



Is This Her Fault or Mine?

Laura B. Vogel & Murray M. Schwartz
Psychiatrist / Emerson College

Abstract

This essay presents contrasting psychosexual profiles of Shakespeare's heroines Isabella, in *Measure for Measure*, and Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Isabella, a classic Freudian hysteric, has no conscious awareness of her desire or her seductiveness, and protects her chastity. Cleopatra is fully cognizant of her powerful and playful sexuality, and joins her lover Antony in a passionate intersubjective relationship. We also look at the patriarchal social order in these two plays, as it affects comedic and tragic form, and raise the possibility that the assumption of sexual subjectivity in women may diminish the impact of misogyny.

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Male bewilderment and consternation about female desire is timeless. Men often conclude that female sexuality provokes male lust, and that vice among men can be controlled by diminishing provocation from women. This belief has led, and continues to lead to mischief at all levels of social organization. Shakespeare's plays include themes about the relationships between sexual behavior, character, and the organization and expression of social and political behavior. Shakespeare understood the diversity of female sexual desire and its relationship to personality characteristics. We will explore the strong contrasts in the psychosexual profiles of two of his heroines, Isabella and Cleopatra, and examine the relationship between their sexuality and the social/ political organization of their societies. We propose that these heroines present striking differences in the intersubjective nature of their relationships with men, and that these two plays considered together raise the possibility that the

assumption of sexual subjectivity in women may diminish the impact of misogyny, even in Shakespeare's patriarchal world.¹

We recognize in Isabella, the young would-be nun in *Measure to Measure*, an early prototype of Freud's hysterics. Indeed, Isabella's "hysteria" dramatically portrayed almost three centuries before the classical syndrome was described by Freud and Breuer accounts for some of the dark-comic dimensions of this play. They postulated that many psychological symptoms and syndromes arose from the ways in which Oedipal conflicts were experienced and expressed. Features that these "hysterical" women had in

¹ A brief consideration of the differences in male and female development will be useful here. Nancy Chodorow's classic text, *The Reproduction of Mothering* and the work of Robert Stoller on gender identity formation, as well as Freud's ideas about the Oedipus complex and castration anxiety provide the foundation for this discussion. Traditional gender roles have been redefined to some extent, and same-sex male couples are raising children, but for the most part, infants and young children are still primarily cared for by mothers and women, and this will be the assumption here. The first experience of emotional intimacy and emotional merger is with a mother, and this creates an asymmetry and subsequent difference in male and female development. For the baby girl, developing a sense of a self does require separation, but becoming a feminine self does not require a break with the earliest identification with the mother, which, however enigmatic, is continuous and maintained. The baby boy, however, needs both to separate and disavow his identification with mother in order to establish a sense of masculine self. Stoller describes masculinity in males as "an achievement"; (1985,18) it is an achievement which, in most cultures, entails a crucial break in one's earliest connection and at a very tender age.

The sense of masculine self is acquired through growth of internal defenses constructed to ward off psychic merger with the mother, through cultural roles presented to the boy which are internalized, and often by identification with a father or other males in his life. Stoller describes a "symbiosis anxiety" in males, a perpetual fear of a regressive psychological merger with the mother which requires constant vigilance. (1975, 149) Chodorow explains that the girl's continued identification with her mother results in a sense of self in women which is more continuous with others, whereas men "experience themselves as more separate and distinct from others." (1978, 207) Male efforts to define themselves as not-female and ensure this critical separation often include a rejection of intimacy and tenderness, contempt for and devaluation of women, and sometimes include the attribution of malevolence to women. Here are the origins of misogyny. Perceiving women as malevolent can be a consequence of the psychological defense of splitting. Here one image is that of the idealized "good" mother and the other, the powerful but malevolent "bad" mother. Although in actuality these are attributes of the same mother, the child relates to these images as though they were two figures, neither responsible for the motives of the other. These developmental gender differences also account for differences in later heterosexual love relationships. Women do not quite experience the same sense of symbiotic merger in sexual unions with men that they first experienced with their mothers; they can achieve this indirectly, through an identification with a male partner. Men, however, can more easily approximate that sense of merger in sexual unions with women. In doing so, they risk the activation of symbiosis anxiety. Here, one can visualize Antony sucking at Cleopatra's breast and entering her body in sexual union, and in his imagination becoming a baby soothed by his mother into a state of blissful merger where he fears he will dissolve and die. Lust detached from affection may or may not activate symbiosis anxiety in men. Hatred of women may serve as a defense against this activation, the angry insistence that one is "not female" aids in the defense against the fear of merger. Patriarchal cultures organize around multiple misogynist assumptions including contempt for women and a routine assumption that female sexuality provokes, and should be blamed for, male lust. To the extent that the experience of lust evokes an awareness of male need or aggression, either can be disavowed by the projective claim that the impulse originated in the female.

common included repressed sexual desire for forbidden “objects,” unconscious shame and guilt in response to forbidden erotic longings and subsequent need for atonement and punishment because of these desires and urges, and tendencies to behave seductively while simultaneously denying sexual desire. Hysterics demonstrated a tendency to experience affects with great intensity as well as with shallowness, where intense feelings motivated behavior and were replaced by other equally intense feelings which appeared to motivate entirely different behavior. Dramatic displays of emotion and enactments of desires and conflicts coexist with a denial of awareness of intention to appear dramatic. These patients were prone to sensory and motor disturbances in which psychological conflicts were “converted” into physical symptoms.

Isabella anticipates a number of features of hysteria: Oedipal dynamics, striking sexual shame and guilt, erotic masochism, and repression and denial of sexual impulses coexistent with unconscious seductiveness. In an interaction with Claudio, her brother, she demonstrates rapid shifts in intense feelings as well.

In *Measure for Measure*, Duke Vincentio perceives that Vienna, under his rule, has declined into a state mired in moral laxity and sexual licentiousness. He appoints Angelo, his harsh and puritanical deputy, to rule in his stead and clean up the mess; the Duke and Angelo agree that there is an excess of appetite in the population. The Duke then disguises himself as a friar so that he can observe the behavior of his subjects. Angelo immediately decides to close the brothels, and to revive a dormant law punishing fornication outside of marriage by execution. Claudio faces imminent execution for having impregnated his fiancé, Juliet. (Juliet’s life will be spared because she is carrying a child.) At Claudio’s request, his friend Lucio retrieves Isabella from the convent she has just entered as a novice. Isabella agrees to meet with Angelo and implore him to spare her brother’s life.

The chaste, young, and attractive Isabella, engaged in a passionate and well-matched debate with Angelo evokes sudden desire in Angelo. Aware of his unwelcome arousal, he exclaims, “What’s this? What’s this? Is this her fault or mine?”

The three major characters in *Measure for Measure* present different strategies for containing sexual impulses. The Duke, Angelo, and Isabella all use repression and denial in efforts to control their own intrapsychic impulses, and the Duke is certainly the most successful of the three in this regard.

