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The "infinite variety" of Cleopatra's pretenses affirms her allegiance to a theater that embraces idleness, and finally becomes idleness.[1] When Cleopatra dallies over the lines of the self-sacrificing or magnanimous lover—"Sir, you and I must part, but that's not it; / Sir, you and I have loved, but there's not it"—Antony replies, "But that your royalty / Holds idleness your subject, I should take you / For idleness itself" (1.3.89–90, 94–96). Shakespeare's drama appears all too ready to corroborate the unease of early modern antitheatricalists who impugn theater for the spread of idleness within the culture. When in his *Anatomie of Abuses* Philip Stubbes observes, "If you will learne … to practise Idlenesse … you neede to goe to no other Schoole [i.e., theater], for all these good examples maie you see painted before your eyes in Enterludes and Plaies," the recreational rhythms of Cleopatra's Egypt might well serve as illustration. Here the queen may "laugh[]" her Antony "out of patience, and that night … laugh[] him into patience, and next morn, / Ere the ninth hour … dr[ink] him to his bed" (2.5.19–21). Rather than refute the charge that theater is "a nurseris of idelnesse,"[2] Cleopatra's variable palate of "Enterludes & Plaies" seems set on further stoking such heated discourse, as Antony and Cleopatra not only prove their culpability as idlers, they do so ardently.[3]

Of course, while Shakespeare's Egypt is a holiday world, ruled by a queen devoted to the glorification of play, it is all the time being roundly censured by a Rome whose emperor remains soberly attuned to politics and warfare. Though Rome, led by Caesar, closely follows our couple, it does so with a perception primed for practical goals, and which can only disparage the lovers' fanciful moves. Pompey reads Cleopatra's diversions not as ennobling, but as debilitating and ultimately deadening, as he calls

for her to "tie up the libertine [Antony] in a field of feasts; / Keep his brain fuming.… [S]leep and feeding may prorouge his honour / even till a Lethe'd dullness" (2.1.23–24, 26–27). The variant tones of the play's two worlds have often been read as two types of performance: an Egyptian theater that fosters unrestrained yet graceful designs spun from illusions and lies, and a Romanized one, steadfast and moralistic, which insists on staging idleness only in order to humiliate and condemn it. Hence, when defeated in battle, Antony foresees his followers "windowed" in Rome, himself publicly "subdued / To penetrative shame" (4.14.73, 75–76).

For centuries audiences have been conflicted over which of these worlds should win their sympathy—where indeed the playwright's own sympathies might lie. My reading of the play's central tension, which builds from Rome's dedication to practicable purpose and Egypt's immersion in play, asserts that it is the latter—a theater in which idleness is foundational—that Shakespeare's play celebrates. Roman resoluteness serves rather to secure one's admiration for Egyptian gambols. Rephrased, this observation is equally if not more curious: the impulsive nature, often exasperatingly so, of Egypt at play succeeds more often than not in souring us toward Roman resolve. I realize of course that I am joining a conversation long in session, and one that is replete with impressive studies of the play's dichotomous worlds.[4] My inclination to stand with Egypt is certainly unextraordinary, and seemingly there is little to add in the way of hoisting the charms of our lovers high above the didactic maneuvers of Shakespeare's Caesar. Still, despite a longstanding critical trend to praise Egypt, the importance of idleness in the play, of players playing at loving, at warring, and even at dying, has yet, in my view, to be properly understood and celebrated.

Celebrations of idleness adorn Shakespeare's play. Michael J. C. Echeruo reminds us that "a celebration is not an imitation of anything, only a statement of something. In celebrating, we make a statement through a pattern of representations (acts of playing) without a causative or even a logical relation to the statement itself."[5] When "the city cast[s] / Her people out" to gaze upon their queen as she floats down the Cydnus River, it is Cleopatra's effortless effects that all admire (2.2.223–24). Enobarbus recounts:

> For her own person,
> It beggared all description: she did lie
> In her pavilion, cloth-of-gold of tissue,
> O'erpicturing that Venus where we see
> The fancy outwork nature. On each side her
> Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling cupids,
> With divers-coloured fans, whose wind did seem
> To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
> And what they undid did.
>
> (2.2.207–15)

Upon her barge the Queen of Egypt does nothing, and this she does impressively. She "did lie / In her pavilion," cooled by the wind of "divers-coloured fans" that "did seem / To glow her delicate cheeks," and which finally did nothing, as "what they undid did." But precisely why do the citizens of Egypt find Cleopatra's caprices so fascinating, and what is the source of our own attraction to Egyptian fabrications, moves, and declarations, that while failing to convince us that they are anything other than fiction, nonetheless can stir us to celebration? How might we celebrate Shakespeare's invention of dramatic characters whose idle ways would surely rally support for those who call for the closing of public theaters, for such venues, as our play bears out, clearly do swell with idle touches?

Whether idling is disruptive of human activity or a reinvigorating respite that allows for greater productivity has long been debated. In his 1577 treatise in which he "reproves" most idle behavior, John Northbrooke discriminates between "an honest and necessarie ydlenesse" and that which is "beastly and slothfull." The former, he claims, makes "good men … more apte and ready to doe their labors and vocations wherevnto they are called. This kynde of ydlenesse God doth not onely persuade, but also commandeth it in his lawe."[6] The dramatist Thomas Dekker, on the other hand, pictures idleness "ever sleeping as Dormise … or ever prating to no purpose, as Birdes of the ayre."[7] Moreover, the peculiar evaluation that playing can be a profession spawned debate over whether the stage might be a purveyor or preventer of disorder. I. G., for one, decides that "many vitious Persons when they know not how any longer to be idle, for variety of Idlenesse goe to see Plaies."[8] As he traces the roots of English drama, Glynne Wickham finds that in early modern England the professional player was regarded by many "as living by means of fraudulent pretense

instead of by honest toil," and as such, found himself the target of "sporadic outbursts of hostility grounded in envy for a way of life that seemed to offer … an escape from the normal burden of Adam's yoke."[9] While one voice asserts that playgoing shall keep men from "devising upon felonie or treason, and howe he may best exalt himselfe by mischiefe," another counters that the players are themselves "masters of vice, teachers of wantonnesse, spurres to impuritie."[10]

