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THE TRANSFORMING EYE: THE POETIC FICTIONS OF FALSTAFF AND CLEOPATRA

The Ohio State University

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THE TRANSFORMING EYE:
THE POETIC FICTIONS OF FALSTAFF AND CLEOPATRA

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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1981

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

At first glance, it may seem arbitrary or whimsical to yoke together the two radically different characters with whom this essay is concerned, Falstaff and Cleopatra. The purpose of my thesis, however, is to explore and describe a very important similarity between them. Both characters imaginatively and creatively transform their respective playworlds in order to resist the levelling influence of those duller minds which rule their political destinies.

Other characters in 1 Henry IV and Antony and Cleopatra also transform. That is, for various reasons, they alter or distort reality as it is established for us in the plays. Some, seeking to enhance their political or personal status, alter in order to deceive someone else. Others, like Hotspur and Antony, are blinded or self-deceived and cannot help distorting. Characters transform in order to cast their activities in the best possible light, to detract from the actions of their competitors, to control and give shape to their "stories," or to impose particular patterns or interpretations upon the events which comprise those stories. Several characters try to
impose "interpretations" on Cleopatra and Falstaff, assigning them "parts" as the cunning and dissipated seducers of other, more virtuous souls. But in our perspective, the Egyptian and the Knight resist such reductive "placing."

They do not resist, however, by actually working in the playworld to counteract the designs of their opponents or to implement their own plots and schemes, as we might expect transformers to do. Rather, they reimagine their worlds and themselves, they see from a different angle, and they make us see with them. When they are transforming in this manner, they engage us in their visions and win us away from the versions of their stories forwarded by the other characters whose transforming impulses are more self-serving or harmful and, hence, disquieting to us. Almost every character in these plays alters "reality" in some fashion, but Falstaff and Cleopatra, unlike any of the others, are poetic transformers, characters who "distort," revitalize, and even remake their worlds solely in the province of the imagination. The self-conscious interest Shakespearean drama often has in itself as drama has been frequently noted. These two plays, however, go beyond a self-reflexive concern with the power (and possible danger) of the dramatist's art, taking as one of their major subjects, and then affirming, the potency and value of poetic imagination.
There are other similarities between Falstaff and Cleopatra. We can little imagine the sensuous Egyptian and Hal's jolly companion swilling sack together in the Boar's Head or chatting in the palace in Alexandria about their common problems with the politicians. Being told that he had an affinity with Cleopatra, Falstaff might protest that the comparison was unsavory, and Cleopatra would doubtlessly banish anyone who dared align her with a "fat-witted" Englishman. Still, were the two to walk the streets together in disguise, noting "the quality of the people" and eavesdropping on their conversations, they would discover just how alike the virtues and defects imputed to them really are, especially if they wandered into modern critical quarters. In fact, audiences before now have thought to link them together for various reasons. "Cleopatra stands in a group with Hamlet and Falstaff," says A. C. Bradley, as a character who is "inexhaustible," and she shares one of Falstaff's weaknesses, vanity. According to Philip Traci, "Falstaff and what he represents are as important for Hal to experience in his growth to Henry V as Cleopatra and what she represents are to Antony's growth to dream proportions," and Walter C. Foreman, Jr., coming even nearer to the concerns of this essay, mentions in a footnote the fertility of Falstaff's and Cleopatra's imaginations and the varying degrees to which their "creative idleness" triumphs.
But whether critics consciously think of them together or not, the adjectives employed to describe one often crop up in descriptions of the other. For example, both are accused by other characters, as well as by the plays' audiences, of being sinners enough to "corrupt a saint," not to mention a Hal or an Antony. Falstaff is saturated with vices and follies, including cowardice, drunkenness, lying, gluttony, sloth, and vanity, while Cleopatra, wily serpent of the Nile and mistress of the "dark" arts of feminine seductiveness, is faithless and cunning, a debauched and lascivious strumpet. So say their detractors. On the other hand, say even those same detractors—realizing quite rightly that not all has yet been accounted for—Cleopatra and Falstaff generate a vitality that infuses their plays, a vitality that inspires Maurice Morgann's spirited defense of Falstaff from charges of cowardice, Harold Goddard's insistence that we are as deceived as Caesar if we think that Cleopatra wavers in her determination to kill herself, and most other critics' tempering of even their most intolerant stances with concessions to the attractiveness of whichever "sinner" they happen to be discussing. Cleopatra and Falstaff, most of us agree, are inventive and witty, infinitely variable, energetic, mirthful, entertaining, possessed of a dramatic sense of life, and, in spite of their advanced years, youthful. They both occupy a great deal of the imaginative
space of their plays, and they appear especially lively and
life-loving when placed in the company of the priggish and
disapproving politicians with whom both collide. There are,
in short, apparently conflicting, or at least incompatible,
signals given off by the sometimes not-quite-queenly Queen
and the something-less-than-honorable Knight which cause
readers, whether they essentially admire or condemn the
characters, to hedge their opinions. Thus, W. H. Auden,
seeking for an explanation of "why Falstaff affects us as
he does," decides that, overtly, he is "a Lord of Misrule,"
but "parabolically, he is a comic symbol for the super­
natural order of charity. . . ."4 The issue between the
"psychological and anti-psychological interpretations of
Falstaff," states Robert Langbaum, who worries that we are
made to admire such a scoundrel as he thinks Falstaff to be,
is whether as coward, lecher, and glutton he is
the butt of the comedy and deservedly outwitted
in the end, or whether he is the maker of the
comedy, playing the butt for the sake of the
humor which he turns upon himself as well as
everyone else—whether he is, in other words,
victorious in all the wit combats whatever
his circumstantial defeat.5

In Cleopatra's case, the hesitation to praise or damn her
outright is most acute in discussions of the final scene.
Though most agree that it is a stunning scene, many dis­
trust its effect. Its "power and beauty," says L. C.
Knights, for example, should not "obscure the continued
presence of something self-deceiving and unreal."6
E. A. J. Honigmann, coming from the opposite direction, rather reluctantly agrees that, in spite of all Cleopatra's fluctuating intentions after Antony's death, "there comes a point, as we are swept along by her performance, when we wonder whether she has indeed transcended 'baser life.'" Referring to an overall impression of the Egyptian, Rosalie Colie notes that "there is every reason to think very little of Cleopatra—although, to balance her crudities . . . we are made to see that even in her breaches of decorum . . . she is delightful." To give full play to their impressions of Cleopatra and Falstaff, audiences often find that they must qualify and modify their praise or blame.

I do not argue that mixed reactions to this pair are incorrect. What Norman Rabkin says about the characterization of Lorenzo and Jessica in The Merchant of Venice—that it has "been disputed often enough to suggest that their ambivalence is built into the play"—applies here too. Neither, however, is my primary interest in locating precisely the sources of our ambivalent reactions. My focus is on imagination and how imagination can transform reality and even bring about a new reality. Nevertheless, my treatment of 1 Henry IV and Antony and Cleopatra does partially explain, I think, why we have difficulty sorting out our responses to these characters. In the first place, they are complex characters who evoke mixed reactions even within the confines of a single scene. In the second, our
relationship with them changes over the course of their plays, and, with respect to Falstaff, over the course of two plays. The Falstaff in whom I am mainly interested is the character in 1 Henry IV, and he is different from the Falstaff of 2 Henry IV, though critics frequently combine them (and sometimes even the Merry Wives' Falstaff), into one personality. My aim is to differentiate his and Cleopatra's brands of transforming from the kinds in which characters like Hal, Hotspur, Antony and Caesar indulge. To accomplish this, I pay extremely close attention to the texts, and, in the process, I pinpoint, I believe, the origin of at least some of our critical confusion. In general, my thesis holds that, when Cleopatra and Falstaff are least engaging, they are transforming in ways that worry us. However, neither character is ever as debauched as his most disparaging critics make him out to be, for neither is a covert seducer of others. More importantly, my argument demonstrates that when we are most deeply engaged with them—during Cleopatra's last scene, for example, and during the early acts of 1 Henry IV before Falstaff goes off to war—they are practicing a type of transformation which I call "poetic," since, like a poet's fiction, it makes itself known as a product of the imagination at the same time that it insists upon our investments in it. Transformation is related to verbal scenemaking and is a natural outgrowth of the reliance Shakespeare's
dramas have upon their characters to present verbally, not only their physical landscapes, but virtually their entire worlds. These terms will be explained more fully in the second chapter, which describes different kinds of scene-makers and transformers, characters who can help us sharpen, mainly through contrast, our focus on Falstaff and Cleopatra, whose own transforming powers are, I think, unique in Shakespearean drama.

The difficulty we have separating out our critical opinions of Falstaff and Cleopatra, arises partially, I believe, from our tendency to collapse our experiences of a play into generalizations about theme, character, structure, tone, or imagery when we write about it, rather than to consider the manner in which it affects us as it unfolds before us. My effort here is to avoid such generalizations and to describe our dynamic and ongoing relationship with 1 Henry IV and Antony and Cleopatra as they work to engage us with or detach us from their characters and actions, for only in this fashion can I make the distinctions I wish to make as clearly as I wish to make them. We must take note of how a play shapes our responses as it goes along before we can describe effectively our experience with it. My close attention to the progression of events and my "immersion" in many of the scenes will, I hope, find justification in a better understanding of the power Cleopatra and Falstaff hold over us as well as in a
clarification of our feelings about them. Drama, and especially Shakespearean drama, is a complex experience which demands that we monitor it carefully if we wish to report on it accurately. More importantly, however, it is a joyful experience which repeatedly entices us away from the neat outlines of our arguments and catches us up in its magic. If the arguments of this thesis run the risk of being obscured by a too-frequent or too-involved attention to individual scenes, I hope that at least the reader will come away with a renewed sense of the joy with which Shakespeare's plays invariably fill us.
NOTES

Chapter 1. Introduction


9 Norman Rabkin, Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 17; William Empson, in "Falstaff and Mr. Dover Wilson," Shakespeare, "Henry IV Parts I and II": A Casebook (London: MacMillan, 1970); rpt. from Kenyon Review, 15 (1953), pp. 213-262, lists other ambiguities he believes should be allowed to stand, some of which I think, however, the play allows us to resolve (pp. 137-144).

In the forward to a collection of essays entitled *Reinterpretations of Elizabethan Drama: Selected Papers from the English Institute* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1969), Norman Rabkin observes that the volume "reflects a marked shift in approach, indicating the emergence of a new paradigm for the study of Renaissance drama if not of all theatrical art." The writers whose essays are included in the book, he hastens to add, "would certainly not agree on all matters of interpretation, or even on the value . . . of each other's essays," but each shares with the others the fact that he discusses a play "as it impinges on its audience, as it is experienced" (p. vii). Rabkin himself illustrates the approach with a reading of *The Merchant of Venice*, in "Meaning and Shakespeare." Of the essays included in *Reinterpretations of Elizabethan Drama*, Stephen Booth's "On the Value of Hamlet" most clearly suggests the kind of audience-play relationship I am attempting to describe (pp. 137-76). E. A. J. Honigmann, in *Shakespeare: Seven Tragedies: The Dramatist's Manipulation of Response* is also interested in the effect a play has upon its audience as it unfolds and how such effects are achieved, and that interest also informs Robert C. Jones's *Engagement with Knavery*. 
CHAPTER 2. LUNATICS, LOVERS, AND POETS

The term "transformation" and the presence in English Renaissance drama of so many characters who engage in the activity of altering reality can better be understood when we remember the extent to which that drama depends upon words to bring its worlds before our eyes. The "reality" that is subject to distortion and alteration by some characters is established verbally by others. Our knowledge of, and attitudes toward, almost every facet of a Renaissance playworld, including its physical landscapes, the personalities of its characters, its tone, its atmosphere, and the ethos of the cultures it presents derive from the voices of those who comment upon what they see, experience, and feel in their worlds. In effect, the playworld is reflected in the eyes of those who inhabit it, and it should not be surprising that, sometimes, those eyes refract rather than mirror "reality."

In Shakespeare's plays, especially, we see what we hear. Nowhere is that trait more patently manifest on his stage than in the fact that the physical setting itself is verbally created. Though modern plays frequently begin with detailed authorial instructions about setting, costumes, and even character motivation, such information
about Shakespeare's plays and about English Renaissance plays in general, must be gleaned from the speeches of the characters themselves.¹ Rather than filling the stage with elaborate scenery and numerous props, the Elizabethan playwright depends heavily upon his audience's imagination and his characters' verbal evocations of scenes to turn a bare stage into a forest, a court, or a battlefield and to flesh out these settings with the desired atmosphere. Verbal scenemaking is a pervasive trait of Renaissance drama and ranges from casual remarks about objects which characters "see" before them to sustained poetic creations of spectacular events and actions. Referring specifically to Shakespearean theater, Bernard Beckerman states that the phrase "two boards and a passion" probably sums up all that was essential to it and that, at the Globe, for example, spectators were usually told where a scene took place, but "they were informed by the words they heard, not the sights they saw."² Much more emerges from the speeches of the characters who inhabit the dramatic worlds of Shakespeare and other English Renaissance artists than physical landscapes, but verbal scene-setting clearly illustrates our reliance on words to fill the empty stage for us. Furthermore, since it may itself become the occasion for a transformation, it offers a convenient vehicle for exploring the various kinds of relationships transformers may have with their worlds. Physical landscapes are simply the least
complicated examples of a "reality" that is verbally created and may also be verbally transformed.

I.

The least complex type of verbal stage setting occurs when a character merely gestures toward his surroundings and does so in a manner that gives us no reason to question the accuracy of his observations. "This green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorne brake our tiring house," decides Peter Quince as the clowns in 

_The Midsummer Night's Dream_ prepare to rehearse "Pyramus and Thisbe." Even though his translation of the wood into a stage comprises part of the fun the play has with his and his companions' naive conceptions of theater and fiction, we assume, without question, that the forest and the thicket are there. Similarly, we believe Banquo's and Duncan's observation, however ironic, that Macbeth's castle is a pleasant spot, its appeal enhanced by sweet-smelling air and singing birds. We trust Rosalind when she informs us incidentally that the Forest of Arden, in 

_As You Like It_, contains, among other perhaps more significant and interesting items, brambles and hawthornes, and we have no reason to suspect Lorenzo of distorting the truth when he tells us that "the moon shines bright" and the "sweet wind" gently kisses the trees in Portia's garden,
though his observation quickly becomes a subject for his and Jessica's wit (The Merchant of Venice, V. i, 1-2).

Scenemaking involves much more, however, than reportorial glances at the countryside. Though the novel may have an inherent advantage over drama in describing scenes, Elizabethan playwrights, and especially Shakespeare, went a long way toward counterbalancing that advantage through verbal settings. Like the narrators of stories or novels who bring before our mind's eye a drawing room in London, an Amazonian jungle, a war on the Plains of Troy, or a Martian space colony, dramatic characters can create scenes for us which do not lend themselves to easy duplication in a visible stage setting. D. J. Palmer points out, for example, that we are heavily dependent upon poetic evocation of scenes in Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, a play whose setting is a universe which includes heaven and hell. Similarly, the mariners, at the beginning of The Tempest, invoke a vast action that cannot be encompassed in a theater, but even plays whose worlds are much less geographically vast contain equally suggestive "narrators." Horatio, in The Spanish Tragedy, meets Bel-Imperia, his mistress, in the garden in which he will eventually be murdered. At the time of the meeting, however, the spot seems perfect for love:

Now that the night begins with sable wings
To overcloud the brightness of the sun,
And that in darkness pleasures may be done,
The stars, thou seest, hold back their twinkling shine,  
And Luna hides herself to pleasure us.  

After Horatio is murdered, the bower assumes a terrifying new significance for his grieving father, whose description of it is much more emotional than this one. In a like manner, while mechanical stage directions do indicate that there is a storm on the heath in III. ii of King Lear, Lear himself fills out the picture for us:

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks. Rage, blow!  
You cataracts and hurricanes, spout  
Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks.  
You sulph'rous and thought-executing fires,  
Vaunt-couriers of oak cleaving thunderbolts,  
Singe my white head. And thou, all-shaking thunder,  
Strike flat the thick rotundity o' th' world,  

(III. ii, 1-7)

We "see" the storm crackling about the King's head as he speaks, just as in I. i of The Tempest we hear the wind howling, the sea roaring, and "watch" the ship foundering as the mariners shout to each other in an effort to save it.

Not only is scenemaking a fact of Renaissance drama, it is also sometimes its subject, and plays point self-reflexively at the process of imagination involved when an audience is "caught up" in verbal creation. In Titus Andronicus, for example, Tamora, the villainess, enters a lonely part of the forest near Rome, armed with "words more sweet, and yet more dangerous, / Than baits to fish or honey
stalks to sheep," weapons she normally uses to perpetrate her vile schemes, but with which she now purposes to seduce Aaron, the play's other villain. In keeping with her rhetorical tactics, she creates for him an atmosphere conducive to love:

The birds chaunt melody on every bush,
The snakes lie rollèd in the cheerful sun,
The green leaves quiver with cooling wind,
And make a checkered shadow on the ground.

(II. iii, 12-15)

This, she urges, is a spot in which she and Aaron may, "each wreathèd in the other's arms,/. . . possess a golden slumber,/.Whiles hounds and horns and sweet melodious birds" sing lullabies (II. iii, 25-27). Unfortunately for Tamora, Aaron has other plans in his head at the moment, but she has better success in her next enterprise a short while later. To prompt her two sons to kill Titus' son-in-law, she "resets" the same spot in the forest:

A barren detested vale, you see it is;
The trees, though summer, yet forlorn and lean,
Overcome with moss and baleful mistletoe:
Here never shines the sun: here nothing breeds,
Unless the nightly owl or fatal raven:

(II. iii, 93-97)

The play thus suggests our dependence upon verbal scene evocation, for only a bare stage can accommodate this abrupt shift from the conventional pastoral to the revenge tragedy setting.
The experience of having a character poetically set a stage is placed for us as inventions or fictionmaking when Edgar, in *King Lear*, standing in a field near Dover, summons up for his blind father the prospect from a nonexistent cliff, making the image so palpable that the old man actually believes he falls from the high spot:

Come on, sir; here's the place: stand still.
How fearful
And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low!
The crows and choughs that wing the midway air
Show scarce so gross as beetles. Half way down
Hangs one that gathers sampire, dreadful trade!
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.
The fishermen that walk upon the beach
Appear like mice; and yond tall anchoring bark
Diminished to her cock; her cock, a buoy
Almost too small for sight, the murmuring surge
That on th' unnumb'red idle pebble chafes
Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more,
Lest my brain turn and the deficient sight
Topple down headlong.

(IV. vi, 11-24)

Edgar's description is potent enough, furthermore, to make the cliff take on a reality even for us, and we forget momentarily, what is "really" true, that there is no cliff on the Dover field. In fact, our realization that the cliff is an invention as Edgar describes it must depend on his preceding exchange with his father and on our understanding of his character, not on the description itself, which gives no clues at all about its fictive nature.

In its own right, this speech might stand as a particularly effective example of verbal setting in Shakespeare's
theater.

At the beginning of *The Life of Henry Fifth*, the Prologue brings the matter entirely into the open and explicates, though somewhat inadequately, the imaginative process of dressing an essentially bare stage:

> But pardon, gentles all,  
> The flat unraised spirits that hath dared  
> On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth  
> So great an object. Can this cockpit hold  
> The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram  
> Within this wooden O the very casques  
> That did affright the air at Agincourt?  
> O, pardon—since a crooked finger may  
> Attest in little place a million;  
> And let us, ciphers to this great accompt,  
> On your imaginary forces work.  
> Suppose within the girdle of these walls  
> Are now confined two mighty monarchies,  
> Whose high, upreared and abutting fronts  
> The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder.  
> Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts:  
> Into a thousand parts divide one man  
> And make imaginary puissance.

*(Prologue. i, 8-25)*

In contrast with Bottom, who has no faith in his audience's ability to imagine moonshine, the Prologue speaks slightingly of the talents of the actors and the playwright, giving most of the credit to our imaginations. Nevertheless, we do not have to struggle very hard to accept a few bare boards as "vasty fields" when we watch the play, guided as we are by the verbal settings in it.
"Narrator" describes only one of numerous relationships that characters in a play have with the playworld, and it is not the most crucial term for this thesis. Prospero's island, the Forest of Arden, and King Henry's court are bursting with people who find meaning and significance in their surroundings and who explicate, speculate about, and judge, as well as describe and participate in, the landscape and the events in which they find themselves. Objective reporting is actually scarce, and even Peter Quince's and Banquo's casual gestures toward the physical setting resonate with the ironies of their respective plays. Peter Quince, in fact, points to a real stage and a real tiring house when he turns the forest and the hawthorne brake into a stage and a tiring house, thereby refuting his own troupe’s lack of faith in the audience’s ability to suspend disbelief.

The Duke and Jacques, in As You Like It, are good examples of characters who differ from straightforward "narrators." Rather than simply creating or describing a scene, they moralize the spectacles they encounter in Arden. Trying his best to "translate the stubbornness of fortune" into a pleasant experience, for example, Duke Senior decides that the forest to which he has been banished has, after all, much to teach him:
Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
More free from peril than the envious court?
Here feel we not the penalty of Adam;
The seasons' difference, as the icy fang
And churlish chiding of the winter's wind,
Which, when it bites and blows upon my body
Even till I shrink with cold, I smile and say,
"This is no flattery; these are counselors
That feelingly persuade me what I am."
Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which, like the toad, ugly and venemous,
Wears yet a precious jewel on his head;
And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running
brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.

(II. i, 2-17)

The term "translate," employed here by Amiens, but also by
other Elizabethan characters in many different contexts,
nicely defines the operation which the Duke, Jacques, and
characters like them perform upon their worlds when, instead
of describing, they turn one thing into another. Almost
everyone in this play translates the forest, finding
tongues in the trees and books in the brooks, from Rosalind,
who encounters literal books in the form of Orlando's vapid
verses hanging on all the bushes, to Touchstone, who mocks
the tendency of other characters to moralize the setting
when he argues that he might as well marry Audrey and be
cuckolded, since even "the noblest deer hath the horns as
huge as the rascal" (III. iii, 54-55). Because they bring
the court world and all its problems into the forest--be-
cause they translate the forest into the court--most of the
characters in As You Like It run the risk of being unable
to see the forest for their own preconceptions, and indeed, though Rosalind solves the dilemmas which first arise at court, some of the questions which originate in Arden remain unanswered. Like the Duke, Jacques finds books in the brooks, and just as he can "suck melancholy out of a song as a weasel sucks eggs," so can he suck a simile out of the spectacle of a wounded deer who has taken refuge near a stream. "First, for the deer's weeping into the needless stream," recounts a lord who has overheard Jacques' melancholic oration:

"Poor deer," quoth . . . Jacques, "thou mak'st a testament
As worldlings do, giving thy sum of more
To that which had too much." Then, being there alone,
Left and abandoned of his velvet friend:
"'Tis right," quoth he, "thus misery doth part
The flux of company."

(II. i, 47-52)

When we encounter characters like Jacques, our attention shifts away from the scene being commented upon and toward the commentator, in the same manner that a novelist might shift it away from Lolita to Humbert's misperception of the nymph or away from Ishmael's story to his struggle to tell that story and find meaning in it. At times, visible objects are so thoroughly strained through the sieve of imagination that very little of them actually remains, and we are left with no solid sense of place or setting. While critics often refer to the Italian settings of Elizabethan
tragedies, for example, the landscapes which emerge from such plays as The Duchess of Malfi, The White Devil, or The Revenger's Tragedy are not so much Renaissance Italy as they are heavily atmospheric, highly colored, figurative landscapes, manifesting more evidence of the characters' mental states than of their objective responses to an actual locale. Macbeth does not see castles and birds; he envisions a world in which "wither'd Murder . . . with his stealthy pace/ . . . toward his design/ Moves like a ghost" (II. i, 52-56). The lack of physical setting, and the corresponding emphasis on verbal scenemaking and on characters' stances and attitudes toward the playworld result in the generalized, emblematic, and imaginary settings which are the trademark of much Renaissance literature. In some tragedies, physical landscapes are almost entirely usurped by mental ones which then dominate our experience with the play.

III.

Though the characters described to this point illustrate a variety of relationships with their worlds and require from us equally varied responses, they have in common the fact that none of them raises the question of disbelief. Even though Jacques calls attention to himself and his disposition rather than to the deer, we have no reason
to think that the bit of the scene which does peep around the edges of his moralizing is not actually there, just as we have no reason to suspect Peter Quince's hawthorne brake. We turn now, however, to transformers, characters the accuracy of whose visions of the landscape and the playworld we are compelled to question. Our attention focuses on such characters' impulses to "see" a particular way rather than on what they see, as it does when we watch and listen to Jacques. But Arden's melancholic moralizer, for all his self-indulgence, is still in touch with "reality" and, hence, provides us a clear access to it. Filtered through the eyes of a transformer, however, the playworld emerges twisted and misshapen, a warped shadow of its "real" self.

Tamora, for example, though she sets the scene on some occasions, in Titus Andronicus, at other times exhibits traits which we generally associate with the type of Renaissance character we may call the knave. Knaves are frequently intentional transformers, characters who misrepresent or twist facts or reality in order to dupe or deceive others, usually more to entertain themselves than for any advantages their distortions may afford them. If we feel that Tamora's baits are less subtle than similar ones flung out by Richard III, Iago, Volpone, or others of her more knavish contemporaries, we may also note that the fish for whom she is casting bewitch their own poor
wondering eyes, victimized more by "brainsick homours" than by the stagey and transparent devices of the villainess and her Moor. Her dupes, in fact, are members of another group of transformers who distinguish themselves by misrepresenting, distorting, and translating into something else the playworld or those who occupy it. However, they do not alter reality intentionally or in order to trick someone, but unwittingly, because they simply cannot see clearly and accurately. These unintentional transformers are frequently overengaged or preoccupied with themselves or with a particular mode of behavior, as is Jacques, but unlike Jacques, they are unable to make distinctions between very different kinds of experience. The external world, instead of existing as a source of new knowledge or new experience, for them is merely a reflection of their own inner desires, drives, or compulsions. Again, we pay attention to the effort made by this kind of transformer to describe or create the scene, not so much to the scene itself, for we realize that he will alter and distort anything upon which he gazes. In some instances, he makes the same bid for our investment in his mental landscape that we receive from tragic characters like Lear, Macbeth, or Oedipus, but rather than carrying us out of ourselves with a powerful and evocative presentation of such a landscape, as they do, he presents a world from which, though it is similarly transformed, we remain aloof and upon which we pass judgment. Our primary comment upon
his vision is that it conflicts radically with the reality the play has established for us.

Maddened lovers are prime examples of characters who transform because they are obsessed, turning "monsters and things indigest" into "such cherubims as [the lover's] sweet self resembles" or turning the adored one into a god or goddess (Sonnet 114). The impulse is rendered with comic exaggeration when the doting Titania translates Bottom's ass's head, the result of an earlier and very literal transformation, into "amiable cheeks" and "fair large ears." We usually place fond lovers and laugh at them, but our laughter will be gentle if love is true, as is Orlando's which compels him to abuse the "young plants with carving 'Rosalind' on their bark" (As You Like It, III. iii, 358-59).

When Falstaff, in The Merry Wives of Windsor, translates Ford's wife "out of honesty into English," however, his motives are less pure and more self-centered than Orlando's. The wife, he declares, "discourses," "carves," and "gives the leer of invitation," and "the hardest voice of her behavior, to be Englished rightly, is 'I am Sir John Falstaff's'" (I. iii, 43-47). Page's wife, likewise, "did so course o'er [his] exteriors with such a greedy intention that the appetite of her eye did seem to scorch [him] up like a burning-glass" (I. iii, 64-66). Sir John's transformations of the two worthy wives, both of whom love their husbands, are not prompted by Venus,
unfortunately, but by greed. Secure in the belief that they are helplessly in love with him and therefore ripe for duping, he determines to be "cheater to them both, and they shall be exchequers to him" (I. iii, 68-70). Ultimately, he is the farcical butt of the plotting rather than the successful plotter, and the wives use his shortsightedness against him. Since they are more than capable of fending for themselves and foiling his plots and since he is a witty and entertaining presenter of his own predicaments, as well as being, finally, educable, there is little tension between our enjoyment of him and our concern for his intended victim.

A more potentially obsessive or self-blinded transformer is Malvolio, who first translates himself into "Count Malvolio," then translates Maria's and Toby's nonsensical letter into a love letter, and last, himself again into the ridiculous figure in yellow garters. "Look how imagination blows him," sputters Fabian, as the clowns, barely able to restrain themselves, listen in secret to Malvolio's musings on his future as Olivia's husband (II. v, 40-41). Not love but the hypocritical and self-serving soul which lurks beneath his pious mask drives him to swallow the bait the clown put out for him. Unmasking and exposure, both accomplished through the trick they play upon him, prevent him from exercising a more sinister influence upon the comic world, which ultimately excludes
him from its fold rather than reeducating and including him as the wives do Falstaff. The shadow he casts is darker (though surely not larger) than Falstaff's. Accompanying the tendency for such behavior to be discovered and either corrected or expelled from the comic world is the comparative openness of the transformer, who usually reveals the roots of his compulsion to someone else in the play, as Falstaff does or as Malvolio unknowingly does to the clown when he believes he is alone. In addition, the transforming process itself is overt, and we catch these comic characters in the act of turning one thing into another. For example, along with Maria, Toby, Sir Andrew, and Fabian, we watch as Malvolio "discovers" Oliv'z'a's message in the riddling letter. "'I may command where I adore,'" he reads:

Why, she may command me: I serve her; she is my lady. Why, this is evident to any formal capacity. There is no obstruction in this. And the end; what should that alphabetical position portend? If I could make that resemble something in me! Softly, "M. O. A. I." . . .
M.—Malvolio. M.—Why, that begins my name.
(II. v, 113-118, 122-123)

"Why, thou hast put him in such a dream," Toby congratulates Maria, authoress of the plot, "that, when the image of it leaves him, he must run mad" (II. v, 189-190).
The transforming impulse is not restricted to comedy, for tragic heroes also look at the world through impassioned eyes, compelled by their suffering to see it as much more absolutely corrupt or awful than it actually may be. Incapable of bearing afflictions made more overwhelming by their own supercharged imaginations, they may, at times, slip into madness. Some tragic heroes, like Lear, Hamlet, or Macbeth, compel us to share in their suffering so intensely that their mental landscapes seem to be more substantive than any other experience in the play. We may see with Edgar, in King Lear, but we feel deeply engaged with the mistaken Lear. We may feel that Horatio's promised account of the "carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,/ Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,/ . . . and . . . purposes mistook" will not adequately explain what has happened to Hamlet, whose experience is far more complex than this simple "revenge tragedy" formula suggests.

Titus Andronicus, The Spanish Tragedy, The Jew of Malta, The Revenger's Tragedy, Tamburlaine, and Richard III, among other Elizabethan plays, also profess to be tragedies, but they depart from our expectations for the genre if those expectations are that we will be involved in the noble suffering of a hero whose experience will extend our
own capacity for deeply felt suffering, as we are in *Oedipus Rex* or *King Lear*. Our interest in these other kinds of tragedies, of which there are actually many more examples in the period than of the first kind, is not so fully engaged in the central figure's experiences, though many of these are complex and interesting, but directed more toward the interaction between the focal figure and his world, whether the former be a Titanic hero who towers above that world, a scheming villain who makes it his stage, an innocent victim of its depravity, a malcontent who rails against it, or some combination of these. Our major interest in *Titus Andronicus* and *The Spanish Tragedy* centers on the fact that the main characters interact with worlds which they transform into tragic landscapes, but instead of involving us deeply in their ways of seeing and drawing heavily upon our sympathies, as Lear, Hamlet, or Macbeth do when they transform their worlds, they allow us a detachment that passes judgment on their mistaken visions, and the multiple focus their plays require of us is, in this respect, akin to our experience with comedy. While the transforming impulse may be cured in comedy, however, it is much more deeply embedded, more resistant, and more consequential in tragedy, and far from being manageable, it shapes and determines the action in plays which generally end disastrously for transformers such as Titus or Hieronimo.
As in *1 Henry IV* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, transformation in these two plays is widespread and pervasive and involves much more than the physical landscape. Furthermore, it is a subject upon which both plays dwell, *Titus* perhaps more lingeringly than Kyd's play. Characters do not simply present us with their versions of the landscape but with their versions of the entire dramatic universe, including the mode in which they believe their "stories" are being conveyed. Because we watch them from a detached perspective, however, with our attention firmly fastened on the fact that they are altering "reality" rather than on the playworld that emerges from their transformations, our experience with their plays resembles our experience with the later plays when Falstaff and Cleopatra are not engaging us into their modes of perception or when they are absent. For this and other reasons, a somewhat more detailed treatment of them than other plays have received thus far is in order here. It will, I think, provide useful ways of describing the impact the Egyptian and the Knight have upon us. Critics often accuse Cleopatra, for example, of deceiving us into admiring her by using highly poetical but basically "empty" language, but her transforming language in no way resembles that of the master of empty tragical bombast, *Titus*. Sheer "strength" of poetical language, however (whatever that term actually means), is not at the heart of hers or even Antony's winning ways, though
surely both of them outstrip Titus in this respect. Furthermore, it is not simple sympathy that impels us to share a transformer's vision of the world, as our experience with Hieronimo demonstrates. Neither do Cleopatra and Falstaff use transformation villainously to seduce their rivals, as Aaron, Tamora, or Lorenzo do. Their power over others in their plays and over us derives from a kind of translating that is different from anything we meet in Titus Andronicus or The Spanish Tragedy.

The Shakespearean tragedy which probably is furthest from engaging us deeply in its central character's way of seeing is Titus Andronicus. Critics have discovered numerous parallels between this play and Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy, but Shakespeare's play explores the interaction among various literary modes, ranging from highly conventional to shockingly realistic, and thereby makes such things as theatricalism and scenemaking its subjects, whereas Kyd's play focuses more insistently on Heironimo's sorrow. Living in a fictive world best describes the condition in which we find most of the characters in Titus Andronicus, from the villains, who are self-consciously aware of what a villain is supposed to be, to Titus, whose consciousness has been thoroughly permeated, and poisoned, by old stories and whose patterns of behavior are drawn from fictional models. We watch as "reality" is repeatedly transformed into "fictive" landscapes and as characters act
out "storybook" parts. The play explores, in effect, the differences between fictions and fact, figurative and literal, and real and imagined, exercising our ability to distinguish between these opposites and undermining those characters in the play who cannot do so. Like comedy, it upholds the virtue of knowing and appreciating the differences between fictions and real life as well as that of recognizing the similarities. In some respects, it is easier to align Titus with Orsino, in Twelfth Night, who plays at being a lover, than with any tragic hero. Naive overengagement with stories leaves the characters in Titus Andronicus with the mistaken notion that stories and life are identical, a notion which precludes their ability to participate either in real life or in fiction. The multiple consciousness that allows Falstaff and Cleopatra to make important distinctions between transformed worlds and real ones is missing from most of these characters, who are self-blinded and self-deluded transformers.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from Tamora's poetic scenemaking described above is the appearance on stage of Lavinia, Titus' raped and mutilated daughter, a very literal embodiment of the Philomela to whom Aaron has referred figuratively early in the play. While the characters in the play may confuse art and life, we know the difference between convincingly "real" literary modes and more conventional ones, and Lavinia's bleeding stumps and mouth
cause us to recoil in horror, a reaction which is unmatched in earlier less realistic scenes which also present us with bleeding bodies. To Titus, however, whose family has been subjected to much torment by the villains, this spectacle is no different from any of the others he has witnessed, and, convinced that he is in a "timeless tragedy" rather than a villain's simplistic plot, he resorts to his usual "literary" excesses to mark his daughter's appearance. "Oh, thus I found her," says his brother, Marcus, leading in the mutilated girl, "straying in the park,/Seeking to hide herself, as doth the deer/That hath received some unrecuring wound." Marcus' simile does not hide Lavinia from us, but Titus' play on his brother's words does:

   It was my dear, and he that wounded her
   Hath hurt me more than had he killed me dead:
   For now I stand as one upon a rock,
   Environed with a wilderness of seas,
   Who marks the waxing tide grow wave by wave,
   Expecting ever when some envious surge
   Will in his brinish bowels swallow him.

   Had I but seen thy picture in this plight,
   It would have maddened me: what shall I do
   Now I behold thy lively body so?
   (III. i, 88-97; 103-105)

We are very likely to note that Titus does not "behold" Lavinia directly enough. Placing himself at the center of a universal conflict whose intensity registers itself in the sea, the waves, and the earth, as well as in his daughter's body, he pours all his energy into sustaining
the frenzied pitch of his transforming "vision":

Gentle Lavinia, let me kiss thy lips,
Or make some sign how I may do thee ease.
Shall thy good uncle, and thy brother Lucius,
Shall thou, and I, sit round about some fountain,
Looking all downwards, to behold our cheeks
How they are stained, like meadows yet not dry
With miry slime left on them by a flood?

What shall we do? Let us, that have our tongues,
Plot some device of further misery,
To make us wondered at in time to come.

(III. i, 120-126; 133-135)

This speech is a telling one, for it indicates the degree to which Titus, however unconsciously, is concerned more with his place in the annals of tragic suffering than with the supposed cause of all his woes, and his image of the mourners huddled around the fountain to watch themselves cry is a perfect expression of that concern as well as of the selfish self-engrossment which causes him to turn his playworld into conventional tragedy.

Convinced that Rome is royal, that he (like Priam) has heroically and nobly sacrificed his sons, and that those who should thank him are using him ignobly, he laments as tragic heroes are supposed to lament. His inability to distinguish reality from the fictions into which his infected imagination turns it makes him incapable of helping himself. Earlier in the play, for example, when two of his sons are tricked, trapped, and condemned to die--Aaron and Tamora have blackmailed them with a dead body, a forged letter,
and a hidden bag of gold—Titus, rather than devising a plan to rescue the two boys, as another son, Lucius, urges him to do, agonizes because the Roman tribunes fail to heed his pleas. If they will not listen to him, he decides, he'll tell his sorrows to the stones, for they "receive [his] tears and seem to weep with [him]":

And were they but attirèd in grave weeds,  
Rome could afford no tribunes like to these,  
A stone is silent and offendeth not,  
And tribunes with their tongues doom men to death.  
(III. i, 37-47)

Instead of transporting us and engaging us in his "tragic" vision, Titus' hyperbolical rhetoric compels us to observe that stones may be better for throwing at villains than for soaking up tragic tears and that Rome is not the "wilderness of tigers" he takes it to be but a parlourful of pussycats having their way with a nearsighted mouse.

When Titus at last determines to revenge the evils perpetrated against his family by Aaron and Tamora, he once again transforms the playworld into "fiction." He models his plan after Progne's revenge of the rape and mutilation of Philomela, imitating the story blow for blow, a "poetic justice" which, however, produces more very realistic dead bodies. The confusion of the relationship between art and life culminates in the banquet scene, during which Tamora unwittingly eats her two sons. When Saturninus, the Roman emperor, arrives at the banquet, he is closely questioned
by the grieving father. "Was it well done of rash
Virginius/To slay his daughter with his own right hand/
Because she was enforced, stained, and deflow'red?" he in-
quires. Having read the story of Virginius, or at least
having been taught it, the Emperor replies in the affirmative
and offers the traditional explication. The girl "should
not survive her shame,/And by her presence still renew
her father's sorrows," he declares matter-of-factly. "A
reason mighty, strong, and effectual," agrees the mad reven-
ger:

A pattern, precedent, and lively warrant,
For me, most wretched, to perform the like.
Die, die Lavinia, and thy shame die with thee,
And with thy shame thy father's sorrow die!

He kills her

Sat: What hast thou done, unnatural and unkind?
(V. iii, 36-38; 41-47)

The emperor's dismay at having this old story literally
"translated" into real life right before his eyes parallels
our earliest response when Lavinia first enters with her
"lop'd limbs," a figurative Philomela made "real." So dis-
tinct are stories and life to Saturninus that he has dif-
ficulty making the connection between Titus' question and
the killing of the girl. The revenger ultimately dies, too,
after revealing to Tamora the grisly truth about her recent
repast, his eyes bewitched to the bitter end by his books.
Whereas Titus' armor, forged from fictions, is impervious to the deaths of his children, Hieronimo, in The Spanish Tragedy, grieves excessively over the death of his son, Horatio, transforming the entire landscape of the play into a hellish image of his own torment and suffering. Like the maddened lover whose attention is at least focused upon someone other than himself, Hieronimo is a more appealing character than is Titus, and he is able to create a disjunction between us and the world of officialdom which actually dominates the play, even though we recognize that world to be less thoroughly evil than Hieronimo takes it to be. We cannot make fun of Hieronimo's blindness as we can Titus'.

While Lorenzo, the villain who kills Horatio, is sinister and vicious, shallowness and imperceptiveness are the only sins of which the political figures from whom Hieronimo wishes to obtain justice are guilty. But, in his grief, he treats all these characters in the same way, translating them and the physical landscape into a world which resembles the more totally corrupt public worlds of The Revenger's Tragedy, The White Devil, or The Duchess of Malfi. The absent moon and the dark night which Horatio welcomed when he met Bel-Imperia, for example, become in Hieronimo's "dream," accomplices in the murder:
Night is a murderous slut,
That would not have her treasons to be seen;
And yonder pale-faced Hecate there, the moon,
Doth give consent to that is done in darkness;
And all those stars that gaze upon her face,
Are aglets on her sleeve, pins on her train;
And those that should be powerful and divine
Do sleep in darkness when they most should shine.

(III. xiiA, 31-38)

Not only nature but the King and his court, according to Hieronimo, are part of this horrific landscape and are conspiring against him to prevent justice from being done. This delusion and his inability to maintain a grasp on sanity long enough to present his case, keep him from bringing the entire matter to light and make him an easy target for Lorenzo, who obviously wishes to keep the murder hidden. The mere sight of his son's murderer, in fact, plunges Hieronimo into a transforming madness:

Away, Lorenzo, hinder me no more;
For thou hast made me bankrupt of my bliss.
Give me my son! You shall not ransom him!
Away! I'll rip the bowels of the earth,
(He diggeth with his dagger)
And ferry over to th' Elysian plains,
And bring my son to show his deadly wounds.

(III. xii, 68-73)

Both the King and Lorenzo's father have much respect for Hieronimo, who is the Marshall of Spain, and they would, we are led to believe, redress his wrongs if given the opportunity. Neither of them, however, is even aware that a murder has been committed.
As a Marshall of Spain, Hieronimo is in a position to mete out justice also, and twice during the play, the fathers of murdered sons approach him for help. The first is grief-stricken too, but not so lost that he cannot tell his story, as Hieronimo is. Nevertheless, Hieronimo interrupts him, and, learning that the suppliant is a painter, requests a picture portraying his own grief. In doing so, he gives some insight into the literary origin of the images into which he transforms experience:

Let the clouds scowl, make the moon dark, the stars extinct, the winds blowing, the bells tolling, the owl shrieking, the toads croaking, the minutes jarring, and the clock striking twelve. And then at last, sir, starting, behold a man hanging, and tottering, as you know the wind will wave a man, and I with a trice to cut him down. And looking upon him by the advantage of my torch, find it to be my son Horatio. There you may show a passion, there you may show a passion! Draw me like old Priam of Troy, crying, "The house is afire, the house is afire, as the torch over my head!" Make me curse, make me rave, make me cry, make me mad, make me well again, make me curse hell, invoke heaven, and in the end leave me in a trance—and so forth.

**Painterm: And is this the end?**

**Hieronimo:** Oh no, there is no end; the end is death and madness... At the last, sir, bring me to one of the murderers; were he as strong as Hector, thus would I tear and drag him up and down.

(III. xiiA, 140-56, 159-61)

Carried away by passion and the vision he now has of his son's murder, Hieronimo beats the hapless painter, whom he suddenly believes to be the murderer. The extent to which
both he and Titus are predisposed to see the world in tragic terms is suggested by the fact that each places himself as a figure in a picture or story, unlike Lear, who, though he too "sees" a world more totally corrupt than it actually is, more directly and unselfconsciously confronts and explores each facet of his devastating experience. We never find ourselves faulting Lear for not acting to avenge his daughters' treatment of him.

The second father, Don Bazulto, is also seeking justice for a murdered son but fares no better than the first, as Hieronimo first turns him into Horatio and then into "a Fury . . . /Sent from the empty kingdom of black night" to plague him for not revenging the murder. While Hamlet knows that life and experience are too complex to allow one to make hasty decisions about ghosts who demand revenge, Hieronimo's vision is singleminded, and if no ghost actually appears to him, he will supply the deficiency. Ironically, when Bel-Imperia tells him who murdered Horatio and urges him to seek revenge, Hieronimo hesitates, sure that she, too, is part of a plan to "entrap . . . [his] life" (III. ii, 38).

Too far gone in madness to recognize that he could be granted a hearing, Hieronimo resorts finally to a revenge plot which involves a play whose plot parallels the larger action and during which Bel-Imperia, Balthazar, and Lorenzo all die. The justice which is meted out in the
play-within-the-play is sufficient, we feel, but Hieronimo goes beyond that by killing the viceroy, who, in suffering the loss of his two children, is already paying a very high price for obtuseness. Hieronimo's pain-inspired blindness has, once again, taken him beyond boundaries and distinctions which we both recognize and respect. He is somewhat like the two ghosts, Andrea and Revenge, who have watched the larger action throughout and whose only interest in it is in seeing Lorenzo killed. The ghost of Andrea desires revenge on his former enemy, and, dedicated wholeheartedly to the maxim that the end crowns the means, is undisturbed by the fact that, in the process of working itself out, this particular revenge tragedy kills several innocent people. One tragedy is like another to him, and at the end of the play, he consigns all the dead characters to hell and condemns them to the same hellish tortures regardless of their actual roles in the play. In a much similar fashion, Hieronimo condemns to death the innocent as well as the evil, and, while we sympathize with him in his grief and understand that grief, not ego, is responsible for his transforming impulse, we never lose sight of "reality." We are hardly more caught up in his version of the playworld than we are in Titus'. Our interest in both Titus Andronicus and The Spanish Tragedy stems not from our engagement into a tragic vision, as it does in King Lear, but from our awareness of the discrepancies between the "real" world and the world envisioned by the transforming characters.
"Lovers and madmen," concludes Duke Theseus, in A Midsummer Night's Dream,

have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,
That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination,
That, if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;
Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

(V. i, 4-22)

Not surprisingly, Theseus is a sceptic and, refusing to make the distinction between madmen and poets, he becomes like the member of a theater audience who refuses to be "taken in" by fictions and "lying" poets. We, on the other hand, recognize that poets' dreams become "reality" for us when their creators induce us to participate in their fictions, while the dreams of madmen and lovers have no such power. Furthermore, we have seen that, within the confines of a fiction, lovers and madmen may invest unrelentingly in their
visions of the playworld, but we may still refuse to relinquish our own grasp of what is "real" and "true" in that world.

