"Courtiers of Beauteous Freedom": *Antony and Cleopatra* in its Time

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In terms of the political culture of the early Stuart period, *Antony and Cleopatra*'s account of the shift from the magnificent but senescent Egyptian past to the pragmatic but successful Roman future can be seen as a critical register of the symbolic constructions and political ramifications of the shift from the Elizabethan to the Jacobean style of rule. In this paper, I want to suggest that the meanings of the play in 1606-1607 were on the whole more political and certainly more topical than they are now. To locate *Antony and Cleopatra* in the linguistic, symbolic, and literary fields which comprised the context for the play's first audiences will require a survey of a broad range of texts—some literary, some political, some constructed as triumphal arches in the streets of London. In such terms, *Antony and Cleopatra* emerges as both contribution to and critique of the emerging Jacobean political culture. I want to argue, then, that the Jacobean *Antony and Cleopatra* possessed a level of political meaning which the twentieth-century *Antony and Cleopatra* does not possess. This does not mean that the modern play is in any sense poorer than its seventeenth-century counterpart. Probably we appreciate the play's metatheatricity more than the first audience did;¹ possibly we respond more seriously to the play's interest in gender and power.² Accordingly, the Jacobean *Antony and Cleopatra*—the play I will try to recreate in some measure—cannot claim to be better than our *Antony and Cleopatra*; it can only claim to be different. Taking the measure of that difference is the principal purpose of this essay.

The contextualization of *Antony and Cleopatra* will reveal the politicized resonances of the play's language, characterization, and handling of sources. Contextualization suggests that Shakespeare's poetic styles are themselves politically meaningful. Pompey's gorgeous phrase, "courtiers of beauteous freedom," so long as it is interpreted without reference to the political connotations of Jacobean language, can be little more than gorgeous (and a

little puzzling: what have courtiers to do with freedom?); however the phrase can be recast in an historicized linguistic field in order to clarify both the connotative range of each word and the relationship between the words.

"Courtiers of beauteous freedom" is the crowning phrase in Pompey's verbal attack on the triumvirate. Pompey denigrates his enemies by opposing the mercantile and political present (Antony, Caesar, and Lepidus are "senators" and "factors"; Julius Caesar's ghost saw them "laboring" at Philippi) to the aristocratic and chivalric past ("all-honor'd, honest" Brutus, Cassius, and the "armed rest" were "courtiers" who, when moved "to conspire" by their dedication to freedom, "drenched" the Capitol with Caesar's blood—so that even the assassination was performed with characteristic aristocratic largess). Pompey conceives the moment of his opposition to the triumvirate as historically decisive: either he, as agent of the heroic past, will revive aristocratic values or the triumvirate, the "senators alone of this great world," will succeed in consolidating the new political culture and so enforce the decline of true Roman values:

To you all three,
 The senators alone of this great world,
 Chief factors for the gods, I do not know
 Wherefore my father should revengers want,
 Having a son and friends, since Julius Caesar,
 Who at Philippi the good Brutus ghosted,
 There saw you laboring for him. What was't
 The mov'd pale Cassius to conspire? And what
 Made the all-honor'd, honest, Roman Brutus,
 With the arm'd rest, courtiers of beauteous freedom,
 To drench the Capitol, but that they would
 Have one man but a man? And that is it
 Hath made me rig my navy, at whose burden
 The anger'd ocean foams, with which I meant
 To scourge th'ingratitude that despiteful Rome
 Cast on my noble father.

(II.vi.8-23)³

Pompey's rhetorical opposition of past to present and of an aristocratic, chivalric ethos to a mercantile, political ethos adumbrates the ideational framework of the play; in terms of the overall design, Antony and Cleopatra belong to the aristocratic, chivalric, *magnificent* past whereas Caesar represents the mercantile, political, pragmatic present. In the world of the play, the magnificent past persists only in Egypt, the exotic backwater of the empire.

"Courtiers of beauteous freedom" helps to situate this opposition in its historical moment of the play itself since it intimates a parallel between the chivalric and heroic past on the one hand and the Court of the late Queen on the other. Just as Elizabeth presided over her splendid courtiers, so "freedom"—"libertas"—was the beauteous queen of the freedom-loving Roman courtiers. Pompey's evocation of the golden past summons the Elizabethan Court out of the shadows in order to lend weight to his argument; and in its turn, the political subtext of the play appropriates Pompey's opposition of Roman past and Roman present to its treatment of the relationship between the Elizabethan past and the Jacobean present. The play's evocation of lost magnificence suggests its nostalgic fealty to the past; however, the play also registers a pragmatic acceptance of the present. The same is true of Pompey's speech: pale Cassius and Roman Brutus are more attractive than the triumvirate, and "courtiers" are more appealing than "factors"—even "factors for the gods"—but Pompey's position is not persuasive since he is driven by futile self-promotion rather than by a desire for justice. Even with respect to individual words, the text imposes questions and qualifications concerning Pompey's rhetorical position. "Courtier," for example, is a word usually tainted by courtiers' proverbial preciousness and sycophancy (this seems to have been so in spite of the popularity of Hoby's Castiglione). English writers tend to handle the word gingerly and for satiric effect: Spenser, for one, does not use it at all (in any form) in *Faerie Queene* (although it appears seven times in the satirical and topical "Mother Hubberds Tale." For Donne, "courtier" is virtually synonymous with venality:

He which did lay
Rules to make Courtiers, (hee being understood
May make good Courtiers, but who Courtiers good?)⁴

