

CHAPTER 3

‘THE HIGH ROMAN FASHION’: SUICIDE AND STOICISM IN *ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA*

In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare focuses on the most obvious forms of human passibility: our mortality, our physical weakness, and our susceptibility to passions such as anger, grief and pity. In his later Roman play, *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare turns to a different and more subtle aspect of human vulnerability: our sensitivity to shame. In the general introduction, I suggested that, whereas *Julius Caesar* shows the end of the dying Republic, *Antony and Cleopatra* shows the beginning of the Roman Empire, and that this transition mirrors the contemporary English ‘crisis of the aristocracy’. In this later tragedy, Shakespeare considers the attractions of art itself as an escape, given the deep-set sense of humiliation that this kind of crisis can provoke. English aristocrats who once prided themselves on being warriors found to their chagrin that they were now obliged to become courtiers, instead: the yes-men they had once so heartily despised. Shakespeare mocks such spineless flatterers in the form of characters such as Osric in *Hamlet* and Oswald in *King Lear*. The English nobility did not blithely relinquish their traditional conception of themselves, but instead met the diminution of their power with anxiety, indignation and occasional outbreaks of reactionary violence. Essex’s ill-considered rebellion is the most obvious example; others include duelling, privateering, foolhardiness on the battlefield, and an effort to revive medieval chivalric practices such as jousting.

As traditional martial autonomy became ever more circumscribed, the same class of noblemen who sought solace in the late Elizabethan chivalric revival also found consolation in the new

philosophy of Neostoicism. As it once had in ancient Rome long before, the characteristic will to power St Augustine calls *libido dominandi* turned inwards towards conquering the self rather than the world at large. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, as in *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare is keenly interested in the mutability and volatility of this kind of thwarted ambition. Uncertain how best to proceed, Roman protagonists such as Brutus and Antony move back and forth, vexed, between the objective pursuit of political independence and the subjective cultivation of emotional invulnerability. Brutus abandons his initial Stoicism to become a man of action, but too late. Even when he does try his hand at politics, he cannot shake off his tendency to approach oratory as if it were a game within his own mind, a logical puzzle to be solved by pure 'reason' (3.1.237). Antony in *Julius Caesar* proves, by contrast, the master of embracing his own passibility, like an actor. He uses the methods of Ciceronian oratory, but against the Republic, as a demagogue, rather than in the service of the 'common good' (5.5.73).

Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra* is more like his former antagonist in *Julius Caesar*, Brutus, than he might seem *prima facie*. Much as Brutus oscillates between Ciceronian engagement in Roman politics and Senecan retreat into 'philosophy', Antony alternates between Roman 'labor' (4.14.48) and Egyptian 'idleness' (1.3.94). The two other major characters, his rival, Octavian, and his lover, Cleopatra, symbolise these two poles of his own split existence. Octavian represents the objective pursuit of political dominance, an aspect of life Antony finds bothersome and boring, but also, despite his desultory efforts, inescapable. Cleopatra represents, by contrast, a subjective retreat into his own imagination, a world of endless feasts, revelry and games where everything answers to his slightest whim, as if he were a god – or a playwright. Shakespeare seems to see in the opposition between Rome and Alexandria something like the opposition between the world as it is, at times a grim and inhospitable place, and the world as it can be in the mind's eye, the 'dream' that comes to life in poetry, as well as on the stage. In the language of the play, 'fancy' is more enchanting than 'nature.' Like a stage-play, however, or a dream, 'fancy' cannot be sustained *ad infinitum*.

Coriolanus serves here, too, as a useful point of both comparison and contrast. Like Antony, Coriolanus is exquisitely sensitive to shame. He is humiliated by anything that suggests that he depends

on anyone other than himself, since it would reveal that he falls short of an idealised self-sufficiency. Much as Coriolanus is reluctant to canvass for votes, Antony is deeply upset at the thought of having to beg for mercy from his rival, Octavian. After his defeat at Actium, he laments, 'Now I must / To the young man send humble treaties; dodge / And palter in the shifts of lowness' (3.11.61-3). This indignity is itself a result, however, of a cause for deeper 'shame' (3.11.52): his 'un noble swerving' (3.11.49) at Actium. As he confesses, he is bound as if in 'strong Egyptian fetters' (1.2.123) by his love for Cleopatra. Coriolanus, too, proves bound to his mother, Volumnia: 'O mother, mother! / What have you done?' (5.3.183-4) he asks. His question is the opposite of a divine fiat; the agency in the scene is finally hers, not his. Like Antony with Cleopatra, he proves unexpectedly, profoundly passible.

Defeated earlier in the play by 'the beast / With many heads' (4.1.1-2), Coriolanus is banished from Rome. And, humiliated, he then tries to project that banishment back on to his opponent. 'I banish you!' (3.3.123) he replies, indignant. 'There is a world elsewhere' (3.3.135). Similar language appears in *Richard II*. When Bolingbroke is banished, his father exhorts him to consider his exile from the perspective of a 'wise man': a reference, perhaps, to the Stoic *sapiens*. 'All places that the eye of heaven visits / Are to the wise man ports and happy havens' (1.3.275-6). For example, Gaunt suggests, 'Think not the king did banish thee, / But thou the king' (1.3.279-80). Bolingbroke insists that there are sharp limits, however, to the consolation provided by this kind of retreat into subjective fantasy. Introspective dissociation, driving a wedge of sheer will between the mind and the world, is not as easy or sustainable as his father makes it out to be. 'O who can hold a fire in his hand,' he protests, 'by thinking on the frosty Caucasus?' (1.3.294-5). Coriolanus possesses, if anything, even less capacity to retreat into his own counterfactual imagination than Bolingbroke. When he says, 'I banish you!' he does not mean it in the sense that Gaunt does. He is not imagining a different, fictional world. Rather, he means more literally that he banishes the Romans from his protective presence, as former defender of their safety. 'Here remain with your uncertainty!' (3.3.124) he goes on. 'Let every feeble rumor shake your hearts!' (3.3.125). When he says, 'There is a world elsewhere!' he does not mean, like Hamlet, the 'nutshell' (2.2.254) of his own mind; instead, he means more

objectively that there are other places where he believes he can live and maintain more autonomy, such as with the Volscians.

Although Antony in some ways represents the same kind of ‘Herculean hero’ as Coriolanus, he is also markedly different, both in circumstances and in character.¹ Like Coriolanus, once he is defeated objectively, he tries to withdraw objectively: he asks Caesar ‘To let him breathe between the heavens and earth, / A private man in Athens’ (3.12.14–15).² For Antony, however, unlike Coriolanus, there is no such ‘world elsewhere’. Octavian is the ‘universal landlord’ (3.13.72), and he dismisses Antony’s request out of hand. What Antony does possess, by contrast, that Coriolanus does not is an imagination. He is able to escape subjectively, into a world of make-believe much akin to that of the theatre. ‘Let’s have one other gaudy night’ (3.13.188), he tells Cleopatra, after his defeat at Actium. ‘Call to me / All my sad captains. Fill our bowls once more. / Let’s mock the midnight bell’ (3.13.188–90). Even in the face of utter ruin, Antony is capable of living instead in a world ‘as if’, a counterfactual alternate reality much like that of an actor on stage. Cleopatra finds his bravado comforting: ‘Since my lord / Is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra’ (3.13.190–1).

Coriolanus has no such companion. Much as Portia and Calpurnia in *Julius Caesar* represent their husbands’ faculty of pity, which they suppress to a fault, Cleopatra represents Antony’s distinctive faculty of imagination or ‘fancy’, which he indulges to excess. This capacity Coriolanus utterly lacks, even to his own detriment. As A. D. Nuttall says, ‘he has no inside’.³ ‘Would you have me / False to my nature?’ (3.2.14–15) Coriolanus asks, incredulous. ‘Rather say I play / The man I am’ (3.2.15–16). He cannot give an oration like Antony’s in *Julius Caesar*, not because, like Brutus, he is too intellectual, but because he is not intellectual enough. He cannot dissociate the external world from his own internal self-perception, his ‘bosom’s truth’ (3.2.57). Despite his mother’s desperate attempts to coach him to ‘dissemble’ (3.2.62), Coriolanus cannot bring himself to play the ‘mountebank’ (3.2.132). As Leah Whittington explains,

It is not simply a question of being unable to tolerate a disjunction between outer expression and inner being; Coriolanus believes that going through the physical motions of pleading will transform him

into a new, corrupted self. The gestures of supplication – smiling, weeping, pleading, kneeling – threaten to imprint themselves on his character, teaching his mind ‘a most inherent baseness’ that threatens the integrity of his selfhood.⁴

Hence Coriolanus’ restless drive in exile to return to Rome and defeat it decisively; he cannot simply forget Rome or pretend as if it does not exist, but instead feels compelled in this, as in every circumstance, to take objective action in the public sphere. He cannot console himself, as Antony does, with a bowl of wine and the company of a woman. He must validate his sense of himself as invincible on the battlefield or die trying: there is no other option.

Coriolanus thus stands at one end of a spectrum of manifestations of the will to power, the *ne plus ultra* of the objective expression of *libido dominandi*. Shakespeare is also fascinated, however, by the subjective expression of this impulse: the desire to be master of one’s own experience, independent of the world at large. Antony’s tendency to escape into a dream-world of revelry and drunkenness, like Brutus’ Stoicism, is but one example among many of this tendency, one version of a story that Shakespeare tells again and again, in various guises: a retreat from a shared, public reality into a more isolated, private alternative, as a response to the loss of power. Seeking refuge in fantasy or ‘fancy’ reappears repeatedly as a response to the rise of a hostile, absolutist government. Lear escapes into outright madness; Edgar, like Hamlet, into its semblance. Richard II takes refuge in self-aggrandising storytelling: a theatrical reimagining of himself much akin to Cleopatra’s final moments. Achilles sulks by his ship, watching Patroclus imitate his countrymen: a kind of play within a play. Timon of Athens tricks his fellow citizens into attending a satirical feast, a bit like a dumb-show, then abandons the city for a cave in the wilderness. The common thread in these disparate narratives is a flight from the world ‘as-is’ into another world ‘as if’, modelled on Shakespeare’s experience of the theatre.⁵ The mind flees the intransigent givenness of an unaccommodating world in favour of self-generated, solipsistic delusions of grandeur.

