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CHAPTER

10 'Greatness going off' in Renaissance Antony and Cleopatra Tragedies

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Abstract

The suicides of Antony and Cleopatra afforded the Renaissance dramatist various angles on what Shakespeare called 'Greatness going off'. Renaissance Antony and Cleopatra tragedies in France and England pointedly thematised how the great failed to preserve the dignity of their rank and office in life, and how they fell short of securing personal posthumous renown in death. Antony and his Egyptian queen found themselves unexpectedly upstaged by social inferiors. Renaissance tragedians noted the irony of Antony's incompetent imitation of his slave, Eros, who took his own life rather than his master's in a 'most noble acte' of disobedience (Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke). Cleopatra's death, meanwhile, is unceremoniously delayed by a rebel 'serf', her treasurer (Etienne Jodelle); it is then facilitated by a garrulous 'clown' and a pair of loyal maids, one of whom almost beats the queen out of 'this vile world' (Shakespeare). The incongruities are manifest: what is *said* about Antony's magnanimity, or Cleopatra's alluring charms, is noticeably at odds with what is *shown* of their remorse, clumsiness, even physical debility, as they struggle to prevent their greatness going off. Culturally, Renaissance Antony and Cleopatra tragedies were in tune with the political–religious crises of their day; but they also sounded deeper notes of an aristocracy in slow decline.

Keywords: [greatness](#), [tragedies](#), [Antony](#), [Cleopatra](#), [Shakespeare](#), [Garnier](#), [Jodelle](#), [Pembroke](#), [Daniel](#), [dignity](#), [vile](#)

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See High order in this great solemnity.¹

IN THE FINAL scene of Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*, Octavian Caesar demands that 'a pair so famous' are laid to rest with all the pomp and circumstance that their greatness demands. And yet, by this point, the spectator is likely to be more than a little perplexed. How can the lives of a manifestly lascivious, self-loathing rebel and his capricious Egyptian queen truly merit the solemn respect of all Rome? Furthermore, one might ask, what do Caesar's laudatory intentions communicate about the perennial early modern preoccupation with living and dying well? And if Caesar is misguided, how exactly *should* Antony and Cleopatra be remembered?² In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, these questions aroused considerable interest on both sides of the Channel and across Europe. Numerous plays about Antony and Cleopatra came into existence, each refashioning the tragic story of these ill-fated lovers. Through a

comparison of five versions of the tragedy, I shall interrogate its significance as a representation of greatness – that equivocal obsession of the social and political elites across Renaissance Europe.

p. 202 My interpretation of Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra* (first published 1623, but probably performed as early as 1606) will be informed by four other tragedies that preceded it.³ I shall examine two notable French versions: that of Etienne Jodelle (1552–3; published 1574) and that of Robert Garnier (1578; revised 1585). In the sixteenth century, these two plays were appreciable as drama ↵ to be read or declaimed; moreover, stage performances of both plays have been attested.⁴ I shall set the works of Jodelle, Garnier, and Shakespeare in dialogue with two lesser-known English closet dramas: that of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke⁵ (1592; reprinted 1595) and that of Samuel Daniel (1594; revised 1607).⁶ The Antony and Cleopatra tragedies of Jodelle, Garnier, Pembroke, Daniel, and Shakespeare cover a range of dramatic forms and formats. Their emergence is a story of transcultural reception, encompassing public and private performance, domestic recitation, and printed editions. But within that wider story of diversity we discover compelling points of intersection. The play-texts of these five works enable us to constellate a number of perspectives – and staging difficulties – around a particular problem of greatness. Shakespeare succinctly captured it as 'greatness going off' (*Anthony and Cleopatra*, IV.xiv, 6): a notion of debasement harking back to Plutarch's *Lives*.

p. 203 Across the Renaissance world, greatness could mean many things. My approach will be oriented by what it meant to be great in the context of Anglo-French thinking about social hierarchy. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, a period that instantiated profound social reorganisation across Europe, both France and England witnessed a surge in attempts to stratify society ↵ according to fine-grained notions of rank or standing (*état, degree, order, sort*, among other labels commonly used).⁷ Within the numerous treatises propounding an overarching vision of the social edifice we find a calibration of degrees of 'dignity' (*dignitas*) among the nobility, 'the better sort' or 'les grands'.⁸ Socially speaking, their degree of dignity, the measure of their greatness, was to be judged in accordance with the quality of their bloodline, their lordship over property, and their exercise of public office. Yet these factors alone were not enough: nearly all commentators insisted that the great could only preserve their dignity through honourable conduct commensurate with the demands of their rank and office. Maintaining a firm grip on one's dignity was by no means a foregone conclusion: Christian morality warned of all humanity's penchant for vice, from the lowliest to the greatest. When urging the nobility or royalty not to let moral standards slip, commentators frequently drew upon historical examples illustrating the precariousness of greatness. In this regard, Plutarch's *Lives*,⁹ available in Greek, Latin, and the vernacular, provided an irresistible subject from Roman history: the sensuous warrior-statesman Mark Antony whose dalliances with the voluptuous Cleopatra made civil war the price of personal pleasure.¹⁰

p. 204 Renaissance Antony and Cleopatra tragedies repeatedly ask: how far can one maintain great status without dignity? And conversely: how can those of humble status act 'nobly'? In response to these questions, a comparative analysis of our five plays reveals numerous incidents where rank and dignity are manifestly misaligned. Such misalignment, I shall argue, was nonetheless productive in a wider cultural sense. It afforded an unusually close focus on historical individuals who could inspire challenging, present-oriented reflection on the evils of luxury, on the dangers of civil war, and, more broadly, on what and who was truly noble.¹¹ In the tragic ↵ genre, this process of cultural critique came about through echoes of the earlier, vulgar narratives about Antony and Cleopatra found in Plutarch – narratives which were simultaneously finding outlets in more unruly forms of Renaissance popular culture. Even where it aspired to a neoclassical elitism, tragedy could not adequately address the problem of greatness without an active contribution from 'baser sorts'. Commoners and servants, we shall see, play a vital role in Renaissance tragedians' questioning of what made Antony and Cleopatra great – right up to their deaths.

Much of what Plutarch said about the lives of Mark Antony and Cleopatra was quietly omitted from Renaissance tragedies based on his work. And yet, large sections of the commonly excluded material tell a colourful story of youthful indiscretion that deserves a second look. Though the tragedian may not have cared for such incidents (or even deliberately sought to avoid them), other early modern readers of Plutarch reacted very differently. One such reader was Simon Goulart (1543–1628) whose knowledge of the *Lives* had few equals. A Calvinist theologian and pastor, as well as a tireless editor of texts ancient and modern, Goulart brought out a French version of the *Lives* in 1583 based on Jacques Amyot's vernacular translation.¹² Goulart wanted to use Ancient philosophers in the service of a Calvinist humanism aimed particularly at statesmen.¹³ His augmented version reached a wide readership across Europe, through no less than 17 editions in the period 1583–1620.¹⁴

An outspoken moralist, Goulart had no hesitation in supplementing Amyot's translation of Plutarch's text with his own laconic and often severe commentary. On Antony, Goulart certainly did not pull his punches. He views Antony's youth as the first instalment of a 'vie immonde' ('filthy life') anticipating a 'deshonneste mort' ('dishonourable death'). Antony came from noble stock, particularly on his mother's side (she was of the house of Caesar). As a young man, we learn, Antony inherited his father's commendable generosity, and showed great military potential (fol. 598r). But a juvenile propensity for seeking out bad company, combined with a flaring temper, meant that his public image was always questionable. An astringent marginal comment (fol. 598r) makes a didactic overture to socially elite readers:

Mais c'est chose indigne en tous, et encores plus es hommes de qualité d'estre maquereaux et rufiens, aussi tels vices sont les sources de tous malheurs tesmoin ce qui avint finalement à Antonius.

