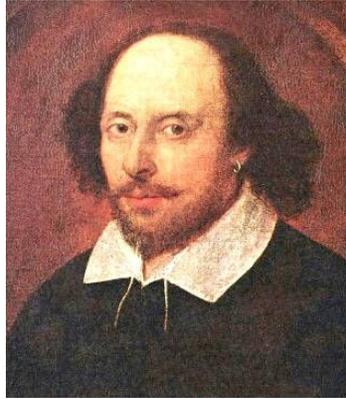


ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

by William Shakespeare



THE AUTHOR

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was born into the family of a prosperous tradesman in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. While in his mid-teens, he was forced to leave school because his family fell into a period of poverty, so that he had only a rudimentary education. In 1582, he married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior and already three months pregnant. The marriage produced three children in three years, but in 1585, Shakespeare left Stratford to go to London to seek his fortune in the big city.

In London, he embarked upon a career on the stage, becoming a popular actor by the early fifteen nineties. In 1591, he penned his first play, *Love's Labour's Lost*. His early plays were comedies, and show nothing of the depth that characterized his later works. His plots were borrowed from a variety of sources, both ancient and contemporary. During his career, he wrote 37 plays, three narrative poems, and 154 sonnets.

His writing brought him fame and popularity, but he continued to act as well as write (critics love to speculate about which of the characters in his plays would have been played by the author). He eventually became a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men when James I ascended the throne). Most of his plays were performed at local theaters like the Rose, the Globe, and the indoor Blackfriars. When the Globe burned to the ground in 1613 (a cannon misfired during a performance of *Henry VIII*), Shakespeare retired, and died in Stratford three years later on his fifty-second birthday.

Antony and Cleopatra (1607), like *Julius Caesar*, *Richard II*, and *Richard III*, is both a history play and a tragedy, but, unlike the others, was written after the great tragedies for which Shakespeare is best known. The main source of the story is Plutarch's *Lives of Noble Greeks and Romans*, to whose Life of Mark Antony Shakespeare adheres rather closely. The most notable aspects of the play involve the contradictions in the central characters - each is by turns strong and weak, noble and deplorable, possessed of integrity and ready to betray those nearest and dearest for personal advantage. Only if both the strengths and weaknesses are taken seriously can the play truly be viewed as a tragedy, the story of those who are noble and great brought down by self-

destructive impulses. If the strengths, which in truth are rarely on display, are not assumed by the reader, the deceit and vacillation will reduce the play to a story of a fundamentally weak man getting what he deserves because he allows himself to be seduced by a *femme fatale*.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Mark Antony - A Roman general and member of the Second Triumvirate, here pictured as an aging playboy, he falls in love with Cleopatra and loses a civil war against Octavius, then commits suicide.
- Octavius Caesar - This member of the Second Triumvirate wins the civil war and becomes Augustus, Rome's first emperor.
- M. Aemilius Lepidus - The third, rather nondescript, member of the Second Triumvirate, he is deposed and imprisoned by Caesar.
- Sextus Pompeius - Son of Pompey the Great, member of the First Triumvirate, he is in rebellion against the Triumvirate. After a truce, Caesar attacks him and has him murdered.
- Enobarbus - Antony's closest retainer, he deserts his master after becoming fed up with his foolish decisions, then regrets his betrayal and comes back to die outside Alexandria.
- Demetrius, Philo, Ventidius, Scarus, Eros, Decretas - Friends of Antony.
- Canidius - Antony's commander at the Battle of Actium.
- Agrippa, Maecenas, Thidias, Proculeius - Friends of Caesar.
- Taurus - Caesar's commander at the Battle of Actium.
- Menas, Varrius - Friends of Pompey.
- Cleopatra - Queen of Egypt, she falls in love with Antony, betrays him, and then commits suicide.
- Charmian, Iras, Alexas, Diomedes - Cleopatra's attendants.
- Mardian - Cleopatra's eunuch.
- Seleucus - Cleopatra's treasurer.
- Octavia - Sister of Caesar and wife of Mark Antony.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“Take but good note, and you shall see in him
The triple pillar of the world transformed
Into a strumpet’s fool” (Philo, Ii, 11-13)