Isabella seeks to augment her internal defenses by joining a convent and avoiding contact with men. Angelo seeks to restrain lust through violent punishment of others. In doing so, his dehumanization of sexuality and the harshness of his retaliatory aggression- literally, chopping off men’s heads- are suggestive of projection with pornographic castration. The Duke employs social engineering to constrict passion and restore social order; this includes spying, deception, manipulation, and the ultimate weapon, marriage. The play is set mostly in confined spaces, much of it literally within the walls of a prison,

and this setting undoubtedly echoes the major characters' efforts at constriction colliding with the unruly impulses of the bawds and their patrons. *Measure for Measure* concerns itself mostly with the regulation of lust detached from affection. Although the play is classified as a comedy, it is certainly a grim one. The insistence of the characters, and their society, in restricting erotic impulses reminds us that those impulses open our horizons to pleasure, joy, and love.

Freud's phallogocentric Oedipal-based model of understanding male and female sexuality has been extensively critiqued by contemporary feminist critics and psychoanalysts who have often focused on the pre-Oedipal development relatively neglected in Freud's theories. Jessica Benjamin proposed an alternative model for female desire using the concept of intersubjectivity. This is a spatial representation with some of its origins in Winnicott's notion of the holding environment between mother and child expanding into the transitional spaces of children's play, fantasy, and creativity. Benjamin describes intersubjectivity as a mutual recognition of partners in a relationship, where both men and women achieve sexual subjectivity. (Benjamin, 1986, 92-98 and 1988, 125-131) Here the female inner space is not defined by the absence of a phallus, and female sexual passivity is not perceived as "healthy."

Cleopatra, the Egyptian queen in *Antony and Cleopatra*, is a passionate woman who experiences no shame or guilt in the expression of her playful sexuality. She is consciously and dramatically seductive. She is a mother whose fertility and fecundity are critical to her self-presentation; she allies herself with the goddess Isis and with the life giving Nile. Cleopatra is ever aware of her physical interior and delights in her own powerful desire. She creates an erotic relationship with her lover Mark Antony that is playful, creative, and theatrical. He is ambivalent about being with her, but their love ultimately proves irresistible to him, and Cleopatra's sexual subjectivity allows her to join him in a fully intersubjective relationship that is transformative and transcendent.

In this play, the conflict between sexual passion and the social order is represented partly as a tension between two contrasting gendered cultures. Feminine Egypt, sensual, erotic, boundless, and shameless, intersects with masculine Rome, a culture of war, politics, restraint, and duty, in the love affair between Cleopatra and Mark Antony. Their intense passion, challenging the Roman patriarchal norms, results in their military defeat by Octavius Caesar, and their deaths. Cleopatra is perceived by the Romans, and by Antony himself through much of the play, as the cause of Antony's loss of military power, strength, heroism and manliness; they see this diminution in Antony as "her fault." Antony experiences guilt and shame that he has deviated from acceptable Roman behavior in his attachment to Cleopatra and his lack of self-control.

The feminine principle of Egypt and Cleopatra is presented as an alternative, creative world, alluring and enticing, but contradictory to male judgment and the maintenance of social regulation. The grand scale of this play is enhanced by the changes in setting, many short scenes, shiftings back and forth from Egypt to Rome, and by the entrances and exits of multiple messengers arranged to confound the linear sense of time. Although Shakespeare enacts the tragic consequences of ignoring the dictates of power, he also celebrates the power of the imagination and mutual love to transcend worldly strife.

These two plays, examined from a psychoanalytically informed perspective, yield interesting psychosexual portraits of the two heroines. The question raised in *Measure for Measure* whether women are responsible for male desire speaks to the perception that female sexuality must be controlled so that it will not provoke male lust. Controlling female sexuality, and male lust, maintains the social order. The misogyny in this comedy is directed by both Angelo and the Duke towards the chaste Isabella and the virtuous Mariana. (Nuns in habits apparently have spawned pornographic images for centuries.)

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Cleopatra evokes, full-throttle, the classic range of male responses to a truly sexual female; she is labeled manly, dominating, a strumpet, a whore, an enchantress. The Romans demonstrate fear, blame, and the need to punish sexual women; Antony himself, in a rage at her, says “The witch shall die.” The scope and scale of these reactions are elicited by passionate, mutual, devoted and ambivalent love, rather than lust. The tragedy engages us with its hero and heroine, so that we see in this play the truly subversive threat of unbounded, intersubjective male and female desire fueled by love. Shakespeare, no Roman himself, portrays the predicament created by his erotic, exotic, theatrical heroine whose passion exists outside of the Roman social order. Octavius Caesar wishes to capture her and subject her to the humiliation of a triumphal march in Rome. She eludes his control with her suicide.

Isabella

Isabella wears the garments of a Sister, and is speaking with a nun when she first appears on stage. She asks Francisca:

And have you nuns no farther privileges?

Nun: Are not these large enough?

Isabella: Yes, truly. I speak not as desiring more,
But rather wishing a more strict restraint

Upon the sisterhood, the votarists of Saint Clare. (1.4.1-5)

Isabella’s quest for “more strict restraint” is one of several solutions posed for unruly sexual passion in this play. She personally wishes to completely retreat

from contact with males in order to secure her chastity and augment her already rigid defenses restraining her sexuality. Donning the habit of a Sister is an additional effort to literally cover up and disguise her sexual impulses, which sometimes escape the control of the young and beautiful Isabella in the form of unconscious seductiveness. The nature of Isabella's unconscious sexual organization becomes most evident in an interchange she has with her brother Claudio. She has come to discuss with Claudio Angelo's proposition that if she has sex with him, he will spare Claudio's life. At first, Claudio is unaware of Angelo's offer and says

If I must die,
I will encounter darkness as a bride
And hug it in my arms. (3.1.93-95)

Isabella responds:

There spake my brother! There my father's grave
Did utter forth a voice. (3.1.96-97)

When Isabella finally clarifies Angelo's offer, Claudio requests, "Sweet sister, let me live" (3.1.149). Isabella's response to his suggestion is vitriolic:

O, you beast!
O faithless coward, O dishonest wretch,
Will thou be made a man out of my vice?
Is't not a kind of incest to take life
From thine own sister's shame? What should I think?
Heaven shield my mother played my father fair,
For such a warped slip of wilderness
Ne'er issued from his blood. Take my defiance;
Die, perish. Might but my bending down
Relieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed.
I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death,
No word to save thee (3.1.153-164)

The dynamics underlying these passages are striking. When Isabella assumes, as she does at first, that Claudio will die to preserve her chastity, he is kin to her idealized beloved father, speaking from the grave to protect her. After Claudio asks her to have sex with Angelo, her odd vision of this as incest suggests that she sees Claudio as attempting to identify her with their mother, whom Isabella clearly devalues, and from whom she seeks to distance herself. We see Isabella as an hysterical character, with the display of Oedipal dynamics, unconscious seductiveness as well as a complete repression and denial of her own sexual impulses motivated by guilt and shame. More bizarre

is Isabella's fantasy that the beastly Claudio must have been conceived in an affair between their wanton mother and someone other than "her" father. In her rage, she sees Claudio, not herself, as their mother's child: I am not like my mother, you are a dishonest wretch like my mother. Perhaps Isabella's fantasy extends to a view of herself as her father's solo creation where he did not "profit by" her mother.