Yet it is an indignity for all ranks, and all the more so for men of the better sort, to behave as pimps and ruffians; such vices are the sources of all ills, as we witness in what eventually befell Antonius.

For Goulart, Antony was a quintessential example of a highborn, aspiring leader who from the outset of his career showed a constant weakness in matters of sexual conduct. Read in this way, the seductive Cleopatra was not the start of Antony's debasement but rather the consummation of it – 'le comble de tous ses maux' (fol. 604r). Goulart is in no doubt that the Egyptian queen was nought but a whore (even though his source text allows for a more positive consideration of her supreme self-confidence, charm, and gracefulness). At no point are we given the impression that the Antony–Cleopatra partnership was one of stainless noble affections. Antony, lest we forget, was at this stage on his third wife, the irascible and rebellious Fulvia; after divorcing her he would enter a fourth marriage to the irreproachable, long-suffering Octavia, a union which also ended in divorce on account of his on-off relations with Cleopatra.

When they had returned to Egypt, Antony, we learn, began to invite Cleopatra to join him in his nightly routine of ale-house roistering – an invitation she readily accepted. Thinly disguised as a 'valet' ('domestic servant') and 'chambriere' ('chambermaid'), the amorous pair would visit the haunts of 'petites gens mechaniques' ('the meanest sort'), where the rough merriment often came to blows. The local Alexandrians allegedly took it all in good spirit, amused as they were by Antony's play-acting abilities: they got to enjoy his comic side whereas to his fellow Romans he showed only his austere side. Harmless, even endearing fun and games that allow readers to empathise with Antony and Cleopatra as lovers?¹⁵ Not for Goulart. When the great despise their own dignity, he sententiously averred, there is no tomfoolery, no filthy pastime to which they will not stoop, to make fools laugh and wise men weep (fol. 604v). Such warnings should not be instantly dismissed as heavy-handed moralising. In Goulart's view, those who have the most to lose, socially speaking, are those who are most likely to descend into irreversible patterns of self-humiliation, the moment they start behaving beneath their social status. For Goulart, Antony's early affections for Cleopatra clearly presaged this danger, and are thus vital to the reader's understanding of his deeply ignominious end; one which, in overtly theatrical language (fol. 619r), Goulart will signal as the catastrophe of a 'tragique et malheureuse vie' ('tragic and ill-fortuned life').

Of Renaissance Antony and Cleopatra plays, only the Shakespearean version extracts further dramatic potential from this tragicomic backstory. With its hyperbolic language, fluid geographical displacements and ambitious dramatic time-span, *Anthony and Cleopatra* forms a marked counterpoint to the neoclassical restraint of earlier French and English versions of the play. Moreover, as is well known, Shakespeare got

plenty of mileage from Thomas North's 1579 English translation of Plutarch's *Lives*. So it is unsurprising that Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra* interpolates base material from the Plutarchian back-stories largely shunned by his contemporaries. From the outset Shakespeare uses socially inflected dichotomies to have his audience observe how the great *triumvir* is being 'transformed /Into a strumpet's fool' (I.i, 12–13). Sure enough, we are soon presented with a reluctant statesman who derives 'the nobleness of life' in whatever mutual (and often carnal) pleasure he can enjoy with Cleopatra. The Shakespearean Antony is one who wears his Roman titles lightly when he is far removed from Rome. He readily exploits opportunities to pass with anonymity, relishing the opportunity to accompany Cleopatra on a new nightly wander through the streets of Alexandria where they can both observe the 'qualities of the people' and mingle with the common crowds (I.i, 55–6).

In Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*, the lovers' lowly sport is no mere frivolity; it has become an obsession. Antony seeks ever more extreme ways of testing how every passion makes itself 'fair and admired' in his lover (though interestingly, much of this is reported rather than directly enacted onstage). Enobarbus explains why Antony can never tear himself from the Egyptian queen: she is a woman of 'infinite variety'¹⁶ such that even 'the vilest things /Become themselves in her' (II.ii, 241–6). Enobarbus's judgement will be tested on multiple levels as the play unfolds. In due course, the ever-changing queen, facing political defeats and suicide, will be tasked with dignifying much more demeaning vileness than perfecting Antony's love of cheap pastimes, be they fishing, or drinking with 'knaves that smell of sweat' (I.iv, 1–21), or bedroom cross-dressing (II.v, 20–3). It is no small irony that when all is lost, the prospect of renewed contact with the lowborn – this time the 'Mechanic slaves' of Rome – strikes Cleopatra as a fate more humiliating than death. What, after all, could be baser than ending her days listening to her 'Alexandrian revels' retold in extemporised street songs performed by 'Saucy lictors' and 'quick comedians' (V.ii, 214–18)?

p. 207 In the course of *Anthony and Cleopatra*, undignified recreation shifts from a mutually satisfying mingling of the highborn with the lowborn, to a form of grotesque play-acting that would gratify only the commoner. Cleopatra's fond reminiscence of counterfeiting gender roles is transformed into a distinct threat – 'I shall see /Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness /I' th' posture of a ♀ whore' (V.ii, 219–21).¹⁷ Distorted souvenirs of Plutarch become part of a forward-projecting ploy – one that, à la Goulart, spies the catastrophe in the early warning signs of indecorous sports. Renewed evocations of baseness are an indispensable irony in Shakespeare's version, where the power mimetically to renew Cleopatra's humiliation would appropriate her infinite variety among the meanest sorts as a paradoxical reflection of Caesar's immortality.¹⁸

'How? Not dead?' Antony's Botched Assisted Suicide

O que c'est une chose vile
Sentant son courage imbécile,
Qu'au besoin ne pouvoir mourir!¹⁹

How abject him, how base think I,
Who wanting courage can not dye
When need him therto calleth?²⁰

So speaks the chorus midway through the Garnier tragedy, and in its English translation by Pembroke.²¹ A servile fear of death is deemed an unthinkable prospect for the distraught Antony and his unfortunate queen facing down their defeat at Actium (31 BC); instead the chorus eagerly anticipates how their yearning for death may yet rob a victorious Caesar of his triumph. Thus Garnier and Pembroke challenge their audiences to consider whether death – and specifically *these* deaths – can provide the means for restoring the greatness of Antony and his Egyptian queen; and if not, could the lovers at least prepare to die with honour and thereby avoid a posthumous reputation for vileness and shame? Faced with a double suicide that posed considerable dramatic and staging difficulties,²² late Renaissance tragedians saw an opportunity to question, and even counteract, a wider neo-Stoic preoccupation with 'noble' deaths that afforded the ultimate liberation from tyranny.