Although the English Renaissance is thought to be among "the most playful ages in Western history," Mihai Spariosu remarks that "to [his] knowledge, no comprehensive history of the play concepts" in this period exists.[11] In his anthropology of play and its parallels in aestheticism, Spariosu returns us to Plato's concept of "mimesis-imitation," which argues that the imaginary is an imitation or representation of reality and as such can only be an inferior, or even deceitful, copy of the real. Plato thus launches the notion that the fine arts do not constitute " 'true knowledge,' but simulation thereof, not the 'higher' contemplative, but the 'lower' recreational, pleasure."[12] "Painting or drawing, and imitation in general," writes Plato, "are far removed from truth, and the companions and friends and associates of a principle within us which is equally removed from reason, and … they have no true or healthy aim."[13] Platonic-style mimesis was in fact born out of Plato's desire to temper an earlier, presocratic version of mimesis, whose mode was spontaneous, arbitrary, and joyous play. Spariosu explains that in contrast to "mimesis-imitation," the aim of "mimesis-play" was not to reproduce an original idea, but rather to simulate or invoke raw power or delight in the feeling of freedom—the bare exuberance of Homer's warriors in battle is one such illustration. Plato had wished to reign in such "unconstrained play of physical forces," which he regarded as irrational, trance-inducing, and fundamentally threatening to the ideal Republic. And he did so by reallocating these impulsive performances to literature and poetry, as Plato perceived the arts as able to subsume such impetuous conduct into "new rational values." In this way, Plato had managed to divest play of its "immediate power and violent emotion and subordinat[e] it to the rational, mediated, and nonviolent pleasure of philosophical contemplation."[14]

Reflections on man at play, most notably those of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich von Schiller, who to some degree continue to subordinate

play to Reason, and those of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, whose explorations of play reverse this Platonic perspective, have grown into a branch of philosophy known as play theory. Arguably Nietzsche's writings, which privilege "falsehood, copy, representation, fiction, irreality, irrationality … over essence, presence … truth, reality, and rationality," give birth to the notion that play is fundamental to human activity and in some measure revive the Hellenic notion of mimetic play as a "ceaseless play of forces or Becoming."[15] More recently, play theorist James S. Hans asserts that "play is the most meaningful of human activities." Its "essence … is its capacity to saturate virtually every aspect of our lives, though not continuously." Hans maintains that a "misunderstanding" about play has prevailed for far too long in Western culture, namely the faulty notion that "there is no sense in which the constructs of art [which is one aspect of play] become the constructs of life." Rather than relegate play to the "fictional and arbitrary, and hence illusory," Hans wishes to "break down the wall that separates play from work or life," as, he argues, "it is only through play that the structures we live by grow and change."[16]

While play theorists generally agree that by juxtaposing real and playful acts we may arrive at a definition of serious purpose, that we may even regard real purpose as a redirected form of play, Eugen Fink questions whether the former can shed a discerning light on the meaning of play. In his essay "The Oasis of Happiness: Toward an Ontology of Play," Fink recommends that we pose the question of whether at play, "man remains in the human sphere or whether he does not … assume a relationship beyond himself." Fink writes:

> Play is a basic existential phenomenon, just as primordial and autonomous as death, love, work and struggle for power, but it is *not* bound to these phenomena in a common ultimate purpose. Play, so to speak, confronts them all—it absorbs them by representing them. We play at being serious, we play truth, we play reality, we play work and struggle, we play love and death—and we even play play itself.[17]

Spariosu points out that Fink's theory of play topples the Platonic dialectic that elevates reality above irreality. Here play, Spariosu summarizes, "is in fact more 'real' than reality, because it is a mode of knowledge which comes much closer to Being than the 'natural' objects and phenomena."[18]

Whereas Hans posits that to be of consequence, play must correspond with daily life—"once the cleavage between the 'real' world and the world of play takes place, play will always have a subsidiary role, no matter what the rhetoric might suggest"[19]—Fink decides that "the motivation of play does not coincide with that of other human activity." In contrast to Hans, for Fink the value of play rests in its ability to resist being "fitted into the complex structure of goals." Rather, Fink writes, "play resembles an oasis of happiness that we happen upon in the desert of our Tantalus-like seeking and pursuit of happiness."[20]

Though the above introduces us to the inquiries of only two play theorists among the many who have nurtured decades of debate,[21] Hans's and Fink's divergent views on the status of the imaginary and real will serve us aptly as we revisit Rome's mystification over its general's behavior, as well as critical debate over how to read the lovers' magnificent visions. Specifically, three essential themes discussed in Fink's theory of play will help us to understand Antony and Cleopatra's singular will to play, and why Roman figures find Egyptian play so provocative. First, Fink conceives of play as an autonomous adventure. Real time and space, with their flurry of deadlines and inveterate communal duties, do not penetrate the realm of play. "In contrast with the restless dynamism, the obscure ambiguity and relentless futurism of our life," Fink delineates, "play is characterized by calm, timeless 'presence' and autonomous, self-sufficient meaning." Because it can liberate us from reality's "precipitate rush of successive moments," play promises to elevate us. Second, Fink writes that play's "internal multiplicity of meaning" is not always "recognized" by "common sense," for which "play means only frivolity, artificiality, unreality, idleness." For Fink, these very terms meant as pejoratives by those unable to cherish play denote its most remarkable and inviolable attributes. Finally, it is the play of the real world, in which a premium is placed on the feasible or practical, that Fink claims is transitory, even senseless.[22]