“Things that are past are done with me. ‘Tis thus:
Who tells me true, though in his tale lie death,
I hear him as he flattered.” (Antony, Iii, 93-95)

“Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety; other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies.” (Enobarbus, Iiii, 36-39)

“It is shaped, sir, like itself, and it is as broad as it hath breadth; it is just so high as it is, and moves with its own organs. It lives by that which nourisheth it, and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates.” (Antony, IIvii, 41-44)

“Tis better playing with a lion’s whelp
Than with an old one dying.” (Enobarbus, IIIxiii, 94-95)

“The breaking of so great a thing should make
A greater crack.” (Caesar, Vi, 14-15)

NOTES

Act I, scene 1 - The play begins in Egypt, and Demetrius and Philo, friends of Mark Antony, are bemoaning the fact that their glorious and brave captain has been enmeshed by the web of love spun by Cleopatra. They see in him an old man acting like a foolish boy. Meanwhile, Antony and Cleopatra enter, mooning over one another. Soon a messenger arrives, and the two speculate about what the message might be, but put off hearing it and speak of the delights they intend to enjoy that evening.

Act I, scene 2 - Some of Cleopatra’s attendants summon a soothsayer to tell their fortunes, which leads to ribald banter among them. Cleopatra then enters, looking for Antony, who soon approaches with the messenger, prompting her to leave. Antony asks for the message from Rome, and hears that his wife Fulvia has died. He had long wished for such an event because of his love for Cleopatra, but now regrets her death. He also feels guilty that Rome is at war while he is in Egypt fooling around with the Queen, and decides to return home.

Act I, scene 3 - Cleopatra, angry that Antony is planning to leave, decides to play hard to get. Antony appears, and Cleopatra proceeds to sulk and rant against his unfaithfulness. He tells her that he is needed in Rome because of the civil war, and informs her of Fulvia’s death. Cleopatra immediately upbraids him for not mourning the death of his wife, suggesting that he would act the same way were she to die. He asks her leave to depart, but she continues to scold and manipulate.

Act I, scene 4 - In Rome, Caesar and Lepidus speak of Antony, appalled at his womanly weakness in Rome's hour of peril. A messenger tells them that pirates have joined forces with Pompey against Rome, and, bemoaning Antony's continued absence and determined to raise an army without him.

Act I, scene 5 - Back in Egypt, Cleopatra complains to her attendants that she misses Antony already, and makes bawdy jests with her eunuch Mardian. Alexas arrives with a gift from Antony - a pearl, which he promises will be followed by conquered kingdoms laid at her feet. She gives orders that paper and ink be brought so she can write Antony every day while he is gone.

Act II, scene 1 - Pompey enters with some of his men. The war is going well for them - he controls the sea and enjoys the favor of the common people. Meanwhile, Antony seeks his pleasure in Egypt and Caesar lacks popular support. A messenger then arrives to tell him that Caesar and Lepidus have an army in the field, and that Antony is expected in Rome momentarily. Pompey fears Antony's military prowess, but hopes that he and Caesar will quarrel.

Act II, scene 2 - Antony has arrived in Rome and is preparing to meet with Caesar. Lepidus tells Enobarbus to warn Antony to control his tongue. The two principals arrive, and Lepidus begs them to put their differences aside. They find this hard to do; Caesar accuses Antony of urging his wife and brother to make war on him, but Antony denies having anything to do with their actions. He then accuses Antony of not supplying men and arms when he requested them, and Antony admits he procrastinated, but asks forgiveness. Their friends encourage them to settle their differences after meeting Pompey's threat, but Caesar admits he can never again be friends with Antony, though he desires to make common cause with him in the present crisis. Agrippa then proposes, since Antony's wife has died, that he should marry Caesar's sister Octavia, thus cementing the bond between them, and both men agree. Antony then says that, since he had received great kindness from Pompey in the past, he must thank him before making war on him, and Caesar agrees. He and Antony leave immediately to solemnize the marriage, while Enobarbus talks about Egypt and the way Cleopatra had at first pursued and won the love of Antony. For the second time, we see a reference to the fact that Cleopatra had earlier seduced Julius Caesar.

