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Some Notes on Ambiguity and the Hero

The Case of Mark Antony¹

To consider Shakespeare's Roman Plays from the perspective of ambiguity is not new: quite a number of scholarly articles have been written about individual plays or the plays grouped under that label with regard to their generic ambiguity² or the ambiguity of their heroes³, respectively. Many of these papers are based on a rather broad, if not fuzzy, concept of 'ambiguity' (indistinct, e.g., from ambivalence).⁴ The main characters – i.e. the heroes as protagonists – are read as being ambiguous because they are 'mixed' in the Aristotelian sense – and, hence, tragic heroes.⁵ But a mixed character is not (necessarily) an ambiguous one. The prerequisite of an ambiguous character – as outlined in the introduction to this collection of essays – is that the hero is ambiguous as a sign, in this case a dramatic sign, and can be interpreted in (at least) two distinct ways; or, put in simpler terms: a character is ambiguous if he or she can be read as being both 'A' and 'B' at the same time. What this means and what the implications of such an ambiguous hero may entail will be exemplified in the following on the basis of one character in particular: Mark Antony, who figures in two of the Roman plays, *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606) and the earlier *Julius Caesar* (1599).⁶ Especially after having read or watched the earlier JC, we may witness the opening scene of AC with the expectation of meeting a worthy soldier. But then we are presented with a character that is called a "strumpet's fool" (1.1.13) and, a little later, claims "the nobleness of life / Is to do thus" (i.e. embrace Cleopatra, 1.1.37-38). Because of our knowledge of JC we know that this does not just signal a change of character, a fall from nobility, but ambiguity. Even in the earlier play, what we learn about Antony is ambiguous: is he a true friend of Caesar, or is he self-servingly ambitious? The identities of the two Mark Antonys in each play may hence even be part of the ambiguity of character as this ambiguity may be the result of the 'same' historical character being represented differently in the two plays. The hero thus turns out to be an ambiguous dramatic sign

on the external communicative level: because of the way he acts (including the things he says) and is perceived within the play, the evaluation of his character remains contradictory throughout. This ambiguity is not resolved in the course of AC: not even in the death of the eponymous hero.

The ambiguity of Antony

Characterisation of Antony: "strumpet's fool" and "infinite virtue"

Antony and Cleopatra opens, as is usual for Shakespeare's plays, *in medias res*, with Philo, one of Antony's followers, commenting on "this dotage of our general's" which, in his view, "[o]erflows the measure" (1.1.1-2). What is striking is the blatantly negative introduction of the eponymous hero by another character, according to whom neither moderation nor measurement are being adhered to.⁷ The assumed decadence and excess may then indeed become obvious and visible when, nine lines later, Antony and Cleopatra enter the stage:

PHILO. Look where they come!
Take but good note, and you shall see in him
The triple pillar of the world transformed
Into a strumpet's fool. Behold and see.
(1.1.10-13)

Philo invites the audience – both on the internal and external level of communication – to "look", "see", "behold" by repeating words from the semantic field of *seeing* as well as related concepts ("Take but good note"). He introduces us to Antony as a sign that is to be read, and wishes for us to arrive at his interpretation of this sign.⁸ In performance, the ambiguity may easily be enhanced by presenting Antony as dignified rather than ridiculous – or the character portrayal may cater to Philo's persuasive aim, who

describes Antony in altogether negative terms⁹: before drawing his listeners' attention to the couple, Philo called him "the bellows and the fan / To cool a gipsy's lust" (1.1.8-9). Philo casts Antony, at the beginning of the play, as the exact opposite of the hero as a character to be admired or a person of particular ability.¹⁰

His allegedly being without measure and the related negative evaluation of his character, however, is contrasted with moments of self-recognition and self-reflection as the play moves on; and even his evocation of the "nobleness of life" (1.1.37) contributes to the ambiguity: is he indeed a "strumpet's fool", or is he to be admired for partaking in a nobility (of love) more valuable than that of a military leader, i.e. has he chosen love over military and political prowess? A third option is offered after Antony has learned that his wife Fulvia is dead:

ANTONY. [...]

I must from this enchanting queen break off.

Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know,

My idleness doth hatch. (1.2.135-137)

Antony here shows that he is not a fool as he recognizes Cleopatra as a "strumpet" (or enchanting queen) and desires to break off from her. He is aware of the "harms" and "ills" caused by his relationship with her and their joint "idleness". "Idleness" is used ambiguously in itself: it may refer to both his inactivity and indolence as well as his folly, which conforms with his introduction as a doting "fool",¹¹ eventually, the meanings merge within the course of the play.¹² While he wishes to act upon his recognition and to leave immediately, Enobarbus warns him of the consequences: Cleopatra might die.¹³ Yet, his actual phrasing "she hath such a celerity in dying" (1.2.151) reveals his dislike of the queen, which Antony responds to with the observation that "She is cunning past man's thought" (1.2.152).

These moments of anagnorisis are juxtaposed with moments of infatuation; as a result, Antony ignores insights into her character, which has fatal consequences: as he wages war for her sake (4.12.9-15), he finds that she has "betrayed" (10) him. His anger causes a certain degree of ambivalence on the part of the reader/audience, as it is both understandable and, yet, it is not¹⁴: while he knew what she was like to begin with (see 1.2.152), he still appears to be disappointed in her now that he feels betrayed. Once more, the external level of communication potentially foregrounds this ambiguity¹⁵: when Cleopatra arms him (4.4), he says "Thou art the armourer of my heart" (6-7), lines assigned to Cleopatra in F (the emendation is Malone's).

The words are followed by Antony's "False, false!" (7), which is generally read as referring to Cleopatra trying "to put a wrong piece of armour on Antony" (233n7).¹⁶ To the audience, however, this may read like another moment of recognition (in particular retrospectively), and "False, false!" then refers to Cleopatra as well. This referential ambiguity contributes to (or is part and parcel with) the overall ambiguity of Antony. We hence may read the lines as Antony either being in love, despite knowing better, or pretending to be in love since he knows better (in which case the words "False, false!" could also be an aside referring to his own words).

As opposed to Antony, who is presented as a character who is either torn between his passion for Cleopatra and his virtue as a soldier, or who has chosen love over being a soldier, or who loves her against his better knowledge and still tries to be a good soldier (but eventually fails), Cleopatra herself is neither a mixed character, nor is she ambiguous: she appears to be seeking just her own advantage, playing different roles as befits the situation. After Antony has won the first battle against Octavius, Cleopatra greets him with the words "O infinite virtue" (4.8.17),¹⁷ only to spin an intrigue a few moments later: because Antony is so enraged at her (4.12), she has word sent to him that she is dead, "And word it, prithee, piteously" (4.13.9), as she commands her servant. She is described as enacting mood swings from the start,¹⁸ which entails that she is never 'herself', that there is no 'essence' in the description of her character, and that their relationship, accordingly, is based on mistrust. Antony, on the contrary, is ambiguous: throughout the play, he is perceived and evaluated by various characters as a fool, guided by passion *and*, at the same time, as virtuous and noble.¹⁹ The fact that Enobarbus is the first to acknowledge Antony's nobility does not resolve this ambiguity either: his wish to die is linked to the recognition of his fault in leaving Antony; nevertheless, throughout the play, he was one of his major critics. That he now notes: "O Antony, / Nobler than my revolt is infamous" (4.9.22), after which he sinks down (SD 246) and remains lifeless, may be indicative of some recognition of Antony's benevolence towards him, but this does not invalidate all negative statements made by Enobarbus about Antony's general character traits in the preceding four acts. Indeed, his reaction, one might argue, adds to the ambiguity.²⁰

The death of a *hero*?

Towards the ending, this ambiguity of Antony's character is once more foregrounded: he naively believes that Cleopatra killed herself, obviously forgetting or disregarding his dialogue with Enobarbus in 1.2, and decides to kill himself subsequent to her suicide, thus again showing traits of being as much "the strumpet's fool" as the virtuous soldier. When he tries to commit suicide and to die nobly, the fall on his sword does not immediately kill him, and when he asks the guards who join him to complete the task, no one dares do it. Instead, he is carried to Cleopatra's monument to find her alive. On meeting her, he states that "Antony hath triumphed on himself" (4.15.15). He thus alludes to his earlier reaction to Cleopatra's (assumed) death and his own "baseness" (4.14.58) that he thought to have recognized in the context of her suicide, i.e. when he regarded her more as virtuous (and courageous) than him for killing herself. Cleopatra equally comments that he was the "Noblest of men" (4.15.61) when he finally dies.

