's love than the fate of her kingdom. The point is proven further by the abandonment of the Egyptian fleet, which seems to no longer feel any personal loyalty to Antony and Cleopatra. Their absorption in their private romantic life seems to have made them less than effective at leading a force against Octavius.

Antony is in a rage at the Egyptian fleet's betrayal and is apparently raving at Cleopatra. Alexas advises Cleopatra to go hide in her monument for the time being, since Antony will suspect that she betrayed him to the Romans. In the meantime, he promises to go plead her case with Octavius. Now justifiably suspicious of his advice, Cleopatra refuses and asks Serapion for help. Serapion also advises that she hide in the monument but suggests that they send Alexas to speak to Antony on her behalf. Alexas is afraid of Antony and begs them not to send him, but Cleopatra threatens him with death if he disobeys. She declares that she is not afraid to die, and in fact would be honored to die with Antony.

Alexas continues to try to strategize and help Cleopatra find some way of salvaging her life and freedom. By suing for peace with Octavius, Cleopatra might be able to save her own life. Cleopatra, on the other hand, professes that she only wants to die with Antony. Her life in the world seems increasingly of less meaning and importance to her. In fact, she seems to welcome death because it offers one more chance to prove her loyalty and demonstrate her passion for Antony by dying by his side.

Left on his own, Alexas plots to find some way to save his life. Meanwhile, Antony enters with Ventidius. They rant against Cleopatra and the Egyptians who betrayed them, and Antony asks if there is any way to make a final stand against Octavius. Ventidius tells him that there are three legions left to fight for him. Antony professes the intention of taking these last few men to war against Octavius, taking as many Romans down with him as possible. Ventidius pledges to die with him.

After the betrayal of the Egyptian fleet, Antony plans a suicide mission with his remaining soldiers, preferring to die in battle rather than be captured. This suggests his inability to tolerate change from the ruler he once was. He would rather die than live as Octavius's captive because his notions of honor would make that life seem unbearable.

Alexas enters, and Ventidius draws his sword and threatens to kill him. Antony once again accuses Cleopatra of betraying him to Octavius. Alexas tells him that Cleopatra is gone, and Antony at first is enraged, thinking she has escaped with Dollabella. Alexas protests her innocence. Antony asks why Cleopatra has not come to defend herself, if she is indeed innocent, but Alexas says that Cleopatra "could not bear to be accused by you." Instead, he tells Antony that she locked herself in her monument, where she stabbed herself with a knife and cried out "Antony" with her last breath.

Alexas is lying about Cleopatra's fate—she is in fact alive in her monument—but his story is plausible given Cleopatra's tempestuous and passionate nature. It is calculated to please Antony, who will be gratified that Cleopatra died still loyal to him, choosing love over her honor, freedom, and life. Alexas, on the other hand, is making a very different choice, since he is lying in an attempt to protect his own life from Antony's rage.

Ventidius rejoices at Cleopatra's death, only expressing regret that she hadn't died earlier (since then Antony might have been able to make peace with Octavius.) Antony, by contrast, is devastated at the revelation that Cleopatra is dead and is now convinced that she is innocent. Seeing this, Alexas is pleased, since he plans that Antony will reconcile with Cleopatra when he finds that she is still alive. Antony orders Alexas away.

Ventidius is pleased at the news of Cleopatra's "death" because he is convinced that she is the cause of the decline of Antony's fortunes. He seems to think that, with Cleopatra gone, Antony will reverse the changes he has undergone and become his old self again. However, this shows how little Ventidius understands the love Antony has for Cleopatra.

Ventidius tries to raise Antony's spirits, reminding him that they had promised to die in battle together. However, Antony says that he has no more spirit to fight anymore. Ventidius asks how he can say this when Octavius is at the gates of the palace, but Antony says "he's welcome now." He explains that all he wants now is to die, since Cleopatra was the "jewel" that made his life worth living. All his conquests, glory, and honors were merely the ransom he used to buy her love.