From the ancient records, the scope for transforming Antony's passing into a fully ennobling death was limited. Plutarch's account speaks of the progressive isolation of a once-great general, fast running out of

honourable ways to die. Shakespeare's remorseful traitor, Enobarbus, interrupts this demise, recognising
 ↳ in Antony's pardon a friend 'Nobler than my revolt is infamous' (*Anthony and Cleopatra*, IV.x, 19).²³ For Eugene Waith this generosity suggests that Antony *does* recover a degree of his erstwhile greatness: a personal heroism rather than heroic achievement despite – or perhaps because of – circumstantial adversity over which he has no control.²⁴ However, as Jonathan Dollimore has argued, heroism of a public figure such as Antony can never be entirely personal.²⁵ Nowhere is Antony able to demonstrate much more in the way of living proofs to Enobarbus's claim.

Arguably the critical missed opportunity was the duel declined by Octavian Caesar: a final chance for Antony to set the military record straight by facing his adversary directly. Caesar, as those who knew their Plutarch would have recalled, briskly rejected the challenge (*Life of Antony*, LXXV) – and in so doing, turned a promising heroic show-down into a deeply insulting put-down. Garnier, Pembroke, and Shakespeare each noted this humiliation. In the Garnier and Pembroke versions, Antony fulminates against fortune and the gods for taunting him thus: that Caesar, 'un homme effeminé de corps et de courage', 'a woman both in might and mind', should have denied a grey-haired warrior one last opportunity to prove his mettle (*Marc Antoine*, III, 1048–69; *Antonius*, III, 1059–80). Richard Hillman foregrounds the wider anxieties about age, manliness, and fate triggered by this incident, to which I would add revilement in a socio-cultural sense. In Garnier, Caesar behaves 'vilainement': an adverb suggesting scorn. As such, Caesar's conduct is tantamount to that of an ignoble *vilain* (peasant) and thus unworthy of martial honour befitting those of noble rank. Turning to Shakespeare, and Caesar responds with a socially inflected taunt to match: 'old ruffian' (IV.i, 4). In the late Renaissance lexicography of John Florio and Randle Cotgrave, *ruffian* (a cognate of *villain*) suggested shades of lowborn bawdiness in either sex.²⁶ Hence, Antony's indecorous backstory returns to haunt him, with echoes of his youthful exploits among pimps and ruffians (cf. Goulart, *Les Vies des hommes illustres*, fol. 598r, 619v). Now an old ruffian, Antony will never attain personal greatness on the battlefield commensurate with the status of 'emperor' frequently ascribed to him by his followers. Though in the Shakespearean play he may still stumble on, and even hold out valiantly for a time, as in all other versions, there can be no overturning Caesar by the sword.

p. 209 In the three main interpretations of Antony's death (Shakespeare, Pembroke, Garnier), suicide emerges as Antony's only remaining option to prevent a servile surrender to Caesar. In the Garnier play, Antony's hopes are lodged high: in quasireligious tones he endeavours to take his own life as atonement ('expier') for his sins, thus washing away the dishonour of his long-standing infatuation with the Egyptian queen (*Marc Antoine*, III, 1234–41).²⁷ The theological naivety of Antony's sudden piety would not be lost on the likes of Garnier, whose notion of suicide approximated to the criminal act of *homicide de soy-mesme* (*self-homicide*, or *felo-de-se*), for which, traditionally, the church gave no quarter.²⁸ Furthermore, the underlying Plutarchian intertext militated against a swift realisation of such high-minded ideals. Plutarch's *Life of Antony* (LXXVI–VII) related in copious detail the protracted manner in which Antony finally expired. After valedictory oaths to the supposedly departed Cleopatra, and following the suicide of his slave Eros, Antony effected an unsuccessful attempt on his own life. Then, we are told, he received news of Cleopatra's non-death, whereupon his wounded body was taken to her place of refuge (a monument) and hauled in through an upper window; having still survived this lacerating entry, he then held death at bay long enough to recognise his queen, stop her wringing laments, and issue her with instructions about preserving herself and his memory with dignity.

Such a prolonged passing would not straightforwardly transfer in its entirety to any form of theatrical representation. We find elements of it enacted onstage in Shakespeare, and sections of it reported to the audience in the Garnier and Pembroke versions, suggesting doubts as to what – and how – the symbolic values of Antony's death should be ascribed. Faced with the prospect of a staging a technically demanding suicide, Garnier and Pembroke opted for a discursive solution: a messenger (Dircet /Dircetus) who appears in Act IV to narrate the disaster in Senecan fashion, thick with gory disfigurement. Thus we are to imagine the
 ↳ direful scene: Eros flatly refusing to fulfil his obligation to kill his master, instead plunging his sword into his own breast, and then collapsing in a blood-spurting, soul-spewing heap. When it comes to Antony, both tragedians are in agreement that gushing fountains of his blood should freely flow – but his life remain – as soon as he has had his turn with the sword (*Marc Antoine*, IV, 1606–9; *Antonius*, IV, 1623–6). Nonetheless, Pembroke makes a much more conscious effort to accentuate the contrasting volumes of gore between master and servant. The net effect of this contrast is to accentuate the irony of Antony's flamboyant but incompetent imitation of Eros's quieter, efficient, and 'most noble acte' of disobedience. Antony's lack of courage and failed self-killing falls well short of these standards. Instead he is reduced to the ignominy of 'extreame wretchednes' brought on by 'lingr'ing death' that none can or will hasten

(*Antonius*, IV, 1634–5). Debased to a ‘life–dead’ corpse encrusted with blood, the Antony of the Pembroke play does not survive its final ordeal, its laborious ‘pull’d’ entry into the monument to the accompaniment of a weeping populace below. Though all of this comes in the form of an off–stage report, the Senecan combination of blood and bombast still make for an intense theatre of affect, in which onstage characters and their audience beyond become immersed.²⁹

Shakespeare’s rendering of Antony’s end is markedly different in tone and staging. He is far less preoccupied with gushing blood, and much more focused on the enacted exchanges between Antony and Eros. It is only when the last traces of his power are erased that Antony finally reneges on his convictions of heroic omnipotence. Antony realises that he is not a ‘man of steel’ or a ‘firm Roman’, but experiences his dishonour in what Dollimore calls extreme dissolution:³⁰ ‘Eros, now thy captain is /Even such a body: here I am Anthony, /Yet cannot hold this visible shape’ (IV.xv, 12–14). Amplifying Plutarch’s laconic mention of Eros’s inability to fulfil his master’s death wish, Shakespeare spins out a tense dialogue in which Antony exhibits increasing frustration at his slave’s holding back (*Anthony and Cleopatra*, IV.xv, 55–94). We see that no amount of persuasion, nor even the prospect of witnessing his master humiliated before Caesar in triumphal procession, will sway Eros to fulfil his grim duty. This is a far cry from the decisive Eros of the Garnier and Pembroke tragedies, who instantly slays himself; instead, in a manner that could be construed as almost comic,³¹ the Shakespearean slave puts off his suicide for as long as he possibly can with flattering farewells, and a slow drawing of his sword which he will not use until given a direct martial order (‘Now, Eros’).