Act II, scene 3 - Antony has now married Octavia, and promises that he will no more stray as he has in the past, though he must be away from her often because of his responsibilities, to which she meekly agrees. The soothsayer then enters and tells Antony that he should return to Egypt, explaining that he can never win any contest against Caesar, not because he is not the better man, but because Caesar has the better luck. Antony decides to take his advice, while at the same time sending his friend Ventidius to make war on Parthia.

Act II, scene 4 - Lepidus orders Agrippa and Maecenas to Mount Mesena to confront Pompey's army.

Act II, scene 5 - Back in Egypt, Cleopatra is bored, and can't decide whether to listen to music, play billiards, or go fishing. Then a messenger arrives and tells her that Antony has married Octavia; she promptly beats him and draws a knife on him, and he flees. She calls him back and has him repeat the news, sends him away, then, completely flustered, tells her servants to pump

the messenger for details about Octavia's appearance. Note that Shakespeare engages in a bit of obvious foreshadowing in this scene, as Cleopatra repeatedly uses snake imagery in her conversation.

Act II, scene 6 - The armies prepare to meet in battle as the members of the Triumvirate and Pompey gather for a parley. Pompey insists his cause is the same as the one that drove noble Brutus - that of liberty against tyranny. The triumvirs offer Pompey Sicily and Sardinia in exchange for ending his aggression, clearing the sea of pirates, and paying an annual tribute. Pompey agrees, all shake hands, and adjourn to Pompey's ship for a celebratory banquet. Enobarbus then tells Menas that the truce will not last because Antony is sure to return to Egypt, alienating Caesar by his unfaithfulness to Octavia.

Act II, scene 7 - At the banquet, most of the revelers are drunk and Antony is telling the others about the marvels of Egypt. Menas enters, calls Pompey aside, and tells him that he can be master of the world if he simply murders the triumvirs now under his power. Pompey responds that, had Menas done the act without asking first, he should have received great honors, but now that he has asked, Pompey must refuse for his own honor's sake. Menas then swears to himself that he will never serve Pompey again.

Act III, scene 1 - Ventidius has just beaten the Parthians, and his fellow-soldier encourages him to pursue his advantage and conquer more territory. Ventidius refuses, arguing that most of the conquests of the great are really won by their officers, and that an officer who is too successful earns his master's ire. He decides to stop where he is and report to Antony that he has won a great victory in his name.

Act III, scene 2 - Enobarbus and Agrippa mock the drunken Lepidus for the way he seeks to curry the favor of both other triumvirs. Caesar and Antony prepare to part, and Caesar warns Antony not to mistreat his sister. Antony is offended at the very thought that he should do such a thing, and he and his new wife depart.

Act III, scene 3 - Cleopatra grills the messenger about Octavia, and he minimizes her appearance, height, and bearing; she, of course, rewards him for his honesty.

Act III, scene 4 - Antony complains to Octavia that Caesar has broken the truce, waging war on Pompey again, and has furthermore publicized his will, in which he mentions Antony hardly at all. She begs him not to believe everything he hears, but to no avail. He thus prepares to make war on Caesar, but Octavia begs him to allow her to try to mediate the dispute, and he reluctantly agrees.

Act III, scene 5 - Enobarbus reports that Caesar has defeated and murdered Pompey, then denied Lepidus any of the credit for assisting in the victory, throwing him in prison instead. Antony's ships are now heading toward a confrontation with Caesar's forces in Italy.

Act III, scene 6 - Caesar has heard that Antony has returned to Egypt, bestowed much of his conquered territory on Cleopatra, and is preparing a vast alliance to attack Rome. Octavia enters,

bearing her message of reconciliation, and Caesar takes offense at the fact that she enters the city in such plain dress and without an adequate escort. When she hears what Antony has done, she is distraught beyond measure.