It is the intention of the remainder of this essay, however, to describe two "poets," two characters whose transformations raise the question of belief, as all transformations do, but whose bid for our investment and participation in their "dreams" is successful. Like the poet who catches us up in his "dreamworld" in spite of our certain knowledge that it is a dream, Falstaff and Cleopatra make us aware that they are creating fictive worlds, but they engage us in those worlds too. Simultaneous with our recognition that they are transforming is our "belief" in their transformed worlds. When they translate reality, the result is not a self-interested or self-deluded distortion of the playworld, but a new slant on experience or a whole new world, a renewed or revitalized "reality" of the kind that poets always offer us. Their visions are not deluded dreams or maliciously conceived lies, as are those of many of the characters in their plays, but "fictions" which we credit and sometimes prefer to the "truth."

Though Antony and Cleopatra professes to be a tragedy, there is good reason, as Barbara Everett declares in her introduction to the Signet edition, to call it a "Roman Play" and to point out the historical and political interests that distinguish it from King Lear. It is comprised, furthermore, of a well-known and therefore not
easily alterable piece of history, at least as far as the "facts" are concerned, as is 1 Henry IV, and even though some of its characters make references to an idealized, "storybook" Rome, politicians, not Roman heroes, are in charge of the action as they are in the English history play. That Cleopatra and Falstaff appear in historical plays, though 1 Henry IV has comic overtones and Antony and Cleopatra tragic ones, is significant and enters into our understanding of the ways in which their fictions work. Both reside in predominantly political climates, in which, as in history itself, the "truth" or the "facts" are sometimes difficult or impossible to discern. Both are placed by others in the play as threats to the political order—Cleopatra because she distracts Antony from his duties, and Falstaff because he presumably corrupts young Hal. These two characters resist such easy "placing" by us, however, not by demonstrating their innocence, but by re-naming and reimagining their lives, by effecting transformations which inject energy and vitality into otherwise sedentary worlds. They are both surrounded by other kinds of transforming fictionmakers with whom they compete for our engagement, from self-blinded ones like Hotspur to cunning liars like Caesar. "History," as it appears in their plays, is not a factual reality, but a conglomeration of transformers, each with his own version of the "truth." 1 Henry IV and Antony and Cleopatra consciously explore the
problem of turning such inherent formlessness into form, and the "shapes" which finally do emerge stem not so much from our having determined what is true as from our willingness to "believe" in some of the fictive patterns that characters try to impose on history more readily than we believe in others. When Titus and Hieronimo attempt to transform a political world into a tragic one, they fool themselves but do not convince us. When Falstaff presents his comic vision of "reality," however, we credit it as a viable alternative to either King Henry's political realm or Hotspur's heroic one, and when Cleopatra turns mundane politics into a heroic romance, we believe that, if the world is not the one she envisions in her poetry, so much the worse for it. Fictions are trite and conventional and thus succeed only in reducing experience for Titus and Hieronimo, but Cleopatra's fiction is "larger" than her world and more compelling than Caesar's sterile political alternative. In her "poetic" hands, fictions enliven and expand experience.

Like other comic transformers, Falstaff is often in the process of translating his sins into virtues, of "wrenching the right word the wrong way," as the Lord Chief Justice, in 2 Henry IV has it, so that, for example, highway robbery becomes his "vocation," and thereby no sin. The old Knight's motives, however, are so transparent that whatever initial impulse he has to dupe his audience or to advance himself is easily frustrated, and he turns his wit toward
amusing Hal rather than fooling him. To our minds, there is a danger that Hal, bent on creating his own, more selfinterested political fictions, will not recognize his companion's virtues but will, instead, expel him from his company. In others words, the young Prince is in some danger of not being "seduced" by Falstaff. Politicians, after all, do not "need" poets. "To misuse words is not only a fault in itself; it also corrupts the soul," asserts Socrates in Plato's Crito, but whereas Malvolio misuses words and crushes language to his will when he translates one thing into another, Falstaff's creative wit, put to use primarily as entertainment for his audience, provides freedom for him and for us.15

Cleopatra's relationship to her play's landscape is more reminiscent of Hieronimo's or Titus' in the sense that her vision seems fully operative when it reaches the play's surface. Nevertheless, there are occasions when she places her own transforming impulse, an indication that, poetlike, and unlike other kinds of transformers, she is totally conscious of her fictionmaking and freely chooses to indulge in it. Repeatedly, we undergo the experience of being "caught up" in her version of her story and then released from it, much as Antony does, and any desire on our part to resist her and to cling to our knowledge of what is really "true," to insist, in other words, that the political world is the "real" one, is subverted in the play, for
such a stance aligns us with the unimaginative, harsh, and narrow-minded Caesar.

Important in accounting for our willingness to credit Falstaff's and Cleopatra's versions of experience is the fact that they, themselves, participate in their respective plays as if their fictions were true. There is not a more "real" Cleopatra or a more "real" Falstaff lurking behind fictional masks. If either were a knave or mere deceiver, we might expect, at some point, a lowering of the mask which would reveal the false face beneath it, but when the masks are lowered, the "poet" is revealed, and these poets' main desire is to play and to revitalize their lives as well as their audiences'. In both plays, we catch the "poet" at work upon his world, making fictions which are impervious to the charge that they are not "real," in the same way that, in our world, good fictions are always impervious to that charge. Unlike Edgar's cliff, Falstaff's comic world and Cleopatra's stunningly powerful and poetic romance world remain intact, defying our certain knowledge that both are "poets' lies." And, as Sir Philip Sidney declares, "Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers Poets have done."
NOTES

Chapter 2. Lunatics, Lovers, and Poets


6 Thomas Kyd, The First Part of Hieronimo and The Spanish Tragedy, II. iv, 1-3, 18-19. Ed. Andrew S. Cairncross, Regents Renaissance Drama Series, gen. eds. Cyrus Hoy and G. E. Bentley (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1967). This text of The Spanish Tragedy includes the line additions which appeared in Thomas Pavier's 1602 edition of the play and which may not have been written by Kyd. For a discussion of the controversy, see pp. xxi-xxiv of Cairncross' introduction. Many of the lines I quote are part of the additions. Future references will be documented within the text.

7 "This is . . . one of Shakespeare's most powerful descriptive speeches: a wealth of visual detail, complete with a standard of perspective, fills out the receding land and seascapes. . . . In the context of a drama that
depends almost exclusively on its own language for scene-
setting, the passage is apt momentarily to convince us as
it convinces Gloucester," declares Robert Egan, in Drama
within Drama: Shakespeare's Sense of his Art in "King Lear,"
"The Winter's Tale" and "The Tempest" (New York: Columbia

8 Stamm, The Shaping Powers at Work, p. 73.

9 Jones, "Italian Settings and the 'World' of

10 Jones, Engagement with Knavery: Point of View in

11 Jones, Engagement with Knavery.

12 Antony and Cleopatra, which some critics hesitate to
call a tragedy (or a good tragedy) because it does not in-
volve us with its main character in the manner that, say,
King Lear does, is more at home among these latter kinds of
plays, though it differs from them, too, as my argument
demonstrates.

13 That the strength or beauty of Cleopatra's speech
accounts for the sway she holds over us informs, either
explicitly or implicitly, the arguments of numerous critics.
See, for example, Madeleine Doran, Shakespeare's Dramatic
154-181; S. L. Bethell, Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic
Tradition (London: King and Staples, 1944), who says that
"the Egyptian qualities crystallized in Cleopatra are cor-
respondingly raised in our esteem by subtle poetic means"
(p. 154); A. L. French, Shakespeare and the Critics
(Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1972), who declares
that "one doesn't want to deny that Cleopatra's speech is
good poetry despite its hollowness" (p. 220); Matthew N.
Proser, The Heroic Image in Five Shakespearean Tragedies
(Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965), who,
however, makes part of my general point about Cleopatra's
poetry when he describes her speech to Dolabella and points
out that it might seem hollow, despite its splendor, if the
Queen were not conscious of her exaggerations (p. 179);
and William Rosen, Shakespeare and the Craft of Tragedy
(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960), who sug-
gests that those of us "who are dazzled by the incomparable
language often . . . minimize or disregard the unfolding
events that chronicle a man's fall" (p. 146).

I'm telling a terrible story
But it doesn't diminish my glory:
For they would have taken my daughters
Over the billowy waters,
If I hadn't, in elegant diction,
Indulged in an innocent fiction;
Which is not in the same category
As a regular terrible story.
(The Pirates of Penzance)

I.

When the scene is set in the dreamy forest of Arden
or upon a mysterious island and when the story involves
romantic love, discovering that a play is deeply interested
in such subjects as the imagination, the power of fiction
to engage that imagination or the creative and destructive
potential of language and wit should come as no surprise.
The insistently extraordinary worlds of Shakespeare's
romances seem the obvious backdrops for considerations of
questions having to do with the nature of fiction and
theater. The unlikeliest breeding ground for these kinds of
self-reflexive and introspective topics, on the other hand,
should be the hard-nosed, factual, and overwhelmingly
realistic landscapes of the history plays, and yet, to no
less a degree than A Midsummer Night's Dream or The Tempest,
Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays manifest a concern with fictionmaking, theatricalism, and language. At the heart of the self-consciousness of these two plays, especially the first one, is an interest in precisely the kind of problem which would seem to make the historical genre the least natural abode for such subjects. How does one find room for the imagination in material that is, in many respects, inflexibly prescribed and apply fiction's shaping hand to history? Rather than locating shape, order, and form in the flow of history itself and thus conforming to the Tudor Myth that history discloses the coherent movement of Divine Providence, Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays make the difficulty of turning history into a story an object of their scrutiny, presenting in their fictive worlds a disorderly but inexorable march of events and exploring the efforts of the human participants to assign meaning to those events.

The Prodigal Son model, for example, does not describe Prince Hal's role in the plays as we actually experience it, but the fiction which the young Prince stages and acts out for the benefit of his father's court and the people over whom he will ultimately reign. He reveals his plan to create this image of his career in an early aside in the first play. "I know you all," he declares in reference to his tavern friends, "and will awhile uphold/The unyoked humor of your idleness." But at the proper time, he further indicates, he will unveil his princely
qualities:

And, like bright metal on a sullen ground,
My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
Than that which hath no foil to set if off.
I'll so offend to make offense a skill,
Redeeming time when men think least I will.4

According to this plan, Falstaff, his jolly tavern companion, will serve as the Vice figure in his morality play, the misleader of youth whom he will ultimately reject to signal his "reformation." Falstaff, however, has his own meaning to assign to "history" as we experience it. While Hal's contrived story succeeds beautifully for those who only see the old Knight from a distance, it doesn't proceed quite as smoothly in our eyes, for Falstaff is so complex and appealing that it is impossible for us to accept gracefully the new King's dismissal of him at the close of the second play.5 He prevents us from placing him as either a mere comic buffoon or a corrupter of innocent royalty by being a clever, intelligent, and accurate observer of the scenes around him and by consistently providing a comically ironic foil to the more somber vision of life which makes Henry IV seem old much before his time and which grips his heir gradually more tightly as the plays progress. In the atmospherically darker and more ominous second play, Sir John functions, in part, as our Touchstone, seeing clearly to "the bottom of Justice Shallow" and of Lancaster as well,
that "young sober-blooded boy" who cannot be made to laugh. At the same time that he practices reprehensible (though comic) emotional blackmail upon Mistress Quickly or that he allows Mouldy and Bullcalf to buy out their military services, he gives potent voice—sometimes it is a comic one and sometimes it is touched with the same weariness as those around him—to what is awry in a world riddled by old age, death, and poverty, a world which seemingly has no tolerance for comedy and laughter. The nature of Falstaff's resistance in the first play, however, is different. With respect to this thesis, the most important distinction between the Falstaff of 1 Henry IV and the Falstaff of 2 Henry IV is that the "younger," merrier Knight not only resists but successfully transforms his role, and with it much of the world around him, into comedy. The darker aspects of the second play are held in abeyance in its laughter-filled predecessor, especially in the first three acts. Rather than being a victim of time, circumstance, loss of spirit, and his own illusions, as he is in 2 Henry IV, the Falstaff of the first play, even more than Hal, makes "offense a skill," redeeming time by doing so and asserting the primacy of the imagination over the dictates of "history." 6

To get some sense of the impact Falstaff's transforming powers have upon our experience of the play, we may look at the joyless proceedings of the political world as they would
appear without him. Like the tavern, the court is much
given to stories and playacting, though of a very serious
nature. King Henry believes, for example, that there is a
place for fictions and theater in politics and instructs
his supposedly wayward son at one point how, in his own
more exemplary youth, he had won over the hearts of the mul-
titude by being "seldom seen," so that, like a comet, he was
"wond'red at" when he did appear (III. ii, 46-47). Even
as Henry IV opens, the King is engaged in playacting, but
playacting of a covert and purposive kind, as he paints a
stirring picture of the holy war against the pagans in
Jerusalem that will follow the cessation of the present
"civil butchery," if all goes according to his schedule.
He pretends to consider carefully the advice of his coun-
sellors to break off the same "business for the holy land"
for now, a decision, we soon learn, that he has already
made (I. i, 13, 48). That our understanding of Henry's
opening "act" is initially misinformed suggests an impor-
tant difference between the grim political fictions, de-
signed to hide the truth, and the open and enjoyable fic-
tions in which, as we shall see, Falstaff indulges and which
we never mistake. Like many other Renaissance landscapes,
the "factual," or "historical," one in this play disappears
beneath a seemingly endless progression of different kinds
of fictions, from outright lies or the overt and conscious
playacting of Hal and Henry, to the less conscious and
less self-conscious "interpretations" of experience offered by such characters as Hotspur, Glendower, and Vernon. The "history" we see unfolding before us is not comprised of cold, hard, unchangeable facts or of clearly delineated patterns but of personalities, sometimes explosive ones, each with its own motives for forwarding a particular view of the world. The play does not simply reflect the fact that history is a matter of interpretation. Rather, it calls attention to that fact by presenting us a playworld each of whose characters try to give it the shape they see, a playworld that is continually being molded and remolded into various shapes by each character in turn. From our vantage point, then, we see it as a competition among fictionmakers. Hal's conscious theatricalism, Hotspur's compulsive transformations, Glendower's naive assertion of the "pathetic fallacy," and Worcester's less creative and flamboyant "creations," his political lies, vie with each other for the attention and acceptance of various audiences, including even the gaping, elbow-scratching rabble described by the King in Act I of the first play. This world, as Falstaff observes at one point, is "given to lying," but not all lies, as we will see, are created equal.

Right and wrong in such a world are nearly impossible to determine, as we quickly discover in the first two court scenes (I. i and I. iii). After Henry determines to
forego immediate plans for a foreign war, he calls for
Hotspur to learn why that young warrior has withheld some
recently captured prisoners. Hotspur's first appearance
in the play brings spirit and color to this seemingly petty
dispute as he relates the humorous antics of the affected
court messenger who angered him by appearing before the
smoke of battle had cleared, "perfumed like a milliner,"
to demand all prisoners in the King's name (I. iii, 35).
Hotspur is more articulate and energetic than his peers,
and his account of the simpering court syncophant is com­
pelling. As the play progresses, however, it becomes appar­
ent that Hotspur labors under a dangerous delusion that life
is a heroic romance. His dedication to the rites of war,
evident in his denunciation of the messenger, is actually
a consuming passion that compels him to translate the land­
scape into a setting for his own knightly quest. Never­
theless, we may well share Sir Walter Blunt's opinion, in
this instance, that Percy should be forgiven for withholding
the prisoners. Henry, however, immediately questions the
story, suggests other equally plausible reasons for the
behavior, and thus undercuts our original impulse to condone
the action. Still, even if we imagine that the King's ver­
sion may be true, or close to the truth, we do not simul­
taneously dismiss Percy as a liar and are able to distin­
guish his unintentional and compulsive transformations from
calculated lies. Surprisingly, Henry is unaffected by the
story, refuses to acknowledge what is obviously the case—that Hotspur is emotionally involved and requires some sensitive handling—and peremptorily demands the prisoners. To add insult to injury, he accuses Mortimer, Percy’s kinsman, of treachery, prompting Percy’s eloquent description of the battle between Mortimer and Glendower, a description which, like his earlier one, is clearly an embroidery of reality but is winning nevertheless. Three times during the battle, he insists, the two combatants breathed,

and three times did they drink,
Upon agreement, of swift Severn's flood:
Who then affrighted with their bloody looks
Ran fearfully among the trembling reeds
And hid his crisp head in the hollow bank,
Bloodstained with these valiant combatants.
Never did bare and rotten policy
Color her working with such dreadful wounds;
(I. iii, 101-108)

Though Hotspur's poetic elaboration and highly wrought personification of the landscape suggest the extent to which he is out of touch with the harsher realities of war, we recognize that his vision is heartfelt and not an intentional distortion of the truth. Unlike Hal, who also learns to make such important distinctions, the angry King is oblivious to them and responds by denying, not only the heroical, "fictive" nature of the battle, but that it occurred at all, a reaction which is seemingly clarified only later when we hear, though admittedly from Worcester, that Henry hates and fears, and therefore slanders, Mortimer. While we might
speculate now that "reality" resides somewhere between "bare and rotten policy" and Hotspur's unrealistic romance, we are never certain what actually occurred between Mortimer and Glendower, for neither of these versions of the action, one told by a passion-blinded transformer "with great imagination/Proper to madmen" (as Percy is described in the retrospective second play), and the other by a worried king whose crown is not securely fastened on his head, is trustworthy (2 Henry IV, I. iii, 31-33). By now, Hotspur is characteristically furious, no more capable of talking rationally with Henry than Henry is capable of listening to him. Like blind transformers in other plays, Hotspur is easy prey for those who wish to manipulate him, and Worcester takes advantage both of the anger and the blindness when he proposes rebellion.

In some respects, as these early scenes demonstrate, the play mirrors its primary source, the Chronicles, described by Robert Ornstein as a "fascinating hodgepodge of significant and trivial facts, of shrewd judgements and fantastic opinions" rather than an "authorized" version of the past. As the non-ending of 1 Henry IV emphasizes, history, rather than revealing order, is essentially shapeless, formless, and ongoing, a succession of incidents which takes on significance and form only through interpretation, and the patterns which do emerge are "more than history can shape" unaided. The play draws even more attention to this
fact in its presentation of characters who reflect upon and interpret their own histories. The King, as we have seen, visualizes his youth as a pageant in which he outplayed his rival. He has, however, an investment in interpreting his past in this light, and there are different and competing versions of it, just as there are competing fictions about the play's "present." Worcester interprets Henry's rise to the throne, for instance, in a manner which supports his own claim that the King is indebted to him and his family:

And you did swear that oath at Doncaster,
That you did nothing purpose 'gainst the state,
Nor claim no further than your new-fall'n right,
The seat of Gaunt, dukedom of Lancaster,
To this we swore our aid. But in short space
It rained down fortune show'ring on your head,
And such a flood of greatness fell on you--
What with our help, what with the absent king,
What with the injuries of a wanton time,
The seeming sufferances that you had borne,
And the contrarious winds that held the king
So long in his unlucky Irish wars
That all in England did repute him dead--
And from this swarm of fair advantages
You took occasion to be quickly wooed
To gripe the general sway into your hand.
(V. i, 42-57)

Hotspur's attitude toward the same past is also different from the King's:

And when he was not six and twenty strong,
Sick in the world's regard, wretched and low,
A poor unmind ed outlaw sneaking home,
My father gave him welcome to the shore.
(IV. iii, 56-59)

Later, after his power had increased somewhat, according
to Hotspur, Henry resorted to deceptive theatricalism, appearing "to weep/Over his country's wrongs," and with this face, "this seeming brow of justice, did he win/The hearts of all that he did angle for" (IV. iii, 81-84). Hotspur casts what Henry considered to be good policy into terms of good and evil, in keeping with his romantic notions that his family has been dishonored and that the rebellion, is, therefore, justified. His fictions are no less self-deceptive, though perhaps more sophisticated, than those of Glendower, who relates that the earth trembled at his nativity. Like the Forest of Arden in As You Like It, the facts that comprise "history" in this play are filtered through and refracted by the preconceived attitudes and premeditated policies of the characters who present them to us. Thus, the "history" which unfolds before us, as well as that which is "remembered" by the King, Hotspur, and others, shifts its form constantly. In our perspective, it becomes a continuing and unresolvable debate among self-interested and self-deceived characters. The kinds of political issues that we might expect to see resolved in a play whose primary interest is history and politics, the question of the King's right to the throne, of his indebtedness to Worcester, of the danger Worcester faces in consequence of that debt, or of Percy's withholding of the prisoners, are never settled here, a fact that is, again, underscored by the play's non-ending. Our attention is called both to the inherent
shapelessness of the historical process and to the interpretive impulse of those who are participants in it rather than to any preferred interpretation of its events.

"Truth uncompromisingly told will always have its ragged edges," but 1 Henry IV has, after all, a dramatic shape and a conclusion. Finally, of course, we are watching as Hal trims the ragged edges of "history" and very pointedly gives a fictional shape to his own "history," creating, or at least imitating, what will ultimately become his past as it is seen by the characters in the play.

The dramatic conclusion of 1 Henry IV is the Prince's emergence from the tavern to defeat his rival, Hotspur, a defeat which is significant, not because it settles any of the political disputes which have precipitated the rebellion, but because it fills a need in the imaginations of his future followers for a prince who is something more than politically expedient. When he emerges from the Boar's Head, he shrugs off one identity, not to reveal himself as a realistic and clear-sighted politician like the Archbishop (though he certainly is one), but to usurp Hotspur's role in the heroic romance and make it his own. He leaves off his supposed debauchery to become "feathered Mercury." While Percy is a successful hero in the opinion of the admiring King and his court, at least for a time, we consistently identify him as one of those "madmen" whose brain is ruled by a fantasy, and consequently, his transforming vision, though not
devoid of appeal, does not engage us in a romantic point of view, just as Titus' or Hieronimo's fail to engage us in a tragic perspective. But when Hal steps on history's stage, fully aware as Percy is not, that he is on a stage, he succeeds where his rival fails and is a hero both for his countrymen and for us. Unlike the Englishmen over whom he will eventually rule, we realize that Hal is creatively expanding and remodeling the part allotted him by history, that he is making himself a very imposing figure by giving fictive form to his rise to power. Nevertheless, though we recognize always that his "story" is consciously fashioned, it is potent enough to dominate most of our experience with the last two acts of the play and to give us, thus, a shape for our "history" also. Percy's death is not a conclusion to the political action, which simply continues, but it is a climax nonetheless, and we are caught up in Hal's victory over his hot-tempered rival. Whereas fear, ego, greed, and blindness distance us from the fictions of other characters, Hal is open about his theatricalism, clear in his purpose, and, more importantly, he seems to believe in his own role, investing himself not only in the efficacy of the Prodigal Son model, but also in its propriety. He is no ill-intentioned deceiver, plotting and manipulating his way to power, though he certainly has the perceptiveness and the acting skills necessary to be one. Rather, he both plays and is the dashing young Prince whom Vernon describes to Percy.
One of the most overt instances of self-reflexiveness in the play, then, is the drama Hal stages. We are made keenly aware that the "history" we are witnessing has "conclusions" only because it is submitted to fiction's shaping influence, but simultaneously, we are partially engaged into those fictive conclusions.

Nevertheless, Hal is not, finally, the play's most successful and engaging transformer. Like many Shakespearean plays, 1 Henry IV explores the power of language both to corrupt and create. If "authorized" history is, after all, a fiction, a transformation of the past into a significant and meaningful pattern, can that fiction be created as successfully by the propagandist, the liar, the madman, or the self-interested politician as it can by one who is primarily interested in creativity itself? No doubt, such biased histories can be and are successful, but when we are allowed to watch the shaping process itself, we can make distinctions among the various kinds of fictions imposed on history, and the ones which surface from beneath the helter-skelter chaos of the English public scene in this play to usurp the very modes in which history is normally presented and to claim almost our wholehearted engagement are Falstaff's "innocent" ones.

Hal's fiction, after all, is tainted because it is self-serving, even though the young Prince is no knave, liar, or madman. Furthermore, he is in danger of failing, not in
the view of his prospective subjects, but in our view, because the possibility exists that he will be a needlessly slavish imitator of the Prodigal Son story and will ignore or dismiss, consequently, an important experience which does not fit neatly into his plan, an experience of the kind which does not normally find its way into the records of the past. In our opinion, there is a very great (one might even say huge) obstacle which rears its unseemly head to mar this otherwise spotless rendition of the Prodigal Son, and that obstacle is Falstaff, who refuses to remain in place as the vice-ridden counterpart to Hal's Precocious Prince. The most apparent evidence of our deep engagement with Falstaff is that, when the play returns us to Eastcheap from the political realm, especially in the first three acts, we either "forget" politics or adopt the comic stance toward them, the very responses which Henry fears will keep Hal from his duties. However, though Falstaff and Hal are shrewd observers and commentators upon the political scene, the tavern's comedy has no effect on the plots and the course of events of the "serious" world and the King's anxiety is, therefore, much misplaced. The tavern stands apart from and in defiance of the levelling stream of "history" which rather indiscriminately swallows up the "fictions" of most of those who value its concerns. Even Hal's control over the viewpoints of his peers consists more of his waiting for the right occasion to embellish the part "destiny" has decreed for
him than it does in exercising the kind of influence we generally associate with playmakers such as Richard III, Iago, Oberon, Prospero, or Vincentio. The same cannot be said about Falstaff, who, in our view, remakes the roles "destiny" has assigned him as a knave or vice who almost seduces the future king, and who resists the Prince's efforts to cast him in such a role for his own purposes, though he does not spoil Hal's success by doing so. To us, he is the large, immovable rock in the middle of a stream whose swift and unpredictable current pushes almost all else before it.

Norman Rabkin, in *Shakespeare and the Common Understanding*, argues that Shakespeare's plays present us with a complementary playworld, a universe in which we are forced at every moment to choose which of various ideas, truths, or visions is being upheld "yet which tells us simultaneously that no choice is possible." Certain, the notion of complementary worlds applies to *1 Henry IV*, for it makes us share Falstaff's vision of the world in the first three acts, and then, though never completely sundering our ties with the old Knight, involves us in Hal's return to the fighting and his use of the heroic romance fiction. In doing so, the play suggests that no single vision, no set of conventions, and no generalities are various enough to encompass all experiences. Characters in the play who
approach life with a single mode of perception must either acknowledge the inadequacy of that perception, as Hal is doing when he declares his willingness to "gild" Falstaff's lies with "the happiest term" he has, or they must pay the price of a limited perspective, as do Hotspur and Henry. Experience is composed of unique and individual moments, each of which must be recognized and appreciated. If there is a time for Hotspur's worry, or for the considerations which time itself forces upon us--old age and death--there is also a time for wit and play, for creativity rather than submission to fate, and for freedom from time; in short, there is a proper moment for the comic world which Falstaff so supremely sets before us.

The appeal of Falstaff's world is a very special one, especially in the first half of the play before he leaves the tavern, and our relationship with him differs from our relationship with the kinds of characters in whose company he is frequently placed by other characters and by critics too. He can claim with Marston's Cocledemoy, for instance, that he is "no knave" and that whatsoever he has done "has been only euponia gratia--for wit's sake. . . . All has been for emphasis of wit." His wit, in other words, is essentially "aimless," and his clever transformations are not intended to dupe or deceive. When knaves such as Richard III, Volpone, or Vindice invite us to applaud their
stagecraft and wit, we do so in spite of our certain knowledge
that theatricalism, language, and transformation, though en-
tertaining, will be turned against other characters, and thus
we condone their knavery, at least for a time, at the ex-
pense of those against whom they plot. Our enjoyment of
the fat knight, however, is free from the kinds of tension
which accompany our enjoyment of knaves, for neither the
tavern world nor the political one from which he and Hal
have temporarily withdrawn will suffer from his transforming
fictions.\textsuperscript{14}

Neither is his wit, in the early scenes, first and
foremost a comic commentary on the serious action, though
inevitably, the comedy sheds a revealing light on the dread-
fully earnest activities of the political figures. His
transforming comic vision creates a world whose importance
and significance far transcend the simple function of pro-
viding ironic contrast to questionable political behavior.
Only after policy and statecraft, war and "honor," invade
his comic kingdom does he turn his discerning gaze directly
upon them. Meanwhile, he offers an alternative vision of
what is important in life, a vision which catches us up and
makes us value its truths and its purposes. We are most
deeply engaged with Falstaff when his transformations are
most "aimless," when he is transforming for the sheer sake
of creating and recreating. Free from the self-serving
purposiveness that detaches us from the other transformers
in the play, and free, for a while at least, from the need to confront the standards and values of the world "outside" the Boar's Head, he is released into a realm of infinite creative possibility. It is the exhilarating triumph of pure comic genius and invention, Falstaff's celebration of creativity itself, with which we are so taken. This is not to say, of course, that Sir John's jokes are not subversive of "old father Antic the law." His intention is not harm or villainy, but his wit is all the more powerfully subversive of political values and the world of the court precisely because it has no overt or self-serving designs on them, designs which would reduce Falstaff more to the level of those to whom his comic vision is set in opposition. If Hal brings a dramatist's inventive touch to his part in "history," he is nevertheless largely constrained, outside the tavern, to playing the roles dictated to him by the events in which he finds himself embroiled if he wants to accomplish his goals. History's stage is not a receptive one for the acting out of one's inner compulsions, dreams, or fantasies either, a hard truth with which Hotspur must ultimately reckon. The realm which lends itself most readily to plotting and shaping and in which fantasies have no very dire consequences is the realm of the comic imagination, the province in which Hal resides when he joins Falstaff in the Boar's Head. The tavern community goes about its business, creating its own world, making a game of lying and deception,
activities which, in the political sphere, lead to rebellion. Only gradually—when the time for recreating has passed—do the tavern's inhabitants begin to take heed of serious matters. When the time is ripe to heed these matters, furthermore, neither we nor Hal are dangerously "delayed" in the Boar's Head or seduced by Falstaff's fictions, as we might expect characters who are being duped by a knave to be.15

Forced to go off to battle, the old Knight fights with his wit rather than his weapon, and he does provide, in the last half of the play, an ironic pin that punctures the overinflated rhetoric, the "rare words" of war. At this juncture, however, our relationship with him changes somewhat. His transformations, while they may expose the fallacies in which the war is grounded, become a means also of glossing over or excusing his own conduct, conduct that we are made to see as more distinctly wrong than anything he has done before quitting the Boar's Head. He is not now so exclusively a "poet." Regardless of how much we still laugh at his comedy— and we still laugh heartily— or of how much we may agree with his assessment of words like "honor"— and we agree with it largely— he is no longer an "innocent" transformer exercising his wit out of pure joy that he has a wit, and therefore, our engagement with him is modified. At the same time that Falstaff's motives for transforming alter, furthermore, Hal's fiction thrusts itself into the foreground as the strongest competitor for our attention and
involvement in the field of political fictions. The result of the transforming Knight's qualified innocence and of our partial engagement into Hal's "return" is that the comic vision no longer dominates so completely our experience with the play. Its case remains a very strong one but not the only one any longer.

It is Falstaff's unique comic transformations, however, his "poetic" transformations, in which this thesis is mainly interested. The world of the Boar's Head is astonishingly palpable and vibrant. It is a world unto itself, and, rather than simply echoing the "serious" concerns of the society outside the tavern by pointing up the flaws inherent in those concerns or offering us the inadvertent though fitting commentary of comic buffoonery, the comic vision, in its celebration of imagination, is an opposing point of view, and, at "moments," the most engaging one. Falstaff is primarily a magnificent entertainer and changes the shape of "history" only in his prolongation of our experience with the play, in his influence on our attitudes about imaginative, creative influence versus other kinds of shaping influence on the world, and in his prompting us to celebrate life, a celebration which the serious world never acknowledges. The Knight wins us away from the realm of political struggle and that realm never wins us back again completely.

Hall, too, is caught up in Falstaff's view of experience, at least in part. This response saves the young
Prince from committing the error which so radically alienates him from us at the end of the second play, when his roleplaying seems to have gotten the better of him. Muses the Prince, in I. II, "If all the year were playing holidays,/To sport would be as tedious as to work" (202-203). But what his jolly companion insists on by example (and what an unnecessarily careworn and anxious Henry evidences), is that the other side of this coin is also valid currency. At the end of the play, Hal, always the resilient one, the good audience, moves over to accommodate Falstaff, and Henry IV concludes not with a disconcerting rejection, but with comedy and romance standing side by side, two "fictions" insisting that imagination is more powerful than "fact."

II.

As Empson warns us, our reaction against suggestions that the hero of the Boar's Head is a wanton rogue and an unconscionable misleader of youth should not send us reeling so far in the opposite direction that we conclude him to be a "sweet old dear" after all. There is a touch of larceny in Falstaff's blood and a knavish inclination to mix crime and sport. Yet so overt is this less presentable side of his personality that Hal, in command of the holiday retreat to a degree he never attains outside of it, unravels Sir John's schemes as rapidly as he conceives of them and defuses Gadshill's potentially dangerous robbery in which the
Knight takes part before the first victim ever sets foot on the highway. No energy need be expended to expose such transparent devilishness. The Prince's insightfulness, however, deserves much less credit for Falstaff's "failure" as a duplicitous transformer than does the Knight's own real disinterest in utilizing his verbal and histrionic talents for harm. Though he plays at keeping up his reputation and deceiving his friends, signs of his lack of commitment to villainy are apparent at every turn. A serious and pur­posive plotter would endeavor, for example, to make a mouthpiece of the "heir apparent," as Parolles does Bertram. Besides being flush enough to pay the tavern reckoning now, a future king will someday be in a position to assist his friends and to effect some needed reforms, especially in those laws governing thieves, laws which occasionally occupy a moment or two of Sir John's thoughts. An imaginatively gifted knave could easily dupe a "good king's son," and if he could not, he could at least put those bent on deterring him through their paces. The comic relationship between Hal and Falstaff, however, is not characterized by such interaction. Though "when thou art a king" is much on Sir John's mind, rather than plotting to gain and retain Hal's favor, he outrageously assumes, and acts openly upon the assumption, that the Prince is "his" already and will pro­tect him from "old father Antic the Law." He does, as C. L. Barber charges, redefine and "rechristian" his
immodest behavior when he converses with the future king, a ploy to which subtler schemers frequently resort, but his interest focuses on exercising his capacity for wit and language, not on harnessing it to pull Hal's attention away from reality. Repeatedly, Falstaff's transforming impulse overflows into the realm of pure entertainment as his audience becomes involved in the spirit of the comic mode.

We are first introduced to the matchless genius of Falstaff in I. ii, when he idly asks his royal companion for the time of day. In an interesting twist on verbal scene-making, the question is never answered, and thus we remain ignorant of just when "now" is. In fact, Hal's sarcastic parrying of the question inadvertently acknowledges what the scene boldly demonstrates, that when Falstaff is playing, we forget about clocks. Unlike the splenetic Hotspur and other characters whose fictions, whether conscious or unconscious, have an aim and who are caught up in "history," Falstaff resides in the essentially timeless world of comedy. That Hal does not answer his query concerns neither Sir John nor us. "What a devil hast thou to do with the time of the day?" the Prince demands and then proves that his acquaintance with the Knight is more than a nodding one by anatomizing most of his faults in a sentence:

Unless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the tongues of bawds, and dials the signs of leaping houses, and the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in flame-colored taffeta, I
see no reason why thou should'st be so superfluous to demand the time of the day.
(I. ii, 6-12)

Though Hal takes his companion to task for his particular method of marking off time, he is not like the stern Chief Justice, in 2 Henry IV, who assures Falstaff that nothing, "not a confident brow, nor the throng of words that come with such more impudent sauciness/Can thrust . . . [him] from a level consideration" of his crimes. He is, instead, in company with us in being repeatedly thrust from such consideration. Rather than studying Sir John from afar as he does others, Hal pays the tavern reckoning voluntarily and is provoked into the comic mode, his reply to the first question displaying a wit of its own. For his part, while the prosperity of his jests does not necessarily lie totally in the royal ear, Falstaff basks in the attention of his favorite audience and rewards him with numerous performances.

Pouncing on the openings afforded him by the Prince's humorous tongue-lashing, for example, Falstaff concedes that his need to know the time is superfluous, "for we that take purses go by the moon and seven stars, and not by Phoebus, he that wand'ring knight so fair." He then entices Hal into the first of many games. "And I prithee, sweet wag, when thou art a king, as, God save thy grace—majesty I should say, for grace thou wilt have none—." As he pauses invitingly, the affable Prince offers no resistance, and instead of being scandalized by the familiarity, supplies
the response necessary for the joke to continue. "What, none?" he retorts with a "disapproving" raise of the eyebrows. "No, by my troth; not as much as will serve to be prologue to an egg and butter," comes the prompt punchline (I. ii, 13-21). Though he does not call a halt to this levity, Hal does steer Sir John back to his original course, whereupon the old Knight resumes his earlier quibbling on day and "knight," concluding the exchange eventually by translating his shady profession into an honorable one. Importantly, however, his transformation is a show delivered on a "stage" prepared by Hal, and as he speaks, he calls his audience to attention, lest some part of the jest be lost:

Marry, then, sweet wag, when thou art king, let not us that are squires of the night's body be called thieves of the day's beauty. Let us be Diana's foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the moon; and let men say we be men of good government, being governed, as the sea is, by our noble and chaste mistress the moon, under whose countenance we steal.

(I. ii, 23-30)

"Sir John, Sir John," chides the harried Chief Justice in the second play, having been subjected to a similar, though less playful, welter of Falstaffian verbiage, "I am well acquainted with your manner of wrenching the true cause the false way" (2 Henry IV, II. i, 108-110). Everyone else is well acquainted with it also, which is precisely why it is
not sinister. If, as the Justice does later, Hal deter-
mined here to weather this storm, to get at the "truth" hid-
den behind this profusion of puns and quibbles, only those
of us incapable of making distinctions among the various
uses and abuses of language which occur in both Henry IV
plays would applaud him. Our reaction to Sir John's wrench-
ings here is not to hope that "gravity" will stem the tide
of treacherous verbal distortions before Youth suffers irre-
parable damage or that Youth will prudishly refuse to play,
but to cheer the plethora of puns and to be exhilarating by
the wit. Falstaff's quibbles are not Hal's seductive and
fatal Cleopatras. The equation of thieves and robbers with
men of good government is no knavish effort to disfigure
reality or to manufacture a mask behind which to hide a
villainous face, but a game which makes fun of reality.
Falstaff, assuming that Hal is one of the thieves' party
already and can share in the joke, is not interested in
making a case for forgiveness of thieves. He wishes instead
to meet the Prince's "challenge," to triumph in the game of
wit, and thus to assert the primacy of his fertile imagination.

We may contrast his transformations here with those
effectected by characters in other plays who actually are guilty
of the crime Barber imputes to Falstaff, translating a rotten
deed into a desirable or acceptable one by substituting one
system of values for another. In Marlowe's Tamburlaine,
for instance, Thersites worries that, in following
Tamburlaine, he shall prove a traitor to his own king. "No," Tamburlaine soothes him, "but the trusty friend of Tamburlaine." According to Morton, in 2 Henry IV, Scroop, the Archbishop of York, believed that "that same word 'rebellion' did divide/The actions of men's bodies from their souls" during the recent fighting, and he therefore turned "insurrection to religion" (I. i, 194-95, 201). In rather more blatant fashion, Spurio decides, for the sake of convenience, to "call foul incest but a venial sin," in The Revenger's Tragedy. Obviously, Falstaff, Tamburlaine, the Archbishop, and Spurio are glossing over the truth, and each is as conscious as we are of his verbal sleight-of-hand. But the characters in these other plays offer flattering transformations which allow them and their listeners to neglect important distinctions for everyone's mutual benefit. They slide from one value system to another as quietly and undramatically as possible in order not to arouse any conveniently sleepy consciences. Falstaff, on the other hand, insists upon distinctions. Rather than offering as much of a translation as will serve a false turn, he invents a colorful stream of euphemistic phrases in a calculated effort to draw attention to the process of his verbal acrobatics and thus to win the Prince's applause. There is no self-interested attempt to hedge the disparity between reality as Hal sees it and "reality" as Falstaff presents it anywhere evident in the showman's palpable antics. His virtual
freedom from any investment in his transformations, beyond displaying his creative talents and keeping himself and his prince happily occupied, prevents us from equating him with other fictionmakers in the play, fictionmakers whose purposiveness blocks our complete absorption into their inventions. That freedom also distinguishes him from other comic transformers, such as Malvolio, or even the Falstaff of The Merry Wives of Windsor, who requires some laundering before he is deemed presentable. As any residual penchant for keeping up a good front in Hal's presence disappears, Falstaff ceases to be a liar and becomes, instead, a "poet," a character whose transforming is characterized by spontaneity, joy, and an overriding interest in creativity, invention, and transformation for their own sakes. If this youthful old man has a deeper need to transform than entertaining and exercising his imagination in the process, it is a need to hold time, old age, and death at bay and to resist the pressures which turn the hairs of King Henry's head white. Sighing and grief "blows a man up like a bladder," after all (II. iv, 335-36). When Hal leaves the tavern eventually, there is a noticeable change in Sir John's temperament, and not even a bawdy song puts him back in tune.

Hal keeps the game going now by offhandedly mentioning the gallows, a topic of conversation intended to startle Falstaff out of all countenance and thus galvanize him into further comic action. That the ploy works is
evidenced when Sir John pointedly ignores the Prince. He changes the subject abruptly, but so abruptly, in fact, that his refusal to discuss the issue any further becomes, in itself, a joke. With the irrelevant question, "is not my hostess of the tavern a most sweet wench?" he volunteers a pleasanter subject than hanging. Hal, though not letting his "victim" out of his sight, nevertheless does not insist that he seriously contemplate the spectre of his large bulk bending the limb of a nearby tree and mend his ways accordingly. Instead, he sets out to outwit the wit. "As the honey of Hybla," he smoothly acknowledges the hostess' good temperment, "and is not a buff jerkin a most sweet robe of durance?" This time, Falstaff "bites" and the Prince exultantly reels him in:

Fal: How now, how now, mad wag? What, in thy quips and thy quiddities? What a plague have I to do with a buff jerkin?

Hal: Why, what a pox have I to do with my hostess of the tavern?

(I. ii, 40-48)

Hal would do well to savor this minute victory, for his triumphs over the Knight are few and far between, even when his strategy is far more complex than this. This victory, for that matter, depends more on the "loser's" decision not to pursue the provocative question too far than it does on Hal's dexterity.

Brought round again to the distasteful topic of gallows, the thief confronts his worries openly and addresses the
issue he has pretended to ignore. Rather than having seriously offered himself as a creature undeserving of the rope, Sir John, after playing at being such a creature, straightforwardly throws himself upon Hal's future mercy, trusting that a prince's soft hand can "stroke the rough head of the law/And make it lie smooth" (The Revenger's Tragedy, II. iii, 75-76). It is in a somewhat sober tone that he asks Hal whether or not there shall "be gallows standing in England" when he is king (57-59).

The shadow which darkens his jolly countenance, however, passes momentarily. After the Prince again answers a direct question with a quibble, remaining noncommittal about the future status of that cruel instrument, Falstaff makes himself and his brief fit of melancholy the next occasion for comedy, and his audience, again, readily acquiesces in the sport:

Fal: 'Sblood, I am as melancholy as a gib-cat or a lugged bear.

Hal: Or an old lion, or a lover's lute.

Fal: Yea, or the drone of a Lincolnshire bagpipe.

Hal: What sayest thou to a hare, or the melancholy of Moorditch?

(73-79)

The competition here between the two players is reminiscent of that in Donne's "The Comparison," wherein the speaker tries to outdo himself in producing those wonderfully awful
images of his rival's mistress. His purpose, like Hal's and Falstaff's, is not to describe accurately but to make a sport of the process of describing. Whereas Jacques seriously contemplates the significance of his own melancholic transformations, Falstaff derives an enjoyment, which we share with him, from his ability simply to produce them.

The Prince no doubt believes he has topped his rival when he compares him to a London drainage ditch, but Falstaff, though appearing to yield, nimbly points out the unsavoriness of the comparison, and then, seeming suddenly to shift his ground, feigns the courtly concern over Hal's loss of reputation. One's corruption is virtually assured if one is foolish enough to associate with such a man, concludes the Knight, as Hal finds himself translated into a Spoiler of Virtue and fat Falstaff into Virtue Corrupted. Though he attempts to trap his ingenious adversary throughout this new dialogue, the Prince loses the game, but of course simultaneously enjoys the fruits of Falstaff's mental labors. "I would to God thou and I knew where a commodity of good names were to be bought," sighs Sir John with a mock anxiety:

An old lord of the council rated me the other day in the street about you, sir, but I marked him not; and yet he talked very wisely, but I regarded him not; and yet he talked wisely, and in the street too.

"Thou did'st well," praises the Prince on cue, "for wisdom cries out in the streets, and no man regards it" (83-89).
In addition to evidencing quite clearly that the two notorious tavern dwellers know precisely how "wisdom" regards them, this sequence provides us with another enjoyable instance of Falstaff's creative transformations. We can easily imagine the conversation he had with the "old lord," as well as his response to being chid, since he is, like Tristram Shandy's Yorick, a man who "seldom gives gravity much quarter when it falls in his way." Hal knows the true nature of the conversation too, of course, but he is not the least interested in squeezing a confession out of the fat frame, recognizing the clear difference between a lie and a joke with reality. Unfortunately for his standing as a wit, though not for his role as Falstaff's audience, his proverbial reply is effortlessly turned back on him and used as incontrovertible proof of his power to seduce even the most pure at heart. Falstaff offers himself, of course, as a solid member of that group. "O, thou hast damnable iteration," he exclaims in pretended admiration, though with real feeling for Hal too,

and art indeed able to corrupt a saint. Thou hast done much harm upon me, Hal--God forgive thee for it! Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing; and now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked. I must give over this life, and I will give it over! By the Lord, and I do not, I am a villain! I'll be damned for never a king's son in Christendom.

(91-98)
In "speaking truly," Falstaff has turned the tables, and a sequence which began with him as the rogue and the Prince his chastiser concludes with the old reprobate the hapless victim of a scoundrel. It is not difficult to see that, once again, the comic portrayal of the roles into which various old lords and a beleaguered king have cast the pair and the clever reversals of those roles are not intended to demean those whose views of the world are somewhat short-sighted or to see that Falstaff calls even more attention to the playful quality of his transformations by making his "villainy" part of the joke instead of hiding it. The fun he and Hal have with the misconceptions about their relationship is neither malicious nor supercilious, though it is certainly knowing and exposes the limitations of the courtly mind. It is a game and the Prince's participation in the game leaves him unscathed and in control of his destiny. Falstaff's "commitment" to amend his life ("lest he be a villain") is humorously short-lived. Hal proposes to "take a purse tomorrow" to test the new-made resolution, and Sir John unwittingly gives his quick and eager consent. "I see a good amendment of life in thee--from praying to purse-taking," teases the Prince, thinking he has finally caught his opponent in such a contradiction that even his talents will be taxed in the resolution of it. "Why, Hal," parries Sir John, pretending to be nonplussed, "'tis my vocation, Hal. 'Tis no sin for a man to labor in his vocation"
Referring to this particular transformation, Barber states that, in one way, Falstaff "is covering up by using the moral maxim; at the same time he is flouting morality." Surely, however, Falstaff is no Tamburlaine here either, and our engagement in his sport is free from the tension which accompanies our engagement with characters whose intelligence really is put to the task of covering up. Flouting conventions does indeed spice the jest, of course, but we can savor that spice all the more because the flouting is not self-serving. Falstaff's victory derives, not from his having provided himself or Hal with a convenient excuse for winking at morality, but from the fact that he has the last word. At the same time that Hal loses the contest of wit, he wins the moment, as we do, in being treated to an incomparable show.

