Chapter

Antony and Cleopatra, Act 4 Scene 16: ‘A Heavy Sight’ pp. 77-90

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Just how did Shakespeare intend the dying Antony to be raised to Cleopatra in her monument? By what means? By whom? How high? To where? Was there a balustrade to get him over? Was there a window to get him through? These questions have long puzzled theatre historians, and a variety of ingenious answers has been offered.\(^1\) The text has become a basis for speculation on the physical characteristics of the Globe Theatre both because of and despite the fact that it provides no direction other than: ‘They heave Antony aloft to Cleopatra’ (4.16.38.1). While it is usually assumed that more explicit stage directions are missing, it is also possible that what we have is sufficient and an indication that Shakespeare knew what he wanted and how it would be done. Certainly, given his theatrical experience, it is most unlikely that he would have created staging problems requiring complex and therefore expensive and restrictive solutions.

Emendations and additions proposed by most modern scholars are made in the belief that without them the raising of Antony would be disconcertingly and unsuitably awkward. Perhaps, however, we should consider whether Shakespeare intended exactly this effect, and we should begin by asking not ‘how’ but ‘why’ Antony is raised aloft. To suggest that Shakespeare was merely following Plutarch ignores alterations to his source elsewhere.\(^2\) Furthermore, by 1606–8 Shakespeare would not have included staging difficulties without a reason; if such difficulties had interfered with his intentions they would not be there. But possibly, rather than being directed by Plutarch and restricted by the Globe stage, Shakespeare saw a way to combine its physical properties with his interpretation of a famous love story so that one would complement the other. When the focus is shifted from how Antony was raised to why, it becomes apparent that the disturbing relationship between the manner and matter of this scene is similar to that in the play as a whole. And when the scene is no longer considered in isolation from the rest it is possible to perceive how it is prepared for both visually and verbally by what comes before it and is itself the beginning of what follows. Given the paradoxes that pervade the play, when we return to the question of how Antony was raised, the theories seeking to remove staging difficulties become less convincing and a solution that emphasizes the awkwardness rather than removing it seems worth proposing.

‘I do not much dislike the matter, but / The manner of his speech’ (2.2.116–17), says Caesar, the master of ceremonies, about Enobarbus, the plain-speaking observer. An audience is likely to have a similar response to

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\(^{1}\) Some of these will be discussed below.

\(^{2}\) It is generally agreed that North’s translation of Plutarch was Shakespeare’s main source. See Kenneth Muir, \textit{Shakespeare’s Sources}, 8 vols. (London and New York, 1957), vol. 1, 201–19.
the raising of Antony in 4.16 and, just as Caesar's ability to manipulate responses should not be underestimated, neither should Shakespeare's. As observers of this love story we 'like', are emotionally engaged by, the romantic matter: the raising of Antony to join Cleopatra in a final embrace; but we 'dislike', are detached by, the realistic manner: the awkwardness of doing so insisted upon by the dialogue. We experience - and not for the first time - a sense of being pulled two ways in our response, as Antony is pulled between Rome and Egypt until this moment in the play. As has often been noted, Shakespeare's method throughout seems to have been to create as many disconcerting ambiguities for the audience as possible.\(^3\) Especially for the seventeenth-century observer, expectations fostered by Plutarch's criticism of Antony for loving Cleopatra are countered by Shakespeare's refusal to condemn him. As well, while ostensibly a tragedy, the play is actually an inseparable mix of tragedy, comedy, history, and romance. And whereas we know that Caesar's Rome represents the time of 'universal peace', we cannot but regret the loss of the potentially anarchic life-force represented by Cleopatra's Egypt. These and consequent incidental ambiguities pull us, vacillating, through the play until the moment when Antony - the de casibus hero, the victim of Fortune\(^4\) - does not fall as convention dictates but rises to die. That he is raised not only literally, visually, but also metaphorically, and that the raising is both physically awkward and accompanied by puns on heaviness is completely in keeping with the confusing juxtaposition of manner and matter throughout the play. Indeed, this scene is one of several emblematic moments and it works as a microcosm of the wider themes and effects. In particular, when Cleopatra refuses to descend from her monument and Antony must go to her, we see an ironic enactment of the first three lines of that characterizing and characteristic opening exchange between Antony and Cleopatra:

\begin{flushright}
CLEOPATRA 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 out new heaven, new earth. \((1.1.14-17)\)
\end{flushright}

Antony's condition in the fourth line is met by Cleopatra when she becomes 'fire and air' (5.2.284) and joins Antony in an imaginary realm beyond the power of the 'universal landlord' (3.13.72).

Antony's death scene is the last of a series in which Cleopatra causes Antony to move towards her and he willingly does so. In fact, Cleopatra's power to pull Antony to her, both physically and emotionally, can be seen as a key organizing principle of the language and structure of the play. In 4.16 this idea becomes almost farcically literal when Cleopatra refuses to descend from her monument and asks her women to help 'draw him hither' (line 14). The audience is confronted with a visual enactment of the duality characteristic of Antony from the start: as a soldier he is weak for allowing himself to be drawn, but as a lover he is admirable for being willing to go to Cleopatra. Through the play, Antony himself describes his predicament in terms that will perhaps have some bearing when we consider how he is raised to Cleopatra:

\begin{flushright}
These strong Egyptian fetters I must break,
Or lose myself in dotage. \((1.2.110-11)\)
I must from this enchanting queen break off. \((1.2.122)\)
\end{flushright}

\(^3\) See Maynard Mack, 'Antony and Cleopatra: The Stillness and the Dance', in Shakespeare's Art, ed. Milton Crane (Chicago and London, 1973), pp. 79–113. The whole of this study of the play's paradoxical nature provides support for the present analysis but section IV is particularly relevant.