The idea that play corresponds to real goals, optimally those that can benefit the world in which one lives, does resemble Rome's investment in performances that can gain it political or military traction. Shakespeare's Roman theater, to a certain extent, epitomizes Hans's conception of play as "the fundamental activity of man, the back-and-forth movement of encounter and exchange with the world in which man is continually en-

gaged."[23] In the Roman world of public purpose, the imagination, with its appetite for role-playing, is kept in check by the precise limits and obligations of a real political theater in which all players are intent on proving that all men are mortal. In reviewing the course of history, Pompey asks,

> What was't
> That moved pale Cassius to conspire? And what
> Made the all-honoured, honest Roman, Brutus,
> With the armed rest, courtiers of beauteous freedom,
> To drench the Capitol, but that they would
> Have one man but a man?"
>
> (2.6.14–19)

Roman willingness to subordinate the imagination to the common good of the Republic, and the belief that to do otherwise is to be worthy of banishment, appears to replicate Plato's desire to expel the rhapsodes and poets from his own ideal Republic, as, he worried, such versatile imaginations could only inspire uncertainty in a state intended as a model of civic cohesion.[24]

To the Roman eye, Antony's true role is that of valiant general, while his Alexandrian idling is perceived as an aberration or specter that temporarily haunts him. Yet Antony's idleness is no ghostly presence. On the contrary, his idle self is exceptionally lively. The Soothsayer observes that Antony's "lustre thickens" only when Caesar "shines by" (2.4.26–27). To Antony, he repeats, "I say again, thy spirit / Is all afraid to govern thee near him; / But, he away, 'tis noble" (27–29). The implication of these portentous words is that near Cleopatra, and far from Rome, Antony's true "spirit" is awakened. Clare Kinney, too, has noted that when in Rome, Antony's "self is not his own; the 'great property' that is supposed to define him is in a sense 'common property'; his very existence is dependent upon his submission to Rome's code of values."[25] In Egypt, when Antony's mirth dwindles, Cleopatra reasons that "on the sudden / A Roman thought hath struck him" (1.2.87–88), while when he calls to "fill our bowls once more. / Let's mock the midnight bell," she celebrates, "Since my lord / is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra" (3.13.189–90, 191–92).

But it is a Roman Antony that Caesar wistfully remembers, an Antony who, when pursued by famine and thirst "didst drink / The stale of horses and the gilded puddle / Which beasts would cough at. [His] palate then did deign / The roughest berry on the rudest hedge" (1.4.62–65) and had done so in the manner of a seasoned soldier. "All this," Caesar considers, "was borne so like a soldier that [his] cheek / So much as lanked not"

(69, 71–72). Antony's Roman performances had featured remarkable restraints—extraordinary examples of self-denial or asceticism—in the name of a vast communal project, the expansion of the Roman Empire. Though unquestionably impressive, Antony's Roman acts are still within the realm of human possibility; the player remains functional, triumphant, and ultimately attains real historical stature.

In contrast, the fabulous language that accompanies Cleopatra's fanciful impulses abounds in what most critics characterize as hyperbole. In Egyptian verbiage, mortals and Hellenic deities are spoken of interchangeably; Egypt's queen "makes a shower of rain as well as Jove" (1.2.157–58). Uncertainty swirls around the meaning of Cleopatra's superlative visions. Are we meant to see what Cleopatra sees, or are we to regard, for example, her crowning Antony "the demi-Atlas of this earth, the arm / and burgonet of men" (1.5.24–25) as lovelorn exaggeration? Janet Adelman wonders, "Are the visions asserted by the poetry mere fancies, or are they 'nature's piece 'gainst fancy'?"[26] A popular critical tendency has been to root the expansive nature of the lovers' speech in the vagaries of romance. Anne Barton decides that the lovers are "as elusive and contradictory as people known in real life, and as difficult to assess or explain." "What logic there is at work," Barton writes, "is that of love itself, and its pattern is characteristically circular."[27] Likewise, Rosalie L. Colie's illuminating study of the lovers' hyperbolic language, or what she refers to as their "twice-heightened speech," ultimately determines that "their love … rejects conventional hyperbole and invents and creates new overstatements, new forms of overstatement. In the language itself, we can read the insatiability of their love."[28] Adelman traces our willingness to "assent" to Antony and Cleopatra's improbable phrases and flights of fancy to our own romantic impulses: "Ultimately our sense of assent probably comes from the fact that the psychological roots of the play are our psychological roots too."[29] James Hirsh, however, dismisses these romantic diagnoses, pointing out instead that Enobarbus's extravagant speech, like others in the play, "has elements of a tall tale." Hirsh reasons:

> Cleopatra shows her awareness of the fictionality of this Antony. This dream-Antony who bestrid the ocean is (so to speak) a tall tale.… Cleopatra here facetiously plays the role of wide-eyed romantic lover just as she facetiously played a Roman in the opening scene and facetiously played the role of jealous lover.

Hirsh thus concludes that when Cleopatra tells of "an Antony she 'dreamt' rather than the Antony of her waking experience," she is simply being whimsical.[30]

All of the above I find to be unsatisfying conclusions, for to arrive at them is to read Egypt through Roman eyes, namely as a series of love-smitten gestures or tongue-in-cheek jests. Adelman argues that "the exclusivity of the protagonists' vision never becomes part of our experience." Instead, "we participate in the experience of the commentators more often than in the experience of the lovers" and therefore "are forced to notice the world's view of them more often than their view of the world."[31] Colie, too, grants that we come to regard the lovers "as mere voluptuaries, softened and weakened by self-indulgence and excess … only by Roman tongues."[32] On the contrary, Egypt's grandiose language and poses should spirit us away from Roman views, as above all else they express the great divide that exists between these respective worlds. Whereas Roman speech prudently distinguishes between the real and fanciful, careful to emphasize the pre-eminence of the former, in Egypt fancy forever vies with nature and yet again triumphs.