Hotspur's "popinjay," Osric ("Dost know this water-fly?"), and the disguised Autolycus represent Shakespeare's normal sense of the thing itself. Autolycus, furthermore, provides an example of Shakespeare's sense of the word's inescapable ironic tonality:

Whether it like me or no, I am a courtier.
Seest thou not the air of the court in these
enfoldings? Hath not my gait in it the measure
of the court? Receives not thy nose court-odor
from me? Reflect I not on thy baseness court-contempt?
(*Winter's Tale*, IV, iv 733-737)

The unironic sense of the word can be recovered only by insistence on the courtly ideal (Spenser achieves this at one point in "Mother Hubberds Tale"),⁵ but some irony tends to inhere nonetheless. Pompey attempts to purify "courtiers" by projecting the word back into the golden past when gallants worshipped Freedom rather than Vanity; however the text enforces an ironic undercurrent both by collocating "courtiers" with the "poetical" word "beauteous" (OED) and by virtue of Pompey's own folly and self-destructive submission to the antiquated discourse of "honour" (see II.vii.62-85)

The word "freedom" also is politicized within the context of the phrase "courtiers of beauteous freedom." In the first place, "freedom" acquires the sense of "being free and noble; nobility, generosity, liberality" (OED,3) in addition to its primary meaning, "exemption or release from slavery" (OED,1). That is, "freedom" has in this phrase an aristocratic resonance in addition to its primary meaning. "Freedom's" multivalent significance mediates between the aristocratic past (in which noble rank is signalled by conspicuously unconstrained, or "free", expenditure), and the mercantile present (in which the freedom of the individual is an attribute of contractual political relations).⁶ Specifically, as I have already suggested, "freedom" is feminized, invested with a courtly ethos, and even enthroned (by virtue of having courtiers); projected, that is, into the symbolic matrix of the Elizabethan court.

Pompey's ideas about past and present belong and have reference to the imaginative world within the play, but the words and images which he uses to express those ideas embody particular political biases and references which have immediate and unavoidable pertinence to England in 1606-1607. The ghost of the magnificent Queen Elizabeth shadows Pompey's speech, lending strength to his rhetorical attack on the triumvirate; however, as a consequence, Pompey's speech constitutes a reflection upon the perceived shift from Elizabethan magnificence to Jacobean "measure."

II

Recent historical and literary research has made us increasingly aware of two movements in early seventeenth-century political culture which constitute important contexts for *Antony and Cleopatra*. One concerns the nostalgia for Elizabethan Protestant militancy which appeared early in James's reign, specifically in response to the peace James concluded with Spain in 1604.⁷ The other comprises James's own formulation of an innovative "Roman style" of rule.⁸ James's revival of the Augustan ideal constituted a "symbolics

of power" which shaped the public displays of his peace-making and his plans to unify Scotland and England. A third element consists of two plays which connect Cleopatra with Queen Elizabeth—one by Fulke Greville and another by Samuel Daniel (the first we know only by Greville's own report; the second is extant and was probably known to Shakespeare).⁹

Emrys Jones has observed that *Antony and Cleopatra*'s emphasis on Octavius—later Augustus—Caesar's role as peacemaker, and its cloaked, and apparently slighting, allusions to Queen Elizabeth, make the play a somewhat sycophantic tribute to King James:

... the play is an imperial work in a special sense; it was written by the leading dramatist of the King's Men, whose patron was James I, the "Emperor" of Great Britain. Although no records survive of the early performances of *Antony and Cleopatra*, it is hard to resist the notion that this most courtly of Shakespeare's tragedies must have been performed at James's court.

James was England's, or rather "Britain's", own modern Augustus, for whom Caesar's lines in the play—

The time of universal peace is near.

Prove this a prosperous day, the three-nooked world

Shall bear the olive freely—

IV.6.5-7

would have had a special significance: James was himself an imperial, quasi-Augustan, peacemaker. So the British also, one supposes, have relished the allusions to his predecessor Elizabeth in Cleopatra's scenes with the Messenger—for Elizabeth in Cleopatra's had questioned her ambassador about Mary Stuart in a remarkably similar way.)¹⁰

Jones would agree that the Jacobean *Antony and Cleopatra* possessed a political significance which was lost soon after its initial performances, but he would say that this meaning is an excrescence, an unfortunate product of the need to flatter the King, and hence an aspect of the play we are better off without, indeed an aspect the play is better off without. "Fortunately for us," Jones comments, "the play transcends the circumstances of its composition."¹¹ While I agree with Jones about the presence of a political level of meaning in the Jacobean *Antony and Cleopatra*, I want to disagree with his devaluation of its importance to the design of the play. I want to suggest that it is not an excrescence, but an integral part of the play's meaning; and that it is not essentially court flattery directed at King James, but a representation of contemporary politics directed towards a diverse audience. This, I think, is the crucial point to be made about the play's topicality. After that point has been made, I would certainly agree with Jones that Shakespeare would not

have been unhappy if, in addition to the theatre audience, King James also had found the play gratifying.