In his influential study *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy*, Christopher Gill distinguishes between what he calls ‘objective-participant’ and ‘subjective-individualist’ concepts of selfhood, ‘a contrast that functions’, he insists, ‘both *within* modern

thinking' and 'between Greek and (some) modern thinking about the person'. In the subjective-individualist tradition, the self is 'characteristically conceived' as 'a solitary center of consciousness, a unitary "I"'. 'The sense of being the centre of a unique, subjective (first-personal) perspective is seen as constitutive of personal identity.'⁶ As Thomas Pfau observes, this 'modern, autonomous self', 'the quintessentially modern, solitary individual confined to his study', is 'familiar from the candle-lit interior of Descartes' *Meditations* all the way up to the cork-lined refuge where Proust would labor on his magnum opus'. Examples include 'Descartes' *cogito*, Locke's "consciousness," and Johann Gottlieb Fichte's "founding act" (*Tathandlung*).'⁷

Modern thinkers such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Bernard Williams and, more recently, Thomas Pfau criticise what Gill describes as the 'subjectivist-individualist' concept of selfhood as deracinated. In particular, they object to 'Kant's thesis that the moral response involves, or implies, an act of "autonomy" or self-legislation, by which the individual agent binds herself to universal principles.' 'For Kant himself,' Gill notes, 'the idea of the autonomy (self-legislation) of the person as (individual) moral agent is coupled with a stress on the universality of the moral principles thus legislated.' 'Some subsequent thinkers', however, such as Nietzsche and Sartre, 'conceive of the autonomy of the individual agent in markedly subjective (and subjectivist) terms. Only the individual herself (the possessor of a uniquely subjective viewpoint) can determine the validity of the rules that she legislates for herself.'⁸

In the 'objective-participant' tradition, by contrast, 'thought and other psychological processes' tend to be presented as an 'inner dialogue', rather than a 'unitary "I"'. 'The ethical life of the human being is, at the most fundamental level, shared rather than private and individuated.' We arrive at ethical conclusions through 'shared debate' rather than 'by adopting an individual stance of autonomy or self-legislation' or 'by embarking on a program of (individual) self-realization'.⁹ As Pfau insists, 'in both its genesis and its eventual awareness, the self is essentially bound up with its relation to other persons.' 'There is not an autonomous Cartesian self'; 'rather, there is the reciprocity and acknowledgment of one person by another in a dynamic of ipseity, alterity, and community that is as profound as it is fragile.'¹⁰

As an example of this point of view, Pfau enlists a surprising ally: Coleridge. 'His late explorations in Trinitarian theology', Pfau explains, 'complete a reflection about the "self-insufficingness" of the person that had arisen from a critique of modern, autonomous, and self-conscious agency begun in *The Friend* and continued in the *Biographia* and the *Lay Sermons*.'¹¹ 'No human individual is self-sufficing (αυτάρκης),' Coleridge observes.¹² Towards the end of his life, reflecting on the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, Coleridge turns against 'the modern Cartesian conflation of "consciousness" with "self-identity"'.¹³ 'Consciousness itself has the appearance of another,' he maintains.¹⁴ 'There could be no opposite, and of course no distinct or conscious sense of the term "I" as far as the consciousness is concerned, without a "Thou".'¹⁵

In a later study, *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought*, Gill argues that 'Hellenistic-Roman thought on person-ality, like Classical Greek thinking, is best interpreted as "objective-participant" in approach.' This view, he acknowledges, 'runs counter to the claim sometimes made that the Hellenistic-Roman period sees a shift toward a more subjective and individualistic approach to self'.¹⁶ A. A. Long, for example, sees in Stoicism 'a new focus on consciousness, on the individuality of the perceiving subject, as the fundamental feature of the mental'.¹⁷ In her study of 'vision, sexuality, and self-knowledge in the ancient world', *The Mirror of the Self*, Shadi Bartsch takes her conceptual categories from Gill, but finds that 'developments of Roman Stoicism, and in particular the thought of Seneca, innovate in ways that cannot ultimately be contained within the model he sets out for ancient Greek philosophy'.¹⁸ Like Paul Cantor, Bartsch attributes this emerging new form of subjectivity to the change from Republic to Empire. By way of explanation, she draws an analogy to Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, the ingenious but disturbing form of confinement Foucault draws upon as a metaphor in *Discipline and Punish*. In this hypothetical circular prison, eerily similar to what we now might recognise as an 'open-plan office', every inmate is housed in a lighted glass cell visible to a single warden in a central tower. 'It is the fact of being constantly seen, of always being able to be seen,' Foucault explains, 'that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection.'¹⁹

Bartsch argues that the Panopticon does not make sense as a metaphor for the Rome of the Republic. There is 'no reciprocity

of the gaze', whereas 'in republican Rome entire social groups are engaged in reciprocal acts of watching and evaluating'. Bartsch cites Andrew Bell: 'In a true republic no citizen monopolizes the gaze.'²⁰ As a symbol for the court of the Julio-Claudian emperors, however, the Panopticon is apt. 'One of the most salient aspects of the transition to empire' is the 'breakdown' of 'the reciprocity of the gaze'.²¹ As Foucault puts it, 'in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without being seen.'²² 'In Seneca's description of the situation in *De tranquillitate*,' Bartsch observes, 'he seems to catapult us . . . into a kind of Foucauldian scopic regime.' 'Constant observation of oneself is torturous,' Seneca complains. 'It's not a pleasant life, nor one free from anxiety, to live constantly wearing a mask.'²³ As a form of defence, Carlin Barton suggests, 'The Romans donned, as it were, the armor of hypocrisy.' 'The face became a façade.'²⁴

For Bartsch, the transition from Republic to Empire brings a 'turn of emphasis from the public eye to the self-generated eye', 'from the mirror of the community to a form of mirroring that relied upon a doubling of the self'. For figures such as Homer's Hector or Achilles, the imagined observer Bernard Williams calls 'the internalized other' is 'an *unconscious* development', 'a part of the self that has so thoroughly adopted the values of the community that it itself acts as an audience to the actions of the individual'. 'Socrates' *daimonion* is not a product of his decision to provide himself with an ethical interlocutor; Cicero's conscience can plague him against his will.' As in the case of the kind of moral self-legislation Gill associates with Kant, however, in Seneca's thought 'the internalized other is a conscious product of the will of the Stoic individual'. 'One *must set up* a Cato or an Epicurus in one's mind and pretend he is watching.' 'Can we still speak in terms of a community-sanctioned ethics,' Bartsch asks, 'when the community has shrunk to a number of idealized (dead) watchers, and when even this tiny community is absent barring an act of will?'²⁵

As she makes plans to kill herself, Cleopatra appropriates the language of the 'noble Roman'. Her suicide, she claims, will be in 'the high Roman fashion', that is, in the style of austere statesmen such as Cato and Brutus. The incongruity seems jarring, given her very un-Stoic tendency throughout towards extravagant accesses of emotion. Cleopatra's suicide is consistent with Stoicism, however,

because, like Stoicism, it represents a wilful dissociation from reality. 'Can Stoicism, the anti-passion philosophy, be turning into, of all things, Romanticism?' A. D. Nuttall asks. 'That is exactly what is happening.' Cleopatra aims to flee from 'nature' into 'fancy' and sees suicide as a means to that end. 'As Stoicism is subjectivized,' Nuttall explains, 'as the impersonal, rational cosmos fades, a curious internal excitement develops.'²⁶ Like Shakespeare's Romans, Cleopatra as a pagan queen aims in the end to escape passibility itself. Suicide is the culmination of a progressive involution of the will to power, the final step towards a longed-for subjective *autarkeia*. As Eric Langley suggests, like many other early modern authors, Shakespeare in his Roman plays uses 'Stoic structures of politicized self-ownership and aggressive individualism' to represent and reflect upon the early modern pursuit of neo-Roman liberty. Suicide as 'Stoic assertion of autonomous ownership' prefigures the distinctive character of modern selfhood.²⁷

In *The Roots of Romanticism*, Isaiah Berlin acknowledges the difficulty inherent in separating the substance of the movement from its accidents. Nevertheless, he maintains, 'There *was* a Romantic movement; it did have something which was central to it; it did create a great revolution in consciousness; and it is important to discover what this is.' 'The general proposition of the eighteenth century,' Berlin explains, 'indeed of all previous centuries,' is 'that there is a nature of things, there is a *rerum natura*.' For the Romantics, by contrast, 'there is no structure of things. There is no pattern to which you must adapt yourself.' 'You create values, you create goals, you create ends, and in the end you create your own vision of the universe, exactly as artists create works of art.' 'The universe is as you choose to make it, to some degree at any rate.'²⁸

In Romantic literature, the result is 'admiration of wild genius, outlaws, heroes, aestheticism, self-destruction'. 'Rules must be blown up as such.'²⁹ Nietzsche in this respect is in effect a late Romantic. As Paul Cantor observes, 'what really attracted Nietzsche to Shakespeare' was 'larger-than-life characters, transgressive and even law-breaking, living (in Nietzsche's later formulation) "beyond good and evil"'.³⁰ Probably the best example is Schiller's *Robbers*, a play Nietzsche greatly admired. Centre stage now belongs to the glamorous outlaw, the Byronic antihero. Among philosophers, Berlin finds in Fichte the most thoroughgoing Romantic. At the core of Fichte's

thought is an 'important proposition': 'things are as they are, not because they are so independent of me, but because I make them so; things depend upon the way I treat them, what I need them for.' The only teleology that matters, that exists, is the one that we ourselves invent and impose upon the malleable, meaningless, mutable world. 'I am not determined by ends,' Fichte proclaims; 'ends are determined by me.'³¹ Rousseau puts it more simply: 'What I feel to be right is right.'³²

Shakespeare's canonisation was assured in the eighteenth century, when he became a darling of German precursors of Romanticism such as Lessing and Herder, as well as Schiller and the *Sturm und Drang* movement. Goethe calls him *unser Shakespeare* ('our Shakespeare'). Romantic rhapsodising about Shakespeare, however, tends to misinterpret the movement of his mind. Like Blake, placing Milton on the side of Satan, Romantic critics too readily identify Shakespeare himself with characters such as Richard II and Falstaff, as well as Cleopatra, whom he goes out of his way to undermine. To read the second tetralogy of English history plays from the point of view of Falstaff is like reading *Lolita* from the perspective of Humbert Humbert.

At the outset of his neo-Romantic defence of Cleopatra, Richard Strier cites Peter Holbrook: 'Shakespeare anticipates the Romantic revolution in morals.'³³ I agree, but I think that Shakespeare sees this development as a dangerous mistake, rather than an improvement. As I argue elsewhere, the moral error Shakespeare seems to find the most beguiling is a kind of self-absorption: the 'transvaluation of all values' that would eventually develop into what we now know as Romanticism.³⁴ Shakespeare as an artist anticipates Romanticism because 'the whole movement', as Berlin observes, is 'an attempt to impose an aesthetic model upon reality, to say that everything should obey the rules of art.'³⁵ It makes sense that the great temptation for a playwright would be the fantasy that the world is like a play; that other people are like characters; that the control that he enjoys in the privacy of his imagination, the 'infinite space' of artistic possibility, might also be available somehow outside what Hamlet calls the 'nutshell' of the mind. Shakespeare's Cleopatra is the purest expression of this fantasy. But she is prefigured by, of all people, Shakespeare's Brutus, and behind him, Seneca. As A. D. Nuttall explains, 'We have seen how the

exertion of reason by the Roman Stoics can increasingly become a way of denying rather than truly representing reality.³⁶

Stoic Suicide as 'Hobgoblin': Cleopatra and the Question of Consistency

I begin this section by examining Brutus' apparent inconsistency in committing suicide, both in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and in Plutarch's 'Life of Marcus Brutus'. Shakespeare's Brutus condemns Cato for killing himself; suicide, he maintains, is less consistent with his 'rule of philosophy' than 'patience' to endure whatever may befall him in life. Brutus echoes here a criticism of Stoic suicide that can be found in Montaigne's essay, 'A Custom of the Island of Cea', as well as St Augustine's *City of God*. Nevertheless, Brutus does kill himself in the end, dismayed at the thought of being led in triumph. A mistranslation in North's Plutarch exaggerates Brutus' inconsistency in this respect. In the original Greek, Brutus' change of heart about suicide emerges gradually with age, whereas in North's version it comes across as a startling, spur-of-the-moment decision. Shakespeare uses this textual crux to dramatic effect. Brutus' psychological lability becomes a symbol of the impossibility of Stoic 'patience'.

Shakespeare continues to investigate the tension between Stoic 'constancy', understood as a kind of performance, and suppressed human passibility in his later play, *Antony and Cleopatra*. In the character of Cleopatra, Shakespeare exaggerates the same kind of inconsistency that he finds in Brutus ad absurdum. Cleopatra frames her suicide in language that evokes Stoicism, but herself seems as a character the very opposite of a Stoic *sapiens*. Even so, her suicide is not inconsistent. Egyptian pastimes such as drinking, fishing and billiards represent, like Brutus' Stoicism, Cleopatra's attempts to escape awareness of a world outside her own control, retreating instead to a more private, subjective space in which she can be absolute *domina* ('mistress'). Understood psychologically, rather than in terms of abstract ethical principles, Cleopatra's suicide is not so much a non sequitur as the logical culmination of a lifelong involution of her *libido dominandi*. Like other pagan characters, Cleopatra turns inwards in order to escape the shame of outward weakness.