And yet central to our perplexity over Egyptian performance has been the realization that language rarely leads to a literal counterpart; the lovers' reports of one another regularly fail to correspond to the actual or even to the possible. Rather, Antony and Cleopatra, as poets will do, attempt to conceive the immeasurable. And they can do so. For to the lovers, all the world's a stage, and in their vast play world, dimensions otherwise measureless—"new heaven, new earth"—can be exquisitely realized (1.1.17). In the play's first scene, the queen's desire to quantify Antony's love is met with flattering evasions. That which can be measured, Antony tells her, is limited: "There's beggary in the love that can be reckoned" (1.1.15). When she spurs him on by "set[ting] a bourn how far to be beloved" (16), Antony adeptly replies, "Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth" (17), anticipating his ultimate rejection of Caesar's narrow earthen parameters. Yet how might we gain entry to the lovers' play world, a world where we receive their claims as truthful, rather than inflated—where, when she tells Dolabella that she has raised Antony "past the size of dreaming" (5.2.96), we appreciate that Cleopatra does clearly specify scale?

As audience, we are challenged to experience Egypt aurally, to listen so well that sound engages sight, so that we too see a queen who "beggared all description" (2.2.208) and an Antony whose "reared arm / Crested the world" (5.2.81–82). And to do so is to rekindle a creativity that Plato had hoped to banish, and perchance has faded in the wake of our own Roman-steered projects—to reawaken the "stuff / To vie strange forms with fancy" so that we may "condemn[] shadows quite" (96–97, 99). If we allow it, Egypt can transport us to a realm of pure imagination, unconcerned with bounded space or time-propelled venture, and one that too many of us have abandoned to childhood. Arrived, we will listen to Egypt so closely as to be wholly absorbed in its lovely logic. Antony will become our muse whose "voice [is] propertied / As all the tuned spheres" (82–83). Our return to this realm will also return us to the freedom of mimetic play—"free, delightful and effortless"—and, as well, to the writings of Fink that ponder this "apollonian" freedom that so frustrates Roman readers.[33]

Germane to Fink's theory is his portrait of the player as a sovereign lord, who "is not creating within the sphere of reality." Spatial and temporal dimensions that direct the play of the real world "never merge" with the world of play. Thus, Fink asserts,

> play can be experienced as a pinnacle of human sovereignty. Man enjoys here an almost limitless creativity.… The player experiences himself as the lord of the products of his imagination—because it is virtually unlimited, play is an eminent manifestation of human freedom.… Play can contain within itself … the clear apollonian moment of free self-determination."[34]

Appearing almost to allude to Colie's "hyperbolical" heights, Fink proposes that in the autonomy of the play world, "time" can be "experienced, not as a precipitate rush of successive moments, but rather as the one full moment that is, so to speak, a glimpse of eternity."[35]

Wholly devoted to pragmatic goals, Roman readers are not only discomfited by the lovers' predilection to trivialize real human time, but fail as well to appreciate the impulse of Cleopatra's Egyptian theater to imbue each idle moment with beauty and balance.[36] In *Homo Ludens*, Johan Huizinga writes that play is composed of the "noblest" of qualities, namely "rhythm and harmony." Huizinga considers that "the reason why play … seems to lie to such a large extent in the field of aesthetics" is "the profound affinity between play and order." Huizinga writes:

> Play has a tendency to be beautiful. It may be that this aesthetic factor is identical with the impulse to create orderly form, which animates play in all its aspects. The words we use to denote the elements of play belong for the most part to aesthetics, terms with which we try to describe the effects of beauty: tension, poise, balance, contrast, variation, solution, resolution, etc.[37]

In his history of the development of English drama, Wickham similarly finds the term *play* to be associated with "order or structure." "The Latin word *ludus* and its Anglo-Saxon equivalent *pleg*," Wickham writes,

> can be translated as "recreation" in the broadest sense or, in a narrower sense, as "game" or "play" … [as each involves] the ideas of order and pretence; for the order or structure of the game controls its nature and provides the boundary between the make-believe action and the reality for which it is in some sense a substitute or preparation.[38]

Of Cleopatra, Enobarbus reports that "having lost her breath, she spoke and panted, / That she did make defect perfection, / And, breathless, pour breath forth" (2.2.240–42). Cleopatra's recital of her past resonates with assonance and the lilt of alliteration:

> Broad-fronted Caesar,
> When thou wast here above the ground, I was
> A morsel for a monarch; and great Pompey
> Would stand and make his eyes grow in my brow;
> There would he anchor his aspect, and die
> With looking on his life.
>
> (1.5.30–35)

Upon learning that Antony is distraught, Cleopatra instills Antony's "divided disposition" (56) with celestial symmetry:

> He was not sad, for he would shine on those
> That make their looks by his; he was not merry,
> Which seemed to tell them his remembrance lay
> In Egypt with his joy; but between both.
> O heavenly mingle!
>
> (58–62)

Conversely, it is the Roman Octavia who wavers unsteadily: "Husband win, win brother / Prays and destroys the prayer; no midway / 'Twixt these extremes at all" (3.4.18–20).

While Antony and Cleopatra's vistas are manifestly cosmic, Caesar's views are strictly earthbound, only the ground appears always to be shifting.

Caesar is ever on the alert to settle new lands. Critical studies of *Antony and Cleopatra* tend to focus, for the most part, on the queen's flamboyant inability to assume a sustainable policy, while less heed is paid to the fact that serious Roman ends, more quietly perhaps, appear tenuous, short-lived, or unattained. The emperor's moves bespeak a common human compulsion to envisage life as a series of future goals that are always just beyond reach, or are no sooner reached than replaced. This mortal disposition, Fink explains, is an expression of "futurism," a quality peculiar to human beings, and one that remains both "the source of our greatness and of our misery." Fink asserts:

> It is one of the profound paradoxes of human existence that in our never-ending pursuit of happiness we never attain it, and that strictly speaking no man can be reckoned to be happy before his death.… We live in anticipation of the future and experience the present as a preparation, a way-station, a transitional state. This curious "futurism" of human life is intimately related to one of our fundamental characteristics.… Every human answer to the question of the meaning of life assumes the existence of a "final goal."[39]