I want to adjust Jones's assessment of the Jacobean meanings of *Antony and Cleopatra* by pursuing two lines of argument, one pertaining to the "politics" of the Jacobean theatre and another concerning the relationship between Shakespeare's play and the broad range of texts representative of both Jacobean popular nostalgia for Elizabethan magnificence and Jacobean government attempts to develop an original and effective symbolics of power. In general, the politics of the stage were shaped by the conflicting demands of commercialism and censorship. The heterogeneous audience and the tradition of the drama's engagement with political and social issues help make sense of the topical meaning of a play like *Antony and Cleopatra*.¹² Were Emrys Jones right about the bias of Shakespeare's topicality, that is, were it true that the play was intended primarily to flatter King James by paralleling him to Octavius Caesar, we might expect to find a more consistently attractive portrait of the future emperor. Instead we find a complex figure whom most critics find—to quote A.P. Riemer—"unattractive, perhaps sinister",¹³ and yet a figure whom, as actors such as Keith Baxter and Jonathan Pryce have shown, can be played sympathetically, even as a hero.¹⁴ Such opposite readings of the character of Octavius show how effectively Shakespeare has contrived to leave unanswered the central questions about Octavius' motivations and morals. To a degree, Shakespeare has surrendered the production of meaning to his audiences: royalist members of the audience—perhaps even a royal audience—are empowered by the text to focus on Octavius' peace-making; members of the audience disenchanted with the King or nostalgic for an earlier reign can emphasize Octavius' machiavellian pursuit of power. Subtle shifts in the actor's presentation of the character will tend to foreground one or the other interpretation so that the play can be adapted for different audiences. The interpretive openness of the characterization of Octavius dovetails with the requirements of a play which was to be performable both at the Globe and at Whitehall. The conditions of production, in short, helped determine the characteristic "balance" (or, more accurately, two-facedness) of Shakespeare's handling of Octavius.

The necessity of writing for different audiences and the pressures of censorship constitute the extrinsic causes of the balance and complexity of Shakespeare's treatment of politics, both Roman and Jacobean. Of course, extrinsic factors are not sufficient in themselves to bring about a balanced view of politics (as the nostalgic works of Dekker, Heywood, and Chapman make clear); however, insofar as the pressures of commercialism and censor-

ship provide the ground for Shakespeare's penetrating critique of the historical competition between opposing symbolics of power, they should be seen as liberating rather than as constraining.

That *Antony and Cleopatra* can bear comparison with plays explicitly concerned with the memory of Elizabeth has been established by Geoffrey Bullough, Helen Morris, Kenneth Muir, and Keith Rinehart.¹⁵ The proposed parallels between the Queen of Egypt and the Queen of England have become familiar to students of the play and have been widely accepted, if only because the claims made for their importance to the play have been so modest. The argument runs something like this: details in the characterization of Cleopatra such as her militancy, her likening herself to a milk-maid (Elizabeth had done likewise in a speech before Parliament), her fiery temper, her fondness for travel in a river-barge, her wit, her immense charm, (all prominent aspects in contemporary accounts of Elizabeth) reveal a characteristically Elizabethan handling of classical source-material. It is as if Shakespeare had used what he knew about Elizabeth in order to work towards an understanding of Cleopatra.

All this is true enough, but we must go further. At the moment of creation and reception, the meaning of the products of imagination is determined largely by political, literary, and linguistic context, and by audience and authorial expectations and modes of understanding attendant upon context. In other words, recollections of Elizabeth in *Antony and Cleopatra* must take on a particular coloration during the reign of her successor. Recollections of Elizabeth must *mean* something.

The meaning of these recollections of Elizabeth in *Antony and Cleopatra* can be elucidated by measuring them against Jacobean nostalgia for "Good Queen Bess's Golden Days." According to Anne Barton, nostalgia for the late Queen appeared very soon after James came to the throne of England: there are indications of it in Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* (1604); as well as full-scale tributes to the Queen in Heywood's *If You Know Not Me* (1604), and Dekker's *Whore of Babylon* (1606).¹⁶ There is, of course, no surprise in the fact that, once a king is dead, his people often wish him back again, even though they hated him while he was living. It seems to be the very nature of the populace to lackey the varying tide of events, and the very nature of rulers to become deared only by being lacked. Shakespeare's contemporary, Bishop Godfrey Goodman, explained the Jacobean revival of Elizabeth's memory in similar terms:

... in effect the people were very generally weary of an old woman's government. ... But after a few years, when we had experience of the Scottish government, then in disparagement of the Scots, and in hate and detestation of them, the Queen did seem to revive; then was her memory much magnified,—such ringing of bells, such public joy and sermons in commemoration of her, the picture of her tomb painted in many churches, and in effect more solemnity and joy in memory of her coronation than was for the coming in of King James.¹⁷

Late in James's reign and largely in response to the Kings' "appeasement" of Catholic Spain, recollections of Elizabeth became weapons in the hands of Protestant propagandists like Thomas Scot; and nostalgia even figured in the plays which both expressed and promoted popular dissatisfaction with English non-involvement in the Continental wars—plays such as Massinger's *Maid of Honour* (1621) and Drue's *Duchess of Suffolk* (1624). This propagandistic nostalgia belongs both to the last years of James's reign and to the early Caroline period; however, several early instances do seem politically purposeful, and one of these in particular (Samuel Daniel's *Cleopatra*) is relevant to the present discussion.