In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare adumbrates the more extended treatment of the horror of being led in triumph that he presents in *Antony and Cleopatra*. As Brutus and Cassius prepare for the Battle of Philippi, Cassius is troubled by inauspicious omens. 'Let's reason with the worst that may befall' (5.1.96), he suggests to Brutus. 'If we do lose this battle,' he asks, 'What are you then determined to do?' (5.1.97–8). Brutus' thoughts turn immediately to suicide, prompted by the memory of another, earlier opponent of Caesar, Cato of Utica.

Even by that rule of philosophy
 By which I did blame Cato for the death
 Which he did give himself – I know not how,
 But I do find it cowardly and vile,
 For fear of what might fall, so to prevent
 The time of life – arming myself with patience
 To stay the providence of some high powers
 That govern us below.

(5.1.100–7)

In plays such as *Hamlet* which are set in a Christian context, the argument against suicide is one sense relatively simple. 'O God! God!' Hamlet cries. 'O . . . that the Everlasting had not fix'd / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter' (1.2.129–32). Hamlet's notorious reluctance to act extends, of course, beyond simple fear of damnation. Nevertheless, he does see suicide in a very different light than an 'antique Roman' (5.2.346). For a character such as Brutus, the question of the moral rectitude of suicide must be answered, not in terms of service or obedience to the Godhead, but instead in terms of its impact on his reputation. How will he appear in the history books? If he were to commit suicide, would that act be seen by posterity as brave or 'cowardly'? Noble or 'vile'? How he will be remembered is, for Shakespeare's Brutus, the equivalent of what heaven or hell is to a Christian. In this respect, as Gordon Braden points out, Shakespeare brings Brutus closer, in fact, to his historical original than the Brutus that he encountered in his most important source for the play, Sir Thomas North's English translation of Jacques Amyot's French translation of Plutarch's *Lives*.³⁷

Once it becomes clear that he has been defeated, Brutus does eventually commit suicide, despite the objections that he presents to Cassius here, and it is some question why he reverses his position.

In North's version of his life, Brutus justifies the decision by saying that his good deed in assassinating Caesar, a kind of martyrdom for the sake of his country, is enough to guarantee him a pleasant afterlife, even if he does subsequently commit suicide. 'I gave up my life for my contry in the Ides of Marche, for the whiche I shall live in another more glorious worlde.'³⁸ Shakespeare's Brutus, by contrast, makes no such reference to life after death. As Gordon Braden points out, this line in North's Plutarch is a mistranslation, however, introduced not initially by North himself, but rather by Jacques Amyot, whose French translation from the Greek served as his source.³⁹ In the second edition of his *Lives*, but not the first, Amyot changes the tense of the original verb, 'I have lived' (*ezēsa*; aorist), from the perfect to the future. North amends the sentence still further, introducing the idea of 'another more glorious worlde'. In the original, what Brutus says rather is that since the Ides of March, he has lived 'another life [*bion allon*], free and of good repute [*eleutheron kai endoxon*]'.⁴⁰ In the context of his larger argument about suicide, what Plutarch's Brutus seems to be saying, in other words, is that he is more comfortable with the prospect of committing suicide than he might be otherwise, because he has already won so much glory by securing his own freedom. Shakespeare is therefore more correct, perhaps, than he even knew in making Brutus' calculations those of honour in this world, rather than glory in the next. Brutus' chief concern is not divine approval, but the praise of other men (*doxē*; cf. *endoxon*): he wants his peers to admire him, both now and *ad perpetuum*, much as he admires his own most illustrious ancestor, Lucius Junius Brutus, celebrated foe of the tyrannical Tarquins.

What is perhaps most intriguing about Marcus Junius Brutus, however, in comparison to his namesake, is that he is not content to be remembered simply as a courageous patrician. It is not enough for him to be the leader of the *optimates*, fighting like Cassius or Casca for the Good Old Cause (so to speak) of the Roman Republic. He wants to be known as a philosopher, as well. As his late-night reading habits suggest, along with Cassius' teasing him about his 'philosophy', Brutus prides himself, like Cato before him, on being educated in what was at the time a relatively new Greek import, and on his adherence to its theoretical precepts. When he considers suicide, Brutus is concerned about its implications for his legacy in this respect, as well: his understanding of himself as strictly rational. If he killed himself, like Cato, would

that act be perceived as an illogical access of emotion, or instead as consistent with the principles of his 'philosophy'?

The observation that the Stoics' glorification of suicide seems to be at odds with their more general ethical theory is not Brutus' alone. 'This does not pass without contradiction,' Montaigne writes. In his essay on the ethics of suicide, 'A Custom of the Island of Cea', Montaigne criticises Cato in much the same terms as Brutus does here. 'There is much more fortitude in wearing out the chain that binds us than in breaking it, and more proof of strength in Regulus than in Cato. It is lack of judgment and of patience that hastens our pace.'⁴¹ In his *City of God*, St Augustine makes the same comparison, and to the same end.⁴² Even by the standards of the pagans, St Augustine argues, suicide is, as Brutus says, 'cowardly'.

If you look at the matter more closely, you will scarcely call it greatness of soul, which prompts a man to kill himself rather than bear up against some hardships of fortune. . . . Is it not rather proof of a feeble mind, to be unable to bear either the pains of bodily servitude, or the foolish opinion of the vulgar? And is not that to be pronounced the greater mind, which rather faces than flees the ills of life, and which . . . holds in small esteem the judgment of men, and specially of the vulgar, which is frequently involved in a mist of error?⁴³

Montaigne makes the same point a bit more vividly. 'It is an act of cowardice, not of virtue, to go and hide in a hole, under a massive tomb, in order to avoid the blows of fortune.'⁴⁴ Moreover, he adds, 'there being so many sudden changes in human affairs, it is hard to judge just at what point we are at the end of our hope.' As an example of an admirable tenacity, he cites the story of Josephus, who, he says, 'did well to hang on stubbornly to his hopes', and in contrast censures Brutus, as well as Cassius. 'Cassius and Brutus, on the contrary, demolished the last remnants of Roman liberty, of which they were the protectors, by the rash haste with which they have killed themselves before the proper time and occasion.'⁴⁵

In North's version of Plutarch, what changes Brutus' mind about suicide includes the conviction that he will enjoy a 'glorious' afterlife. In Plutarch's original, that motive turns out to be, instead, a sense of self-satisfaction. Come what may, Brutus concludes, he

is still the man who secured Roman liberty; he is the tyrannicide who prevented the return of a would-be Tarquin, and no subsequent stain can entirely blot out that achievement. Another aspect of his openness to suicide, however, in Plutarch's original as well as Amyot's French, is a new spirit of moral pragmatism: a willingness to compromise his ideals, which Brutus associates with growing older. In North's translation, this motive drops out of the picture, due to an error in punctuation. North writes:

Brutus aunswered him, being yet but a young man, and not overgreatly experienced in the world: I trust, (I know not how) a certaine rule of Philosophie, by the which I did greatly blame and reprove Cato for killing of him selfe . . . but being nowe in the middest of the daunger, I am of a contrary mind. For if it be not the will of God, that this battell fall out fortunate for us: I will look no more for hope, neither seeke to make any new supply againe, but will rid me of this miserable world, and content me with my fortune.⁴⁶

Corrected in light of the original, the punctuation here (as it does in Amyot's translation) should run instead: 'Brutus aunswered him: being yet but a young man, and not overgreatly experienced in the world', and so on. 'I trust' should also be emended to something more like 'I let loose, put forward' (*aphēka*), with the sense of 'carelessly expounded': again, the Greek aorist seems to have presented difficulties. Here, it should be translated in the past tense, rather than the present. In modern English, the basic sense of this part of the sentence is: 'When I was young [*neos*, with the suggestion of 'new', 'fresh'], I let slip an opinion [*logon*] about philosophy', and so on. In the Greek, 'daunger' also is more ambiguous: *allois* . . . *tychais* ('different fortunes/circumstances').

North's version of this speech presented a potential stumbling-block for Shakespeare, because it makes it seem as if Brutus changes his mind about suicide abruptly out of cowardice (fear of 'daunger'), rather than as a result of humbling experience and increasing years. M. W. MacCallum presents Shakespeare here, rather than eliding the incongruity, as turning the textual distortion to his advantage as a dramatist, 'making Brutus's latter sentiment the sudden response of his heart, in defiance of his philosophy, to Cassius' anticipation of what they must expect if defeated'.⁴⁷ To

do so, Shakespeare fleshes out North's interpolation, 'daunger', giving it more specific form and pressure.

CASSIUS Then, if we lose this battle,
 You are contented to be led in triumph
 Thorough the streets of Rome?

BRUTUS No, Cassius, no: think not, thou noble Roman,
 That ever Brutus will go bound to Rome.
 He bears too great a mind.

(5.1.107-112)

What in Shakespeare's source had come across as a disruption of psychological mimesis becomes instead a masterstroke. Shakespeare uses this interchange to reveal the dissonance of Brutus' double ambition: his desire to be honoured both as a philosopher and as a public man. The two aims prove incompatible; forced to choose between them, Brutus' instincts as a traditional statesman turn out to run deeper. A reputation for philosophical rigour is a welcome bonus; at the end of the day, however, Brutus is not willing, like Alexander the Great, to trade places with Diogenes. Still less is he willing to be Christ, spat upon and jeered at as a failed Messiah. There is a limit to Brutus' willingness to sacrifice his considerable social and political status, simply for the sake of a 'rule of philosophy'.⁴⁸

Like Hamlet, Brutus is deeply attracted to the idea of an escape from politics into the privacy of his own 'mind': his study, his books, his own subjective experience. There, he believes, he can be more completely in control. What he discovers, however, is that he cannot entirely give up his desire for public approbation. The external world impinges upon his consciousness; he cannot simply scoff at the 'foolish opinion of the vulgar', like St Augustine. To be exposed to the scorn of the masses would be more than he believes that he can endure; to be 'led in triumph' would be to lose that 'greatness of mind', Aristotle's *megalopsychia*, which, like Cleopatra, Brutus sees as integral to his own self-definition. That pride in his own idealised self-image is more precious to him than life itself.

Above all, Brutus cannot bear even to imagine the prospect of being displayed to the public as a captive, or to suppose that Cassius is doing so: 'think not, thou noble Roman', he begins. He is not willing to operate in a world in which such a possibility is conceivable.

The epithet, 'noble Roman', indicates what is at stake: he is reminding Cassius, thereby, of their shared identity. He, like Cassius, is 'noble', not a commoner. He is a 'Roman', not a suppliant. He is not willing to put these attributes in doubt. They are part of a dichotomy which for him must remain absolute. He must be, as Antony says, 'the noblest Roman of them all', whether or not the world accepts that moral judgement.

Much literary-critical energy has been spent trying to identify what Cassius calls simply Brutus' 'philosophy' with this or that specific ancient school of thought.⁴⁹ Brutus' own book *On Virtue* is no longer extant; judging from Cicero, however, Brutus seems to have been relatively sympathetic to Stoicism; more so than Cicero himself. Historically speaking, Brutus, like Cicero, was a follower of Antiochus of Ascalon, a Greek-speaking expatriate who claimed to be reviving what he called the Old Academy, and whose thought is a complicated synthesis of Platonism, Aristotelianism and Stoicism. What exactly it means to say that Brutus or Cicero was a student of Antiochus is unclear, however. Students do not always agree with every one of their teacher's conclusions. More importantly, painstaking inquiries into the philosophical opinions of the historical Brutus are in this case beside the point. Even if his long-lost works were rediscovered, in all their subtlety, they would not necessarily provide a master key to the 'philosophy' of Shakespeare's Brutus. Looking back on this debate, Geoffrey Miles sees 'a blind alley'.