Act III, scene 7 - In Egypt, Cleopatra is determined to accompany Antony to war, but Enobarbus argues that her presence would weaken his resolve and concentration. Antony enters and speaks of his resolve to meet Caesar at sea, though his sailors are inexperienced and Antony himself has no record as a naval commander. Despite the warnings of Enobarbus and his commander Canidius, Antony is determined to meet Caesar's fleet at Actium.

Act III, scene 8 - Caesar tells his commander, Taurus, to hold back his troops until the battle at sea is over rather than joining battle on land immediately.

Act III, scene 9 - Antony tells Enobarbus to gather his army on a hill to see the outcome of the sea battle.

Act III, scene 10 - Enobarbus reports that the sea battle has become a rout. Antony's ships were winning at first, but Cleopatra fled unaccountably and Antony followed her rather than pursuing the fight. Canidius prepares to surrender his troops to Caesar as six kings have already done, while Enobarbus goes off to follow Antony.

Act III, scene 11 - Antony, thoroughly ashamed of himself, tells his followers to divide up the treasure in his ship and flee for their lives or surrender to Caesar. Cleopatra then enters, full of apologies for her cowardly flight, never dreaming that he would follow her rather than pursue the battle. Unable to help himself, he forgives her and prepares to humble himself before Caesar.

Act III, scene 12 - Caesar receives Antony's ambassador, a humble schoolmaster, who begs that Antony be allowed to remain in Egypt, or at least live as a private citizen in Athens. Cleopatra asks that Egypt remain under her even though she must give up the rest of her lands. Caesar refuses Antony's request and tells Cleopatra she can have what she wants if she executes or exiles Antony, then sends Thidias to try to persuade Cleopatra to betray Antony.

Act III, scene 13 - Cleopatra asks Enobarbus whether she or Antony was at fault for the defeat, and he assures her that he, being the seasoned soldier, was at fault because he should have known better than to give in to his emotions. Antony, having heard Caesar's conditions, agrees to be turned over to him so Cleopatra can retain her kingdom, but at the same time issues a challenge to single combat, though Enobarbus knows no such challenge will be accepted. Thidias arrives from Caesar and asks Cleopatra whether she submitted to Antony of her own free will or under compulsion, and she affirms the latter, and submits herself to the will of Caesar. When Antony enters and sees Thidias kissing Cleopatra's hand, he orders him whipped. He then cries out against Cleopatra for her unfaithfulness, then angrily sends the beaten Thidias back to Caesar. Cleopatra avers that she loves Antony still, and he tells her he intends to continue the war on land. Before that, however, they will spend the night in feasting and love. Enobarbus, knowing that Antony will be no more effective in the field in anger than he was in doting love, considers how he might leave his service.

Act IV, scene 1 - Caesar laughs when he hears of Antony's challenge and, fortified by deserters from Antony's army, prepares to finish him off in the following day's battle.

Act IV, scene 2 - Antony, hearing that Caesar has rejected his challenge, encourages his friends to enjoy the feast, for it may be their last.

Act IV, scene 3 - Antony's soldiers, preparing for the coming battle, hear strange music from underground and think it is the god Hercules abandoning Antony.

Act IV, scene 4 - Antony, not having slept at all, dons his armor and heads out to battle, while Cleopatra retires to her bedroom with her attendants.

Act IV, scene 5 - Antony, prepared for battle, realizes the folly of not fighting Caesar on land to begin with. When he is told that Enobarbus has deserted him and gone over to Caesar, he realizes that it is his own fault and sends the loyal retainer's treasure to him with his thanks.

Act IV, scene 6 - Caesar tells Agrippa that he wants Antony taken alive, and orders that those who have deserted Antony should be put in the front lines against him. When Enobarbus hears that Antony has sent his treasure after him, he is overwhelmed with guilt, decides not to fight against his old master, but rather to go die in a ditch.

Act IV, scene 7 - Encountering more resistance than he expected, Agrippa is forced to retreat and Antony and his men go on the offensive.