But here the attentive reader/member of the audience comes to a halt. On the external level of communication, these words spoken by Cleopatra echo: as we remember, they were mentioned (quite prominently) by Antony himself in *Julius Caesar*; and, more importantly still, they were mentioned not only once but twice. While at this moment Cleopatra, on the internal communicative level, may be serious about her evaluation of Antony's character (one can never be quite sure), on the external level, the statement results in Antony remaining an ambiguous character.²¹ In the earlier play, Antony used the noble superlatives with reference to *both* Caesar and Brutus, calling each "the noblest [Ro]man" (3.1.256 and 5.5.69), which is a semantic contradiction. The statement cannot be true with regard to both characters: if Caesar is the noblest of all Romans or men, then the utterance about Brutus, in turn, is ironic or empty, meaningless – and vice versa. As the words about Caesar are uttered in a soliloquy, they are probably to be taken as an honest evaluation of his character. However, one might argue, Antony may recognise Brutus' valour in the course of events (which he could not have been aware of in Act 3 of the play). The statement may also be true in neither case as, pragmatically, we tend not to believe a speaker who makes contradictory (or mutually exclusive) statements. This reading may be underscored as both Caesar and Brutus are ambiguous with regard to their status as a hero (both as protagonists and regarding their being admired or of particular ability) in this double

tragedy.²² With regard to Antony, the question remains open as to whether he is a strategic politician²³ or rather a liar – or whether he is in himself torn (i.e. a conflicted character) and, perhaps, even ambivalent as to whom he regards as the "noblest [Ro]man". The ambiguity of Antony as a dramatic sign is thus confirmed by Cleopatra's echoing statement.²⁴

Ambiguous hero vs. mixed character: Antony vs. Othello

Antony's ambiguity is based on the analysis of his own utterances in different contexts and those others make about him. In the case of JC, there is the possibility that he may have forgotten or is simply ignoring what he said earlier; the result, in any case, is a simultaneous interpretation of his character along contradictory lines, culminating in the logical contradiction of his using the identical superlative for two distinct entities. In AC, different characters appear to have different impressions of him and sometimes waver between positive and negative evaluations. These contradictory assessments undeniably go beyond Antony's having merely a "double identity" as proposed by Cheney (21).²⁵

In order to exemplify the difference between an (Aristotelian) mixed character and a character who is turned into an ambiguous dramatic sign, a comparison may be useful. A character quite distinct from Antony, in that he is neither utterly good nor evil but still falling, is Othello. He only gains self-awareness in his anagnorisis (which follows the murder of his wife), and he is mixed in the sense of Aristotle's *Poetics*:

We are left [...] with the person intermediate between these [depraved people undergoing a change from bad fortune to good fortune and a wicked person falling from good fortune to bad]. This is the sort of person who is not outstanding in moral excellence or justice; on the other hand, the change to bad fortune which he undergoes is not due to any moral defect or depravity, but to an error of some kind. (1453a)

With Othello, Shakespeare introduces a hero who is, concurrently, a great and rational warrior, and a great and passionate lover, who ends up doubting his love and falling for the error or flaw of his jealousy, the "green-eyed monster" (3.3.168) that Iago introduces him to. He has, in this sense, a "double identity", to use Cheney's

categorization (21), of his private and his public self. Both selves co-exist, but they never lead to contradictions in how he is perceived and/or evaluated. This ‘double identity’ is situated logically on a different level, as he is evaluated on the basis of his character features. Antony, by contrast, remains ambiguous throughout on the external level of communication; he may be conflicted from time to time, but this is only a symptom (or even a result) of his being ambiguous. The conflicted character of Othello, however, follows a clear pattern: he falls into the trap of his *hamartia*, recognizes his mistake, and dies. Iago is the villain of the tragedy who brought this chain of events about. There is nothing ambiguous about his character nor about the outcome of the tragedy: when Othello kills himself, he is the tragic hero, Iago is the villain, and the audience (depending on the quality of the performance, for sure) has ideally gone through some emotions (Aristotle’s pity and fear). With Antony, it is never quite resolved whether he is the “strumpet’s fool”, the valiant soldier, one after the other, a conflicted combination of both, or still the crafty politician we know from JC.²⁶ The difference is a conceptual one.