It seems undeniable that to represent the 'Romanity' of Brutus, and to a lesser extent of other characters, Shakespeare draws upon the Stoic traditions descending from Seneca and Cicero, and attributes to them attitudes and actions which his audience would clearly have identified as 'stoical'.⁵⁰

Shakespeare's Cleopatra, by contrast, easily seems the furthest thing from a Roman Stoic. In her rapid oscillation between love and anger, she evokes Seneca's tragic heroines, not his idealised Stoic *sapiens*.⁵¹ In her decision to kill herself, nonetheless, Cleopatra imagines herself, as well as her chambermaids, as entering Stoic hagiography. 'What's brave, what's noble / Let's do't after the high Roman fashion / And make death proud to take us' (4.5.90–2). Considered as Stoic rhetoric, the word 'fashion' here is out of place, with its suggestion of the external and the momentary. In its very

incongruity, the slip in diction does reveal, however, the nature of her relationship with Stoicism: ad hoc, superficial. Cleopatra's new Stoicism is in one sense deadly serious; her description of it as a 'fashion', however, suggests that it is merely another stratagem, like billiards or fishing, to escape from the press of reality. 'Now from head to foot / I am marble-constant,' she proclaims. 'Now the fleeting moon / No planet is of mine' (5.2.238–40). Repeated at the head of both of these sentences is the key word 'now': 'now', at this moment, but not necessarily before or after. Cleopatra's suicide, unlike Cato's, is not the culmination of a lifelong attempt to abide by Stoic principles. Instead, Cleopatra's consistency inheres in her very inconsistency itself. She is so mutable that she can even become, for a time, the apparent opposite of that mutability.

Stoic philosophers tend to emphasise logical consistency, even to a fault. Plutarch in particular mocks them in his *Moralia* for insisting that there can be no degrees in virtue, 'just as in the sea the man a cubit from the surface is drowning no less than the one who has sunk 500 fathoms'.⁵² Among Stoics, Seneca is relatively pragmatic; even Seneca, however, applies this rule to Cato, as part of his emphasis on the continuity between the Stoic sage's suicide and his other actions. 'Cato's honourable death was no less a good than his honourable life, since virtue admits of no stretching.' Like a 'carpenter's rule', virtue 'admits of no bending'; like 'truth', it does not 'grow', but instead 'has its due proportions and is complete'.⁵³ By this inhuman standard, Cleopatra falls short; even her 'marble-constant' suicide, howsoever 'noble' or 'brave', does not represent a lifetime of sustained Stoic virtue. Her behaviour, however, is not simply capricious. As Polonius says of Hamlet: 'Though this be madness, yet there is method in't' (2.2.205–6).

The key here is to see Stoicism as a means, rather than an end. Stoic ethical ideals are not the framing narrative, the standard by which Cleopatra is to be measured. Instead, her adoption of Stoic practice should itself be examined in light of a different criterion of consistency, that of psychological mimesis. How does a Stoic suicide illustrate Cleopatra's character? What common thread ties it to her other behaviour? Stoicism itself, moreover, is not necessarily what it proclaims itself to be. Citing Hannah Arendt, Gordon Braden argues that 'there is considerable justification for taking Stoicism as less a philosophy of its announced themes of reason and virtue than a philosophy of the will – even, as Arendt has it, of

“the omnipotence of the will”.⁵⁴ In an essay on Epictetus, Arendt explains that, although he sees man as ‘entirely powerless in the real world’, he also sees him as able ‘to reproduce the outside – complete but deprived of reality – inside his mind, where he is undisputed lord and master’. In practice, however, that mastery is in doubt. ‘The constant question is whether your will is strong enough not merely to distract your attention from external, threatening things but to fasten your imagination on different “impressions” in the actual presence of pain and misfortune.’⁵⁵ Hamlet for his part registers this difficulty. Speaking to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he proclaims, ‘I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space – were it not that I have bad dreams’ (2.2.254–6). A. D. Nuttall observes that Hamlet here, ‘separating dream from reality’, ‘transposes his “dream” to another place in the system’: ‘the bad dream is the site not of an illusion but of shocking veracity’.⁵⁶ ‘Dreams’ in this case mean the world at large, impinging on Hamlet’s attempt, like a Stoic, to retain control over his own experience. As it turns out, the mind is not entirely, as Milton’s Satan says, ‘its own place’.⁵⁷ Instead, it is passible, permeable, ‘vulnerable’ to the painful impressions Hamlet calls ‘bad dreams’.

Looking back to Shakespeare’s sources, the interest apparent in *Antony and Cleopatra* in the idea of the mind as a refuge from the world owes perhaps most to the influence of Samuel Daniel’s *Cleopatra*.⁵⁸ There, in his opening speech, Caesar explains what is chiefly at stake in this, Daniel’s version of the story: Cleopatra’s assent to be Caesar’s subject. ‘Behold, my forces vanquisht have this Land’ (269), Octavian says. ‘Onely this Queene, that hath lost all this all, / To whom is nothing left except a minde: / Cannot into a thought of yeelding fall’ (273–5). Caesar wants to rule ‘hearts and minds’, not just bodies. As he recognises, however, this winning of the will of the other is beyond his power to force outright. ‘I see mens bodies onely ours, no more, / The rest, anothers right, that rules the minde’ (267–8).

Kingdoms I see we winne, we conquere Climates,
 Yet we cannot vanquish hearts, nor force obedience.
 Affections kept in close-concealed limits,
 Stand farre without the reach of sword or violence.
 Who forc’d do pay us dutie, pay not love:
 Free is the heart, the temple of the minde[.]

(257–62)

Shakespeare's play upon this premise is to focus on perception, especially self-perception, rather than 'affections' such as 'love'. His Antony and Cleopatra want to see themselves as gods, that is, as incarnations of their own ideal selves, and that perception is under threat from without. A retreat into the mind, enabled by withdrawal into some relatively isolated place, such as Alexandria (in comparison to Rome), or the queen's monument (in comparison to Alexandria, besieged) as well as the selection of a sympathetic audience, helps enable the self to preserve its power of self-flattering, self-aggrandising self-definition.

Seen in this light, Cleopatra's suicide is not at all inconsistent with her character, but instead the continuation of a pattern in place from the very beginning of the play. 'Give me to drink mandragora' (1.5.4), she asks Charmian, 'That I might sleep out this great gap of time / My Antony is away' (1.5.5-6). Any time her power proves less than absolute, Cleopatra longs to dissociate from reality itself, through means as mundane as sleep, wine or fantasising about sex, or as exotic as the supposed soporific power of mandrake root. Suicide is simply the most radical version of this retreat into a world of 'dreams', a creation of the beholder's own imagination or 'fancy'. 'I dreamt there was an emperor Antony. / O such another sleep, that I might see / But such another man!' (5.2.75-7).

Shakespeare draws the connection between suicide and drugged or inebriated dissociation from the world, Cleopatra's and Antony's pursuit both alike of what Pompey calls 'Lethe'd dullness' (2.1.27), by foreshadowing Cleopatra's unusual method of suicide, deliberate exposure to the bite of an asp, in two earlier references to 'poison'. When Caesar rebukes Antony for having denied him 'arms and aid' (2.2.94), Antony excuses himself for having been out of sorts. 'Neglected, rather,' he protests, 'and then when poison'd hours had bound me up / From mine own knowledge' (2.2.95-7). When Cleopatra in Antony's absence amuses herself with fantasies of him, in like manner, musing about her, she imagines him 'murmuring, "Where's my serpent of old Nile?"' (1.5.26). Cleopatra does indeed prove Antony's 'serpent', as fatal to him in the end as the asp is to her. She pauses here, however, and reproaches herself for having let herself become lost in a possibly counterfactual reverie. 'Now I feed myself / With most delicious poison' (1.5.27-8). Imagination becomes in her figurative language

an unhealthy narcotic, one that she administers to Antony, and he to her, like a serpent biting its victim. Watching Iras succumb to the asp's poison, Cleopatra compares the 'stroke of death' wistfully to 'a lover's pinch' (5.2.294).

'Fancy' vs. 'Nature': Self-deception as Pleasure and Peril

In the previous section, I argued that Cleopatra's suicide is not inconsistent with her character, but instead the culmination of her characteristic escapism. Under pressure, she flees from unpleasant objective fact into soothing fantasies, and she often encourages Antony to do the same. In this sense, Cleopatra is a symbol of Antony's own imagination, as well as 'fantasy' or 'fancy' more generally considered, the faculty that allows the involution to the subjective characteristic of Brutus, as well as Antony, and that Coriolanus, by contrast, seems to lack altogether. Like Brutus retreating to his study, or Hamlet to the 'nutshell' of his own mind, Antony and Cleopatra repeatedly withdraw from the world 'as-is' into another, more subjective world 'as if'. Two celebrated speeches reveal this preference for 'fancy' over 'nature' in particular detail: Enobarbus' description of Cleopatra's arrival by barge at Antony's camp upon the banks of the river Cydnus, and Cleopatra's description of her 'dream' of Antony to her Roman guard, Dolabella.

In the fantasy of themselves that Antony and Cleopatra construct, they represent themselves as divine, ideal figures: Mars and Venus, Isis and Osiris. Over the course of the play, however, objective reality insistently intrudes upon this subjective transformation. The free play of the imagination turns out to be limited, not only by rivalry with Octavian, but also by more impersonal forces such as time and fortune. Anonymous messengers and soothsayers represent a world of fact which the two lovers tend to dismiss or ignore, with tragic consequences. At once actors and audience, they enable each other, like playgoers, to escape their own awareness of mundane obligations, constraints and humiliations. They imbue each other with glamour and create an alternate, mythic vision of themselves. Shakespeare suggests, however, that this *folie à deux* comes at a cost. An escape into subjective fantasy that begins as a voluntary respite from the burdens and indignities of objective passibility becomes in the end an involuntary exile from objective power.

Cleopatra herself is a symbol of the imagination: Aristotle's *phantasia*.⁵⁹ Like this faculty of the mind, Cleopatra is at once alluring and suspect; the natural ally of Antony's irrational and unchecked passion. She is, in one sense, Antony's own imagination, personified and rendered external, even though she is also, at the same time, a fully rounded character, much as Portia represents Brutus' own faculty of pity, even though she, too, has her own internal conflicts. For instance, Cleopatra is repeatedly described in terms of another common symbol of fantasy or 'fancy': magic. Pompey describes her as assailing Antony with 'witchcraft' (2.1.22) and 'charms' (2.1.20). Scarus, too, speaks of Antony as 'the noble ruin of her magic' (3.10.19). Antony himself describes her variously as 'enchanting' (1.2.135), a 'great fairy' (4.8.12), 'my charm' (4.12.16), a 'grave charm' (4.12.25), a 'gypsy' (4.12.30; cf. 1.1.10), a 'spell' (4.12.28) and a 'witch' (4.12.47). Caught up in such a reverie, like a wandering knight in a romance, Antony no longer feels the need to impose his will upon the entire Roman world; instead, he can enjoy a feeling of absolute power, if not its reality, ready at hand. As Cleopatra's favourite, he can feast, drink and enjoy all the pleasures of Egypt's wealth, without the headache of Roman politics. Like 'mandragora', Cleopatra enables Antony to escape into a 'dream' of himself.

Like Cleopatra's suicide, Antony's ignominious flight from the Battle of Actium is not unprecedented, but instead the culmination of a characteristic escapism. His retreat, like his suicide, is a synecdoche. The play itself opens, for example, with Philo complaining that his commander's 'goodly eyes', which once 'glowed' over 'the files and musters of the war', 'now bend, now turn / The office and devotion of their view / Upon a tawny front' (1.1.2-6). In Egypt, in his 'lascivious wassails' (1.4.57), Antony finds an easier way to feel like a god than the hardships of the kinds of military campaigns so vividly described, by contrast, by his rival, Octavian: 'famine' (1.4.60) and lack of water, for example, as Antony and his men fled across the Alps from Modena.