III.

When the play moves us from Falstaff's shows, performed in the Prince's lodgings or in the Boar's Head, to Hotspur's romantic delusion and to the more calculating performances staged by Henry and Hal in the public, political theater, we experience a radical shifting of the dramatic gears. That Falstaff offers a viable alternative to the purposive fictionmaking of the political intriguers and
to Hotspur's unconsciously imposed fictions is most immediately discernible in this initial disjunctiveness and in our sense that we are following, at least for a time, two different stories, though Falstaff's is not leading us toward any conclusion. "The night of the Boar's Head Tavern play-scene," asserts Anne Righter, responding to the atmospheric and tonal dissonance between comedy and history, "is somehow enchanted, a period of suspended time in which the violence and rebellion abroad in the world seem curiously remote." Her description may be more broadly applied to include the earlier comic scenes as well. In fact, those which take place before Falstaff enters with "villainous news from abroad," in II. iv, seem even further distanced from the inexorable logic governing history than does the "play extempore," whose subject, after all, is prompted by the appearance of Henry's messenger. 1 Henry IV is a play "whose parts tend to separate," says Empson, and to separate more profoundly, we might add, than do those of most other Shakespearean plays with comic subplots. Our impression that comedy is an alien in the serious realm of history may be offset somewhat by the continuous echoes and parallels, frequently cited by critics, among the various versions of reality offered in the play, the most overt ones being, perhaps, the parallels between Hotspur's conception of honor and Falstaff's or between Hotspur's real death and Falstaff's expedient pretense. Rather than closing the breach between
the comedy and the history, however, these echoes merely underscore the fact that the play presents us with a double vision of similar experience, or, more accurately, with multiple visions. Because Falstaff brings a masterful voice to his particular way of seeing, he manages to create a disjunctiveness with the political world. When the transforming eye is focused specifically on the scene outside the tavern, the comedy persistently voices the very parodies we are put in mind of by the blindness and boasting of the rebels or the foolish worry over Hal. Before its attention is called so directly to what is happening "outside," comedy's comportment offers parodic parallels to that of characters in the "serious" world. Hotspur's angry refusal to turn over his prisoners even if "the devil come and roar for them," for instance, is echoed comically in the old Knight's studied refusal to explain, "on compulsion," how he knew the robbers wore kendal green. Aside from these "inadvertant" echoes, however, we usually "forget" what is occurring outside the tavern world when Falstaff is entertaining us. We are not afraid that Hal is ignorant of the state of the realm or that Sir John's inventive transformations are hiding from him the perilous condition it is in. Thus we are able to enjoy the comedy of the poetic imagination free from those nagging anxieties which vex our appreciation of knavish entertainers or of other comic transformers. When Hal and Falstaff are finally called to war, we
are so engrossed in the revelry at the Boar's Head that the summons seems a brutal interruption coming from somewhere "outside," in much the same way that bad news seems so suddenly to break up the festivities in Love's Labor's Lost.

The fictions to which we are returned when the play interrupts our comedy are much less innocent than Falstaff's are. His ability to create "the whole work before our eyes" and give it "a thickness and an atmosphere, an inner momentum, a life," as Robert Langbaum admiringly describes it, is enhanced by the fact that the transformers against whom he vies for our engagement and approval are up to something. Poets' lies are one thing; those of politicians and egoists are quite another. The least conscious but most dangerous fictions, and therefore those at furthest remove from the old Knight's, are Hotspur's. While Hotspur is the paragon of knightly virtue in Henry's eyes, at least for a time, to us, he is a rash and often foolish young man. Incapable of the clearsighted judgments which give the final victory to the Prince and lacking the firm grasp on reality that allows Falstaff to play with it, Hotspur pictures the realistic political struggle as an exciting and dangerous adventure undertaken to "pluck bright honor from the pale-faced moon" (I. iii, 200). Initially, he is putty in the hands of Worcester, who slyly introduces his plan for a revolt as one "full of peril and adventurous spirit," terms calculated to appeal to his Nephew's fantasy (I. iii, 188).
As his father, Northumberland, notes, "imagination of some great exploit/Drives him beyond the bounds of patience" (I. iii, 197-198). Beyond all other bounds, too, we are obliged to add when, at the end of I. iii, he urges time to pass quickly so that the battle might begin and "fields and blows and groans applaud" his sport (I. iii, 298). Worcester's politics may be tactically faulty and morally corrupt, but his assessment of Percy's character seems accurate. "In faith, my lord, you are too willful-blame," he cautions:

You must needs learn, lord, to amend this fault. Though sometimes it show greatness, courage, blood-- And that's the dearest grace it renders you-- Yet oftentimes it doth present harsh rage, Defect of manners, want of government, Pride, haughtiness, opinion, and disdain. (III. i, 173, 176-81)

His description comes near to our experience of Hotspur, whose absolute commitment to his ideal makes him attractive at times, while at other times, he appears childish, obdurate, and insensitive. His transformations of conditions which are obviously detrimental to the health of the conspiracy into tokens of its success set the stage upon which Hal finally kills him and are, thus, both determining factors in, and victims of, "history."

Though the evidence is before them from the outset, the conspirators underestimate the degree to which Hotspur is a captive of his own fiction and do not foresee a time
when they could lose control of his infected imagination and become its victims rather than its manipulators. The plot against the throne thickens, mainly because the impatient young man cannot abide any interruptions in the progress of his "sport." The rebels meet with a series of unfortunate accidents which threaten the success of their enterprise, yet Percy remains oblivious to the admonitions of the others, translating obviously bad news into evidence that the rebellion should proceed as planned. In II. iii, for example, he enters reading aloud a letter from a nobleman who has evidently declined an invitation to join forces with the rebels, for what we may suppose are good reasons. "The purpose you undertake is dangerous," argues the letter. "Why, that's certain!" fumes Percy, "'Tis dangerous to take a cold, to sleep, to drink; but I tell you ... out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety." The plot, he concludes, is not, as the letter accuses, "too light for the counterpoise of so great an opposition," but an "excellent plot" and "full of expectation." More persuasive evidence that plans are about to go awry appears in the news that Northumberland is ill and that another ally, Glendower, with whom Hotspur had ridiculously quarreled over the rechanneling of the Trent, has deserted the cause. Percy's refusal to tolerate Glendower's naivete, or even his Welsh language, dangerously angered this important friend and, worse, blinded Percy to the possibility
that prophecies might, indeed, enter into the plans.
This is a mistake that Hal would never make. 36

More obvious signs of the rebellion's disintegration
only provoke more desperate transformations. "Your
father's sickness is a maim to us," pleads Worcester,
attempting to curb the warlike spirit he has helped to
unleash. "A perilous gash, a very limb lopped off," Percy
concedes momentarily, but then he changes his mind:

And yet, in faith, it is not! His present want
Seems more than we shall find it. Were it good
To set the exact wealth of all our states
All at one cast? To set so rich a main
On the nice hazard of one doubtful hour?
It were not good; for therein should we read
The very bottom and the soul of hope.

(IV. i, 42-50)

Though he accuses Worcester of straining too far in pointing
out the adverse psychological effect Northumberland's
absence is likely to have on the army, his own circular
argument's twisted logic results in an absurd conclusion:

I rather of his absence make this use;
It lends a luster and more great opinion,
A larger dare to our great enterprise,
Than if the earl were here.

(75-78)

The appearance of even more stumbling blocks does nothing
to dampen Hotspur's enthusiasm. "Come, let us take a muster
speedily./Doomsday is near. Die all, die merrily," he
blithely admonishes his reticent cohorts (132-133). By this
time, war is virtually inevitable and there is little else
Even in sleep, Percy's imagination is filled with fantastic notions. Though he is not devoid of tenderness, he does not wish his game to be delayed either by misfortune or love and rewards his wife's tender regard for his health and safety by commanding his groom to bring up his roan horse. "This is no world/To play with mammets and to tilt with lips./We must have bloody noses and cracked crowns," he gruffly scolds Kate (II. iii, 90-92). We are somewhat taken aback by his refusal to reassure her and to acknowledge her care with something other than a retort whose humor is intended to hold love and tenderness at arm's length. There are times when one should not tilt with lips, we may agree, but surely never worlds. Kate, and later the Welsh lady to whom Mortimer is married and of whom Hotspur makes fun, have no comprehension of the currents which are moving their husbands closer to destruction, only vague apprehensions of danger, but their tears articulate better than any speech in the play the loss of awareness of life and love that results from blind dedication to narrow definitions of concepts such as honor and bravery. Their intuitions, stronger than their capacities to describe them, cut through the forms, conventions, and words which enmesh Hotspur, Mortimer, and even Hal. Just as Falstaff will supply a comic counterpart to Hotspur's honor and Douglas' boastful bravery, so the women, with purer motives than Falstaff's,
tug fruitlessly at Hotspur's consciousness with a disturbing reminder that life is no game when death is potentially the only victor.

In contrast to the gloriously rash and compulsive transformations which culminate in Percy's demise are Hal's deliberate but engaging performances as the Prodigal Son and the Warrior Prince. As Empson and others note, Hal bridges the gap between worlds, because he talks everyone's language. He is the superb actor who has mastered the exuberant vernacular of the tavern, the political rhetoric of the court, and the chivalric language of Hotspur's fantasy. His holiday among the commoners is the occasion for a further study of language and roles, and, as his mimicry of the tapsters, his father, or his chief rival illustrates, his prowess is extensive. Of course, we admire Hal because he is so talented, but because we are never allowed to forget that he is playing a part, we have some difficulty feeling completely comfortable with him. On the one hand, he has a knowledge of human nature and a perspective on himself and those around him which allow him some control over his life but which are potentially subject to abuse too. Hal could, as his father does in the first scene, make cynical use of theatrics to deceive others. Perhaps the most glaring example of his distance from other characters, a distance which suggests that he is not incapable of misusing the knowledge gained from his studies, is the scene he creates in the tavern as he tries to pass the time
until Falstaff returns. As Maynard Mack points out, though the Prince accurately imitates Francis the Drawer, whom he has cast as the leading figure in his playlet, the joke he plays on the unfortunate fellow "falls flat." Hal proves that he has become proficient enough to "drink with any tinker in his own language," but not that he is proficient in, or interested in, reading men's hearts (II. iv, 18-19). Francis' deference to Hal, his generosity and his obviously unhappy situation in life move our sympathies, but the Prince appears deaf to the nuances of language which convey to us that Francis, like Falstaff, loves him.

On the other hand, the "true prince" does not prove to be, after all, a cynical deceiver, nor can we accuse him, as we can his father or Hotspur, of actively working upon the plot to usurp another's given role. Furthermore, he infects us with his fiction. We see him in eloquent action, for example, in III. ii, when he is called to give an account of himself to his father. We can little imagine Percy maintaining the presence of mind that enables the Prince to submit to Henry's accusations and lectures. Rather than hotly defending his reputation, Hal is properly penitent and submissive, promising to reform someday and to make his father proud of him:

I will redeem all this on Percy's head
And, in the closing of some glorious day,
Be bold to tell you that I am your son,
When I will wear a garment all of blood,
And stain my favors in a bloody mask,
Which, washed away, shall scour my shame with it.

. . .
Percy is but my factor, good my Lord,
To engross up glorious deeds on my behalf;
And I will call him to so strict account
That he shall render every glory up,
Yea, even the slightest worship of his time.

(III. ii, 132-37, 147-51)

Henry's frown melts away in the fire of his son's performance. In assuming the guilt for a life of dissipation, Hal makes good use of the role into which he has been cast and plays his part so effectively that Henry, disarmed, vows to give him "charge and sovereign trust herein" (161). In marked contrast to Hal's behavior is Percy's rage against the King, in I. ii, or his flippant "well, I am schooled," in response to Worcester's remarks on his character (III. i, 186). We, too, are drawn partially into Hal's controlled fiction and cannot maintain the detached perspective upon it that we gradually assume over the one that controls Hotspur. Like Henry's, our feelings are touched by Hal's words and by his own apparent commitment to his role, a commitment borne out by the fact that he does precisely what he says he will do, though it is impossible to draw the line between his actual engagement and his purposive eloquence. However, though Hal does not plot against other characters or drop his theatrical pose to reveal some malevolent motive or scheme, our awareness that he is playing a part in a fiction whose aim is, finally, political, an awareness aroused here when he
pleads guilty to a sin of which he is innocent, prevents us from the wholehearted participation into which Henry is drawn and which characterizes our response to Falstaff's transforming fictions.

If he is not Falstaff, nor quite an Edgar who can make us forget momentarily what is actually "real," neither is Hal a Hotspur, a Henry, or a cold-blooded and humorless Prince John. Nothing encourages our faith in his good nature and proper intentions so much as his willingness to laugh with the character in whom we take so much pleasure. In fact, it is not accurate to say that Hal swerves not a jot from his original course, for his involvement with Falstaff goes beyond "awhile upholding the unyoked humor" of his huge companion's idleness. Hal clearly recognizes all of Falstaff's flaws, as even their first dialogue demonstrates, but his remonstrances, unlike those of the worthy Chief Justice, are not interested in exposing a character whose less commendable intentions are already transparent even to the hostess. Instead, he encourages Falstaff's wit, playing straight man for this consummate comedian, and his knowing verbal prods and duplicitous devices result, not in Falstaffian remorse, anger, repentance, or expulsion from the comedy, but in performances. Without his restless presence in the tavern, the lighthearted tone of the early scenes would be virtually impossible. We are dependent upon Hal, not only to encourage the wit by simply appreciating it, but also to provide
occasions for its display, and we recognize that his willingness and eagerness to do so are politically gratuitous. Though he has much to gain by appearing to rub shoulders with ruffians and scapegraces, indulging Falstaff's talents is an extraneous diversion, an unnecessary chapter in the Prodigal Son story. While Hotspur is busy "engrossing" up glorious deeds," Hal wisely bides his time in the Boar's Head until the most propitious moment to act presents itself. Even more wisely, he avails himself of the entertainment offered there, and we are never closer to him than when we stand with him as openmouthed members of Falstaff's audience, waiting expectantly for whatever "device" the great performer will inevitably pull out of his hat.

IV.

The rebellion is still very distant thunder in the ears of the revellers when Poins proposes robbing the Gadshill robbers and initiates a series of scenes bursting with such devices. This "excellent sport" begins on the highway, in II. ii, and ends behind the arras, in II. iv. Sir John displays his talents, in these sections of the play, in more explicitly theatrical situations than were provided in his first scenes as he and the Prince plot and counterplot against each other and then perform an extemporaneous drama. Like the language of which they are comprised, shows and
plays may be used by characters to distort reality, as
King Henry and Hal well know. But theatrics and theater, in
Falstaff's world, are no more purposive than his quibbles.
In his effort to snare the huge robber, Hal only plays at
what the lords in All's Well That Ends Well undertake to do
seriously—contrive a scene that will show a coward to be a
coward—and Falstaff, in return, only plays at covering up
his faults.42 At this point in 1 Henry IV, purposive
transformation is still largely the domain of "history."

Though he has just joked with Sir John about taking
purses, the Prince refuses to "make one" of the robber band,
which, according to Gadshill's cynical version of Falstaff's
earlier transformations, "preys" on its "saint," the com­
monwealth. Going along with the scheme in order to trick
the old Knight, however, is another matter, and when Poins
says he has in mind a jest whose virtue will be "the in­
comprehensible lies" Falstaff will inevitably tell after
he has been fleeced, "how thirty, at least, he fought with;
what wards, what blows, what extremities he endured," Hal
happily consents to "prove a false thief" (I. ii, 183-87).
The sinister and knowing air which envelops the beginning
of Act II, as the real robbers lay their plans, is all turned
to comedy ultimately, and our potential uneasiness about
the robbery is relieved when we realize that Hal, rather
than being an actual thief, has all this thievery in hand,
including Gadshill's. He eventually declares his intentions
to return the stolen money. By maintaining his control over the comic action, Hal allows us to focus almost exclusively on the jest and its "victim." From the outset, the actual robbery is exposed and doomed to fail and therefore concerns us little.\textsuperscript{43}

The show begins when Hal and Poins steal Falstaff's horse. Though the horse may have good reason to celebrate this turn in his fortune, Falstaff, forced now to transport his own huge bulk over the uneven ground, does not share in his joy, and the "professional" Gadshill probably worries lest the fuming Knight's noises interrupt the plans. Surely Hal's and Poins's return on this not particularly innovative investment is much more than they either expect or deserve. Like the Falstaff of \textit{The Merry Wives}, without whose own account of it the joke which lands him in the basket of dirty laundry would not be nearly as funny, Falstaff here creates for us the vision of his own comic discomfiture. "I am accursed to rob in that thief's company," he scolds, referring to Poins,

\begin{quote}
If I travel but four foot by the squire further afoot, I shall break my wind. Well, I doubt not but to die a fair death for all this, if I scape hanging for killing that rogue. I have forsworn his company hourly any time this two and twenty years, and yet I am bewitched with the rogue's company. If the rascal have not given me medicine to make me love him, I'll be hanged. It could not be else: . . . I'll starve ere I'll rob a foot further. And 'twere not as good a deed as drink to turn true man and to leave, these rogues, I am the veriest varlet that ever chewed with a tooth. Eight yards of uneven ground is
\end{quote}
threescore and ten miles afoot with me, and
the stony-hearted villains know it well enough.
... Whew! A plague upon you all! Give me
my horse, you rogues! Give me my horse and be
hanged!

(II. ii, 10-19, 21-27, 28-30)

We are inclined to laugh sympathetically with the wheezing
Knight and to agree that his antagonists are, indeed, stony-
hearted villains, both reactions signalling that we are not
laughing as much at the spectacle the pranksters have made
of him as at the one he makes of himself after they provide
the occasion. He is the star of the show rather than the
butt of their joke. Like the Prince, who, in more crucial
circumstances, makes an "assigned" role completely his own,
Falstaff throws himself into his part and plays at being
the comic buffoon, more interested in playing the role than
in venting his spleen. He is no explosive Hotspur. His
oath that he is the "veriest varlet that ever chewed with
tooth" if he doesn't sever relations with these two rap-
scallions, with its implication that he's not a varlet
otherwise, is not an ironic boomerang, returning to its
clownish origin to inflict its wounds, as is Sir Andrew
Aguecheek's observation that he has "no more wit than a
Christian or an ordinary man has," or Justice Dogberry's
unnecessary warning to his comrades to "remember that he is
an ass" (Twelfth Night, I. iii, 81-82; Much Ado, IV. ii,
77-78). Language does not slip away from Falstaff. As we
watch him puffing and stewing along, we are laughing
because he makes comedy out of his own undignified state,
transforming the buffoon's part into which his comrades have cast him into his own more vital and interesting Buffoon.

Though Falstaff is not a model of Virtue, neither is he a cynical Gadshill. During the strategy session immediately preceding the robbery, he learns that there are eight or ten travelers in the party whose goods are being eyed, and he has some discretionary second thoughts. "Zounds, will they not rob us?" he blurts out fearfully (64). When the travelers at last appear, however, he plunges down the hill toward them, bawling at the top of his lungs, apparently forgetful both of his fear and his oath not to rob a foot further without his horse. The victims are undone, though Falstaff sets a comic tone even for the robbery itself. His victory cries are suddenly squelched when Hal and Poins attack and rob him, and, after exchanging a couple of blows with his unknown assailants, he prudently flees.

We pick up the comic thread again in II. iv, a scene which opens in the vacuum created by Falstaff's absence from the tavern. Hal is lounging and languishing among the drawers, and finally, out of boredom and a need to "laugh a little," stages the game with Francis the Drawer to "drive away the time till Falstaff come" (2, 28-29). The prank is so pointless and curious that we ask, in concert with Poins, what "cunning match" has been made with it, but Hal does not answer the question directly, replying only that he is "now of all humors that have showed themselves humors since
the old days of goodman Adam to the pupil age of this present twelve o'clock at midnight," an indication that he believes his linguistic and acting education to be virtually complete (92-97). Where Falstaff would make something of Hal's lame attempt at spontaneous sport, Francis cannot save it and becomes, instead, its sympathetic victim, much as the old Knight might have if his wit had deserted him along with his horse. Furthermore, while Hal leads us to expect that his jests will have a point, Falstaff, nourishing his wit upon the food he finds in his way, never provokes such a question as Poins asks. He does, as Hal knows he will, beguile the time.

He enters at last, stepping solidly onto the twig the Prince and Poins have limed for him. It is immediately apparent that Falstaff has invented some scheme which he imagines will help to extricate him from the embarrassing dilemma of not having the money. His plan has even gone so far as to include props, for he has convinced his confederates to hack their swords and smear them with blood. Deciding evidently that the best defense is a good offense, he makes the first move, posing as a brave man who has been basely deserted in the heat of battle by cowardly comrades, as Poins expected he would do. Already, however, the jest is yielding rewards which surpass Poins' most liberal predictions. Falstaff does not know yet that he is an actor in Hal's play rather than author of his own, and he is still
interested in protecting the tattered remains of his reputation. However, the elaborateness of his preparations and the energy he brings to his self-assigned role suggest that, already, his pleasure in the theatrical possibilities of the situation is at least as strong as his wish to dupe Hal and keep up the pretense that he is no coward. Overjoyed at the depth of the hole Falstaff is digging for himself and hoping it gets even deeper, Hal encourages the lie by demanding to know what all the grumbling is about. "What's the matter?" retorts the Knight "incredulously." "There be four of us here have ta'en a thousand pound this day morning."

"Where is it Jack, where is it?" prompts the Prince.

The charade commences:

Fal: Where is it? Taken from us it is. A hundred upon poor four of us!

Hal: What, a hundred, man?

Fal: I am a rogue if I were not at half-sword with a dozen of them two hours together. I have scaped by miracle. I am eight times thrust through the doublet, four through the hose; my buckler cut through and through; my sword hacked like a handsaw—ecce signum! I never dealt better since I was a man. All would not do. A plague of all cowards! Let them speak. If they speak more or less than truth, they are villains and the sons of darkness.

(II. iv, 159-73)

Hal turns to the other participants in the robbery for confirmation of this harrowing tale, but when they show
signs of proving to be honest men by blurting out the truth, Falstaff hastily interrupts. As if the lie weren't large enough already, the "narrator," rather warming to his story, turns from obvious exaggeration—he begins with a hundred assailants rather than the thirty Poins predicted—to the "authenticating" force of detail, a force which, in his hands, results in even more patent fictions. The "two rogues in buckram suits," who supposedly breathed their last at the point of his sword, of a sudden grow to four and four become seven. Like Hotspur, who decides that his "good plot," now that he thinks on it, is really a very good plot, Sir John decides that this may be a very good story, especially if the Prince is as gullible as he appears to be. "Seven," replies the appropriately astonished Hal. "Why, there were but four even now." The apparent contradiction gives Falstaff some pause. "In buckram?" he reminds his auditors. Poins has some difficulty containing himself throughout the account and will not let this slip go by so easily. "Ay, four, in buckram suits," he insists, but Falstaff, who always speaks "more or less than truth" himself, chooses rather more here and with an uncharacteristically straightforward "transformation," resolves the problem in an instant. "Seven, by these hilts, or I am a villain else," he swears solemnly. Fearful that Poins may spoil the game by calling Sir John's bluff too soon, Hal cautions him in an aside, and Falstaff plunges on, but not before
admonishing his whispering audience to pay close attention. "These nine in buckram that I told thee of," he begins brazenly.

"So, two more already," Hal observes sardonically but with no visible effect on the narrator of this "history," who presses on, surely demonstrating his prowess in battle with all the nimbleness his body can muster. "Began to give me ground; but I followed me close, came in, foot and hand, and with a thought seven of the eleven I paid."

"On monstrous!" we all shout gleefully with the Prince as seven unabashedly grows to eleven. So monstrous, in fact, have Sir John's lies grown that we can no longer believe him to be operating in the dark about his audience. Flushed from his hiding place, he turns a predicament into a performance and wants his auditors to pay attention.47

"But, as the devil would have it," he sinks his voice a note dramatically,

three misbegotten knaves in Kendal green came at my back and let drive at me; for it was so dark, Hal, that thou couldest not see thy hand.

(204-225)

It is possible for us to be absorbed enough in Falstaff's performance to overlook these gross contradictions, so that, when Hal suddenly launches his vociferous attack on Sir John's character and physique, we may suppose it to be a prelude to the game's final moment and that he will now
fetch forth his trump card. "What, art thou mad?"

sputters Falstaff at the "inexplicable" interruption. "Is not the truth the truth?" If the play directed us to anticipate the deflation of a blustering coward or a "swaggerer," we could never find a better place than this for the deed to be done. Since we are not so directed, we are delighted that Hal, much too interested in this sport to halt it yet, keeps his own card hidden and points triumphantly instead at the one Falstaff has let drop.

Why, how couldst thou know these men in Kendal green when it was so dark thou couldst not see thy hand? Come, tell us your reason. What sayest thou to this?

Knowing full well when he puts the question that there will be an answer, the Prince waits expectantly, and, sure enough, the indefatigable wit does not disappoint him. Though he may very well respond immediately, Falstaff can, with little difficulty, be imagined to pause calmly and deliberately here as he makes the mental calculations necessary to ferret out a hole in this trap. Unencumbered by the necessity to pretend any longer that he is innocent, he concentrates on what intrigues him more anyway, invention, and makes a joke even of being caught off guard and forced to rise to an occasion:

What, upon compulsion? Zounds, and I were at the strappado or all the racks in the world, I would
not tell you on compulsion. Give you a reason
on compulsion? If reasons were as plentiful as
blackberries, I would give no man a reason upon
compulsion, I.

(237-242)

His excuse is like his lies, and they, as Hal insists, are
"like their father that begets them—gross as a mountain,
open, palpable" (II. iv, 226-227). In seeking to emphasize
Falstaff's "heinous" persistence in telling them, Hal suc-
cceeds only in clarifying the very reason that we enjoy them
so completely. The storyteller, recognizing that he has
milked about all he can get from this situation, joins in
the namecalling, the only response Hal can muster for the
moment, and makes a joke of it also by cleverly answering
each of Hal's "fat" names with a skinny one.

At last, Hal must bring out his heaviest artillery.
Unmasking is generally a high point in our relationship
with other comic transformers, but instead of anticipating
the bursting of Falstaff's fictional bubble or the "reproof"
of his lies, we are made to look forward to the bigger,
brighter, and more flamboyant one he is bound to blow.
"Mark now," the Prince firmly bids him, in possession of a
solid truth the likes of which is never to be found in the
"historical" world, "how a plain tale shall put you down"
(256-257). A "plain tale" puts down Falstaff of The Merry
Wives, who swears that he would repent, if his wind were
long enough. Revelation of the truth expels the puritanical
transformer, Malvolio, from the comic world, shatters the last moment of the wicked Duke's life, in The Revenger's Tragedy, overturns Parolles' control of Bertram, undermines Hotspur's fantasy, and points up the shortsightedness of the characters who watch Hieronimo's play. Revelation of the truth, in short, is not only a point we look forward to, it usually has some visible effect on the characters who experience it, and if it does not, we judge them to be foolishly blind. But, of course, truth is not at issue here, and Hal's revelation is simply another straight line, though perhaps the best one in the play, delivered to provoke a comic response. As we now expect, it has little negative effect on the newly enlightened "liar." Thinking perhaps that finally Sir John may be hard pressed to meet this newest challenge, Hal recounts all the facts of the robbery, ticking them off point by point, and then throws down his gauntlet. "What trick, what device, what starting hole canst thou now find out to hide thee from this open and apparent shame?" he dares the Knight, his very way of putting the question enhancing our anticipation of a Falstaffian fiction. Pondering briefly, Sir John at last composes his face into its shrewdest and soberest expression and brazenly serves up his most monstrous and marvelous lie:

By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that made ye. Why, hear you, my masters. Was it for me to kill
the heir apparent? Should I turn upon the true prince? Why, thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules, but beware instinct. The lion will not touch the true prince. Instinct is a great matter. I was now a coward on instinct.

(265-276)

Hal's colorless rendition of the facts, compared with this fiction, is a plain tale indeed. Though we can little imagine the "heir apparent" collapsing in helpless laughter, he can hardly be disappointed in the rewards he has reaped from this "plot." Falstaff, relieved that his friends still have the money, happily proposes a "play extempore," and the Prince readily assents to the idea, somewhat callously suggesting Falstaff's cowardice as the play's subject. Following his usual pattern of "confronting" the issue his transformations have pretended to hide, the old Knight at last drops his pose, and then goes a step further than he has before by sheepishly begging Hal to let the episode be forgotten.

To see more clearly why we are content for Hal to let the issue drop without having obtained a confession, we may compare the robbery scene to scenes in Beaumont's and Fletcher's *A King and No King*. Falstaff's comic counterpart in the play is Bessus, a character who actually is the miles gloriosus Falstaff plays at being and one who finds himself in very Falstaffian dilemmas. Having earned a reputation for bravery after accidentally running upon an enemy position when he believed he was running away from one, Bessus
is bent on maintaining it at all costs and on using it to install himself in the King's favor. While his actions parody and burlesque those of the more serious characters and entertain us in the process, he is committed to the values and conventions of the serious world and epitomizes the absurdity of that world rather than offering us an alternative to it. Like Falstaff, Bessus seems always to spring back from adversity, but his resiliency obtains, not from a freedom from self-interest, but from pure obstinacy and a refusal to be embarrassed when he is exposed. His transformations are, in fact, transparent to all but the most helplessly stupid, but they are calculated lies and not innocent fictions nonetheless.

He finds himself, naturally, in a continual quandary. Because he is famous, sundry gentlemen, wishing to build up their own reputations, challenge him to duels, and, as he is too cowardly to fight but too egotistical to admit fear, he must rely on his wit to extricate him from potentially embarrassing situations. When one of these preposterous gentlemen sends him "an inviting to the field," Bessus, after making fun of the pretentious wording of the invitation, agrees to fight if the challenger will get in line behind the other two hundred and twelve there before him. "All the kindness I can do him is to set him resolutely in my roll the two hundred and thirteenth man," he declares obligingly. Bessus' humor has some elements of the comic
exaggeration which characterizes Falstaff's own scurries to find a "starting hole," but he has, in addition, a commitment to his image, and rather than having a flair for telling a good story, he is simply too inept to keep his motives hidden. At the same time that we laugh at his foolish challengers, we are laughing at Bessus' discomfiture, fairly certain that he will back himself into a corner shortly. Sure enough, Bacurius enters during the conversation with the messenger and says abruptly that he is "none of the multitude" that believes in Bessus' courage. The braggart finds himself, again, in a perilous plight. To save his honor, he resorts to a shameless transformation:

Bes: Since you provoke me thus far, my lord, I will fight with you, and, by my sword, it shall cost me twenty pounds but I will have my leg well a week sooner purposely.

Bac: Your leg! Why, what ails your leg? I'll do a cure on you; stand up!

Bes: My lord, this is not noble in you.

Bac: What dost thou with such a phrase in thy mouth? I will kick thee out of all good words before I leave thee. [Kicks him.]

Bes: My lord, I take this as a punishment for the offense I did when I was a coward.

(124-133)

Like Falstaff, who turns his robber's role into a vocation, Bessus turns his coward's role into noble submission. Bessus, however, does not manage to carry the day quite as the Knight does, not only because his transformations are
less imaginative than Falstaff's, but also because, even when his "cunning" is naked to all, he persists in his original intention to deceive. Obviously, Bacurius is no Hal, either, wanting to see what sport can be made of this braggart. Exasperated that verbal exposure seems to have no effect on Bessus, he resorts to kicks. Kicks seem relatively ineffectual also. Though the political realm in this play is hardly less deplorable than the comic one, we do not protest the treatment Bessus receives at its hands, and we laugh at his frequent and cartoon-like resurrections. Both Falstaff and Bessus tell progressively more flagrant lies, but we laugh with Falstaff rather than at him, and any attempt on Hal's part to quell the comedy with an impatient kick would elicit from us a quite different response.53

The "sweet young prince," however, neither kicks Sir John nor insists that he comport himself in a more civil and seemly manner. Instead, he makes room for more comedy, still managing to accommodate the "play extempore" even as the first clouds of the rebellion begin rolling in. Yet the playlet Hal and Falstaff stage, for all its initial lightheartedness, travels a somewhat different emotional route from the preceding tavern scene, growing slightly somber as it progresses. It is, to some extent, a microcosm of the larger action, featuring Falstaff blithely exploring his new roles and Hal rehearsing for his political future. It reenacts the Prodigal Son story, with Falstaff
mocking Hal's and Henry's parts in that story; and in his opaque promise to "banish plump Jack," Hal/Henry recalls Hal's original plan to rid himself of bad company when the time was ripe. The most significant echoes between the playlet and the larger action, however, are contrastive ones. The exuberance and absoluteness of Falstaff's "victory" in the preceding scenes are qualified here as the play-within-the-play ends with a hint at what might be if the comic spirit were to be deceived by its audience, if Falstaff were to discover that Hal is not "his" after all, as he does in 2 Henry IV. The Prince, with what degree of passion it is difficult to discern, practices the rejection of Falstaff, partially dispelling the comic atmosphere. The "play extempore" then, mirrors the movement of the play in which it is embedded, beginning in hilarity and later turning toward more serious business. It differs from the parent play, however, in that it does not return full circle to comedy. The power of Falstaff's transforming fictions is evidenced, in large part, by the fact that he successfully overcomes the sobriety introduced here, as well as the sobering influence of trouble ahead, to reinstate his vision of the world at the end of the play.

When Falstaff reenters the Boar's Head after sending Henry's messenger packing, Hal delays delivery of the news from court momentarily by joking about the Knight's size, and then, rather than rushing immediately away in response
to his father's summons, lingers a while longer. Though Falstaff has forebodings that his pleasure may soon be interrupted by business, he makes no effort to prevent Hal's departure from the tavern by misrepresenting the import of the message, as we might expect a knave or a Vice to do. He delivers it faithfully, though not before translating it to comedy, and expresses concern over Hal's three dangerous enemies. It is the Prince himself, in fact, who makes fun of the dangers Falstaff fears. We might also imagine a character who would knavishly translate important news into trivia to convince his victim that his serious attention to it is not warranted. Cleopatra, for example, is frequently accused of seducing Antony away from the political scene in this manner and thus precipitating his fall from power. In this play, however, the "victim" is cavalier about the proceedings abroad, at this point at least, and the "Vice," though he participates in caricaturing the three rebels, is worried.

Furthermore, it is hardly a Vice's maneuver to suggest that his dupe practice anything in order to avoid trouble, but that is precisely what Falstaff does when he learns that the Prince must report to his father. Of course, his benevolent interest in Hal's rocky relationship with Henry may stem from the Prince's initial proposal to make cowardice the impromptu play's theme. Sir John's duplicity in this matter, however, is inconsequential, and when he begins to
gird himself for his part as King Henry, setting out a chair, a dagger, and a cushion as tokens of his royal state, it is his relish for the game and not his own or Hal's best interests that gives impetus to the scene. As far as Falstaff conceives it, the play-within-the-play is an opportunity for more sport.

The staging of shows is a staple of Renaissance drama, but few embedded plays are as "aimless" as this one. Hamlet is only the best known of numerous revengers, for example, who, with varying results, put on a play or stage a scene. Hieronimo directs a play whose purpose is to disclose the truth about his son's murder, while Vindice, the witty intriguer of The Revenger's Tragedy, cannot kill his enemy before involving him in a bit of theatrics which shows that his crimes have been detected. Revengers are not the only playmakers. Richard III stages several performances, one to convince the mayor that he accepts the crown only out of a sense of duty. Lucifer produces pageants and shows to keep Faustus' mind off a serious contemplation of hell, and Volpone and Mosca play for the greedy Venetians who are coveting Volpone's riches. In most cases, as these examples suggest, shows are intended either to reveal truth or to conceal it, and, like unmasking, they generally have some impact on the course of the action. Leonato, Claudio, and Don Pedro stage a scene, in Much Ado, to show Benedict that Beatrice loves him, while Iago malevolently creates
scenes to hide reality from Othello. The ostensible purpose of Hal's less formally theatrical "plot" against Falstaff the Robber was to reveal the Knight as a coward, while Falstaff's counterplot was intended, theoretically, to cover up that flaw. The ostensible purpose of the "play extempore," from Hal's standpoint, is to rehearse his forthcoming scene with Henry and to practice being king. From Falstaff's point of view, it is presumably an opportune moment for him to promote his self-image and to shape Hal's future behavior toward him. However, like the earlier plots, this one is contrived primarily for the sake of "excellent sport" alone, its very extemporaneity testifying to its "innocence." Perhaps it is most easily aligned, then, with those dramas put on by the mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Love's Labor's Lost*, drama intended mainly for the entertainment of an audience. Even the clowns, however, expect a reward from their respective audiences. Furthermore, playing is difficult for them and requires much practice, and, for all that, exposes their foolishness. For Falstaff, on the other hand, playing is virtually its own reward, and his wit thrives on the extemporaneous situation.

That he plays at playing is emphasized by his assumption of the overcharged pomposity of King Cambyses' vein. He holds his countenance, exclaims the delighted hostess, "like one of these harlotry players" (II. iv, 400-401). In
a wonderful bit of impromptu theater, he incorporates into the skit the tears of laughter falling from the hostess' eyes and then assumes his solemn and kingly countenance before turning to his fallen "son":

Harry, I do not only marvel where thou spendest thy time, but also how thou art accompanied. For though the camomile, the more it is trodden on, the faster it grows, so youth, the more it is wasted, the sooner it wears.

(II. iv, 403-407)

Sounding something like Dickens' Chadband, Falstaff caricatures Henry and all his woes, his puffed-up camomile simile parodying Euphuistic rhythms and figures. "King Henry" observes next that, though Hal's deeds are not princely, he is possessed of certain qualities which nevertheless mark him as heir to the throne:

That thou art my son I have partly thy mother's word, partly my own opinion, but chiefly a villainous trick of thine eye and a foolish hanging of thy nether lip that doth warrant me.

(407-410)

This transformation of the King into a long-winded and apparently unsightly worrier and the "insulting" rendition of a carbon-copy son, like his earlier transformations, asks for laughter and applause, not so much at the King's or Hal's expense, though certainly Falstaff is making fun of the royal pair, but because it is inventive and because Falstaff himself enjoys the sport so much.

Still playing Henry, Sir John invents another overblown metaphor--the company Hal keeps is like pitch that
"doth defile"--and then decides to put in a good word or two on his own behalf. (II. iv, 418-419). When he concludes, the Prince, having barely said a word as "Prince Hal," orders Sir John to abdicate his throne and switch roles. After some comic equivocation about being deposed, Falstaff steps down and is replaced by a sterner, more realistic Henry. The undercurrent of seriousness in the scene is attributable to the Prince's diatribe against the fat Knight in his first speech as "Henry," for he seems to take an inordinate amount of pleasure in dressing down the libertine.57 "Thou art violently carried away from grace," he scolds his errant "son,"

As we know already, the Prince simply cannot bring to his comic roleplaying the same depth and ease which Sir John brings to his. It is impossible to determine, then, how much of this somewhat chilling performance is attributable to Hal's inability to do much more than adapt to his role, as one critic says, the voice he normally uses when jestingly insulting Falstaff and how much to some hint he gives us that he still honors his initial pledge to "uphold the unyoked humours" only for a time.58 His quietly ominous
"I do, I will" combines with other moments in the play—his refusal to answer Falstaff's question about the gallows, for example—to remind us of his original plan to throw off his tavern friend.59 He is still playing here, nevertheless. Gamely ignoring for a moment the possibility that Hal's disparaging remarks are more pointed than usual, Sir John pretends, to our delight, not to know whom the Prince is describing. "That villainous abominable misleader of youth, Falstaff, that old white-bearded Satan," the "King" clarifies in no uncertain terms (467-468). Falstaff's answer is also still playful and playing, but he, too, is apparently slightly unsure about Hal's adamant tone, for he partially drops the comic stance. There is a new earnestness in his second comic portrait of himself, as if he had a sudden glimmering recognition that this occasion perhaps should be used for educational purposes after all:

Fal: My lord, the man I know.

... But to say I know more harm in him than in myself were to say more than I know. That he is old, the more the pity, his white hairs do witness it; but that he is, saving your reverence, a whoremaster, that I utterly deny. If sack and sugar be a fault, God help the wicked! If to be old and merry be a sin, then many an old host that I know is damned. If to be fat be to be hated, then Pharoah's lean kine are to be loved. ... banish not him thy Harry's company, banish plump Jack, and banish all the world!

Hal: I do, I will. (469-485)
We are left feeling somewhat uncomfortable, partly because we recognize that the subject matter of their play is precisely Hal's Prodigal Son role and that a crucial juncture has come in his playing of that role outside the tavern and partly because Falstaff's appeal to the heavyhanded "King" is so rousing. Hal, as the old Knight makes clear here, is preoccupied with "vices" that do not seem to us to be particularly threatening. Falstaff has ignored that preoccupation heretofore for the sake of his sport, but he does not ignore "King Henry's" insistent jabs here, and perhaps he does find some relief through his roleplaying after all. We cannot tell whether Henry/Hal's "I do, I will" is still totally within the context of the playlet, and it is therefore disquieting to us, a brutal hint that he might someday dismiss Falstaff. But, though the playlet does not return us to carefree comedy, it does return us to Falstaff, having suggested the kind of painful effect upon us that any refusal on Hal's part to recognize the comic vision will have.

It is impossible to calculate the impact the playlet actually does have on Hal as he watches "himself" speaking out for the institution of a new and more tolerant order. It suffices that he is more than willing to participate in the comedy as long as he has time to do so. The air of tension between the two "actors" is relieved by the hasty entrance of Bardolph, who brings more unwelcome news from "outside." He is followed shortly by the hostess, who
breathlessly notifies the assembled company that the sheriff, searching for Falstaff, intends to look in the tavern. The atmosphere of comedy suddenly begins to dissipate, and even Sir John is quickened by the scurry, though he is confident that Hal will save him. "If you will deny the sheriff, so," he casually declares with a wave of the hand, "if not, let him enter. . . . I hope I shall as soon be strangled with a halter as another" (500-504). Justifying Falstaff's faith in him, the Prince gives him permission to hide behind the arras. The Sheriff's entrance signifies that Hal's stay in the tavern world has come almost to an end and that he must set about the task of guiding his political future to its "proper" conclusion. Time and order, held in abeyance thus far, reenter, as Hal promises to send Sir John to answer for his crimes "by tomorrow dinner time" (520). When the Sheriff departs, the Prince pulls back the curtain to reveal, not the coward listening anxiously to overhear what fate awaits him, but the remarkable sight of fat Falstaff fast asleep, his very snores making light of "old father Antic the law" and expressing his unwavering belief that he is safe in Hal's hands. Though the Prince is making his critical transition back to business, he still finds time to accommodate Sir John's comedy. He goes through the sleeping giant's pockets, resolving to keep the bill for an "intolerable deal of sack" which he finds in them for some future plot (546). Once again, and with our complete approbation, the Prince is
caught back in the game of Falstaff's "monstrousness."

V.

When Hal finally emerges from the tavern to reveal himself as "the true Prince," he takes a reluctant and recalcitrant Sir John with him. It is during his tenure as a soldier fighting against the rebels that our relationship with the glib Knight grows more vexed. Our partial detachment from his comic vision results when he tries to transform the playworld outside the Boar's Head into comedy for less commendable motives than showing off his creative imagination and entertaining his audience. He is no longer so purely a "poet" now, for when he uses comedy as a cover-up for his conduct, it is more purposive and self-interested, more intended to be a cover-up. This deceptive quality in his transforming is highlighted by a clearer demarcation between fact and fiction than we have been shown before and by Falstaff's appearance on stage alone for the first time, where we watch him putting his comic mask into place. Knavelike, he reveals one face to us in his soliloquies before assuming another to encounter with Hal's disapproval of his unknightly behavior. However, though he shares some traits with them, he is not a knave even now, and his antics are still open and palpable rather than covert and dangerous. He poses no threat to the completion of Hal's
performance for his peers, and the Prince, because he recognizes what it is, can wave aside the comedy and refuse to "jest and dally" at a time when such "lightness" would prove fatal to his cause. Simultaneous with the change in the types of transformations Falstaff effects, then, is Hal's return to public life and to his place as heir to the throne, as he judiciously reveals the heroic qualities he has kept strategically concealed. Because the role he plays is not a false or usurped one, he catches not only his countrymen, but us too, to a great extent, into his version of the heroic romance.

A less frolicsome atmosphere prevails in the Boar's Head when we return to it, in III. iii, to find the Knight fretting over the loss of his sport. Little has happened in the wake of Hal's departure, and Falstaff's enthusiasm is on the wane, though not his comic appeal.65 "Am I not fall'n away vilely since this last action?" he grumbles to Bardolph, referring to the robbery and the playlet. "Do I not bate? Do I not dwindle" (1-2)? Forced by Hal's absence to assume responsibility for his tavern bill, he tries to remedy the situation by beguiling the hostess, little imagining that this scheme, too, is firmly in the royal hand that has recently picked his pocket. The Prince reenters the tavern during the quarrel between the debtor and his creditor, and the scene begins to brighten. Having returned to the tavern hopeful of an opportunity for a last fling
at fun, Hal restores briefly a touch of the carnival air and much of Sir John's good humor. Swearing that "three or four bonds of forty pound apiece and a seal of ring" have been stolen from his pocket as he slept in the tavern, Falstaff, as usual, becomes the Prince's "victim," and Hal prolongs the resultant jesting by playing his role as straight man (107-108). More quickly than before, however, he trots out the truth. "If thy pockets were enriched with any other injuries but these, I am a villain," he scolds, referring to the tavern reckonings, the sugar candy, and the other "treasures" he found earlier in Falstaff's pocket which testify to a dissolute existence (168-170). Typically, the "victim" wittily extricates himself from his dilemma and dexterously turns the trick back on the Prince. "You confess then, you picked my pocket?" he slyly inquires before magnanimously, and outrageously, forgiving the bewildered hostess (176).

Play at last begins to give way to work. Declaring to Sir John that he is now "good friends" with his father "and may do anything," Hal arouses in us a flickering suspicion that he might abandon his inheritance after all, if not actually to take advantage of his new alliance with Henry to rob the exchequer, as Falstaff proposes, at least to tarry longer in the tavern than he should (189-190). However, though he does not banish plump Jack, Hal's reply to the proposal does not encourage any lighthearted banter. Still,
he seems to want to savor the final moments of the sport. He answers Falstaff by reasserting the old joke about procuring his companion a charge of foot, and, by actually carrying through with the joke, he is, himself, extending comedy (at least his rather grim version of it) beyond the boundaries of the tavern world and onto the battlefield. The joke, however, has serious consequences as far as Falstaff is concerned, and the jesting spirit is visibly dampened. Hal then moves from the language of comedy to the heroic language he will employ in the political theater. "The land is burning, Percy stands on high,/And either we or they must lower lie."