The intensity of Isabella's rage at Claudio, her difficulty identifying herself as a female ("they" switching to "us"), her evident psychological decompensation in the question, "What should I think?" and her strange answer to that question, the rapidity of the splitting which is mobilized where Claudio switches instantly in her assessment from a brother she identifies with an idealized father to one who she identifies with an extremely devalued mother, all display an hysterical pattern. Her relationship with Claudio is revealed in this comic but disturbing passage to be quite fraught.

Isabella's dialogue at the beginning of the play with Francisca, the Sister, is interrupted by the entrance of Lucio, Claudio's friend. At Claudio's request, Lucio implores Isabella to speak with Angelo and ask him to spare her brother's life. Claudio, describing his sister's eloquence to Lucio, also alludes to an aspect of her hysteria, her seductiveness, hoping that

. . . in her youth

There is a prone and speechless dialect
Such as move men. Besides, she hath prosperous art
When she will play with reason and discourse,
And well she can persuade. (1.3.180-184)

Here the double meaning of "prone" as both "natural" and "lying down" is exploited along with the implication that "move" might suggest "arouse," in this sly assessment of his sister's capacity to arouse men. Lucio accompanies Isabella as she pleads with Angelo to spare Claudio's life. Her arguments are indeed forceful, moving, and passionate; she is one of Shakespeare's most articulate and verbally skilled women. This is the eloquent and persuasive language of a woman with agency:

. . . Well believe this:

No ceremony that to great ones longs,
Not the king's crown, nor the deputed sword,
The marshal's truncheon, not the judge's robe
Become them with one half so good a grace
As mercy does.
If he had been as you, and you as he,
You would have slipped like him, but he like you
Would not have been so stern. (2.2.78-86)

She continues in her pleas:

. . . authority, though it err like others,
Hath yet a kind of medicine in itself
That skins the vice o' th' top. Go to your bosom,
Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know
That's like my brother's fault. If it confess
A natural guiltiness such as is his,
Let it not sound a thought on your tongue
Against my brother's life. (2.2.164-171)

Disavowing the “natural guiltiness” accompanying original sin, Angelo dismisses Isabella, but as he turns away, she requests “Gentle my lord, turn back” (2.2.175) and then adds “Hark how I'll bribe you” (2.2.177). Angelo, startled, asks “How? Bribe me?” and Isabella responds, “Ay with such gifts that heaven shall share with you” (2.2.179); she goes on to describe these gifts as prayers from fasting maids.

Isabella's unconscious seductiveness is apparent in these passages. In the two earlier passages, her implication that Angelo, like her brother, is a man who is acquainted with lust shifts the focus from an abstract request for mercy to a personal inquiry about Angelo's own experience of sexual impulses at that moment. Her parting “Hark how I'll bribe you” is, of course, heard by Angelo as a prelude to a sexual offer.

The dialogue between Angelo and Isabella is interrupted frequently by asides from Lucio to Isabella. Lucio's exhortations to Isabella, cheering her on, resemble a kind of sexual “sportscasting,” calling the “plays.” At first he tells her, twice, “You are too cold.” (2.2.62, 2.2.76) Later, he cheers, “Ay, touch him; there's the vein.” (2.2.92), and finally, “O, to him, to him, wench. He will relent. He's coming. I perceive 't.” (2.2.153-154) Lucio's commentary, with its sexual overtones, illuminates the impulses hidden by Angelo's punitive puritanism and Isabella's efforts at chastity; comically, he demonstrates that they are a “match” for each other, intellectually, verbally and sexually. Lucio's description of Isabella as “too cold” echoes his previous description of Angelo as “a man whose blood is very snow-broth” (1.4.61).

The snow-broth melts. After Isabella departs, Angelo describes in a soliloquy the sudden intense desire he feels for her, “What's this? What's this? Is this her fault or mine?” (2.2.199) and goes on to ask “Shall we desire to raze the sanctuary and pitch our evils there?” (2.2.207-8). He concludes, “this virtuous maid subdues me quite. Ever till now when men were fond I smiled and wondered how” (2.2.222-224). Certainly, the “What's this? What's this?” can be played comically to signal his cognizance of his erection; Angelo is aware that he is experiencing lust. “This” could also refer to Angelo's sense that the defenses he has erected to contain and repress his sexual impulses are breaking down and not holding the fortress. Angelo struggles with his lust,

which is compelling as well as repugnant to him, in soliloquys in Act 2, Scene 2 and Act 2, Scene 4; he concludes “Blood, thou art blood” (2.4.15). “This” could also, however, be an indicator that Angelo is smitten with feelings of love for Isabella as well as lust, and that his state of being has shifted in multiple complex ways, all new to his experience.

Isabella, in contrast to Angelo, maintains a defensive unawareness of her sexual feelings for him throughout the play. Lucio’s commentary in their first meeting is important to note because it underlines the mutuality of physical attraction and the sense that Angelo and Isabella are “a match” in spite of this discrepancy in self awareness.

Isabella appears, alone, for her second meeting with Angelo. When he asks, “How now, fair maid” she responds, “I am come to know your pleasure” (2.4.333). Here, the word “pleasure” rather than the more neutral “will” indicates that this is an unconsciously seductive statement. (Later, in a meeting with the Duke disguised as a friar, Isabella asks “What is your will?” [3.1.172].) Angelo proposes to her that she can save her brother’s life by having sex with him, but Isabella does not initially understand the nature of his proposition. When she does, she says:

That is, were I under the terms of death,
Th’impression of keen whips I’d wear as rubies
And strip myself to death as to a bed
That longing have been sick for, ere I’d yield
My body up to shame. (2.4.107-11)

Isabella’s spontaneous offering of a vision of her body, stripped naked, whipped, and bearing welts valued as rubies is consistent with religious preoccupations and practices of her time, and it is also a highly provocative, seductive, sexual, sadomasochistic image.

Returning to Angelo’s question, “Is this her fault or mine?”, what appears to be a comic question involving perplexed projection may in fact suggest a complex mode of interaction in sexual relationships. In their first meeting, when Isabella suggests to Angelo “Go to your bosom, Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know that’s like my brother’s fault” (2.2.166-168), Angelo says in an aside to the audience “She speaks, and tis such sense that my sense breeds with it.” It is as though what Angelo experiences when Isabella instructs him to examine his heart is a discovery, or a sense, that she has planted his desire for her there. It is also very possible that Isabella instructs Angelo to look in his own heart because she herself is unconsciously aware that Angelo is attracted to her; her instruction to him follows a sense of his feeling for her. The mutual sense of desire in this couple, conscious in one person and unconscious in the other, is cascading back and forth between them, setting up resonant vibrations which increase in intensity and seem to each of

them to arise from the other. Arousal, conscious or unconscious, diminishes the boundaries between the players and confuses the location of desire.