The hero and the effects of ambiguity

The ambiguity of Antony as a hero is located, as we have seen, not on the lexical level but on the level of statements about him (and, to a lesser degree, statements by himself, especially in JC), which turns him into an ambiguous dramatic sign. Shakespeare, in his design of Antony, seems to have taken advantage of the fact that this character appears in two plays. Antony, in this regard, is not unique: In the second Henriad (i.e. in *Richard II*, both parts of *Henry IV* and *Henry V*, and the three *Henry VI*-plays), quite a number of characters appear across the plays. In contrast to Antony, however, they are, e.g. in the case of Hal and Henry V, disambiguated in the course of their development over time. Hal develops from a prodigal son, failing to obey his father, to the triumphant king Henry in the battle of Agincourt²⁷; Falstaff may not even be regarded as the same character in the *Henriad* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.²⁸ Antony, then, is somewhat unique, as his character can be considered as a (metadramatic) reflection on what may happen to the identity of a historical figure as a construct in a fictional text. He is interpreted differently in the plays by himself but mostly by other characters, i.e. on the internal level of communication, which results in the

irritation (and possibly ambivalence) of the reader and audience.

The ambiguity of Antony as a dramatic sign relies to a great extent on the doubling of communicative levels in the play: what is being said on the internal level of communication may result in ambiguity on the external level. Overall, AC is a play that tends to be somewhat ambiguous. To begin with, as with JC, one may ask who is the hero or heroine? The title gives three options: Antony and/or Cleopatra. And while Shakespeare relies on historical sources (first and foremost Plutarch’s *Lives* in the 1579 translation of Thomas North), the title (contrary to the other Roman Plays with one central eponymous character) is also suggestive of *Romeo and Juliet*; the play, accordingly, has been and continues to be read as a love tragedy (Smith 262).²⁹ Whereas Romeo and Juliet die shortly after one another, it takes two scenes for Antony to die (from 4.14.103-142 and 4.15.9-65), and Cleopatra only kills herself in 5.2.311. The heroes’ deaths are another curiosity of this play. Unlike all other tragedies, AC does not end with the death of the male, but of the female protagonist. While Antony and Cleopatra are, eventually, thought of in terms of a unity when Caesar speaks of “a pair so famous” (5.2.359), it has been argued that, “[i]n controlling the play’s final movement, Cleopatra has the structural equivalence of Hamlet, or Macbeth, or King Lear, or Othello – the key position of the tragedy.” (Smith 256)³⁰ And then there is the question of genre: is it a tragedy or a history – or both? Bourus, in her short introduction to the play in *The New Oxford Shakespeare*, notes how Shakespeare omitted the commonly used “tragedy” in the title as well as “any other generic labels” (3252).³¹

This openness with regard to characters and genre, as one component of the play’s ambiguity, is, at least partly, based on Plutarch’s *Lives*, the most important source that Shakespeare used for his play, in the translation of Thomas North (1579).³² The extent or kind of Plutarch’s influence on Shakespeare has generated some division among scholars. Catherine Belsey, for instance, notes: “Plutarch was a brilliant storyteller. He was also a great gossip. [...] Shakespeare must have learnt something about unifying his fictional figures as characters from his reading of Plutarch.” (90) While she speaks of Shakespeare’s “unifying” the characters from his source, thus implying a need for such unification (on the basis of ambiguity?), other readers of Plutarch and the play have foregrounded that “something of the ambiguous, self-contradictory quality of Antony and Cleopatra was already present in Plutarch’s narrative waiting to

be developed.” (Wilders 60)³³ When Plutarch, for example, ends the *Life of Antonius* on his descendants, the last words are dedicated to Nero: “This Nero was emperor in our time, and slew his own mother, and had almost destroyed the empire of Rome, through his madness and wicked life, being the fifth emperor of Rome after Antonius.” (Plutarch 161) This ending may be read as a clear statement regarding heredity: “P. [sic] could hardly avoid ambivalence when he wrote of Nero. He stressed the outrages: they endangered the empire, and his removal was a blessed deliverance (87.9).” (Pelling 10) And yet, as Pelling points out in *God’s Slowness to Punish*, Plutarch’s description of the “wicked in Hell” not only includes Nero but also mentions how “a great light suddenly shone forth” at the moment of Nero’s punishment: “and a voice spoke from the light, bidding them change [the incandescent rivets] into a gentler species [...]; for he paid the penalty for his crimes, and moreover the gods owed him a favour, because he had liberated Greece.” (567e, Russell 2; see Pelling 10) Pelling notes that, “[i]f P. shows something of the same ambivalence when he writes of A., it will be no surprise.” (10)