"Rare words! Brave world!" is a disgruntled Falstaff's commentary offered to the Prince's retreating back (211-214). Put to the task of actually recruiting his "charge of foot," the old Knight is at last caught up in the troubles abroad. Throughout those sequences in the play in which Hal reigns as the splendid warrior-prince returning to claim his place in his country's regard, Falstaff, fully intending to come through the war unscathed if he can, is a troublesome transformer. Nevertheless, he retains much of his comic appeal. He is still not primarily interested in keeping up a good appearance and his fictions insist, not so much upon his honor—"honor" is one of those "rare words" for which he has little regard—but upon the value of his life. If his "sensible" anatomy of honor does not totally subvert
the Prince's or Douglas' brand of that virtue, it certainly looks through Percy's abstract and bloodless concept of it.

Many comic heroes find themselves unwittingly entangled in the larger actions of the plays which contain them. Falstaff, however, is more unwillingly than unwittingly entangled in the chaos fostered by Percy's rebellion, and rather than going about his job in this new landscape in a manner befitting his rank, he persists in turning all to comedy. As knaves frequently do, he takes us into his confidence and asks us to applaud his clever recruiting practices, for the first time showing us the truth openly before transforming it for Hal. In fact, it is the straightforwardness of Falstaff's presentation of them which rouses our pity for his soldiers. "I press me none but good householders, yeomen's sons," he winks at us invitingly,

I pressed me none but such toasts-and-butters, with hearts in their bellies no bigger than pins' heads, and they have bought out their services; and now my whole charge consists of ancients, corporals, lieutenants, gentlemen of companies—slaves as ragged as Lazarus in the painted cloth . . . the cankers of a calm world and a long peace.

(IV. ii, 14-31)

Despite his clever and humorous portrayal of the members of his ragged band, we are appalled at the prospect of such pathetic creatures being led to slaughter. Like Richard III, who transforms "peace on earth" into an object of ridicule to set his playmaking in motion, Falstaff entertains but dismays us too. The truth is that he has profited by
this venture and that he has, knavishly, changed the course of the action insofar as his men will be killed in battle, and that truth is too significant to wave aside. The threatened destruction of his army challenges his next comic transformation, effected when Hal enters and sees the charge of foot. Replying as if he were still in the Boar's Head and still able to entertain his audience with a "device," Falstaff quickly leaves the truth he has told us behind and brushes aside Hal's disapproval by transforming his soldiers into men who will "fill a pit as well as better," but the cleverness of the quip does not make us feel much relieved about the fate of the "pitiful rascals." This time, the "jest," having taken for its object the much too potent glimpse we have had of the human drama behind both the comedy and the political machinations, is not, in our eyes, turned back on Hal. The very presence of the ragged band, of course, gravely questions the morality of this war and of all those who participate in it, and Falstaff's transformation inadvertently reveals the real horror of death and destruction. Nevertheless, his wit makes light of circumstances which we cannot so easily dismiss, and regardless of the truth it accidentally reveals, it is no longer so "innocent" as it was.67

The effect of Falstaff's inability to engage us completely in his comedy at the expense of reality--the innocent deaths of his troops--further places as foolish and
unnecessary any concern that he can significantly alter or jeopardize Hal's fiction or the realm for which it is played out. He is, after all, no deeply committed and sly plotter like Richard, but the huge, red-cheeked, "open and apparent" Falstaff. While Robert Langbaum insists that his genius for creating his own world is, finally, dangerous, "since the single vision of life cannot be identical with it," it seems more accurate to say that, when Falstaff's fiction-making is no longer "poetry" but "propaganda," we can recognize the difference and withdraw ourselves from its grasp accordingly. 68 Hal, furthermore, is no more subject to "improper" transformations than are we and duplicates our partial disengagement from the old Knight. In the midst of the battle, for example, as Falstaff concludes his report to us that his "rag-of-muffins ... are peppered"—he reveals to us the truth again—the Prince arrives and the comic mask goes back on:

**Hal:** What, stands thou idle here? Lend me thy sword. Many a nobleman lies stark and still Under the hoofs of vaunting enemies, Whose deaths are yet unrevenged. I prithee Lend my thy sword.

**Fal:** O Hal, I prithee give me leave to breathe awhile. Turk Gregory never did such deeds in arms as I have done this day. I have paid Percy, I have made him sure.

**Hal:** He is indeed, and living to kill thee. I prithee lend me thy sword.

**Fal:** Nay, before God, Hal, if Percy be alive, thou gets not my sword; but take my pistol if thou wilt.
Hal: Give it me. What, is it in the case?

Fal: Ay, Hal. 'Tis hot, 'tis hot. There's that will sack a city.
(The Prince draws it out and finds it to be a bottle of sack.)

Hal: What, is it a time to jest and dally now?
(He throws the bottle at him. Exit)

(V. iii, 36, 40-57)

Hal resists all efforts on Sir John's part to divert him from his princely duties, and, though neither coldly nor with a kick, rebukes his less-than-patriotic countryman. In keeping with his role as the reformed Prince, he describes the dead noblemen in the language of heroic romance, and since playing a noble part for Falstaff's benefit can serve no useful purpose--Hal's cheerless brother John is not looking over his shoulder now--this scene suggests the degree to which he is actually invested in his role and to which he is a brave prince and the glory of his people.

At the same time, however, he is not so "lost" in his part that he cannot accommodate Falstaff's comedy nor so single-minded that he refuses to tolerate his "aberrant" behavior. Even now, Hal acknowledges comedy's call. He steps out of his heroic mode momentarily and addresses Falstaff in the tavern's language. Furthermore, he takes the old Knight's malingering fairly much in stride, since it is essentially harmless. He does not berate him for not doing his part, wishing only to borrow his idle sword, and he even licenses the comic atmosphere of this breathing space by
making a joke of Falstaff's humorous boast that he has "paid Percy." He loses patience only when he discovers that the jesting Knight's holstered weapon is a bottle of sack, and that he'll get no assistance here. Hal's investment in his princely role and in his cause does not come at the expense of his multiple perspective, and he does not, therefore, needlessly suppress Falstaff's attitudes toward war and fighting, as Hotspur, in his monocular seriousness, surely would. Falstaff's faults here do not threaten the outcome of the battle, and his comic "transformation" of his idleness--his "open and apparent" lie that the job Hal must do has already been done--does not derail the Prince, who merely throws the bottle of sack at its owner and leaves to close the interlude. In our eyes, however, Falstaff has partially undermined his own comic cause by leading his "rag-of-muffins" to their doom, a consequence that we, again, cannot see as comic or dismiss as easily as he does. Hal's clearsighted engagement into his role enlists our involvement in the heroic Romance, though we, too, can still recognize when comedy is appropriate. It is not difficult for us to answer his question at this point, however, and we see, with him, that the heat of the battle that will ultimately lead to his "restoration" is hardly a time for comedy or sack, or at least that comedy can only come at an interlude. When lives hang in the balance, the time is not ripe for jesting.
As Sir John's comic fictions loosen their grip on us, then, we see Hal with increasing frequency in his winning performance as the chivalric hero speaking the highly wrought language of romance. Act V, for instance, opens with Henry's "literary" observation that the sun peers "bloodily" above the hills and that the "day looks pale/At his distemp'rature," in contrast with the opening of I. ii, with its comic "non-setting." Hal responds in kind. "The southern wind," he adds to this portrait of a Nature which reflects men's actions, "doth play the trumpet to his purposes/And by his hollow whistling in the leaves/Foretells a tempest and a blust'ring day" (V. i, 1-7). We have already heard similar language from Vernon. After Hotspur's inquiry into the whereabouts of the "nimble-footed madcap Prince of Wales,/And his comrades, that daffed the world aside/And bid it pass," Vernon creates for us a stirring image of the "reformed" Prince and his army:

All furnished, all in arms;
All plumed like estridges that with the wind
Bated like eagles having lately bathed;
Glittering in golden coats like images;
As full of spirit as the month of May
And gorgeous as the sun at midsummer;
Wanton as youthful goats, wild as young bulls.
I saw young Harry with his beaver on,
His cushes on his thighs, gallantly armed,
Rise from the ground like feathered Mercury.

(IV. i, 93-105)

Hotspur's disparaging references to his enemy and Vernon's description are testimony to the absolute success, from the
viewpoint of his countrymen, of Hal's fiction. It largely succeeds with us, too, for there is nothing in the play to call into question Hal's real valor or the propriety of his assumption of a prince's role. He simply makes the best of his place in "history." Percy's indiscretion and his single-minded commitment to an unexamined honor undermine the principle of romantic heroism in whose name he purports to act. When Hal enters the "theater," however, he wisely acknowledges the courage of his enemies, thus transcending the petty jealousies which consistently mark the behavior of other characters. "I do not think a braver gentleman,/ More active-valiant or more valiant-young,/ . . . is now alive," he praises Hotspur. We remember that he is performing only when he apologizes to his "audience" for having "a truant been to chivalry" (V. i, 89-91, 94). However, this praise of an enemy and magnanimity of spirit are not pure pretense, as Hal's later tribute to his fallen rival will make clearer, and Hal is more generous than Percy, as that hot-blooded warrior's reaction to Vernon's depiction of the returned Prince shows. "No more, no more!" he sputters angrily. "Worse than the sun in March,/This praise doth nourish agues" (IV. i, 110-111). Hal brings to his conscious roleplaying what is lacking in Hotspur's unconsciously played version, discretion, wisdom, and largesse, thus providing his subjects with a comforting image of a prodigal son returned to rule his country and us
with a hero toward whom we are drawn. Though he has taken advantage of "fate," he has not, in any Machiavellian sense, manipulated it. If the two young rivals had their ways absolutely, the battle would involve only themselves, "Harry to Harry... hot horse to horse," struggling to win the world (IV. i, 121). But like the playworlds of Troilus and Cressida or Antony and Cleopatra, which are too cynical to accommodate Hector's brave challenge to Achilles or Antony's to Caesar, the playworld of 1 Henry IV is given over too much to policy to lend itself to such easy and complete shaping. The romance ending is marred by the deaths of others besides Hotspur.

Furthermore, in spite of our willingness to invest in the Prodigal Prince's fictional return and in spite of the play's suggestion that "history" cannot all be turned to comedy, the "heroic romance" fiction, even when it holds strongest sway over us, barely resists Falstaff's constant exposure of it. When the old Knight retorts, in response to more "rare words" from the rebels, that "rebellion lay" in Worcester's way "and he found it," the Prince must hurriedly shush him in order to maintain the proper atmosphere for "serious" business (V. i, 28-29). If Hal does not invite parody, Hotspur and his followers do, and Falstaff serves as commentator on the action as well as buffoonish imitator of it. Voicing his commitment to the belief that life, especially his, is more important than
honor, he provides a compelling counterpart to Hotspur's earlier, highly metaphorical vow to "dive into the bottom of the deep,/ . . . And pluck up drowned honor by the locks," a commendable goal in comparison with those of policy and statecraft, but one not commendably carried out (I. iii, 201, 203). Sir John's catechism exposes the shortcomings of indiscretionary honor, though it does not transform successfully any and every honorable action in the play into comedy. "Honor pricks me on," he asserts boldly enough, but then has second thoughts:

Yea, but how if honor prick me off when I come on? How then? Can honor set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honor hath no skill in surgery then? No. What is honor? A word. What is in that word honor? What is that honor? Air—a trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died a Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible then? Yea, to the dead.

(V. i, 129-138)

Sir John's comic translation does not fail to point out precisely the fate which will be Percy's, to die for a word and to lose all his "proud titles" to Hal. The young rebel's death is a bitter, not a triumphant one. "Thoughts," he laments in his last breath, are the "slaves of life." The idea applies especially to him, whose high thoughts are thwarted, not only by the Prince, but by himself also. Equally applicable to him is the opposite expression, furthermore, that life may be a slave to thoughts. It is,
indeed, as he recognizes, "time's fool/And time, that takes
survey of all the world,/Must have a stop" (V. iv, 79-81).
Unfortunately, Percy, whose vision of life was narrowly
restricted to his particular brand of "sport," died
knowing only half the truth, having never had the capacity
to experience the restorative balm of "timeless" comedy.

When the battle between Hotspur and Hal finally con­
cludes, the victorious Prince, alone on stage, addresses
the bodies of his fallen rival and his equally low-lying
tavern companion, who, in order to avoid being slain by
Douglas and caught out again by Hal, pretends to be slain
already. Always mindful of linguistic propriety, Hal
eulogizes Hotspur in courtly language, but his tribute to
Falstaff resorts to a quibble or two. "Fare thee well,
great heart," he addresses Percy,

Ill-weaved ambition, how much art thou shrunk!
When that this body did contain a spirit,
A kingdom for it was too small a bound.
(V. iv, 85-88)

In contrast to Percy's great spirit lodged in a small body,
he implies, is Falstaff's rather larger body but smaller,
though nonetheless attractive spirit:

What, old acquaintance? Could not all this flesh
Keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell!
I could have better spared a better man.
O, I should have a heavy miss of thee
If I were much in love with vanity.
Death hath not struck so fat a deer today,
Though many dearer, in this bloody fray.
Like characters at the conclusion of other plays, who, with varying degrees of accuracy and insight, sum up events and spell out the new order, Hal brings his "play" to a close, but there is a note of regret in his voice, an indication that his relationship with Vanity, whom he planned all along to dismiss eventually, is more complex than the one he initially conceived of. The symmetrical nature of the two speeches underlines Hal's propensity for orderly progression and control, but he cannot lay all that flesh to rest so easily. And, of course, as he speaks what he believes are his last words to the fat "corpse," Falstaff is threatening to steal the show back again.

VI.

Having almost been caught red-handed again at counterfeiting—getting caught thus is the talent for which he is most noted—Falstaff remains motionless on the battlefield as Hal delivers the eulogies. His discomfiture at having to consider the prospect of being "emboweled" and our certain knowledge that, momentarily, the corpse will spring to life and dismiss its dishonorable behavior with another outlandish "counterfeit," signal the play's transition back
toward comedy. Yet the experience of war has taken its toll and the carefree atmosphere of earlier times can never be fully restored. Falstaff's comic transformations are not, finally, as powerful as Cleopatra's will prove to be and cannot entirely repossess the landscape of 1 Henry IV. Like Hal's and Hotspur's heroic romance fictions, Falstaff's fiction is marred by "policy's" dead bodies.

After the Prince's exit, Sir John "riseth up" and defends his discretionary "valor" by translating the word "counterfeit," turning dead men into fraudulent counterfeiters and his own unheroical behavior into wisdom:

'Sblood, 'twas time to counterfeit, or that hot termagant Scot had paid me scot and lot too. Counterfeit? I lie; I am no counterfeit. To die is to be a counterfeit, for he is but the counterfeit of a man who hath not the life of a man; but to counterfeit dying when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed. The better part of valor is discretion.

(V. iv, 111-118)

His argument is a culmination and direct statement of the play's impulse to value life and the regard for life over too strict an attention to conventions or modes of perception, and like his catechism of honor, underlines the absurdity of Percy's death, though it cannot equally translate Blunt's truly valorous demise. Falstaff then casts about for a "device" which will ostensibly remedy his present predicament of having to explain his resurrection. He hits upon the idea of stabbing the newly fallen Percy and
swearing to Hal that that "gunpowder" fell by his hand. Though the plan is a good one and a characteristically outrageous one, we are taken aback slightly by his assault on the body. No "fiction," however comic, can dismiss the fact that "the perfect image of life" bears upon its back a bleeding corpse.

Nevertheless, Falstaff almost has his way with us completely when he brazenly deposits Percy at the feet of the very person who killed him and demands a reward. For the first time in the play, the Prince, at the sight of "Vanity" resurrected, is caught off guard and gasps out his surprise and pleasure. "Art thou alive," he demands, "or is it fantasy that plays upon our eyesight?/I prithee speak . . . ./Thou art not what thou seem'st" (132-135). Even though he knows the truth, Hal, out of sheer amazement, may not have this scheme in hand as firmly as he has had earlier ones, but he quickly begins to regain his composure when Falstaff proves that he truly is what he seems by indulging in another palpable fiction. "There is Percy. If your father will do me any honor, so; if not, let him kill the next Percy himself" (137-139). Hal, watched all this time by Prince John, "uneartths" the scheme instantly. "Why, Percy I killed myself, and saw thee dead!" he insists. Of course, Falstaff possessing on this occasion something of an upper hand, is not the least chagrined:
Didst thou? Lord, Lord, how this world is given to lying. I grant you I was down, and out of breath, and so was he; but we rose both at an instant and fought a long hour by Shrewsbury clock. If I may be believed, so: if not, let them that should reward valor bear the sin upon their own heads. I'll take it upon my death, I gave him this wound in the thigh. If the man were alive and would deny it, zounds! I would make him eat a piece of my sword.

(142-151)

In a world that is, as Falstaff says, "given to lying," his playful and harmless fictions stand apart, and, in this case, of course, he is telling the "truth" about the wound in Percy's thigh.

"Shakespearean drama," states Jonas Barish, "normally works toward a synthesis in which characters find themselves enhanced in their sympathies and more varied in their responses than before." At the end of 2 Henry IV, he says, "Hal is ashamed of his holiday, and he despises his dream," and the play gives us, rather than synthesis, "a forcible sundering" of the two kinds of experience in which the Prince participates. The ending of this play, however, differs radically from that of its sequel. Though he still has several minor details in his own fiction to which he must attend and does not have a large amount of time to spend in the comic mode, he makes room for it once again. He does not dismiss or even chastise jesting and dallying, as he did when the old Knight told this same transparent lie once before on the battlefield. Rather, at the same
time that he exposes the latest patently fictional "explanation" as a lie, he promises to "gild" it with "the happiest terms" he has, even though doing so will be at the expense of his own story (155-156). Hal's magnanimous gesture in Sir John's behalf marks his release from the grip of his own "script." He does not dismiss "Vanity," nor will he insist upon being credited for Hotspur's death. Though he has "a plain tale" with which to confute Falstaff's story--at least he does if his word will be taken against Falstaff's--he foregoes the telling of it, acknowledging thus both the harmlessness of, and his own pleasures in, the old Knight's fiction, as well as his relief at seeing him still alive. The overturning of his "ending," which would have been less inclusive, less expansive, and less interesting than the one Falstaff brings about, is not a matter of concern to Hal. The final "victory" belongs both to the romantic hero and the comic one, to the Knight for reasserting his comedy and to the Prince for tipping his hat, once again, to the world according to Falstaff.
"Only we die in earnest; that's no jest."
(Sir Walter Raleigh)

By setting comedy into history, 1 Henry IV suggests both the power and limitations of the "poetic truths" offered by the comic imagination. Most importantly, Falstaff's consciously chosen mode of perception virtually detaches him from the conventions which govern so much of the activity outside the Boar's Head and which tie men, almost irrevocably, to "historical necessity." He makes his own world to a very great extent, and it is replete with its own praiseworthy values. His fictions, furthermore, offer Hal a release from the emotionally and intellectually cloying need to submit to "fate" entirely, to play the role he must play, and to repress the ironic commentary which an informed perspective of "history's" progress feels compelled to provide.

Nevertheless, though Sir John is an enormously strong poet and even though the prosperity of his comic fictions may not lie absolutely in an audience's ear, the comic atmosphere is somewhat fragile, subject, in part, to the whims of an audience. It may be enhanced by an enthusiastic reception and dampened by a casual one. A much greater impact upon it may be made by other uncontrollable elements.
as well, and when death enters the picture, the comic air is inevitably challenged. Not only can death not be translated into comedy entirely, but the efficacy of the transformations is limited by the transformer himself, who cannot, and still remain comedy's "true and perfect image of life," seal his commitment to his vision with his own death. He must continuously uphold the value of life and present the argument for its continuance at all costs. But as the play suggests, life is not to be preserved at absolutely any cost, nor is a contemplation of death to be held forever in abeyance by comedy's "counterfeits." The totally successful poet, finally, is the poet whose capacity for fictionmaking is not challenged even by the threat of dying. Where Falstaff gives us a necessary alternative view of life, Cleopatra releases us into a world of "fictive truth" which takes precedence over all reality, as she transforms even her own death into poetic victory.
Chapter 3. "For Emphasis of Wit"

1 James L. Calderwood, in Metadrama in Shakespeare's Henriad: Richard II to Henry V (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1979) also believes that Shakespeare projects "his concerns about drama" into the history plays (p. 5). Calderwood touches on several of the points I make in this chapter, but his observations serve a view that is much more insistently metadramatic than mine is.


6 "In general," declares Harry Levin, in "Falstaff's Encore," Shakespeare Quarterly, 32 (1981), "the critics seem to be equally divided, voicing strong opinions in both camps, on the composition of Part Two, its relationship with Part One, the inclusion of the pair in a trilogy with Henry V, and of all three into a tetralogy with Richard II, coexisting in synoptic unity. Samuel Johnson heads the role of unitarians ... S. B. Hemingway, the Variorum editor of The First Part, speaks very forcefully on behalf of the pluralists" (p. 5). For further comment on this issue, see, for example, Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, pp. 264-66; Wilson, The Fortunes of Falstaff, pp. 90-91; and Harold Jenkins, "The Structural Problem in Shakespeare's Henry IV," Shakespeare: Henry IV Parts I and II, ed. G. K. Hunter (London: MacMillan, 1970), all of whom contend that the plays are to be read as one; and M. A. Shaaber, "The Unity of Henry IV," Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies, eds. James G. McManaway, Giles E. Dawson, and Edwin E. Willoughby (Washington, D. C.: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1948); and H. Edward Cain, "Further Light on the Relation of 1 and 2 Henry IV," Shakespeare Quarterly, 3 (1952), 21-38, who are opposed to the "unitarian" view. Many commentators on this
play simply assume that the two parts are to be read as one and that Falstaff is the same character in each part, but John Pettigrew, in "The Mood of Henry IV, Part 2," Stratford Papers, 1965-1967, ed. B. A. W. Jackson (Canada: McMaster Univ. Library Press, 1969) and Michael McCanles, Dialectical Criticism and Renaissance Literature (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1975) are among those who note important atmospheric differences between the two plays which are partially attributable to a change in Falstaff's character. Arguments that the play is not thematically unified or coherent unless viewed as half of a longer play have little bearing on my reading, which describes our evolving relationship with the "history" as it unfolds.

7 For other discussions of the theatrical elements in Shakespeare's histories, see James L. Calderwood, Metadrama in Shakespeare's Henriad; Anne Righter, Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962); Robert Ornstein, A Kingdom for a Stage; and Thomas F. Van Laan, Role-playing in Shakespeare (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1978).

8 "Hotspur's first speech, describing the courtier . . . . is finely conceived in the comic spirit; this is the man of action at his best. . . . What takes place after the king's angry departure, however, shows the subjection of this impulsive warrior to the labyrinth of political behavior," says Derek Traversi, in An Approach to Shakespeare, pp. 196-197.

9 With regard to the quarrels between Henry IV and the Percies, Peter Saccio states, in Shakespeare's English Kings: History, Chronicle, and Drama (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), that "Shakespeare does not decide which party has the better case: . . . each side is allowed to make sound points, occasionally to bluster, and occasionally to fall victim to undermining ironies" (p. 43).

10 Robert Ornstein, A Kingdom for a Stage, p. 22.

11 A. P. Rossiter, in Angel with Horns, rejects the pattern of retributive justice of the Tudor scheme in favor of one he terms "retributive reaction" (p. 43).

12 Herman Melville, Billy Budd and Other Stories, eds. Kenneth S. Lynn and Arno Jewett (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1970), p. 204. "Truth uncompromisingly told will always have its ragged edges" because "the symmetry of form attainable in pure fiction can not so readily be achieved in a narration essentially having less to do with fables than with fact" (p. 204).
Robert C. Jones, *Engagement with Knavery: Point of View in "Richard III," "The Jew of Malta," "Volpone," and "The Revenger's Tragedy,"* a work-in-progress. The term "knaves" as Jones applies it to Barabas, Vindice, Volpone, and Richard III, "includes a full measure of villainy along with its mischievous wit." My argument will suggest that Falstaff is not a knave, since our enjoyment of his sport is not inhibited by any real criminal activity on his part.


Almost all audiences of the Henry IV plays see some sort of mixture of crime and sport in Falstaff. Those who believe there is a heavier dose of crime than sport, the "moralists" we may call them, generally view the old Knight as a potential source of danger to Hal, and they frequently trace his lineage back to the Vice figure of the morality plays or equate him with some other type of "immoral" comic character. Rosalie Colie, in *Shakespeare's Living Art* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1974), conveniently lists the kinds of characters with whom he is most often identified:

We recognize in Falstaff the braggart soldier, the parasite, and the buffone of Latin comedy, commedia dell'arte: we recognize in him . . . the Vice of the morality play, Mundus with his Infans, Gluttony, Appetite, Riot, and the rest of the temptations besetting this important prodigal son; we recognize in him the Lord of Misrule and Carnival of folkish and medieval festival (p. 19).

Perhaps the leading spokesperson for this position is John Dover Wilson, in *The Fortunes of Falstaff*. Others who have a strong "moralist" bent include E. E. Stoll, *Falstaff* (Darby, Pa.: Darby Books [Norwood Editions], 1977; rpt. from *Modern Philology*, 12 (1914), 65-108, who refutes...
A. C. Bradley's and Maurice Morgann's "sentimentalist" positions; D. C. Boughner, "Traditional Elements in Falstaff," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 43 (1944), who places Falstaff with the braggart soldier; and Irving Ribner, The English History Plays, who warns that "we must always remember that Falstaff is the destructive element" (p. 171).

Maurice Morgann's "An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff" (1777), Shakespearian Criticism, ed. Daniel A. Fineman (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972) is unquestionably the foundation stone of the "sentimentalist" school, composed of audiences who, while they may acknowledge a criminal element in Falstaff's character, believe that his villainy is counterbalanced by an almost irresistible wit and humor. Critics of this persuasion point not infrequently to deficiencies in the character of Hal, Hotspur, and Henry. Thus they move even further away from Wilson's "morality play" reading and toward a view which holds that the rejection of Falstaff, at the end of 2 Henry IV, reflects more on Hal and his world than on Falstaff. A. C. Bradley, for example, in "The Rejection of Falstaff," believes that Shakespeare meant the second play to end pleasantly but failed to weaken our attachment to Falstaff (p. 259); A. P. Rossiter, in Angel with Horns, charges that the rigidity of the Tudor scheme oversimplifies the Knight, and he equates John Dover Wilson with the humorless Prince John (p. 45). According to John Palmer, in Political Characters of Shakespeare, Falstaff embodies "the genial humanity and free play of the mind" which the politicians must give up (p. 187). Jones Barish, in "The Turning Away of Prince Hal," declares that, at the end of the second play, "it is the kill-joys who win out and the spirit of Carnival who is . . . placed under lock and key in the Fleet" (p. 10). Norman Rabkin, in Shakespeare and the Common Understanding, and Derek Traversi, in "Henry IV, Part I: History and the Artist's Vision," William Shakespeare's "Henry the Fourth, Part I," A Norton Critical Edition, ed. James L. Sanderson (New York: Norton, 1962; rev. ed., 1969; rpt., 1972) from Scrutiny, 15 (1947), pp. 24-35, agrees with Palmer and Barish that Hal's rejection of Falstaff is a sign of the narrowness of the political world; and Robert M. Torrance, in The Comic Hero, supports Morgann's contention that Falstaff is a "knave without malice" (p. 111).

It is actually impossible, however, to assign most critics, including the ones I have assigned, exclusively to one or the other of these camps, since most acknowledge the complexity of Falstaff's character. They might be arranged, instead, along a spectrum whose extremes are the moralist and sentimentalist positions, and many would surely agree with Alfred Harbage's view, in As They Liked It: An Essay on Shakespeare and Morality (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1947), that Sir John is a "moral paradox" who arouses our good feelings as well as our impulse to pass moral judgment on him (pp. 81-82).
18. Waldo F. McNeir, "Structure and Theme in The First Tavern Scene (II. iv) of 1 Henry IV," Pacific Coast Studies in Shakespeare, eds. Waldo F. McNeir and Thelma N. Greenfield (Eugene: Univ. of Oregon, 1966), links Falstaff with Parolles and Sir Andrew Aguecheek (p. 98), and E. E. Stoll, in Falstaff, links him with Malvolio and Bessus (pp. 7, 13, and 27), characters whom I offer as contrasts to him.


20. C. L. Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy, p. 69.


23. Falstaff's "funniest moments invariably fill us with the joy of recognizing his preposterous insistence on remaining young despite his considerable age," asserts Norman Rabkin in Shakespeare and the Common Understanding (p. 95); and Robert G. Hunter, in "Shakespeare's Comic Sense as it Strikes Us Today," declares that "Falstaff copes with the fact of time's linearity by stoutly denying it . . ." (p. 127).

24. Robert G. Hunter, in "Shakespeare's Comic Sense as it Strikes Us Today," agrees that "Falstaff copes with melancholy by playing with Hal at finding similes for it" (p. 127).


26. C. L. Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy, p. 69.

27. Anne Righter, Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play, p. 106.


29 Numerous critics discuss the parallels between the comedy and the history, usually to demonstrate the manner in which Falstaff's tavern world sheds light on the political world. See, for example, Gareth Lloyd Evans, "The Comical-Tragical-Historical Method," who says that the comedy is used to "deepen and underline" the "serious" action of the play (p. 213); Robert Hapgood, "Falstaff's Vocation," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 16 (1965), who says that Shakespeare makes use of "the thieveries of low life to illuminate the thieveries in high life, both by resemblance and contrast" (p. 94); L. C. Knights, "Henry IV as Satire," *William Shakespeare, Henry the Fourth, Part I*, A Norton Critical Edition, ed. James L. Sanderson (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1962; 1969), who declares that the "satire is general, directed against statecraft and warfare" (p. 333); D. A. Traversi, "Henry IV, Part I," who says that "Falstaff is . . . used as a commentator who passes judgements on the events represented in the play in the light of his own superabundant comic vitality" (p. 327); Robert M. Torrance, *The Comic Hero*, who observes that Falstaff "mocks the serious world not by railing at its defects, but by incorporating and magnifying its follies in his own preposterous person" (p. 123); and Irving Ribner, who notes that Falstaff "serves . . . as a comic commentary upon the austere world of kings and nobles, enabling us to see this world in a clearer perspective," in *The English History Plays* (p. 172). C. L. Barber, in *Shakespeare's Festive Comedies*, notes the difference in the relationship between the two parts of the play in the first three acts from that relationship in the last acts when he points out that, though "Falstaff's comedy is continuously responsive to the serious action" and that there are "constant parallels and contrasts with what happens at court" during the early acts, "these parallels are not explicitly noted" (p. 199).


32 Hotspur "confounds fact with fiction no less cavalierly than Falstaff, but without Falstaff's conscious
mastery," says Robert M. Torrance, in *The Comic Hero* (p. 129). Other critics also place Hotspur and Falstaff in opposition to one another, though usually to argue that the two represent extremes between which Hal is the mean. See, for example, Maynard Mack, "Introduction to *The History of Henry the Fourth (Part One),*" *The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare,* ed. Sylvan Barnet (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972), p. 641; Marion Bodwell Smith, *Dualities in Shakespeare* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1966), who says that Hal is "the exemplar of the golden mean between the vanity of Hotspur's view of honor and the depravity of Falstaff's" (p. 34); John Palmer, in *Political Characters of Shakespeare,* who sees "practical Falstaff" dismissing honor "as a mere word," and a "romantic Hotspur, who is ready to pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon" (p. 187); and William B. Hunter, Jr., "Prince Hal, His Struggle Toward a Moral Perfection," *William Shakespeare's "Henry the Fourth, Part I."

33 Leonard Dean, in "From Richard II to Henry V," speaks of "the brilliantly despicable way in which Worcester and Northumberland needle Hotspur while pretending to soothe him" (p. 47); and Derek Traversi, in *An Approach to Shakespeare,* points out that "Hotspur, out of his depth, salutes his uncle's contrivance as 'a noble plot,' whilst Worcester more accurately reveals its foundations in guilt and expediency" (p. 198).

34 G. M Pincis, in "The Old Honor and the New Courtesy: I Henry IV," *Shakespeare Survey,* 31 (1978), places all the blame for the rebellion on Percy. He argues that Bolingbroke's refusal to ransom Hotspur's brother-in-law Mortimer, to consult with his father and uncle on matters of state, and to acknowledge the assistance of the Percys in taking the throne from Richard II are cited as particular reasons for rebelling. But all of those causes should be subsumed under one heading, Percy's "desire to 'pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon'" (p. 86).

35 The scene in which Hotspur reads the letter, says Waldo F. McNeir, "reiterates the traits" revealed earlier—Hotspur's "cocksureness, lack of caution, romantic idea that an 'honorable' plot against the King is bound to succeed, contempt and scorn of opposition or disagreement,
ruthless self-absorption—and adds the effect of these on his relations with his loved but neglected wife" ("Structure and Theme in the First Tavern Scene," p. 92).

36 Hotspur "in a high dudgeon insists that the river Trent be turned ..." and "only the cooler head of the Welsh leader preserves the fragile rebel alliance," according to Larry S. Champion, in Perspectives in Shakespeare's English Histories (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1980), p. 124.

37 William Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral, p. 29. Several other critics make this point also. See, for example, Gareth Lloyd Evans, "The Comical-Tragical-Historical Method," p. 195.


40 Alvin B. Kernan, in The Playwright as Magician, voices our discomfort: "... if, in Hal, Shakespeare portrays the perfect actor, ... his success at once raises certain deeper questions about the uses to which acting and theater may be put" (p. 84). Robert M. Torrance, in The Comic Hero, also speaks to our ambivalent feelings about Hal, acknowledging that, though he will "turn his skills not to murder and self-aggrandizement, like Richard, but to the benefit of his people," deception and falsity "are intrinsic to his policy ..." (p. 118). Referring to this particular speech in An Approach to Shakespeare, Derek Traversi points out, quite rightly, I think, that Hal, despite his self-control, does react to "the galling superiority attributed to his rival," but I do not agree that, at this point, a "rigid war machine" is born (p. 208).

41 Falstaff's relationship with Hal "is the motive power behind most of the comedy of Part I and provides the circumstances through which we come to know Falstaff himself," asserts Moody E. Prior, in an interesting article entitled "Comic Theory and the Rejection of Falstaff," Shakespeare Studies, 9 (1976). Hal's "amused sympathy with Falstaff is one of the things we share with him" (p. 167). With a somewhat less positive view of the relationship, Gareth Lloyd Evans, in "The Comical-Tragical-Historical Method," says that "Falstaff's comic genius needs something equal in magnificence to itself to feed upon. It
must have Hal to gorge its pride and joy and exultation" (p. 206). The whole question of Hal's real feelings about Falstaff is something of a vexed one. I think Robert Torrance is correct in asserting that Falstaff, in his "total dependence on the Prince's continued good will" is "vulnerable as no comic hero has been before" (The Comic Hero, p. 120). Other critics feel that Hal, in spite of the fact that he is entertained by Falstaff, is disdainful of the old Knight, and I think that, to a certain extent, that is probably true. His detachment, as it does in the speech to his father, makes us unsure about his attitudes, even when he is participating in the comedy. For other discussions of Hal's feelings about Falstaff, see, for example, W. H. Auden, "The Prince's Dog," p. 196; Muriel C. Bradbrook, "King Henry IV," Stratford Papers on Shakespeare, ed. B. A. W. Jackson (Canada: McMaster Univ. Library Press, 1969; for the 1965-67 sessions of the Shakespeare Seminar), p. 175; G. F. Bradby, "Falstaff," p. 60; A. C. Bradley, "The Rejection of Falstaff," p. 269; Willard Farnham, The Shakespearean Grotesque: Its Genesis and Transformations (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 83; John Palmer, Political Characters of Shakespeare, pp. 188-189; Waldo F. McNeir, "Structure and Theme in the First Tavern Scene," p. 97; and Irving Ribner, The English History Plays, p. 173.

42 "There was never a less villainous planning than this for Gadshill," says Gareth Lloyd Evans, in "The Comical-Tragical-Historical Method" (p. 197). But like many audiences, he argues that the robbery's "chief virtue" is the unmasking of Falstaff's cowardice. Moody E. Prior, in "Comic Theory and the Rejection of Falstaff," summarizes my own argument when he points out the distinction between a standard comic situation, in which "Falstaff would be a comic butt whose failings are exposed" and this situation in which the trap is set to provide Falstaff "with an opportunity to display his wit . . ." (p. 44). A. C. Bradley's observation that Poins and Hal wait eagerly to convict Falstaff, "not that they may really put him to shame, but in order to enjoy the greater lie that will swallow up the less" suggests also the "unconventional" nature of this comic situation ("The Rejection of Falstaff," p. 264).

43 Defending Hal's part in the robbery, Hugh Dickinson says that our moral teeth are drawn not so much by the fact that the money is paid back again, "but by our delightful complicity in the event" ("The Reformation of Prince Hal," Shakespeare Quarterly, 12 (1961), p. 42).
44 Seeking to explain this curious scene, Gareth Lloyd Evans asserts that Hal momentarily "relaxes his hold on the conscious curriculum of his 'education,' and engages with that he had decided to observe. In short, he is drunk" ("The Comical-Tragical-Historical Method," p. 198). For other views see, for example, J. D. Shuchter, "Prince Hal and Francis: The Imitation of an Action," Shakespeare Studies, 3 (1968 for 1967), who claims that Hal brings Francis "into a situation which mirrors the conflicts which plague Hal himself . . ." (p. 130); and Waldo McNeir, "Structure and Theme in the First Tavern Scene," who also believes that the jest parallels several themes of the play (pp. 93-94).

45 Basically, I agree with James L. Calderwood's observation that Falstaff is an "inveterate improviser" who can "use words only in the present; he cannot enlist them in the service of future action. He has no plans or programs. In short, he cannot plot, he can only extemporize to evade the plots of others" (Metadrama in Shakespeare's Henriad, p. 43). However, Calderwood implies that Falstaff is not capable of plotting; I would argue that he simply is not interested in plotting. Furthermore, there is a shadow of a Falstaffian plot here, though it does, I think, "collapse" in fairly short order.

46 There is some critical debate over whether or not Falstaff suspects the trick from the very beginning, but there is nothing in the play that raises the question. As Maynard Mack points out, in "Engagement and Detachment in Shakespeare's Plays," the scene is not interested in the "truth about Falstaff's consciousness" but in "the dramaturgical effect of thwarted expectancy," as Falstaff refuses to play the role set down for him (p. 292).

47 A. R. Humphreys, in "Falstaff," Shakespeare's Histories: An Anthology of Modern Criticism, ed. William A. Armstrong (Baltimore: Penguin, 1972), from the introductions to the Arden Shakespeare editions of The First Part of Henry IV (1961) and The Second Part of Henry IV (1966) (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1961 and 1966), says that the "exaggerations are not to be explained realistically by the argument that so acute a wit cannot expect so absurd a yarn to be believed and is merely countermirgin the Prince and Poins for the truth he has detected: he has not detected it, but, like the brilliant stage-comic he is, he has an invention full of nimble and delectable shapes which he exercises on all possible occasions" (p. 217). For another view of these events which differs even more from mine, see Waldo F. McNeir, "Structure and Theme in the First Tavern Scene," pp. 96-97. Derek Traversi, in
An Approach to Shakespeare, notes that Falstaff's transformations of the incident make it "a satire of the exaggerations of heroic warfare" (p. 42).

48 Maynard Mack, "Engagement and Detachment in Shakespeare's Plays," p. 293. However, Mack makes Hal a frustrated loser in the game to expose Falstaff rather than a participant in the comedy.

49 Says James L. Calderwood, "it is Hal who directs the 'exposure' of Falstaff in the Boars Head Tavern after Gadshill, setting the stage, supplying Falstaff with leading questions, acting as straight man" (Metadrama in Shakespeare's Henriad, pp. 77-78).

50 Waldo McNeir, in "Structure and Theme in the First Tavern Scene," holds, however, that Falstaff is "incapable of shame" and that "he gladly believes he has regained Hal's affection and gleefully learns the loot from the robbery is intact" (p. 98).

51 See Footnotes 17 and 18.


53 Referring to Falstaff in a more general sense, A. C. Bradley says that "besides laughing at Falstaff, we are made happy by him and laugh with him" ("The Rejection of Falstaff," p. 261).


55 For a view which sees Falstaff operating here as if he were like a Vice, see Waldo F. McNeir, "Structure and Theme in the First Tavern Scene," p. 100.

56 In an interesting discussion of this scene, Thomas F. Van Laan argues that Falstaff is trying to "control Hal's more permanent role-playing, to determine what kind of king he shall be," but Van Laan recognizes also that he
is more interested in role-playing for pleasure (Role-Playing in Shakespeare, p. 148). Waldo F. McNeir believes, however, that Falstaff's major purpose is to use his role "for self-praise and self-justification" ("Structure and Theme in the First Tavern Scene," p. 101).

57 "When . . . Hal assumes the crown and reprimands Falstaff . . . excellent sport imperceptibly gives way to a private joke in grim earnest" (Robert Torrance, The Comic Hero, p. 127).


59 Waldo F. McNeir, in "Structure and Theme in the First Tavern Scene," believes that Hal's joking with Falstaff about being hanged "is the first clear forecast of the rejection of Falstaff" (p. 95); and Derek Traversi, in An Approach to Shakespeare, also sees the gallows jokes as evidence of Hal's detachment from Falstaff (p. 194).

60 "From the beginning," says Robert M. Torrance, in The Comic Hero, "Prince Henry has seen 'fat-guts' in terms of a gross physicality that he finds amusing but secretly disdains" (p. 127).


62 "He can afford to take a nap when the sheriff comes to the inn to inquire about the robbery because Hal will take care of that small hanging matter," states Moody E. Prior, in "Comic Theory and the Rejection of Falstaff," p. 165. Waldo McNeir believes that Falstaff falls asleep only after he overhears the Prince tell the sheriff that the man for whom he searches isn't in the tavern ("Structure and Theme in the First Tavern Scene," p. 104). A. C. Bradley also comments on the fact that Falstaff, rather than quaking with fear, falls asleep ("The Rejection of Falstaff," p. 267).

63 Again, Moody E. Prior, in "Comic Theory and the Rejection of Falstaff," notes, with respect to the picking of Falstaff's pockets, that "what in a fairly conventional
comic design would be the comic exposure of the failings of a dupe is in Falstaff's case the preparation for an opportunity to see a brilliant humorist recover" (p. 165).

64 For a discussion of Knaves' relationship with their audience, see Robert C. Jones, Engagement with Knavery.

65 See Footnote 41.

66 Jones, Engagement with Knavery.

67 Robert M. Torrance, in The Comic Hero, says that "in acknowledging that he is marching his rag-of-muffins off to their deaths as 'food for powder,' " Falstaff "punctures the age-old glorification of war . . ." (p. 132). I agree with this view except that I would emphasize that the puncturing is an inadvertant by-product of Falstaff's excusing himself. I also think Harry Levin is correct in suggesting that "it is just as well that we have had no first-hand view" of Falstaff's regiment "since later we are callously informed that all but two or three of them have been killed off" ("Falstaff's Encore," p. 15). The view of the men we are given through Falstaff is as close as the play can afford to take us to them and still bring the Knight's comedy off relatively intact. If we were to witness the slaying of Francis Feeble, for example, we would probably have a much more difficult time partaking of the comic fare Falstaff serves up here than we do now. Leonard Dean, in "Three Notes on Comic Morality: Celia, Bobadill, and Falstaff," Studies in English Literature: 1500-1900, 16 (1976), offers a totally different reading of the scene and declares that "Tush, man, mortal men . . ." is Falstaff's "finest gag," and, while I do not agree with him, his statement underlines the fact that we still see the Knight as a comedic figure even though we are slightly detached from him here (p. 267).


69 The Prince's jesting farewell "is the sort which accords with the jesting and affectionate companionship of the two in the past. It conveys a depth of feeling that perhaps would not be conveyed by a mere solemn tribute," say Cleanth Brooks and Robert B. Heilman, in "Shakespeare, Henry IV, Part I," p. 221.

70 For a different view of Falstaff's "counterfeiting," see James L. Calderwood, Metadrama in Shakespeare's Henriad, pp. 72-75. Robert M. Torrance makes many of the points I wish to make here, in The Comic Hero. He says, for example, that, in the "counterfeiting" speech, Falstaff "articulates
for the first time his governing belief in the superior reality of make-believe" (p. 133). He also notes that "we are delighted when he calls death a counterfeit, but scandalized when he stabs a dead man; we cease laughing when our own taboos are no longer inviolate" (p. 133-134). I don't think we cease laughing entirely, however.


72 Robert M. Torrance, in The Comic Hero, states that "the Prince is constrained to share his honors in the hour of his greatest triumph; but his willingness to gild Falstaff's preposterous lie implies no lasting concord between them" (p. 134). I see nothing to constrain Hal, however. In fact, he gilds the lie in spite of the presence of Prince John, who is suspicious of "the strangest tale" that ever he heard. James L. Calderwood, with a very different reading, argues that Hal gilds the lie in order to lure Falstaff back into the historical fiction. It is the price Hal must pay to restore "the mode of dramatic reality to which Percy was so totally committed" (Metadrama in Shakespeare's Henriad, pp. 85, 80).

CHAPTER 4. THE HONEST LIE

A very honest woman, but something
given to a lie, as a woman should not
do but in the way of honesty
(Antony and Cleopatra)

I.

Seduced by an Egyptian enchantress and no longer "Lord
of his reason," an aging Roman hero squanders away his em­
pire to a younger and less accomplished rival. Once
rulers over vast domains, he and his mistress find them­
selves in a rapidly shrinking universe, until, having no
room left to "breathe between the heavens and earth," they
are driven to kill themselves. Though these are the bare
facts of the story, most readers will agree they no more
describe our experience with The Tragedy of Antony and
Cleopatra than the Prodigal Son myth, which casts Falstaff
as a seducer, describes 1 Henry IV. While Caesar benefits
from the excesses of Egypt and from the Roman gossip which
has Cleopatra's witchcraft dulling her lover's wit, both
the witch and the libertine, like Falstaff and Hal, resist
any efforts to define them so formulaically. In the play's
opening scene, for example, we find ourselves somewhat at
odds with an on-stage "chorus" when it describes the inter­
action between the two in such terms. "Take but good note,"
Philo prompts Demetrius as Antony and Cleopatra enter, "and you shall see in him/The triple pillar of the world transformed/Into a strumpet's fool" (I. i, 11-13). Sure enough, Cleopatra's taunting words effect a transformation in Antony. Stung by her derisive accusations that he is at Caesar's and Fulvia's beck and call, he impetuously shrugs off his public responsibilities and sets against them a private world of love:

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space,
Kingdoms are clay: our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man. The nobleness of life
Is to do thus: when such a mutual pair
And such a twain can do't, in which I bind
On pain of punishment, the world to weet
We stand up peerless.2

With the wink of a lover's eye, he eclipses reality and appears to be Cleopatra's "fool." But he is not simply a fool. His depiction of a life with Cleopatra that outshines Rome and the empire is compelling, and we almost forget what the onlookers have warned us to expect. In fact, we are somewhat startled to hear them conclude that the exchange between the two confirms the gossip of the "common liar," which has it that Antony's noble "captain's heart" has become the "bellows and the fan/To cool a gypsy's lust" (60, 6, 9-10). While it is true, as Demetrius says, that Caesar and his business are prized lightly by Antony, we do not see Cleopatra's efforts to
distract him as necessarily lust-induced, nor does his vision of a beautiful private life seem altogether absurd. His dream may be an impossible one, but if it is not, or cannot, be real, perhaps it should be.³

We gradually realize, however, that Antony, somewhat like Hotspur, is a captive of the imagination that erases empires and exalts love, and hence a captive of the woman upon whom his imagination focuses. His vision of an existence in which embraces are more precious than empires prevents him from performing his duties as a triumvir satisfactorily, even when he tries to break away from the enchanting Queen. It also blinds him to her foibles and failings. If she were the woman he imagines her to be and they lived together the life he envisions in their opening exchange, a kiss would be worth everything; but through a large portion of the play, Cleopatra is not an unimpeachably faithful mistress, remarkable woman though she always is, and she belies her lover's transforming vision of her with her wavering commitment to him.