When they meet for the second time, Isabella senses and resonates, unaware, with Angelo's masculine desire to possess her. Her responsive sexual excitement provokes in her, again unconsciously, considerable shame and guilt. She conjures and presents to him an image of herself being beaten as punishment for this excitement. Angelo's awareness of and resonance with Isabella's feminine submission further inflames his desire for her, and intensifies his experience of lust. Is this her fault or his? In this instance, Isabella's seductiveness actually renders this a complicated question, although Angelo quickly concludes that the "fault" is his:

The tempter or the tempted, who sins most, ha?
Not she, nor doth she tempt; but it is I
That, lying by the violet in the sun,
Do as the carrion does, not as the flower,
Corrupt with virtuous season. (2.2.200-204)

Faced with a young, virginal nun wearing the garb of a sister, Angelo perceives her as an innocent flower and himself as rotting flesh. He does not persist in blaming her for his lust, and in this and a subsequent soliloquy he wrestles with his responses to her with an assumption of his own responsibility for his desire. In spite of his resonance with and response to Isabella's unconscious seductiveness, Angelo understands that Isabella is not experiencing or expressing conscious desire for him. True intersubjectivity of desire requires of both partners in a sexual couple a consciousness and ownership of desire, as well as a recognition of the other's desire. (Benjamin, 1988, 126) He finally tells Isabella in their second meeting:

Plainly conceive I love you.
Isabella: My brother did love Juliet,
And you tell me that he shall die for't.
Angelo: He shall not, Isabel, if you give me love. (2.4.152-155)

Isabella's response to Angelo's declaration of love is to angrily threaten to expose him for his hypocrisy. Angelo tells her, also angrily, that no one will believe her, and says:

And now I give my sensual race the rein.
Fit thy consent to my sharp appetite. (2.4.174-175)

This is a demand for submission to Angelo's will and his desire. Although it certainly speaks to his awareness that Isabella is not a sexual subject in this relationship, it is also possible that his demand is an aggressive response to

feelings of rejection created by the denial of his hopes or expectations for mutual love when Isabella threatens to expose him. When Angelo says, “Plainly conceive I love you,” how do we understand this claim? Is Angelo actually experiencing love or merely trying to put a more attractive and seductive gloss on his lust? He asks in his soliloquy following their first meeting:

What, do I love her
That I desire to hear her speak again
And feast upon her eyes? What is ‘t I dream on? (2.2.214-216)

and Angelo concludes this soliloquy:

. . . this virtuous maid
Subdues me quite. Ever till now
When men were fond, I smiled and wondered how. (222-224)

The word “subdues” here is interesting. In the conventional language of romantic love, Angelo feels conquered and controlled by his desire for Isabella, but perhaps in saying she “subdues me quite” he is also “subdued quiet.” His wish to hear her voice and see her eyes indicates to us that he is experiencing love as well as sexual desire. It is also reminiscent of the earliest responses of an infant who is soothed and quieted by the voice and the mutual gaze of his mother. Perhaps Angelo’s disappointment in not experiencing love as a response from Isabella generates rage in reaction to his unmet need for love, which has arisen unbidden in him for the first time. Isabella’s revulsion at her own sexuality emerges as she continues her second dialogue with Angelo. When he says to her “women are frail, too” she replies:

Ay, as the glasses where they view themselves,
Which are as easy broke as they make forms.
Women- help, heaven- men their creation mar
In profiting by them. Nay, call us ten times frail . . . (2.4.135-138)

In her anxiety, Isabella initially distances herself from women, referring to women as “they” before she switches to “us.” She refers to women’s vanity in the metaphor of “glasses” but then shifts to an image of the mirrors breaking as they make forms. Since this is followed by her saying that “men their creation mar in profiting by” women, her associations suggest fear, or disgust, in women’s participation in procreation and birth. Women can be broken as they make babies- they can die in childbirth- and the implication, and fantasy, that men would be better off reproducing on their own without women to “mar” creation would remove women, and herself, from this sordid process altogether.

Isabella's conversation with Claudio about Angelo's proposition is interrupted by Duke Vincentio, disguised as a friar, who had been eavesdropping. He explains to Isabella that he will arrange a "bed trick" where Angelo, thinking he is with Isabella, will have sex with Mariana, the fiancé he had rejected. The Duke in friar's clothing reassures her that the deceit of this device is outweighed by its benefit. Isabella, upon magically finding this good protective "father," says "the image of it gives me content already, and I trust it will grow to a most prosperous perfection" (3.2.286-287). Isabella believes she has been rescued. The potential growth will be in Mariana's belly, not hers.

This "good father" dresses as a friar and falsely takes "confession" from Juliet and from Claudio. He convinces Isabella and Mariana to deceive Angelo and participate in the arrangement of the bed trick, and absolves these deceptions with his "religious" authority. Later, still disguised as the friar, he instructs Isabella to approach the Duke and accuse Angelo of having seduced her with a promise not to execute her brother, and subsequently executing her brother despite his promise. She follows these instructions, both perjuring herself and proclaiming with great shame and humiliation in front of a large group of people that she yielded her body to Angelo, who then executed Claudio. The Duke's first response is to publicly accuse Isabella of madness. He then has her arrested and sent to prison for slandering Angelo. He withholds from Isabella, as well as everyone else, the information that Claudio was not in fact executed, revealing this only at the very end of the play. Eventually, the Duke reveals the "bed trick" and subjects Mariana to the same public shame and humiliation as Isabella. The Duke orders Angelo to marry Mariana and then be executed for his execution of Claudio. Isabella joins Mariana, who asks her to kneel and beg for Angelo's life. Isabella:

. . . I partly think
A due sincerity governed his deeds
Till he did look on me. Since it is so,
Let him not die. My brother had but justice,
In that he did the thing for which he died.
For Angelo,
His act did not o'ertake his bad intent,
And must be buried but as an intent
That perished by the way. (5.1.513-517)

Claudio is brought forth by the Duke, who then proposes to Isabel, and pardons Angelo. The Duke, who had earlier declared to Friar Thomas that he was immune to "the dribbling dart of love" (1.3.2) again proposes marriage to Isabella at the end of the play. He has the play's last words:

. . . Dear Isabel,

I have a motion much imports your good,
Whereto if you'll a willing ear incline,
What's mine is yours, and what's yours is mine—
So, bring us to our palace, where we'll show
What's yet behind that's meet you all should know.(5.1.607-613)

Isabella, silent, does not assent to either proposal. Comparing Isabella's last speech to her multiple brilliant pleas for mercy in 2.2, her last speech is notably pallid and very brief. The ending of the play is extremely disquieting; this heroine who begins with a powerful voice, with agency so striking in her verbal eloquence and ability to persuade, is reduced to silence, in the Duke's words, to a "willing ear." The sight of a silent Isabella standing on the stage can present a condensation of multiple narratives collapsed into this visual image. She has been sexually harassed by Angelo and manipulated and humiliated in multiple situations by the Duke, who is chillingly like a puppeteer, pulling the strings of his subjects. Her desire was aroused by Angelo, but she was certainly unaware of this at the critical juncture when Angelo made his proposition. Her own sense of shame and guilt about her sexuality instead rendered her vulnerable to the Duke's machinations. She has just been shocked by the revelation that her brother is alive, a fact withheld from her for days by her suitor. And now this proposal of marriage is presented to her, an offer of a place of prestige in the social order by this man who has induced her to perjury and subjected both Isabella and Mariana to public shame and humiliation. Keeping in mind the Duke's statement to Juliet that her sin was of a "heavier kind" than Claudio's, the Duke's treatment of Isabella and Mariana seems truly cruel, the misogynous behavior of a man whose culture supports his belief that women are more at fault for sexual sins than men.