p. 211 This combination of Eros procrastinating and then suddenly stabbing himself affords Shakespeare a critical opportunity to distance his action from classical models of heroic suicide. Though Antony’s subsequent actions result in a drawn–out mutilating of his body, redolent of Cato (it is sometimes argued),³² the net outcome amounts to a botched assisted suicide. Eros has refused the role of compliant assistant, unlike, say, the doctors who eventually ended Seneca’s life.³³ Antony is twice undone, firstly by his failure to anticipate Eros’s insubordination, and secondly, by his failure to imitate Eros’s death as he falls on his sword. The anti–climax is remarkable. The subject’s almost speechless surprise and dismay at his failure to die (‘How? Not dead? Not dead?’) is then compounded further: three guards and another comrade (Dercetas) arrive, each refusing to heed their master’s feeble pleas to finish him off.³⁴ The dramatic impasse ends only upon the arrival of yet another comrade, Dolabella, bringing news that Cleopatra still lives: and so the irony of unassisted death shifts gear once more, with a still–sentient Antony transported aloft into Cleopatra’s monument for the lovers’ final parting. Extracting every last ounce of drama from this scene, Shakespeare has Cleopatra shoulder the physical burden of winching Antony into her mausoleum – ‘sport indeed!’, she tersely comments (IV.xvi, 34). No other Renaissance tragedian would attempt such a spectacle, and many have since have balked at the sizeable technical challenge it necessitates.³⁵

p. 212 Grinding to a dolorous conclusion, the passing of Antony in late Renaissance tragedies keeps calling into question what status each of its key players has achieved. Recognition of ‘noble’ dignity is constantly displaced, from Antony to Eros (Pembroke and Garnier), and from Eros back to Antony, when the latter is hailed by Cleopatra as the ‘noblest of men’ by his ‘former fortunes’ (Shakespeare). ↪ Mutilation notwithstanding, the Renaissance Antony may still claim, as in Plutarch, that he does not ‘basely die’ in submission to his chief Roman rival (*Anthony and Cleopatra*, IV.xvi, 55–7). But in return, his immediate legacy is to bequeath an abject corpse quite literally on his lover’s shoulders, and a bloody sword to Caesar that speaks ambivalently of ‘taints and honours’ (V.i, 30).

What, then, of Cleopatra, all the while holed up inside her Alexandrian monument? Her spirited demise is the focal point of the tragedies of Etienne Jodelle, Samuel Daniel, and Shakespeare. Not that this struggle made her eventual death any less ambivalent. Her celebrated suicide by snake bite had long been enveloped in delicious mystery, since so little forensic proof could be adduced. Daniel and Shakespeare supplied the missing links such as they could be recovered from Plutarch’s inconclusive account: an unlikely agent, a poor ‘countryman’ (Daniel) or garrulous ‘clown’ (Shakespeare), smuggling a beguiling, aspic-laden basket of figs past the guards;³⁶ and a pair of loyal maids, one of whom (Charmian) survives to confirm the deed, but almost (in Shakespeare) beats the queen out of ‘this vile world’ (*Anthony and Cleopatra*, V.ii, 310–12). This instrumentalisation of various subordinates and ‘baser sorts’ justified a degree of artistic leeway in which Renaissance dramatists could offset rank and dignity in the build-up to the queen’s end. Representing Cleopatra’s death as a noble act was no straightforward process, not least because the Egyptian queen had to overcome several obstacles just before she died that might rob her of a dignified, regal departure – and with it, a posthumous reputation for greatness.

The first obstacle was enforced captivity: Caesar’s intention for the Egyptian queen. The Cleopatra of Renaissance tragedy has no intention of exploring what, at least in Plutarch, was voiced by the dying Antony as a living possibility: that by remaining alive she had the chance to consult her own safety without disgrace (*Life of Antony*, LXXVII). Ongoing life under Caesar is simply unthinkable for a queen who, as Shakespeare explains, cannot see past the social humiliation of Caesar’s gloating triumph, Octavia’s chastising sober eye, and the shouting varletry of censuring Rome (*Anthony and Cleopatra*, V.ii, 53–7). Here Shakespeare touched upon what would emerge elsewhere as a deeper philosophical quandary. As Brian Cummings has shown, Renaissance suicidal argument only appears on the surface to be one about self-murder, because the real subject is even more painful ↵ and troubling.³⁷ What it is to die conceals the underlying question: what it is to live, especially when one is prevented from dying.³⁸

For Cleopatra, life must end; but the final moments of life are just as important as death itself. She still has to answer legendary accusations of lasciviousness and betrayal.³⁹ In most versions of the tragedy, the audience has been cued to sympathise, at least partially, with images of a faithless seductress who ostentatiously accepts full responsibility for corrupting, then betraying, and even ‘murdering’ Antony by deceitful enticements (as per Jodelle’s version). Everything thus hinges on the prospect of Cleopatra restoring honour – her own and Antony’s – by orchestrating and seeing through to completion a death ceremony that befits them both. This is tantamount to attempting what Mary Ellen Lamb has called a ‘heroics of constancy’,⁴⁰ by which Cleopatra will adopt the posture of faithful, loving ‘wife’,⁴¹ against the pleas of various confidantes who counsel her to remain alive for the greater good. Pembroke’s version neatly splits audience sympathy between Cleopatra, the self-styled ‘wife kindhearted’, and the ‘hardhearted mother’ perceived instead by Charmian (*Antonius*, III, 563). Through tense, stichomythic exchanges between the queen and her maidservants, we see that the flipside of Cleopatra’s heroic constancy is a stubborn, even chilling refusal to live on in the interests of her children and country.

These quandaries notwithstanding, there is a more immediate obstacle: the queen must face Caesar before making any attempt on her life. Several Renaissance tragedians seized upon this opportunity to switch off Cleopatra’s regal composure: facing her overlord, the Egyptian monarch unleashes raw affective responses that can only unsettle the spectator. These sudden outbursts are particularly marked in the Jodelle, Daniel, and Shakespeare plays. In each play, Cleopatra’s dignity transmutes into a savage resistance towards her conqueror and to any who would seemingly assist him.

Particularly striking is Jodelle’s early rendering of this theme.⁴² His 1552 play *Cléopâtre captive* attests to a keenness for images of physical robustness ↵ and defilement that complement the plaintive and ‘rauque’ (‘hoarse’) voice of the queen preparing for suicide. Jodelle is noticeably coy about Cleopatra’s suffering that has entailed the loss of her ‘blancheur pompeuse’ (‘haughty whiteness’) and ‘beau teint’ (‘beauteous complexion’): hints, therefore, at the loss of racialised European ideals of beauty inflected by neoclassical aesthetics that elsewhere eroticised Cleopatra even to the point of death.⁴³ Physically, the heroine of *Cléopâtre captive* is a far cry from her later, alabaster-faced counterparts in Garnier’s *Marc Antoine* and Pembroke’s *Antonius*. Instead, Jodelle stages a half-dead queen confronting Caesar (*Cléopâtre captive*, III, 882–3), with ‘deux mammelles ... maigres et déchirées’ (‘two ... withered and lacerated breasts’). The vile side of Cleopatra’s demise comes to the fore, as related in Plutarch:⁴⁴ a story of Caesar’s struggle to restrain

the queen from destroying herself and her enormous treasure, replete with degrading incidents some of which will recur in the Shakespeare and Daniel versions.