In dying, Antony reflects upon the 'miserable change' (4.15.53) in his fortunes. 'Please your thoughts', he tells Cleopatra, 'In feeding them with those my former fortunes, / Wherein I lived the greatest prince o'th'world, / The noblest' (4.15.54-7). Antony is consoling himself in this moment, as well as his mistress; he returns here, if only in memory, to his former days of glory, much

as she does later when she proclaims herself 'again for Cydnus' (5.2.227). Imagination of another world 'as if', in this case, 'as if' the past were the present, provides, like suicide, an alternative to an unpalatable, present reality. So also Othello, just before he kills himself, returns in memory to his former days of glory as a soldier for Venice against the Turk: 'in Aleppo once [etc.]' (5.2.350). As T. S. Eliot says, he is 'cheering himself up'; 'endeavoring to escape reality'. Eliot's tone is cruelly unsympathetic, but his assessment nonetheless contains an element of truth. We see in Othello's last moments, as well as those of Antony and Cleopatra, some degree of what he calls '*bovarysme*': 'the human will to see things as they are not'.⁶⁰

Shakespeare provides two touchstones of the fantastical image of themselves that Antony and Cleopatra aim to preserve, even in death. The first is Cleopatra's first meeting with Antony 'upon the river of Cydnus' (2.2.197), as recounted by Enobarbus. The second is the dream of Antony that Cleopatra describes to the Roman soldier Dolabella.⁶¹ The speeches are familiar; in both, the lover in question appears larger than life, like a deity. Cleopatra is compared to Venus; Antony, to Atlas, or perhaps, the Colossus of Rhodes; grander, even. 'His legs bestrid the ocean; his reared arm / Crested the world' (5.2.81-2), and so on. The lines recall Cassius' description of Julius Caesar: 'he doth bestride the narrow world / Like a colossus' (1.2.135-6). As in that speech, the emphasis is on Antony's seemingly unlimited power, akin to that of the god Jupiter. He is able 'to quail and shake the orb' like 'rattling thunder' (5.2.84-5); to give away 'realms and islands' (5.2.90). 'For his bounty, / There was no winter in't' (5.2.85-6). Cleopatra for her part, in Enobarbus' account, makes 'defect perfection' (2.2.241), so that even 'holy priests / Bless her when she is riggish' (2.2.249-50). 'Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale / Her infinite variety' (2.2.245-6).

These two well-known speeches, Enobarbus' on Cleopatra and Cleopatra's on Antony, are united, moreover, by two other conceits. One is that their subjects are held to exceed even the scope of the most outrageous hyperbole. From Enobarbus' perspective, Cleopatra cannot be adequately depicted, no matter how high the comparison. 'As for her person,' Enobarbus declares, 'It beggared all description' (2.2.207-8). Cleopatra describes her vision of Antony as 'past the size of dreaming' (5.2.96). This repeated

turn to apophysis, normally associated with descriptions of the Godhead, flags a reaction against the inherent 'givenness' of language, as well as the 'givenness' more generally of the larger world. The speakers reject their own proffered metaphors in the same way that mystics insist their meagre, thread-bare analogies cannot adequately even begin to approach the actual glory of the divine. To connect the subject of their description to the world by figurative language, as tenor to vehicle, is to introduce a sense of limitation that they see as fundamentally alien to its nature.

The other shared conceit is that of a conflict between 'fancy' and 'nature'. Anne Barton calls it 'an Elizabethan cliché, the conceit of an art more realistic than reality itself'.⁶² Realism is not the criterion here, however, so much as idealism. In a speech that otherwise follows its source, Plutarch's 'Life of Marcus Antonius', almost word for word, Enobarbus describes Cleopatra as 'O'erpicturing that Venus where we see / The fancy out-work nature' (2.2.210-11). The contest implied between 'fancy' and 'nature' is a Shakespearean interpolation; Plutarch says only that Cleopatra was 'apparelled and attired like the goddess Venus, commonly drawn in picture'.⁶³ Building on this brief description, Shakespeare introduces a much more complex analogy. Cleopatra represents the ideal woman more accurately than an unspecified, but presumably extraordinary, picture of Venus, just as that image of the divine, which is itself a creation of 'fancy', exceeds 'nature' (presumably, human nature); women as they typically tend to be, out in the world at large. The nadir that serves as the counterpoint to this zenith is Cleopatra's own lament immediately after Antony's death, 'No more but e'en a woman [etc.]'. Caught off guard, Cleopatra describes herself here, in a moment of rare lucidity, as 'commanded / By', rather than commanding, 'passion', and compares herself, in her shared susceptibility to grief, to 'the maid that milks / And does the meanest chares' (4.15.77-9).

The same concept of a conflict between 'fancy' and 'nature' reappears in even more complicated guise in Cleopatra's defence of her dream of Antony to Dolabella. 'Think you there was or might be such a man / As this I dreamt of?' (5.2.92-3) she asks. 'Gentle madam, no' (5.2.93), he replies. She rebukes him indignantly. 'You lie up to the hearing of the gods!' (5.2.94). They are alone; Cleopatra in her grandiosity, as well as desperation, aligns her own 'hearing'

with that of 'the gods'. After first accusing Dolabella baldly of lying, Cleopatra's reply becomes more nuanced:

But if there be nor ever were one such,
It's past the size of dreaming. Nature wants stuff
To vie strange forms with fancy; yet t' imagine
An Antony were nature's piece against fancy,
Condemning shadows quite.

(5.2.95–9)

The first line of the passage cited is confusing, because it suggests that Cleopatra has become infected, if only for a moment, with Dolabella's doubt. She does not say simply 'there is' or 'was' 'one such', namely, such as Antony; instead, she introduces an 'if'. 'But' also implies that she is going to qualify her immediately prior accusation, 'You lie', by granting it some degree of truth. Her doubt, however, is not complete. The use of 'be' as well as 'were' in the protasis, combined with the use of present tense in the apodosis (elided 'is' in 'It's') makes it unclear whether the conditional is counterfactual. 'Nor' implies a negative assertion, but is not confirmed in this case by any negative correlative such as 'nor' or 'neither'.

Cleopatra defends her 'dream' of Antony by arguing that the possibility that the idealised, all-powerful version of Antony that she has just attempted to describe might in fact exist exceeds the scope of the limited human imagination. 'It's past the size of dreaming.' She says, in effect, much as Enobarbus says of her, 'for [his] person, it beggar[s] all description'. Nature lacks ('wants') the wherewithal ('stuff') to compete with 'fancy' in the elaboration of 'strange forms'. 'Yet' if it 'were' possible, then 't' imagine / An Antony' would be 'nature's piece', that is, its '[master]piece', in its competition with 'fancy'. Cleopatra's past subjunctive ('were') implies that the conditional at the core of her dream is counterfactual: if the imagination ('fancy') could produce an image of Antony representative enough of Antony to be called 'an Antony', then imagination itself, as part of 'nature', a faculty of the human mind, would surpass itself, 'condemning quite' its other, more chimerical products, such as 'dreams', in comparison as merely thin, insubstantial imitations ('shadows'). In other words, Cleopatra in her response to Dolabella does not forgo so much as double down on her hyperbole, inserting a wedge of apophasis between

her description and its object. Dolabella is right to say that ‘such a man’ never existed, but for the wrong reasons; Cleopatra’s dream of Antony as a kind of ‘colossus’, considered self-consciously as a speech-act, is not exaggerated, as she sees it, but inadequate. Antony was even grander, she claims, than ‘fancy’ itself can compass.

Other examples of the two lovers’ conception of themselves as larger than life are easier to grasp. Antony repeatedly compares himself to Hercules; Cleopatra compares him to Mars, as well. Caesar reports that Cleopatra appears frequently ‘in the public eye’ in Alexandria ‘in th’habiliments of the goddess Isis’ (3.6.17), and that Antony accompanies her in the style of an Eastern magnate, much to the disgust of the people of Rome, whom Caesar describes as ‘queasy with his insolence’. ‘Here’s the manner of’t’ (3.6.2), Caesar explains. ‘I’t’h market-place, on a tribunal silvered, / Cleopatra and himself in chairs of gold / Were publicly enthroned’ (3.6.3–5). In this guise as king, Antony gave Cleopatra ‘the stablishment of Egypt’, and also proclaimed her ‘Absolute Queen’ of ‘lower Syria, Cyprus, Lydia’ (3.6.9–11). Ironically, Octavian, as the later Augustus Caesar, went on in history to hold almost precisely the same kind of power whose display he disparages here. Like Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar, however, pushing away a crown, the historical Augustus was much more careful than Antony is in Egypt to avoid the obvious trappings of authoritarianism. He styled himself *princeps*, for example, rather than *rex*. Antony and Cleopatra are caught up in a ‘dream’ of themselves as deities in the much more open, Egyptian tradition of the Pharaoh, the God-King.⁶⁴

Several forces recur throughout the play as threats to the protagonists’ grandiose sense of themselves. The most obvious such opponent is Octavian. Others, however, are more abstract: time, old age, ‘Fortune’, ‘destiny’. In Virgil’s *Aeneid*, the rise of Augustus and the fate of Aeneas seem so inextricably intertwined that it can be difficult at times to distinguish one from the other. So also here, each of these forces, including Octavian, can be understood as an analogue for any other. Collectively, they represent objective reality itself, encroaching upon a cherished, unsustainable subjective alternative: the world ‘as if’, in which the subject has the power, if only in ‘fancy’, to dismiss such concerns. What Antony and Cleopatra are trying to escape, in a word, is what Heidegger would call our ‘thrownness’ (*Geworfenheit*). They rebel against

the shared facticity of fact, in favour of the malleability of their own private fantasies.

In Egypt, Antony and Cleopatra enjoy fabled, apparently unlimited wealth: 'eight wild boars roasted whole at a breakfast, and but twelve persons there' (2.2.189–90). It makes sense, therefore, that Shakespeare would turn to time, rather than money, as his example of a limiting factor. Time is a resource of which even the wealthiest and most powerful have only a finite supply. Most obviously, time appears in the lovers' age, as they themselves at times acknowledge: Antony's 'head' is 'grizzled' (3.13.17); Cleopatra is 'wrinkled deep in time' (1.5.30), her 'salad days' behind her (1.5.76). Flush with the thrill of victory, Antony prefers, nonetheless, to minimise their manifest years. Cleopatra, he calls 'girl' (4.8.19), an incongruous form of address. He himself, he boasts, 'is able to get goal for goal of youth', 'Though grey / Do something mingle with our younger brown' (4.8.20–2).

The other sense in which time figures as an antagonist is more subtle. Time, it turns out, is not infinitely tractable.⁶⁵ Instead, time appears in *Antony and Cleopatra* as what an economist might call a fixed or illiquid asset, prone to depreciation. The author of Ecclesiastes writes, 'To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven' (3:1). So also in Shakespeare's tragedy, particular moments seem to be designated, as if objectively, to certain set purposes, which the protagonists ignore at their peril. The most obvious instance of such negligence is Antony's flight from the Battle of Actium. Not only did he turn away, Scarus complains, but he fled 'i'th' midst o'th' fight / When vantage like a pair of twins appeared / Both as the same – or, rather, ours the elder' (3.10.11–13). The problem of opportunity or 'vantage' is not limited to Antony and Cleopatra: the pirate Menas abandons Pompey's service, precisely because he is not willing to seize an opportune moment to secure his power. 'For this,' Menas vows, 'I'll never follow thy pall'd fortunes more. / Who seeks, and will not take when once 'tis offer'd, / Shall never find it more' (2.7.82–5).