Angelo raised the question, "Is this her fault or mine?" In this comedy, a particularly dark one that verges on satire, the subject of the play is mostly lust, rather than love, and this is at least partly a comic question. The perception that Isabella is seductive with him is also "comic"; she herself says in her last speech that intents are "but merely thoughts," and it is clear that she is unaware of any conscious intention to seduce Angelo. Isabella's phrase, "A due sincerity governed his deeds till he did look on me" presents herself, in her last speech, as the object of Angelo's gaze rather than as a subject in an interaction. Enamored of a young and beautiful virgin in nun's clothing, Angelo quickly discards the notion that Isabella is at fault for his feelings, and assumes responsibility for his desire. Isabella, sadly, never becomes aware of her own sexual feelings. Her Oedipal conflicts and the shame, guilt, and masochism that are consequences of those issues combine with her strenuous repression and denial; all of these prevent her from ever knowing what she wants as a woman. The audience observes the liveliness, eloquence and energy of her exchanges with Angelo and senses, as Lucio's comments humorously highlight, that they are a match for each other.

It is possible that the Duke's proposal of marriage represents, on his part, a further assertion of male hierarchical power; he is asserting the supremacy of his power over Angelo's. Certainly the manipulation of the bed trick ensured that Angelo could not have Isabella. The trick, presumably designed to "rescue" Isabella, also conveniently traps Angelo in a marriage with Mariana.

Marriage is this patriarch's primary solution for the unruly sexual passions. It presents a more benign solution than Angelo's of violent punishment, and a more sustainable one than Isabella's retreat to the convent, as the world must be peopled. Marriage certainly represents an effort to control women's sexuality; that this is not always successful is ruefully noted by the frequent references to cuckoldry in Shakespeare's plays. At the end of the play, the Duke has ordered Angelo to marry Mariana, Claudio to marry Juliet, and Lucio, who slandered the Duke, to marry Kate Keepdown, the prostitute he had impregnated. Claudio is the only man of the three who is, perhaps, happy about his marriage. Like his sister, he is silent at the end of the play.

The social order is restored, but the grimness of these marriages and Isabella's eloquent silence undermine the usual pleasure at a comedy's end. The play's resolutions lack the interpersonal freedom, the "potential space" (Winnicott, 1971, 103) that both generates and sustains the interplay of subjectivities that comedic marriage symbolizes. Any sparks lit by the match of Isabella and Angelo have been skillfully extinguished by the intervention of the Duke's bed trick, and with those sparks perhaps also the hopes for heterosexual sexual pleasure and love in this previously ardent, if inhibited, young woman's life. Angelo passionately desires Isabella, and loved her; he could love her again were she to acknowledge her own desire for him. The convent might well be a more welcoming and warmer place than the Duke's bed.

Cleopatra

Several years after writing *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare wrote a tragedy, *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which "Is this her fault or mine?" becomes an ongoing source of debate. The military hero Mark Antony, passionately in love with the Egyptian queen Cleopatra, deviates from the Roman standards valuing war, political duty, and self-control. The Roman men in this play reflect his deviation and loss of heroic stature, questioning whether their leader or his exotic, sexual lover is responsible for Antony's desire and his decline. Male Roman characters, including sometimes Antony, insists, quite persistently, that the "fault" for Antony's lust is hers. In the opening lines of the play, Philo, one of Antony's soldiers, articulates Roman dismay in revealing images of lost potency:

Nay, but this dotage of our general's
O'erflows the measure. Those his goodly eyes,
That o'er the files and musters of the war

Have glowed like plated Mars, now bend, now turn,
The office and devotion of their view
Upon a tawny front. His captain's heart
. . . reneges all temper
And is become the bellows and the fan
To cool a gypsy's lust. (1.1.1-10)

As Philo is speaking, Antony and Cleopatra enter with eunuchs fanning her, the castrated male servants emphasizing Philo's point. Philo continues:

. . . 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. (1.1.11-14)

What the audiences sees, in fact, is Cleopatra teasing Antony:

If it be love indeed, tell me how much.
Antony: There's beggary in the love that can be reckoned.
Cleopatra: I'll set a bourn how far to be beloved.
Antony: Then must thou needs find new heaven, new earth. (1.1.15-20)

It is Antony, in his first appearance on stage, who insists that the love he shares with Cleopatra is boundless and infinite, a love which exists in the expansive territory of "new heaven, new earth." He defines the terms for the loving, sexual space between them which has and will be constructed by both of them, and which will be imaginatively envisioned by Antony in Act 4 and by Cleopatra in Act 5. Cleopatra's extraordinary sexual power is a part of Roman historical lore, as Agrippa, one of Caesar's generals, reminds us in a reference to Octavius' uncle Julius Caesar:

She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed;
He plowed her and she cropped. (2.3.268-269)

The beautiful queen who captured the heart of Julius Caesar and Antony is proud of her eroticism; speaking to her servants, and referring to Julius Caesar, she describes herself as "a morsel for a monarch" (1.5.36). Cleopatra's description of herself as "a morsel" is also an example of a facet of her sexuality which contributes to its power. Cleopatra's sexual body is repeatedly portrayed in an appetitive context; her body itself, as food, is seen as stimulating sexual desire. Enobarbus, Antony's soldier and friend, refers to her as "Antony's Egyptian dish" (2.6.156). Pompey claims:

. . . Mark Antony

In Egypt sits at dinner, and will make
No wars without doors (2.1.14-16)

Enobarbus, explaining to other Romans why Antony will never leave her,
describes her magic:

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. For vilest things
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
Bless her when she is riggish. (2.3.276-281)

In Roman eyes, Cleopatra's paradoxically idealized body provides both endless desire and infinite gratification. Enobarbus also captures the essence of Cleopatra's charm; her "infinite variety." She is mercurial, emotional, always changing, forever "becoming" something or someone different. Her "becoming" is performative and dramatic; staging herself as a queen and a woman she "plays" constantly. Her theatricality is self-conscious. She says, "I'll seem the fool I am not. Antony will be himself." (1.1.48-49) Cleopatra sends her servant Alexas to spy on Antony:

See where he is, who's with him, what he does.
I did not send you. If you find him sad,
Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report
That I am sudden sick. Quick, and return. (1.3.3-6)

Charmian, Cleopatra's female servant, comments after Alexas leaves that Cleopatra's deliberately contrary behavior with Antony is problematic; she advises that the queen "in each thing give him way: cross him in nothing" (1.3.11). Cleopatra responds "thou teachest like a fool: the way to lose him" (1.3.12).

One of the goals of Cleopatra's theatricality is seduction; she wishes to ensure that Antony maintains his sexual interest, which is critically important to her. Her wish to be desired as a sexual object actually foregrounds an aspect of female sexual subjectivity, in which becoming the object of the male gaze can enhance the woman's sense of erotic vitality. She is intensely jealous of his wives, and clearly wants Antony as an exclusive sexual partner. Cleopatra's sexuality inherently involves dramatic performance where Cleopatra, as Diva, is the writer, director, and starring actress. She is funny, unpredictable and mesmerizing; and in her rapid shifts in passions and behaviors she elicits responsive adaptations in Antony. In this way, Cleopatra provides constant sources of novelty within their union, avoids habituation and boredom, and maintains sexual excitement.