As Margot Heinemann points out, "Within the play, everything external is in rapid change. Fixed points disappear, military and political alliances form and break up, eastern and western cultures clash, allegiance and authority melt away."[40] Joan Lord Hall likewise traces this "continual stymying of activity, an entropy at the heart of what seems to signal momentum and vigor," to the play's "political world," observing that "heroic effort" in the play is "ultimately self-defeating."[41] Pompey astutely reflects that "whiles we are suitors to [the gods'] throne, decays / The thing we sue for" (2.1.4–5). Pompey offers a concise outline of this ever-dissolving political theater: "Caesar gets money where / He loses hearts; Lepidus flatters both, / Of both is flattered; but he neither loves, / Nor either cares for him" (13–16). Caesar too recognizes that political triumphs can be fleeting, as the "common body," he reminds himself, is inherently fickle:

> It hath been taught us from the primal state
> That he which is was wished until he were,
> And the ebbed man, ne'er loved till ne'er worth love,
> Comes deared by being lacked. This common body,
> Like to a vagabond flag upon the stream,
> Goes to and back, lackeying the varying tide,
> To rot itself with motion.
>
> (1.4.41–47)

Still, Caesar's course remains carefully and calculatedly synchronized to real timetables and terrains. And still, his labors are perpetually threatened by the "dungy earth['s]" insatiable appetite to consume all that it bears (1.1.36).

Cleopatra's Egypt, on the other hand, may be compared to a stage ruled by an actress who nurtures fiction to no apparent end other than to inspire Antony to jubilantly decree: "There's not a minute of our lives should stretch / Without some pleasure now" (1.1.47–48).[42] As for "the motives behind … her flight from the battle of Actium," Hall can only specify that they remain "opaque."[43] Barton asks:

> How is one to separate wisdom from folly in the conflict between Rome and Egypt, value from emptiness in the love of Antony and his exasperating queen? Not even Enobarbus, that shrewd and realistic commentator, can tell the difference between Cleopatra's glorious variety and her propensity to lies.[44]

Similarly, Judah Stampfer summarizes: "She sports contradictions, refuses to respect any convention, though she makes her peace with them, working by truth, lies, contradiction, joyous service, pretended death, living at once in the lustful present tense and in eternity."[45]

Yet, evidently, Shakespeare's drama construes Rome's more central and inexorable threat to be the lovers' pleasantries. Caesar's projects continually find themselves beset by Cleopatra's fancies. Alexandrian sport continues to be read as tactically consequential.[46] Caesar estimates, "we do bear / So great weight in [Antony's] lightness" (1.4.24–25). The emperor is especially perturbed by Antony preferring to "confound such time / That drums him from his sport, and speaks as loud / As his own state and ours" in sport with "the Queen of Ptolemy" (28–30, 6), as the news from Alexandria reports that Alexandrian relaxations have relaxed Antony's virility: "he fishes, drinks, and wastes / The lamps of night in revel; is not more manlike / Than Cleopatra, nor the Queen of Ptolemy / more womanly than he" (4–7).

As Caesar struggles to claim other kingdoms, Cleopatra asserts that "in [Antony's] livery / Walked crowns and crownets; realms and islands were / As plates dropped from his pocket" (5.2.89–91). If she so chooses, Cleopatra can become even Caesar himself. Under her direction, however, Caesar's "powerful mandate" is Cleopatra's teasing script (1.1.23). In

imitation of "the sum" of Roman news, Cleopatra farcically orders, " 'Do this, or this; / Take in that kingdom and enfranchise that. / Perform't, or else we damn thee'" (19, 23–25). But though her joyless commands may expose the insecurity of Roman performance, Cleopatra's variable acts and dispositions, I would submit, articulate a disinterest in devising a credible, stable threat to Roman goals.

If we follow Fink, for play to become entangled in such mundane missions, as for instance empire building, would mean that "play has been perverted."[47] In a clear reversal of a basic tenet of "mimesis-imitation," Fink asserts that the irreality of the play world is superior to the real play *of* the world, as the play of the imagination is neither subordinate to a real model nor a representation of one. Spariosu points out that according to Fink, "one can no longer speak of representation or copy, because appearances [in the case of play] do not imitate or reproduce anything; on the contrary, they stand in a metonymic (rather than a metaphoric) relation to Being."[48] Fink explains:

> The *immanent* purpose of play is not subordinate to the ultimate purpose served by all other human activity. Play has only internal purpose, unrelated to anything external to itself. Whenever we play "for the sake of" physical fitness, military training, or health, play has been perverted and has become merely a means to an end.[49]

To employ play, so to speak, is to dispossess it of its extraordinary independence, leaving it penetrable to compulsory, and often mendacious, motives. On occasion, Caesar himself engineers its assimilation in his political theater.

One could argue that Caesar engages in as many pretenses as Cleopatra, only his are intended as covert catalysts to future political victories. As Cleopatra mocks Caesar (1.1.19–25), she generates no discernible policy. Contrariwise, Caesar's decision to marry his sister Octavia to Antony, for example, is a subtle, Machiavellian deployment of his own variety of play. Addressing Caesar and Antony, Agrippa affirms how the betrothal will serve

> To hold you in perpetual amity,
> To make you brothers, and to knit your hearts
> With an unslipping knot, take Antony
> Octavia to his wife …
> . . .

> Her love to both
> Would each to other, and all loves to both
> Draw after her.
> (2.2.132–35, 142–44)

It is of course not the marriage of Antony and Octavia that we are witnessing but the union of a "twain" who are far from "mutual" and far from "peerless" (1.1.39, 38, 41), namely the wedding of Antony's ardor to Caesar's cold calculations. Enobarbus presages that "the band that seems to tie their friendship together will be the very strangler of their amity" (2.6.122–24) and several lines later elaborates, "that which is the strength of their amity shall prove the immediate author of their variance" (128–32).