Arthur Bell sees 'the relentless tempo of time and "the times"' as a 'standard' or 'norm' by which 'Antony's degeneration' can be 'measured and explained', a standard which he argues Shakespeare derives most immediately from his chief source, Plutarch's 'Life of Marcus Antonius'. In North's version, Plutarch writes that

Antony 'spent and lost in childish sports . . . and idle pastimes the most precious thing a man can spend, as Antiphon saith: and that is, time'.⁶⁶ Shakespeare, Bell argues, 'preserved the same sense of time's relentless surge as the inexorable condition confronting all his characters'.⁶⁷ David Kaula argues that 'the world of the play is generally dominated by a heightened sense of temporal change', and that 'major characters' such as Antony, Cleopatra and Caesar 'may be distinguished' in part by their 'sharply differing responses to this condition'.⁶⁸ Later in the play, as their rivalry comes to a head, Antony marvels at Caesar's efficiency in execution. 'Is it not strange,' he says, 'He could so quickly cut the Ionian sea, / And take in Tornyne?' (3.7.20-3). Canidius agrees: 'This speed of Caesar's / Carries beyond belief' (3.7.74-5). Cleopatra upbraids Antony for his relative delay: 'Celerity is never more admired / Than by the negligent' (3.7.24-5). What Antony acknowledges as his 'slackness' (3.7.27), however, is as much her fault as his. When she joins Antony on the battlefield, Enobarbus is distraught; her distracting his commander at such a juncture, even though it has already been happening, in a less obvious sense, from the very beginning of the play, seems to him preposterous. 'Your presence needs must puzzle Antony; / Take from his heart, take from his brain, from's time, / What should not then be spared' (3.7.10-12).

For Cleopatra, whom Antony calls 'idleness itself' (1.3.94), time is an enemy: an empty space which she tries, often in vain, to while away with amusements such as fishing, billiards, and listening to Mardian sing, and which she would most prefer to fill with Antony's company. Antony himself, by contrast, is torn between competing impulses. 'Struck' by a 'Roman thought' (1.2.88), he recognises early on that 'the strong necessity of time commands / Our services a while' (1.3.43-4). More often, however, he is unwilling to sacrifice time at play with Cleopatra in order to attend to affairs of state.

For the love of Love and her soft hours
 Let's not confound the time with conference harsh.
 There's not a minute of our lives should stretch
 Without some pleasure now. What sport tonight?

(1.1.45-9)

These same 'soft hours' Antony will describe as 'poison'd' later, back in Rome, when he is confronted with the consequences of

his negligence (2.2.96). In Alexandria, however, pleasure replaces business, just as night replaces day. In Rome, recollecting his time in Egypt, Enobarbus brags, 'we did sleep day out of countenance, and made the night light with drinking' (2.2.187–8). Caesar, however, is not impressed: Antony, he complains, 'wastes / The lamps of the night in revel' (1.4.4–5).

The last and most mysterious force that opposes Antony and Cleopatra is 'Fortune' or 'destiny'. The difference between these two concepts is not stressed; instead, the salient point is that they both represent a world that is to some extent fixed or 'given'. The self is not the only locus of authority and agency; vital outcomes depend, instead, on an unassailable, immutable and external power, akin to that of divine providence. Cleopatra rails against 'the false huswife Fortune' (5.15.26), seeing that she favours 'the full-fortuned Caesar' (5.15.25). Since his success depends on 'Fortune', however, 'Tis paltry to be Caesar' (5.2.2). 'Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave, / A minister of her will' (5.2.3–4). What is glorious is to be autonomous, self-sufficient. In contrast to what she represents as Caesar's passive reliance on chance, her suicide, Cleopatra argues, will be all the more grand. To commit suicide is, as she sees it, to escape all such ignoble dependence.

And it is great
To do that thing that ends all other deeds,
Which shackles accidents and bolts up change,
Which sleeps and never palates more the dung,
The beggar's nurse and Caesar.

(5.2.4–8)

Cleopatra's language here recalls that of Hamlet, as well as, especially, Duke Vincentio in *Measure for Measure*. To 'exist', the Duke tells Angelo, is not 'noble', because it means to be dependent on 'many a thousand grains that issue out of dust' (3.1.20–1). Embodiment itself impinges upon a prized *autarkeia*. This understanding of suicide as an escape from what Cassius calls 'accidental evils', and Hamlet, 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune', seems to be characteristic of aristocratic culture at its most extreme. The sense of death as annihilation more easily possible in pagan culture allows Cleopatra to imagine, as Hamlet and Claudio find they cannot, death as a 'sleep' untroubled by 'dreams'.⁶⁹ To die, for

her, seems simply to become immune to all further influence from without: death guarantees invulnerability.

Antony's relationship with 'Fortune' is not so much a full-throated and indignant protest at its humiliations, as in the case of Cleopatra, as it is a self-conscious, uneasy denial of its force. A soothsayer tells Antony that Caesar's 'fortunes' will 'rise higher' (2.3.15) than his, and, after dismissing the man, Antony confesses that he 'hath spoken true' (2.3.32). 'The very dice obey him; / And in our sports my better cunning faints / Under his chance: if we draw lots, he speeds' (2.3.32-4). Caesar has luck on his side: his fighting cocks beat Antony's, as well as his quails. Before the Battle of Actium, swallows build their nests in Cleopatra's sails, a poor omen: 'the augurers / Say they know not, they cannot tell; look grimly, / And dare not speak their knowledge' (4.12.4-6). Antony himself alternates between 'hope' and 'fear' (4.12.8); he knows too well, on account of these signs, that he cannot defeat Caesar, yet he repeatedly convinces himself that somehow, nonetheless, he has a fighting chance.

At Cleopatra's court, the kind of destiny or 'Fortune' that so haunts Antony seems, by contrast, to be scarcely understood. After wine is served, itself a symbol of a flight from objective reality, Charmian gives her hand to a 'soothsayer', evidently a palm-reader, and makes an odd request. 'Good sir, give me a good fortune' (1.2.14-15). The verb 'give' here is a false note. 'I make not,' the soothsayer protests, 'but foresee' (1.2.16). Charmian is undaunted: 'Pray then, foresee me one' (1.2.17). She misunderstands the fortune-teller's art; he himself is not the author of the future he discerns. 'In nature's infinite book of secrecy,' he explains, 'a little I can read' (1.2.10-11). Alexas, a Greek lord, is more respectful: 'Vex not his prescience!' (1.2.22). The word 'prescience' suggests knowledge, certainty (Latin, *scientia*, knowledge); Alexas implies thereby that he accepts the fortune-teller's own understanding of 'fortune' or 'destiny' as an external structure of reality, rather than his own creation. Charmian, however, remains dismissive: 'Hush!' (1.2.23).

The palm-reader's prophecies do in fact all come true, even those which Charmian finds objectionable. The riddling manner in which he presents his predictions is in keeping, however, with the ambiguous nature of reality itself, considered as an object of perception. For example, the soothsayer tells Charmian, 'You have

seen and proved a fairer former fortune / Than that which is to approach' (1.2.35–6). These words do indeed prove prophetic: Charmian dies young in a barren monument. Charmian herself, however, takes the enigmatic epigram more lightly, as a suggestion that she will give birth to bastards. 'Then belike my children will have no names' (1.2.37–8). Or, for example, the soothsayer predicts that Charmian will be 'far fairer' (1.2.18) than she already is. He means, with the pallor of death; Charmian, however, takes it as a prognostication of middle-aged embonpoint. 'He means in flesh' (1.2.19). Iras disagrees: 'No, you shall paint when you are old' (1.2.20). Like Charmian, Iras takes the soothsayer's warning in jest. Shakespeare, however, does not. In contrast to Cleopatra's chambermaids, Shakespeare seems to accept here the premise that the future is to some degree fixed without irony or doubt. Even Enobarbus' mocking imitation of an oracular pronouncement proves reliable. When Menas suggests that Antony's marriage to Octavia will lead to peace between him and Octavian, Enobarbus dismisses the notion. 'If I were bound to divine of this unity, I would not prophecy so' (2.6.118–19).

Shakespeare's point in this case seems to be that reality has its own objective, independent existence, including the reality of future events. The world exists outside the mind, following its own separate course. Nevertheless, reality does not command or enforce upon the observer any single, reliable interpretation of its own nature. It can be recognised, but it can also be denied. More specifically, Shakespeare sees individual human recognition of the truth, including especially, the truth about the self, as something that is worked out in the context of relationships with other human beings. We establish what we accept as true through conversations with other people. Conversely, we prevent ourselves from being obliged to acknowledge unpleasant realities by avoiding interaction with other people who bring those facts to our attention: snubbing them, shunning them, banishing them; even at times killing them outright.⁷⁰

To present recognition of the truth as a process grounded in social interaction is not the same, however, as presenting truth itself as a social construct. From Shakespeare's perspective, there is something out there to be discerned, regardless of any given society's or individual's ability or willingness to do so. Objective reality exists, independent even of humanity itself. Truth is not a

human invention or fiction; it is what a phenomenologist such as Jean-Luc Marion would call a 'given', literally, a *datum* (Latin, 'given').⁷¹ Given the long shadow of Virgil's *Aeneid*, with its sad sense of inevitability, it is perhaps only fitting that in this particular tragedy, *Antony and Cleopatra*, the Roman play closest to the *Aeneid* in its subject matter, the truth in its nature as 'given' or objective 'data' is represented by a Virgilian sense of impersonal, occasionally cruel 'destiny'. Cleopatra's chambermaids do not understand it; for them, the world is a product of will, and the only question is whose: their own or someone else's. Cleopatra herself tries to escape it by the desperate expedient of suicide, seeing it as a gross indignity to be acted upon, rather than agent. Antony tries to pretend he does not sense its hold over him. Caesar, however, finds it a consolation. When Octavia becomes distraught, hearing of Antony's infidelity, he counsels her simply to accept it as a fact. 'Let determined things to destiny / Hold unbewail'd their way' (3.6.86–7).

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the role of other people as vehicles of truth is represented by two types of characters: for future events, 'soothsayers' or 'augurers'; for past events or present facts, 'messengers'.⁷² For the most part, these characters are not named; in a play about the relationship between character and misperception, their very anonymity serves as an index of their relative reliability. They have no strongly distinct personality, and no proportionate propensity, therefore, towards what Bacon calls the 'Idols of the Cave'. They present instead an idealised one-to-one correspondence with the external world. How Antony, Cleopatra and Octavian respond to these characters reveals much, therefore, about their more general relationship to the world at large: specifically, the extent to which they each choose to live in a state of denial.

In light of Shakespeare's notorious predilection for puns, it is useful to distinguish in this case between two possible interpretations of the term itself, 'soothsayer', which he uses to describe the Egyptian equivalent of a Roman augur or haruspex. To be a 'soothsayer' is to be a kind of prophet, like Tiresias or Cassandra; one might say less grandly, a fortune-teller. To be a soothsayer in this sense, however, is not to be a 'soothsayer' in another. More commonly in Shakespeare, 'to soothe' means 'to flatter'. A 'soother' in this case is a yes-man, a toady, a flattering courtier. For example, in 1 *Henry IV*, Hotspur boasts, 'By heaven, I cannot

flatter: I defy / The tongues of soothers' (4.1.6–7). In *Richard III*, Margaret warns Buckingham not to 'soothe the devil' (1.3.298), meaning Richard. Richard himself, wooing Anne, protests disingenuously, 'I never could learn sweet soothing words' (1.2.156); one might compare this outrageous self-misrepresentation to his later, equally misleading description of himself as a 'plain man' (1.3.45). 'I cannot flatter and look fair,' he claims: 'Smile in men's faces, smooth, deceive, and cog' (1.3.46–7). In *Richard II*, Richard complains to Aumerle of the humiliation of having to utter 'words of sooth' (3.3.137): the 'gentle words' and 'kind commends' (3.3.127) that he finds himself obliged to convey to the newly victorious Bolingbroke.⁷³

The word itself, 'soothe', can be traced back to the Middle English verb *soðien*, 'to confirm, verify, affirm as true', itself derived from the adjective *soth*, 'true'. In the Renaissance, the word comes to mean something more precise, as well as perilously close to the opposite of this older sense. 'To soothe' in Shakespeare's language means not simply 'to affirm' but instead more specifically, 'to flatter or humor with feigned agreement; to placate or propitiate by means of disingenuous assent'. To soothe, in other words, means to tell someone that what he or she is saying is true, even though – and here is the Renaissance addition – one knows full well it is false. Soothing is the opposite of 'giving the lie'. It is this kind of 'soothsaying', a 'truth-saying' which ironically is anything but, that Cleopatra's attendant Charmian seems to hope for from Alexas' 'soothsayer', not, as she receives instead, any kind of earnest prophecy. She wants the same type of flattery that her mistress, Cleopatra, seems to crave from her, and, like Cleopatra, she is only disappointed when she is presented with its opposite.