Despite their shortcomings, however, both Antony and Cleopatra are magnificent creatures, representatives of a vanishing breed of heroes for whom the essentially dreary political stage is much too small. Both conceptualize life on a grand scale, but the "modern" world offers little room for their conceptions to be realized. It has no place for Antony's idea of honor nor for Cleopatra's rich and vibrant
love for life, her mystique, or her sexuality. Incapable of being truly interested in the quest for power for its own sake, Antony tries unsuccessfully to make politics a medium for honorable and heroic behavior. Tormented by the thought that his reputation is crumbling, and stung by the Roman gossips who label him a strumpet's fool, he searches for his place in the political scene and attempts to act in the logical and rational fashion expected of him by his peers, but he is too passionately committed to Cleopatra, too engrossed in his identity crisis, too "large," in essence, to provide the cunning touch necessary to statecraft for very long. When he returns to Cleopatra after his stint with the politicians, he dreams again of life in which being the greatest prince in the world means being the godlike lover and warrior-servant of a matchless queen whose throne he can decorate with kingdoms and provinces. Unfortunately, Antony does not always know the difference between his visionary realms and real ones. Though his own transformations are powerful and moving, they are like Hieronimo's in that they call upon our sympathy without engaging us into their visions of the world, for we realize that they frequently distort and disfigure.

Cleopatra, too, begins to feel the encroachment of a regime that can use, but not appreciate, remarkableness, and it is her remarkableness, not her craftiness, that is the essence of her power over those around her. She reacts
with stunning pain and emotional force to signals that
the "brave new world" is no longer in awe of her or that
Rome may hold greater attraction for Antony than she or
Egypt do. Her confidence in herself as "Cleopatra," the
irresistible Egyptian loved by the greatest men in the
world, depends much upon Antony, the Roman who is worthy
to be her lover and who can "piece/Her opulent throne"
with empires and kings. When he is away, the hours drag.
She thinks on him when Mardian mentions "what Venus did
with Mars," and then playfully and consciously evokes a
world, as he does compulsively in I. i, with which she
fills the vacuum created by his absence. She imagines
a "demi-Atlas" whose horse must be happy, as she has
been, to bear his weight. When she is not inventing, she
is recalling such times as when she laughed Antony out
of patience and then laughed him in again or when she
played a practical joke on him. However, even as she
"remembers" him, Antony is denouncing her to the Romans
as he unwittingly serves Caesar's purposes in the poli-
tical struggle for control of the Empire. Cleopatra's
imagination, her variety, her humor, and her dramatic
sense of life imbue her intimate moments with her lover
and her "empty hours" with a significance equal to or
greater than that we assign to the matters which occupy
the triumvirate; but her Egyptian mode, which values
these "lesser things," is being seriously threatened both
by Caesar and by Antony. Antony's return to Rome and his subsequent marriage to Octavia are telling blows to her sense of herself as "Cleopatra," and she must work desperately to keep that sense in place, even resorting, at one point, to blatant self-deception. When Mark Antony does return to Egypt, he loses his political position, and Cleopatra, whose own stature requires kingdoms to be laid at her feet, contemplates deserting him. As Caesar's victories make conditions increasingly less tolerable for them, the two lovers struggle to preserve their more vital and heroic lives in the real world, but more and more they are driven apart, and their imaginations and memories become the main preserve of that "better" life.

Yet Antony and Cleopatra, so frequently at odds in the play, are at their best when they are together and "playing" for each other. They find nourishment, courage, and the strength to make reality resemble their grand and heroic conception of themselves and their love only when each believes in his transformed vision of the other and is trying to live up to the role of consort to the other's greatness and nobility. Only during those brief moments when both have an investment, even if it is a tentative one, in their vitalizing vision of life, do they actually approach being the matchless pair they envision themselves to be and thereby engage us in that version of experience which values a kiss over an empire. In truth, the perfect
moment does not occur until Cleopatra's triumphant suicide, and we are kept from a complete engagement in the lovers' heroic version of their "story" throughout most of the play. On the one hand, Antony's belief in his exalted view of Cleopatra is sometimes blind and often compulsive, and he oscillates between that view and his anger at her for betraying him. On the other, Cleopatra grows doubtful and sceptical of her lover, demonstrating a lack of confidence which threatens to make a mockery of his love. Though she is the playful inventor of a "demi-Atlas," it becomes clear to her that the real Antony is something less than a Titan, and she hesitates to place her trust in the "dream" in whose grasp Antony finally dies. For a time, it appears that she will abandon him and then, after his death, abandon his memory—that she will desert to Caesar, and thus render the imaginative world of "Antony and Cleopatra" an absurd shadow of reality.

But Cleopatra, the conscious dramatist and dreamer, at last stabilizes the fleeting moments of greatness the couple has together and makes the private "dreamworld" worth losing the Empire for after all. Rather than proving to be an irredeemable boggler and a faithless mistress and thereby permitting the heroic vision to fade away forever, she reasserts both her own and Antony's stature by choosing to "believe" in her transformed version of her dead lover and then by giving what that lover deserves from her.
Aware, as he never is, that she is lending credence to a "fancy," she creates an image composed of the best that is in Antony, and with that vision before her eyes, gives the best that is in her by following him to death. It is as Cleopatra's consciously created fiction, finally, that the "dream" of a better world than Caesar's, peopled by larger-than-life lovers, is made proof against reality's ironic deflation, and it is her faith in the potency of imagination and poetic transformation that allows her to impose the imagined realm upon the real one and alter forever the final shape of hers and Antony's lives.

Given its historical setting, *Antony and Cleopatra* is astonishingly bold in its insistence that we recognize and value the regenerative potential of poetic imagination and poetic vision, and its "poet" is a more compelling creator than is Falstaff, her comic counterpart. The Roman play makes us acutely conscious of its clashes between imagination and reality, emotion and reason, impulse and calculation. It dwells upon the idea that we must sometimes relinquish our hold on "rational" thought—we must sometimes be "children o' th' time" rather than possessors of the time—and follow a higher truth dictated to us by the emotions. More importantly for this thesis, it asks us to "succumb" to the seductive influence of the poet and suggests that if we cannot value the truths of poetic fictions over those of the "real" world, we cannot remake
or renew our lives. We cannot, without poetic imagination, "[earn] a place i' th' story" but must accept what is assigned to us. Like other characters in the play, including Enobarbus and Antony, Cleopatra must eventually decide whether to do the reasonable thing or the "irrational" one. Her hesitation in making the choice disengages us from her for a time, so much so that stealing the show back is more difficult for her than it is for Falstaff. But she accomplishes that task when she makes up her mind, follows her feelings, and chooses to "believe" in her transformed image of Antony. This act of faith catches us up in the vision of a realm in which she and her lover rule and in which their deaths are tragic. Not only does Cleopatra earn a place in the story, she effectively remakes the story.  

Before turning to a closer examination of Cleopatra, I would like to describe briefly the playworld in which she operates and introduce the other important transformers in her play. These digressions will suggest what the landscape would be like without Cleopatra and thus, I hope, help us place and clarify her transforming influence. To an even greater extent than in 1 Henry IV, our perceptions of the playworld of Antony and Cleopatra are filtered through the distorting lenses of various kinds of
transformers and fictionmakers. Antony, Cleopatra, Caesar, and Enobarbus all attempt to form and give significance to their lives. As their efforts to impose a shape upon the "present" are foiled and as the end seems increasingly inevitable, all but Caesar turn their eyes upon the future, seeking to protect their good names and win a place in history (as many Shakespearean characters do) by asserting some shaping influence over their deaths. In such a landscape, it is difficult, and at times impossible, to determine who is right or what is real, as characters interpret and translate events and each other to justify a variety of actions, to promote themselves, or, in the case of self-deluding transformers, to "see" what they wish to see. Perhaps we are safe in describing this landscape only if we use Antony's wonderful nondescription of that Egyptian curiosity, the crocodile: "It is shaped . . . like itself" (II. vii, 43). Cleopatra's poetic transformation at the end of the play stands out sharply against this mercurial backdrop, offering, ironically, a substantiality that "reality" itself does not possess. Our difficulties are compounded by the fact that events, at least up until the time Antony deserts Octavia, are determined more by personality conflicts and characters' perceptions of problems than by actual problems, and, further, by the fact that nobody has Hal's almost god-like detachment and perspective upon the action. Enobarbus sees most clearly how things
are likely to go, but he is not very flexible when it comes to the unruly passions and the deeply ingrained "irrational" forces which govern those around him. The characters and their motives are very complex. Antony, for example, is fully engaged, first in one view of himself and then in another and cannot hold any shape for very long. Cleopatra, generally more watchful and careful than Antony, is nevertheless faced with a crisis that threatens her being and responds with fear, uncertainty, anger, and "boggling."
The nature of her transformations changes over the course of the play, and sometimes, we cannot tell exactly what her own stance toward a given transformation is. As we watch, we try to piece the story together from bits and pieces of information (brought in usually by messengers), but the play's self-interested or self-deluding transformers often shroud the "facts" in an interpretive mist. In the early scenes, for example, we do not know how serious the troubles abroad actually are, or how devastating the consequences of Antony's "indifference" to them will be. Furthermore, though he does eventually leave and scare the rebellious Pompey into submission, he is serving Caesar's purposes by doing so, and fear of Pompey does not even seem to be the primary reason the younger triumvir shames the elder out of Egypt. That Caesar does have a hand in fanning the flames of gossip that anger Antony into leaving Egypt is not disclosed until we meet him the first time, at which
point Cleopatra's chiding tongue does not appear to us to have been so far from the mark. The political "facts" seldom present themselves in a clear and orderly fashion, and the action of the play is discontinuous. As in 1 Henry IV, where political issues are never clearly settled, our attention is focused on characters' perceptions and their efforts to manipulate and shape their world. Even Cleopatra's supposed treachery in turning her navy over to Caesar, if it happens at all, happens so far behind the scenes that we never know of what it actually consists. It is reported to us, after all, by a raging and bitter Antony. Antony's and Cleopatra's plight and the consequences of their actions grow more serious, but the political justification and rationale behind the conflict with Caesar are never offered as firm ground upon which we can stand to survey and judge the actions of those involved in it.

Our experience in having our feet repeatedly cut from under us underscores the instability and shapelessness some of the characters themselves sense and see. Exhausted by the emotional upheavals which have attended his relationship with Cleopatra and depressed and angry at his inability to withstand her and retain his "Roman" shape, Antony laments to his follower, Eros, and provides, as he does so, an accurate description of the playworld as well as of himself:
Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish,
A vapor sometime like a bear or lion,
A towered citadel, a pendant rock,

That which is now a horse, even with a thought
The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct
As water is in water.  

(IV. xiv, 2-4, 9-11)

Where 1 Henry IV gives us some degree of constancy in a
Hotspur too fanatically self-engrossed to swerve in his quest for honor and in a prince whose eye is firmly fastened on his future even as he changes shapes to suit his various audiences, this playworld is inhabited by "bogglers." Other characters besides Antony and Cleopatra waver and change. The gaping, elbow-scratching rabble, part of the audience for whom the politicians play out their several fictions in 1 Henry IV, is replaced in this play by the "common body," an equally plastic assembly that, "like to a vagabond flag upon the stream, /Goes to and back" (I. iv, 45-46). In addition, the soldiers and servants, somewhat closer to the center of things than the rabble, are continually watching and discussing the waxing and waning fortunes of their leaders. They switch allegiance frequently, until it is little wonder that Antony hardly knows whom among Caesar's retinue Cleopatra can trust. However, many of these followers are actually divided in spirit and perhaps not quite as malleable as the more common folk. Though they recognize that business must be taken care of and know, too, which side their
bread is buttered on, they are frequently less interested in the mundane infighting which occurs among their leaders than in things Egyptian, and those about Caesar sometimes seem to take a perverse relish in his failure to use Antony and Cleopatra as he wishes. Like Antony's, their minds and spirits stray from Rome and Caesar, even if their bodies do not. When Cleopatra becomes "marble-constant" at the end of the play—when she becomes the directional North Star rather than remaining the inconstant moon—she justifies their sense that she and Antony are remarkable people who ward off the dullness and monotony of their own lives, though we alone experience the full impact of her death scene.

The characters who try to fashion the responses of these audiences or who attempt to influence the shape of events and of their own lives with various kinds of transforming fictions are also difficult to pigeonhole, perhaps more so than similar characters in 1 Henry IV. Even Caesar, the most obviously cold-blooded, rational, and manipulative fictionmaker in the play does not permit us to place him immediately as a calculating Machiavel. His plan to take over the world does not become firm until after Antony deserts Octavia, and before that, his motives are not always entirely clear. Octavius' political aspirations are combined with a real disdain for Cleopatra and Egypt, as well as for Antony's "debauchery."
Though the fiction that Rome once bred stoic heroes able to endure any adversity and that the greatest of these is destroying himself is a convenient one for him, it is also one in which he may partly believe. The most charitable stance we can take toward Caesar is that he thinks he is morally superior to Antony, who is being politically irresponsible and disloyal, and therefore deserves to triumph over him. According to this "morality play" ethic, Antony's "fall" is deserved and even though Caesar may regret somewhat that he must destroy what remains of a once-noble man, he can depict himself as the agent who is merely bringing to pass the inevitable. Antony, he argues, represents the last vestige of a disciplined tradition. He is a man who once drank "the stale of horses and the gilded puddle/Which beasts would cough at" to stay alive, but who is now permitting himself to be corrupted by a soft and lascivious Egypt (I. iv, 62-63). Whether Octavius actually believes in this narrow interpretation of Antony's life or whether he only uses it to excuse his own behavior is difficult to discern early in the play, but his disdain for "lightness" seems clear enough. Radical personality differences between the two most powerful triumvirs, in fact, are as much responsible for their early quarreling as any well-formed plan on Octavius' part to scheme his way to the top of the political heap.
Later, however, as Antony's and Cleopatra's indiscretions place greater control in his hands, Caesar becomes more blatantly Machiavellian, assaying to make a name for himself by capitalizing on the awe in which his peers hold the famous pair. The version of events he wishes to make official is that which holds his own glory to be all the greater for having subdued Antony and Cleopatra. Though his plan resembles Hal's for Hotspur to some extent, Octavius is more emotionally remote from the action he is trying to direct than Hal is, but also more scheming and intrusive—characteristics which distance us from him. Lacking Hal's perspective, furthermore, he is not always successful in his efforts to influence events and must frequently change his plans to suit the circumstances in which he suddenly finds himself. He is not aware of just how much he is, as Cleopatra says, "Fortune's Knave," nor can he adequately accommodate in his vision those most telling of Fortune's blows, the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra.

Like Malvolio, Octavius Caesar is puritanical, disapproving, and tight-lipped, an outlook that even extends to his "dream" of himself, as Malvolio's does not. Our alienation from him stems from his coldly deceitful political fictionalizing and especially from his callous attempts to cap his victory by displaying the lovers in Rome. Even more off-putting, however, is his sheer noncomprehension of Antony and Cleopatra. While other characters are, as
we are, entranced and moved by them, Caesar is immune. It is his insensitivity to the wonders of life which permits him to benefit, collectedly, coolly, and rationally, from the "foolishness" of those who can feel more and for whom experience is, therefore, more complex and unwieldy.  

Antony, at the opposite extreme from Caesar, is almost always fully engaged in whichever mode of perception his love, his shame, or his anger has impelled him to assume at a given moment. When he is under Cleopatra's influence, he is a maddened lover, and since the prime object of his passion and his transforming impulse is wonderfully attractive to us too, we judge him to be foolish at times and even dangerous to himself and others, but we recognize that his heart is honest and approve its choice. However, when he decides to conquer his "weakness" for Cleopatra and salvage his good name by returning to Rome, he is entangled in the intricacies of policymaking and grows to resemble Caesar more and more. He becomes, momentarily, a better politician, perhaps, but a less engaging and more ambiguous character. Finally, no longer able to keep his attention focused on his duty or to hold his passion for Cleopatra in abeyance, he returns to her upon the slightest of pretexts and virtually guarantees his rival's victory.

Having followed his heart rather than his head, Antony must repeatedly confront evidence of his foolishness in doing so. As he forfeits increasingly more control to
Octavius, he finds no immediate comfort in the private world of love, no unfaltering assurance in Cleopatra that he has chosen something of greater value than the Empire. Rather, the Egyptian, perceiving that his political stature is diminishing, balks, and, to Antony's mind at least, betrays him to his enemy. His wrath at her plummets him into despair from which he laments his tragic fall. Possessed of an extraordinarily talented and expressive voice, he moves us and his on-stage audiences to tears and sharpens our sense of the extreme highs and lows of his intensely emotional life, but he also distorts his catastrophes. Like Hieronimo, a character whose pain we feel but whose sense of reality we do not necessarily share, Antony insists that his fall is tragic and denounces Cleopatra as a whore who has duped him, when, in fact, we see his "tragedy" as potential absurdity brought on by his inability to see clearly. A kiss from his mistress, however, restores his love and moves him sharply in the opposite direction. She is suddenly his "Cleopatra" once again, and he is vowing to fight heroically as her "soldier-servant." Throughout the play, Antony vacillates from one identity to another. As he finally recognizes, he is like the constantly changing clouds, but even recognition does not prevent him from changing again, for he is driven by blind love, moods, and passions that go far deeper than reason.
While his love for Cleopatra ultimately earns him a much higher place in the story than Caesar's puritanical orderliness earns him, Mark Antony's inability to see his condition clearly interferes with our full engagement in any of his different visions of the playworld, even though we find his "dream" of Cleopatra to be compelling and his plight pitiable. One mode of perception always blocks out or distorts others, so that he is never perceiving accurately or fully. In the beginning of the play, for example, he is too serious about Cleopatra in the important sense that he cannot enjoy those aspects of her personality that are funny, as we and Enobarbus can. In every exchange between Falstaff and Hal, both participants recognize that they are playing a game with reality. In the exchanges between Antony and Cleopatra, Antony is typically incapable of resisting the Queen or his "fantasy" about her. We laugh at her "cunning" even as we pity her vulnerability, in I. iii, for example, but nothing is ever a laughing matter to her lover, who is either grandly and movingly poeticizing their private world or darkly accusing her of a knavish subtlety that has brought about his tragic fall. Cleopatra, on the other hand, always aware of the impact she has upon him, tries to use her influence, not always wisely or well, to keep him by her side, though she is no covert practitioner or manipulative artificer even in her worst moments in the play.
Antony's self-blinding transformations of his experience make him both Caesar's and Cleopatra's dupe, though Cleopatra ultimately makes good the image of herself she encourages him to see. Though his profound love for her and his actual belief in his various shapes distinguish him in a positive way from Caesar, a man who slyly hides behind his fictions and plays upon the emotional intensity we admire in Antony, Antony is incapable of the perspective and control necessary to effect a transformation that will, like Falstaff's, engage us fully. Because he is a victim of his fictionmaking rather than a poetic controller of it, we watch him more than we see "with" him.

It is Cleopatra, at the last, who, poet-like, both sees and feels and who rewards her lover's final faith in his feelings for her by making him, in our perspective, the great prince he claims to be. As we shall see, however, her earlier transformations are not always quite as honest, either with herself or with others, as the last one is. Enhancing the miraculousness of her final triumph is the fact that she competes for our engagement in a play which initially does not give itself as wholeheartedly to her as Falstaff's does to him. Much of the first three acts revolves around the disputes among the triumvirs, while Antony is the center of attention in Act IV. Furthermore, unlike the old Knight, the enormity of whose crimes is greatly overrated, Cleopatra does some of the things her
accusers say she does, and she has a profound impact on the play's events. More significantly, perhaps, the play increasingly detaches us from her, even as it carries us toward her triumphant death scene. Falstaff's greatest moments come before his least engaging transformations; the Egyptian Queen's come after we have witnessed the terrible havoc wreaked by her most duplicitous fiction, the message to Antony that she has killed herself. In short, when she steps in to arrest the play's movement, it is carrying her downward. Her decision simply to "reinvent" imaginatively the landscape in which she finds herself reverses that motion. We watch as she deliberately creates an Antony with whom she opposes reality, but when she knowingly invests herself in her vision, we are watching no longer, for her "belief" in a poet's lie compels our own.

II.

Falstaff's imaginative efforts to revitalize his world succeed most brilliantly in the first half of 1 Henry IV, before circumstances squeeze him out of the tavern and onto the battlefield. Cleopatra is not at her best until the last, when she rallies her courage and turns to face her foes, shining brightest in what is potentially her darkest hour. Like her comic counterpart, however, she is no wily misleader of men even at her least engaging
moments. In the first three acts of the play, for example, before Rome begins to obtrude itself too importunately into Egypt's languid atmosphere, we discover and appreciate the real sources of Cleopatra's hold over lovers and other audiences: her sexuality and vulnerability, her variety, humor, and unpredictability, and her dramatic sense of life. This is not to say that she is not also a very conscious coquette or that she is unaware of the artistry involved in creating and sustaining an image of herself, but that she is, finally, not a deceptive artificer, especially compared with her political rivals. The serenity and elan with which she sailed down the Cydnus and pocketed up Antony's heart were part of a carefully orchestrated show, elements of a piece of scenemaking designed, quite obviously, to awe. But her artistry clearly manifested itself there as artistry, and Cleopatra was dependent largely upon her audience's willingness to respond to her, not upon her talents for dissembling. Furthermore, when adversity begins to make its presence felt more acutely in Egypt, her control falters and she can't be duplicitous even when she intends to be.

The clash between Cleopatra and Rome centers on Antony, a man who is unable to decide whether he is Rome's or hers. His boggling and Caesar's and Fulvia's beckonings plunge the Egyptian monarch into turmoil. Each successive gust of dishevelling Roman wind provokes a resentful burst
of activity in her, and she is put to some trouble to
smooth her ruffled dignity, reorder her romance, and
restore her shaken confidence in herself as the mighty
Queen whose hand kings kiss tremulously. Cleopatra is no
longer young nor ideally beautiful. She is "with Phoebus'
amorous pinches black/And wrinkled deep in time," and now
her lover is perhaps deserting her, called away by his
wife and a "scarce-bearded" boy (I. v, 28-29; I. i, 21).
The possibility that Antony will leave is unnerving to
Cleopatra. Though she tries to master her situation and
to retain her queenly demeanor, cracks appear in her pose.
They do not reveal a cool character hiding behind a mask
and cleverly baiting hooks for unsuspecting lovers, or a
woman who is inferior in stature or greatness. Instead,
we are shown a character who actually is what she plays at
being, a woman of infinite variety. Her efforts to keep
her identity in place are comical and not particularly
worrisome. They disclose her vulnerable dependence on her
audience, especially when that audience is comprised of
Antony. Her attractiveness to us stems less and less from
the deliberate artistry that marked her first appearance
to him and more and more from what she inadvertently
reveals as she tries to maintain her composure. The comedy
which results is mainly at her expense, and rather than
being a covert victimizer of an unwitting lover, she is a
partial victim of her own transforming impulse. Not again
until the performance preceding her death will she be the commanding presence who first appeared to the Romans and whose vision of the playworld we share, but she is always an imposing figure who continuously belies Caesar's view of her as a whore and of her life with Antony as debauchery. Though she does keep her lover in Egypt long enough for trouble to brew abroad, her "tactics" are not knavish ones designed to ruin him, but overt and palpable ones which are ultimately not tactics at all. We are not engaged into Cleopatra's perspective during these early phases of the play. She manages to keep her image intact in her own eyes, but her actual success is qualified, the harm she may be causing vaguely troublesome, her vulnerability obvious, and her "cunning" comical. The artist's regal pose is exploded and our laughter mingles with our awe and pity. However, though we do not completely share her perspective, we watch her with delight, not with Caesar-like disdain or disapproval, applauding the vitality that nearly makes "defect perfection."¹⁵

Shortly after Antony swears off Rome and the "ranged Empire," a messenger bearing "stiff news" that the Roman cause is losing ground to its enemies touches a tender spot in the famous triumvir's consciousness (I. ii, 101). The envoy implies that the wagging "general tongue" blames its
hero's laxity for recent defeats, and, clearly, Antony blames himself too. Humiliated by the gossip, he vows to break his "strong Egyptian fetters" before it is too late, a decision that apparently has less to do with the wars and Fulvia's death than with his "Roman" fear of finding himself out of control or losing himself "in dotage" (117-118). In spite of Enobarbus' reluctance to treat the news with urgent seriousness, Antony makes up his mind to bid farewell to the Queen*, but the job is easier said than done. Though he enters Cleopatra's chambers with the firm intention of invoking his pressing political affairs, placating her as best he can, and then departing, he has trouble getting anything said at all, and he ends by reassuring her that he goes from Egypt as her "soldier-servant, making peace or war/as . . . [she] affects" (I. iii, 70-71). However, though Antony's resolve to harden his heart against the Queen melts away during this interview and he changes shape again, the gossips' blow to his dignity has fortified him against her "witchcraft" to the extent that he still manages to leave her, and she must make the best of this very unpleasant situation.

Antony's softening of heart does not come as a result of Cleopatra's craftiness, though her original idea, itself not particularly crafty, is to keep his interest in her alive by playing hard-to-get. Just after we hear him swear privately to rid himself of his fetters
and get back to business, she enters with Charmian, Alexas, and Iras, commanding them to search for her lover. "If you find him sad," she instructs Alexas, "say I am dancing; if in mirth, report/That I am sudden sick" (3-5). Her program for a spirited wooing is reminiscent, perhaps, of Petruchio's plan for taming Kate by crossing her, but it is not quite as successful as Petruchio's is. Cleopatra's feigned emotions suddenly become very real when a "sad" Antony, determined to exit from Egypt, destroys her self-possession and, hence, her "plot." Realizing as soon as he begins to speak that something is radically amiss, she chides and taunts again. However, the taunts barely hide the suffering and distress Cleopatra feels when she realizes that this time Antony is actually going. In I. i, she reacts to the messenger's intrusion quickly and purposively, scolding her lover until he reassures her and promises to remain with her. But that it is reassurance she seeks becomes more apparent during the second scene with him, when her strong emotions break through the facade of the coy mistress. Though the two scenes echo one another, the hints of control and design in Cleopatra's jeering, in I. i, are replaced, in I. iii, by wrath and tears as she nearly succumbs to the bleak prospect of being left alone.

"I am sorry to give breathing to my purpose—" Antony begins diplomatically enough, but he gets no further before
the confident character, who, moments before, rejected out of hand Charmian's sage advice on the handling of men, is wounded to the heart and gasps, "Help me away, dear Charmian! I shall fall./It cannot be thus long: the sides of nature/Will not sustain it" (14-17). The instantaneous shift from imperial certainty to dramatic collapse is touching but funny too, since Antony hasn't yet revealed his purpose in coming. Throughout the scene, we laugh both at his discomfiture and at Cleopatra's heightened sense of the damage being inflicted upon her, until we recognize how extensive that damage actually is. Any concern that she is dangerously imposing her will on Antony or slyly hampering his ability to tend to business by misrepresenting herself is partially alleviated by our scepticism about the real gravity of troubles abroad, and even more by the fact that Cleopatra's "scheme" is transparent and her vulnerability exposed. She is no wily seductress, and, though she has the power to change Antony's feelings with her own deeply felt emotions, we worry as much that he will not recognize her vulnerability and consequently hurt her as we do that he will not pay the necessary attention to business. In actuality, he both changes his stance toward Cleopatra and returns to Rome here, though the balance he strikes is not the result of any Hal-like perspicacity on his part. It is a precarious one that is soon overturned, but at this point in the play at least, Cleopatra's effort to combat the
forces threatening her produce few adverse side effects. The worst of these, furthermore, is that she herself does not see, or cannot afford to see, that "Roman" problems are not going to vanish. The tension between the Egyptian and Roman modes of perception gradually mounts, but it is not overwhelming yet, and we are given some leisure to laugh at the Queen even as we pity her.

His resolve seeming to slip away already in the face of Cleopatra's passionate onslaught, Antony assays to appease her, but she will have none of his placating tone. She surmises that either Fulvia is angry again or that Caesar has sent another order. She imperiously commands Antony to "stand farther" from her, royal rage following close on the heels of pain (18). Unsure now of the safest way to accomplish his task, the uneasy General self-consciously inquires into the cause of his mistress' distress. After all, he hasn't told her a thing yet. "What, says the married woman you may go?" she scolds, guessing the gist of the business:

Would she had never given you leave to come! Let her not say 'tis I that keep you here. I have no power upon you; hers you are. (20-23)

Though Cleopatra is opposing Antony throughout this "conversation," she is not doing so by design, as she first intended, or as Petruchio is doing when he woos Kate. Her
"strategem," even more than in I. i., is too apparent and too emotionally transparent, as she manages spontaneously what she set out to do artificially. Her "plot" to make Antony mend his ways is not hidden, as Caesar's is, for example, when he works behind the scenes to blacken his fellow triumvir's name and shame him back to Rome. Rather, her "cunning" is a loud storm of winds and waters, powered by fear and anxiety, and more likely to blow the building over than to weaken its foundations by surreptitious tunneling. Antony, unlike Kate, understands precisely the nature of his would-be tamer's "madness," but he is anxious to appease it anyway. He calls upon the gods to witness that he is Cleopatra's love, not Fulvia's, but the wrathful Queen cares little about such testimony and interrupts it. "O, never was there queen/So mightily betrayed!" she cries tragically and then lands a telling blow by turning Antony's protestations back upon him. "Why should I think you can be mine, and true/ . . . Who have been false to Fulvia" (24-29)? It's a tricky question to answer, and fortunately for Antony, she doesn't give him the opportunity to try.

In fact, as the scene continues, he cannot get a word in edgewise, for Cleopatra interrupts him at every point. She suspects that her lover will not swear off his public duties as he did earlier. When he tries to interject some explanatory words on his own behalf, she waves him
away, still trying to ward off the bad news and to change his mind:

Nay, pray you seek no color for your going,
But bid farewell, and go. When you sued staying,
Then was the time for words: no going then;
Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
Bliss in our brows' bent, none our parts so poor
But was a race of heaven: they are so still,
Or thou, the greatest soldier of the world,
Art turned the greatest liar.

(32-39)

This reminder of his earlier grand promise to her not only reinvokes the rich, poetic world Antony "sees" when he is under Cleopatra's influence, but it is also a blatant attack on his honor. His soothing tone disappears and he assumes a defensive posture, roused by her words. When he finally does insist on being heard, he can still articulate the "strong necessity of time," a sign that he has not been totally reshaped in the forge of Cleopatra's passions, but it appears that he does not come through unscathed either. The "triple pillar of the world" seems to relinquish his stern determination to break off from the Queen altogether and is, to some extent at least, the "strumpet's fool" again. "The strong necessity of time commands/Our services awhile," he explains, "but my full heart/Remains in use with you" (42-44).

Nevertheless, though Cleopatra's sighs and tempests have partially restored her world, restoration is not nearly as complete as it was in the first scene. Regardless of
the mental state in which he does it, physically Antony is determined to leave. He is well aware, furthermore, that avowals of love are not enough to compensate for his absence and tries to mitigate further the enormity of his "crime" by offering a bit of news which should "safe" his going, news that Fulvia is dead. Doubtless, his original plan was to save this best for last, and he is still pleased to have within his grasp so failsafe a means for pacifying Cleopatra. He delivers his tidings with confidence, anticipating, as we do, her happy rejoinder. To his immense astonishment and our great delight, Cleopatra defies all expectations and reminds us that some things about her should never be taken for granted. It is a lesson for which Caesar will eventually pay. "O most false love!" she bursts out at Antony. "Where be the sacred vials thou shouldst fill/With sorrowful water? Now I see, I see,/In Fulvia's death, how mine received shall be" (62-65).

If we could possibly have doubted it before, we are now certain that love, not politics, is what interests Cleopatra, who has no desire whatever to read Antony's documents outlining the "garboils" his dead wife "awaked" when she was alive. Again faced with the "infallible" logic of Cleopatra's question, the frustrated Roman, trying to keep his composure, first orders her to "quarrel no more," and then assures her even more insistently that he is still her "soldier-servant," whose purposes are to do what she
wishes him to do (66, 70). Antony's initial intent was to get Cleopatra's "leave to part" by placating her with promises, and hers was to "cross him" in everything in order to "enforce" his love. The scene between them, however, though each accomplishes his "mission," is not the cool bandying of words between a lustful mistress and a jaded and calculating lover. Neither can hold his pose nor unswervingly carry out his plan in the presence of the other. Though Cleopatra accuses him of "excellent dissembling" as he swears again that his love will stand an "honorable trial," Antony means what he says by now, and says what he feels, just as his Queen does (79, 75).

As Charmian earlier feared it might when Cleopatra plotted to vex him, Antony's frustration turns to furious indignation as his mistress continues to question his sincerity, until, his blood risen to the boiling point, he threatens to leave her immediately. His first utterance upon entering her chamber prompted her own fury and indignation. This one, raising suddenly the spectre of his imminent departure on a hostile note, shocks her into momentary silence before she gropes for words to express her anguish. Her failure to find the precise ones best conveys that anguish, and, as she calls him back, the comic elements of her turbulent efforts to win him over to Egypt evaporate completely:
Courteous lord, one word. 
Sir, you and I must part, but that's not it: 
Sir, you and I have loved, but there's not it: 
That you know well. Something it is I would--
O, my oblivion is a very Antony, 
And I am all forgotten. 

(86-91)

The prospect of being deserted by Antony strikes the most fundamental chords of Cleopatra's personality. Beyond the fear of separation is that of being abandoned and forgotten. As we are, Antony is deeply moved by her sorrow, remonstrating with her with gruff tenderness for inventing nonexistent cares: "But that your royalty/Holds idleness your subject, I should take you/For idleness itself" (91-93). Faced with the necessity of his going and perhaps partially crediting his arguments for doing so, the stricken Egyptian indirectly acquiesces to the demands of the time but then rises royally to the occasion:

Your honor calls you hence; 
Therefore be deaf to my unpitied folly, 
And all the gods go with you. Upon your sword 
Sit laurel victory, and smooth success 
Be strewed before your feet! 

(97-101)

The Roman concept of honor with which Antony first entered Cleopatra's chambers in no way lives up to the concept implied in her words here, but his present state of mind seems partially to justify her transforming vision of his duties abroad, for he is momentarily "restored" to her and reinspired to be this kind of hero. Still, though
Cleopatra is not perpetrating an outright hoax on herself with her depiction of Antony's honor, she would like very much to believe that honor, not Caesar or Fulvia, calls her lover away.  

Unable to "sleep out the great gap of time" he is gone, she mopes and frets about the palace and fills the slow hours by thinking on him, hoping, as she does so, that he is thinking of her too:

_0, 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. He's speaking now, Or murmuring, "Where's my serpent of old Nile?" (For so he calls me,) Now I feed myself With most delicious poison. Think on me,_
_That am with Phoebus' amorous pinches black And wrinkled deep in time._

(I. v, 18-29)

The Queen's hyperbolical description, though something comical in its extravagance, arises from her true passion for Antony, and, as she "sees" him in her mind's eye astride his horse, she urges him, almost in an incantation, to remember her. We may even believe, furthermore, though we are not certain, that her humorous recreation of previous affairs to suit this vision of her love for Antony—she
claims they were carried on in her "salad days, / When . . .
[She] was green in judgment, cold in blood . . ."—is not
t entirely a joke and that her feelings about Antony are dif-
ferent from her feelings about those earlier lovers (73-74).
Whatever the case, however, even as she speaks, Antony is
delying her words. Once in Rome, he changes shapes again
and gradually comes to resemble the politicians with whom
he must deal more than he does a "demi-Atlas." Yet
Cleopatra's transformation, while it is comic in its mis-
perception, is not ludicrously so, for she is playfully
and purposefully inventing here. While she may wish for
Antony to be a man of this stature and may even believe he
is, her primary impulse in this scene is toward invention
as she entertains herself and her servants. She enjoys
the fun when her servants tease her about these excessive
claims. There is a self-conscious comic playfulness
prompting her image of the "burgonet of men" and her vow
to "unpeople Egypt" if that's what is required to ensure
that he receives an adequate number of messages from her.
In that same intentionally gamesome but passionate mood,
she translates Alexas' report that the great Roman was
neither sad nor merry when he mounted his "arm-gaunt
steed" to leave. "O well-divided disposition!" she
exclaims with one eye on the object of her passions and
the other on her audience:
Note him,
Note him, good Charmian, 'tis the man; but
note him.
He was not sad, for he would shine on those
That make their looks by his; he was not merry,
Which seemed to tell them his remembrance lay
In Egypt with his joy.

"O, that brave Caesar!" Charmian impishly prods in response to these excesses, "the valiant Caesar!" When Cleopatra, in mock rage, threatens to bloody the servant's teeth if she "paragons" her "man of men" again with Julius Caesar, Charmian gleefully points out that she "sings" but after her mistress, and the Queen acknowledges the joke (67, 69). However, Cleopatra's poeticized version of Antony is not pure Falstaffian comedy, invented for the sake of passing the time either. The transformation is neither self-delusion nor simple sport but an evocation, designed to ward off boredom, upon which she then "feeds" her languishing spirit. It is the first of several increasingly self-conscious and important instances when she knowingly creates an image of her lover in which she is also emotionally invested. This much lighter and less consequential example will serve as a foil to a later, more profound and significant commitment to a transforming vision of life.

The relatively carefree interlude is short-lived, and very soon, Cleopatra is subjected to a third, larger threat to the image she is sustaining of herself and Antony, for
she learns that Antony is married to Octavia. Over a period of time encompassed by two comical scenes, she comes to terms with the problem by transforming Octavia into a drudge who couldn't possibly interest anyone, much less Antony, and inadvertently, she is correct. Since her transformation of Caesar's sister has even less direct effect on the play's events than did her "tyrannical" ragings at her now absent world-conqueror, we enjoy it with no nagging anxieties that her willfulness is destructive. In fact, we are sympathetic with her continuing need to convince herself that all is still well. If we were not already acquainted with Antony's plans to return to Egypt, or if we supposed that Octavia's beauty, wisdom, or modesty held any interest for him, the laughter which accompanies our other feelings for Cleopatra—our pity and our admiration of her inventiveness—would be much uneasier than it is. The browbeating to which she subjects her lover in I. iii, is comically duplicated as she threatens, intimidates, and cudgels the unfortunate messenger who brings her word of the marriage. She is apparently determined to eradicate the new weed that has sprung up in her garden by doing in the hapless soul who dares point it out to her, but adding to the fun of the scenes is the fact that the messenger has a mind and will of his own. Like his predecessor in the unenviable position of bearing bad tidings, he can't change the facts or lie, but eventually he, too, ends by helping
the Queen as she reassures herself that everything is still coming up roses after all.

Also like Antony, the messenger has some difficulty delivering his message, for Cleopatra is unbalanced by his very entrance and fears the worst. Only gradually does she calm down enough to permit him to speak. She makes an unforgettable dramatic show out of such a potentially mundane affair as the arrival of news, but nothing which concerns Cleopatra is ever mundane. An endless stream of messengers appears in the play, but none of them receives as much attention as this one. Our delight, however, is not at Cleopatra's clever "staging" of the event as it would be if Falstaff were at work here. It comes, again, at her expense, this time as she tries to maintain her regal composure while imagining all the terrible fates that have surely befallen her lover and then after she learns what actually has befallen him. Even as she strives to be commanding and imperial, she is trying to cram the words she needs to hear into the envoy's mouth—if he brings bad news, she warns him, "the gold I give thee will I melt and pour/Down thy ill-uttering throat"—revealing a vulnerability to which we, her servants, and eventually the envoy, respond with compassion (II. v, 34-35).

Eventually deducing that her hero is still alive and that he is well too, Cleopatra regains her composure and warms to her role as the Imperial Mistress of Egypt who
can reward messengers with pearls and who is strong enough to hear "the good and bad together" (55). She recites the facts she has learned so far. Antony is "friends with Caesar,/In state of health, thou says't, and thou says't, free" (55-56). But the messenger, not totally devoid of the diplomat's tact or perhaps never having been given the chance to do otherwise, has told the good news first, and the Queen has deduced too much. He's not exactly free, corrects the post, venturing finally into hazardous waters, for he is "bound unto Octavia." Startled and somewhat bewildered, Cleopatra, her smile suddenly fading, asks uncertainly, "For what good turn?" Who can tell what demon possesses the "diplomat" at this crucial juncture and urges him to demonstrate his cleverness rather than his tact! Doubtlessly aware that a report of Antony's death would be infinitely better than one of his marriage, he nevertheless cannot pass up the opportunity to have his little joke. "For the best turn i' th' bed," he wittily replies, pleased with himself (58, 59). His triumph is cut short. Caught off guard, Cleopatra is devastated, and her natural instinct is to wreak similar havoc on the villain standing before her. "Some innocents," after all, "'scape not the thunderbolt" (77). Wisely, this one betakes himself to safer ground. He is recalled when the royal Egyptian believes she has regained control of herself, but her control is short
lived. "Should I lie, madam?" the messenger, with a strong hint at his injured sensibilities, desires to know when she dares him to repeat the news once again (93). Deeply hurt by Antony's betrayal, the jilted monarch finally ejects the messenger from her chambers with a curse for his reward. Her furious and futile efforts to "transform" the ugly fact of the marriage by intimidating the bringer of the tidings into changing his story is funny but affecting too, and her pain is very real, however excessive her expression of it is.

The persistent and very intrusive fact of Antony's marriage is much more resistant to Cleopatra's shaping than Antony's personality is, but the Queen cannot endure her anguish for long. The banished messenger agrees to return and to satisfy her inevitable curiosity about Octavia, and in the course of this second scene, she manages to placate herself. Once more, she is the butt of the comedy, but she is no grasping Malvolio whose self-delusions we both laugh at and wish to see exploded. Her dependence on Antony makes her a potentially pitiable victim, both of his betrayal and of her own overpowering desire not to see the marriage as a threat. She is not pathetic, however, not only because she happens to be right about her lover's relationship with Octavia, but also because her transformation is not so much a self-deluding one as a willful and assertive one. If Cleopatra is not
entirely aware of what she is doing when she "translates" Octavia, the truth lurks very near the surface of her consciousness. 22

Managing finally to keep herself within herself, she closely interrogates the messenger about her new rival:

Cleo: Is she as tall as me?
Mess: She is not, madam.
Cleo: Didst hear her speak? Is she shrill-tongued or low?
Mess: Madam, I heard her speak; she is low-voiced. (III. iii, 13-16)

These two tidbits of information do not form a particularly solid picture of Antony's new bride, and the messenger chooses "low-voiced" over the more negative "shrill-tongued." None of this fazes Cleopatra, however, who quickly concludes that Antony could not possibly like anyone who is "dull of tongue, and dwarfish" (19). Charmian, perceiving a way to allay her mistress' distress, assents to the conclusion eagerly. Becoming more certain of herself and enjoying the heady sensation of having no real rival after all, the Queen continues her interview, and the messenger catches the drift of her questioning. When she asks what "majesty is in . . . [Octavia's] gait," he scurries toward the first glimmer of light he has seen in a heretofore rather dark tunnel, announcing joyfully, "she creeps." Though we suspect him of stretching the
truth a bit, his elucidation of the term is probably a fairly accurate portrait of Octavius' stiff Roman sister:

Her motion and her station are as one.
She shows a body rather than a life,
A statue than a breather.

Cleo: Guess at her years, I prithee.
Mess: Madam, she was a widow.

(20-30)

Cleopatra's countenance lightens considerably at this. "Widow? Charmian, hark," she begins triumphantly, but the messenger misses a cue and blunders on, adding "and I do think she's thirty" (III. iii, 31). To our delight, Cleopatra simply ignores this damaging, and virtually untranslatable, piece of testimony. As the interview continues, she "learns" that, in addition to the blemishes already enumerated, Octavia has an ugly round face and a low forehead. Satisfied that the messenger is "most fit for business" and that "all may be well enough," the mollified Queen resurrects a small smile (40, 50).

In Cleopatra, the problems posed by the mode of life against which hers is pitted touch less conscious, more subterranean impulses than those which Falstaff faces touch in him. Her transformations here are, in some respects, more like Hotspur's than Falstaff's. We enjoy the joke with the fat Knight, who winks openly at his audience as he plays; we usually enjoy the joke on
Cleopatra, as she works to convince herself that her world is still in one piece. Yet her translation of Octavia is a joke, as Hotspur's delusions are not. She is not far from the truth and her wishful thinking springs from her vulnerability rather than from an ego armed against any threatening knowledge about itself. We want Hotspur's fictive bubble to be burst, and chaos and death ensue when it is not. We want Cleopatra to be reassured, for she, too, is a "maddened" lover rather than a purposefully dangerous transformer, and only because she is reassured can we enjoy the comedy which comes at her expense. When she "decides" that her Egyptian world is safe from Octavia, we heartily endorse (without really believing) Charmian's quick support of her mistress, glad that bruised feelings have been soothed.

How cold seem Caesar's distaste for Egypt and his hard assessment of Antony's affair with its Queen when placed next to the warmth of Cleopatra's affections for her lover and her lavish displays of personality! Immediately after the touching scene between the parting lovers, for example, the play turns abruptly to Octavius. A perceptive and therefore exceedingly dangerous opportunist, he is shrewdly heightening the magnitude of Antony's disgraceful conduct as a way of directing his audience's attitudes toward his rival, yet his shrewdness savors of an almost obsessive puritanical disdain for "immodest"
Let's grant it is not
Amiss to tumble on the bed of Ptolemy,
To give a kingdom for a mirth, to sit
And keep the turn of tippling with a slave,
To reel the streets at noon, and stand the buffet
With knaves that smells of sweat.
(I. iv, 16-21)

Of course, he is hardly willing to concede that such activities are blameless, but Lepidus, his auditor, is most unwilling to believe that Antony has "evils enow to darken all his goodness," so Caesar must proceed with caution. Like Philo and Demetrius, he has his facts straight, but the slant he puts on them fails to capture the spirit of Egyptian revelry or to acknowledge the feelings which inspire it. Sourly, he protests that it is not his "natural vice" to hate Antony (though, of course, it is), but that his competitor, after all, "fishes, drinks, and wastes/The lamps of night in revel: is not more manlike/Than Cleopatra," nor is the Queen "more womanly than he" (2-7). Ironically, even as this protest is lodged, Antony, freshly inspired by his love for Cleopatra, is vowing to restore his lost honor. To Caesar, such revolting conduct is inexcusable in a man of Antony's stature, but if we are in the least inclined to agree that "fishing" is a sure sign of advanced moral degeneracy, we are won away from such an opinion when Cleopatra and her servants laughingly recall the incident in which an Egyptian diver hung a salt
fish on Antony's hook. While Caesar is only speaking metaphorically when he refers to Antony's effeminate behavior, his reductive version of experience is offset by Cleopatra's happy recounting of a literal transformation which occurred when she once "drunk" Antony "to his bed" and put her "tires and mantles on him, whilst/.../She wore his sword Phillipan" (II. iv, 21-23). Rather than contradicting Caesar's accusations, what we are shown of Egypt and Cleopatra "recasts" them in a manner that brings Antony's "mirth" properly to light. Caesar's self-interested, parsimonious, and unimaginative translations of the facts tend to extinguish life, and he competes unfavorably with Cleopatra's unstudied urge to celebrate it. His carefully orchestrated and covert efforts to manipulate his peers is set against her open and self-revealing efforts to preserve Egypt and things Egyptian and thus preserve herself.