Daniel wrote his *Tragedie of Cleopatra* as a companion piece to Pembroke's *Antonius*.⁴⁵ Daniel's play picked up the story at the point where Pembroke, his patroness, had left it: the final hours of the Egyptian queen's life. In some respects, Daniel is retracing ground already covered by Jodelle and (perhaps) by Shakespeare.⁴⁶ But what follows is far from a straightforward rewriting of either. Instead, Daniel's intersecting plot-lines unfold different forms of debasement, corruption, and villainy, through which the total destruction of Egypt becomes an ever more imminent reality. In Daniel's play, none come off with great glory, whilst the grievous shortcomings of Cleopatra's staff – Philostratus the court philosopher, Rodon the royal tutor, and Seleucus the treasurer – become an integral feature.

p. 215 Across the Daniel, Shakespeare, and Jodelle tragedies, one of the most salient features is the celebrated 'Seleucus episode' in which treasurer and queen are at odds over the latter's declaration of her wealth to Caesar.⁴⁷ Much has been said about this scene (particularly its appearance in Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*), where some have seen it as a put-up job designed to distract Caesar from Cleopatra's suicide; or alternatively (in Daniel's version) the latest in a series of queenly impostures.⁴⁸ Across the three versions, Cleopatra is not, however, a villain, even if Seleucus is more evenly portrayed that way. Minor differences between the treasurers may be still observed: in Jodelle's *Cléopâtre captive*, Seleucus gives a wordy disavowal of his monarch's good faith (III, 989–1011); Daniel's Seleucus is much more of a minimalist, chipping in briefly that 'some things she hath reservd apart' (*Tragedie of Cleopatra*, III.ii, fol. 22v); somewhere in between is Shakespeare's embarrassed Seleucus, who would rather not affirm that which he knows to be false (*Anthony and Cleopatra*, V.ii, 140–8). All three versions agree on Cleopatra's angry reaction; but the intensity of her anger varies considerably. Daniel's queen is highly affronted:

What? Vile ungratefull wretch durst thou controwle
Thy queene, and soveraigne, caytiffe as thou art?

(*Tragedie of Cleopatra*, III.ii, fol. 22v)

Shakespeare's blushing Cleopatra goes much further, flying into an ungovernable rage:

The ingratitude of this Seleucus does
Even make me wild ...
Go back, I warrant thee, but I'll catch thine eyes
Though they had wings! Slave, soulless villain, dog,
O rarely base!

(*Anthony and Cleopatra*, V.ii, 153–8)

'Slave', 'villain', 'dog' – in Shakespeare, these terms are frequently instruments of heavy hitting verbal abuse;⁴⁹ but here they also expose Cleopatra's hyperbolic inflation of her own status, and her desperation to remain in a self-delusional state of control. Hence her violent outburst, with more than a whiff of Jodelle:

Ah ! Faux meurtrier! Ah! Faux traître! Arraché
Sera le poil de ta tête cruelle.
Que plût aux Dieux que ce fût ta cervelle!
Tiens, traître, tiens.

(*Cléopâtre captive*, III, 1012–15)

p. 216 Ah! False murderer! False traitor!
I'll tear your hair from your cruel head.
I wish to the Gods that I could grab your brains!
Take that, you traitor, and that!

In *Cléopâtre captive*, we see Cleopatra's most disturbing display of womanly violence in a sustained assault. In both Shakespeare and Daniel, Caesar immediately intervenes to protect Seleucus from the raging Cleopatra. In Jodelle, however, Caesar appears at first taken aback by Cleopatra's unleashed fury (1016), eliciting the terrified plea of Seleucus for him to restrain the queen who starts on him again (1019–29). This unusual three-way exchange does not, however, remain a 'woman-on-top' situation for long. Caesar duly

intervenes with a mocking sneer at Cleopatra's 'grinçant courage' ('gnashing courage') and a belittling commonplace about unparalleled female wrath (very much in the Plutarchian idiom, where he openly laughs at her anger). In the Renaissance, queens who attacked a government minister or member of the court laid their dignity on the line; a discreet recovery was virtually impossible.⁵⁰ Jodelle insinuates as much, through Caesar's snide remark that the female assailant has abruptly curtailed her assault (1027–8). One might say, with Hillman, that this brief flare-up is not a clumsy lapse of neoclassical decorum but a daring metadramatic effect. By temporarily stepping outside of convention, Jodelle throws Cleopatra's 'performance' into relief precisely as such; tragic decorum is violated in the cause of dramatic irony.⁵¹

And socio-political irony too. Jodelle and his later English counterparts all accentuate the augmenting and the diminishing that make up the fealty dynamics of the Seleucus episode. Seleucus has manifestly broken rank by questioning his queen's declaration to Caesar. This treasonous betrayal by a 'vassal subject' (Daniel), 'villain' (Shakespeare), and, most notably 'slave'/'serf' (Jodelle) has to be exposed, lest Caesar be misled that Seleucus's word carries a regal authorisation. (Ironically it does in Shakespeare, when Cleopatra enjoins Seleucus to address Caesar (V.ii, 142–4), unaware that her treasurer will immediately betray her.) Jodelle provides the most expansive exploration of these ironies. In *Cléopâtre captive*, the audience already expects the 'serf' to act basely before he speaks. Immediately preceding Seleucus's controversial disclosure, the chorus has remarked that tyrants all too easily extract servile confessions from their captives (III, 967–78). Seleucus is almost an exception to this rule in that no tyrannical pressure is required. In Jodelle (and later again in Daniel), he models a kind of *servitude volontaire* – a voluntary acceptance of tyranny with an ulterior pursuit of promotion in the new Octavian regime. Even after Seleucus's ambitions have purchased nothing but his vilification and eternal shame, the ironic social disparities have not run their course. Caesar elects to continue the Egyptian queen's captivity in the utmost prosperity (*Cléopâtre captive*, III, 1050). Given the taunting comments that preceded his decision in Jodelle's version, one cannot but notice the cruel restoration of hierarchy that undermines Caesar's apparent generosity. Cleopatra's reward is to be kept alive, haggard, subjugated – and rich. Now the consummate vassal-monarch, Cleopatra's treasure remains in her own hands – as does, moreover, the means and opportunity for staging her own lavish queenly death-bed scene. And so the ironies of order are again inverted, with Cleopatra suddenly empowered to die on a gilded 'riche lit' ('sumptuous couch').

Shakespeare is fully attentive to the symbolic ambivalence of this moment. At the climax of the drama (*Anthony and Cleopatra*, V.ii), the monument's opulent interior would have probably occupied the entire globe stage, enabling, as Michael Neill observes, an exceptionally powerful connection between the bravura of Cleopatra's performance and the monumentalising power of the dramatist's own art.⁵² It is a feast for the spectator's eyes and imagination. With subtle hints of Plutarch, and of the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper and the Crucifixion, Cleopatra dresses for her 'noble act' of death by donning her robe and crown. 'Immortal longings' for Antony make her spurn a final cup of 'Egypt's grape' (V.ii, 277–81).