Act IV, scene 8 - Antony's forces win the day and retake Alexandria, with Scarus receiving a terrible wound but continuing to fight.

Act IV, scene 9 - As sentries discuss the events of the day, Enobarbus approaches the city wall, declares himself a traitor and a villain, and dies. The sentries bear him into the city.

Act IV, scene 10 - Antony wakes to find that Caesar is planning an attack by both land and sea.

Act IV, scene 11 - Caesar again decides to hold back his infantry and commence the attack by sea.

Act IV, scene 12 - Antony begins to see evil omens, and soon the battle at sea is lost, as Cleopatra's ships defect to Caesar. He swears he has again been betrayed, senses that his death is imminent, and decides to kill Cleopatra first.

Act IV, scene 13 - Cleopatra locks herself in a monument and tells Mardian to tell Antony that she has killed herself, then bring her word how he responds.

Act IV, scene 14 - Mardian reports Cleopatra's supposed suicide to Antony, and he decides to follow her. He summons Eros and asks him to run him through with his sword, but Eros, reluctant to do so, kills himself instead. Antony then falls on his sword, but botches the job and does not die. Diomedes then comes from Cleopatra, telling Antony that she is not really dead, and he orders his men to carry him to the monument where she is hiding.

Act IV, scene 15 - Antony, dying, is carried to the monument, where he is caressed and mourned by Cleopatra. He dies, and she insists that she will never submit to Caesar, but join her love in death.

Act V, scene 1 - Decretas brings Antony's sword to Caesar and reports his death. Caesar mourns the death of a great man, and regrets that the world was not big enough for both of them. He hears that Cleopatra is locked up in the monument, and sends word by Proculeius that he has no intention of humiliating her, but will treat her kindly once she has been taken to Rome.

Act V, scene 2 - When Proculeius comes to Cleopatra and asks her what gift she would have of Caesar, she replies that she would like her son to succeed her as ruler of Egypt. Soldiers then enter the monument and seize her; when she draws a dagger, she is quickly disarmed. Unwilling to be taken back to Rome a prisoner, she threatens to starve herself to death instead. She speaks words in praise of the dead Antony, then Caesar enters and tells her that if she commits suicide, her children will never rule Egypt. She hands Caesar a record of her treasures, affirming that she has revealed everything, but when she asks her treasurer Seleucus to confirm her accounting, he says she has only listed half her treasure. She insists that he exaggerates, but Caesar tells her that she is welcome to whatever she has reserved for herself. After Caesar leaves, Cleopatra sends Charmian out on an errand, then tells her women to dress her in her finest clothing, what she had worn the day she first met Antony. Soon a clown enters with a basket of figs; concealed in the basket are deadly vipers. Iras is the first to die, followed by Cleopatra, who applies asps to her breast and arm, then finally Charmian. Caesar enters too late, finding all dead, and says that he will bury the queen beside her lover.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* is usually listed among the Bard's tragedies, but a tragedy requires a noble protagonist brought to a bad end because of a flaw in his character. Does Antony qualify as a tragic hero? Is he sufficiently noble for his end to produce the requisite emotional catharsis in the audience? Why or why not? Support your argument with specifics from the play.
2. William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* is one of the great playwright's later tragedies, and clearly Antony is intended to be the tragic hero of the story. Some critics have argued, however, that Cleopatra can also be seen as a tragic heroine. Evaluate this assessment. Is she sufficiently noble for her end to produce the requisite emotional catharsis in the audience, or is she simply a tramp who makes her own bed and at the end is forced to sleep in it? Support your arguments with specifics from the play.
3. Assess the love of the two title characters in William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Do you believe they are really in love, or is their relationship governed by what the Bible calls "the lust of the flesh"? What does love mean to them? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.