\(^4\) Mack notes that we are given the impression of 'a sort of paradigm or exemplum in the de casibus tradition', and also that "'fortune' . . . with its cognates and synonyms, appears some forty times in Antony and Cleopatra . . . and repeatedly in connection with Caesar', pp. 86, 87.
when poisoned hours had bound me up
From mine own knowledge.  

(2.2.95–6)

While from the safety of the auditorium we might be inclined to agree with Antony’s self-condemnation, we are repeatedly prompted to question our response when even Enobarbus and Caesar acknowledge Cleopatra’s drawing power. Our expectations are countered when the Roman soldier, Enobarbus, departs from his characteristic cynicism to describe the Egyptian queen who has captured his captain’s heart. But he immediately returns to his habitual irony when describing the first of many similar responses by Antony and again the language used and the description of the action prepare us for what we hear and see in 4.16. After impressing his listeners with his description of Cleopatra on the Cydnus, Enobarbus continues:

Upon her landing Antony sent to her,
Invited her to supper. She replied
It would be better he became her guest,
Which she entreated. Our courteous Antony,
Whom ne’er the word of ‘No’ woman heard
speak,
Being barbered ten times o’er, goes to the feast,
And for his ordinary pays his heart
For what his eyes eat only.  

(2.2.226–33)

Caesar, too, departs briefly from his characteristically business-like, unemotional mode of speech when he describes Cleopatra, and acknowledges a power that endures even in death:

but she looks like sleep,
As she would catch another Antony
In her strong toil of grace.  

(5.2.340–2)

If the process that brings Antony to the monument to die is begun at Cydnus, so too is the corresponding one that causes Cleopatra to join him in death at the play’s end (‘I am again for Cydnus’, 5.2.224). Indeed, the sequence of Cleopatra’s retreat to her monument having told Antony she is dead, Antony’s attempt to go to her by killing himself, Cleopatra’s message that she is alive, Antony’s movement to the monument, their brief reunion, their separation by his death, and their final union at her death is prepared for by several similar sequences. Each time the two lovers move in tandem: Cleopatra initiating, Antony following, Cleopatra retreating, Antony following, Cleopatra finally moving to him; whereupon the whole process begins again. This is not merely a verbal separating and reuniting but also a physical one and thus visible throughout, culminating in the moment when Antony is lifted up to Cleopatra.

Antony and Cleopatra enter the action together. They argue and separate. In the second scene Cleopatra enters looking for Antony who she says has been struck by ‘a Roman thought’. She asks Enobarbus to ‘Seek him, and bring him hither’, but even as Antony enters, Cleopatra leaves saying, ‘We will not look upon him’ (1.2.77–81). Her purpose in this perverse action is made clear in the next scene when Cleopatra again asks for Antony and sends Charmian to:

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.

Charmian protests, ‘if you did love him dearly, / You do not hold the method to enforce / The like from him’. She advises Cleopatra to ‘give him way; cross him in nothing’. Cleopatra scornfully replies, ‘Thou teachest like a fool, the way to lose him’, and immediately repeats her earlier action when Antony enters and she insists on their separation: ‘Pray you, stand farther from me’ (1.3.2–18). They argue about Fulvia’s death and Antony’s imminent departure, but as he is leaving, Cleopatra finally asks forgiveness for her ‘idleness’ (line 95) and wishes him a successful journey. They embrace, and Antony’s response indicates that this first sequence has ended, as will the last, in a reunion that transcends the physical:
Our separation so abides and flies
That thou residing here goes yet with me,
And I hence fleet ing, here remain with thee.

(1.3.103-5)

The long separation of Antony and Cleopatra in the present action, wherein Antony seems to move away from Cleopatra by marrying Octavia, is filled first with Enobarbus' description of the events on the Cydnus that concludes with Maccenas saying, 'Now Antony / Must leave her utterly', and Enobarbus' reply, which underlines Cleopatra's ability to draw others to her:

Never. He will not.
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. (2.2.240-4)

We are not surprised when, just forty-three lines later, Antony says, 'I will to Egypt; / And though I make this marriage for my peace, / I' th' East my pleasure lies' (2.3.36-8).

To keep the lovers' relationship in the forefront despite their continued separation in the present, we are next given another suggestive description of Antony and Cleopatra. For Cleopatra it is merely a fanciful image, but the echoes of Cydnus and the foreshadowing of 4.16 are surely deliberate on Shakespeare's part.

Give me mine angle. We'll to th' river. There,
My music playing far off, I will betray
Tawny-finned fishes. My bended hook shall pierce
Their slimy jaws, and as I draw them up
I'll think them every one an Antony,
And say 'Ah ha, you're caught!'

(2.5.10-13)

The sequences of separation and reunion are played out in a minor key in the two exchanges between Cleopatra and the Messenger – a substitute for Antony – who comes to tell her of Antony's marriage to Octavia (2.5, 3.3). In passing, it is worth observing that, like the first, this conflict ends on a hopeful note ('All may be well enough', 3.3.46), arguably at the last moment when hope for Antony and Cleopatra in the physical, political world is possible.