When Daniel revised his play early in James's reign, he added a new first scene patently intended to express his unhappiness with the 1604 cessation of hostilities against Spain. Daniel's *Cleopatra* becomes in this scene a despairing *mater patriae*, to whom her son, Caesario, holds out hope of their ultimate victory over Roman hegemony. Cleopatra irresistibly evokes the memory of the militantly anti-Catholic Queen of England. Caesario's speech is transparent political allegory in which ancient Rome stands for the Spanish-Catholic domination of Europe and the Roman Provinces stand for the besieged Protestant Provinces of the Netherlands:

Deare sovereigne mother, suffer not your care
To tumult thus with th'honor of your state:
These miseries of our no strangers are,
Nor is it new to be unfortunate.
And this good, let your many sorrows past
Worke on your heart t'inharden it at last.
Looke but on all the neighbour States beside,
Of *Europe, Afrique, Asia* and but note
What Kings? what States? hath not the Roman pride
Ransackt, confounded, or els servile brought?
And since we are so borne that by our fate,
Against these storms we cannot now bear saile,

And that the boisterous current of their state
 Will beare down all our fortunes, and prevaile:
 Let us yet temper with the time: and thinke
 The windes may change, and all these States opprest,
 Collegu'd in one, may turne again to sincke
 Their Greatnesse, who now holds them all distrest
 And I may lead their troupes, and at the walles
 Of greedie *Rome*, revenge the wronged blood
 And doe th'inthrall'd Provinces this good.
 And therefore my deare mother doe not leave
 hope the best. I doubt not my returne.¹⁸

It might seem as if Daniel though any vehicle would serve to bear his anti-Catholic message, but in allegorizing Cleopatra he was in fact following the example of his friend Fulke Greville. According to his own account, Greville wrote and then destroyed an Antony-and-Cleopatra play because he feared it might be construed as a criticism of Elizabeth's destruction of her own great general—the Earl of Essex. Greville sacrificed his manuscript to the fire, he says, because he thought it might be “strained to a personating of vices in the present Governors, and government. ... And again in the practice of the world, seeing the like instance not poetically, but really fashioned in the Earle of *Essex* then falling; and ever till then worthily beloved, both of the *Queen*, and people ... ”¹⁹ There is, of course, no reason to think that Shakespeare knew Greville's play. But Shakespeare certainly knew, and was influenced by, the 1594 version of *Cleopatra*. Some scholars think that Daniel's 1607 version was in turn influenced by a production of *Antony and Cleopatra*; others disagree.²⁰ Such precise questions of literary indebtedness will probably remain unanswered. The crucial point to be made, however, is that London was a tightly-knit literary community, and that men like Shakespeare and Daniel were likely to be interested to see what each had done with the same material.

The literary connexion between Cleopatra and Elizabeth is complimented by James's self-representation as Caesar Augustus.²¹ James's coronation medal was inscribed: “IAC : I : BRIT : CAE : AVG : HAE CAESARUM CAE. D. D.” (“James I, Caesar Augustus of Britain, Caesar the heir of the Caesars”).²² Panegyric poems on the occasions of James's accession to the English throne introduced an imperial motif: and royal encomium became explicitly Augustan when Jonson undertook to lionize the King in the 1604 royal entry.²³ Here, in the streets of London on March 15, 1604, and in the most elaborate and costly procession of the age, Jonson's Temple Bar Arch

(the last of seven) and his panegyric of welcome in The Strand heralded the King as the new Augustus. A fourfaced head of Janus crowned the Arch; at James's approach, the gates closed on Janus, signifying the peculiarly Augustan peace-making attendant upon the onset of James's reign. On the gates was written: "IMP. IACOBVS MAX. CAESAR AVG. P.P." ("Emperor James the Great, Caesar Augustus, Father of the Country").²⁴ In The Strand the figure of Electra reiterated the comparison:

Let ignorance know, great king, this day is thine,
 And doth admit no night; but all doe shine
 As well nocturnall, as diurnall fires,
 To adde unto the flame of our desires.
 Which are (now thou hast closd up Janus gates,
 And giv'n so generall peace to all estates)
 That no offensive mist, or cloudie staine
 May mixe with splendor of thy golden raigne;
 . . .
 This from that loud, blest *Oracle*, I sing,
 Who here, and first pronounc'd, thee Brit[t]aines king.
 Long maist thou live, and see me thus appeare,
 As omenous a comet, from my spheare,
 Unto thy raigne; as that did auspicate
 lasting glory to Augustus state.²⁵

The Augustan image-making associated both with James's peace-making and with his plans to unite England and Scotland, the parallels between Elizabeth and Shakespeare's and Daniel's Cleopatra, and the increasing tendency to draw invidious comparisons between the late Queen and King James constitute the political-literary context of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Shakespeare organizes this complex material according to an idea of a Fall. The originary period is figured as golden, but only from the postlapsarian point of view; such a relationship suggests that the golden age is a product of the iron age's imaginative formulation of its own etiology. That is, Shakespeare understands that nostalgia for the golden past is normally a secret legitimation of the present. Understanding this allows *Antony and Cleopatra* to retain the late-Elizabethan critical view of the Queen within its own nostalgic evocation of the Elizabethan era.

The extraordinary style of Elizabeth's rule is appreciatively evoked in *Antony and Cleopatra*; moreover the regret which attends the play's rejection of Elizabethan style is not feigned but rather is assimilated in the play's qualified endorsement of the present. Cleopatra shares Elizabeth's mag-

nificence, her showiness, her ability to "caress" the people and "make them good cheer"—to use the words of the Venetian ambassador.²⁶ Shakespeare's Cleopatra, furthermore, evokes Elizabeth's militancy (and as Helen Morris has pointed out, this trait is without warrant in Plutarch):²⁷

Sink Rome, and their tongues rot
That speak against us! A charge we bear i' th' war,
And, as the president of my kingdom, will
Appear there for a man.