Shakespeare fleshes out the ambivalent evaluations of Plutarch and goes beyond him, as the following examples and short comparisons will show. From the beginning, Antony is presented as a character who embodies contradictory behaviour: his “desire [...] to win honour” (Plutarch, *Life of Antonius* 105), his “noble acts” and “honourable reward [...] as his valiantness deserved” (106); he is altogether “a noble presence” (106). But then, he also draws the “ill-will of the common people” as well as of the noblemen who “did abhor his banquetts and drunken feasts” (109). After the death of Caesar and especially the murder of Cicero, Antony is considered “a cruel man” (116), “odious and hateful to the Romans” (116) as he “gave himself to his former riot and excess” (116).³⁴ As Pelling explains:

Ant. begins by characterising A. strongly but unsubtly: the submissiveness, the excess, the dashing leadership, the bluff soldierliness, the generosity of both friends and enemies [...]. Good qualities and bad are both painted in the firmest lines: both are indeed exaggerated to sharpen the contrast, a crude *chiaroscuro* technique (13).³⁵

It is this technique that Shakespeare takes advantage of when he adapts Plutarch’s prose in North’s translation for the stage. Part of this adaptation is to transform one voice – Plutarch’s

narrator – into many voices, and he uses this multiplicity of voices to introduce contradictory value statements and character evaluations of Antony; here drama allows for the different, unambiguous characterizations by different speakers to result in ambiguity.³⁶

But Plutarch is at times also quite straightforward in his assessment of Antony, especially when it comes to his relationship with Cleopatra. After an agreement has been reached with Octavius (on the initiative of Octavia), Plutarch writes:

Then began this pestilent plague and mischief of Cleopatra’s love (which had slept a time, and seemed to have been utterly forgotten, and that Antonius had given place to better counsel) again to kindle, and to be in force, so as soon as Antonius came near unto Syria. And in the end, the horse of the mind as Plato termeth it, that is so hard of rein (I mean the unreined lust of concupiscence) did put out of Antonius’ head, all honest and commendable thoughts. (127)³⁷

What follows in Plutarch’s narrative is the Parthian campaign, which foregrounds Antony’s failure as a soldier because of his infatuation with Cleopatra.³⁸ He even turns him into a hypocrite (echoed in Shakespeare’s “False, false”), who “finely cloak[ed] his shameful deeds with fine words” (127). The disambiguation in this case goes along with an unequivocal ending of the love story between Antony and Cleopatra.

In Plutarch, after Antony has stabbed himself and is carried to Cleopatra’s monument, she takes care of him:

[...] she [...] called him her lord, her husband, and emperor, forgetting her own misery and calamity, for the pity and compassion she took of him. [...] And as for himself, that she should not lament nor sorrow for the miserable change of his fortune at the end of his days: but rather that she should think of him the more fortunate, for the former triumphs and honours he had received, conserving that while he lived he was the noblest and greatest prince of the world, and that now he was overcome, not cowardly, but valiantly, a Roman by another Roman. (155)

This portrayal of his death scene stands in stark contrast to Shakespeare’s, where Antony speaks of his “miserable change” (4.15.53),³⁹ and Cleopatra uses the ambiguous epithet of him being

the “Noblest of men” (61). In Plutarch, “by the end of the *Life* her love is manifestly real, and she is accorded much more sympathy, loyal to A.” (Pelling 16)⁴⁰

Plutarch's *Life of Antonius* ends on a comparison between Antony and Demetrius. While he concludes that “Antonius by his incontinence, did no hurt but to himself: and Demetrius did hurt unto all others” (North, “Antony and Demetrius” 122), he also states that there “is no simple *decline* in A. as there was in Demetrius, and unlike Demetrius he retains almost to the last his capacity to lead and inspire his men. He preserves a nobility and a stature which Demetrius lacks.” (Pelling 25) In Plutarch, while Demetrius is a “corrupted hero” (Pelling 25), Antony remains contradictory to the last. In Shakespeare, he is an ambiguous hero, and the question is whether or not he is also unique among the works in this respect. But that is for another essay.

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2 See, e.g., Kluge; Lyons; McCanles.