III.

In opposition to Cleopatra's instinctive and comical impulse to transform and shape the landscape of Antony and Cleopatra are not only Caesar's disdain, but his, and other characters', more covert and harmful transforming and manipulative behavior. Janet Adelman, in her
very helpful book, *The Common Liar*, notes that the play has absorbed, among other techniques, the "diversity of perspective and opacity of character" central to Shakespeare's history plays. It forces us to live in the ambiguous world of the history play most of the time, "a world in which no motive or emotion is sure, no judgment absolute." Like the England of *1 Henry IV*, the Roman Empire is peopled by self-interested propagandists and characters "lost" in their fictions, all of whom are moved to "interpret" the action for their own reasons and purposes. Their conflicting accounts of themselves and of their playworld produce an endless variety of patterns and configurations through which we must cautiously pick our way. Ms. Adelman's insistence that all the ambiguities, contradictions, and questions raised by their disagreements be allowed to operate and her staunch refusal to oversimplify are certainly rightminded. Nevertheless, the result of acknowledging these complexities is not to be brought into the presence of a completely indeterminate playworld. Our grounds for judgment are often slippery, like the characters themselves, and concrete facts and hard evidence are scarce, but the very presence of ambiguity in Rome's bureaucratic system suggests the questionable motives of its leaders. Their subtle, indirect, and dissembling tactics compare negatively, not only with Cleopatrá's final poetic fiction, but even with her somewhat
less forthright endeavors to maintain her Egyptian mode. In contrast with her easily stirred wrath, whose source is transparent and whose aim is unmistakable, are Caesar's half-submerged jealousies and his puritanical and self-serving "moral" view, "Roman" Antony's sometimes less-than-honorable honor, and the indecipherable reasons for various decisions the political characters make. Perhaps most interesting of all is the wavering in the Roman consciousness, a sign that many of the bureaucrats themselves are suffocating within the niggardly confines of their own moral constructs. Roman lips pay service to business, but Roman eyes are often turned longingly toward Egypt.

The political characters are most mercurial in the early acts, before Antony and Caesar emerge as irreconcilable enemies. Before that, the two greatest triumvirs appear to try to patch up their differences, but we never know, for example, whether Octavius desires a reconciliation or whether he is simply using his partner with the intentions of discarding him later, as he does Lepidus. He takes advantage of every occasion, certainly, but the extent to which he actually engineers occasions is difficult to ascertain. Antony is an even harder character to grasp, because he constantly changes shapes and stances. He leaves Cleopatra, determined to retrieve his good name, and exhibits, while he is away from Egypt, some of the qualities which have brought him renown. However, the
longer he is away, the more qualified his sense of honor becomes. At times, he seems to possess the politician's flair for good timing and diplomacy and to be "playing" Antony in order to win over his audience. At other times, he appears to be completely sincere in what he says. Our general sense of the "duel" between the two rivals, however, is that Antony is Caesar's dupe. If the former changes his shape and his mind as the result of deeply felt injuries to his reputation, the latter, feeling little of anything, changes his to suit the requirements of the moment and to take advantage of his partner's well-deserved fame and of his feelings and follies too. In the feud between Cleopatra and Caesar over "possession" of Antony, Caesar is by far the more inscrutable and, hence, threatening transformer, and unlike Richard III, whose gleeful delight in his own knavery engages us into his scheming, Caesar has no fun we can share with him.

Behind the rhetorical smokescreen thrown up by the political characters are the "facts," most of which never clearly emerge. Why, for example, does Antony really decide to break off from Egypt, and how crucial is his presence in Rome? When he finally gives ear to the messenger, in I. ii, the news may not "infect the teller," as it does when Cleopatra is the audience, but it seems to infect the listener. Our suspicion that Antony wants to be quit of the Queen as much out of embarrassment as out
of any urgent sense that his neglected affairs require attention is increased when he fails to impress Enobarbus with his excuses for departing. "Fulvia is dead," he solemnly intones to his lieutenant after receiving word of his wife's demise. He wishes to cast the event in a properly mournful light so that he can convince Enobarbus of the importance of returning to Rome. Like Cleopatra's to the same news, however, Enobarbus' response is not a predictable one. "Why, sir," comes his blithe rejoinder, "give the gods a thankful sacrifice" (I. ii, 157-161). Not convinced that the trouble in the Empire warrants all the fuss Antony is making about it and not fooled by his General's tragic demeanor, Enobarbus dismisses the solemnity with "light answers," until Antony finally hushes him (much as Hal hushes Falstaff's telling observations about the rebels), and describes the supposedly grave conditions calling him away:

Sextus Pompeius
Hath given the dare to Caesar and commands
The empire of the sea. Our slippery people,
Whose love is never linked to the deserver
Till his deserts are past, begin to throw
Pompey the Great and all his dignities
Upon his son.

(184-190)

While it is true, we later learn, that Pompey is gathering a power, Enobarbus' refusal to overreact to these rumblings calls Antony's motives into some question. Furthermore,
a later conversation between Caesar and Lepidus, in which Caesar describes his rival's "lascivious wassails" and laments the fall of so great a soldier, suggests that the younger triumvir is encouraging the gossip which blames Antony for the Empire's losses.

Nonetheless, Pompey has decided to make his bid for power, believing the great fighting General to be "sitting at dinner" with Cleopatra. Outlining his plan to Menecrates, he makes clear that, though the people love him, the sea is his, and his powers are "crescent," the time is ripe for an uprising mainly because Antony isn't paying any attention to him. He utters a brief prayer that this situation will persist:

But all the charms of love,
Salt Cleopatra, soften thy waned lips!
Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both!
Tie up the libertine in a field of feasts,
Keep his brain fuming. Epicurean cooks
Sharpen with cloyless sauce his appetite,
That sleep and feeding may prorogue his honor
Even til a Lethe'd dullness.

(II. i, 20-27)

Like Caesar, Pompey looks upon Antony's conduct as debauchery, but where Octavius is contemptuous and aloof whenever he speaks of Egypt, Pompey quite evidently entertains a secret desire to trade places with his "ruined" countryman. These are the words of a voyeur who secretly lusts after the life he imagines Antony to be leading. He is "rescued" from his fantastic transforming vision by the
humorous entrance of Varrius, who announces that the libertine is "every hour in Rome/Expected" (II. i, 29-30). Though the heretofore brave rebel is momentarily taken aback, he finds in Antony's attention to what he now admits is a petty war, reason to enlarge his opinion of himself.

Before they can turn to Pompey's rebellion, Caesar and Antony must make peace between themselves. Staged combat, in this play, is not heroic battles, but negotiations, compromises, verbal duels, and childlike displays of temper and pique. In these contests, Caesar generally fares better than Antony, whose sensitivity about his good name and deep passions render him incapable of the calculating self-control which is Caesar's trademark. The meeting between Octavius and Mark Antony suggests that the original source of the tension between them is a difference in temperament. Antony knows that Egypt, not Pompey, is at the root of his co-ruler's dissatisfaction, as is evidenced in his asking Caesar what business it is of his that he (Antony) is in Egypt. Caesar evades any implications that his interest is other than businesslike. However, he offers no very solid reasons for having called Antony home, only excuses, and these he trots out, one by one, beginning with the accusation that Fulvia made war upon him. Antony remains calm and reminds Caesar that a previous letter explaining these matters satisfied him. The younger triumvir does not argue the point and offers other reasons
instead, each of which Antony successfully confutes, strengthening our sense that Caesar's objections are possibly counterfeit ones. Then abruptly, the tension between the two having mounted, Caesar startles his listeners by accusing Antony of breaking the articles of his oath. Lepidus cautions Octavius, but Antony coldly insists that the charge be clarified:

No,
Lepidus; let him speak. The honor is sacred which he talks on now, Supposing that I lacked it. But on, Caesar, The articles of my oath—

Caesar: To lend me arms and aid when I required them, The which you both denied. (II. ii, 84-89)

Instead of leaping angrily and thoughtlessly on this slur against his honor as we expect him to do, however, the Roman hero, displaying some of the character which makes him greater than his peers, generously accepts part of the blame, apologizes to Caesar, and seems to swear off Egypt and Cleopatra:

Neglected rather: And then when poisoned hours had bound me up From mine own knowledge. As nearly as I may, I'll play the penitent to you: but mine honesty Shall not make poor my greatness, nor my power Work without it. Truth is, that Fulvia, To have me out of Egypt, made wars here, For which myself, the ignorant motive, do So far ask pardon as befits mine honor To stoop in such a case. (89-98)
However, though Antony's words sound unaffected here rather than coyly diplomatic, suggesting a sincerity that distinguishes him from Octavius even if he, too, is now misrepresenting Cleopatra, the qualifying phrases in this speech are peculiar. They hint at the extent to which his conception of the quality about which he is being sincere has fallen. His sense of honor and his pride have seemingly shrunk from the dimensions of "heroic" Rome, and certainly of his earlier ringing promises to Cleopatra, to more "modern," Caesar-like standards. Speaking honestly and asking pardon compromise one's greatness, according to him, rather than enhance it. Though we are somewhat bothered by the contradictions—throughout his stay in Rome, Antony's greatness seems qualified as it is here—the less discriminating Lepidus is not, and he is caught up, as characters so frequently are, in the spirit of the moment Antony has created, declaring that the words are "noble spoken" (98).

While Lepidus, Maecenas, and the ever-sceptical Enobarbus encourage the two combatants to cease sparring, Caesar remains silent for a time, and when he speaks again, he touches on the heart of the whole matter. It "cannot be," he says reflectively and prophetically, "we shall remain in friendship, our conditions/So diff'ring in their acts" (113-115). As he apparently recognizes, the difficulties preventing him and Antony from making a real peace
with one another proceed chiefly from a fundamental personality difference. His personality, furthermore, is better suited for the task of winning world power, as soon becomes evident.

War seems inevitable whatever measures Mark Antony and Octavius take to prevent it. At this juncture, however, Agrippa interrupts and proposes that Antony marry Caesar's sister, a union he believes will bind the two together once and for all. "If Cleopatra heard you," admonishes Caesar, "your reproof were well deserved of rashness" (122-123). It is impossible to know whether Caesar deliberately manipulates Antony's emotional strings here, whether he actually favors the marriage, or, if he does, whether his reasons for doing so are benign or malignant. He does not give himself away as Cleopatra always does. It seems most likely that he is genuinely interested in preserving the partnership for the time being, though his motives for wishing to do so surely spring from a strong sense of self-preservation, not from brotherly love. Whatever the case, Antony immediately reacts to this barely veiled reflection on his character, this "hint" that he is Cleopatra's pawn, much as he did to Cleopatra's taunts, and suddenly, his self-control and measured consideration of his political position disappear. Moved once again to assert his independence from Egypt, he vows to marry Octavia:
May I never
To this good purpose, that so fairly shows,
Dream of impediment! Let me have thy hand.
Further this act of grace, and from this hour
The heart of brothers govern in our loves
And sway our great designs.

(145-150)

However foolish and wrongheaded it may be, Antony's sudden resolution is an unlooked for and gratifying surprise, for it probably leaves Caesar agape, though again, it is possible that the clever boy-ruler foresaw the outcome of his taunt all along. While it does not match the beauty and grandeur of his earlier promise to be Cleopatra's "soldier-servant," Antony's vow here resounds with some of the same heroic ardor. Nevertheless, it is risky to declare either that he has been jarred into a drastic reaffirmation of his Roman identity or that he deliberately, if imprudently, challenges Caesar's attempt to treat him as Cleopatra's dupe. Regardless of what compels him to agree to the marriage or what his own stance toward it really is, it amounts only to another dangerous twist in the political labyrinth. Enobarbus observes, after the wedding, that his Captain has "married but his occasion here," an observation Antony seconds (II. vi, 131). However, in spite of the conclusions he reaches later, our sense is not that the marriage is calculated but that it is a move Antony has, perhaps by design, been goaded into making. Furthermore, we are sure, as Enobarbus is,
that he will never stay with Octavia and that the marriage spells disaster. All in all, Antony might have been as well off if he had remained in Egypt.  

That he cannot and will not stay away from Cleopatra is brought home in the next scene by the knowing Lieutenant. As soon as the two leaders conclude their discussions and exit, the onlookers, hardly sparing a moment to celebrate the new peace, eagerly ask Enobarbus for news and stories from Egypt. A spellbinding narrator, he recreates for them the spectacular pageant Cleopatra produced upon her first meeting with Mark Antony and grows so absorbed in the scene he summons up that he slips into the present tense as if he were watching it all over again:

At the helm
A seeming mermaid steers: the silken tackle
Swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands,
That yarely frame the office. From the barge
A strange invisible perfume hits the sense
Of the adjacent wharfs. The city cast
Her people out upon her; and Antony,
Enthroned i' th' marketplace, did sit alone,
Whistling to th' air; which, but for vacancy,
Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,
And made a gap in nature.

"Rare Egyptian!" whispers an awestricken Agrippa. Brought back to himself, Enobarbus makes a mild joke of the fact that "our courteous Antony, whom ne'er the word of 'No' woman heard speak," gave his heart to this one (220, 224-225). Perhaps, we are apt to reply, most do not say
"no" to a woman whom the priests bless even when she is "riggish." 32

Antony and Caesar at last address themselves to Pompey, who proves to be no match for them. After some blustering and posturing, during which he swears that he came prepared to take their offers but that Mark Antony has put him to "some impatience," he agrees to the terms they offer him, intimidated by the famous Roman's presence and won over, much as Lepidus was, by Antony's generous admission of guilt. This time, Antony admits that "the beds i' th' East are soft" and that he owes thanks to Pompey, who "called . . . him timelier than . . . his purpose hither" (II. vi, 50-51). Pompey, whose shrewdness leaves much to be desired, is more than satisfied by these attentions. Once again, however, we cannot tell whether Antony is really apologizing or whether he is expertly exercising his influence with his peers. Still, whether he is being sincere or politic, Antony, as he usually (though not always) does, towers above the other Romans, something of a "misfit" in their mundane world.

As soon as the issues are settled and peace is made, Pompey, too, inquires into the rumors he has heard about Egypt and Cleopatra. The new alliance among the Roman leaders is celebrated with a feast aboard Pompey's yacht, and, predictably, the conversation turns to Egypt. As the feast "ripens" toward an "Alexandrian" one, the revellers
join hands and dance the Egyptian bacchanals, and suddenly, as they sing a drunken song to Bacchus, theirsenses steeped in "the conquering wine," these plotting world-sharers are caught up in a wave of good feeling and good fellowship. Stiff and self-important Romans relinquish themselves to Egyptian "excess." Only two do not participate in the festivities. The first is Menas. While the celebrants match stories about the wonders of Egypt, he tries to interest Pompey in a plot to kill the triumvirs, but Pompey's own brand of honor, though it is even further removed from real honor than Antony's diluted Roman version, rejects the scheme. The second is Octavius, who refuses to participate because his "graver business/Frowns at this levity." Urged by Antony to be "a child o' th' time," the ever-watchful younger triumvir disapprovingly replies that he will "possess" the time instead (II. vii, 121-122, 101-102).

His refusal to give himself to this or any other moment reiterates just how much, indeed, his and Antony's "conditions" differ "in their acts." The marriage, as Enobarbus predicted, founders, and rather than cementing Octavius and Antony together, pulls them apart, as each accuses the other of plotting. While it is possible that Antony means it when he promises Caesar to love Octavia and that he is, again, determining to be a "Roman" (even though he has shortly before sworn to return to Egypt),
it is more likely that he is playing the part which will insure a peaceful coexistence with his rival until such time as he can conveniently slip away to Cleopatra. But, though he may originally be sincere in his promise to Octavia to start anew, live according to the rules, and love her, by the end of his separation from Cleopatra, he sounds more like Caesar himself than like an honorable Roman hero. Leaving Cleopatra and tending to business have brought out the worst in Antony, not the best. "Nay, nay, Octavia," he replies when she tries to keep peace between him and her brother,

he hath waged
New wars 'gainst Pompey; made his will, and read it To public ear;
Spoke scantily of me: when perforce he could not But pay me terms of honor, cold and sickly
He vented them, most narrow measures lent me;
When the best hint was given him, he not took't Or did it from his teeth.

(III. iv, 1, 3-9)

If his citing of these injuries seems like a child's tattling, Caesar's seems no less so:

Contemning Rome, he has done all this and more In Alexandria. Here's the manner of 't: I' th' marketplace on a tribunal silvered, Cleopatra and himself in chairs of gold Were publicly enthroned: at the feet sat Caesarion, whom they call my father's son, And all the unlawful issue that their lust Since then hath made between them.

(III. vi, 1-8)

Just below the surface of these accusations are Antony's
pride and Caesar's scandalized moral sensibility. The play gives us no verifiable idea of just how much truth lies behind any of these charges. Whether or not Octavius is truly angry at the treatment afforded his sister or whether she serves as a convenient excuse for a declaration of war on his rival is another question we cannot settle, any more than we can settle whether Hotspur or the King is in the wrong about the Welsh prisoners. Answers to such questions hardly matter, however, and though conditions outside Egypt may not have been very serious initially, they are so now, for either Antony or Caesar must die.

IV.

The self-conscious interest in the problem of shaping history that Antony and Cleopatra shares with 1 Henry IV is more sharply focused after Antony returns to Egypt. However, the characters' growing concern with fashioning their political and historical destinies does not mean that the play assumes a more definitive shape or that we can now more easily disentangle fact from fiction. More than ever before, we are submitted to a cacophony of interpretive voices, and the effect is to make us even more wary of accepting anyone's version of events. Our first-hand encounters with Antony and Cleopatra, for
example, give way to second-hand reports on their activities or to Enobarbus' intervening commentaries on what we do see of them. As a result, their greatness, most in evidence when they share with each other and with us their poetical vision of experience, is difficult to perceive clearly or surely. Instead of witnessing their reunion in Egypt, we hear about it from Caesar. The sea battle, in which the Egyptian navy is defeated, is reported entirely through a critical audience with nothing to offset the portrait of Cleopatra fleeing away "like a cow in June" or of Antony's following her like a "doting Mallard." The Queen's dalliance with Caesar's toadying ambassador looks bad, as Enobarbus says, but the play never allows us to ascertain whether she actually betrays Antony. The great General's fortunes appear to be ruined. However, his two recoveries from defeat and depression ("Fall not a tear, I say," in III. xi, 69ff., and "I am satisfied," in III. xiii, 167ff.) seem extraordinary efforts to transform his plight. The ease with which he shrugs off his losses conflicts with all the accounts we have heard from him and others of his hapless straits, so that we are unsure in III. xiii, for example, whether his report that the land forces have held is surprisingly good news or wishful transformation itself. Our engagement with Cleopatra, already only a partial one, becomes even more tentative and qualified during this phase of the play, because we
are not sure what she intends to do. There is a possibility that Antony, in his blind rage over his losses, is blaming her for them but an alternate possibility that she deserves at least some of the blame. That we can't keep her in clear focus checks our severest judgment of her, but whether she betrays her lover or not, she is concerned about the preservation of her kingdom now—she cannot be "Cleopatra" without it—and contemplates leaving him. Such a step would, of course, utterly belie his "dream" of her, and make him, indeed, a "strumpet's fool." Thus, we watch Cleopatra closely and curiously, much as she watches those around her, and her transformations are less comical and more disquieting to us than before. It is as though the play were doing everything possible to stack the deck against her and against the affirmation that will come in the conclusion.

Far from leaving destiny untended to wander its way toward some unforeseen conclusion, Caesar, we gradually realize, is trying to determine its course. More precisely, he self-righteously capitalizes on the good fortune thrown into his lap by an erring Antony. Earlier, his lies were not so much blatant untruths as calculated exaggeration of the truth. Now, however, it is increasingly evident to him that his brother-in-law might be more valuable in some
capacity other than that of co-ruler. He has used Lepidus to wage a successful campaign against Pompey and has subsequently refused to allow the weakest triumvir to "partake in the glory of the action" (III. v, 9). He has similarly used Antony to quell Pompey's first rebellion, but now intends to destroy him and take over as sole ruler of the Empire. Somewhat like Hal, who makes Hotspur exchange glorious deeds for indignities, Octavius means to divert to his own account not only Antony's political power, but also the value accruing to his reputation, as well as the awe Cleopatra inspires in the Romans. All this he can do, furthermore, in the name of morality, since the Queen and her Roman consort are obviously responsible for their own misfortunes. Unlike Hal, of course, Caesar does not share his plan with us, nor are we ever engaged in his perspective on his "story" as it unfolds, as we sometimes are in Hal's.

 Competing with Caesar's "morality play" version of events is Antony's and Cleopatra's conception of themselves as characters too large and remarkable to become mere victims of Caesar's conquest. Just as Hal competes with Hotspur and Worcester to impart significance to otherwise shapeless events or as Falstaff transforms his role as a wastrel, so the characters to whom Caesar assigns roles in his rise to power seek to assert their own identities. Part of the discontinuity of the play arises from the fact that the lovers do not know yet how to be "Antony" or
"Cleopatra." For Antony, always lost in either an Egyptian fiction or a Roman one, self-assertion at this point is rage at the prospect of declining from his former greatness, an impulsive desire to give stature to his fall by transforming it into tragedy, or, when he is under Cleopatra's spell, heroic vows to fight against the odds. We are not equally removed from all these manifestations of his character, of course, but the rapid shifts in mood keep us ever-mindful of Antony's "cloudlike" consciousness. The more desperate his situation grows, the more intensely he responds, sometimes turning furiously on Cleopatra, though we always recognize that his deep feelings for her bring on his pain and anger. We see less of the Queen during these sequences, but when we do see her, we realize how much more consciously and deliberately she takes stock of her dilemma than Antony does of his, and how much more observant and calculating she is than he. Her lover is losing the war. She watches him continually, questioning Enobarbus about his moods and behavior. She begins to entertain the notion that the younger triumvir will eventually be in a better position to provide for her and that she should place her future in his hands. Caesar, recognizing a golden opportunity when he sees one and having no regard whatsoever for Cleopatra, "practices" upon her, promising to let her keep Egypt. Tempted, she is very much the boggler now, unsure of what she should do. She
resorts to increasingly Caesar-like strategems to prevent Antony from deserting her, desirous perhaps to keep her options open but also very reluctant to lose him. We cannot always tell what her stance toward him actually is, a difficulty we never encountered earlier. Roaming uncertainly on the outskirts of the action, Cleopatra, along with other characters caught in a maelstrom of political forces, tries to decide how best to survive, not necessarily literally—though certainly she prefers to stay alive at this point— but "historically." Each character can either make the correct choice and "write" his own history or choose incorrectly and allow "history" to write him into an absurd role, or worse, into oblivion.

Antony's opportunities to make his name in the political theater slip away rapidly. Against the sound advice of Enobarbus and others, he makes up his mind to fight at sea rather than on land, for no better reason than that Caesar "dares . . . \( \sqrt{\text{him}} \) to 't" (III. vii, 29). Cleopatra, furthermore, will not be left behind. "'Tis said in Rome/That Photinus an eunuch and your maids/Manage this war," Enobarbus argues frantically with her, trying to convince her that her presence will distract Antony. His tactics, of course, are the worst possible ones and only serve to provoke her. "Sink Rome, and their tongues rot/ . . . A charge we bear i' th' war," she answers in stubborn fury (13-16). To an even greater
degree than we are from Falstaff when he transforms his pathetic army into comedy, we are detached from Cleopatra and her attempt to transform herself into a soldier. Imposing herself as a fighter on a situation where she has no business interfering has none of Falstaff's sense of humor about the impossibility of translating his "food for fodder" into an army. Feeding her lover's blind compulsion to risk all on a dare with her own profound desire to resist Rome is a far cry from imaginatively transforming Octavia and even from working upon Antony during less troubled times. Conditions are much too dangerous now for private stomaching. Though she is responding still to the probing of a tender spot that prompted her earlier "scenes," her once sympathetic vulnerability is offset here by what appears as selfishness and foolishness. Sure enough, she "hoists sails, and flies," (more likely frightened by the battle than having deliberately deserted), and according to the onlookers, Antony follows her "like a doting mallard" (III. x, 15, 19). With "very ignorance," thus, or at least with uncontrollable passion, the pair seems to throw away "the greater cantle of the world" to Caesar, and Antony bemoans the fact that he, who once "with half the bulk o' th' world played," must now "dodge/And palter in the shifts of lowness" (III. x, 7, 6; III. xi, 64, 63).
The sea battle lost, a hopeless Antony orders his friends and followers to seek better fortunes elsewhere, he himself having "resolved upon a course/Which has no need of them" (III. xi, 9-10). Though he believes she knew well enough he would follow her "fearful sails," the disheartened General does not believe that Cleopatra deliberately betrayed him. The Queen has been shaken by the experience, her pose as "the president of...her kingdom" rudely shattered by the realities of fighting. She turns to Antony for reassurance, her vulnerability once more apparent, and, because we, too, are fairly certain at this juncture that she has neither betrayed Antony nor foreseen the consequences of her rashness—he was under no obligation to follow in any case—we approve when he forgives her. He dismisses the incident when she tearfully pleads with him, and he invokes the private, poetic microcosm he thinks he shares with her:

Fall not a tear, I say; one of them rates  
All that is won and lost. Give me a kiss;  
Even this repays me.

* * *

Fortune knows  
We scorn her most when most she offers blow.  
(III. xi, 69-71, 73-74)

Antony's willingness to tend to her vulnerability on such occasions and his faith in this vision of life when he is with her cause him to throw away his Empire but, of course, they set him far above Caesar in our perspective.
Cleopatra says nothing in reply, her uncharacteristic silence suggesting, as do her pleas for pardon, her touching submission to both his anger and his comfort. But she is also aware that her world with Antony is no longer secure and cannot be fully restored by his moving, grand, but politically futile, gesture, and perhaps she is already worrying about the future. When an ambassador promises that the newly risen star of the Roman show will, as Antony phrases it, "fill . . . [her] wishes to the brim/With principalities" if she will only send him Antony's "grizzled head," she hesitates, almost as if she were in a daze, neither refusing nor accepting the offer (III. xiii, 17-18). She seems torn between her deep feelings for Antony and her need for the greatest man in the world to play opposite "Cleopatra."

Antony is understandably infuriated by the proposal and flings a brave but unreasoned challenge back at Caesar, daring his opponent to "lay his gay comparisons apart/And answer . . . [him] declined, sword against sword" (26-27). Such a fight would resemble the truly heroic battles fought by their Roman ancestors. But, while we sympathize with Antony's valor even as we note its illogic, Enobarbus sees only its illogic. Knowing that Caesar would be a fool to "unstate his happiness and be staged to th' show/Against a sworder," he, too, begins to contemplate the possible advantages of leaving Antony. While Cleopatra fears that
the man she loves can no longer be her champion, Enobarbus is afraid that his Captain's judgment has been impaired. He decides, nevertheless, to stick with Antony a while longer, for

he that can endure
To follow with allegiance a fall'n lord
Does conquer him that did his master conquer
And earns a place i' th' story.

(43-46)

Like Antony and Cleopatra, Enobarbus is not certain yet how to go about "shaping" his story, but the degree to which we prefer heroic defiance and honest intentions to successful politics is measured in our approval here of his decision to remain with his friend and master.

Caesar also wants to earn a place in the story and to etch his greatness into the minds of his subjects. Winning the world away from Antony, a task he is accomplishing with apparently little difficulty, is a great deed that will offset his rival's charismatic personality and former glory, perhaps, but he wishes to add splendor to his success by utilizing the potential for public relations inherent in the Romans' respect for Antony and their attraction to Cleopatra. Initially, he is determined to kill Antony but decides eventually to take him alive. Parading the legendary figure through Rome's streets can only enhance his own stature as a world-conquerer. He probably knows from the moment he finds himself holding the reins of government
what use he wishes to make of Cleopatra, though his plan does not become immediately clear to her or to us. Unlike other men who are hypnotized by her, the "universal landlord" seems immune. He sends Thidias to win her away from her lover with cunning, certain that "women are not/In their best fortunes strong, but want will perjure/The ne'er-touched vestal" (III. xii, 29-31). Since she is hardly one of those, she is bound to be an easy target. And, though in his literal-minded fashion he is inevitably mistaken about much that is important to her, he appears to be correct in his assumption that she can be swayed, for she entertains Thidias' offers. Though it is possible that, at first, she is bandying words with this ambassador, neither agreeing outright with him nor flatly dismissing him, she seems at last to give way:

Thidias: Caesar knows that you embraced not Antony
         As you did love, but as you feared him.

Cleo: O!

Thidias: The scars upon your honor therefore he
         Does pity, as constrained blemishes,
         Not as deserved.

Cleo: He is a god, and knows
         What is most right. Mine honor was not
         yielded,
         But conquered merely. (III. xiii, 56-62)

Cleopatra may be taking advantage of the excuse Caesar offers her. Certainly, she is not slamming the door in
the face of opportunity. Yet her "O" is a cry of pain
and she chooses her words carefully so that her reply is
not a total condemnation of Antony. Irony looks through
her speech, since love, as well as force, may conquer
honor. Therefore, we are not quite as certain as
Enobarbus that this "leaky" vessel is rapidly sinking be­
neath the great Roman's feet. Even when she promises to
turn her crown over to Caesar, we cannot tell whether she
is buying time or actually surrendering to him. In fact,
the play never permits us to determine the precise nature
of Cleopatra's treating with Caesar or his deputies,
though Antony grows increasingly sure that his mistress is
double-dealing. 38 Our uncertainty about her, coupled
with her own fear and uncertainty and with continued evi­
dence of her strong emotional ties to Antony prevent a
radical collapse in our relationship with her. Some shred
of doubt always clings to the evidence that she has
betrayed her lover to save herself.

Unfortunately, she goes a step beyond assuring Thidias
that she hears the boy-ruler's "all-obeying breath" and
offers the deputy her hand to kiss, suggesting more strongly
in that gesture than in her speech that she might seek her
fortune with Caesar. She obviously relishes the kiss as
a reminder of her former glory. "Your Caesar's father oft,/n
When he hath mused of taking kingdoms in,/Bestowed his lips
on that unworthy place,/As it rained kisses," she fondly
relates to Thidias (82-85). As she momentarily basks in the glow of these attentions, Antony enters, and the sight of his enemy's ambassador touching her hand angers and hurts him more deeply than any of her previous follies. Caring nothing that he will probably incite Octavius to wrathful vengeance, Antony orders his servants to whip Thidias and then turns to his mistress:

You were half blasted ere I knew you. Ha!
Have I my pillow left unpressed in Rome,
Forborne the getting of a lawful race,
And by a gem of women, to be abused
By one that looks on feeders?

(105-109)

This time, it is Cleopatra who is given no opportunity to protest, as Antony, enraged, waves off her attempts:

You have been a boggler ever:
But when we in our own viciousness grow hard
(O misery on't!) the wise gods seel our eyes,
In our own filth drop our clear judgments, make us
Adore our errors, laugh at's while we strut
To our confusion.

(110-115)

As is usually the case when he is angry with Cleopatra, he is filled with self-loathing and self-reproach too. But, while he blames himself in large part for his demise, an indication that he knows he is a victim of a fatal attraction rather than of a deception (at least up to this point), his vision of his predicament is not in accord with ours. Though Cleopatra has foolishly thrust herself into a battle where she did not belong, has browbeaten Antony, and is
toying with the idea of forsaking him, we recoil when he transforms his relationship with her into filth and viciousness. He may have good reason to reproach Cleopatra who has hurt him deeply, and we sympathize with his pain, much as we sympathize with Hieronimo's, but, like Hieronimo, he is no Lear waking up to the awful truth about his plotting daughters. Even in her worst moments, Cleopatra is not fiendishly manipulative or malicious. 39

Still, she exercises a control that Antony cannot manage, and for that reason, she is potentially a more dangerous transformer than she has heretofore proven to be, for she can watch and choose when he cannot. These scenes in which he gives way to his fury while she attempts to quench it and to pacify him parallel those earlier ones in which she is the injured party and he the soother of ruffled feelings. The contrasts between the two characters are more instructive than the similarities, however, for they make clear that Antony lacks the perspective on himself or the playworld which allows Cleopatra to decide what to do with herself. He is simply "caught up," first in one shape and then another. His anger here, for example, is not directed toward refashioning Cleopatra, as hers so obviously was toward him. It is the uncontrolled release of pent up frustrations and emotions. Similarly, his poetic evocations of the private world in which he imagines himself to reside with her have none of the playful
qualities which characterize her own deliberate creation of a superheroic Antony who dreams on her while he is away, and none of the purposefulness of her bitter reminder that the greatest soldier will become the greatest liar if he deserts her. Unlike Cleopatra, Caesar, and Enobarbus, all of whom can stand aside and watch, he is "lost" in the moment, unable to "remember" life with Cleopatra when he is "Roman" Antony or life as a triumvir when he is "Egyptian" Antony.

The Queen, on the other hand, is, in some respects, like a vulnerable and indecisive Hal. She doesn't have Hal's control and she doesn't prepare for this scene, but she presents us some of the difficulties Hal presents us when he appears before his father to "apologize" for his loose behavior. We know that he is not remorseful about his behavior and that he is roleplaying for Henry's benefit. At the same time, he seems to be committed to that role, to be engaged in his own fiction, and, in truth, his future actions never belie his fiction except in a way we approve when he does not eschew Falstaff. Cleopatra, in an effort to lessen the intensity of Antony's wrath, eloquently summons up the poeticized vision of love which Antony has previously evoked. However, we cannot tell by now to what extent she feels her words. As the scene progresses, it is clear that she is not swept up into her own imaginative redefinition and transformation of her love, not lost in her poeticizing
the way he is always lost in his. Yet neither does she have a Caesar-like distance from it. Cleopatra is surely moved by the obvious signs of Antony's devotion and love and may deeply regret her error; she is afraid of him too and calls upon that which she knows will powerfully affect him. She does not want to lose Antony, but we cannot tell for certain that the image she creates springs entirely from her deep feelings and not from a more calculating effort to appease him. Our trust in her words is partially blocked by the fact that she has heretofore kept a watchful distance from Antony as she tries to decide what to do. Like Enobarbus, she can still decide that remaining with him is no longer a viable alternative. Antony, however, cannot exercise a similar choice. He believes she is sincere, of course, and, in fact, his faith seems to make Cleopatra's grow stronger. For a short period of time, the two manage to put aside their difficulties, partially restore their heroic world, and even impose that world on reality to a limited degree. Their descent is briefly arrested, and we are shown a shadowy preview of their final scene together and of Cleopatra's triumphant death scene too.

Antony's fury having finally abated, Cleopatra finds opportunity to speak. "Cold-hearted toward me?" he sullenly asks, exhausted by his despair. The Queen denies it:

Ah, dear, if I be so,
From my cold heart let heaven engender hail,
And poison it in the source, and the first stone
Drop in my neck: as it determines, so
Dissolve my life! The next Caesarian smite,
Till by degrees the memory of my womb,
Together with my brave Egyptians all,
By the discandying of this pelleted storm,
Lie graveless, till the flies and gnats of Nile
Have buried them for prey!  

"We cannot be sure that any natures, however inflexible or
peculiar, will resist [being 'wrought on' by] a more massive
being than their own," declares the wise and observant
narrator of *Middlemarch*. "They may be taken by storm and
for the moment converted, becoming part of the soul which
enwraps them in the ardour of its movement."  

Again, it is not easy to tell whether design or ardor moves
Cleopatra's soul here, but if it is design, there is a great
deal of ardor in it. Furthermore, Antony is not possessed
of the "inflexible" nature which "protects" Caesar from the
world's lures, nor of Enobarbus' ability to ignore and dis­
miss what moves him. He thinks Cleopatra is sincere and
experiences precisely this kind of conversion, once again.
Calling upon the poetic and transforming talents she has
heretofore used only playfully, Cleopatra taps directly
into Antony's "Egyptian" vein, and, though we may be wary
of her motives, he clearly is not. "I am satisfied," he
replies simply, and the feeling wells up in him again.
With a grace and style that only he among the Romans commands
and which are at their best when he believes in Cleopatra,
he waves away Fortune again, aware of the "unreasonableness" of his words, and responds to Cleopatra's declaration by transforming himself into one who is worthy of such a love. His rekindled spirit, furthermore, seems to infect her. "Caesar sits down in Alexandria, where/I will oppose his fate," he asserts,

Dost thou hear, lady?
If from the field I shall return once more
To kiss these lips, I will appear in blood;
I and my sword will earn our chronicle.
There's hope in't yet.

(167-176)

As Antony knows, there is little hope in it, really. While he longs to believe in the fiction that he can defeat Caesar and may very well inspire in himself confidence that the apparently impossible is possible, he feels, in any case, that even if he dies he can "earn" his and his mistress' "chronicle" by making one last bold move in the game. Stirred by Cleopatra, he fashions himself after the image he sees reflected in her eyes. He has no delusion here, at least insofar as his assessment of his plight is concerned. He is not so much the Antony of earlier transformations being turned into the "strumpet's fool" and throwing away his empire along with his good name. Though he may still be deluded in his belief that Cleopatra has recommitted herself to him, he has very little to lose politically by being her noble warrior. Giving the dare
to Caesar is not so much an alternative to winning the war as it was earlier, nor is it inspired by the same thoughtless bravado with which he challenged his enemy at sea, hoping there, too, to live up to Cleopatra's image of him. Rather than being prodded by the Queen into a retaliatory stance that will ultimately only benefit Caesar, Antony, though he cannot "choose" Cleopatra, does choose to go down in a blaze of glory if he must go down. He is ignorant only of the fact that the creature for whom he will perform this feat and toward whom he looks for confirmation of his imaginative view of their relationship is still quite capable of turning her back upon him. He is casting his historical anchor, in short, in exceedingly treacherous waters.

However, Cleopatra is reinvigorated somewhat by his new assertiveness and gallantry. If she originally swore her undying and unsurpassable love for defensive purposes, she, too, wants to believe and vows to be "Cleopatra" again if he will be "Antony." With her encouragement, Antony describes the deeds he means to perform to earn a place in history:

\[
\begin{align*}
I \ & \text{will be treble-sinewed, hearted, breathed,} \\
& \text{And fight maliciously; for when mine hours} \\
& \text{Were nice and lucky, men did ransom lives} \\
& \text{Of me for jests; but now I'Il set my teeth} \\
& \text{And send to darkness all that stop me.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(178-182)
Despite its vitality, however, the spirited mockery of Fortune is tinged with sadness, its ecstatic tone tempered by Antony's sense that now, more than ever before, "not a minute" of life should "stretch without some pleasure," for he speaks as though few minutes remain to him:

Let's have one other gaudy night: call to me all my sad captains; fill our bowls once more; let's mock the midnight bell.

Cleo: It is my birthday. I had thought t' have held it poor. But since my lord is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra.

(183-187)

It is still possible to doubt the Queen's sincerity, as there is no reason yet to trust her promise to be "Cleopatra." Nevertheless, there is indication that she wishes to trust in this translation, even if she cannot entirely do so. She may boggle again, and thus topple the "fiction" she now encourages, but at this moment, if she is engaging in a strategem, it is one she would like to see legitimized, hoping against hope that Antony can do what he swears to do. Phoenix-like then, the vision of a heroic world rises shakily out of the ashes of their earlier conflicts, weakened, however, by the still present threat that Cleopatra does not absolutely believe in it.

But if our willingness to surrender ourselves to the fiction is partially blocked here by our having to keep one watchful eye upon her, we are nevertheless made to recognize
the intensity of our wishes for this version of history to prevail against all the odds when Enobarbus, who also watches the transformation, responds to it by deciding to desert his master. Almost as if he were seeing Hotspur's self-deluding translations rather than this creative and mutually inspired one, Enobarbus, not softening his words with any acknowledgment of the heroic grandeur of the "dream," reacts with his sceptical rationality:

Now he'll outstare the lightning. To be furious Is to be frightened out of fear, and in that mood The dove will peck the estridge; and I see still A diminution in our captain's brain Restores his heart, When valor preys on reason, It eats the sword it fights with. I will seek Some way to leave him.

(194-201)

Enobarbus' speech poses in the starkest terms the dilemma the play has presented to us all along, and if the current of our feelings has tended to flow with Antony's and Cleopatra's transformed world, our barely submerged reason, which tells us that their dream may be only an airy nothing and that, worse, Cleopatra may not even believe in it, is brought to the surface of our consciousness. As the voice of reason, Enobarbus is, we suppose, "right." Still, his response to this scene troubles us. If he isolates our own rational scepticism of Antony's vision, he follows it to a logical but deplorable consequence, desertion to Caesar. Furthermore, the terms in which he casts the scene do not
conveniently resolve his choice into one between good and evil, right and wrong, after all. "Reason," in fact, seems to be a narrowminded tyrant, and if it is "right" that going out to fight is an act of desperation, it is right at the expense of "heart" and "valor," those attractive qualities which fire Antony's imagination. Rather than voicing the full complexity of our response to the transformation we have seen, Enobarbus' speech dismays us even as it reminds us of the "reality" of the famous couple's situation.\textsuperscript{42} Antony's, and to the degree that she is actually participating in it, Cleopatra's quixotic challenge is knowingly quixotic, and their own recognition that their world may not prevail undermines Enobarbus' description of a "diminution" of his Captain's brain. More conscious and deliberate here in searching for a way to stymie Caesar than in times past, Antony and Cleopatra want to impose a mode of existence on reality, to make their "dream" manifest itself in the world. We decried that impulse earlier when they fought at sea on a dare, but now that they have slipped from power, it is virtually all that remains with which they can defy Caesar. It is now more a casting into heroic terms of what must be done than a false view of what should be done.

Enobarbus, however, is not affected, or perhaps, refuses to be affected, by Antony's new determination to stand up to his foe. He has reason enough to write Antony off as
a doomed man, a weak and dying lion roaring at his tormentors. There is always a price to pay for letting passion sway reason, but in this instance there is an even greater one to pay for ignoring the promptings of the heart.

Ironically, Enobarbus has already articulated the fate which awaits him. His resistance to being made "onion-eyed" and his insistence on placing experience in a rational framework, even though he is not an icily rational man, threaten to precipitate him headlong into the historical void which swallows up that other, less admirable and eminently forgettable deserter, Agrippa. Enobarbus is saved from anonymity but earns only the most pitiable place in the story when he acknowledges Caesar's deceitfulness and Antony's generosity.

In a move that might also be accounted "irrational," the master returns to his soldier his property, gratifying, when he does, our own sense that he is infinitely more than Enobarbus' narrow categories can encompass and forcing Enobarbus to recognize the limitations of terms and categories which exclude each other so unrelentingly as his have done.

Fittingly, he dies of a broken heart, not "alone the villain of the earth," as he supposes, since the breakdown of his ironic distance from Antony admits him back into our company, but a pathetic victim of his inability to trust or credit "irrational" impulses (IV. vi, 30). While he is most assuredly not a Caesar, a prudish judge of other men's
follies who refuses to be part of any moment— one cannot, according to Caesar, possess a moment one is part of— Enobarbus is, nevertheless, a commentator on scenes, a man who is uncomfortable with tears or other evidence of intense feelings, and who is determined not to do anything as "womanish" as submitting his judgment to passion's control. He is the man of "right reason," the character of exemplary conduct who appreciates Egypt at the "proper" time, but when the jaws begin to grind more firmly, he knows, as Hal does, that it is time for business. Certainly, he is the observer with whom we are most frequently aligned in the early scenes, even though his uneasiness and embarrassment puzzle us at times. But when Enobarbus finds in Antony's transformation of himself only evidence of a mental decline, we are partially detached from him.

Expending his last ounce of energy, however, Enobarbus reasserts some control over his "story" by acknowledging Antony's magnanimity, and he suggests with his grief that to possess a moment which contains nothing of oneself is to possess nothing at all. The broken-hearted Lieutenant does make a place for himself in the story of Antony and Cleopatra, one that is much more attractive than he imagines it to be when he dies. His submission to the evidence of Antony's greatness, furthermore, looks forward to a time when Antony, also dying, submits himself to Cleopatra, another important "irrational" step in the play but one
taken with less hard evidence that the Queen deserves such trust than Enobarbus has to vouch for his master's goodness.43

Still, it is Cleopatra's final decision to stabilize Antony's fiction with her own death rather than betray it which prevents the collapse into anticlimatic absurdity of both Antony's and Enobarbus' "histories." For all its heroic ring, the world Antony envisions here is a fragile one, a challenge flung into the teeth of a cunning "fate" which will inexorably track down both him and his mistress anyway. Their awareness of its fragility lends an air of melancholic yearning to their defiant postures as "Antony" and "Cleopatra," and, as the scene progresses, Cleopatra struggles with her doubts about the efficacy of throwing in with a potential loser. "He goes forth gallantly," she observes thoughtfully to Charmian, as Antony departs for battle. "That he and Caesar might/Determine this great war in single fight! /Then Antony--but now--Well, on," she sighs, cognizant of her present predicament (IV. iv, 36-38). While her heart lingers with the older man, her thoughts turn more and more to the younger. Her worry over Antony has been aggravated, furthermore, by his behavior toward his followers. She has seen him shake hands with his servants while preparing for the upcoming battle, and, in essence, bidding them farewell. "What does he mean?" she whispers to Enobarbus as the two stand watching her lover's tearful adieus. "To make his followers weep," the
Lieutenant aptly replies, his own eyes brimming with tears (IV. ii, 23-24). Afterwards, he chides Antony for transforming him into a woman. Interestingly, Enobarbus has already decided, by this time, to desert, and, though he, like others, is touched by Antony's speech, he endures this additional onslaught on his heart and persists in his decision. Cleopatra twice asks him to interpret Antony's behavior, bemused by her lover's apparent resignation of himself to death.