(III.vii.15-18)

However, whereas Cleopatra's "public body" is figured in terms of magnificence (an attribute which Spenser had identified as the perfection of all the virtues),²⁸ her private body is lapped in *luxuria* and *vanitas*. Her queenly pleasure at her people's devotion (again the Venetian ambassador's words about Elizabeth)²⁹ is an expression both of her vanity and of the public, "corporate," joy a ruler properly feels at the happy order of her commonwealth. That is, the characterization of Cleopatra forces into the open the contradictions attendant upon female rule in a patriarchal society.³⁰ Cleopatra upon the river of Cydnus, enthroned in the market-place ("in chairs of gold ... In th' habiliments of the goddess Isis" [III.vi. 4,17]), "levying/ The kings o' th' earth for war" (III.vi.68-69) is at once an evocation both of England's great and "popular" Queen and of the demonized archetype of female rule—the Whore of Babylon. Shakespeare has incorporated in on character the fiercely contradictory aspects of Elizabeth's rule, aspects which Spenser had been able to keep separate—had been compelled to keep separate—in pairs of opposing characters such as Lucifera and the Faerie Queene, Malecasta and Britomart, Radigund and Britomart. As an unfolding of the contradiction attendant upon the Elizabethan symbolics of power, Shakespeare's Cleopatra is a repudiation of female rule, a demonstration of its volatility and inefficacy. While Cleopatra's splendid showy victory over Octavius encourages the audience's admiration, it nonetheless leaves the loser master of the world. In the wake of her suicidal leap towards the divine, the world, newly settled in the *Pax Augusta*, can graciously acknowledge—and dismiss—her now disarmed charisma: "she looks like sleep,/ As she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace" (V.ii.345-7). Cleopatra has been transformed into a monument; the world can return to business.

Antony and Cleopatra's repudiation of Elizabethan style would seem to make the play—as Emrys Jones has suggested—a tribute to King James, Elizabeth's successor and himself the engineer of the *Pax Britannica*. How-

ever Octavius' pacification of the "three-nook'd world" precipitates a fall into the mercantile (as opposed to the aristocratic). Augustan rule will not be "royal"; on the contrary, it will be a factor's peace under the shroud of "the universal landlord." Even on the eve of battle, Caesar parsimoniously adheres to the principle of "measure"—"And feast the army; we have store to do't,/And they have earn'd the waste" (IV.i.16-17). By yoking the Augustan ideal to mercantilism, Shakespeare is able to produce a subtle critique of Jonson's figuration of James as Caesar. Further, Shakespeare's refiguration of the Augustan symbolics of power includes James's well-known anti-popularism: both Octavius and James are contemptuous of their people (this trait in Octavius has little warrant in Plutarch; rather it seems to derive from James):

He does not caress the people nor make them that good cheer the late Queen did, whereby she won their loves: for the English adore their Sovereigns, and if the King passed through the same street a hundred times a day the people would still run to see him; they like their King to show pleasure at their devotion, as the late Queen knew well how to do; but his King manifests no taste for them but rather contempt and dislike.³¹

Octavius' conquest is necessary since it brings peace and since it is destined (in the real-life world, Elizabeth *is* dead, James *is* King)—

Be you not troubled with the time, which drives
O'er your content these strong necessities,
But let determin'd things to destiny
Hold unbewail'd their way.
(III.vi.84-87)

However manifest Octavius' destiny might or might not be (note the Virgilian exigency is his words to his sister [see *Aeneid*, IV.331-61]), the play's emotional endorsement of its own movement towards Augustan rule remains burdened by Caesar's mercenary coldness. Both Octavius' and James's special failing as rulers lies in their perverse response to public celebration: they fail to give assent to the sense of joyful community which had flourished—or which was beginning to seem to have flourished—under Elizabeth.³² For this reason, Octavius' ideal version of a triumphal entry is not celebratory but rather perverted and even sadistic:

The wife of Antony
Should have an army for an usher, and

The neighs of horse to tell of her approach
 Long ere she did appear. The trees by th'way
 Should have borne men, and expectation fainted,
 Longing for what it had not. Nay, the dust
 Should have ascended to the roof of heaven,
 Rais'd by your populous troops.
 (III.vi.43-50)

Antony and Cleopatra then, considered in its context, may be seen to comprehend the full range of contemporary response to the shift from Elizabethan to Jacobean rule, from Daniel's disappointment and hostility to Jonson's reverential approval. The play's range of response represents the fullest possible treatment of the complex state of political culture in 1606–1607. The reiterated off-stage immanence of the nativity of Christ lends positive value to Octavius' peace-making, however suspect it might be on its own account,³³ and Cleopatra's engaging magnificence is tempered by our knowledge of her vanity and her failure. *Antony and Cleopatra's* endorsement of Jacobean imperial rule is shadowed by the emerging myth of the militant Protestant Queen, a formulation of feminized and millenarian power which would harass James throughout his reign.³⁴

III

The language of *Antony and Cleopatra* resonates most clearly in the linguistic milieu of the early seventeenth century. Thus the word "business" in Octavius' truncated eulogy for Antony (V.i.50) seals the demise of Roman—and Elizabethan—chivalry, signalling by its degraded status the ascendancy of the new "political" style of rule.³⁵ However, the play's language has special attachments with culturally privileged texts such as the Bible, Horace, Virgil, and Spenser. These connexions, especially those with the Book of Revelations and with the style of the Augustan poets, contribute importantly to Shakespeare's contrasting treatment of Elizabethan and Jacobean rule.