Enobarbus describes, at length, for the Romans, and the audience, Cleopatra's breathtaking performance when she first seduced Mark Antony on the river of Cydnus; in Enobarbus' words she "pursed up his heart." This famous passage in 2.2, beginning, "The barge she sat in like a burnished throne burned on the water." enlists some of Shakespeare's most beautiful poetry in the service of conveying the erotic enchantment, "O'er picturing that Venus." Antony notes at the beginning of the play that Cleopatra's "becomings" continue their appeal:

. . . Fie, wrangling queen,

Whom everything becomes—to chide, to laugh,
To weep; whose every passion fully strives
To make itself, in thee, fair and admired! (1.1.56-59)

Cleopatra's theatricality, her constant transformations and "becomings" are reminiscent of sexualized play of childhood, as when she sends Alexas to spy on Antony, and to report to Antony that Cleopatra's mood is the opposite of Antony's presentation. when Antony enters the room in Act 1, Scene 2; she deliberately exits. Like children, they chase and elude each other with a mixture of teasing, aggression, excitement, exhibitionism, and sexual arousal and pleasure. Just before he says "Age cannot wither her," Enobarbus reports of Cleopatra:

. . . I saw her once
Hop forty paces through the public street,
And having lost her breath, she spoke and panted,
That she did make defect perfection,
And breathless pour breath forth. (2.2.269-273)

This is a public exhibition of breathlessness and panting evocative of sexual exertion, but followed the childhood play activity of hopping- a condensation of child's play, exhibitionism, and sex. Children engaging in sexual chase play are "innocent", and shame and guilt are irrelevant to these activities, which are seen as "just playing." Cleopatra's sexuality, in its exuberant playfulness, exhibitionism, and theatricality, is similarly without a tinge of shame or guilt. Her invitation to Antony to join her in this fun is irresistible, and Enobarbus understands, wisely, that Antony will never leave her. Antony's generosity, described by Enobarbus as a "mine of bounty" (4.6.36), and largeness of heart and spirit are fully engaged in a passionate and reciprocal love relationship with Cleopatra.

Antony, however, is a Roman, and his relationship with Cleopatra is, in fact, a source of derision from his fellow Romans and a source of guilt and shame for him. Caesar describes Antony as "not more manlike than Cleopatra,

nor the queen of Ptolemy more womanly than he” (1.4.6-7), and condemns him roundly for his “lightness,” his voluptuousness, and his “lascivious wassails” (1.4.65). The Romans perceive Antony as feminized by his sexual passion; their Mars, now disarmed, tied up, and fattened by a powerful Venus, is “womanly” and useless as a warrior.

Antony himself is ambivalent about his attachment to Cleopatra. He is aware that his love for her creates conflict with the emphasis on war and political duties which the Romans believe are both virtuous and manly, and he often perceives himself as emasculated by his love for her. Upon hearing that his wife Fulvia has died, he experiences Egyptian bonds as a threat to his Roman identity:

These strong Egyptian fetters I must break,
Or lose myself in dotage. (1.2.128-129)

He adds:

I must from this enchanting queen break off.
Ten thousand harms more than the ills I know
My idleness doth hatch. (1.2.143-145)

To Enobarbus, Antony exclaims “Would I had never seen her!” (1.2.168). Antony marries Octavia, Caesar’s sister, in an effort to sure up his political alliance with Caesar, but then leaves her, as Enobarbus predicts, to return to Cleopatra and Egypt. Caesar’s forces pursue Antony and Cleopatra, Antony foolishly allows Cleopatra to persuade him to fight Caesar at sea, and then he disastrously follows her ships as she, frightened, flees the battle. Sounding like his Roman critics, Antony attributes his defeat to his “weakening” by his love for his “conqueror”; his shame and guilt led in this instance to a masochistic choice that was truly calamitous.

. . . You did know
How much you were my conqueror, and that
My sword, made weak by my affection, would
Obey it on all cause. (3.11.71-74)

Later, when Antony’s ships desert him and go over to Caesar’s side, a desertion whose cause is never clarified in the play, Antony rages and he blames Cleopatra:

. . . All is lost!
This foul Egyptian has betrayed me.
. . . Triple-turned whore! (4.12.11-15)

When he sees her, he exclaims “Thou spell!”, and after she exits he declares:

The witch shall die.(4.12.53)

Somewhat later, Antony adds:

She has robbed me of my sword. (4.14.28)

All of the other Roman males, and Antony much of the time, do see his passionate attachment to Cleopatra as antagonistic to the Roman ethos. His interest in making love to her has overridden his interest in making war, and this is unacceptable to them. It is also clear that although they fault Antony for his weakness, they see his love for her as “her fault.” The Romans, and Antony, see her as a witch, an enchantress, and a temptress whose sexual power cannot be resisted. Although the Romans, and sometimes Antony, perceive Cleopatra as dominating Antony, there is evidence in the play that Cleopatra actually changes modes between erotic assertiveness and erotic submissiveness as an aspect of her “infinite variety”: she does not wish to dominate Antony, merely to ensure his continued interest. Their idealizations are mutual. Thinking about Antony in his absence, Cleopatra asks:

. . . O Charmian,
Where think'st thou he is now? Stands he, or sits he?
Or does he walk? Or is he on his horse?
O happy horse to bear the weight of Antony!
Do bravely, horse, for wot'st thou whom thou mov'st?
The demi-Atlas of this earth, the arm
And burgonet of men (1.5.22-29)

Cleopatra is greeted by Alexas with a pearl from Antony; Alexas comments on the number of messengers she is sending with letters to him- daily. Cleopatra's amusing sexual envy of Antony's horse, her idealization of her lover, and her constant posts to him belie the Roman view of her as an erotic dominant. She does perceive herself as a woman of power, and what she actually wants is an heroic Antony, and the love of a demi-Atlas which will enhance her stature as a queen. A paradoxically aggressive form of sexual receptivity is implied in Cleopatra's greeting to a later messenger, “Ram thou thy fruitful tidings in mine ears that long time have been barren” (2.5.29-30). This greeting occurs in a scene where Cleopatra, glum from a long absence of messages from Antony, sexually teases Mardian, the eunuch, and then muses about going fishing. She describes how:

. . . My bended hook shall pierce
Their slimy jaws, and as I draw them up
I'll think them every one an Antony

And say “Aha! You’re caught.” (2.5.14-17)

There is a condensation in this cruel image. Cleopatra imagines herself with a phallic capability of penetration and painful entry. She is also imagining an endpoint of snaring the elusive Antony, who she fears she has lost. Charmian reminds her of a “merry” time when Cleopatra and Antony went fishing. Cleopatra recalls:

That time? . . . O, times! . . .