For instance, Cleopatra asks Charmian at one point if her former love for Caesar was ever the equal of her present love for Antony. Cleopatra expects a certain answer: no, of course not; Antony is the obviously the better man. Charmian, however, seizes the opportunity to make fun of her, instead. 'O that brave Caesar!' (1.5.70) she cries, imitating Cleopatra's characteristic hyperbole, and thereby deflating its present application to a different man. 'Be choked with such another emphasis!' (1.5.71). Cleopatra replies. 'Say, the brave Antony' (1.5.72). But Charmian persists. 'The valiant Caesar!' (1.5.72). 'By Isis,' Cleopatra replies, 'I will give thee bloody teeth, / If thou with Caesar paragon again / My man of men' (1.5.73–5).

Swearing by Isis, Cleopatra evokes her understanding of herself as a goddess; it is this view of herself as an ideal, superhuman entity that Charmian's mockery endangers. Cleopatra's reciprocal threats to silence Charmian are also typical: a comical version of the much more serious threats and even physical violence that she brings to bear against the unfortunate messenger who brings her the news that Antony has married Octavia. As throughout, Cleopatra's characteristic method for dealing with an unpleasant truth is to deny it, either by dissociation, up to and including suicide, or by, as the saying is, 'shooting the messenger'. She prefers an echo-chamber of compliant courtiers to an accurate assessment of the world outside.

As often in Shakespeare's plays, the first scene is a microcosm of what is to come. A messenger arrives with 'news' for Antony 'from Rome' (1.1.18). Cleopatra interrupts the emissary, however, before he can present even 'the sum' of his message, taunting Antony mercilessly (1.1.19). 'Nay, hear them, Antony' (1.1.20), she insists, mocking him. 'Call in the messengers!' (1.1.30). Then again: 'The messengers!' (1.1.33). And again: 'Hear the ambassadors!' (1.1.49). From Cleopatra's perspective, to be concerned enough about the external world to interrupt a moment of pleasure is a shameful sign of dependence; a failure of autonomy, like a pet responding to a tug at a leash. Stung by her sarcasm, Antony finally sends the messenger away unheard. 'Speak not to us' (1.1.56), he says. 'No messenger but thine' (1.1.53), he reassures Cleopatra, will he deign to receive. Caesar rebukes him for such a rebuff later: 'You / Did pocket up my letters, and with taunts / Did gibe my missive out of audience' (2.2.77-9).

Eventually, however, Antony changes course. 'A Roman thought hath struck him' (1.2.88), Cleopatra complains, and true to her description, Antony enters almost immediately afterwards deep in conversation with a second messenger, plying the man with requests for further details. 'Well, what worst?' (1.2.100) he asks. The messenger balks. 'The nature of bad news infects the teller' (1.2.101), he protests, and with reason, given the kind of reaction to such news we see later from Cleopatra. Antony, however, scoffs at the objection. 'When it concerns the fool or coward. On!' (1.2.102). Much in contrast to Cleopatra, Antony claims, at least, that he prefers truth to flattery. 'Things that are past are done with me' (1.2.103), he says. That is to say, he accepts the independent

reality of time; past events are a given, over which he grants that he has no sway or mastery.

Antony even actively solicits criticism of his own behavior, as well as Cleopatra's. 'Speak to me home; mince not the general tongue: / Name Cleopatra as she is call'd in Rome' (1.2.111-2). He asks his attendants to call in a second messenger: 'From Sicyon how the news? Speak there!' (1.2.119). 'He stays upon your will' (1.2.121), the attendant replies; to which Antony, 'Let him appear' (1.2.121). Such lines might seem superfluous, but they have a symbolic significance. Shakespeare here as elsewhere is trying to express an observation about human perception: recognition of external fact depends upon the internal assent of the 'will.' Antony's attitude towards messengers goes back and forth; sometimes he welcomes them, sometimes he tosses them out without a hearing. Caesar and Cleopatra, by contrast, present consistent, characteristic, diametrically opposed reactions to the messengers they each receive. In the scene in which Caesar first appears, for instance, a messenger arrives and informs him that his 'biddings' have been done: 'every hour', he reassures him, Caesar will receive 'report / how 'tis abroad' (1.4.34-5). As if in confirmation, another messenger arrives only moments later, bringing him news of Pompey's progress.

Lepidus for his part admires and strives to emulate Octavian's obvious command of information. In the same scene, he reassures Caesar that, the next day, he will be 'furnish'd to inform [him] rightly' (1.4.77) what he can offer in terms of troops, and asks him, moreover, to let him be 'partaker' of anything new that he might learn 'meantime' of what 'stirs abroad' (1.2.82-4). Lepidus is no match for his supposed ally, however, in ruthless engagement with reality. Later, when Octavia comes to Caesar to complain about his falling-out with her new husband, Antony, Caesar explains that her husband has been unfaithful to her and reveals that he maintains spies as well as messengers in his service. 'I have eyes upon him,' he says, meaning, Antony, 'and his affairs come to me on the wind' (3.6.63-4).

The contrast with Cleopatra could scarcely be more clear-cut. She uses messengers almost solely to keep tabs on Antony, and even then is very reluctant to hear anything that does not serve to confirm her hold over him. 'How goes it with my brave Mark Antony?' (1.5.40) she asks Alexas, ignoring all other questions of

world affairs. Fortunately for him, he brings back a token of Antony's continuing affection: an 'orient pearl' (1.5.43). Later on, an anonymous Egyptian servant does not fare so well. He brings word that Antony has married Octavia, and this news comes as a sharp blow to Cleopatra's hopes. How she reacts to this shock reveals much about her willingness to acknowledge a reality over which she does not reign as absolute mistress. In a surprisingly long scene, about a hundred lines, in a play where some scenes barely make it to a dozen, Cleopatra oscillates rapidly between promising the man rich rewards such as 'gold' (2.5.28, 31), 'a shower of gold' (2.5.45), 'rich pearls' (2.5.46) and even a 'province' (2.5.68), if he tells her what she wants to hear, that is, if he lies, recanting his tidings of Antony's marriage, and threatening him with horrifying torture if he persists instead in telling the truth, ranging in kind from the relatively straightforward (gouging out his eyes [2.5.63-4], ripping out his hair [2.5.64]), to the more inventive (pouring molten gold down his throat [2.5.32-4], whipping him with wires [2.5.65], stewing him in brine [2.5.65]). She strikes him herself, then draws a knife to stab him, at which point he takes to his heels; Cleopatra's maidservants are only with much ado able at last to bring him back before her. 'Should I lie, madam?' (2.5.93) he asks, bewildered. Her reply is telling: 'Oh, I would thou didst!' (2.5.93).

Such long interchanges between Cleopatra and her messenger are not idle by-play, but instead should be understood as revealing indications of Cleopatra's more general relationship to the world outside herself. She is extremely reluctant to acknowledge any aspect of external reality as a 'given' a priori, independent of her desires, and therefore manipulates those around her, through her considerable powers of reward and punishment, into becoming collaborators, whether they like it or not, in elaborate and mutually sustained processes of denial. She surrounds herself with what psychoanalysts would call 'enablers': 'yes-men' and 'yes-women' such as Mardian, Charmian and Iras. By far Cleopatra's preferred method for fortifying her delusions, however, is to see them reflected and confirmed in the subjectivity of some other, more independent individual, a lover, who in this case serves as a kind of flattering mirror. Even one such man, a Caesar or an Antony grand enough to overtop all others, can seem sufficient to validate her own grandiose self-image. Given her superabundance of personal charms, as well as her relative lack of military might, it

is much easier for Cleopatra to cultivate the self-abasement of one such renowned general than to exact tribute more directly from the world at large.

Nor is the deal altogether one-sided. Antony for his part is able to find in Cleopatra a welcome respite from the gruelling hardship involved in securing his part of the Empire: fighting Parthians with his lieutenant Ventidius out in the borderlands to the east, or else eating bark and 'strange flesh' (1.4.68) in Alpine passes, as he flees from his own countrymen. Having won Cleopatra's affections provides Antony an easier, more immediate validation of himself as a world-bestrident conqueror than the toil and slog of such thankless, risky and unpleasant military campaigns. Cleopatra's status as a celebrated prize makes her seem sufficient as a substitute for a larger, more hostile world. 'Fall not a tear,' he says, comforting her: 'one of them rates / All that is won and lost' (3.11.69–70). This tear, worth all, Antony says, that he has lost at Actium, is one of several symbols of what he describes in the first scene of the play as 'new heaven, new earth' (1.1.17): the private world of the two lovers, which they hope to recover in the afterlife. The final representation of this shared, self-enclosed subjective space is the tomb-like 'monument' which serves as the setting for the play's final scenes: a less-solitary version of Hamlet's solipsistic 'nutshell' (2.2.254). The tomb is a symbol of their final, immortal grandeur as figures of the imagination: the kind of 'marble' or 'gilded monument' which Shakespeare emulates and aims to exceed in his sonnets.⁷⁴ As a symbol of a retreat into 'fancy', however, the monument is also a kind of prison, cutting them off from the world outside. Withdrawal from the world which began as voluntary becomes in the end involuntary.

Another example of this separate world 'as if' is the 'orient pearl' which Alexas delivers to Cleopatra from Antony as a gift upon his departure. Antony calls it 'the treasure of an oyster' (1.5.46), and bestows upon it, before handing it over, 'many doubled kisses' (1.5.42). To call the pearl that Antony sends to Cleopatra 'orient' casts it most immediately as a symbol of a place, the Orient: 'the East', as Antony also calls it. 'I th' East my pleasure lies' (2.4.39). Yet this place, the 'orient', is itself a symbol of a more imaginary, immaterial locale: the virtual reality, so to speak, Antony shares with Cleopatra. 'Here is my space' (1.1.35), Antony proclaims, embracing her: the pearl represents the referent of that exuberant,

indefinite 'here'. To call it 'the treasure of an oyster' calls to mind Erasmus' 'Silenus box': Antony's and Cleopatra's shared subjective 'space' looks one way from the outside, another from within.⁷⁵ The adjective 'doubled', applied here to Antony's kisses, suggests not only the degree of his affection, but also the sense in which he depends upon Cleopatra as a 'double', and she upon him. They 'double' each other like reflections in a mirror, reflecting back in each case the other that the other most wants to see.