While Rome aims to suppress Egyptian charms, as for it not to do so could undo its own Roman purpose, in accordance with Fink's theory, we need to consider that the charms themselves are contrived by a queen who desires no share in the sweat and soil of Rome's "paltry" affairs (5.2.2), which she recognizes as transient. To her attendants, the queen ultimately tutors, " 'Tis paltry to be Caesar. / Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave, / A minister of her will" (2–4). Caesar's pursuits, Cleopatra claims, merely "palate[] … the dung," "nurse" to both "beggar … and Caesar" alike (7–8). When on occasion Roman news perforates Cleopatra's play world, the messenger is severely chided. Having brought news of Antony's marriage to Octavia, the truthful messenger asks, incredulous, "Should I lie, madam?" to which Cleopatra responds, "Oh, I would thou didst, / So half my Egypt were submerged and made / A cistern for scaled snakes" (2.5.93–95). And yet the lovers' performances are by no means free of purpose. On the contrary, Antony and Cleopatra present us with roles that aspire to eternity. Cleopatra reminds Antony that before Caesar's summoning, "Eternity was in our lips and eyes, / Bliss in our brows' bent" (1.3.36–37).

By act 3, Antony wishes no longer to be perverted by Caesar's "more urgent touches" (1.2.187) and chooses to remove himself permanently from Roman calendars. Even those scenes in which Antony once again dons his military armor pronounce his fidelity as "soldier, servant" to Cleopatra, "making peace or war / As [his queen] affects" (1.3.71–72). Success in battle salutes the potency of Cleopatra's charms rather than

the revival of the great Roman soldier. "To this great fairy," Antony tells his soldiers, "I'll commend thy acts" (4.8.12). However, the queen does not appear to believe that honor denotes an actual state and, moreover, makes no distinction between feigned and factual honor. Even "perfect honour," Cleopatra jests, may be attainable by "play[ing] one scene / Of excellent dissembling" (1.3.81, 79–80).[50] Undaunted by the weight of worldly Roman goals, dismissive of all practical restraints, Cleopatra and her Antony abide instead in a realm of idle sovereignty, wherein honor, sooner than defended, is easily dissembled.

Yet it is with some trepidation that Cleopatra, the consummate performer, contemplates how she might be "shown / In Rome" (5.2.207–8). "Shall they hoist me up / And show me to the shouting varletry / Of censuring Rome?" Cleopatra wonders, and then defiantly delivers, "Rather a ditch in Egypt / Be gentle grave unto me" (54–57). Cleopatra fears being exhibited by Caesar, staged as a strumpet before the base Roman masses. When Antony is himself furious with Cleopatra, he threatens to allow Caesar to "hoist [her] up to the shouting plebeians" and let her "most monster-like be shown / For poor'st diminutives, for dolts" (4.12.34, 36–37).[51] Such shaming—the theater of the scaffold, in which prisoners are displayed and vices are reprimanded—is the sort of Romanized theater that Caesar practices. And such punitive stagings are naturally hostile to Cleopatra's decadent play. To her attendant Iras, Cleopatra envisions the Romanization of Egyptian performance as a grotesquerie of mimetic acting. The actor that shall bring her to life will be a "mechanic slave," his rendition the "vapour" of "thick breath." In addition, Cleopatra foresees herself "enclouded," caught, "ballad[ed]," "extemporally … stage[d]." According to Cleopatra, Roman theater bares no beauty or balance. Instead, hers is a harsh vision of "greasy aprons" and "drunken" comedians; it is a cacophony of "rules and hammers," "saucy lictors," "scald rhymers," "out o'tune" ballads, and worst of all, "some squeaking … boy" (5.2.208–19).

Cleopatra's prophetic view of Roman theater presents a metadramatic moment that acknowledges two potential reactions to the story of Antony and Cleopatra. One can either deride the lovers, as the Roman theater would choose to do, cautioning the audience not to lose its Roman honor and fall victim to Cleopatra's wiles, or one can admire the lovers, celebrating them as two who have risen above the common and dungy.

If Shakespeare's play is essentially engaged in the former, Cleopatra's lines mock Shakespeare's own project, suggesting that his play is intent on no more than a character assassination.[52] If, however, the play does more than simply "boy" her "greatness," Cleopatra herself is calling attention to the fact that Shakespeare's play refuses to turn her into a figure of fun, and in so doing, raises her above the common Roman theater.

To applaud Cleopatra's transcendence is to give oneself over completely to aesthetic impulses, to embrace the notion (the nightmare for many early modern polemicists) that idleness serves no greater purpose than its own creative ends. Yet rather than begetting a world of chaos and vice, as many had forecasted, in idle abandon Shakespeare's lovers spawn a higher, enchantingly playful and timeless world that subsumes all clayey conquests. Paradoxically, this wondrous world comes into greatest focus when, in the eyes of Roman law, the lovers are most in mortal danger. This perception returns us to our initial puzzlement over Shakespeare's ostensible support for antitheatrical allegations. While the Roman world echoes those who sermonize against theater, relentlessly reproaching the lovers as hopelessly irresponsible, Shakespeare's play also chronicles a pair beyond nature's failings, whose "course" can "light[] / The little O, the earth" (5.2.79–80). Antony's "bounty," according to Cleopatra, had "no winter in't; an autumn it was / That grew the more by reaping" (85–87), while of the queen, Enobarbus recites, "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale / her infinite variety" (2.2.245–46).