An otherworldly manifestation of greatness? Or another theologically naïve affectation, paralleling that of Garnier's Antony? Goulart would have said the latter, pointing with disdain to the lavish meal Cleopatra reportedly ate before poisoning herself with a concealed serpent: a metaphor for her 'poisonous' lifestyle and the divine judgement it incurred (*Les Vies des hommes illustres*, fol. 621r). Shakespeare's audience may not have judged her this severely, since the final banquet is all but omitted from *Anthony and Cleopatra*; but at the mention of the Egypt's grape, a savvy Jacobean theatre-goer might have thought back to her filling bowls on a final 'gaudy night' with Antony (III.xiii, 183–4). Indeed, going beyond Shakespeare's direct allusions, other feasts from her past might have sprung to mind, with even less propitious connotations.⁵³ By the early 1600s, Cleopatra's legendary pearl banquet, first told in Pliny, was becoming a stock motif of travel literature, and of City comedies. These regularly invoked the banquet to portray disgust with and desire for profligate consumption in late Renaissance England.⁵⁴ Wherever Cleopatra appears, notes Alison Scott, the Egyptian queen is inherently theatrical – capable of *luxuria*'s illusory and enchanting arts, and dangerous in her attractions right up to her death.⁵⁵ Seen in this light, Cleopatra's opulent death preparations are perhaps the ultimate illusion: the *sine qua non* of greatness veering off course, recalling the dubious enticements of those who 'trade in love' (*Anthony and Cleopatra*, II.v, 2) – from Egypt to Venice, where latter-day Cleopatras ply their overpriced trade to hapless Antonies bound for the debtors' prison.⁵⁶

Again and again, we are forced into dilemmas of judgement: between what is *said* about Antony's magnanimity, Cleopatra's alluring charms, or Caesar's tyranny, and what is *shown* of their remorse, clumsiness, even physical debility, as they struggle to embody true greatness commensurate with their elevated rank.⁵⁷ This struggle foregrounds an uncomfortable transcultural theme in the Renaissance:

vileness is the lurking shadow behind any claims to greatness, dignity, and valour among the highborn. It is a modern critical commonplace to assert that tragedy transcends moralism; but does it always have to? Pre-modern drama affords intriguing interpretative possibilities when we consider it working *with* rather than against the ethical grain. As such, Renaissance Antony and Cleopatra tragedies continually remind us of one of Goulart's lessons: a noble or ruler who shows repeated signs of debasement makes a mockery of the social concept of dignity by degrees. Hence, the prospect of salvaging personal honour, even through an exemplary death, is put to a searing test.

Spectacles of greatness under duress place peculiar demands upon the spectator's tolerance of ceremonial display among the highborn. After so many protracted valedictions, Shakespeare was wise to let his public go with the thought of 'high order', rather than play on, and risk turning the solemn, state burial of Antony and Cleopatra into a painful anti-climax. Lengthy funeral rituals with their litany of ostentatious displays were by no means to every Renaissance spectator's taste. In the words of Florio, translating Montaigne: 'Happie is that death, which takes all leasure from the preparations of such an equipage.'⁵⁸

Notes

- 1 Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Anthony and Cleopatra*, V.ii, 363–4. All quotations are taken from Michael Neill's Oxford Shakespeare edition (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).
- 2 'Antony' and 'Cleopatra' are the default English names used in this chapter; but where particular sources use vernacular and/or Latin variants, these variants will be retained.
- 3 These five tragedies enjoyed different and often mixed fortunes – even Shakespeare's was not regularly performed until the mid-nineteenth century. Besides the plays to be discussed in this chapter, one might also mention Nicolas de Montreux's *Cleopatre, tragedie* (1594). Four sixteenth-century Italian versions are known: Giulio Landi's *La Vita di Cleopatra* (1551); Giambattista Giraldis Cinthio's *Cleopatra tragedia* (c. 1542, published 1583); Cesare de' Caesari's *Cleopatra* (1552); and Celso Pistorelli's *Marc' Antonio e Cleopatra* (1576). A Spanish version was also in circulation: Diego López de Castro's *Marco Antonio y Cleopatra* (c. 1582). On the plays' development in a wider European context, see Enrica Zanin, *Fins tragiques: poétique et éthique du dénouement dans la tragédie de la première modernité (Italie, France, Espagne, Allemagne)* (Geneva: Droz, 2014), pp. 191–200. For an earlier study which covers medieval sources (Dante, Boccaccio, and Chaucer), see Marilyn Williamson, *Infinite Variety: Antony and Cleopatra in Renaissance Drama and Earlier Tradition* (Connecticut: L. Verry, 1974).
- 4 Jodelle's *Cléopâtre captive* was first staged before a royal audience at the Hôtel de Reims (the Paris residence of Charles de Guise, Cardinal de Lorraine), probably in early 1553. Garnier's subsequent *Marc Antoine* may have been staged in the year of its first publication (1578) at Saint-Maixent; it was performed in Touraine (1579), and in Paris (1594 or 1595), according to Raymond Lebègue, *Marc Antoine / Hippolyte* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1974), p. 217.
- 5 Mary Sidney (the sister of Philip Sidney) married Henry Herbert, 2nd Earl of Pembroke, in 1577. Her name is a source of scholarly divisions: Gavin Alexander discusses the problem in *Translation and Literature*, 8.1 (1999), 78–91 at 80–1. I adopt his suggestion of calling her 'Pembroke', the title by which she referred to herself after her husband's death.
- 6 The term *closet drama* is ambiguous. It elides various kinds of unperformed English drama including those that were intended for reading rather than performance, and those that were not only read but also performed in a private or semi-private domestic context (sometimes as a staged reading). Recent scholarship has challenged the traditional view that Pembroke and Daniel produced unperformable closet dramas that were destined for reading alone. Daniel's *Tragedie of Cleopatra* was likely to have been staged in Lady Anne Clifford's household: see Yasmin Arshad, Helen Hackett, and Emma Whipday, 'Daniel's *Cleopatra* and Lady Anne Clifford: From a Jacobean Portrait to Modern Performance', *Early Theatre*, 18.2 (2015), 167–86. There are no attested stagings of Pembroke's *Antonius*; yet Pembroke was by no means averse to stage productions, and at the very least her text suggests she may have envisioned some kind of spatialised performance (upon 'The stage supposed Alexandria'): see Marie-Alice Belle and Line Cottegnies, *Robert Garnier in Elizabethan England: Mary Sidney Herbert's 'Antonius' and Thomas Kyd's 'Cornelia'* (Cambridge: MHRA, 2017), pp. 25–7.
- 7 Case studies of particular social strata are too numerous to mention. For an overview, see *Dire et vivre l'ordre social en France sous l'Ancien Régime*, ed. Fanny Cosandey (Paris: Editions EHESS, 2005); Keith Wrightson, 'Estates, Degrees, and Sorts: Changing Perceptions of Society in Tudor and Stuart England', in Penelope Corfield (ed.), *Language, History and Class* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 30–52.
- 8 In the modern West, dignity is considered universally inherent in all humanity from birth; in the Renaissance, only persons of noble blood were thought to be born with dignity – although others could attain it on merit. On this subject, see especially Lyndan Warner, *The Ideas of Man and Woman in Renaissance France: Print, Rhetoric, and Law* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge Carney, and Debra Barrett-Graves (eds), *High and Mighty Queens of Early Modern England: Realities and Representations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
- 9 All other references unless otherwise stated are to the Loeb edition: Plutarch, *Lives: Demetrius and Antony; Pyrrhus and Caius Marcus*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920).
- 10 For further studies of ancient sources (Plutarch, Dio Cassius, Appian, not discounting Lucan's *Pharsalia* and Seneca's historical tragedy, *Octavia*), see Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957–75), V: *The Roman Plays*.