Antony's desire to die rather than make a heroic final stand suggests that Ventidius was wrong about Cleopatra changing Antony. Cleopatra wasn't the disastrous change in Antony's life. Rather, she was the continuity, the constant source of love and inspiration that provided the impetus for all his conquests and glory. Without her, Antony has no more desire to live.

Now, Antony says, is the time to give up his power struggle with Octavius and let the world "know whom to obey." Ventidius accepts Antony's desire to die and expresses his wish to go with him, since his own life is not worth living without Antony. However, Antony begs Ventidius to stay alive in order to defend his legacy against those who will slander his reputation.

Antony gives up the fight against Octavius not only because of his grief at Cleopatra's death, but because he knows that his conflict with Octavius has caused civil war and suffering on both sides. With Octavius in charge, authority and order will be restored under a single leader.

Ventidius refuses again to outlive Antony. As a final request, Antony then asks that Ventidius at least kill him first, since he would rather die by the hands of his friend. Ventidius agrees but asks Antony to turn away his face. When Antony looks away, Ventidius stabs himself instead. He asks the gods to forgive him, since he'd rather die a liar than murder his friend. Antony observes how easily Ventidius died, as if death was an old friend who welcomed him anytime.

Ventidius prefers to commit suicide rather than murder his friend because to kill Antony is too painful. Arguably, the "honorable" thing to do would be to obey his master's orders. The fact that he doesn't—choosing, in a sense, love over honor—is an unexpected reversal for a character who has consistently preached the virtues of honor over love.

Antony then falls on his sword, hoping to join Ventidius and Cleopatra. However, he misses his heart and begins bleeding out on the floor. He hears the sound of someone entering and tries to kill himself again—but it is Cleopatra, Iras, and Charmion. He asks Cleopatra if she is real or is the first ghost to meet him in the afterlife. Cleopatra asks him tenderly how he is, and Antony compares himself to a traveler who realizes he has left a precious jewel behind and comes back for it.

Although Antony is leaving everything else behind by committing suicide—his power, wealth, and armies—he calls Cleopatra the precious jewel that he cannot bear to leave behind. In this sense, Cleopatra is the only constant that Antony will take with him to the afterlife when he has otherwise been transformed from the person he used to be.

Cleopatra begs the gods to keep Antony alive, but he tells her gently that this cannot be. Instead, he asks her one last time to pledge her innocence. Cleopatra swears that she had no knowledge of Alexas's plot to fake her death, that she never betrayed him to Octavius, and that she never cared for Dollabella. As he dies, Antony makes her promise to come soon after him, promising that they will have troops of the ghosts of lovers to wait on them in heaven. He gives her one last kiss and dies.

As he dies, Antony imagines that he and Cleopatra will have troops of the ghosts of lovers to wait on them in heaven. This suggests that although they may have failed as rulers and politicians, their love will be legendary and their passion for each other will provide a model and example for lovers for many years to come.

Cleopatra proclaims that she will die with Antony as his wife, in a bond that no "Roman laws" will be able to break. Iras and Charmion remind her that Octavius is merciful and may spare her life, but Cleopatra balks at the idea that Octavius would keep her alive as his captive, to parade through the streets of Rome. Charmion and Iras pledge to follow her wherever she goes, even to death. Cleopatra bids them to quickly bring her royal robes and something called "the cure of all ills."

Throughout the play, Cleopatra has frequently expressed the wish that she could be Antony's legal wife rather than occupying the socially degrading status of mistress. Now, however, in their death, she claims that their joint suicide is a form of marriage—a marriage that transcends the authority of Roman laws.

Alone with Antony's corpse, Cleopatra kisses his lips, observing that they are now alone again, like lovers. Iras and Charmion reenter, and Cleopatra dresses herself in her finest clothes. She places a laurel on Antony's head, reminding her maids that Antony died honorably, fighting for his life. She then seats herself beside Antony on the throne of Egypt, in remembrance of their former greatness.