The Actium sequence begins with Cleopatra insisting that she join Antony in battle despite Enobarbus' protests. And his fears are confirmed when Cleopatra,

- i' th' midst o' th' fight -
When vantage like a pair of twins appeared,
Both as the same, or rather ours the elder -
The breese upon her, like a cow in June,
Hoists sails and flies . . .

She once being luffed,
The noble ruin of her magic, Antony,
Claps on his sea-wing and, like a doting mallard,
Leaving the fight in height, flies after her.

(3.10.11-15, 17-20)

In the next scene, it takes some effort by Eros, Iras, and Charmian to bring Antony and Cleopatra together again. A distraught Antony asks, 'O, whither hast thou led me, Egypt?' Cleopatra responds, 'Forgive my fearful sails! I little thought / You would have followed' (3.11.51, 55-6). This reply is frequently met with hoots of derision and incredulity from spectators and critics, and even Antony finds it hard to accept:

Egypt, thou knew'st too well
My heart was to thy rudder tied by th' strings,
And thou shouldst tow me after. O'er my spirit
Thy full supremacy thou knew'st, and that
Thy beck might from the bidding of the gods
Command me.

(3.11.56-61)

The scene ends with their temporary reconciliation, but now there is a note of sadness – Shakespeare invites us to say 'heaviness' – as well:

Fall not a tear, I say. One of them rates
All that is won and lost. Give me a kiss.

He kisses her

Even this repays me. (To an Attendant) We sent
our schoolmaster;

Is a come back? (To Cleopatra) Love, I am full of
lead. (Calling) Some wine
Within there, and our viands! Fortune knows
We scorn her most when most she offers blows.

(3.11.69-74)

The imagery used by Antony to describe Cleopatra’s effect on him and the juxtaposition of their kiss with his defiance of Fortune anticipate the scene towards which Shakespeare is pulling them and us.

But this sequence of together, apart, together, apart, together is not yet complete. When Antony sees Thidia kissing Cleopatra’s hand they draw apart once more until Cleopatra again initiates their reconciliation, whereupon Antony is ‘satisfied’ (3.13.170), and goes off to his final battle renewed as both lover and soldier.

The final sequence begins by both confirming and questioning this soldier–lover duality when Cleopatra and Eros arm Antony. After the first stage of the battle, a triumphant Antony meets Cleopatra at Alexandria. But the inevitable separation soon follows when, according to Antony, Cleopatra betrays him, and he is defeated by Caesar as a consequence. When Cleopatra enters he spurns her and she flees to her monument, sending the message that she is dead. Her command to Mardian – suggested, ironically, by Charmian – is a reminder of how she has toyed with Antony earlier:

go tell him I have slain myself.
Say that the last I spoke was ‘Antony’,
And word it, prithee, piteously. Hence,
Mardian,
And bring me how he takes my death. To th’
monument!

(4.14.7–10)

That she can do this and not be aware of the probable consequences gives us an important insight into the all too human motives for Cleopatra’s actions. Here and earlier when she says, ‘I little thought you would have followed’, and ‘Why is my lord enraged against his love?’ (4.13.31), she shows how her need to exercise her power over others, especially Antony – to be loved in the most basic sense – paradoxically blinds her to the effect that power has on others, especially Antony. She does not, or perhaps cannot, distinguish between the game of love and the game of war – it is all ‘sport’ to her, and because she conflates the two, so does Antony:

I made these wars for Egypt, and the Queen –
Whose heart I thought I had, for she had mine,
Which whilst it was mine had annexed unto’t
A million more, now lost –

(4.15.15–18)

When he is told that Cleopatra is dead, Antony vows to ‘o’ertake’ (4.15.44) her by the only possible means: suicide. But the sequence is not complete: Cleopatra is alive and the dying Antony asks to be taken to her for the ritual embrace of reconciliation. When he dies they are separated physically for the last time but, also for the final time, it is Cleopatra who will make the movement towards Antony to finish the sequence and the play by dying herself and joining him in the world of myth.

Manner and matter conflict in Shakespeare’s treatment of both Antony’s and Cleopatra’s suicides – one might say they die in the ‘high Egyptian fashion’. As is the case throughout the play, what is said counters the effect of what is done so that our response is equally mixed. Cleopatra’s suicide – made possible by a simple peasant whose unintentional puns prompt both our amusement and analysis – is prepared for when Antony bungles his suicide and must be cumbersomely lifted to a punning Cleopatra. But while on one level her puns are intentional, she, like the ‘rural fellow’ (5.2.229), says more than she knows.

For an audience whose ears have become attuned to the puns and paradoxes about the related ideas of weight, bearing, drawing, rising, and falling that fill the play, both the action of raising Antony and the accompany-

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5 As far as I can discover, no studies of the play’s imagery have analysed this aspect; indeed, it is rarely noted except in passing.
ing language should have implications that preclude any single, unambiguous response. As she will do at her own death, Cleopatra acts as both director of and commentator on the action: 'Help me, my women. - We must draw thee up. / Assist, good friends' (4.16.31–2). 'Draw' recalls the fishing image, already quoted, and stirs up other equally ironic echoes as well. When Agrippa is helping Caesar to manipulate Antony into marrying Octavia he argues, 'Her love to both / Would each to other and all loves to both / Draw after her' (2.2.141–3). And when Octavia is leaving her husband to return to her brother, Antony advises: 'Let your best love draw to that point which seeks / Best to preserve it' (3.4.21–2). As Enobarbus prepares to leave Antony he justifies himself by philosophizing about manner and matter, using imagery to present a negative view of Antony that will be challenged in 4.16:

Yes, like enough, high-battled Caesar will
Unstate his happiness and be staged to th' show
Against a sworder! I see men's judgements are
A parcel of their fortunes, and things outward
Do draw the inward quality after them
To suffer all alike. That he should dream,
Knowing all measures, the full Caesar will
Answer his emptiness! Caesar, thou hast
subdued
His judgement, too. (3.13.28–36)

'Staged' and 'show' are overt references to the theatrical element in the characterization and action important through the play, especially in the final act. As well, the metaphorical 'draw' is heard again. But even more significantly, Enobarbus contrasts a 'full' Caesar with Antony's 'emptiness'. In 4.16 Antony's weight, his heaviness, will be used visibly and verbally to counter this view, but not before a multiplicity of connotations has been brought to our attention. Frequently the implication is overtly bawdy, as when Charmian, having her fortune told, says 'Good Isis, hear me this prayer, though thou deny me a matter of more weight' (1.2.61–2). Cleopatra imagining Antony on his horse exclaims, 'O happy horse, to bear the weight of Antony!' (1.5.21). This idea is twisted by various Romans into suggestions of Antony's effeminacy, as when Enobarbus riddles, 'If we should serve with horse and mares together, / The horse were merely lost; the mares would bear / A soldier and his horse' (3.7.7–9). The 'bearing' of things literally or metaphorically 'heavy' is referred to in other related contexts. Early in the play Cleopatra foreshadows the complexities of 4.16 by saying to Antony: '"'Tis sweating labour / To bear such idleness so near the heart / As Cleopatra this' (1.3.94–6). Of Lepidus, and thus of Antony, Enobarbus says, 'A bears the third part of the world' (2.7.87). And after being defeated, Antony tells his men, 'The land bids me tread no more upon't,
/ It is ashamed to bear me' (3.11.1–2). Then, describing the consequences of Antony's defeat, Caesar says, 'the three-nooked world / Shall bear the olive freely' (4.6.5–6). In the scene just preceding 4.16, the dying Antony asks his followers to 'Bear me . . . where Cleopatra bides'; they cry, 'Most heavy day!' (4.15.129, 132), but Antony tells them and us how to respond to what will follow:

Nay, good my fellows, do not please sharp fate
To grace it with your sorrows. Bid that
welcome
Which comes to punish us, and we punish it,
Seeming to bear it lightly. Take me up.
I have led you oft; carry me now, good friends,
And have my thanks for all. (4.15.133–8)

Finally, when Cleopatra tells Dolabella of her dream Antony, he replies: 'Your loss is as yourself, great, and you bear it / As answering to the weight' (5.2.100–1).

Cleopatra's comment as they begin to lift Antony to her, 'Here's sport indeed' (4.16.33), has puzzled, even offended many who think it out of place at this serious moment. Others, however, have perceived the allusion to
Charmian’s earlier description of past sport with Antony:

'Twas merry when
You wagered on your angling, when your diver
Did hang a salt fish on his hook, which he
With fervency drew up. (2.5.15-18)

As suggested above, Cleopatra’s responses to Antony’s accusation of betrayal invite us to conclude that it is all angling for attention, all sport to her; paradoxically, it is only when she is literally drawing up the consequences of her actions that she gains the inner strength to downplay the seriousness by making light of heaviness, as it were. Her punning words, ‘How heavy weighs my lord! / Our strength is all gone into heaviness, / That makes the weight’ (4.16.33-5) can be contrasted with Caesar’s earlier criticism of Antony’s indulgence in ‘mirth’ and ‘sport’, and his self-righteous warning: ‘– yet must Antony / No way excuse his foils when we do bear / So great weight in his lightness’ (1.4.18, 29, 23-5).

In the political world Caesar rises as Antony falls. But countering this, and complicating our response, is that as Antony falls in that context, he is raised, both literally and figuratively in another: the world of love. When Antony asks the Soothsayer, ‘Whose fortunes shall rise higher: Caesar’s or mine?’ (2.3.15), he prompts the audience to formulate an answer. After Actium, Antony describes himself as ‘declined’ (3.13.26) and speaks of his ‘fall’ (3.13.158, 4.13.48). In defeat he also speaks of his ‘baseness’ (4.15.57, 77) which, considering Shakespeare’s use of ‘base’ in Richard II (3.3.175-93), probably has a similar significance here. But when he has regained his soldier’s confidence he can conflate war and love: ‘To business that we love we rise betime, / And go to’t with delight’ (4.4.20-1). And if the first words of Antony’s men when they see he is dying are, ‘The star is fall’n’ (4.15.106), Antony’s nadir as a Roman and a soldier coincides with the beginning of a process that seems intended to raise him in our estimation as a human being and lover. From the point when Antony bungles his suicide, our appreciation of what makes him great, of his magnanimity and its effect on others, is fostered and we are prompted to agree that he ‘do[es] . . . not basely die’ (4.16.57). When he learns Cleopatra has lied about her death he unquestioningly forgives her and goes willingly to the new ‘bourn’ she has set ‘how far to be beloved’. But it is especially after Antony has died that Cleopatra ‘find[s] out new heaven, new earth’ in the world of the imagination – hers and ours – where she establishes an Antony who ‘grew the more by reaping’ and rises to join him saying, ‘I am fire and air; my other elements / I give to baser life’ (5.2.87, 284-5).