A last and most striking contrast between the play's two theaters is found in its final scene, as here we are presented with two conclusions. In the presence of the now dead queen, Caesar ponders "the dreaded act which [he] / So sought[] to hinder" (5.2.330–31). As he sees the charisma that continues to animate his rival, the emperor wonders: might the queen's allure be more potent than the bite of a venomous asp? For in death, Caesar observes, Cleopatra remains eternally poised "as she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace" (346–47). Cleopatra appears as able to "purse[] up" the "heart" of Mark Antony upon her bed as on her barge (2.2.197). Caesar's weighty pause, however, is then followed by a Roman thought: "Our army shall / In solemn show attend this funeral, / And then to Rome" (5.2.362–64). Caesar's performance, we learn, will lead to a success of pressing moments that are also fleeting, as Caesar announces

that he will return to the business of Rome—where, like in Shakespeare's sonnet 60, "our minutes hasten to their end, / Each changing place with that which goes before, / In sequent toil all forwards do contend."[53]

In *The Faerie Queene*, Edmund Spenser not only condemns "high minded *Cleopatra*" and "fierce *Antonius*" to "that sad house of Pride"; he also locates them in the same hellish "dongeon" as the prideful "ruines of the *Romaines* fall."[54] Spenser's reading confers equal disapproval upon our central figures. Caesar and Antony are cataloged as "mighty men," Cleopatra as a "proud" woman, and all three are to be reviled as "vaine" and "forgetfull of their yoke."[55] Shakespeare, however, judges only Caesar's commonplace virtues—diligence and duty—as instruments of vanity or pride. Distinguishing the lovers as idle rather than industrious, playful rather than prideful, Shakespeare steals Antony and Cleopatra away from "the endlesse routs of wretched thralls / … / which in that Dongeon lay."[56] In the freedom of Shakespeare's Egyptian play world, the two are elevated to rhetorical divines, and idleness is celebrated as the means to reach this new heaven.[57]

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Notes

[1] William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. John Wilders, Arden Shakespeare, 3rd ser. (London: Routledge, 1995), 2.2.246. Subsequent quotations from this edition are cited in the text.

[2] Philip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583), in *The English Drama and Stage under the Tudor and Stuart Princes, 1543–1664*, ed. W. C. Hazlitt (New York: Burt Franklin, 1964), 224; Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (London, 1582), 60. See also William Rankins, *A Mirrour of Monsters* (1587), ed. Arthur Freeman (New York: Garland, 1973).

[3] In *Shakespeare and Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Phyllis Rackin points out that "Cleopatra's critics within the play make the same kind of charges against her that anti-theatrical writers were levelling against the players and their customers.… The time [Antony] spends with her in Egypt is wasted in idleness and debauchery" (86).

[4] In *Shakespeare's Living Art* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), Rosalie L. Colie distinguishes the "austerity" of the Roman world from the "softness" of Egypt. Colie writes, "Rome is duty, obligation, austerity, politics, warfare, and honor: Rome is public life. Egypt is comfort, pleasure, softness, seduction, sensuousness … variety, and sport.… Rome is business, Egypt is foison; Rome is warfare, Egypt is love" (177). See also Barbara C. Vincent, "Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and the Rise of Comedy," *English Literary Renaissance* 12 (1982): 53–86; Janet Adelman, *The Common Liar: An Essay on "Antony and Cleopatra"* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973); Julian Markels, *The Pillar of the World: "Antony and Cleopatra" in Shakespeare's Development* (Columbus:

Ohio State University Press, 1968); Jyotsyna Singh, "Renaissance Anti-theatricality, Anti-feminism, and Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*," in *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. John Drakakis (New York: St. Martin's, 1994), 308–29; Anne Barton, " 'Nature's piece 'gainst fancy': The Divided Catastrophe in *Antony and Cleopatra*," in *William Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra,"* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), 35–55; Harald W. Fawkner, *Shakespeare's Hyperontology: "Antony and Cleopatra"* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990).

[5] "These acts are signs, not pictures or substitute objects," Echeruo continues, "and their correlation to real life is as specious as that between linguistic signs and their signified referents" (Michael J. C. Echeruo, "Redefining the Ludic: Mimesis, Expression, and the Festival Mode," in *The Play of the Self*, ed. Ronald Bogue and Mihai I. Spariosu [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994], 137–56 [152]).

[6] John A. Northbrooke, *A Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes, with Other Idle Pastimes*, ed. J. P. Collier. (London: Shakespeare Society, 1843), 62–63.

[7] Thomas Dekker, "The Seven Deadly Sinnes of London" (1606), in *The Non-Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, 5 vols. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), 2:48–49.

[8] I. G., *A Refutation of the Apologie for Actors* (1615), ed. Richard H. Perkinson (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1941), 60. As for the players themselves, I. G. compares them to "braue and noble beggers, [who] stand to take money of euery one that comes to see them loyter and play. Hence it is that they are Vicious; for idlenesse is the mother of vice, and they cannot exercise their offices but in vices, and treating of and with vicious men" (55).

[9] Glynne Wickham, "The Beginnings of English Drama," in *English Drama to 1710*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Peter Bedrick, 1987), 1–53 (30–31).

[10] Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Divell*, in *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow, 5 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), 1:214; Gosson, 62.

[11] Mihai Spariosu, *Dionysus Reborn: Play and the Aesthetic Dimension in Modern Philosophical and Scientific Discourse* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), 23.

[12] Mihai Spariosu, *Literature, Mimesis and Play: Essays in Literary Theory* (Tübingen: G. Narr, 1982), 21. The English Renaissance was familiar with Plato's theory. In his *Defence of Poesy*, Sir Philip Sidney endeavors to reconsider mimesis as a viable bearer of knowledge. Averring that "poesy … is an art of imitation," Sidney identifies mimesis as a laudable means of "representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth," comparing it to "a speaking picture—with this end, to teach and delight" (*The Defence of Poesy*, in *Sir Philip Sidney: Selected Prose and Poetry*, ed. Robert Kimbrough [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983], 97–158 [109–10]).

[13] Plato, *The Republic*, ed. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Modern Library), 10.603b.

[14] Spariosu, *Dionysus Reborn*, 21, 17–18, 15.

[15] Spariosu, *Literature, Mimesis and Play*, 25; Spariosu, *Dionysus Reborn*, 13.

[16] James S. Hans, *The Play of the World* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), vi, 2, 4–5.

[17] Eugen Fink, "The Oasis of Happiness: Toward an Ontology of Play," *Yale French Studies*: 41 (1968): 19–30 (25, 22).

[18] Spariosu, *Literature, Mimesis and Play*, 27.

[19] Hans, 2.