Although Antony and Cleopatra have lost everything, their death has a sense of continuity with their previous lives. They sit on their thrones again as rulers of Rome and Egypt, and they are alone together as they were when they first fell in love—reminding themselves of the past just when everything around them is crumbling.

"The cure of all ills" turns out to be a snake that carries venomous poison, carried in a basket brought in by Iras and Charmion. However, when the snake bites, it brings no pain and makes the victim seem to fall gently into sleep. Serapion shouts from outside that Octavius is at the palace gates. Cleopatra quickly bares her arm and lets the snake bite her. As the guards begin to break down the doors, Iras and Charmion do the same. As she dies, Cleopatra professes her desire to meet Antony again, daring Octavius: "Now part us if thou canst."

Cleopatra plays a final trump card against Octavius by killing herself. In part, she does this because she is too proud and passionate to be paraded through the streets as his captive. But she also commits suicide in a final act of defiance against the authority of Rome, taunting Octavius that he has no power now to separate her and Antony in death.

Serapion, two priests, and Alexas (who is in chains) enter the room. Horrified by the spectacle of Cleopatra and Iras's bodies (as Iras has also killed herself with Cleopatra), Serapion asks Charmion "is this well done?" Charmion proclaims proudly that Cleopatra died honorably, as the last of a great line of monarchs, before sinking down and dying herself. Alexas admits that it is better to die in Egypt than holiday in Rome. Serapion tells the priests to use "this villain" (Alexas) as their security to buy their freedom from Octavius.

Many characters in the play proclaim that Cleopatra's love for Antony (and vice versa) has cost her the honor of her position as queen. However, Charmion points out that there is honor in dying for love. In a sense, Cleopatra lived up to the example of her powerful ancestors by refusing to submit to the power of Rome and remaining true to herself.

Serapion observes how noble Antony and Cleopatra look, as if they ruled half the world. He is glad that the lovers are now safe from their unhappy fate and proclaims that future generations will always remember their love story.

The onlookers see a tragedy in Antony and Cleopatra's suicide, but they also acknowledge that their passion is inspirational and poetic—more lasting and powerful, perhaps, than even Rome's triumph.

EPILOGUE

Dryden observes that poets only have one weapon: words, and more specifically, insults. He comments particularly on the war of words between "verse" (which is to say, poets and playwrights) and "prose" (which is to say, critics). He calls this a "civil war," since both groups are in the business of professional writing. For his part, Dryden claims that he is just a "poor wretch" who aims to please audiences with his writing, even if critics like "Mr. Bayes"—the pseudonym which the Duke of Buckingham used when he satirized Dryden in *The Rehearsal* (1671)—don't like his work.

Dryden tends to be self-effacing and modest about his work, calling himself a "poor wretch" who has no authority of his own and is dependent on the goodwill of audiences to make his living as a writer. However, this modesty may not be entirely genuine, as Dryden clearly has strong political and literary opinions. He claims that words aren't real power, but the forcefulness of his statements against his critics suggests otherwise.

If he must be judged for this play, Dryden hopes that he will be judged by the "fair sex." Men might be interested in Octavius's ambition, but women will enjoy the story of a man, Antony, who died "all for love." Dryden grants that some old women might say that this story is unrealistic and has nothing to do with society today, but he argues that this is because they are ugly and wrinkled and can't enjoy the pleasures of love anymore. Instead, he asks to be judged by the "young and beauteous," since "young wits and sparks" are the poet's best defense against his critics.

In his appeal to women in particular, Dryden suggests that he expects audiences to respond emotionally to the story of Antony and Cleopatra. Their choice of passion over reason—sacrificing "all for love"—will appeal to the hearts rather than the minds of audiences, he argues. Audiences can condemn the lovers for their mistakes while still admiring the example of two people who gave up everything for love.

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