7 See David Bevington, Action is Eloquence (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1984). Discussing ‘ironies of visual hierarchy’ in Shakespeare, he says they ‘can be found in the monument scene in Antony and Cleopatra where the lifting up of the dying Antony to Cleopatra and her women simultaneously emphasizes his tragic failure (expressed in the heaviness of his body and the cumber-someness of lifting him aloft right before the spectators’ eyes) and his elevation to mythic greatness as the immortal lover of the Egyptian queen’, p. 107.

8 See Robert Ornstein, ‘The Ethic of the Imagination: Love and Art in Antony and Cleopatra’, in Later Shakespeare, eds J. R. Brown and B. Harris, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 8 (London, 1966): ‘Whatever ironies attach to the manner of Antony’s death, he is raised visually, and poetically, above the earth on which the melancholy Enobarbus sinks’, p. 42. And Maurice Charney, Shakespeare’s Roman Plays (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), notes that the fall of Antony is ‘marked by a persistent imagery of vertical dimension’; that . . . Antony’s place is an elevated one (both literally and figuratively) and in its own way defies the temporal height of Caesar. The note of fulfillment and reconciliation in this image places the fate of Antony outside the toils of tragedy’, pp. 133, 135.
Since manner and matter, ideal and reality are never reconciled in any element of the play and our response is always equivocal as a consequence, it is not surprising that Cleopatra's motives are perhaps not as admirable as the actions and language they produce. From the moment she flees up into her monument until she escapes up into death she is acting to avoid being, in Antony's telling phrase, 'hoist . . . up to the shouting plebeians' by Caesar (4.13.34). From one perspective, Antony's death marks the beginning of a struggle between Cleopatra and Caesar to see who will direct and star in the rest of the show. In a way that Antony is not, both are consummate performers always playing to and conscious of an audience; neither would or could allow himself or herself to be 'hoist' anywhere as Antony so willingly does. But Antony senses Cleopatra's greatest fear and his angry threat is accurate: Act 5 is a contest between Caesar's desire to lead Cleopatra in triumph and her determination to stage a triumph of her own.

Cleopatra's immediate response to Antony's threat (4.13.32-9) is to flee to the safety of her monument. And when the dying Antony pleads for a last kiss, she refuses, revealing the fear his words have planted:

Dear, my lord, pardon. I dare not,
Lest I be taken. Not th'imperious show
Of the full-fortuned Caesar ever shall
Be brooched with me, if knife, drugs,
serpents, have
Edge, sting, or operation. I am safe.

(4.16.23-7)

When Proculeius comes to persuade Cleopatra to surrender, she asks defiantly: 'Shall they hoist me up / And show me to the shouting varlety / Of censuring Rome?' (5.2.54-6). Later when a sympathetic Dolabella confirms Caesar's intention Cleopatra tells Iras:

Thou, an Egyptian puppet shall be shown
In Rome, as well as I. Mechanic slaves
With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers shall
Uplift us to the view . . .

The quick comedians
Extemporally will stage us, and present
Our Alexandrian revels. Antony
Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I' th' posture of a whore. (5.2.204-7, 212-17)

As many have noted, the phrase 'boy my greatness' is an overt reference to a theatrical convention of Shakespeare's theatre. As such the reference is daring since it makes the audience aware of their 'willing suspension of disbelief' and thus threatens to shatter it. In a similar way, Quince's 'This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn brake our tiring-house' challenges the audience of A Midsummer Night's Dream (3.1.3-4). Not surprisingly, both plays use theatrical conventions to explore the illusions and delusions of love, their power to cause 'dotage', and the greater power of the imagination to foster belief in the literally unbelievable. Paradoxically the 'boy' reference in Antony and Cleopatra, like the green plot/stage inversion, does not break the illusion; rather it is strengthened by being challenged. As well it confronts us with the artifice of art — Cleopatra's and Shakespeare's — and prompts us to become aware of how art can mask a less than ideal reality.

'Boy my greatness' is perhaps the most striking theatrical self-reference in the play, but it is only one of many overt references which are, in turn, only a part of the concern with performance and performing that pervades it. Not just Caesar and Cleopatra, but virtually all the main characters are self-conscious role-players, concerned with 'earn[ing] a place i' th' story' (3.13.45); others are equally self-conscious observers and commentators; some, most notably Enobarbus, are both. Repeated commands to on-stage observers to 'behold and see' or 'observe' make the off stage audience more aware of its role

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and thus of the difficulty of separating performance from reality, manner from matter, in politics and in love.

With this in mind it seems worth considering whether Shakespeare deliberately constructed the play to put such strain on the physical stage and its conventions that an audience cannot help but become conscious of its characteristics, limitations, and connotations. The multiplicity of locations is unusually and notoriously difficult to stage,10 but this difficulty enhances our sense of movement, 'Like to a vagabond flag upon the stream, / Goes to, and back, lackeying the varying tide, / To rot itself with motion' (1.4.45–7). Oscillation, equivocation, and ambiguity characterize both the actions of Antony and Cleopatra and our response to them.11 This disconcerting quality is made particularly apparent by the staging of 4.16. On the one hand, the three levels of the stage represent a hierarchy with the upper level often suggesting superiority — moral and political or social12 — and by this point in the action we must question Cleopatra's, or anybody's, right to be there. On the other hand, the difficulty of lifting Antony 'aloft' gives visual form to the verbal redemption (one is tempted to say resurrection) of Antony achieved here by Cleopatra. These and similarly conflicting signals might prompt us to consider whether we are to see this emblematic moment as a celebration of the power of love or as a demonstration of stage management — or both.