3 See, e.g., Corti; Kullmann; Larquetoux; Parker; Weis. Simmons, e.g., notes that “Shakespeare is concerned with the moral status of heroes, and he renders Antony and Coriolanus critically from first to last.” (118) Jenkins summarizes this moral status as follows: “[The heroes’] defects and virtues are inseparable, [...] their flaws are intertwined with everything that is admirable.” (30) Guardamagna generally speaks of “the rich ambiguity of the playwright’s approach” towards Rome (1). Guardamagna includes *Cymbeline* (and *The Rape of Lucrece*) in her volume of essays; whereas only the tragedies will be considered in what follows. – On the critical history on the heroic and heroes in Shakespeare, see, e.g., Korte for a concise overview. She moreover speaks of heroes as ‘tilting figures’ (“Kippfiguren” 15).

4 McCanles, for example, speaks of the “ambiguity of the dialectic of transcendence” (44) when he, apparently, wishes to refer to the concept of ambivalence; Fuzier comments on the open ending, the lack of an “order figure” (42), and seems to read this as ‘ambiguity’. For clear-cut definitions see, e.g., Bauer et al.; Winter-Froemel/Zirker; Ziegler.

5 See, e.g., Kluge 305.

6 In the following, the Roman plays will be referred to as AC (*Antony and Cleopatra*) and JC (*Julius Caesar*).

7 See also the note in the Arden edition (ed. John Wilders) that comments on the “two related concepts: moderation and

measurement” (Shakespeare, AC 90n2). Jacobson speaks of “a condemnation of excess” implied here (95); see also Cheney (17). Bradley speaks of “the tragic excess” (293) in the opening scene. – *Othello* similarly opens in *medias res* and with a thoroughly negative evaluation of the tragic hero; see section “Ambiguous hero” of this essay for a further comparison between the plays.

8 See Belsey: “Certainly, it is in the Roman plays that the dramatis personae most commonly talk about each other, especially in order to determine who and what these others essentially are.” (90) The point is, however, that we do not learn who Antony is on the basis of Philo’s comments; rather do his statements contribute to the character’s ambiguity.

9 “Our first view is unfavourable, through Philo’s moral disapproval” (Bullough 239); Bullough also goes on to comment on the influence of performance. In the opening scene begins what Patrick Gray describes as follows: “the audience is kept at a distance from the action, uncertain which perspective to take, as centuries of divided assessments attest.” (*Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Empire* 259) Bevington devotes a chapter to “The contrarities of critical response” in his Introduction (13-17).

10 See *OED*, “hero, *n.*” 1. and 4.

11 See *OED*, “idleness, *n.*”: “†3. Light-headedness, imbecility; delirium; also folly, foolishness, silliness. *Obsolete. rare.*” and “4. The state or condition of being idle or unoccupied; want of occupation; habitual avoidance of work, inactivity, indolence; an instance of this. (Now the ordinary sense.)” See also the Arden edition which, however, gives an incorrect *OED* reference (Shakespeare, AC 103n137).

12 See, e.g., 1.3.91-101: Antony either means himself when he says that Cleopatra “holds idleness her subject”, which fits her earlier reference to her oblivion being “a very Antony”; or he refers to her being in control of idleness, as suggested by the Arden edition: “If it were not that your highness were in control of these frivolities” (Shakespeare, AC 112n93-4). Cleopatra first ironically and paradoxically speaks of her “sweating labour” of bearing idleness; a possible paraphrase is that Cleopatra finds it strenuous to be lazy, which makes sense if Antony himself is identified with idleness. This, however, also implies the other meaning of idleness, as is expressly stated when Cleopatra speaks of her “unpitied folly”. This ambiguity – which results in the merging of both meanings – is once more explicitly foregrounded in 1.4, when Caesar recognizes his own folly as he underestimated the influence of Pompey (1.4.40ff) and ends with a comment on his inactivity (1.4.76-77).

13 On the (anti-)heroism of Cleopatra, see, e.g. Smith-Howard. See also Vickers on *otium*.

14 See also Bullough, who comments (with reference to Schanzer): “the play is built up on a constant oscillation between attraction and repulsion to and from the two chief characters.” (252)

15 See Blissett on dramatic irony or discrepant awareness in AC.

16 Gray comments on both Eros’ and Cleopatra’s “ineptness at their task”: “Antony ostensibly draws a distinction between the two armourers [...] but instead ironically flags a similarity [...]. Cleopatra protects his sense of himself as a grand, godlike figure [...]. Ultimately [...] this armour proves ‘false, false’.” (*Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Empire* 214-15)

17 “Virtue” here has the meaning of Latin *virtus*, i.e. fortitude and courage (*OED* I.6.a.; see also Shakespeare, AC 243n17).