Against all the odds, however, Antony wins the contest, becoming on the battlefield the "treble-sinewed, hearted, breathed" warrior who fights "maliciously." Valor hasn't simply played on reason after all, and the victory is a gratifying fulfillment of our desires for Antony and Cleopatra to prevail. For a flickering interlude, the poeticized version of experience merges with reality, and the world belongs to them. Flushed with triumph, Antony elatedly addresses his troops:

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you have shown all Hectors.
Enter the city, clip your wives, your friends,
Tell them your feats, whilst they with joyful tears
Wash the congealment from your wounds, and kiss
The honored gashes whole.
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(IV. viii, 7-11)

He then returns to Alexandria and is greeted by his joyful and astonished Queen, who utters, upon seeing him, one of the most beautiful lines in the play. "O infinite virtue,"
she rejoices, rising very much to the spirit of the occasion, "cam'st thou smiling from/The world's great snare uncaught" (17-18)? Nourishing one another's need and desire to believe in their vitalizing vision of life, the two turn a hopeless battle into a monument to the invigorating force of love and vision. "We have beat them to their beds," Antony exults,

What, girl! Though gray
Do something mingle with our younger brown, yet ha' we
A brain that nourishes our nerves, and can
Get goal for goal of youth.  

(19-22)

The moment cannot last, however, and the battle, after all, is an insignificant one. Unwittingly, Antony describes the source of energy that will power Cleopatra's final move against Caesar and absurdity, "a brain that nourishes." For now, though, the world they have created and partly sustained is a delicate one, subject to the fortunes of war, and, worse, to Cleopatra's wavering. Not long after this, another battle is fought and lost, and Antony thinks again, more strongly than ever, that he has been betrayed. The Roman world washes over the heroic one again, threatening to erase it.
Cleopatra arrives at the nadir of her relationship with us when, for the first time in the play, she resorts to a blatantly duplicitous fiction in another effort to pacify Antony's rage. Having lost all hope for a successful campaign against Caesar, the older triumvir is driven to consider suicide as a way to stymie the younger one's attempt to write him into a politician's morality play. After all, "the conqueror can but make a fire" of the enemy who overcomes himself (Julius Caesar, V. v, 55). As his world heaves and tosses beneath him, he tries to put together his "death scene," to fashion at least this segment of his story and thus triumph over his enemy as well as solidify, once and for all, the "black vesper's [pageant]" he believes his life has been. But even his final moments are touched by Cleopatra, who very nearly makes a mockery and a spectacle of his death when she sends him word that she has killed herself. Stricken by the news, Antony abruptly veers from his original intent to make his suicide a victory over Caesar and dedicates it, instead, to Cleopatra, who has only betrayed him again. Yet he still manages to exert some control over his last hours. Furthermore, he is aided in giving heroic shape to his history by the character who almost spoils his "artistry," Cleopatra. Though her hopes of restoring herself to her
original royal state through the power of Antony's arm are dashed when he dies, she does not desert her lover and turn to Caesar but justifies Antony's last act of confidence in her, at least for the time being. From this point, where she assists in giving form and meaning to his almost botched suicide, the royal Egyptian begins her ascent toward the elevated position she will ultimately occupy in our memories. In the midst of chaos and the disintegration of our engagement with her, she wins us back, and, though she will stumble again, the worst is over and the best is yet to come.

Agonizing over the most recent treasonous act he thinks she is guilty of, Antony turns loose upon Cleopatra the full force of his rage. "Vanish," he furiously commands her when she appears to him after having presumably "sold" him to the "novice,"

or I shall give thee thy deserving
And blemish Caesar's triumph. Let him take thee
And hoist thee up to the shouting plebians;
Follow his chariot, like the greatest spot
Of all thy sex: most monsterlike be shown
For poor'st diminutives, for dolts, and let
Patient Octavia plow thy visage up
With her preparèd nails.

(IV. xii, 32-39)

Perhaps because she is suddenly stunned by the awful image of herself being made an object of public derision and
certainly because she realizes that her lover is too far gone in anger to be appeased in the normal fashion, Cleopatra exits without replying, locks herself in the monument, and, in a panic, sends word that she has slain herself. Broken in spirit and painfully aware that the Empire now belongs to Caesar to whom the "foul Egyptian," the "triple turned whore," has betrayed him, Antony's resolution to end his life is accompanied by an almost overpowering urge to end hers first. "She hath betrayed me," he spits out in reply to the first words of Mardian, the servant who is bringing the Queen's message, "and shall die the death." Mardian, however, plays his part well:

Death of one person can be paid but once, 
And that she has discharged. What thou 
wouldst do 
Is done unto thy hand.  

(IV. xiv, 26-29)

The grief he could never feel at Fulvia's death infuses Antony now. The world and Caesar, Rome and the Empire, and even his determination to kill himself lest he be captured matter to him no longer, usurped by the agony this news causes him. Devastated, he calls to his servant:

Unarm, Eros. The long day's task is done, And we must sleep.

... 
Off, pluck off: 
The sevenfold shield of Ajax cannot keep The battery from my heart. O, cleave, my sides! Heart, once be stronger than thy continent, Crack thy frail case!

...
I will o'ertake thee, Cleopatra, and
Weep for my pardon. So it must be, for now
All length is torture: since the torch is out,
Lie down, and stray no farther. Now all labor
Mars what it does; yea, very force entangles
Itself with strength. Seal then, and all is done.
Eros!—I come my Queen.—Eros! Stay for me.
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. —Come, Eros, Eros!

(35-54)

Caught inevitably back into Cleopatra's spell, more forceful now that he has lost her, Antony evokes the beautiful poetic mode of perception she always awakens in him. But, of course, his preparations to die for her, to follow her example, are ironically undermined by the fact that she is very much alive and safely ensconced in her monument, not waiting for him in Elysium. The ironies of Romeo's speech over the still-living Juliet are minimized by its references to her life-like appearance and made tragic by the awful certainty that Juliet, no boggler, will be dead shortly, even if she isn't so yet. Only the intensity of Antony's passion, however, and the possibility that Cleopatra will yet prove a Juliet and actually die with her lover's name on her lips keep Antony's speech from seeming foolishly deluded. Though Eros' strong feelings for him support our sense of Antony's greatness here on the one hand, on the other, the servant inadvertently helps to undermine the scene somewhat when he refuses to deal the fatal blow to his master, giving it to himself instead.
Antony then falls on his sword but bungles the job and fails to kill himself. At least he is not deceived in Eros' commitment to him, however, and the servant truly has taught him, with brave instruction, what he must do.

Cleopatra's lie creates the widest gap in the play between her and us, just as Falstaff's translation of his pathetically ragged army marks the low point of his comic career, for it nearly destroys Antony's efforts to steal one last small portion of his life from "fate" and make it his own. Her lie threatens to turn his tragedy into an ironic fiction, and he is brought to the edge of absurdity. Where Falstaff's transformation is still open and apparent, however ill-timed and disquieting, Cleopatra's is a covert, behind-the-scenes attempt to influence another character, and Antony has no way of knowing, even if he were capable of knowing, that this time the "sighs and tears," reported to him by Mardian, are false ones. Yet Cleopatra is still saved from our harshest judgment. Her "transformation" here, invented by Charmian, is an act of desperation rather than a systematically conceived plot. She is no more in control of this plan, suggested to her on the spur of the moment when she is frightened and under great stress, than she was of those earlier, more humorous, and much less damaging ones to woo her lover by crossing him. She knows very well by now that Antony's disposition may be "wrought/From that it is disposed," but she is
certainly no calculating Caesar. When she sends Mardian to Antony, she is bewildered and thinks only later of the possible consequences of her actions.

Nevertheless, her translation is hardly an honest or innocent fiction, and the scene in which Antony learns from Diomedes that she is alive might be grotesque comedy. The injured Roman, his lifeblood oozing from his wounds in testimony to his great love for the Egyptian, looks up in astonishment and disbelief when he is told that she is not dead. All of her earlier betrayals and his subsequent rages have built toward this final ludicrous repetition of the pattern, and we anticipate the horrible sight of Antony spewing out his rage along with his blood. Surprisingly, the outburst is not forthcoming, and Antony at last holds his shape. Rather than wasting his few remaining breaths on vituperative denunciations of Cleopatra, he quietly orders his friends to convey him to her, choosing to spend what little remains of his life with her in spite of the evidence that she has once more played him false. He accepts his fate rather than bemoaning it and with acceptance come peace and quiet victory. "Do not please sharp fate/To grace it with your sorrows," he instructs his saddened followers. "Bid that welcome/Which comes to punish us, and we punish it,/Seeming to bear it lightly" (IV. xiv, 134-137). Defiance, the snarling contempt of the exhausted quarry for his hunters, is replaced by quiet acquiescence and an act
of faith in his feelings, and in these gestures is release for Antony from the terrible pressures that have dominated him and kept his life in an almost constant state of flux. Furthermore, his final belief in Cleopatra, held in spite of the evidence against her, will be rewarded, for his name will be on her lips when she dies as it deserves to be.47

Not right away, however, and Antony must now submit to a potentially ignominious scene that might have pushed his romantic tragedy even closer to absurdity and grotesqueness. To receive his last kiss from his mistress, he must be hoisted up the side of the monument by the Queen and her straining servants, all of whom find the task to be a sweaty one. Unable to open the doors for fear that Caesar's soldiers will spoil the plan she, too, now has to kill herself, she cries in anguish as she peers down at her dying lover:

I dare not, dear;
Dear my lord, pardon: I dare not,
Lest I be taken. Not th' imperious show
Of the full-fortuned Caesar ever shall
Be broached with me, if knife, drug, serpents have
Edge, sting, or operation. I am safe:
Your wife Octavia, with her modest eyes
And still conclusion, shall acquire no honor
Demuring upon me.

(IV. xv, 21-29)

Antony has earlier described to her in graphic detail the fate that awaits her, and she is resolved, at the moment, to be "Cleopatra." Later, of course, she is surprised easily by the soldiers.
But the royal Egyptian pulls Antony back from the brink of absurdity even as she pulls him up into the monument. Though she is no Pyramus, the constant lover who slays himself at the first hint that his beloved is dead, the Queen does not leave Antony to bleed to death alone at the foot of what might then be a monument to his foolishness. She will waver again before hardening in her resolve to resist Caesar by dying as Antony's "Cleopatra," but not for lack of love for the great Roman, and she makes the first motion toward raising herself in our eyes when she raises up Antony. She is fairly convinced now that he is right that the "beardless boy" intends to submit her to the humiliation of Octavia's "modest" gaze. But there is still a chance that Caesar means what he says and that the greatness that is rightfully hers will be preserved under his rule. She knows beyond a doubt that Antony's sword will never again have the strength to restore her or her kingdom. If she were to refuse Antony admittance, we might then place her with Juliet, if that faithful mistress had arisen from her deep sleep, gazed sadly but briefly at Romeo's corpse, and then walked out of the tomb. Cleopatra just might do that.

However, though the actual suicide which will crown Antony's final move to make her his "chief end" is some time away, she goes a great distance toward strengthening the underpinnings of his transforming conception of her when
she extends the epitaph he writes for himself, giving her own poetical voice to the pain she feels at his death. To begin with, however, she defuses the ridiculousness inherent in the sight of him dangling unceremoniously below her when she first acknowledges the difficulty of lifting him, and, afterwards, makes the scene we are watching the basis for a metaphor. Here we are given a rare example of a character whose words actually transform what we see happening on stage. Edgar creates a cliff for us, pitting his transforming voice not only against a bare stage but against our knowledge that he is "lying" about the cliff. But Cleopatra goes a step farther, pitting her poetic version of reality against a physical reality we see before us. Her speech allows to rise to the surface of the play what the audience cannot help but be thinking and provides a safety valve for the tension that might otherwise explode into laughter. In this unusual instance, language is used to make us see the actual scene as the characters feel it. "Here's sport indeed!" Cleopatra grimly exclaims,

How heavy weigh my lord! Our strength is all gone into heaviness, That makes the weight. Had I great Juno's power, The strong-winged Mercury should fetch thee up And set thee by Jove's side. Yet come a little, Wishers were ever fools, O, come, come, come. (32-37)

It is a "heavy" sight, as the servants so aptly describe it, but the heaviness is comprised mostly of Cleopatra's
sorrow, not of Antony's bodily weight.48 After he has been heaved "aloft," Antony, with little strength remaining, begs leave to speak, and Cleopatra ceases her lamentations long enough to listen.49 Not confident that she is strong enough to fly in Fortune's face in "the high Roman fashion," as he has done, he counsels her to save herself by seeking honor and safety with Caesar. It is a gracious and loving act on his part to bless that alternative for her rather than damn it, and Antony helps to reassert his heroic stature and save his death scene with the gesture, but Cleopatra is almost certain that honor and safety do not now go together.

As his last action toward imprinting form on his history, Antony uses his remaining moments to justify his life, to set the record straight:

The miserable change now at my end
Lament nor sorrow at, but please your thoughts
In feeding them with those my former fortunes,
Wherein I lived; the greatest prince o' th' world,
The noblest; and do now not basely die,
Not cowardly put off my helmet to
My countryman; a Roman, by a Roman
Valiantly vanquished.

(51-58)

Yet however much he believes in, or wishes to believe in, this characterization of himself, he is only partially right, and if Cleopatra turns her back on him, he will come very near to being a Roman by an Egyptian vanquished, and
not so valiantly at that. Antony dies in the grip of an image of Cleopatra, dies for a fictional Cleopatra, who, for much of the play, has been belied, however inadvertently, by the real one. It is possible that, like Enobarbus, he has chosen the wrong way to insure that his good name will be perpetuated and that the place in the story he has just earned will be as the blinded and pathetic victim of a woman who proved, finally, to be a false enchantress.

Cleopatra, however, partially legitimizes her lover's "epitaph" when, for no strategic reason, impelled only by her feelings, she hoists Antony up into the monument and then "usurps" his last words with her own beautiful tribute to him. She is his "Cleopatra" during these moments, the legendary Queen, who, alone of all women, is capable of returning a love as great as the one he gave. As she had done earlier in a more playful mood, she raises before her mind's eye a transformed Antony, a man "purified" and divested of all his less worthy traits. He is "the greatest prince o' th' world," and it is this man for whom she then sheds "Cleopatran" tears. She flings her hero at the dull world and afterwards faints:

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's nothing left remarkable
Beneath the visiting moon.

(62-68)
In contrast with Antony's own translation of himself, a translation whose innocence is marred by traces of self-delusion, Cleopatra's warrior-lover is a conscious invention, a poetic vision of life set against the now-bleak political landscape. More importantly, while Cleopatra consciously transforms, putting before us an image of the best Antony, she invests in her vision with her tears, honoring his "dream" of their love by "believing" in it too. Ultimately, not only her tears, but her death will pay tribute to it. Antony's and Cleopatra's descent into absurdity is not only arrested but turned into an ascent.

Our engagement in the "dream" is even stronger here than it is when both lovers "believe" that Antony can win the battle against Caesar. Cleopatra's transformation is both knowing and felt, an honest, poetical creation that catches us up into its vitalizing perspective, because we have no reason to suspect its motive. Nevertheless, our engagement is not final and the moment during which their dream becomes our reality is, again, transitory. Cleopatra has only embarked on the path which will lead her, finally, to validate and stabilize the imaginative conception of the life of Antony and Cleopatra, and she will stumble again. It is still possible, we can reflect in a cooler moment after she ceases to speak, that Antony could have become just another man in a long string of famous men with whom she has built her reputation, even if it is clear that her
love for him is different. His poetic story, after all, requires her death; Caesar's political one does not. She firms up her resolution to be the fabled Egyptian only when she is certain that Caesar means to put her on exhibit. But Cleopatra loves her life, so much that she makes us love it too. Furthermore, the price she pays in making her final decision absolves her from the "sin" of waiting to die, as she lifts herself and Antony, once and for all, out of the hands of the comedians and into the tragic sphere.

Even now, the extent to which she has reclaimed Antony from the comically absurd is brought home by Caesar's words. "The breaking of so great a thing," he says of his rival's death, "should make/A greater crack" (V. i, 14-15). He has not heard what we have just heard. He cannot have Antony alive now and must listen to his men praise that great competitor's courage. He tries to make use of their open admiration by pointing at his own role in the drama:

O Antony,
I have followed thee to this. But we do launch
Diseases in our bodies. I must perforce
Have shown to thee such a declining day
Or look on thine.

(V. i, 35-39)

Oblivious of the real circumstances surrounding Antony's suicide, his sorrow--what there is of it that is real--
mingles with his pride that history will record the death as the culmination of a struggle between two great men who "could not stall together/In the whole world" (39-40). He remains unaware that Cleopatra, not he, has brought Antony to this, and that the event has been made to seem triumphant, as though he has had little to do with it. He may partially believe that he has played the moralist's part in having lanced a dangerous boil while ignoring the pain it has caused him but his inner anguish can hardly be compared to Brutus', for example, when Brutus tries to rationalize to himself and others the killing of Julius Caesar. Perhaps Caesar's greatest sin is not that he is a deceiver of others, but that he is a colorless and unimaginative man. The only fictions which seem to have permeated his straight-laced brain are morality plays, and he is quite incapable of comprehending the specialness of those characters he tries to use, a failing which will eventually aid Cleopatra in her plan to outwit him. The grim and narrow constructs he imposes on experience have no room for such "extravagances" as the artistically conceived lives of Antony and Cleopatra. Caesar is not even interested in the Egyptian crocodile. Having gotten rid of the "arm" of his own body, he manages to pull himself together to salvage something from his foiled plan to take Antony alive. Though he is disappointed that he has been robbed of an opportunity
to garnish his victory procession through Rome, he still has another card to play. He orders Proculeus to go to Cleopatra and

give her what comforts
The quality of her passions shall require.
Lest, in her greatness, by some mortal stroke
She do defeat us. For her life in Rome
Would be eternal in our triumph.

(62-66)

But like the elusive Falstaff, whom the Prince can always count on for having one more "starting hole," Cleopatra also has a trump card to play, one which will quite spoil Caesar's own hand.

VI.

Before she settles down to play that card, however, Cleopatra appears to reconsider the other cards remaining in her hand, wavering again in her fidelity to Antony's "dream." But her deliberations also demonstrate the multiplicity of vision and consciousness of choice which set her apart from other characters and ultimately produce the final scene. Her vitality makes her seem almost as much an alien to death as Falstaff, but where he droops and pines after Hal leaves him, Cleopatra feels that life without Antony is desolation. Furthermore, if Caesar is not aware that his success depends frequently upon such "accidents" as whether he arrives in time to prevent a
suicide, Cleopatra is. The man whom she has apparently considered soliciting as Antony's heir to her favors has suddenly been made to look "paltry," and she does not wish to suffer the same fate:

Not being Fortune but Fortune's knave,  
A minister of her will. And it is great  
To do that thing that ends all other deeds,  
Which shackles accidents and bolts up change.  
(V. ii, 3-6)

Her capacity to weigh alternatives and to view suicide as both a "cure" for desolation and a way to do what is "great" distinguish her perspective from Caesar's monocular one and from Antony's self-deluding one, in which each of his visions of the world, when he is in its grasp, excludes the other. Still, though her awareness makes the last scene possible, it is also what continues to make us watchful of the Queen as she tries to decide whether or not to cast her lot with Caesar. Antony's suicide has not, after all, immunized him from Fortune's blows, and his place in history is not yet guaranteed. Whatever Cleopatra determines to do will partially dictate which "story" about the Roman leader future generations will "read," and so far, she looks little like the solid bulwark against change and accident to whose protection one ought to submit his future reputation. Cleopatra still retains some lingering hopes that she can preserve her identity in the flesh, and she
must actually meet Caesar before she accepts the truth that he is interested only in her political worth. Her love for life, her wit, her feeling, and her dramatic exuberance run strongly counter to the idea of suicide, and because we appreciate her life, we appreciate her reluctance to leave it. We are not coldly detached from her, since her reasons for boggling are understandable and are not merely cunning. In addition, along with her growing realization that the remaining triumvir does not hold out the promise of renewed life comes the firming up of her determination to deny her basic impulse toward life and follow Antony's lead. However, she will do so only on her own terms. When she resurrects for Dolabella her dead "soldier-servant," we are given a clue as to what these terms shall be. Though we have seen less of Cleopatra in the preceding section of the play, Act V belongs to her.

Though Cleopatra appreciates the impact Antony's death has had upon Caesar's image and considers following his example, she is not "marble-constant" in her resolution. She suffers from the emptiness his absence has created, but it is no easy task for her to surrender to the thought that age might have withered or custom staled her, that Caesar is a breed of Roman who can and will resist her, or that no great lover will ever again recognize her uniqueness and share her vision of the world. Therefore, she
half hopefully entertains Caesar's flattering offers when they are smoothly proffered by Proculeus, the envoy whom Antony has counselled her to trust. Though her dying lover has generously released her from her commitment to him and has given her his leave to seek safety with the boy-ruler, it is not for that reason that we do not completely divorce ourselves from her when she wavers, for, of course, his gesture merely indicates how much he deserves her loyalty. Rather, her vulnerability still shields her from our harshest judgment. We were distanced from her before Antony's death because she thoughtlessly inserted herself into a war, and, after that, lied to Antony. Now, we are distanced from her tendency to seek the best opportunities for herself. However, though she is calculating to an extent, she is also hesitant and indecisive, fearful and virtually alone, and she feels the loss of Antony deeply. Her lingering desire to believe that she still possesses those "fatal" attractions to which people are so irresistibly and irrationally drawn, and her love for life itself, make her a target for Proculeus as they did for Thidias, but a sense of desolation and a growing certainty that Caesar is not what he pretends to be begin to outweigh her wishful thinking.

Neither Caesar nor Proculeus is wise enough to capitalize fully on her Egyptian "weaknesses." Proculeus is not the oily courtier Thidias was and Caesar, who finally comes
to represent himself, is even less perceptive. Proculeus' betrayal of the Queen is a tactical error, furthermore. Sent by Caesar to prevent another career-demolishing "mortal stroke," he does not recognize in Cleopatra's tentative explorations of the new political terrain the real key to keeping her alive, as Thidias no doubt would have. For her part, the Egyptian is uncomfortably close to begging for the necessary trappings to "keep decorum," though she manages to preserve some semblance of pride:

> If your master
> Would have a queen his beggar, you must tell him
> That majesty, to keep decorum, must
> No less beg than a kingdom: if he please
> To give me conquered Egypt for my son,
> He gives me so much of mine own as I
> Will kneel to him with thanks.

(V. ii, 15-21)

Deprived of other ways to retain her identity, she asks Caesar not to force her to beg, couching her request in terms which imply that Egypt is not his to give or take in the first place. Reassured by Procleus that she will be treated kindly, Cleopatra relinquishes her cautious stance and seems to move closer to Caesar's camp. "Pray you, tell him/I am his fortune's vassal, and I send him/The greatness he has got," she instructs the ambassador, still, however, choosing her words carefully (28-30). Antony cannot rush in at this point to interrupt the interview and even though no kissing of hands dresses up the Roman
offer, Cleopatra entertains it, thinking, surely, that Caesar, too, once he meets her, will not be able to resist her. On the one hand, Cleopatra's submissiveness here is a ploy, a projection of vulnerability designed to appeal to Caesar's masculine ego; on the other, Cleopatra, only partly aware that her adversary is immune to her "sorcery," is herself the victim.

Her complacency is destroyed by the sudden entrance of Roman soldiers, and she is made a very real vassal. Instead of reassuring and flattering her, Proculeus orders her to be taken prisoner, but in doing so, he inadvertently pushes her a step closer to suicide. Just as Enobarbus' recounting of Roman gossip galvanizes her into action and insures rather than prevents her going along with Antony into battle, so this betrayal strengthens her determination to thwart Caesar's plans. She draws a dagger, and, though Proculeus disarms her, there is no reason to believe that she would not have used it if she had not been prevented:

Know, sir, that I
Will not wait pinned at your master's court
Nor once be chastised with the sober eye
Of dull Octavia. Shall they hoist me up
And show me to the shouting varletry
Of censuring Rome? Rather a ditch in Egypt
Be gentle grave unto me!

(52-58)

Still, though we do not take her words lightly, it is possible that her determination to end her pain and to prevent
the world from seeing Caesar's "nobleness well acted" will pass with her anger, that a cooler mind will foster cooler consideration.

Left "alone" with Dolabella, however, Cleopatra angrily defies Caesar and Rome, not with futile protestations, but by filling the void left by Antony's death and made more unendurable by Proculeus' betrayal with an image of that "plated Mars" figure Antony was in his noblest moments. As she once did when left alone to pass the dull hours, she "invents" Antony here, but her emptiness is much more profound now and invention is no playful game. What emerges from the scene is not only defiance but a clear articulation of a fact that we have seen demonstrated repeatedly, that Cleopatra knows the difference between fictive or imagined and real, and that for her, as it is not for Antony, an imaginatively transformed life is a mode she can choose. While Antony is blinded by his fictive vision of her, and while Caesar manipulates others with his political fictions, Cleopatra can choose to invent her lover and, further, honor her invention as a reality that equals or surpasses other kinds of truth.

Still recovering from her shock and dismay at having been taken by the soldiers, she chides Dolabella for his Roman condescension toward the Egyptian custom of believing in dreams. When he does not understand, she relates her own "dream":


I dreamt there was an Emperor Antony.
O, such another sleep, that I might see
But such another man.

(76-78)

Pitying the unfortunate Queen, Dolabella, still not understanding, tries to prevent her from recalling the fantasy, supposing that the memory can only be painful for her and not wishing to encourage useless self-delusion. But she ignores his gentle attempts to dispel her "Emperor Antony," countering them with an exultant and exalted portrait of the man:

His face was as the heav'n's, and therein stuck
A sun and moon, which kept their course and
lighted
The little O, th' earth.

Dol: Most sovereign creature—

Cleo: His legs bestrid the ocean: his reared arm
Crested the world: his voice was propertied
As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends;
But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,
He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,
There was no winter in't: an autumn 'twas
That grew the more by reaping. His delights
Were dolphinlike, they showed his back above
The element they lived in. In his livery
Walked crown and crownets: realms and islands were
As plates dropped from his pocket.

(79-92)

Dolabella cannot stay the flood of impassioned words nor does he yet comprehend the purposefulness with which she "recalls" this transformed and transcendent version of her absent lover. When Cleopatra asks him whether or not
"there was or might be such a man/as this [she] dreamt of,"
the question is a rhetorical one or perhaps a test of
Dolabella's "Romanness," not a sign of her own wavering
faith that there ever was a hero like this one, as
Dolabella takes it to be. Though Dolabella is no scoffer,
the question is posed as a challenge to those who scoff
"when boys or women tell their dreams," and Cleopatra
dares her auditor not to take her "fancy" seriously. Her
defense of "shadows," prompted by Dolabella's well-inten­
tioned efforts to keep her founded in the real world,
imbues an activity she has heretofore engaged in playfully
for the most part with seriousness and significance. She
raises the possibility that an imaginary creature can vie
with nature if one chooses to believe in it. "You lie, up
to the hearing of the gods," she responds magnificently to
the Roman's gentle scepticism:

But if there be nor ever were one such,
It's past the size of dreaming; nature wants stuff
To vie strange forms with fancy, yet t' imagine
An Antony were nature's piece 'gainst fancy,
Condemning shadows quite.

(95-99)

Perhaps Nature does not make such men, agrees Cleopatra,
but She should, and if She were to put her own imagination
to work, She could then fashion an Antony who would rival
this "fanciful" one in stature. The Antony Nature did
create, we might be tempted to add, was, in many respects,
hardly more substantial than Cleopatra's "airy" one, in spite of his flesh and blood. The Queen both consciously creates and then mourns for her "Egyptian" Antony, a man whom the real Antony, as Cleopatra knows, resembled only for short periods of time, and her creative act foreshadows the decision she makes in her final scene. Unlike Enobarbus, who resisted the appeal of dreams, Dolabella is caught up, along with us, in Cleopatra's mourning and feels "by the rebound of . . . [hers] a grief that smites/ . . . [his] very heart at root" (103-105). The Queen's flouting of loneliness and betrayal with her image of Antony and her insistence that dreams are not to be taken lightly looks forward to the moment when she will demonstrate just how seriously she, herself, is willing to take them.

Having raised her invention against the threat presented by her tormentors (though she offers it only to Dolabella, who is scarcely a tormentor), Cleopatra further reveals her multifaceted consciousness when she responds to Dolabella's tribute with the acute practical question, "know you what Caesar means to do with me" (V. ii, 106)? Though she is passionately engaged in it, she is clearly not "lost" in her vision of Antony. She is armed, furthermore, with Dolabella's honest answer when Caesar enters the monument to put the finishing touches on his political handiwork. She watches him carefully and has the advantage
over him in that she is more fully aware of his intentions 
than he takes her to be. But even now, after she is 
almost certain that he will lead her in triumph, she is 
reluctant to give over the notion that he means to deal 
honestly with her. However, Rome and Caesar are evidently 
not the only options she is considering, a fact which is 
suggested in her attempt to deceive the young ruler about 
the holdings in her treasury. It is an essentially harmless 
duplicity and would be rather gratifying if she succeeded 
in pulling it off. Seemingly vaunting in its ascendancy 
over her, however, "fate" hands her one more embarrassing 
defeat before she makes it retire forever. As in her 
earlier experiments with the fine art of deception, this 
one goes slightly awry, not so much because she cannot 
control herself—she exhibits admirable control, actually--
but because, regardless of the wide angles and depth of 
her vision, she cannot foresee every contingency.

The face-to-face confrontation with the man whom 
destiny has pushed closer and closer to her seems necessary 
to dispel the last particle of her hope that he might succumb 
to her blandishments and replace Antony as her lover. And 
surely she cannot help but notice, when she finally meets 
Octavius, that she has no effect on him. He does not even 
recognize which of the women present she is, an oversight 
which doesn't surprise us but which must be disquieting to 
her. In addition, her coyness in assuming the posture
of a suppliant and confessing that she has "been laden with like frailties which before have often shamed ... her sex," has no impact on the well-oiled delivery of his message to her (123-134). His chief aim is to convince her that he intends to "dispose" her, as he phrases it, as she "shall give him counsel," and he treats her with a businesslike brusqueness that belies his assurances and that is very far removed from Thidias' crafty courtesies (186-187).

The only aggravation, in fact, that threatens to put Caesar out of the part he has studied is not Cleopatra's sexuality or vulnerability, but Seleucus' revelation that she has fudged a bit on listing the contents of her treasury. Pretending to yield all to Caesar, she hands him a "brief" which purports to account for the money, plate, and jewels she owns. Perhaps it should not be surprising that Seleucus fails to back up her story, causing her to be embarrassingly caught out, as Falstaff so frequently is. "Wert thou a man," she charges him, "thou wouldst have mercy on me," but Seleucus not only apparently lacks something of being a man, he is a treasurer to boot (174-175). It is a wonderfully comic moment, the laughter coming partially at Cleopatra's expense but partially at Caesar's too. Keeping back part of the treasury is an unpredictable and therefore thoroughly Cleopatran maneuver, and Caesar, who is pretending to believe in the Queen's
virtue and majesty, finds himself in a ticklish situation. No hardened liar, Cleopatra blushes and resorts to a tactic Falstaffian in its obviousness, though she intends it for persuasive, not comic purposes:

Say, good Caesar,
That I some lady trifles have reserved,
Immortal toys, things of such dignity
As we greet modern friends withal; and say
Some nobler token I have kept apart
For Livia and Octavia, to induce
Their mediations.

(164-170)

It is a delightful transformation, hovering on the borderline between vulnerability and brashness, and it could not possibly deceive Caesar into thinking that she is preparing herself for Rome. We know that Cleopatra had rather die than pay her compliments to Octavia, and so does Caesar, but he is not interested in trapping her and keeps up the pretense that he recognizes her majesty. It is a somewhat difficult role to play in view of the fact that he inadvertently sees majesty embarrassingly compromised. He smooths over the incident, however, and probably means it when he assures her that he approves the "wisdom of the deed" (150). That kind of policy would appeal to him. Apparently, however, nothing else about her does. He, too, finally, seems to lack something of being a man, responding neither to the humorousness and courage of Cleopatra's transformation nor to the piteousness of her plight. He
swerves not a jot from his original program, asking her to believe that "Caesar's no merchant, to make prize with . . . [her] of things that merchants sold" and thus reveals again the stuff of which his soul is made (183-184). 57

However, though she has not attracted him, Cleopatra has fooled Caesar after all. Her flattery of his ego and her attempt to finagle the royal funds have not tricked him, but they have unwittingly confirmed his preconception of her as a weak, unstable, and hardly virtuous woman, for he is incapable of discerning the ironies implicit in her submissive tone. She is not like Octavia, nor, we imagine, would Caesar consider her worthy enough to present his sister with a token of her esteem even if she were willing to do so. Smugly confident that she is just what he expected and is, consequently, putty in his hands, he exits from the monument and fails to hear her mutter scornfully at his retreating back, "he words me, girls, he words me, that I should not/Be noble to myself" (191-192). Immediately after his departure, she makes whispered arrangements for the asps to be brought, a task perhaps made easier by Caesar's complacency. Dolabella underscores the urgency of the situation with news that the "sole sir o' th' world," as Cleopatra calls him, intends to send for and her children "within three days" (201). Bereft of her lover, her kingdom, and even her treasures now, Cleopatra knows there is no more time for boggling.
VII.

*Moby Dick's* Starbuck, gazing dreamily into the sea, murmurs softly to himself:

> Loveliness unfathomable, as ever lover saw in his young bride's eyes!—Tell me not of thy teeth-tiered sharks, and thy kidnapping cannibal ways. Let faith oust fact; let fancy oust memory; I look deep down and do believe.  

Starbuck's transformation of the sea-jungle into loveliness is a self-indulgent refusal to see what is in the ocean, a fantasy in which we know better than to believe. When Cleopatra defeats Caesar by erecting before her mind's eye an image of the man whose face "was as the Heav'ns" however, she is not foolishly refusing to see how alien and barren the Roman landscape is nor to acknowledge her own fallen condition. Rather, she is knowingly and willfully defying that landscape and the "moral" constructs in which Caesar tries to place his accession to power. With her gaze fixed firmly upon her lover, she applies the poisonous asps to her body, thus demonstrating the depth of her faith in "fancy" and imagination. Cleopatra at last honors Antony's heroic "dream," electing to die as "Cleopatra," worthy consort of a "plated Mars." Having shaken off a fleeting sorrow at the prospect of never being able to enjoy the world again and a momentary and touching
fear of death, her last "weaknesses," she chooses over an empty life without Antony "another sleep, that . . . [she] might see/But such another man" (V. ii, 284-285). When Cleopatra "banishes" fact with fancy, however, she validates her fancy with her own death; she is the artist who loves her creations, the poet whose show engages us precisely because we know, beyond a doubt, what its purpose is. She thus wrests her "story" from Caesar, revises its genre from absurdist to tragic and places herself and her lover forever beyond the pale of Rome's comic playwrights, its shouting varletry, and its reductive vision of her love affair. Neither blind to the truth as Antony was when he died nor egotistically preying upon it, as Caesar is, Cleopatra imaginatively transforms her landscape, and then, investing herself absolutely in that transformation, changes the reality of her life to match it.\(^59\)

Cleopatra's spectacularly theatrical death, the "thing that ends all other deeds," is the culmination of that tendency in the play for characters to approach life as if it were a story they could comprehend, direct, and control. Shakespeare's tragedies show us repeatedly the folly of taking too literally the commonplace that "all the world's a stage," but Antony and Cleopatra presents us, in Cleopatra, a character who manages, finally, to direct her "play" and
to make life imitate art. Her achievement lends the play an affirmative conclusion something akin to comedy or romance. She does not succeed, however, at the expense of tragedy's view of life as essentially capricious and ungovernable or its view of man's proneness to oversimplification as foolish. Despite the advantages in perceptiveness and clarity of vision she holds over other characters, Cleopatra is not passionless enough and calculating enough to keep her vital Egyptian kingdom from disintegrating. She preserves it from Fortune's blows and from Caesar's "kidnapping cannibal ways" not "in reality," but in the province of the imagination. It is the poet's realm, finally, which offers her the freedom necessary to change her world, and which, ultimately, does provide a new reality.

The pity we feel for Lear is surely more important, when all is considered, than what *King Lear* shows us about trying to reduce complex experience to artistic orderliness. Cleopatra, while she is systematically being stripped of her lover, her kingdom, and her fortune, does not evoke in us, as Lear does when he is similarly stripped, the powerful emotional surge which cancels out the fact that he has behaved foolishly. Her vulnerability is affecting but funny too. Her Falstaffian zest for life (in contrast with Rome's insensitivity), her deep feelings, her bountiful imagination, and her basic lack of guile save her from our severest censure, but we are not fully engaged with her during most
of the play as we are with Lear. We watch somewhat
detachedly as she struggles to maintain her identity, our
detachment increasing when her struggles grow less "innoc­
cent" and have a graver impact on those around her. How­
ever, her ultimate decision to imbue her vitalizing vision
of herself and Antony with supreme importance moves
Cleopatra beyond the sphere of those who destroy tragic
characters' false assumptions that they can direct their
"plays," Fortune, death, and chance. Simultaneously, she
catches us back into her manner of perceiving the "story"
of Antony and Cleopatra and arrests its downward descent
once and for all. Where Falstaff's most innocent and
engaging fictions come at the beginning of the play,
Cleopatra's comes at the end. And, just as King Lear's suf­
fering reaffirms humanity's stature in a dehumanizing uni­
verse, so the royal Egyptian reasserts the primacy of love
and of the human imagination, that faculty which can
"recast" the story and thus renew a landscape deadened by an
overweening interest in practicality and "reality." When
we recognize that her impulse to influence and shape is
"confined" to the poet's world, the last of our anxieties
about her transformations disappears. Like Falstaff's
playful inventions, Cleopatra's last transformation is
"innocent." It neither practices upon an unsuspecting
audience, as Caesar's transformations do, nor is self­
deluding, as Antony's frequently are. We give ourselves
to her "dream," acknowledging, in that act, our own faith in fictive truth, imagination's regenerative potential, and the superiority of poets' "lies" over those of politicians and madmen.

Lear wishes to perpetuate his reunion with Cordelia by removing it forever from the world of time and chance. Cleopatra determines at last to bring remarkableness back into an existence in which "there is nothing left remarkable/Beneath the visiting moon" by perpetuating her finest moment with Antony. She is "again for Cydnus/To meet Mark Antony" (V. ii, 228-229). The old King cannot, of course, impose his dream on reality. It is an impossible dream and one in which he is so lost that he has no sense of its fictionality. He does not "dream" knowingly, in other words, to counter the awfulness of the landscape he sees, and he is too far gone in suffering and in his tragic vision of life to have the multifarious consciousness necessary for artistic control. Not his control but his pain, the pity we, and some of the characters, feel for him, and his own capacity to pity, render the political backdrop of his play hollow. Cleopatra, however, makes Caesar's own successful imposition of his barren "story" a hollow victory when she utilizes the very calculation, control, and perspective which make her a potential destroyer of Antony's dream to create an artistic monument to their love. By
following her transformed Antony into death, she declares the "innocent" intentions of her show, provides nature with the "stuff/To vie strange forms with fancy," and gives an immutable substantiality to the noble moments of her life with him. Cleopatra imposes her "story" finally, upon the only area of human experience which, itself, is free from Fortune and can, therefore, "eternally" perpetuate that story, the human imagination.

A better sense of the degree to which her final show engages us and of the skill and authority with which she directs it may be obtained by comparing it with Antony's death scene, a comparison which verbal and structural echoing almost insist upon. The most significant and obvious difference between the suicides is the difference in perspective between the two transformers involved. Cleopatra knows exactly what she is doing when she sets out to give shape and meaning to her life; Antony could not see quite so clearly. Even more pointedly than 1 Henry IV suggests the scope and limitations of comedy, Antony and Cleopatra draws out of its own fabric the various strands which comprise the tragic genre and submits them for our close scrutiny. We cannot be fully engaged in Antony's "tragedy" during his suicide attempt, for example, because he does not know that he is dying for a "dream" which may never be realized and because the stage business itself is bungled. Both these conditions
interfere with his efforts to "perform" tragedy, even though the strength of his passion for Cleopatra differentiates him from such "failed" transformers as Hotspur, Titus, or Malvolio. We do not wish for Antony's "dream" to be dispelled; we are simply aware, as he is not, that it can be. He is Theseus' maddened lover, who "sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt" when we are not yet certain that "Egypt" merits even one man's death, much less a Trojan War. In contrast with Caesar's self-serving political fictions and his "morality play" mentality, Antony's blind transformations are injurious mainly to himself and only inadvertently to others.

When Cleopatra transforms with a poet's lie, however, she hurts nobody except herself, and that hurt "is as a lover's pinch" (V. ii, 295). She sees clearly the dreary vista against which she opposes her invigorating vision of life with Antony. Like Prospero, the Queen knows the difference between art and life but believes implicitly in "fancy's" power to change life forever.

Antony's death, however messy, causes a greater "crack" in history than Caesar's efficient rise to power, as the play upholds the merit of being receptive to feelings that may seem irrational. In King Lear, pity, the ability to share another person's anguish, prevents man from being only a "poor, bare, forked animal" (King Lear, III. iv, 106-107). Lear's pity for
Cordelia at the end of the play causes him to cry out at
the injustice of her lying dead while "a dog, a horse, a
rat have life," and throughout, we are, to varying
degrees, aligned with the characters who heed the prompt­
ings of their humane feelings even when, as the Fool
observes, one may catch cold if one cannot "smile as the
wind sits" (King Lear, I. iv, 101-102). In Antony and
Cleopatra, Enobarbus is saved from our condemnation and
earns a more exalted place in the story than that of
"master-leaver" when he submits to his "irrational" love
for Antony, but he is made the recipient of one of his
captain's munificent gestures before he does so. Submitting
to irrational feelings is risky business for Antony, but
he earns a much higher place in the story than either
Enobarbus or Caesar when he yields himself to Cleopatra
in spite of the evidence that she has lied to him.
Eventually, she rewards his faith. Her own conscious
choice of her transformed world over the "real" one,
however, requires the greatest act of faith and courage.
In contrast with her lover, she is well aware that she
is believing in a transformation as she entrusts her
own "story" to the "irrational" domain of the imagination.
Finally, the emotional surge of the play sweeps us toward
her death scene, during which we are asked to duplicate
her faith by giving ourselves to what is very obviously
a "show." Like the lords who gape in wonder to see
Prospero alive, in *The Tempest*, when we encounter Cleopatra in the last scene, we "do so much admire/That ... we devour ... our reason" (*The Tempest*, V. i, 154-155).

She begins preparing for the scene by rousing her servants, using the same argument Antony used to induce Eros to strike the blow when he hesitated. "Saucy lictors/Will catch at us like strumpets," she warns Iras:

Ballad us out o' tune, 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. 61

(V. ii, 214-221)

There is a noticeable difference, however, between Cleopatra's relationship with her servants and Antony's with Eros. Iras and Charmian, as always, share almost totally the Queen's view of her situation and recognize here not only the necessity of death but the importance that it be a particular kind of death. Significantly, these two are the only "witnesses" for the death scene (Iras dies before it is completed), and essentially, Cleopatra plays the scene for herself, producing a show whose purpose has nothing to do with revealing truth to an audience or concealing it. The servants need no convincing that death is necessary nor do they question
the propriety of the death their mistress envisions. Iras says, "the bright day is done,/And we are for the dark," even before Cleopatra reminds her of Rome's "quick comedians" (193-194). Both attendants are extensions of the Queen's will, stagehands who fetch her "best attire" and arrange for the asps to be brought. Their unqualified commitment to Cleopatra's plan ushers in and supports our own. Of course, Eros loved Antony too. But the great Roman, enwrapt by his "dream" of Cleopatra, who, he imagines, has conquered Caesar by conquering herself, is overeager to follow her example. He is not the careful artist his mistress is, and he does not consider the awful responsibility he places on his servant's shoulders. He pleads with Eros to kill him, and the heartstricken servant kills himself instead. Rather than enriching his master's moment of death with his own knowing participation in it, Eros adds to the confusion and helps Cleopatra turn it into a debacle.

Antony's haste and blindness, thus, affect the physical staging of his "tragedy." Not only his ignorance of the fact that his vision of Cleopatra is being undermined by reality but the physical awkwardness of the attempt to fall on his sword interferes with our engagement in his tragic transformation of his plight. "Failed" tragedy, as Titus, Hieronimo, and Antony show, makes us uncomfortable in some way and may even result in comic or
grotesque absurdity. The "audience" at such a "play" may eventually titter at the hyperbole trying to pass for sublimity or may be appalled at the spectacle that is made of death. While Antony possesses the poetic strength necessary to create a tragic vision of the universe, his lack of awareness causes him to make a spectacle of himself instead, albeit, like Hieronimo, a very painful one. In his haste to overtake Cleopatra and "weep for her pardon," he bungles his suicide. As in the scene in which the royal Egyptian's poetic voice is set against the visual impact of a body being laboriously hauled up the side of a monument to receive its last kiss, Antony's beautifully evocative poetic voice, unknown to him, is at odds with its playworld, and he does not have the perspective which permits her to accommodate verbally the outlandish physical circumstances of the monument scene, and later the "accidents" which befall her own death scene. Cleopatra's complete control at the last is manifested in the smoothness and quietness of her death. Furthermore, while much stage business accompanies her lover's death, the physical business of her own is virtually invisible and is made palpable to us almost solely through her poetry. Cleopatra fills the empty stage for us, and her verbal scenemaking working upon our imaginations proves to be more potent than death in the "high Roman fashion."
Inadvertently, the Clown, purveyor of that essential prop, the "pretty worm of Nilus," provides the best introduction to the show we are about to watch. His awkwardly articulated worry that Cleopatra underestimates the dangerousness of the asps is both touching and humorously bawdy. As he blunders on and on, holding up the show, Cleopatra experiences some tremors of fear, asking him if he has ever seen anyone die from the asp's bite. She is somewhat impatient and wishes him to go, but she is also reluctant for him to go and calls him back once. His puns on lying and dying and honest women, and his parting wish that Cleopatra have "joy o' th' worm" are certainly not in disagreement with her sexuality, but the comic interlude, rather than functioning as an unwitting or irreverent expose of a harlot, offers a perfect description of Cleopatra's final scene. In the first place, the biting of the worm will be "immortal" after all. In the second, Cleopatra, because she is an open transformer, is lying only as a woman (or anyone else) should, "in the way of honesty" (254). Her honest lie, like Falstaff's, remakes the world when other lies cannot.