[20] Fink, 20, 21.

[21] See Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (New York: Free Press, 1961); Jacques Ehrmann, ed., *Game, Play, Literature* (Boston: Beacon, 1971); Ronald Bogue, "Foucault, Deleuze, and the Playful Fold of the Self," in *The Play of the Self*, 3–21; Lori J. Ducharme and Gary Alan Fine, "No Escaping Obligation: Erving Goffman on the Demands and Constraints of Play," in *The Play of the Self*, 89–111; Gerald Guinness and Andrew Hurley, eds., *Auctor Ludens: Essays on Play in Literature* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1986); Mihai I. Spariosu. *The Wreath of Wild Olive: Play, Liminality, and the Study of Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

[22] Fink, 21, 25.

[23] Hans, x.

[24] In *Republic*, 10.607a, Plato warns, "If you grant admission to the honeyed Muse in lyric or epic, pleasure and pain will be lords of your city instead of law and that which shall from time to time have approved itself to the general reason as the best." See also Plato's *Ion*.

[25] Clare Kinney, "The Queen's Two Bodies and the Divided Emperor: Some Problems of Identity in *Antony and Cleopatra*," in *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print: Counterbalancing the Canon*, ed. Anne M. Haselkorn and Betty S. Travitsky (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 177–86 (182). This would seem to contradict Philo's announcement at the opening of act 1, as he observes Antony in Egypt: "When he is not Antony, / He comes too short of that great property / Which still should go with Antony" (1.1.58–60).

[26] Adelman, 105.

[27] Anne Barton, "Shakespeare: His Tragedies," in *English Drama to 1710*, 197–233, (231, 232).

[28] Colie, 201, 198; Colie elaborates: "Their ideas of themselves and of each other may have been unrealistic, vain, self-flattering, and self-deceitful, but they reflected what can never be readily explained, the peculiar sense of well-being and power a man and woman in love can give each other" (198).

[29] Adelman, 160. "Antony's fear that he is losing his visible shape," Adelman continues, "may come dangerously close to home: for it is to some extent the fear of everyone in love. When this fear at last becomes desire, when mere loss of self is transformed into 'I come, my queen,' we are bound to feel the release as well as Antony. As the lovers die asserting that death is union, they temporarily resolve the tension for us; and in that sense, their resolution is bound to be ours."

[30] James Hirsh, "Rome and Egypt in *Antony and Cleopatra* and in Criticism of the Play," in *"Antony and Cleopatra": New Critical Essays*, ed. Sara Munson Deats (New York: Routledge, 2005), 175–91 (180, 178).

[31] Adelman, 45, 40. She continues, "This emphasis on alien perspectives accounts, I think, for one of the structural peculiarities of the play" (40).

[32] Colie, 205–6.

[33] Spariosu, *Dionysus Reborn*, 22.

[34] Fink, 24, 24–25.

[35] Ibid., 21.

[36] Though the freedom of Cleopatra's theater may resemble that of Falstaff's, Falstaff's idleness displays a ridiculous earthiness, while Cleopatra's amusements are far more elegant.

[37] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge, 1949), 10.

[38] Wickham, 1–2.

[39] Fink, 20.

[40] Margot Heinemann, " 'Let Rome in Tiber melt': Order and Disorder in *Antony and Cleopatra*," in *"Antony and Cleopatra,"* ed. John Drakakis (New York: St. Martin's, 1994), 166–81 (168).

[41] Joan Lord Hall, *"Antony and Cleopatra": A Guide to the Play* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2002), 137, 135.

[42] "Continually dropping metadramatic references," Mary Ann Bushman argues, "Cleopatra not only plays roles but continually points out her style of playing them, the fact that she *is* playing them" ("Representing Cleopatra," in *In Another Country: Feminist Perspectives on Renaissance Drama*, ed. Dorothea Kehler and Susan Baker [Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1991], 36–49 [39]). Cleopatra's "spectacular parade of shifting moods and stratagems," Rackin observes, is central to "the sharply divided critical estimates of her character and motivation" (85).

[43] Hall, 114.

[44] Barton, "Shakespeare: His Tragedies," 231. Singh also recognizes Cleopatra's "consistently 'playful' " self. However, Singh's interest in "Cleopatra's subversion of the Roman claims to a stable identity" is finally about fears of female dissembling within the culture (320).

[45] Judah Stampfer, *The Tragic Engagement: A Study of Shakespeare's Classical Tragedies* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), 279.

[46] Hall suggests, "A more central dialectic in the play might seem to be the claims of the everyday world colliding with those of fantasy or imagination" (130).

[47] Fink, 21.

[48] Spariosu, *Literature, Mimesis and Play*, 27–28. Hall proposes, "Cleopatra's protean inventiveness can be applauded as a revelation of amplitude, an energy of being" (113).

[49] Fink, 21.

[50] Cleopatra's admiration for dissembled honor can be read as an extension of Falstaff's logic, which maintains that honor is merely a "word," "air," a thing "insensible," that can be possessed neither by the living nor the dead. See William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part One*, ed. David Scott Kastan, Arden Shakespeare, 3rd ser. (London: Thomson, 2002), 5.1.127–39.

[51] See Louis Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[52] In *The Music of the Close: The Final Scenes of Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1978), Walter C. Foreman, Jr., writes, "Through Cleopatra's art the most wonderful becomes the most natural, the most real. But Cleopatra's art is really the art of her creator, and the process she performs with Antony is the basis of the dramatist's art, a process Shakespeare performs in each play, making his dreams seem real" (65).

[53] William Shakespeare, sonnet 60, in Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 283.

[54] Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas P. Roche, Jr. (New York: Penguin, 1978), 1.5, sts. 49–50, 53.

[55] Ibid., 1.5, st. 50.

[56] Ibid., 1.5, st. 51.

[57] In *The Motives of Eloquence: Literary Rhetoric in the Renaissance* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1976), Richard A. Lanham insists that the freedom of rhetoric "invites us to think ourselves divine" (9).