4. William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* consists of five acts divided into forty-two scenes. This means that the audience or the reader is constantly being bounced around from one place to another, from one group of people to another - not always easy to follow when the acting is taking place on a virtually bare stage. Some have criticized this structure as destroying the unity of the play, but Shakespeare clearly had a purpose in mind; after all, when he wrote this play in 1607 he was a seasoned and popular dramatist. Why do you think he chose to divide the play this way? What purposes might he have had for breaking it up into so many scenes?
5. In William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, the two leading members of the Second Triumvirate, Antony and Caesar, are foils. In what ways do the contrasts between them bring out the salient characteristics of each? Use specific incidents and quotations to support your argument.
6. In William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, the two women in Antony's life, Cleopatra and Octavia, are foils. In what ways do the contrasts between them bring out the salient characteristics of each? Use specific incidents and quotations to support your argument.
7. In William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, how accurate would it be to characterize Cleopatra as essentially an actress, a woman who is always playing a part, and can't really prevent herself from doing so? How does this assessment explain her responses in key situations in the story? Can you think of any places in the play where this evaluation is *not* accurate?
8. Throughout much of William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony seems to be fighting an internal battle between his reason and his emotions, his duty and his passion, or what are sometimes characterized as the male and female sides of his personality. Which side does Shakespeare consider to be more important? Which, at the end of the play, wins out?
9. In William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, the lines between the public and private lives of the characters, especially the two protagonists, are constantly being blurred. For a playwright who lived during the reign of Elizabeth I, who constantly used her private life as a political tool, can any such dividing line exist? Discuss the extent to which those in positions of power in the play are presented as having private lives at all. Do the private lives of the principals simply become extensions of their politics? Does the desire for a private life apart from public duty constitute a mark of betrayal and abdication? Support your argument with specifics from the play.
10. William Shakespeare wrote *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Macbeth* at about the same time, and the leading female figures are often considered Shakespeare's strongest. Compare and contrast the strength of the central female characters, Cleopatra and Lady Macbeth, being sure to consider their ability to control strong men, their tendency to use their sexuality as a tool to gain power over others, and the major features of their personalities.

11. William Shakespeare wrote *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Macbeth* at about the same time. The leading male figures in the plays have in common the fact that our ability to picture them as noble and worthy is largely dependent on the words others speak about them. Compare and contrast the ways in which Shakespeare establishes the nobility of Antony and Macbeth through the eyes of their friends and the foes who respect them. Are these testimonials sufficient to establish the quality of the characters in the eyes of the audience? Why or why not?
12. Women are often accused of being moody and changeable. To what extent does the female protagonist of William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* fit that stereotype? Do these features of her character represent something she is unable to control, or are they aspects of the persona she presents to the world in order to manipulate people and accomplish her goals? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
13. In William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony likes to picture himself as a great military hero, especially in his reminiscences about past triumphs. To what extent is this picture of himself an accurate one, and to what extent is he self-deceived? Is he a genuine hero who has become distracted because of his infatuation with the most beautiful woman in the world, or is he a has-been who is trying to rest on past laurels?
14. William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* has much to say about the power exercised by women over the men around them. Giving attention to both Cleopatra and Octavia, discuss the extent to which their power is illusion and the extent to which it is reality. What are the sources of this power? To what extent are the fears of those who fear female influence and the expectations of those who place their hopes in it justified? Use specific quotations from the play to support your argument.
15. Audiences who attend plays appreciate the appearance of admirable characters, people they admire and for whom they desire success and happiness. Consider William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* in this light. Does the play contain any truly admirable characters? If so, who are they and why are they admirable? If not, why do none of the leading characters qualify, and what impact does this have on your enjoyment of the play?
16. In William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Rome and Egypt represent two different kinds of society, two ways of looking at the world. What are the chief characteristics of these two different cultures? How does Shakespeare use the contrasts between the two to bring out key themes in the story? Can you find any important ways in which the two societies are the same?
17. Much of the action of William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* involves the protagonist being caught in a tug-of-war between Cleopatra and Caesar, Egypt and Rome, love and duty. In the end, which side wins? Does Shakespeare approve of this outcome? What is the playwright trying to communicate by means of this conflict?