When her performance begins, we feel almost as if there had been no interval between the time she held her dying lover in her arms and now, as she prepares to follow him into death, no boggling to break up her finest moment.
Almost "marble-constant," she dons her imperial robes and her crown, aided by her women. The mythopoeic language of her playful inventions and carefree hours sounds again, bringing forth "Emperor Antony" again, and, as she prepares to place the asps on her body, she focuses her inner eye upon the image:

Give me my robe, put on my crown, I have Immortal longings in me. Now no more The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip. Yare, yare, good Iras; quick: methinks I hear Antony call: I see him rouse himself To praise my noble act. I hear him mock The luck of Caesar, which the gods give men To excuse their after wrath. Husband, I come: Now to that name my courage prove my title! I am fire, and air; my other elements I give to baser life. (280-290)

However, though she concentrates on the Antony she has chosen to remember and upon the ennobling world in which he awaits her, she is not so absorbed in the vision that all else is blotted out, not lost in her transformation as Antony is when he sees her beckoning to him from the land where "souls do couch on flowers" (IV. xiv, 51). The multiple consciousness which she has manifested throughout the play does not desert her here, and it remains clear that she is choosing to let fancy oust fact. Antony, hastening toward his "otherworldly" Egyptian, is almost oblivious, not only to the details involved in getting himself killed, but to the fact of death itself.
Cleopatra, however, thinks about dying, poignantly aware that she shall never again taste "the juice of Egypt's grape." She also recognizes that what she is doing will both "reunite" her with her lover and mock Caesar, and, even as she keeps the image of Antony before her, she is directing her women. Prospero-like, she has the artist's capacity to see everything at once and to be deeply engaged in what she sees too. Enobarbus is helplessly ravished for a moment, before he shakes off its influence, by his recollection of Cleopatra's appearance on her barge, and Pompey grows uncontrollably enamoured of his description of Antony's debauchery in Egypt. As the Queen "recollects" her lover, however, she exhibits no sign of being at the mercy of her verbal creation, nor does she resemble the Cleopatra who deluded herself with a powerful dose of wishful thinking when Antony married Octavia. Aware of all the various strands that compose her "show," she exhorts herself to constancy, trying to quell that in her which rebels against death. And, though her wavering has almost ceased, there is still a slight chance, because she is awake to every facet of experience, that she will not go through with this plan and that her "womanly" fear of death will overwhelm her at the last. As before, the fact that she can choose makes her a potentially faithless underminer of the heroic conception of life. And, as long as the remotest
chance exists that she will waver, our complete engagement in the tragedy she is directing is checked. Only her own absolute commitment to it will insure for us the honesty of her "lie."

Prospero, enjoying the interlude he has contrived to celebrate Ferdinand's and Miranda's betrothal, almost forgets about Caliban's plot, and there are other instances, in The Tempest, which serve to remind us that his artistic control does not always proceed smoothly, though nothing ever really happens to threaten the outcome of his magic. Gentle ripples appear on the surface of Cleopatra's much shorter play too, quieter variations of the problems that beset Antony's suicide. Iras dies before her and the asps which she applies to her breast seem almost as reluctant to kill her as Eros is to kill Antony. Still, though she is momentarily stunned by Iras' sudden fall, she first absorbs, as Antony does not when Eros dies, the physical fact of her servant's death and then translates it into a positive sign. "The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch,/Which hurts and is desired" and Iras dies with so little struggle that she "tell'st the world/It is not worth leave-taking" (295-298). If there is still a minute trace left of her desire to reassure herself that death is not frightening, a hesitation that hinders our total engrossment in this transformation, it suddenly disappears when, spurred by Iras'
example, Cleopatra shakes off fear. At the point when she chooses to "believe" fully in her transformed Antony, at the point when all wavering ceases, we are absorbed into her vision. The last "weakness" disappears. She turns her back forever on one life, and, with an absolute "belief" in another, signalled by her anxiety that Iras will "meet the curled Antony" before her and receive the "kiss/Which is . . . [her] heaven to have," she applies the asps to her body (301-303). Tormented no longer by fear and doubt, Cleopatra chooses, not another lover in a long string of lovers, but a "husband," the "bridegroom" who ran to death before her.64

As the asps' venom slowly begins to work upon her, Cleopatra gradually fades into unconsciousness and death. Underlining the fact, however, that her act of faith was choice and not sudden madness is her continuing awareness that she has outplayed Caesar and a vague wish that she could somehow enjoy his discomfiture. There is nothing physically spectacular about her suicide, no Roman swords or blood. Her awesome display of control as she kisses her maids farewell and puts her mind firmly upon that better Antony reintroduces the Egyptian atmosphere of tranquility and ease which we see at the beginning of the play. Gone are the frantic pace and the frayed emotions of Antony's death, replaced by the slow, feminine, fertility of Egypt, where death is a "baby at
"The breast, That sucks the nurse asleep" (309-310).

"Easy," a word which, in Caesar's vocabulary is deprecatory--ease is not part of Rome's tradition--is, in hers, a calm and knowing sundering of the strings which bind body and soul together. Her serenity, standing out so sharply from the clamoring and quarreling of Rome, moves her effortlessly beyond Caesar's grasp, in our eyes, and beyond his attempts to cheapen her suicide by calling it "easy."

Bursting on the scene immediately after the Queen and her women die, Caesar finds only a beautifully robed corpse, but even he is moved by her at last, stunned by her courage and, more significantly, by her serenity in death. He pays her an inadvertently fitting tribute when he observes that she could purse up Antony's heart again in "her strong toil of grace," for that is her purpose. Finding some reassurance in the fact that Cleopatra did not die in the "high Roman fashion" but found an easier way, the boy-ruler regains his self-possession and endeavors, once more, to make the best of a bad situation. "High events as these," he solemnly points out

\[
\text{Strike those that make them; and their story is No less in pity, than his glory which Brought them to be lamented.} \quad (359-362)
\]

But where Hal succeeds, Caesar does not. Though he has
brought Antony and Cleopatra to their graves, to us he has had, finally, nothing to do with their deaths. The "child of State" is Time's Fool and his insignificance measures our investment in Cleopatra's fiction (Sonnet 124). Having chosen to gaze into the eyes of her transformed lover at the moment of death, the Queen has eclipsed the image of Caesar. Reality does not stand up against the fancy that outworks it, and the "hero" of the political story, the character who embodies efficiency and rational self-control, cannot be our hero or even our spokesperson, to whom is left the task of summing up the tragedy. As Prospero's charms work upon Gonzalo and Alonso, those characters in the play who have the capacity to "be struck to the quick" by his "rough magic," so Cleopatra's honest fiction works upon us, but, in reality, her show, like his, is "rough magic." The greater miracle is the human imagination that not only can compose fictions but can believe in them too, and believe so strongly that reality is changed forever. Not to believe in Cleopatra's new world even in spite of its fictionality, not to take a "chance" on the "irrational," is to be aligned with Caesar in this play or with Sebastian and Antonio in Prospero's. It is to reject the efficacy of the imagination to restructure the world, when, in essence, that faculty offers the only real way
in which it can be restructured. A refusal to credit fictive truths is submission to "the real world," or to "the hard facts," and truly, that submission makes us passive recipients of a life that someone else has shaped for us. It offers no hope of our ever making our lives our own. There is no tragedy for Caesar and that is his loss.
Chapter 4. The Honest Lie

1 Though Chaucer's Monk might very well reduce the play to a paradigm of de casibus tragedy, few readers do. "The lovers' defiance of reality represents the lyric imagination's rejection of the values implicit in history's de casibus judgment of them," states, for example, Richard S. Ide, in a helpful essay on the play in Possessed with Greatness: The Heroic Tragedies of Chapman and Shakespeare (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1980), p. 105; "Antony and Cleopatra is not . . . the story of a drunk and a whore; such a tale would be merely tedious," says A. L. French, in Shakespeare and the Critics (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1972), p. 233; and Madeleine Doran, in Shakespeare's Dramatic Language (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1976) echoes those sentiments (pp. 154-55). Most audiences would surely agree with Maynard Mack's statement that the "full story chiseled out of Plutarch receives . . . many kinds of imaginative extensions . . ." ("The Stillness and the Dance," Shakespeare's Art: Seven Essays, ed. Milton Crane (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 89), since most acknowledge the play's complexities. As in the case of 1 Henry IV, however, many critics range between two opposing views of the story of Antony and Cleopatra. At one extreme are the moralists, who claim that the play condemns Antony and Cleopatra, while at the other are those who argue that it exalts romantic love. More recently, however, and to a greater degree than is true in the case of the English history play, criticism has tended to speak of a dialectic between politics and love or of a balancing of oppositions. As William Rosen, in Shakespeare and the Craft of Tragedy (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960) observes, "Antony and Cleopatra is a puzzle to many because Shakespeare sustains things in perilous balance, so much so that critics have recurrently used the terms 'paradox,' 'duality,' and 'ambiguity' to describe a play that is "a tangled skein" (p. 147). To Robin Lee, for example, the play seems "a destructive vacillation between incompatible alternative choices" (Shakespeare, "Antony and Cleopatra" (London: Arnold, 1971), p. 21); and to Marion Bodwell Smith, in Dualities in Shakespeare (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976),
1966), its oppositions seem "far from being regarded as moral absolutes" (p. 190). David Cecil, in "Antony and Cleopatra," *Poets and Story-Tellers* (London: Constable, 1949; rpt. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961), from *Antony and Cleopatra* (Glasgow: Jackson, 1943), provides a representative statement about the play's oppositions:

Antony's love is a self-indulgent passion that weakens his will and blinds his judgment while Cleopatra is, by a strict moral standard, a vain, worthless, capricious coquette who does not care in the least about the true interests of her lover, and who is so dominated by the desire to attract that she cannot be faithful to him for half-an-hour once his back is turned. Yet in spite of all, the figures are both resplendent with romance. Antony is a true king of men . . . As for Cleopatra, she is simply the sorceress of the world (p. 22).

Madeleine Doran, in *Shakespeare's Dramatic Language*, offers a very similar summary (pp. 168-169). According to Janet Adelman, in *The Common Liar: An Essay on "Antony and Cleopatra"* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1973) and Ruth Nevo, *Tragic Form in Shakespeare* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), resolving the oppositions and clearing up ambiguities are difficult, if not impossible, tasks. The play's dramatic design "forces us to acknowledge the process of judgment at every turn," according to Adelman, who then concludes that judgments are often impossible to make (p. 31). Though I do not think that *Antony and Cleopatra* is as indeterminate as Adelman does—Nevo believes that what Cleopatra does at the end of the play affects "retrospectively" our view of the entire story and thus settles some of our questions (see pp. 309 and 339, for example)—I am nevertheless in sympathy with her insistence that we experience the play as a process, as well as her belief that we must acknowledge its numerous ambiguities. I think my reading is responsive to them.

For more traditional readings of the play, see, for example, Franklin Dickey's *Not Wisely But Too Well: Shakespeare's Love Tragedies* (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1957) and Robert E. Fitch's "No Greater Crack?" *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 19 (1968), 3-17, both of which hold that Cleopatra is Antony's "fatal flaw," as does Daniel Stempel's "The Transmigration of the Crockodile," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 7 (1956), 59-72, which argues against the Romantic view by describing a very "unromantic" Renaissance mind for which, presumably, the play was written. For a more "romantic" view, see, for example, A. C. Bradley, "Antony and Cleopatra," *Shakespeare, "Antony and Cleopatra": A Casebook*, ed. John Russell


3 "Neither the phrase 'a strumpet's fool' nor the assertion 'the nobleness of life is to do thus,' answers to the total effect of the play," says A. C. Bradley, in "Antony and Cleopatra" (p. 75). "Shakespeare makes the


Almost every reader, whether he accepts the value of it or not, has pointed at the triumphant quality of Cleopatra's death scene. (See Note 60.)

The state of flux is noted by numerous audiences, including Janet Adelman, who observes that "our impression is simultaneously that nothing changes and that nothing is the same" (The Common Liar, p. 47). John F. Danby points out that "is is characteristic of the play that what is hated during life should find favor once it is dead" ("Antony and Cleopatra," pp. 47-48). "Nobility and mutability ... penetrates the play at every point," contends Maynard Mack ("The Stillness and the Dance," p. 90), as does John Holloway, in "Antony and Cleopatra," p. 70.

Shakespeare seems to take pains . . . to make it clear that Octavius' assumption of moral superiority rests on nothing more solid than his conviction that the things he wants, political power, the sole control of the Roman empire . . . are more admirable than the things that Antony wants," asserts D. R. C. Marsh, in Passion Lends Them Power, p. 152.

Says J. Leeds Barroll, in "The Characterization of Octavius," Shakespeare Studies, 6 (1972 for 1970), "Caesar's praise . . . may . . . emerge as more of a burden than a grace, more as an indication of how Caesar personally views life than as an amply-minded tribute which Antony is to be compelled constantly to justify" (p. 240).

Plutarch's Antony is a "merry fellow," says E. A. J. Honigmann, in *Shakespeare: Seven Tragedies: The Dramatist's Manipulation of Response* (London: The MacMillan Press, Ltd., 1976). "In the play it is Cleopatra who rails and mocks, and Antony is always at the receiving end and not amused. Shakespeare greatly accentuated the laughter at Antony's expense, in the play's opening scenes, and at the same time deprived his hero of the ability to laugh back" (p. 151). The humor is not all at Antony's expense, however, nor is Cleopatra being merely witty, as Honigmann implies elsewhere.

"No matter how diminished Antony was in grandeur, he was nonetheless the only grandeur we had; at his death, there is nothing left remarkable beneath the visiting moon. For Antony's place is midway between the generation of the fathers and the generation of the sons" (Janet Adelman, *The Common Liar*, p. 137). "Like his ancestor, Hercules," says Rosalie Colie, "Antony does things no other man can do, on a scale on which no other man can do them" (Shakespeare's *Living Art*, p. 197). Many critics believe the main focus of the play is on Antony's dilemma at being caught between two worlds, and, of course, that is an extremely important aspect of it. William Rosen, for example, states that "the main drama lies in the exposure of vying demands upon Antony" (Shakespeare and the *Craft of Tragedy*, p. 123); Julian Markels argues that Mark Antony is disciplined in the distinctive vision of the play, wherein he is challenged either to choose between the opposed values represented by Cleopatra and Octavia or not to choose between them; and that instead of choosing, he resolves the conflict by striving equally toward both values and rhythmically making each one a measure and condition of the other.

( *The Pillar of the World*, p. 9)


13 Janet Adelman, in The Common Liar, differentiates Antony and Cleopatra from other tragedies on the basis of our engagement with the heroes:

"Tragedies do not normally ask us to identify ourselves with the minor characters. But in Antony and Cleopatra we participate in the experience of the commentator more often than in the experience of the lovers: we are forced to notice the world's view of them more often than their view of the world. . . . In the major tragedies, the presentation of character and the structure generally function to focus our attention on the protagonists, to force us to participate in their experience and to live for a time within the moral contours of their universe. . . . The dramatic structure of this play functions to diffuse and dissipate our attention throughout a wider universe than that which the protagonists know."

(pp. 40, 44)

argument holds that our detachment from Cleopatra and from the lovers' view of themselves is broken up by periods of at least partial engagement. The structure of this play, with reference to our perspective on the main characters, resembles the structure of much non-Shakespearean Renaissance tragedy and resembles, as those plays do, the structure of comedy. (See also Note 12, Chapter 2.)

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate that Cleopatra is delightful, not duplicitous in any harmful way, and to counter such views as M. R. Ridley's, in his introduction to The New Arden Shakespeare edition of Antony and Cleopatra, gen. eds., Harold F. Brooks and Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1951), which holds that "it would be hard to find . . . a more unsparing picture of the professional courtesan than Shakespeare's picture of Cleopatra in the first four acts" (p. liii); Julian Markels', in The Pillar of the World, that "in the first half of the play Shakespeare altered the Cleopatra he found in Plutarch by elaborating upon her seductiveness and decadence" (p. 7, see also p. 18); Thomas McFarland's, in Tragic Meaning in Shakespeare (New York: Random House, 1966), which sees Egypt itself "on the brink of moral bankruptcy, lushly corrupt, luxurious, lecherous, and, most damning of all, mindless (p. 95); and Mathew Proser's, in The Heroic Image in Five Shakespearean Tragedies, which sees Cleopatra as being strategic throughout these early scenes (pp. 190-194).

For readings of the early scenes that are similar to mine, see, for example, Elias Schwartz, The Mortal Worm, p. 74; D. R. C. Marsh, Passion Lends Them Power, who declares that "for all her pretenses and playacting, Cleopatra wears her heart on her sleeve, for in the truest sense she is what she pretends to be" (p. 161); Ruth Nevo, Tragic Form in Shakespeare, p. 314 (Though Nevo's reading differs from mine on several points, she acknowledges that Cleopatra's speech "is hauntingly expressive of the emotions she is . . . hoping to exploit," p. 314, see also p. 308); A. P. Riemer, A Reading of Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra," p. 36; and William Blisset, "Dramatic Irony in Antony and Cleopatra," Shakespeare Quarterly, 18 (1967), 153. For different views, see A. L. French, Shakespeare and the Critics, pp. 209-211; A. C. Bradley, "Antony and Cleopatra," p. 68; and Robin Lee, Shakespeare, "Antony and Cleopatra," p. 26. (Also see note 14.)

J. Leeds Barroll, in "Shakespeare and the Art of Character," says that "the usually complacent Antony is strongly moved by such challenges to his sense of his physical and military superiority." He reacts this way
"to situations which strike him as attacks on his military sense of 'self' and, concomitantly, of his 'honor.' In fact, Cleopatra's success at diverting Antony from politics is based on this trait" (p. 172). Although I am not sure when Antony is "complacent" and I don't think Cleopatra cunningly manipulates this trait, I do think it is present in him, as my argument suggests.

17 "Antony's tactics are to seek for the least troublesome method of telling Cleopatra that he is going to leave her. Cleopatra is intent on preventing him telling her, as well as on postponing his departure. . . . The seriousness of her attachment and her heartsickness at his departure shows through the falling cadence of 'when you sued staying,'" holds Robin Lee, in Shakespeare, "Antony and Cleopatra," p. 42. See also Mathew N. Proser, The Heroic Image in Five Shakespearean Tragedies, p. 192.

18 "While Cleopatra's 'something it is I would' implies the intensity of her emotions, Octavia sounds somewhat silly in her analogous inability to communicate," observes Philip J. Traci, in The Love Play of "Antony and Cleopatra," p. 51. The comparison is interesting, though perhaps "silly" is not the proper word to describe Octavia.

19 A. L. French believes, on the other hand, that Antony's Donne-like couplet here—"our separation so abides and flies"—is hollow (Shakespeare and the Critics, p. 209).

20 "The way she masters her confusion and adopts the role of the noble Roman matron, sending him away from her with a valediction suitable for the part he is playing, show how she strives to keep control of herself, to make his unavoidable departure easy, so that, as she hopes, his return will be speeded," says D. R. C. Marsh, describing the closing speeches slightly differently (Passion Lends Them Power, p. 164).

21 "Her idleness . . . involves an incessant imaginatively activity," says David Kaula, in "The Time Sense of Antony and Cleopatra," "which carries her freely beyond the immediate here and now, enriching even the 'great gap of time' when she has nothing to do but wait passively for Antony" (p. 588).

22 Declares Anthony Caputi, in "Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra," Cleopatra "is aware of what she is doing; Charmian is aware of what she is doing; and each is aware that the others are aware" (pp. 189-190). To say, however, that all that occurs here is mere acting is to rob the scene of its emotion.
For an opposing view of this "transformation" scene, see Bernard Beckerman's "Past the Size of Dreaming," p. 108. William Blissett, in "Dramatic Irony in Antony and Cleopatra," agrees that "Alexandria, that we have seen and . . . Caesar has not, is recognizable but only barely recognizable in the bleak light of his account" (p. 154). For a similar view, see Philip J. Traci's The Love Play of "Antony and Cleopatra," p. 44. Anthony Caputi uses the term "density" to describe the Egyptian experience. "It is in the lovers and their minions," he says, "that we meet the tendency to embrace diversity, to fuse disparities, to take hold of experience in such a way as to feel all possibilities at once, to make every moment expressive of the fullness of all moments" ("Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra," p. 190).

Says Janet Adelman, in The Common Liar, "the opposition is never between the Rome of honor and heroic virtue and the Egypt of the senses: Octavius firmly rejects heroic virtue, and Roman honor has dwindled to Pompey's scrupulous desire for clean hands . . ." (p. 132): "the decay of the Roman state is paradoxical," argues Robert Ornstein, "because it is not a melting into Egyptian softness but a hardening into a marble-like ruthlessness of the universal landlord"("The Ethic of the Imagination," p. 87). For similar views, see, for example, A. C. Bradley, "Antony and Cleopatra," p. 73; and Robin Lee, Shakespeare, "Antony and Cleopatra," p. 22. I fully agree with Anthony Caputi, who says, in "Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra," that the key element lacking in Rome is imagination (p. 186).


Oberves Rosalie L. Colie, "Cleopatra lies from first to last, to others and to herself. We are never in doubt of her duplicity, but its naturalness comes to seem worthy in comparison to the slyness of Octavius and of the 'trustworthy' Proculeus" (Shakespeare's Living Art, p. 182). Robert Ornstein, in "The Ethic of Imagination," makes much the same point (p. 89).

For a somewhat similar view of this exchange between Octavius and Antony, see Brents Stirling's Unity in Shakespearian Tragedy: The Interplay of Theme and Character (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1956), who says that "Caesar's heir" loses face (p. 166). D. R. C. Marsh notes that Antony is still good at the business of exercising power (Passion Lends Them Power, p. 165). For a different view of Caesar's and Antony's exchange, see Derek Traversi, An Approach to Shakespeare, p. 519; and William Bliss, "Dramatic Irony in Antony and Cleopatra," p. 155.

I agree with Richard S. Ide, who says that "Antony loses 'heart' in Rome, both as servant of love and— the telling irony—as soldier of Rome. . . . Individual derring-do no longer has a place in a world where martial ambition must be tempered by discretion . . . . and where martial spirit is squelched by political propriety" (Possessed with Greatness, p. 111); D. R. C. Marsh also notes that "Rome and what it represents seem to attract . . . /Antony/ less and less, as if he needed only to experience its ethos once more in order to be cured of its fascination" (Passion Lends Them Power, p. 167); and Robert Ornstein argues that "no salvation awaits Antony in Rome because there is no honorable purpose to engage him" ("The Ethic of the Imagination," p. 90). Numerous critics note the disjunction between past and present standards in Rome. See, for example, G. K. Hunter, "The Last Tragic Heroes," pp. 21-22; and William Rosen, Shakespeare and the Craft of Tragedy, p. 112.

A. C. Bradley asks:

When . . . /Caesar/ proposed the marriage with Antony (for of course it was he who spoke through Agrippa), was he honest, or was he laying a trap and, in doing so, sacrificing his sister? Did he hope the marriage would really unite him with his brother-in-law; or did he merely mean it to be a source of future difference; or did he calculate that, whether it secured peace or disension, it would in either case bring him great advantage? Shakespeare, who was quite intelligent as his readers . . . may not have cared to answer /such a question/.

("Antony and Cleopatra," p. 71)

On the whole, I agree with Bradley's sense of the scene's ambiguity, though I don't think Caesar pre-planned anything. Robert Ornstein holds that Antony is led by Caesar's lieutenants into "the foolish expediency of the marriage" ("The Ethic of the Imagination," p. 91): while
Richard S. Ide thinks the calculation is Antony's (Possessed with Greatness, p. 107). William Blissett, in "Dramatic Irony in Antony and Cleopatra," believes that the nadir of our relationship with Antony comes when he tells Caesar he isn't married (p. 155). I think that point comes later, when his voice is difficult to distinguish from Caesar's. Agreeing to the marriage seems impulsive and foolish, but not so self-serving or petty as his complaints against Caesar. D. R. C. Marsh, however, in Passion Lends Them Power, also sees the marriage as the least defensible thing Antony does (p. 166).


32 Mathew N. Proser, in The Heroic Image in Five Shakespearean Tragedies, argues that "... Enobarbus'7, the rational man's gesture of acquiescence, is Cleopatra's greatest praise and one of the factors which ought to remind us that 'reason' is not the uncontended standard" in the play (p. 199). Rosalie L. Colie makes a very similar point, in Shakespeare's Living Art, p. 6, as do Philip J. Traci, in The Love Play of "Antony and Cleopatra," p. 49; and William Blissett, in "Dramatic Irony in Antony and Cleopatra," pp. 155-156. For a very different view of Enobarbus' speech, see A. P. Riemer, A Reading of Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra," p. 43.

33 "The Rome that was is recalled by Pompey, who is kept from treachery, not by a personal sense of honor, but by a memory of the honor once sacred to Rome ... by a nostalgia for the ethic of his father," says Robert Ornstein, in "The Ethic of the Imagination," p. 87.

34 "Caesar and Antony, at their leave taking, plainly seem sincere in their wish for amity and affection for Octavia; but in the whispered conversation of Enobarbus and Agrippa which follows, we are at once reminded to watch those in the game for power with an eye for their guile" (John Holloway, "Antony and Cleopatra," p. 73); Julian Markels takes a different stand in The Pillar of the World:

[Antony] takes pleasure in his marriage and his leading question to the soothsayer implies that he for one does not wish himself back in Egypt. When the soothsayer reminds him of his fainting luck in Caesar's presence ... he changes his mind with characteristic abruptness. But this time his newly aroused desire does not lead him to jump for Egypt at the first opportunity, or to break his promise to Octavia and stop living by the rule. Although he is still divided
between Rome and Egypt, now for the first time he stops rejecting one for the other.
(p. 26)

For another view of Antony's stance toward his marriage which differs from mine, see T. McAlindon, *Shakespeare and Decorum* (London: MacMillan, 1973), p. 181. I think it is important to note here that Cleopatra has nothing directly to do with Antony's return to Egypt.

35 Elias Schwartz, in *The Mortal Worm*, believes that Antony is still somewhat sympathetic, though only "by contrast with Caesar. . . . They are all engaged in the quest for power, a game that enforces lies and temporizing—and the appearance of honor" (p. 75).

36 Many critics note the characters' self-conscious interest in controlling and fashioning their stories. "Caesar is walking into history and is keenly conscious of it," says Maynard Mack, for example ("The Stillness and the Dance," p. 93). "The lovers," he also notes, "are also always conscious of "being ever on parade before the reviewing stand of world opinion" (p. 94). Walter Foreman's *Music of the Close* is dedicated to the subject of the conscious shaping of their lives that many Shakespearean characters undertake, especially of that most important of moments, death. His discussion of Antony's and Cleopatra's death scenes is very acute and helpful. Richard S. Ide, in *Possessed with Greatness*, makes some of the distinctions I make, as does Foreman. "As Caesar well knows," Ide contends, "history demands its own kind of artistry, the politicians' improvisatory ability to shape present events, even as they are pressured by the past, into a historical vision of the future. According to Cleopatra's storybook sense of history, however, politics is subsumed in love" (p. 107). "Immediately following the battle that virtually seals Antony's *de casibus* tragedy," he continues somewhat later, "the lovers begin to assert the countergenic values of comedy and romance in defiance of history, Fortune, and empire" (pp. 113-114). See also David Cecil, "Antony and Cleopatra," p. 11; and Thomas F. Van Laan, *Role-Playing in Shakespeare*, p. 220.

37 "It is a common assumption," points out Julian Markels, "that Antony is misled by Cleopatra into making . . . the decision to fight at sea. But Shakespeare takes considerable pains to exclude this possibility and to show that Antony makes up his mind without consulting Cleopatra" (*The Pillar of the World*, p. 128; see also p. 129). Bernard Beckerman believes that Cleopatra's plea for pardon
here is the "first time but one" she appears "divested of all calculation" ("Past the Size of Dreaming," p. 109; see also p. 110). For representative responses to Cleopatra's role at Actium and the reconciliation scene, see also J. Leeds Barroll's "Shakespeare and the Art of Character," p. 175; E. A. J. Honigmann's Shakespeare: Seven Tragedies, p. 161; and Robert Ornstein, "The Ethic of the Imagination," pp. 94-95.

38 A. L. French takes a very different stance toward the exchange between Cleopatra and Thidias: "The . . . interview . . . is overtly comic . . . Her reply—'O!'—could hardly fail to produce laughter in the audience whatever tone the actors adopted" (Shakespeare and the Critics, p. 216). Numerous readers, however, acknowledge the ambiguity of the scene. J. L. Simmons, for example, argues that "criticism easily goes astray in trying to read Cleopatra's motives in the scene with Thidias. Until the end of the play, the enigma of the Egyptian queen is functional and crucial dramaturgically" ("The Comic Pattern and Vision in Antony and Cleopatra," p. 146). Ruth Nevo voices much the same opinion, in Tragic Form in Shakespeare, pp. 326-332, as does Maynard Mack, in "The Stillness and the Dance," pp. 81-82. Robert Ornstein argues that it would be "foolish of this cunning woman to plan a betrayal of Antony in the presence of Enobarbus! What we witness is not Cleopatra's duplicity but Enobarbus' jealous revenge" ("The Ethic of the Imagination," pp. 94-95). I think that Enobarbus hears an ambiguity, not a totally innocent, speech, and that he is predisposed to interpret it unfavorably.

39 A. L. French points out that "it is not merely that Antony has no right to take this kind of tone: it is also that Cleopatra has never set herself up as a moral paragon" (Shakespeare and the Critics, p. 218). However, I don't think that, if she were guilty of the "viciousness" of which she is being accused by Antony, her failure to set herself up as a paragon of virtue would go very far toward excusing her. As many critics do (see note 13), Theodore Spencer differentiates Antony and Cleopatra from King Lear. In the process of doing so, he observes that, "in Antony and Cleopatra there is no awareness, on the part of any character, that what happens is unnatural; nothing hideous or monstrous, like the real lust of Gertrude, the apparent lust of Desdemona, the cruelty of Goneril and Regan, or the criminality of Macbeth" (Shakespeare and the Nature of Man [New York: The MacMillan Co., 1942], p. 169). I think he is right that there is nothing "hideous or monstrous" in the play, but certainly, at this point, Antony thinks Cleopatra is.
The Thidias scene "is followed by one of the most endearing reconciliation scenes ever written," declares Maynard Mack, in "The Stillness and the Dance," p. 81. On the other hand, A. L. French argues that the speech Cleopatra makes is "hollow" and calculating (Shakespeare and the Critics, pp. 219-220). The critical disagreement suggests the ambiguity of Cleopatra's stance.


A. L. French is representative of the opposing view: "There is nothing for it but to agree with Enobarbus when he calls all this a 'diminution of our captain's brain'; and those who want to make him out a nasty cynic, who really can't appreciate the full beauty of the relationship between the lovers, will have to explain why what he says is so often right" (Shakespeare and the Critics, p. 220).


T. McAlindon describes the moment well: "the triumph of manhood and valour and of womanhood and love become indistinguishable—are visibly as well as metaphorically united—and a rare moment of infinite virtue is recorded for the god-like hero, his divine mistress, and all those who have followed them close" (Shakespeare and Decorum, p. 197). Maynard Mack also notes the powerful effect upon us of the moment Antony and Cleopatra meet after the battle: "The episode forces upon our consciousness a recognition of the very different kind of triumph that they have within their power as lovers from the kind for which Caesar seeks . . . /Antony/, and the two competing value systems, theirs and Caesar's, hang for a brief instant in the eye as well as in the ear, as she runs to be embraced" ("The Stillness and the Dance," p. 96). See also J. Leeds Barroll, "Shakespeare and the Art of Character," p. 200.
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45 As J. Leeds Barroll observes, in "Shakespeare and the Art of Character," Antony's "reports of what he has seen ... are one thing; his judgments about them are another. His bias has been rendered throughout the play, and even if he is the audience's sole authority for the news of the defeat, Shakespeare makes the hero report what he has seen, not what has happened in any larger sense" (pp. 201-202).

46 For one of the most interesting and complete discussions of Antony's suicide, see Walter C. Foreman, Jr., The Music of the Close (See, for example, p. 57).

47 "No more rousing assertions: Antony has reached the self beyond the 'heart of loss.' The news of Cleopatra's 'death' brings quieter and firmer knowledge" (Reuben A. Brower, Hero and Saint: Shakespeare and the Graeco-Roman Heroic Tradition [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977], p. 334). For similar accounts of Antony's 'acquiescence' see, for example, Walter C. Foreman, Jr.'s The Music of the Close, p. 40; and E. A. J. Honigmann's Shakespeare: Seven Tragedies, p. 161. However, Honigmann believes that, though Antony "magnificently forgives" Cleopatra, he no longer believes her, as is evidenced by his advice to her to seek her safety with Caesar (p. 162).

48 As D. R. C. Marsh says, the monument scene "is a complex scene, and we must resist any inclination to simplify it by attempting to make it simply satiric or simply triumphant, or even simply tragic" (Passion Lends Them Power, p. 190). A. P. Riemer takes a somewhat different approach from mine in suggesting that the pun may not have been intended by Shakespeare, but that it is "characteristic of something we find throughout Antony and Cleopatra: the play comprehends both the nobility and the ludicrousness of the situation" (A Reading of Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra," p. 60). For very different views of the monument scene, see, for example, Richard S. Ide, Possessed with Greatness, p. 123; and Matthew N. Froser, The Heroic Image in Five Shakespearean Tragedies, pp. 208-213.

49 Regarding the exchange between Antony and Cleopatra preceding Antony's final speech, A. L. French says "if we didn't know this was meant to be a solemn moment, could we infer it from the quoted passage? I doubt it; and my doubts make me wonder just how solemn the moment is really meant to be" (Shakespeare and the Critics, p. 228). I think French is right in seeing potentially comic elements throughout the play, but they are seldom unmingled with an emotional depth that prevents our ironic laughter.
"If Antony's myth-making pays tribute to Cleopatra, she in her final moments must validate his improbable dream by making herself worthy of his tribute. The 'strumpet' must redeem the 'fool' by verifying his insight into her," as Richard S. Ide argues, in Possessed with Greatness, p. 124 (See also pp. 104-105, 111). R. C. Harrier, in "Cleopatra's End," makes much the same point (p. 65), as does Walter C. Foreman, Jr.: Cleopatra's "ultimate problem is to make . . . parody inappropriate . . . and the way she does this is, in effect, to stage her own play in which she becomes the tragic heroine and Antony the tragic hero" (The Music of the Close, pp. 176-177). For a different view of the relationship between Antony's death and Cleopatra's, see Julian Markels' The Pillar of the World, p. 141. William Blissett, in "Dramatic Irony in Antony and Cleopatra," argues that part of the way in which Cleopatra's death scene is made to surpass Antony's is that Antony's death-speeches, the "death-speeches of a man who has been superbly eloquent in two plays, . . . do not rise to a full grandeur or memorability or finality, and Cleopatra steals the scene" (p. 162). Antony's last speech is more clipped and less eloquent than others he has given, but again, the main difference between his death-speeches and hers resides in a difference of awareness.

R. C. Harrier's view of Cleopatra's hesitation is very close to my own:

In her exaltation she vows suicide. . . . Yet her delay suggests that we may continue to suspect her willingness to surrender herself--her life and fortunes--for another, even Antony. The illusion of double-mindedness is, I believe, quite concrete and intended. Cleopatra wishes to seal in death a lover's bond with Antony; yet she desires more deeply--out of her essential being--to go on with life and power.

("Cleopatra's End," p. 64)

Harold Goddard, on the other hand, argues that "what looks like hesitation and toying with the thought of life is but deception utilised with the highest art to make certain that her determination to die is not thwarted" (The Meaning of Shakespeare /Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1951/, p. 199). M. R. Ridley, in his Introduction to the New Arden edition of the play, makes a similar argument (see, for example, p. xxxv). For other views of Cleopatra's wavering, see Walter C. Foreman, Jr.'s The Music of the Close, p. 39; Ruth Nevo, Tragic Form in
With regard to the last three lines of this section, J. L. Simmons says that Cleopatra "gives the essence of Sydney's defense of poetry and Aristotle's justification for the place of poetry. . . . Imperfect nature may not be able to compete in strangeness with the fanciful jumblings of dreams. . . . But the poet, because he knows what perfection is, can glimpse through fallen nature the marvelous forms of ideal nature" ("The Comic Pattern and Vision in Antony and Cleopatra," p. 160).

William Blissett, in "Dramatic Irony in Antony and Cleopatra," declares that "Cleopatra obliterates . . . [Dolabella], using the same image of nature overgrowing art that had been applied to herself in the comparable great passage [Enobarbus' description of the barge], and from this point Dolabella is a changed man" (pp. 163-164). Many critics argue that the whole scene is calculated to get information about Caesar from Dolabella; I, of course, agree with Blissett.

Mathew N. Proser comes very close to my point about Cleopatra's scene with Dolabella:

If we feel that Cleopatra speaks of 'her' Antony with the same lack of self-awareness Othello demonstrates when speaking of himself, . . . [her] speech might truly resound with hollowness, despite its poetic splendors. And if it does not, perhaps it is because the queen remains sublimely conscious of her exaggeration. She soars skyward, defying her knowledge both of Antony and herself, and her awareness somehow gives ballast to what otherwise might be pure rhetoric and nothing more. (The Heroic Image, p. 179)


55 As William Blissett says, "all . . . Caesar's speeches of carefully prepared cordiality cannot conceal the aridity of spirit he reveals in asking which of the women Cleopatra is ("Dramatic Irony in Antony and Cleopatra," p. 164).

56 Though the Seleucus scene is a puzzle, argues Mathew N. Proser, "surely we can agree that Cleopatra has been attempting to trick Caesar in some way, and thus is still very much in and of this world" (*The Heroic Image*, p. 219). Other audiences, however, believe that the scene is a prearranged attempt to fool Caesar into relaxing his guard or to win his sympathy. See, for example, Donald Joseph McGinn, "Cleopatra's Immolation Scene," *Essays in Literary History Presented to J. Milton French*, ed. Rudolf Kirk and C. F. Main (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965; New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1960), pp. 70-72; and Robin Lee, *Shakespeare, Antony and Cleopatra,* p. 50. Walter C. Foreman, Jr. sees "The Beguiling of Caesar" as "an expression of defiance" (*The Music of the Close*, p. 181).


59 Almost all audiences note the triumphant quality of Cleopatra's death scene, even those who place her as a strumpet in the earlier section of the play or who conclude that her triumph is self-delusion or poetic sleight-of-hand. But, as Janet Adelman notes, though the poetry is almost always praised, "the praise frequently coincides with the suspicion that . . . the poetry has somehow taken unfair advantage of us by befuddling our clear moral judgment" (*The Common Liar*, p. 104). Even those who wish to see her death in the best possible light tend to hesitate a bit in awarding her a complete victory. Walter C. Foreman, Jr., for example, contends that "she escapes into a bright new life free of the bonds of Caesar and the kind of life he represents," but that "it is true that this comic victory is ironic, for Antony and Cleopatra are not only old, but also dead" (*The Music of the Close*, p. 62). A. C. Bradley says, "when the glow has faded, Cleopatra's ecstasy comes to appear, I would not say factitious, but an effort strained and prodigious as well as glorious" (*Antony and Cleopatra*, p. 84).
Similarly, Robert Ornstein holds that "even as we cannot resist the spell of her rapturous lyricism, neither can we assent to her vision of eternal love, which is embarrassingly physical" ("The Ethic of the Imagination," pp. 82-83). Ornstein goes on to say, however, that "nothing less is at stake in the final scene than the honesty of the imagination and the superiority of its truths to the facts of imperial conquest" (p. 84). A more negative view of Cleopatra resides in the comments of, for example, E. A. J. Honigmann, in Shakespeare: Seven Tragedies: "I cannot agree with the very large number of critics who stress the 'glory' and 'triumph' of Cleopatra's death. . . . I react differently because I think of Cleopatra as in all things a performer, one who dramatizes herself and those around her unashamedly" (p. 162). The "power and beauty" of her last speech, cautions L. C. Knights, shouldn't obscure "the continued presence of something self-deceiving" ("The Realism of Antony and Cleopatra," p. 176); and A. L. French argues that "by the end of the play . . . Antony is too discredited . . . for us to be able to simply accept what Cleopatra says as anything beyond a truth for her which is poignantly untrue for us" (Shakespeare and the Critics, p. 232). I believe that all of these statements, both the positive and less positive ones, give evidence of the complex response we have to Cleopatra's death. My argument holds that we both know that Cleopatra is engaging in a fiction and "believe" in that fiction, in the same way that we both know a story is a fiction and are caught up in it too. It is in this sense that the play is self-conscious about the process of imagination, as I have tried to point out throughout. For other representative comments on the scene, see, for example, John Alexander, The Paradise Myth, p. 54; Mathew N. Proser, The Heroic Image, p. 216; Janet Adelman, The Common Liar, p. 105; Reuben A. Brower, Hero and Saint, p. 334; John Holloway, "Antony and Cleopatra," p. 78; Robin Lee, Shakespeare, "Antony and Cleopatra," p. 27; Julian Markels, The Pillar of the World, p. 147; J. Middleton Murry, "Antony and Cleopatra," p. 128; Thomas F. Van Laan, Role-Playing in Shakespeare, p. 222; Richard S. Ide, Possessed with Greatness, p. 128; Elias Schwartz, The Mortal Worm, p. 83; Ruth Nevo, Tragic Form in Shakespeare, p. 353; Maynard Mack, "The Stillness and the Dance," p. 111; and Sidney R. Homan, "Divided Responses and the Imagination in Antony and Cleopatra," Philological Quarterly, 49 (1970), 460-468.

60 "Despite the play's being undeniably a tragedy," says D. R. C. Marsh, in Passion Lends Them Power, "there is also that other note, perhaps more characteristic of
the Romances, in which a quality of life and happiness is shown as having been achieved and established in spite of the mutability of the lovers" (p. 144). Walter C. Foreman, Jr., in *The Music of the Close*, has an extensive discussion of the interplay of the comic and the tragic rhythms in the play (see p. 179, for example). See also Janet Adelman, *The Common Liar*, p. 51; and E. A. J. Honigmann, *Shakespeare: Seven Tragedies*, p. 150. My explanation of the play's romance flavor can be found in Thomas F. Van Laan's description of Cleopatra's success:

Her attempt to impose her own will on reality, to become a dramatist of life, constitutes a new and striking example of an action motif that often appears in the tragedies and forms a chief element of Shakespeare's earliest tragic pattern. In sharp contrast to the earlier plays, however, in which the hero's attempt to realize his imaginative drama in concrete terms is consistently thwarted by a destructive counter-action, Cleopatra's attempt itself forms the counter-action. . . . she succeeds in making reality conform to her vision of what it should be.

(p. 221)

My own thinking on this derives from a paper Robert C. Jones wrote for a class in Shakespearean comedy, "God's Spies: Some Notes on our View of Shakespeare's Comedies and Romances."

61 Richard S. Ide makes the important point about Cleopatra's speech here: "The shameful play in which she might see 'some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness' has been, and continues to be, a Roman history play written by Caesar" (*Possessed with Greatness*, p. 126).

62 For a very different view of the clown's function, see Richard S. Ide, *Possessed with Greatness*, p. 126-127.


64 For a very different reading of Cleopatra's last moments, see William Rosen, *Shakespeare and the Craft of Tragedy*, p. 159.
Thomas F. Van Laan makes the point about Caesar's response: "One measure of . . . [Cleopatra's] success is her forcing Caesar to change his scheduled drama and make its final act not the triumphant pageant he had planned but a very different kind of 'show'" (Role-Playing in Shakespeare, p. 221).
Falstaff and Cleopatra are unique among Shakespeare's characters, but the successful transformation of decayed and diseased worlds into vital and nourishing ones is not, as we know, a process unique to Antony and Cleopatra and 1 Henry IV. It informs the shape of Shakespeare's romances, too, plays to which the Roman history especially has often been compared. But characters in The Winter's Tale or The Tempest who transform and shape have much more actual control over the outcome of events than Falstaff and Cleopatra have over the forces of "history." Bohemia and Prospero's island, though not immune to time, are nevertheless like the Green worlds of comedy, those displaced, theater-like arenas to which characters withdraw and generally experience or accomplish whatever is necessary to repair and restore the society they have left. Life, in these "retreats," is more easily managed--more like a play--than the life that has been "momentarily" abandoned. The romances usually point at this "fictive" quality of their playworlds, whose extraordinary coincidences help to further rather than hamper the happy ending and are so much "like an old tale" that the "verity" of them is often in "strong suspicion." In drawing attention to the "unrealistic" atmosphere of their
playworlds, even as they are engaging us into the restoration of Hermione or the love of Ferdinand and Miranda, they suggest that characters cannot "live here ever" in retreat any more than we can stay in the theater forever. Prospero must abandon his magic and return to Naples, though we imagine that the effect of the miracles he has wrought will be felt in that "fallen" world too. But as long as characters remain within the borders of the displaced world, almost anything is possible. Children are saved from certain death; tempests are raised and quelled at will; princes and princesses fall in love; plots are successfully conceived and executed; and characters, touched by the awe and wonder of life, are put back in touch with themselves. The Green worlds of romance are almost as plastic and malleable as those of comedy and lend themselves to the revitalizing transformations of Prospero, or of Time itself, that agent which brings about the restorative union between Florizel and Perdita.

What is striking about Cleopatra and Falstaff is that they transform in worlds to which such outward miracles are completely alien and in which plotting and transformation for the bringing about of happy endings and restoration are virtually impossible. Hal and Caesar, the "successful" characters, are successful largely because they can shape themselves to fit the times. Each loses something in the process so that his achievements
seem a compromise at best, at worst a hollow mockery. In these plays, the "wasteland," the landscape in need of replenishing, predominates, and the Green world, the source for renewed life, is not a "real" place but an island in the imagination of the "poet." Falstaff and Cleopatra find Arden or Bohemia or the woods near Athens, not beyond themselves, but within themselves. Of course, the tavern is a displaced world of sorts, a place in which there is time and room, for awhile at least, to "play out the play," and Egypt is a fertile land of wonders to any who come under its Queen's spell. But Falstaff commands no spirits (except Sherris-sack, of course) and Cleopatra possesses no magic, beyond that of her personality, for keeping Antony beside her. It is the transformations they perform upon imaginative "inner" worlds that create the aura of comedy and romance which captivates Hal and Antony and us and which breathes life into the Boar's Head and the palace at Alexandria. These transformations, effected upon the resilient inner world of the poetic imagination allow the "poets" to withstand, and finally even to change, the brittle outer one.

Having located the "fictive" Green worlds of these two plays in so disembodied and "ineffectual" a place as the poetic imagination, some of us who are already inclined toward Theseus' view will be all the more ready to dismiss the "truths" of such worlds as useless fictions.
But surely those of us who cannot put aside *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a "weak and idle theme/No more yielding but a dream" who feel that some dreams "grow" to something of great constancy," will hardly consent to dismiss our experience with Falstaff and Cleopatra as simply "tricks" of fancy. Fictive truth, poets' lies, and poetic transformation, as we experience them in the "real" worlds of *1 Henry IV* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, reside in the minds of the poets and transformation is a matter of making us see differently. But the visions they yield are more solid, more palpable, and more vibrant than anything else these worlds have to offer. If the "realists," then, were to warn us against the subtle influence of Cleopatra's and Falstaff's lies, if we were cautioned to "be advis'd," as Florizel is when he contemplates another kind of "rashness," we might well reply as he does:

I am, and by my fancy: if my reason
Will thereto be obedient, I have reason;
If not, my senses better pleased with madness,
Do bid it welcome.
NOTES

Chapter 5. Conclusion


2 William Empson, in Some Versions of Pastoral (London: Chatto and Windus, 1935) places Falstaff's tavern in his chapter on works with duel plots, one plot of which is romantic and the other heroic.

3 Maynard Mack speaks of the artist's predicament, in "The Jacobean Shakespeare: Some Observations on the Construction of the Tragedies," Jacobean Theater, Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies 1, eds. John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris (London: Arnold, 1960; New York: Capricorn, 1967): The artist, "having been given the power to see the 'truth,' can convey it only through poetry--what we commonly call a 'fiction' and dismiss." The poet, in this sense, is like the prophetess, Cassandra (pp. 46-47).
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