Since neither the dialogue nor the stage directions in the Folio text of Antony and Cleopatra give any specific indication of how Antony was raised or to what, stage historians must speculate, basing their theories on what little is known about the physical characteristics of Shakespeare's stage in general and the upper area in particular. Some have been tempted to use the description in North's Plutarch as a starting point. In North's translation we are told that Antony is lifted by Cleopatra and her women using 'certaine chaines and ropes' which they cast down from above. Raising him was very difficult, but Cleopatra stowping downe with her head, putting to all her strength to her uttermost power, did lift him up with much a doe, and never let goe her hold, with the helpe of the women beneath that bad her be of good corage, and were as sorie to see her labor so, as she her selfe. So when she had gotten him in after that sorte, and layed him on a bed: she rent her garments upon him, clapping her brest, and scratching her face and stomake.13

It is tempting to use this description to fill in what Shakespeare omitted; but if we follow North in this, why not also for the second monument scene (5.2) when Cleopatra is surprised and captured? In North's translation: 'Proculeius did set up a ladder against that high windowe, by the which Antonius was trissed up, and came downe into the monument.'14 Following this would mean staging the second scene on the gallery, an idea which receives no support, either from Shakespeare's text or stage historians. Nevertheless, Shakespeare does use his source selectively throughout and it is possible that he intended the first monument scene to be staged as Plutarch describes it. Taken literally, this would mean the use of ropes and chains, the raising of Antony by Cleopatra and her women only, and the entry of Antony through a window to be laid on a bed within the monument. Most theories of how the scene was staged seem to be attempts to accommodate these details, often with elaborate solutions, the staging of which

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10 For a survey of this and other aspects of the staging see Margaret Lamb, Antony and Cleopatra on the English Stage (Cranbury, N. J. and London, 1980).
12 On the use and symbolism of the stage façade, especially the upper area, see Bevington, pp. 99–114.
14 Bullough, p. 311.
would have been difficult in a venue like the Globe and impossible in a provincial theatre.

There are two general theories about where the action of 4.16 takes place: on the upper playing area or on a specially constructed scaffold. Perhaps the most complicated version of the first theory is that of Bernard Jenkin. He argues that Shakespeare, having written a version that followed Plutarch, discovered that having Antony aloft ‘could not be done without delaying the action of the play, distracting the audience, and dropping the performance to a plane far below that at which tragedy must be kept’, so he wrote a second version using an ‘inner stage’ on both the main and upper levels. In Jenkin’s view, Shakespeare solved the problem by having Antony seem to be raised to the upper area behind a curtain at the back of it, out of sight of the audience so that ‘all delays, mechanical difficulties and devices have been swept out of the way’. But for Dover Wilson, using the inner stages ‘ignores the textual fact . . . that dead bodies have to be carried away at the end of both scenes, a thing unnecessary upon the inner stages with their curtains’. Citing Plutarch’s description, Wilson suggests that the monument was specially constructed on the outer main stage, over the trap through which Cleopatra and her women entered, and below the ‘heavens’ which were equipped with a winch for lifting Antony.

Walter Hodges also postulates a special structure in front of the tiring house façade, but for him the main problems to be solved are in the distance Antony must be raised and the balustrade obstructing the audience’s view of Antony once he is lying in the monument.

Harley Granville-Barker and Bernard Beckerman both discuss these two problems but neither offers any specific solutions. Granville-Barker assumes the height of the upper area to be ten or twelve feet from the main stage, a distance that would be increased by a balustrade ‘at least three feet high’. He continues:

Swinging a dying man over it and lowering him again asks some care. Granted this done with skill and grace, what of the effect of the rest of the scene, of Antony’s death and Cleopatra’s lament over him, played behind the balustrade as behind bars? Clearly it would be a poor one. The balustrade must, one presumes, have been removed for the occasion or made to swing open, if the ordinary upper stage was used.

Beckerman, who thinks the scaffold idea unlikely since the stage direction specifically says ‘aloft’, a term never present when scaffolds are used elsewhere, also addresses the distance and balustrade problems:

Neither 10’ nor 12’ are prohibitive heights although a railing would be difficult to work over. Perhaps it was possible to remove a portion of the railing. Despite the obstacles, however, Antony was raised in a manner which, we must suppose, was not ludicrous.

In perhaps the most detailed study of the scene, Richard Hosley puts together a series of conjectures to develop a proposal for the lifting of Antony. Acknowledging that the text is not specific, Hosley says that Cleopatra and her women ‘are presumably to be imagined as reappearing (as in Plutarch) in an upper window of the monument. I assume that, in the original production at the Globe (1607), the

19 And see Richard Hosley, ‘The Gallery over the Stage in the Public Playhouse of Shakespeare’s Time’, Shakespeare Quarterly, 8 (1957), 15-31: ‘Certainly the business of “heaving Antony aloft” poses a difficult problem in historical reconstruction, but regardless of the exact agency by which he was raised one is on pretty fair grounds (because of two directions calling for action aloft) in supposing what he was raised to was a gallery over the stage’, p. 22.
actors appeared in one of the windows of a tiring-house gallery over the stage generally similar to that depicted in the De Witt drawing of the Swan Playhouse'. Hosley again cites Plutarch in describing how Antony was lifted, saying that, 'Shakespeare's text . . . is consistent with Plutarch. . . . Clearly it is Cleopatra and her Maids who heave Antony aloft, in Shakespeare as well as in Plutarch.' Given this, and his belief that 'the barrier of the gallery would have been some fourteen feet above the stage', Hosley concludes that, 'Cleopatra and her Maids must effect the heaving aloft by means of a rope.' He goes on to suggest that Antony was not lifted in a reclining position, as is usually supposed, but seated in a chair attached to ropes on a winch.