I laughed him out of patience; and that night
I laughed him into patience; and next morn
Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed,
Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst
I wore his sword Philippan (2.5.23-27)

This is cross-dressing in erotic play, fondly remembered by Cleopatra, where she assumes a dominant position. It is also, as Mardian had previously put it, “What Venus did with Mars” (1.5.21). In her comfort with switching into an erotic dominant role, and the playfulness expressed simultaneously with cruelty in her image of snaring “Antony” fish with a hook, Cleopatra also demonstrates ease with the aggressive components of her sexuality. Again, she expresses no shame or guilt about this aggression, which is in the service of sexual arousal rather than harm. Cleopatra’s acceptance of the inextricable merger of sexuality with aggression is an aspect of her sexual allure. It is part of what makes her exciting, but in its implied acceptance of the merger of aggression and sexuality in her male partners it may also be experienced as empathic mirroring, a welcome attunement.

The fluidity of Cleopatra’s sexuality creates a sense of boundlessness in her passion, and in this boundlessness, she and Antony mirror each other throughout the play. Antony does understand that Cleopatra is capable of an empathic erotic connection he has not previously experienced. In their first dialogue in the play, he acknowledges this shared space as “new heaven, new earth.” (1.1.19)

The Roman observation that Antony’s “dotage . . . O’erflows the measure” (1.1.1-2) implies a mirroring of Cleopatra, queen of the Nile, which overflows its banks every year; “The higher Nilus swells, the more it promises” (2.7.20). Antony’s declaration “Let Rome in Tiber melt” is echoed humorously in Cleopatra’s angry “Melt Egypt into Nile” when she hears of Antony’s marriage to Octavia. Cleopatra’s sense of boundlessness in her passion is undoubtedly also reinforced by her image of her own sexual body as containing a fertile inner space, and Antony, who has fathered children with Cleopatra, also knows her womb. When Antony is leaving her to go to Rome, Cleopatra reminds him that she has borne his children:

. . . Tis sweating labor
To bear such idleness so near the heart
As Cleopatra this (1.4.114-116)

Cleopatra's fecundity, her association with the life-giving Nile are echoed in Antony's generosity and bounty. Antony's generosity is most in evidence when he sends Enobarbus' treasure plus a bonus and fond greetings to Caesar's camp after Enobarbus deserts him. This act literally breaks the Roman soldier's heart; Enobarbus refers to Antony as "thou mine of bounty" (4.6.36) just before he dies. Cleopatra says, memorializing Antony, "for his bounty, there was no winter in 't" (5.2.106-107). The metaphors of rivers, fluidity and boundlessness help to elaborate a shared space in which Cleopatra and Antony make love and play; they flow together and into each other in merging erotic attunement. Jessica Benjamin describes that "in erotic union this attunement can be so intense that self and other feel as if momentarily "inside" each other, as part of a whole. Receptivity and self-expression, the sense of losing the self in the other and the sense of being truly known for oneself all coalesce." (1988, 126) This is intersubjectivity of desire, and mutual recognition.

Cleopatra is empathic in her sexual relationship, tender and loving in her attachment to her female servants, and at times tender with Antony. Her lack of sexual shame and guilt do not arise from antisocial tendencies, but rather are consistent with her position as an entitled queen in the culture in which she dwells. It is perhaps also her idealization of Antony, her need to see him as the heroic male she desires and feels she deserves as a mate, which prevents her from validating the extent to which Antony is deviating from the norms of his Roman culture, and suffering because of this. She seems blind to the obvious fact that his passion for her, which contributes to his rift with Caesar, also interferes with his military judgment in a way that will destroy him. His troops perceive this, see his military errors, and desert him, even Enobarbus, who loves Antony, and whose suicide marks the loss of Antony for Rome.

Shakespeare inserts an interesting scene prior to Antony's last land battle. Antony awakes and calls for his soldier Eros to bring his armor. Cleopatra awakes and says, "Sleep a little." Eros brings the armor, and Cleopatra insists on arming Antony for battle.

Cleopatra: Is this not buckled well?
Antony: . . . Thou fumblest, Eros, and my queen's a squire
More tight at this than thou . . . (4.4.17-21)

Antony later returns from this battle victorious and greets Cleopatra:

. . . O, thou day o' th' world,

Chain mine armed neck. Leap thou, attire and all,
Through proof of harness to my heart, and there
Ride on the pants triumphing (4.8.15-19)

Here what begins in these scenes as the customary female request in an aubade ; “Sleep a little” becomes something completely different. Cleopatra arms Antony for battle, he triumphs, and invites her to share his triumph in a sexual embrace. The Roman warrior and the Egyptian queen have created an imaginary space where the two cultures meet and together revive Antony’s masculinity, for a brief moment. The scenes tantalize with their suggestion that perhaps an heroic military culture and loving erotic passion need not be irreconcilable. Here is a glimpse at what their landscape of “new heaven, new earth” might resemble.

It doesn’t last. Antony’s ships desert him in the next battle and join Caesar’s. He blames Cleopatra for this treachery and Cleopatra is terrified of his rage. She sends word that she has killed herself. Finally, faced with her loss, Antony reconciles himself to accepting, without ambivalence, that his love for her was indeed paramount in his life. Addressing Cleopatra, whom he believes dead, he says:

I come, my queen
Where souls do couch on flowers, we’ll hand in hand
And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze.
Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops,
And all the haunt be ours. (4.14.60-64)

This is Antony’s version of an afterlife: “new heaven.” Virgil’s Aeneas, the ancestor of the Romans who deserted his lover, the African queen Dido, causing her suicide, was spurned by Dido in the underworld. Antony, who has imagined a different ending of his eternal union with Cleopatra, says, “. . . I will be a bridegroom in my death and run into ‘t as to a lover’s bed” (4.14.120-121) and stabs himself. Antony dies, at peace with the intensity of his love for her, in Cleopatra’s arms in her monument, Cleopatra’s final “space.” Following her capture in her monument by Caesar, Cleopatra speaks to Dolabella, a sympathetic Roman, and shares with him her “dream” of the “emperor” Antony:

. . . His legs bestrid the ocean, his rear arm
Crested the world. . .
. . . For his bounty,
There was no winter in ‘t; an autumn ‘twas
That grew the more by reaping: his delights
Were dolphin-like; they showed his back above
The element they lived in: in his livery

Walked crowns and crownets; realms and islands were
As plates dropped from his pocket. (5.2.102-113)

This imaginative recreation of an heroic Antony memorializes him, and restores his masculinity to global, rather than merely Roman, proportions.

Cleopatra's final performance is her elaborately staged suicide. Dolabella tells her that Caesar intends to march her in his triumph in Rome; she has already whispered to Charmian to set in motion the plans for her to kill herself. She fumes to Iras that "Thou an Egyptian puppet shall be shown in Rome as well as I." (5.2.254-255) and that "I shall see some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness i' th' posture of a whore" (5.2.267-268). This deconstruction of a boy actor "playing" her in Rome humorously nods to the boy actor with the high-pitched voice playing her on Shakespeare's stage, and collapses the distance between Cleopatra, the ever theatrical queen, and Shakespeare, her ever playful creator.