To put the matter in broad terms, the poetic framework of *Antony and Cleopatra* consists in an opposition between Augustan style and apocalyptic allusion.³⁶ This stylistic opposition subsumes the ethical opposition (as adumbrated in Pompey's speech) between new, "political," mercantile (associated with the Jacobean reign) and old, chivalric, aristocratic (that is, as it was in "good Queen Bess's golden days"). This opposition between Augustan and apocalyptic, moreover, crystallizes in a peculiarly literary way the competing claims of two distinct systems of propagandistic symbolism. Jacobean

royal propaganda, as it emerged in 1604, was this-worldly and "civic," coloured by the Jonson's recollections of the pacific achievements of Caesar Augustus. Elizabethan propaganda, in contrast, as developed by Bale, Foxe, Spenser, and others, was other-worldly and cosmic—indeed the apocalyptic myth of the Elect Nation and the myth of Elizabeth were of a piece.³⁷ The propagandistic contexts of the two monarchs were opposed: James's was largely classical, Elizabeth's mostly biblical.³⁸ In its own struggle between classical and biblical modes of expression, *Antony and Cleopatra* registers and critiques this competition between the politicized allusive fields associated with Elizabeth and James.

Augustan style is characterized by weight and authority; it is forthright, decorous, regular, and balanced; each phrase and each syllable is "wrought in season" (Jonson's phrase).³⁹ Poetry of this kind is urbane rather than metaphysical; it deals with what can be known and expressed, and does not attempt to utter what Carew called (in praising Donne's poetry) "the deepe knowledge of darke truths."⁴⁰ Urbanity and balance distinguish much of the verse in *Antony and Cleopatra*. In the play's first speech, for example, words and phrases are doubled and even trebled in order to lend the verse sentence the weight and authority characteristic of Augustan poetry:

Those his goodly eyes,
That o'er the files and musters of the war
Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
The office and devotion of their view
Upon a tawny front.
(I.i.2-6)⁴¹

At its best, the play's Augustan verse is expressive of the exigencies of power (as in Antony's "strong necessity of time" speech [I.iii.41-56]); at its worst, it remains business-like even if self-important (as in Octavius' first speech [I.iv.1-10]). In every instance, it is realistic and this-worldly; and in this respect it is differentiated from the series of allusions to Revelations.

The allusions to Revelations, first noted by Ethel Seaton, introduce the possibility of a transcendent level of being into the materialist world of the play.⁴² In general terms, the possibility of transcendence can be taken two ways—either as an indication of the fundamental and undermining limitations of Antony and Cleopatra or as a sign of their nascent spiritual superiority over a pagan world.⁴³ In terms of the topicality of the play, however, the pertinence of Revelations becomes clear once we understand the millenarian cast of most Elizabethan propaganda (indeed Dekker's *Whore of Babylon*—which

portrays the godly struggle of Elizabeth and her English against the Spanish Antichrist—was produced in 1606, that is within a year of *Antony and Cleopatra*).

The allusions to Revelations are excessive in form as well as in content. Antony's first two lines in the play contain the first such allusion; they are hypermetrical and breathless, and are set off against Cleopatra's curt pentameters:

CLEOPATRA

If it be love indeed, tell me how much.

ANTONY

There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd.

CLEOPATRA

I'll set a bourn how far to be belov'd.

ANTONY

Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth.

(I.i.14-17)

Antony and Cleopatra on the one hand and Octavius Caesar on the other compete for advantage in the play's intertextual arena. Both the lovers and the emperor-to-be attempt to claim the protagonist's role in a struggle whose principal lineaments derive from Revelations. Most of the biblical references belong to one or the other lover: Antony wishes to find "new heaven, new earth" in order to define his and Cleopatra's extraordinary romance; when Antony is discovered on his sword, his soldiers echo an apocalyptic lament—

SECOND GUARD

The star is fall'n.

FIRST GUARD

And time is at his period.

ALL

Alas, and woe!

(IV.xiv.106-107)⁴⁴

And when Cleopatra remembers Antony ("His legs bestrid the ocean, his rear'd arm / Crested the world" [V.ii.81-91]), he assumes the proportions of an Angel of the Apocalypse—

And I sawe another mightie Angel come downe from heaven, clothed with a cloude, and the rainebowe upon his head, & his face was as the sunne, and his feete as pillars of fyre. And he had in his hand a litle boke open, and he put his right fote upon the sea, and his left on the earth, And cryed with a

lowde voyce, as when a lyon roareth: and when he had cryed, seven thondres uttered their voyces ... And the Angel which I sawe stand upon the sea and upon the earth, lift up his ha[n]d to heaven, And sware by him that liveth for evermore ... that time should be more.⁴⁵

In Cleopatra's struggle for ascendancy over Octavius, reminiscences of Revelations serve to enhance her self-portrayal by figuring her political position as the Faithful threatened by the Roman Antichrist. Once she has outwitted Caesar and has costumed herself for a grand suicide, Cleopatra goes to meet Mark Antony, whom, for the first time, she addresses as "husband": "Husband, I come! / Now to that name my courage prove my title!" (V.ii.287-8). The "trimming" of her diadem (341), the conjoined elements of sacrifice, loyalty, "immortal longings," and transcendent marriage after long trial all enforce the parallel with Revelations; and the imagined marriage in the afterlife crowns and completes the lovers' initial paradisaic intuitions, so that (from Cleopatra's point of view) the span of her relationship with Antony can be summed in two crucial verses from Revelations:

And I sawe a new heaven, & a new earth: for the first heaven, and the first earth were passed away, & there was no more sea. And I John sawe the holie citie newe Jerusalem come down from God out of heaven, pared as a bride trimmed for her housband.⁴⁶