Thus the three boy actors 'heave Antony aloft', swinging him and the chair into the gallery through its window when he has been hoisted to the necessary height. (The gallery windows at the Swan may be estimated as about six feet square.) They lower the chair to the floor of the gallery, and Antony then sits in the gallery window for his subsequent dialogue with Cleopatra, until carried away (still in the chair) at the end of the action.¹¹

Margaret Lamb, in her appendix, 'Heaving Antony Aloft', describes Hosley's proposal as 'colorful but rather clumsy' and adds:

There is . . . only one other recorded contemporary theatrical hoisting, in which a boy was lifted only a few feet; and there is no conclusive evidence that the Globe had flying machinery in 1606. A gallery-and-winch arrangement could not have been used on tour; but in that case Antony could have been heaved up bodily from below and grabbed from above — the simplest, and in some ways the best, solution.²²

However, whereas the earlier theories are largely attempts to accommodate Shakespeare to Plutarch, Lamb is arguing for a connection between Shakespeare's staging and Daniel's revised (1607) and vivid description of the same scene.²³ Thus she concentrates on fitting Shakespeare's dialogue to Daniel's description and ignores the technical problems of height, balustrade, and window.

What it comes down to is that we may speculate as much as we please, but, given the text's vague dialogue and stage directions and our lack of knowledge about the Globe Theatre, we cannot come even close to being certain what was actually done. However, although it is true that metaphorical language is not always a reliable indication of physical action, it is at least worth considering whether a staging can be devised that does not go against the given stage directions on the one hand and complements the imagery and earlier action on the other. By disregarding Plutarch and by assuming that the various physical problems in using the gallery are real and were capitalized on by Shakespeare, one can arrive at a possible staging workable and effective not only at the Globe in 1607, but anywhere with a raised playing area.

Basically, what I want to suggest is that Antony is lifted up to Cleopatra in the gallery but not on to it, and that he is lowered again to the main stage after he dies to be carried out by his men at the end of the scene. While this may not have been the way it was done, it certainly could have been, and staging the scene this way would remove technical problems that have preoccupied directors and critics as well as adding a visual dimension to the dialogue. If this staging is used, the Folio text needs no emendations. The previous scene ends with the exit of Antony's men 'bearing' him and 4.16 begins: 'Enter Cleopatra, and her Maids

22 Lamb, p. 182. And see Lamb's descriptions and illustrations of the various post-Renaissance stagings of this scene: pp. 58, 80, 88–9, 95–7, 141, 153, 168.
aloft, with Charmian & Iras’ (TLN 2996–7). Diomed enters below (as the absence of a specific location indicates) as do ‘Antony, and the Guard’ (4.16.6.1, 9.1; TLN 3005, 3010). Cleopatra asks Charmian, Iras, and ‘friends below’, presumably the soldiers carrying Antony, to ‘draw him hither’. Antony’s first word is ‘Peace’ and perhaps this stops them from raising him. Certainly they do not do so since when Antony asks Cleopatra for a last kiss she refuses to leave her monument and repeats her earlier request while also calling to Antony as she has so often done before:

But come, come, Antony. – Help me, my women. – We must draw thee up. Assist, good friends. (4.16.30–2)

Even without Plutarch’s reference to ‘chains and ropes’ as a suggestion, given the numerous earlier references to bonds, ties, and fetters to describe Antony and Cleopatra’s relationship, it is quite likely that when the opportunity presented itself Shakespeare made the metaphor literal by having Cleopatra and her women lower ropes of some kind so that while the boy actors on the upper level would not actually bear any of the weight, they would seem to. Then, during Cleopatra’s ‘Here’s sport indeed’ speech, Antony’s men lift him gradually and with difficulty towards Cleopatra, who is either in a window or behind a balustrade with her women, miming the action of pulling him to her.24 ‘Yet come a little. / . . . O come, come, come!’ she cries and, as the Folio stage direction says, ‘They heave Anthony aloft to Cleopatra’ (4.16.37–38.1; TLN 3043–5). While this certainly can mean that they put him on the upper stage with Cleopatra, it is equally possible that all they do is raise him to her level. And, assuming that Cleopatra is reaching out of the window or over the balustrade in seeming to pull Antony towards her, the distance to be covered would be reduced to a manageable ten feet or so. As discussed above, the action of the play is essentially a series of sequences ending with the two lovers coming together in an embrace, and Cleopatra’s ‘welcome, welcome’ indicates that a physical union has been achieved once more.25 The image presented would be satisfying and emblematic, reverberating as it does with connotations and allusions both specific and general. And, if Cleopatra is leaning out of and over the gallery and Antony is being held up to her, there would be no problems of visibility for the theatre audience.

The onstage audience cries ‘A heavy sight’ (4.16.42) and so it would be, not only figuratively but also literally if Antony is still being held up by those below. If this punning seems incongruous at such a moment we must remember that Cleopatra has just made the same play on words, and variations of it have run through the play. Furthermore, the mixture of humour with tragedy is quite in keeping with the ambiguous effect of Antony’s bungled suicide attempt and Cleopatra’s asp-bearing peasant. The manner of the scene – the action – would be, should be physically awkward, but as elsewhere this awkwardness is juxtaposed with the language of genuine emotion, neither cancelling the other, each pulling at us simultaneously, asking us to judge the matter, to assess the value, the meaning of what we are seeing.