Cleopatra instructs Charmian and Iras to dress her in her best robe and crown, "I am again for Cydnus to meet Mark Antony" (5.2.278-279). Her request for her royal attire for her suicide is a final insistence upon her subjectivity as well as a reminder of her first magnificent display of her desire for her lover. Before she dies, she imagines her reunion with Antony, proud of her for dying "after the high Roman fashion," (4.15.101) and calls to him, "Husband, I come" (5.2.342). Here she mirrors Antony's description of himself as a "bridegroom." Cleopatra echoes Antony's fantasy of a united Dido and her Aeneas by envisioning Egyptian and Roman united in death in the marriage denied her in life. She dies, bitten by an asp, knowing that Antony's love and passion had been as boundless as her own, and anticipating that she will join him in "new heaven."

Cleopatra's death also evokes other types of reunions. Just before she dies, having placed an asp on her breast, she says to Charmian:

. . . Peace, peace!
Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep?
Charmian: O, break! O, break!
Cleopatra: As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle—
O Antony!—Nay, I will take thee too.
What should I stay? (5.2.367-373)

As she is dying, in her fantasy the asp at her breast becomes a baby nursing, and Cleopatra recalls the sweetness of that mother-infant union. The asp-baby transforms into an image of Antony at her breast as she transports him with her to her death. Cleopatra's fantasy speaks to the symbiotic merger which Antony, and men, both yearn for and fear. It perhaps evokes as well dual images of the Madonna; Mary the mother nursing the baby Jesus, and the

Madonna of the Pieta carrying her adult son after his death. The complex evocation of multiple images as well as multiple intense affects collapsed rapidly into this scene- soothing maternal love, sexual passion, and unspeakable grief condenses their overdetermined interrelatedness.

“Is this her fault or mine?” One can see that Shakespeare grasps the nuances of this question.

Angelo rapidly concludes that the “fault” is his. In his dialogue with himself, he takes responsibility for his own sexual impulses. The notion that Angelo’s desire is self-generated is, however, only partly correct. In fact, Isabella has been seductive in her behavior with him, albeit without conscious intent. The men in *Measure for Measure* perceive Isabella as sexually desirable but chaste. The combination of these features often lead men to fuse sexual and aggressive impulses; the fantasy of wanting to sexually overcome the nun’s reticence by seduction or rape is common. This is enacted directly by Angelo’s attempt to force Isabella into submission after she responds to his declaration of love with anger, and indirectly by the Duke’s various gratuitous humiliations and abuses of Isabella and the chaste Mariana during the play. The question “Is this her fault or mine?” has no real answer in *Measure for Measure* because of the presentation of desire, where Angelo’s is conscious and Isabella’s is present but unconscious.

If *Measure for Measure* is a play about lust which is largely without affection, *Antony and Cleopatra* portrays the opposite: lust in the service of love. Cleopatra is a mother, a queen, and an exotic beauty who is powerfully and unabashedly sexual. The Roman men, often including Antony himself, consider her responsible for what they perceive as the feminization/emasculatation of Antony, and their complaints about this comprise a persistent clamor throughout the play.

Male fear of castration is most commonly perceived as an oedipal level issue, but the pre-oedipal origins of that fear in male gender identity formation also seem much in evidence in this play. “Boundlessness” is emphasized in so many ways. The switching of scenes between Rome and Egypt, the constant disruption by messengers, and the peculiar disjunctions in time created by some of the messages open the frame of the play. The comparison of the protagonists to gods and goddesses as well as mythical heroes and heroines- Mars and Venus, Hercules, Aeneas and Dido contributes to the sense of timelessness and universality in their love story. The boundlessness of their passionate love is noted, and Antony’s attachment to Cleopatra specifically is a constant source of male commentary and derision. Misogyny motivates male behavior towards the powerless Isabella; the queen, Cleopatra, however, generates verbalization of misogyny. Cleopatra is blamed as a “gypsy,” “strumpet,” “strong Egyptian fetters,” “enchantress,” “Salt Cleopatra,” “whore,” “witch,” etc. This love relationship activates full-blown symbiosis anxiety in Antony and the other Roman men, as well as perhaps some envy;

here is the possibility of the regressive merger with the powerful mother which they may wish for and they all fear. Antony, in a momentary rage, says “The witch shall die.” Caesar seeks to control Cleopatra in order to reign in her power, as well as to establish posthumously his dominance of the heroic Antony.

Charmian’s epitaph to Cleopatra is “Now boast thee, Death, in thy possession lies a lass unparalleled.” (5.2.376) Cleopatra is certainly a lass unparalleled in Shakespeare’s theater. She revels in her own powerful and captivating eroticism, which evokes in her neither shame nor guilt, just pleasure. She understands that sexuality can be creative and an exalted form of play. Her suicide forces Caesar to change the script he had planned for her:

She shall be buried by her Antony
No grave upon the earth shall clip in it
A pair so famous. (5.2.429-431)

Shakespeare satisfies Cleopatra’s “immortal longings” (5.2.335) by giving his heroine the last act. He does not, however, give her the last word; that is Caesar’s.

Shakespeare pays high tribute to the power and beauty of mature erotic passion in this play. He perceives, however, that there is a perpetual conflict between sexual passion and the social order, and illustrates the particular threat posed by the highly sexual mother, Cleopatra, to the patriarchal ethos. Antony, a Roman to his core, was continually challenged by his departure from his own cultural norms. The inclusion of the scenes where Cleopatra arms Antony for battle and he triumphs, with a merger of heroism and erotic love, reveals, however, that Shakespeare was not lending his own voice to the condemning Roman chorus; military priorities, duty and restraint should not be confused with Shakespeare’s values. The Roman imperialist culture penetrates, dominates and conquers feminine and fertile Egypt. The unbounded passion Antony shares with Cleopatra costs them their lives, and this is portrayed as a tragic loss, but they are gloriously memorialized, by Caesar and by Shakespeare. Their passion was not Cleopatra’s “fault,” but a loving, and mutual *pas de deux*.

Looking again at the striking contrasts in the heroines in these two plays, one can consider the differences in intersubjectivity in their relationships. Angelo’s desire for Isabella and his love for her are both unmet. Isabella’s desire for him activates him but remains unconscious in her, and she spurns his declaration of love. If she had said to Angelo, “If you love me, marry me” we can imagine a different outcome in this play. For us, the tragedy within this comedy is Isabella’s failure to recognize her desire, a failure which is, of course, presented as comic. Isabella’s refusal of Angelo, her unwillingness to engage with him in a truly intersubjective space, renders her vulnerable to the manipulations of the Duke, and finally to his offer of marriage.

Cleopatra's suicide, on the other hand, seems a far less tragic end than marrying the Duke. Cleopatra is a woman who embodies sexual subjectivity. She and Antony share love, passion, play, laughter, and children. They both elude the humiliations of Roman capture, and each imagines joining the other in a glorious new heaven where they will walk hand in hand until infinity. Unlike Isabella, Cleopatra joins the man she desires in an intersubjective relationship which finally achieves, triumphantly, both mirroring and mutual recognition.

Measure for Measure and *Antony and Cleopatra* illustrate various ways in which heterosexual relationships collide with efforts by the social order to regulate them, and in which female sexuality specifically may be met with misogyny. Cleopatra's intense sexuality invokes constant verbal complaints amongst men, but the name-calling never hurts her. Isabella, who is unable to claim or acknowledge sexual subjectivity, loses her powerful voice.

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