From the Roman point of view, on the other hand, Cleopatra is the Whore of Babylon rather than the Bride of the Lamb (this is, of course, wildly out-of-place, but is nonetheless quite explicit in the text). Octavius echoes the Bible in decrying Cleopatra as "a whore" who is "levying / The kings o' th' earth for war" (III.vi.68-69).⁴⁷ It follows that the destruction of Cleopatra is a necessary precondition of Augustan "universal peace" (note that this peculiarly apocalyptic view of the struggle between Caesar and Cleopatra dovetails with the Augustan view set forth in Horace's Ode on the fall of Cleopatra and in Virgil's ekphrastic rendering of the Battle of Actium in the *Aeneid*).⁴⁸

The doubleness and struggle which attends Shakespeare's use of Revelations in the play, the opposite and conflicting ways in which apocalyptic allusion can colour that play's central conflict, contributes to the complexity of the play's evocation of Elizabethan rule, and matches—as I have already suggested—the bifurcated allegorical presentation of Elizabeth in *Faerie Queene*. Spenser's poem, written during Elizabeth's reign, plays out the cultural struggle to come to terms with a Queen who was both the leader of

the Elect Nation and also a notoriously vain woman, enacting the wider controversy in its own divided allegorization of the Queen and in its wealth of incriminating detail (Lucifera is "A mayden Queene" [I.iv.8], Malecasta's robes are uncannily like those of "the virgin Eliza" [III.i.59]).⁴⁹ Shakespeare's Jacobean play is able to force together these contrary qualities in the character of Cleopatra, and to invest that character with the Jacobean nostalgias for the millenarian aspirations of the Elizabethan era. The play suggests, then, that the death of the great Queen and the accession of the peacemaker has tamed the violent energies of female rule, but that it has also precipitated a fall into secular—as opposed to apocalyptic—history.

IV

It is the distinguishing feature of great drama that it can make itself at home before different audiences, that it can adapt to radically differing modes of response. This, as I have argued, was true of *Antony and Cleopatra* in 1606-1607 when—possibly—it was performed both at the Globe and at Court; it is certainly true now since the play continues to flourish even though it has lost the topical level of meaning which I have argued it possessed at first. The first audiences of *Antony and Cleopatra* would not, I think, have felt any more intensely than we the fierce contraries embodied in Egypt's Queen, but they would have apprehended these contraries more complexly than we, as political as well as moral, responding to the play as they were out of a specific, immediate, and deeply-felt political frame of reference.

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Notes

1. See Janet Adelman, *The Common Liar: An Essay on Antony and Cleopatra* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 102-68.
2. For a recent discussion of the play's treatment of gender and power, see Theodora A. Jankowski, "'As I Am Egypt' Queen": Cleopatra, Elizabeth I, and the Female Body Politic," in *Assays. Critical approaches to Medieval and Renaissance Texts*, 5 (1989), 91-110.
3. All Shakespeare quotations are from *Complete Works*, ed. David Bevington, 3rd ed. (Glenview: Scott, Foresman, 1980).
4. John Donne, *Poetical Works*, ed. Herbert Grierson (rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1966), Satyre V, II. 2-4.
5. "Prosopopoeia: or Mother Hubberds Tale," in *Poetical Works*, ed. J.C. Smith and E. de Selincourt (rpt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), II. 717ff. Note that even in this passage, Spenser reverts to the phrase "Courtly Gentleman" (l. 753).

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6. See also *Troilus and Cressida*, I.iii.235-6, where the collocation of "courtiers" and "free" also highlights the aristocratic sense of the word.
7. See Anne Barton, "Harking Back to Elizabeth: Ben Jonson and Caroline Nostalgia," *ELH*, 48 (1981), 706-31; for a dissenting view, see D. R. Woolf, "Two Elizabeths? James I and the Late Queen's Famous Memory," *Canadian Journal of History*, 20:2 (Aug. 1985), 167-91.
8. For a brilliant discussion of James's Roman style, see Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and Their Contemporaries* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), pp. 27-54; see also Graham Parry, *The Golden Age Restor'd: The Culture of the Stuart Court, 1603-42* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), pp. 15-20; Howard Erskine-Hill, *The Augustan Idea in English Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), pp. 99-178; H. Neville Davies, "Jacobean Antony and Cleopatra," *Shakespeare Studies*, 17 (1985), 123-58.
9. The connexion between Greville's lost play and *Antony and Cleopatra* was noted by Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957-75), 5:216-17.
10. Emrys Jones, "Introduction," *Antony and Cleopatra* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp. 46-7. I should note that the dates are against the Melville/Messenger parallel. The incident itself happened in 1564 (the year of Shakespeare's birth), and Melville's *Memoirs* were not published until 1683; it is unlikely that the exchange between Elizabeth and Melville would have still been a matter of public knowledge in 1606-07.
11. Jones, p. 47
12. For an extensive discussion of the politics of the Jacobean Theatre, see the present author's "the Powerless Theater," forthcoming. in *ELR*.
13. A.P. Riemer, *A Reading of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1968), p. 39.
14. See Margaret Lamb, *Antony and Cleopatra on the English Stage* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1980), p. 164; and Davies, "Jacobean Antony and Cleopatra," p. 123-4.
15. Bullough, *Sources of Shakespeare*, 5:216-17; Helen Morris, "Queen Elizabeth I 'Shadowed' in Cleopatra," *HLQ* 32 (1968-69), 271-8, Kenneth Muir, "Elizabeth I, Jodelle, and Cleopatra," *Renaissance Drama*, ns 2 (1969), 197-206; and Keith Rinehart, "Shakespeare's Cleopatra and England's Elizabeth," *SQ*, 23 (1972), 81-6.
16. Barton, "Caroline Nostalgia," p. 712.
17. Quoted in Robert Ashton, ed., *James I by his Contemporaries: An Account of his Career and Character as Seen by Some of his Contemporaries* (London: Hutchinson, 1969), p. 77.
18. Samuel Daniel, *Cleopatra*, in *The Complete Works in Verse and Prose*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, 5 vols. (rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), 3:5.
19. Quoted in Bullough, 5:217.
20. Those who have argued that the 1607 *Cleopatra* was influenced by *Antony and Cleopatra* include J. Leeds Barroll, "The Chronology of Shakespeare's Jacobean Plays and the Dating of *Antony and Cleopatra*," in *Essays on Shakespeare* ed. Gordon Ross