- 11 It has become established practice to read individual plays, particularly those of Garnier, Pembroke, and Daniel, as political allegories of a war-torn France and of her unsettled English neighbour. Instead, my comparative approach is modelled on that of Richard Hillman in *French Reflections in the Shakespearean Tragic: Three Case Studies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), ch. 3. Hillman's analysis differs from mine in that his is less directly concerned with questions of social representation.
- 12 Amyot's *Vies des hommes illustres grecs et romains* first appeared in 1559, with multiple further editions. It is likely that Thomas North may have used the Goulart edition for his augmented English translation of Plutarch's *Lives* (1603). On Goulart in general, see *Simon Goulart: un pasteur aux intérêts vastes comme le monde*, ed. Olivier Pot (Geneva: Droz, 2013).
- 13 Amyot, a Catholic humanist scholar, had translated Plutarch for his royal pupil, the future Charles IX.
- 14 All French quotations are from Goulart (ed.), *Les Vies des hommes illustres grecs et romains* (Cologne: Jacob Stoer, 1617). See further Jacques Pineaux, 'Un continuateur des *Vies Parallèles*: Simon Goulart de Senlis', in Michael Balard (ed.), *Fortunes de Jacques Amyot: actes du colloque de Melun (18-20 avril 1985)* (Paris: Nizet, 1986), pp. 331–42.
- 15 Williamson, *Infinite Variety*, p. 41.
- 16 An epithet possibly suggested by the description of Isis in Plutarch's *Moralia*, according to which the goddess has an infinite number of names, forms, and shapes. See J. H. Walter, 'Four Notes on "Antony and Cleopatra"', *Notes and Queries*, 16.4 (1969), 137-b-139.
- 17 See further Michael Shapiro, 'Boying her Greatness: Shakespeare's Use of Closet Drama in *Antony and Cleopatra*', *Modern Language Review*, 77 (1982), 1–15.
- 18 See Hillman, *French Reflections*, p. 112.
- 19 Garnier, *Marc Antoine*, III, 1320–2, ed. Charles Mazouer, in *La Tragédie à l'époque d'Henri III. Deuxième série, vol. 1(1574–1579)* (Florence and Paris: Olschki, 1999), ed. Enea Balmas and others, pp. 217–320 at 293. All quotations are from this edition.
- 20 Pembroke, *Antonius*, III, 1334–6, in *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke*, ed. Margaret Hannay, Noel Kinnamon, and Michael Brennan, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), I, pp. 139–207, at 189. All quotations are from this edition.
- 21 On the social significance of Pembroke's debut in print culture though the publication of *Antonius*, see Belle and Cottagnies, *Robert Garnier in Elizabethan England*, pp. 20–1.
- 22 For a further discussion, see Zanin, *Fins tragiques*, pp. 192–3.
- 23 The social connotations are marked. Enobarbus the disloyal vassal dies the death of a 'master-leaver' (IV.x, 22), a phrase deriving from the world of early modern livery and military companies to denote the worst kind of wayward, fugitive apprentice. See John Archer, *Citizen Shakespeare: Freeman and Aliens in the Language of the Plays* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 142.
- 24 Eugene Waith, *The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare and Dryden* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), pp. 118–21.
- 25 Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 206.
- 26 See Florio's Anglo-Italian *World of Words* (1598), s.v. 'Roffiano' and 'Roffiana': both defined as 'a bawd', 'a pander', 'a ruffian'; Cotgrave, *Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (1611), s.v. 'Maquereau' and 'Maquerelle' (a male and female bawd respectively): 'Ruffien' (m.), 'a Bawde, a Pandar'.
- 27 Whilst Garnier's religious vocabulary in *Marc Antoine* is far from precise, it tends to be more marked than Pembroke's (see Hillman, *French Reflections*, pp. 132–3). The connotations of atonement in 'expier mon diffame et mes nuisants ébats... que ma fin suprême / Lave mon déshonneur, me punissant moimême' (*Marc Antoine*, III, 1235, 1240–1) are flattened to 'I must... Conclusion make of all foregoing harmes... that my last daie / By mine own hand my spotts may wash away' (*Antonius*, III, 1247–8, 1253–4).
- 28 Garnier, a devout Catholic and distinguished magistrate, held the office of Lieutenant Criminel du Maine (from 1574) and eventually membership of the Grand Conseil du Roi (1586). He would doubtless have understood the long-standing embarrassment of *homicide de soy-mesme* to the community at large. Self-murder warranted forfeiture of a Christian burial, legal confiscation of property, imprisonment, or execution (if the attempted self-killing failed). And yet, the suicides of high-ranking nobles or clerics were often concealed or excused as an act of insanity, a legal loophole that guaranteed that normal burial ceremonies could proceed; influential family connections could also intervene to safeguard property and family reputation. See Georges Minois, *Histoire du suicide: la société occidentale face à la mort volontaire* (Paris: Fayard, 1995); Dennis Hoffman and Vincent Webb, 'Suicide as Murder at Common Law', *Criminology*, 19 (1981), 372–84; Alan Marks, 'Historical Suicide', in Clifton Bryant (ed.), *Handbook of Death and Dying*, 2 vols (Thousand Oaks and London: Sage, 2003), I, pp. 309–18.
- 29 On neo-Senecan tragedy as affective rather than mimetic, see Helen Slaney, *The Senecan Aesthetic: A Performance History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), especially ch. 3.
- 30 Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, p. 211.
- 31 See Neill, *The Tragedy of Anthony and Cleopatra*, 'Introduction', p. 76. Modern productions which have injected humour into this scene include Giles Block's 1999 production at the Globe, of which 'Antony's bungled suicide comes across like a scene in the worst sort of minor opera', according to Katherine Duncan-Jones (*Times Literary Supplement*, 6 August 1999), 'except that we are entirely free to laugh at it'. See Bridget Escolme, *Antony and Cleopatra* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 133.
- 32 The Younger Cato's allegedly honourable suicide is recorded in Plutarch's *Life of Cato Utican*. In protest against Julius Caesar Cato failed to inflict death upon himself at the first attempt, and expired only after ripping out his innards on the