18. Discuss the pictures of friendship presented in William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Choose either the friendship of Antony and Enobarbus or that of Cleopatra and Charmian and present the major characteristics of the friendship you select. What do the minor characters who are confidants of the protagonists reveal about the traits of the leading figures? How do they contribute to the overall message of the play?
19. "When in Rome, act like the Romans." This advice to blend in with one's surroundings is often valuable for the traveler, but is of much more questionable use to a leader. In fact, a leader who acts like a chameleon is often pictured as weak and vacillating. To what extent is Antony in William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* guilty of this flaw? Is he a man who stays true to himself no matter where he is, or does he change his stripes depending on his location? Support your conclusion with details from the play.
20. Discuss the use of foreshadowing in William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Choose three specific examples of the technique and explain how they contribute to the audience's perception of the characters and the action. Why does Shakespeare choose to give away the ending through these frequent allusions to the final result of the conflict that dominates the play?
21. William Shakespeare's Roman plays *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* both contain soothsayers. Compare and contrast the roles of these characters in the two plays. What do these similarities and differences convey about the themes and tones of the two works of literature? Be sure to do more than talk about the few scenes in which the soothsayers actually appear.
22. Joyce Carol Oates, in her essay on William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, argues that the play is "the most godless of Shakespeare's plays, because it is about human beings for whom anything less than self-divinity will be a failure." Do you agree? Evaluate Oates' assessment of the play from within the script, but also assess her implied comparison with other "pagan" plays like *Julius Caesar* and *King Lear*.
23. Joyce Carol Oates, in her essay on William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, argues that the play represents the triumph of imagination over reality, unlike other Shakespearean tragedies, where the catharsis is only achieved when the protagonist's illusions are broken at last. Do you agree? Support Oates' assertion with details and quotations from the play, and suggest the possible significance of her thesis.
24. Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* was well-known to Englishmen of Shakespeare's time; in fact, English rulers such as Henry VIII and Elizabeth were often accused of being Machiavellian, and this was not always an insult. Shakespeare thus often incorporates Machiavellian characteristics into some of his political figures. Consider the extent to which this is the case in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Is Octavius Caesar a Machiavellian politician? What specific pieces of advice from the famous political treatise does Caesar practice? Be sure to use supporting quotations and incidents from both works in developing your essay.

25. In a classical Greek tragedy, the Chorus served the purpose of commenting on the action for the benefit of the audience. William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* is written according to the classical form. What character or characters in the play fill the place of the Chorus? Support your choice or choices with specific quotations from the play, noting how these examples help accomplish the purpose for which the Chorus existed in classical drama.
26. Discuss the theme of youth and age as presented in William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Antony is the veteran warrior, while Caesar is constantly belittled by Antony for his youth and inexperience. To what extent do the two men fit these stereotypes, and to what extent does Antony behave immaturely and Caesar show wisdom and confidence beyond his years? Support your assessment with specifics from the play.
27. Discuss the relationship between love and power in William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. To what extent is one the means for achieving the other? Which is the more dominant factor? What does your conclusion tell you about the natures of the two societies depicted in the play?
28. Shakespeare often portrays suicide as a noble denouement to the life of one who has experienced dishonor or is seeking to avoid it. Consider the role of suicide in William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Do you consider the suicides of the protagonists noble or not? What about the suicides of their closest retainers, Eros and Enobarbus on the one hand and Iras and Charmian on the other? Do you draw the same conclusions about all six suicides in the play? Why or why not?
29. Critics have sometimes commented on William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* that it is a tragedy without a villain. While some would nominate Octavius Caesar for the honor, he is more a foil than a villain in the story. Why do you think Shakespeare makes this choice? What are the consequences of the conflicts that drive the plot being more a matter of man against himself or competing ways of life driving the central figure to distraction rather than a clear-cut dichotomy between good and evil? In your opinion, does this strengthen or weaken the play? Support your conclusion with details from the script.
30. Some critics have suggested that William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* is, as a pre-Christian play, a story without religion, and therefore without sin. Do you agree? Consider especially the playwright's treatments of marriage, sexuality, and the principles of good government and compare them to the Bible's teachings on these subjects. Be specific.