- Smith (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1965), pp. 138-45; and Lamb, *Antony on the Stage*, pp. 180-5. Those who disagree include Ernest Schanzer, "Daniel's Revision of his *Cleopatra*," *Res*, ns 8 no 32 (1957), 375-81; and Bullough, 5:231-2.
21. See note 7; the present author's argument was presented in a paper, "Egyptian Past, Roman Future: The Jacobean *Antony and Cleopatra*," at the meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America, April 1986.
22. See Davies, 125, 149n4.
23. For a good account of this pageant, see Parry, *Golden Age*, pp. 1-21.
24. *Ben Jonson*, ed. C.H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, II vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-52), 7:105.
25. *Ben Jonson*, 7:107-109.
26. Quoted in Ashton, p. 10.
27. Morris, 276-7.
28. See Spenser, *Works*, p. 407.
29. Quoted in Ashton, p. 10.
30. See Jankowski "Female Body Politic"; see also Louis Adrian Montrose, "'Shaping Fantasies': Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture," *Representations*, 1 (1983), 61-94. For a brilliant discussion of Shakespeare's figuration of the Queen in *I Henry VI*, see Leah S. Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 51-92.
31. Quoted in Ashton, p. 10. Note that Antony's fondest desire in his dotage upon Cleopatra is to "wander through the streets and note / The qualities of people" (I.i.54-5), and it is precisely this princely enthusiasm for the people that draws Octavius' most nauseated criticism: "Let's grant it is not / Amiss to tumble on the bed of Ptolemy, / And keep the turn of tippling with a slave, / To reel the streets at noon, and stand the buffet / With knaves that smell of sweat" (I.iv.17-21).
32. See Goldberg, *Politics of Literature*, pp. 30-2.
33. For a discussion of the implied Christian ethos in the play, see Andrew Fichter, "'Antony and Cleopatra': 'The Time of Universal Peace,'" *Shakespeare Survey*, 33 (1980), 99-111.
34. For a good discussion of the effects of the myth of Elizabeth upon James's relations with the English, see R. Malcolm Smuts, *Court Culture and the Origins of a Royalist Tradition in Early Stuart England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), pp. 15-37.
35. Caesar's bathetic shift from a noble eulogistic tone highlights the degraded sense of the word "business." A few examples of the degradation of this word include the following: *Winter's Tale*, I.ii.227-8 (where the word has not uncommon sexual connotation); "On Don Surly" (*Ben Jonson*, 8:35, II.7-8); "The Praises of the Country Life" (*Jonson*, 8:289, II.1-2); and "Breake of Day" (Donne, *Poetical Works*, p. 22, II.13, 16-17). The choice of the word "business" constitutes a weak and self-betraying moment in Caesar's attempts to appropriate the heroic language which belongs to the past generation.

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36. See Jones, "Introduction," *Antony and Cleopatra*, p. 46, for the suggestion that Shakespeare's style is reminiscent of Horace. For a discussion of Shakespeare's "transvaluation" of the Augustan ethos, see Barbara J. Bono, *Literary Transvaluation: From Virgillian Epic to Shakespearean Tragicomedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), esp. pp. 140ff.
37. See William Haller, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963); and Elkin Calhoun Wilson, *England's Eliza* (rpt. London: Frank Cass, 1966), esp. 3-95.
38. See Goldberg, *Politics of Literature*, p. 33.
39. *Ben Jonson*, 8:245, II. 60-61.
40. *The Poems of Thomas Carew*, ed. Rhodes Dunlap (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), p. 72, I. 19.
41. Cf., for example, Horace, "Ode XXXVII," in *The Odes and Epodes*, trans. C.E. Bennett (rev. London: Heinemann, 1968), p. 98, esp. II. 104; and Virgil, *Aeneid*, bk. I, II. 1-7, in *Virgil*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, 2 vols. (rev. London: Heinemann, 1974), 1:240.
42. Ethel Seaton, "Antony and Cleopatra and the Book of Revelation," *RES*, 22 (1946), 219-24.
43. See Fichter, "Time of Universal Peace," pp. 99-111; and Seaton, esp. p. 224.
44. See Revelations, 8.10, in *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition*, ed. Lloyd E. Berry (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); cited by Seaton, pp. 219-20.
45. Revelations, 10. 1-6; cited by Seaton, pp. 220-1.
46. Revelations, 21. 1-2.
47. See Revelations, 17. 1-2; cited by Seaton, p. 223.
48. See Franklin M. Dickey, *Not Wisely But Too Well: Shakespeare's Love Tragedies* (San Marino: Huntington Library Publications, 1966), pp. 146-8.
49. See *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton (London: Longman, 1977), gloss on III.i.59.