- second. For a reading that stresses self-authenticating manliness and dignity in this act, comparable to that of Antony, see Coppélia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 125–7.
- 33 The Younger Seneca's drawn-out death in protest against Nero is recorded by Tacitus in *Annals* XV.60–4. A combination of bleeding, poison, and hot water eventually brought about his end, during which he retained an extraordinary composure. The incident was well known to Renaissance commentators (see for instance Montaigne, *Essays* II.35).
- 34 Wounded, bleeding, and lacking agency, Antony adopts what some critics have taken as a typically feminine position, as his masculinity and heroic valour sink to their lowest ebb. See Cynthia Marshall, 'Man of Steel Done Got the Blues: Melancholic Subversion of Presence in *Antony and Cleopatra*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 44 (1993), 385–408.
- 35 According to stage historian Richard Hosley, early productions would have used a winch, pulley, and harness to lift Antony 14 feet above the level of the main stage to the gallery. See Hosley, 'The Staging of the Monument Scene in *Antony and Cleopatra*', *Literary Chronicle*, 30 (1964), 62–71. Performance critics have worried about 'a high monument aloft, a missed handhold, a flimsy railing', which could precipitate 'a slapstick catastrophe, as Antony plummets to the stage [floor]'. See William Worthen, 'The Weight of History: Staging "Characters" in *Antony and Cleopatra*', *Studies in English Literature*, 26 (1986), 295–308 at 295.
- 36 From Plutarch onwards, commentators have expressed doubts about the snake-bite theory: see Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *Cleopatra: Queen, Lover, Legend* (London: Pimlico, 2006), pp. 138–9, 191; Colin Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 209–10.
- 37 Brian Cummings, *Mortal Thoughts: Religion, Secularity, Identity in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 273–4.
- 38 However, failed suicide need not equate to lasting dishonour. In *Essays* II.35, Michel de Montaigne considers the length to which Seneca's devoted wife Paulina went to take her life at the point when he took his. Her efforts were ultimately unsuccessful; she lived on, yet 'tres-honorablement' ('most honorably'), in Montaigne's estimation. See Cummings, *Mortal Thoughts*, pp. 262–4.
- 39 See Hughes-Hallett, *Cleopatra*, especially ch. 1.
- 40 See Mary Ellen Lamb, *Gender and Authorship in the Sidney Circle* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), especially pp. 129–30.
- 41 From the middle ages, Cleopatra was repeatedly put forward as an exemplar of patient, self-denying virtue, alongside the likes of Lucretia, Griselda, Penelope, and Dido.
- 42 All quotations are from *Cléopâtre captive*, ed. Enea Balmas, in *La Tragédie à l'époque d'Henri II et de Charles IX. Vol. 1, 1550–1561*, ed. Enea Balmas and others (Florence: Olschki, 1986), pp. 55–117.
- 43 An artistic trend notably reproduced in curvaceous semi-nudes of the sixteenth-century school of Fontainebleau. See Hughes-Hallett, *Cleopatra*, especially chs. 5 and 6. Jodelle does not deliberately play on shades of white/non-white in Cleopatra's skin colour, as does Shakespeare, whose Cleopatra embodies these racial ambiguities with frank, mature sexuality (thereby stimulating a prurient male fascination, according to modern feminists). See Linda Fitz (later Woodbridge), 'Egyptian Queens and Male Reviewers: Sexist Attitudes in *Antony and Cleopatra* Criticism', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 28.3 (1977), 297–316; more generally, Yasmin Arshad, *Imagining Cleopatra: Performing Gender and Power in Early Modern England* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2019), ch. 5.
- 44 'Le sein tout meurtri ... en plusieurs lieux ulceree avec inflammation' ('her breast beaten black and blue ... ulcerated and inflamed in several places'), as Amyot's equally lurid translation reads (*Les Vies des hommes illustres*, fol. 620r).
- 45 The first version of Daniel's *Tragedie of Cleopatra* appeared in 1594; a substantially revised version was published in 1607, from which all quotations are taken. On Daniel's literary career, see Joan Rees, *Samuel Daniel: A Critical and Biographical Study* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1964).
- 46 On Daniel's use of Jodelle, see Howard Norland, *Neoclassical Tragedy in Elizabethan England* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), pp. 211–18. Hillman (*French Reflections*, pp. 103–15) discusses Daniel in relation to Jodelle and to Shakespeare. He notes that Daniel may have revised his text with knowledge of Shakespeare's play: 'there is no settling the issue of priority, but likewise no questioning the interreferentiality of the two texts' (p. 104).
- 47 The historical source for this incident is Dio Cassius's *Roman History*: see Joan Rees, 'Samuel Daniel's *Cleopatra* and Two French Plays', *Modern Language Review*, 47 (1952), 1–10.
- 48 For a discussion, see Brents Stirling, 'Cleopatra's Scene with Seleucus: Plutarch, Daniel, and Shakespeare', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 15 (1964), 299–311.
- 49 See further Mary Nyquist, 'Base Slavery and Roman Yoke', in Lorna Hutson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of English Law and Literature, 1500–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 624–46 at 627.
- 50 Catherine of Aragon, reputedly a woman who possessed all the virtuous qualities of 'a noble woman borne', came in for severe criticism in Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587) when she directly accused Cardinal Wolsey of being her enemy in open court. Earlier chroniclers report that she blamed Wolsey on personal grounds for her divorce proceedings and departed in silent disgrace. See Matthew Hansen, '"And a Queen of England, Too": The "Englishing" of Catherine of Aragon in Sixteenth-Century English Literary and Chronicle History', in Levin et al. (eds), *High and Mighty Queens of Early Modern England*, pp. 79–99 at 88–9. The spectacle of a queen resorting to physical violence, moreover, could spark a diplomatic incident. Witness George Chapman's notorious 'slap scene' in *The Tragedy of Byron* (1608): a defamatory representation of the court of Henri IV which drew a formal complaint from the French Ambassador, Antoine Lefèvre de La Boderie, for its portrayal of the king's consort slapping the face of his mistress, Henriette d'Entragues. The ignominious scene was banned forthwith. See J. J. Jusserand, 'Ambassador La Boderie and the "Compositeur" of the Byron Plays', *Modern Language Review*, 6 (1911), 203–5.
- 51 Hillman, *French Reflections*, p. 111.
- 52 Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp. 37–8.

- 53 Cf. Thomas Nashe, who portrays his hapless traveler, Jack Wilton, caught with his courtesan/lover 'like Antony and Cleopatra when they quaffed standing bowls of wine spiced with pearl together', *The Unfortunate Traveller and Other Works*, ed. J. B. Steane (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 312.
- 54 See Alison Scott, *Literature and the Idea of Luxury in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 62.
- 55 Scott, *Literature and the Idea of Luxury*, p. 66.
- 56 Hence Thomas Coryat's titillating portrait of the Venetian courtesan: 'For thou shalt see her decked with many chaines of gold and orient pearle like a second Cleopatra ... yet if thou shalt rightly weigh them in the scales of mature judgement, thou wilt say ... that they are like a golden ring in a swines snowt' (*Coryats crudities* [London: William Stansby, 1611], pp. 266–7).
- 57 See Neill (*The Tragedy of Anthony and Cleopatra*, 'Introduction', p. 68), for whom 'overreaching' is the basic rhetorical and structural motif of Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra*, whereby high hopes are anticlimactically dashed, thus creating the 'perceived gap between expectation and performance'. On these dilemmas more broadly, see Graham Bradshaw, *Shakespeare's Scepticism* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987).
- 58 Florio, *The Essayes of Lord Michaell de Montaigne: The First Booke* (London: Valentine Simmes for Edward Blount, 1603), p. 39.