Shakespeare's most charming representation of the two lovers' 'space', self-enclosed like that of a pearl in an oyster, is the scene the morning before the second battle outside Alexandria, when Cleopatra helps Antony don his armour. The scene is a Shakespearean interpolation, and rich in a significance that shades over into outright allegory. It may seem strange to speak of this scene as representative of Antony's and Cleopatra's private reality, when technically speaking there is another character there, too, Antony's attendant, Eros. Eros, however, can be understood in this case as an allegorical representation of love itself (Greek, *erōs*, 'romantic love'). Shakespeare finds the character's name in Plutarch, but he also makes the most of his material. 'Eros! Mine armor, Eros!' Antony repeatedly cries (4.4.1, 3). It is the same literary device, a symbolic apostrophe to a personified influence, which Shakespeare uses in *Macbeth*, when he shows Macbeth in like manner crying out repeatedly for his manservant 'Seyton' (sc. the homophone 'Satan') to come help him arm himself for battle.⁷⁶

But to return to the scene: Eros helps Antony arm for battle, with the help of Cleopatra, and both prove inept at their task. This clumsiness foreshadows the more abstract truth that love does not, in the end, prove as apt a defence from external reality as lovers themselves might wish. 'Eros' is Antony's 'armor': the juxtaposition in his apostrophe, repeated for emphasis, confirms the symbolism. Like Eros himself, however, that armour will prove fallible. When Cleopatra comes to help Eros arm Antony, Antony at first tries to prevent her. 'Ah, let be, let be!' he tells her. 'Thou art / The armor of my heart. False, false!' (4.4.6–7). Antony ostensibly draws a distinction between the two armourers, Eros and Cleopatra, but instead ironically flags a similarity: a complex analogy between the literal, physical stage business, his transformation into what Cleopatra calls 'a man of steel' (4.5.34), and the psychological effects of his overwhelming investment in Cleopatra's

approbation, to the exclusion of a more prudent, more general concern for the approval of others. Cleopatra protects his sense of himself as a grand, godlike figure, his 'heart', from being subject to anyone else's opinion but her own; when he gives himself over to his love for her, he feels as if he were invulnerable. He is safe from scorn or defeat within the shelter of their comforting *folie à deux*; each partner protects the other's delusions of grandeur from outside attack, in the manner of a suit of armour. Ultimately, however, this armour proves 'false, false'.

A lover's admiration may be reassuring, may even seem an impenetrable shield, but it is not in the end an adequate defence on its own against what Hamlet calls 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune'. Like Coriolanus with his mother or actors with an audience, Antony is vulnerable to unexpected disapproval, even outright betrayal; much more vulnerable than he realises. Exposure to the possibility of shame is not so much eliminated altogether as concentrated in a single, highly fraught relationship. Thus Antony's unmitigated distress at the thought that Cleopatra has betrayed him, as well as hers when she finds out that he has married Octavia. The more that Antony succumbs to the allure of the *folie à deux*, the more insulated he becomes from the workaday humiliations of the outside world. The more at the mercy, however, he becomes, as well, of the other partner in question. His feeling of invincibility comes, paradoxically, at a steep cost in actual emotional sovereignty.

Notes

1. Cf. Waith, *The Herculean Hero*.
2. Plutarch gives more details: 'Antonius, he forsooke the citie and companie of his frendes, and built him a house in the sea, by the Ile of Pharos, upon certaine forced mountes which he caused to be cast into the sea, and dwelt there, as a man that banished him selfe from all mens companie: saying that he would lead Timons life.' Cf. Plutarch, 'Life of Marcus Antonius', 304. Shakespeare takes up the story of this kind of literal, physical retreat from society in his own *Timon of Athens*, instead.
3. Nuttall, *New Mimesis*, 116.
4. Whittington, *Renaissance Suppliants*.
5. For more on the concept of acting 'as if', see Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of 'As If'*. Vaihinger's 'fictionalism', itself in part derived from

Jeremy Bentham's earlier *Theory of Fictions*, strongly influenced Adler's concept of a 'fictional final goal', as well as Frank Kermode's discussion of narrative in his *Sense of an Ending*. A useful overview of Vaihinger and his influence is Fine, 'Fictionalism'. See also Ogden, ed., *Bentham's Theory of Fictions*.

6. Gill, *Personality*, 15, 9.
7. Thomas Pfau, *Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 1.
8. Gill, *Personality*, 7, 9.
9. *Ibid.*, 15–16.
10. Pfau, *Minding the Modern*, 14, 575.
11. *Ibid.*, 578.
12. Notebook entry of October 1820; cited in Pfau, *Minding the Modern*, 557.
13. Pfau, *Minding the Modern*, 573.
14. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Opus Maximum*, ed. Thomas McFarland and Nick Halmi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 127; cited in Pfau, *Minding the Modern*, 573.
15. Coleridge, *Opus Maximum*, 74–5; cited in Pfau, *Minding the Modern*, 602.
16. Gill, *Structured Self*, xxi.
17. A. A. Long, *Stoic Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 266; cited in Bartsch, *Mirror of the Self*, 250, and Langley, *Narcissism and Suicide*, 148.
18. Bartsch, *Mirror of the Self*, 1, 236.
19. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), 187; cited in Bartsch, *Mirror of the Self*, 137.
20. Andrew J. E. Bell, 'Cicero and the Spectacle of Power', 8, *Journal of Roman Studies* 87 (1997): 1–22; cited in Bartsch, *Mirror of the Self*, 137.
21. Bartsch, *Mirror of the Self*, 138.
22. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 201–2; cited in Bartsch, *Mirror of the Self*, 137.
23. Sen. *Tranq.* 17.1; cited in Bartsch, *Mirror of the Self*, 225, as well as Langley, *Narcissism and Suicide*, 149.
24. Carlin Barton, *Roman Honor: The Fire in the Bones* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 120; cited in Bartsch, *Mirror of the Self*, 225 n. 115.
25. Bartsch, *Mirror of the Self*, 229, 244–5.
26. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker*, 193.
27. Langley, *Suicide and Narcissism*, 148.

28. Berlin, *Roots of Romanticism*, 20, 114, 119.
29. Ibid., 14, 117.
30. Cantor, *Shakespeare's Roman Trilogy*, 101.
31. Berlin, *Roots of Romanticism*, 89.
32. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: Dent, 1982; 1st edition 1911), 193; cited in Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker*, 193.
33. Peter Holbrook, *Shakespeare's Individualism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 12–13; cited in Strier, *The Unrepentant Renaissance*, 98 n. 2.
34. Patrick Gray, 'Seduced by Romanticism'.
35. Berlin, *Roots of Romanticism*, 145.
36. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker*, 193–4.
37. Braden, 'Plutarch, Shakespeare, and the Alpha Males', 192.
38. Plutarch, 'The Life of Marcus Brutus', 120, in Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources*, 90–132.
39. Braden, 'Fame, Eternity, and Shakespeare's Romans', 37–55. For Cantor's response to this essay, see Cantor, *Shakespeare's Roman Trilogy*, 46, 77, 184.
40. Plutarch, 'Life of Marcus Brutus', 40.4–5. Cf. Amyot, which except for the tense of the word *vivray* (future) remains truer to the Greek. 'Car je donnay aux Ides de mars ma vie à mon païs, pour laquelle j'en vivray une autre libre et glorieuse.' Plutarch, *Les Vies*, 166–7.
41. Montaigne, 'A Custom of the Island of Cea', 253, in Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Frame, 251–61.
42. August. *De civ. D.* 1.24.
43. Ibid., 1.22.
44. Montaigne, 'A Custom of the Island of Cea', 254.
45. Ibid., 255–6.
46. Plutarch, 'The Life of Marcus Brutus', 119–20.
47. M. W. MacCallum, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and Their Background* (London: St. Martin's, 1967), 185; cited in Braden, 'Alpha Males', 192.
48. Cf. Cantor, *Shakespeare's Roman Trilogy*, 49, on Brutus and Cassius as 'political men who profess apolitical philosophies'.
49. See Monsarrat, *Light from the Porch*, 139–44, in which Monsarrat disagrees most immediately with Vawter, 'Division 'tween our Souls'. Monsarrat also cites J. C. Maxwell, 'Brutus's Philosophy', *Notes and Queries*, n.s., 17 (1970): 128, and M. Sacharoff, 'Suicide and Brutus' Philosophy in *Julius Caesar*', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 33 (1972): 115–22. See also Fleissner, 'That Philosophy in *Julius Caesar* Again'.
50. Miles, *Constant Romans*, 126; cf. 4 n. 8.

51. On Shakespeare's reception of Senecan tragedy, see Patrick Gray, 'Shakespeare vs. Seneca'.
52. Plutarch, 'Against the Stoics on Common Conceptions', 1063a, in Plutarch, *Moralia*, vol. 13, part 2.
53. Seneca, *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales*, 71.16–20.
54. Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 2:73–84; cited in Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy*, 20.
55. Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 78–9.
56. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker*, 195–6.
57. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1.233.
58. All references to Samuel Daniel's *Cleopatra* are taken from Daniel, *The Tragedy of Cleopatra (1599 Edition)*, 406–52, in Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources*, vol. 9.
59. For a sense of the reputation of this faculty in the Renaissance, as well as its classical sources, see Cocking, *Imagination*, as well as Rossky, 'Imagination in the English Renaissance'.
60. Eliot, 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca', 110–11.
61. For a complementary reading of these two speeches, see Sugimura, 'Two Concepts of Reality in *Antony in Cleopatra*', 82 ff. Citing similar readings by Charles Martindale and A. D. Nuttall, Sugimura compares them to St Anselm's argument for the existence of God.
62. Barton, "'Nature's piece 'gainst fancy'", 54.
63. Plutarch, 'The Life of Marcus Antonius', 274, in Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources*, 254–318.
64. See, for example, Plutarch's interesting essay, 'On Isis and Osiris', in his *Moralia*, as well as the passage in his 'Life of Marcus Antonius' about Antony being greeted as the god Dionysius. 'In the citie of Epheusus, women attyred as they goe in the feastes and sacrifice of Bacchus, came out to meete him with such solemnities and ceremonies, as are then used: with men and children disguised like Fawnes and Satyres. Moreover, the citie was full of Ivey, and . . . in their songes they called him Bacchus', and so on: Plutarch, 'Life of Marcus Antonius', 272; cf. 291. Shakespeare replaces Dionysus with Hercules, but retains the basic conceit of Antony and especially, Cleopatra, styling themselves as gods.
65. Janet Adelman argues, by contrast, that time as a 'measurable and inescapable quantity' is merely 'Roman time', which Antony and Cleopatra are in the end able to escape through suicide. 'In their deaths, the lovers escape from time itself.' See Adelman, *Common Liar*, 151–4. I discuss problems with this conclusion in more detail in the conclusion to this part, 'The Last Interpellation'. Briefly put, the 'gap of time' in which Adelman claims Cleopatra 'exists', 'the

hyperbolic time of which Cleopatra is mistress', may not be as infinite in duration as Cleopatra imagines.

66. *Shakespeare's Plutarch*, ed. T. J. B. Spencer (London: Harmondsworth, 1964), 203; cited in Bell, 'Time and Convention', 255 n. 8.
67. Bell, 'Time and Convention', 255.
68. Kaula, 'Time Sense', 215.
69. See Watson, *The Rest is Silence*.
70. See Patrick Gray, 'Shakespeare versus Aristotle'.
71. See Marion, *Being Given*.
72. For a contrary reading of the messengers as extensions of the play's principal characters, see Heffner, 'The Messengers'. For contrary readings of the messengers as an index of the difficulty of attaining certain knowledge of objective reality, see Macdonald, 'Playing till Doomday: Interpreting *Antony and Cleopatra*', and Adelman, *Common Liar*, 34–9.
73. See also, for example, *Comedy of Errors*, 'Is't good to soothe him in these contraries?' (4.4.82) and *Venus and Adonis*, 'Soothing the humor of fantastic wits' (850).
74. Cf. Sonnet 55: 'Neither marble nor gilded monuments / Of princes', and so on.
75. See Erasmus, 'The Sileni of Alcibiades', in *The Adages of Erasmus*, trans. Margaret Mann Phillips, 245 ff.
76. Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, 4.4 *passim*; cf. Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 5.3 *passim*, but esp. 33: 'Give me mine armour.'