18 An early indication of this is Cleopatra’s order to a messenger: “If you find him sad, / Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report / That I am sudden sick.” (1.3.4-6)

19 His virtue is linked to his ‘nobility’, which is mentioned

several times in the course of the play, once as a noun and 33 times as an adjective or adverb.

20 Some readers even go as far as to regard Enobarbus as a potential candidate for the tragic hero of AC; see Wald/Sprang.

21 As Bradley notes: “we do not feel the hero of the tragedy to be a man of the noblest type.” (294)

22 See Gray, “Caesar the Comic Antichrist” and “The Compassionate Stoic”; Riecker/Zirker.

23 See Knappe/Winkler.

24 On the internal level, this Janus-like appearance is addressed over and over again in the play (e.g. by Cleopatra in 2.5.116-17; see also the note by Wilders, 153n116-17), which can be seen in the light of Shakespeare’s interest in the ambiguity of identity as addressed in various plays during this period, e.g. in *King Lear* (see also Dupas, esp. 9-10).

25 Gray speaks of Antony’s “split existence” (*Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Empire* 178). The inner strife between two conflicting attitudes, often expressed in a *psychomachia*, is typical of many of Shakespeare’s heroes; Antony, for example, is also at times torn between his will and reason, e.g. in 3.13.4 and 202-205. But this is not the same as him being an ambiguous character. – On *psychomachia* in Shakespeare, see also Zirker, esp. ch. 2; Kluge 316. See Dupas on the dualities and oppositions introduced in the play, e.g. Orient/Occident, Egypt/Rome, past/present, morality/immorality (8); and see Cantor (e.g. 189) and Smith (e.g. 266) for reasons why such simple dichotomies do not hold.

26 Cheney apparently includes the audience’s perception of the character when he writes that there is “a fundamental uncertainty, from a Roman viewpoint, whether it is Antony’s virility or his effeminacy that they are witnessing.” (18) Ambivalence towards a character may be the result of ambiguity; the decisive point, however, is that the character is an ambiguous sign, and ambivalence may be one effect of this ambiguity.

27 See, e.g., Estill/Meneses.

28 See, e.g., Levenson.

29 See also Bourus’s introduction in the *New Oxford Shakespeare*; and Pelling on the motif of the *Liebested* (17). Bullough writes: “Antony and Cleopatra are not star-crossed lovers, but prisoners of their own characters” (238); this shows the extent to which he takes into account their psychology.

30 “In some readings, the death of the two lovers gives us a double tragedy, deepening or amplifying the tragic movement through reiteration. In others, the second death either undermines the first, or is rendered bathetic by it – and this links to the ways in which the play’s genre teeters between high tragedy and satirical collapse, challenging the single arc we normally associate with tragedy by its repeated structure of doubling and duplication.” (Smith 258)

31 She notes that Shakespeare was “probably influenced” by two “closet dramas” on Antony and Cleopatra, respectively: “Robert Garnier’s French Antonius, translated by the Countess of Pembroke (Mary Sidney Herbert) as *The Tragedie of Antonius* (1595, STC 11623), and Samuel Daniel’s *The Tragedie of Cleopatra*, published in a series of collections of Daniel’s poetry, beginning in 1594.” (3251) See also Bullough 231-36, 358-406 and 406-49; and Gray, *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic* 195. Bullough further introduces another ambiguity of genre: “both a tragedy of state and a tragedy of love and honour” (252). See also Leimberg: “Does not, rather, each single tragedy in the canon belong to an essentially different type within the tragic genre as seen in Shakespeare’s day and is, accordingly, different in tone and purpose?” (251-52); she accordingly speaks against any attempts to classify Shakespeare’s plays with generalizing labels and goes on to state: “It seems to me that there are

no such things as ‘Shakespeare’s tragic heroes’ in general, much less that they are all ‘slaves of passion.’” (252)

32 On Shakespeare’s use of Plutarch see, e.g., Bevington; Bourus 3251; Bullough 218.

33 Pelling, in his work on Plutarch’s *Life of Antony*, similarly writes: “the concerns of the two writers are often closely similar: so similar, indeed, that comparison with Shakespeare continually illuminates Plutarch’s own narrative and dramatic techniques.” (37) See also Bevington: “Shakespeare is faithful not only to the historical facts but to the spirit of Plutarch’s account.” (4) Bullough writes that Shakespeare’s “characters are [...] composed of many opposite qualities. In this conception of ‘the union of opposites’ he was aided by Plutarch, who loved to portray the diversity of motives warring in the same man.” (250-251) As we have seen, there is more to Antony than the “warring” of a diversity of motives, but still: the ambiguity of Shakespeare’s Antony is at least partly instigated by Plutarch.