In this staging, Antony would be held aloft only until he dies – just twenty-four lines of dialogue – and it is possible to speculate that his descent is also signalled by Cleopatra. Again, while acknowledging that dialogue is an unreliable indicator of action, I offer the following as a possibility, but a very real one since nothing works against it and the thematic implications are considerable. The Folio provides no stage direction for Antony’s death, but as is often the case this job is left to the

24 If the ropes are used for symbolic purposes only, no winch would be necessary.
25 See Ornstein: ‘Even the sorrow she feels in bearing his dying weight is transmuted by the memory of their earlier "dyings"’, p. 35.
dialogue. Antony's words, 'Now my spirit is going; / I can no more' (4.16.60-1), are the signal and, if he is merely being held aloft rather than lying on the upper stage, perhaps Cleopatra's response is intended not only as a confirmation that he is dead, but also as a description of his physical descent and separation from her:

O see, my women,
The crown o' th' earth doth melt. My lord!
O, withered is the garland of the war.
The soldier's pole is fall'n. Young boys and girls
Are level now with men. The odds is gone,
And there is nothing left remarkable
Beneath the visiting moon. (4.16.64-70)

In passing it is worth observing that, as modern editors indicate, Cleopatra faints as she finishes this speech.26 If, however, she is on a Swan-type gallery, behind a window or even behind a balustrade, she would have to collapse into the arms of her women or over the sill or railing if she is to remain in view for this brief, but important, moment when she seems to move toward Antony, but returns to take control once more. Similarly, if Antony's body has been lowered to the main stage it would still be visible, which it would not be if lying on the floor of the gallery. Surely the audience should be able to see the body as Cleopatra directs our attention to it when next she speaks?27 The contrast between Antony dead below and Cleopatra taking control above would be an effective way to initiate the final movement of the play. And, as a last point, the Folio stage direction concluding the scene, 'Exeunt, bearing of Anthonies body' (TLN 3107), needs no explication or emendation if he is lying on the floor of the gallery. Surely the audience should be able to see the body as Cleopatra directs our attention to it when next she speaks?27 The contrast between Antony dead below and Cleopatra taking control above would be an effective way to initiate the final movement of the play. And, as a last point, the Folio stage direction concluding the scene, 'Exeunt, bearing of Anthonies body' (TLN 3107), needs no explication or emendation if he is lying on the main stage. Since it is the end of the scene the 'exeunt' applies not only to Cleopatra and her women, but to all on both levels of the stage; if Antony's body is below, his men bear him off to burial from there.28

Staged in this way, the fall of Antony the soldier is also the triumph, in its Medieval, visual sense as well as metaphorical, of Antony the lover, a transcendence necessary for the presentation and acceptance of Cleopatra's dream Antony in Act 5. By contrasting the awkward physical action of lifting Antony, with Cleopatra's loving lament in 4.16, Shakespeare challenges us, as Cleopatra will later challenge Dolabella, to accept with our hearts what our minds resist. We are encouraged to suspend our disbelief, if you will, and perceive, with Hippolyta, 'something of great constancy': the power of love.29

Antony and Cleopatra is a study of human love in all its manifestations and at its centre are the title characters: not idealized lovers but fallibly human ones. The nature of their relationship is the organizing principle of the play: the generic mix and the shifting locales create a realistic context for the vacillation and paradox characteristic of love. Antony and Cleopatra may seem larger than life, but their relationship is a paradigm of the human struggle, and capacity, to love and be loved. And the play dramatizes the sad truth that the more intense love is, the more it is likely to reveal not only our best qualities but our worst flaws as well; indeed, that more often than not the two are inseparable. One way Shakespeare conveys this essential paradox is to combine romantic motives and language with realism-

26 See, for example, the Arden, Riverside, and Signet editions. The Oxford Complete Works has 'She falls.' If this is meant to be taken literally, and if she did so on a Swan-type stage, Cleopatra would not have been visible to the audience. A few lines later the Oxford has her 'recovering'.

27 Note that, while it cannot be considered a definite indication of location, Cleopatra says, 'The case of that huge spirit now is cold' (4.16.91), rather than the 'this' we might expect if he were above with her.

28 'We'll bury him', Cleopatra says (4.16.88), so presumably Antony is buried in some other part of the monument. Caesar's final words, 'Take up her bed, / And bear her women from the monument. / She shall be buried by her Antony' (5.2.350-2), do not help to clarify the matter.

29 The word 'love' and its forms occurs more than fifty times in the play.
tically awkward physical action, inviting us as well as the onstage observers to respond. On the face of it, Cleopatra holed up in her monument and Antony being hauled up to it prompt us to view her as selfish and him as effeminate; but the context and the language counter this view, making us aware of what is admirable: Antony’s selflessness and Cleopatra’s determination to survive. We are never allowed to remain passive observers complacently condemning Cleopatra for beckoning and Antony for coming. Unlike Plutarch, Shakespeare does not criticize Antony for loving her and Cleopatra for ruining him; rather, by setting up comparisons through the play he invites us to see that a great but flawed love is incomparably preferable to no love at all, or to a love that falters in adversity, or to one that is founded upon practical considerations. The disconcerting ambiguities are reminders that by its very nature human love is irrational, causing us to desire it even as we resist it. Antony’s death scene, like Cleopatra’s, is and should be troublesome and troubling, not because Shakespeare did not know what he was doing, but because he did.