34 See also Plutarch’s *Life of Julius Caesar*, where, in the aftermath of Caesar’s murder, Antony unjustly has people killed: “some followed this troupe [of Brutus and the conspirators], and went amongst them, as if they had bene of the conspiracie, and falsely chalenged parte of the honor with them: among them was Caius Octavius, and Lentulus Spinther. But both of them were afterwards put to death, for their vaine covetousnes of honor, by Antonius, and Octavius Caesar, the younger: and yet had no parte of that honor for the which they were put to death, neither did any man beleve that they were any of the confederates, or of counsel with them. For they that did put them to death, tooke revenge rather of the will they had to offend, then of any fact they had committed.” (North, *Plutarch’s Life of Julius Caesar* 330) But then, Shakespeare also adds another facet to this trait when he has Antony open Caesar’s testament in the forum, and not Brutus and his confederates as in Plutarch: “But when they had opened Caesars testament, and found a liberrall legacie of money, bequeathed unto every citizen of Rome.” (North, *Plutarch’s Life of JC* 330)

35 Pelling continues: “We are gradually shown a noble and brilliant nature, a man torn by psychological struggle and cruelly undone by his flaws: by his weakness of will, by his susceptibility, by his sad and conscious submission to his lowest traits.” (15) See also Cantor: “Antony is mutable and can adapt himself to the manner and mood of the people around him [...] [he] is a warm-hearted and erotic character who [...] is able to indulge in all sorts of vices without losing his status as a hero.” (188) Cantor here refers to a passage in Plutarch: “Things that seems intolerable in other men, as to boast commonly, to jeast with one or other, to drinke like a good fellow with every body, to sith with the souldiers when they dine, and to eate and drink with them souldierlike: it is incredible what wonderfull love it wane him amongst them.” (Bullough 5: 257; Cantor 284n18)

36 Wilders comments: “As a result of this transposition [from Plutarch’s prose to drama] the unfavourable comments on Antony become distinctively Roman and lose something of the authoritative force and objectivity they had when delivered by Plutarch himself. They become only one of several ways in which he may be assessed.” (59) Wilders does not speak of ambiguity, but he certainly thinks along the lines of contradictions regarding Antony in this statement. See also Bevington: “Plutarch views Antony as the victim of a tragic infatuation. [...] All this is of course in Shakespeare’s play as well, but it is expressed by Roman commentators like Demetrius and Philo, or Caesar, or Antony himself when a ‘Roman thought’ has struck him, and is offset by a contrasting world of pleasure and imagination. [...] [4] The difference is one of emphasis. Shakespeare found in Plutarch a rich complexity in both of his protagonists, one that gave him ample material for his portrayal of their relationship once he set aside the Graeco-Roman perspective of the narrator he found in his original. Plutarch speaks censoriously, and yet he lends

support to the idea that Antony and Cleopatra are like demigods. Shakespeare retains much derogatory information not so much in what we see Antony actually do onstage as in what others say about him and what he admits about himself. Yet Shakespeare balances this picture of a tragic fall into enslavement in two ways: by ennobling the vision of love in a fashion that Plutarch could never have sanctioned, and conversely by exploring a darker side of Octavius Caesar's rise to empire than is evident in Plutarch." (4-5)

37 The reference is to *Phaedrus* 233 d-e (xvii n1). – He earlier calls their love “the last and extremest mischief of all other” which “did waken and stir up many vices yet hidden in him” (119). See also Bevington: “Antony became an example of enslavement to lust in Boccaccio and in subsequent stories of ‘the Fall of Princes’ written by John Lydgate and others.” (6)

38 Pelling suggests that Shakespeare chose to “drop” this episode “to bring out A.’s soldierly greatness on stage” (40).

39 See also Gray, *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic* 198.

40 Pelling also comments on how “A. disappears from the narrative at 78.1, and the closing chapters are Cleopatra’s. P. often continues a *Life*’s narrative beyond a subject’s death [...], but never so elaborately as this [...]. We have two heroes whose fates have become one.” (16) – Bullough refers to Chaucer’s legend of Cleopatra as “a tale of true love” (221) in *The Legend of Good Women*.

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