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## CHARACTERISATION

The characterisations of Antony, Cleopatra and Octavius Caesar follow quite closely the portraits of them in Plutarch, except that Shakespeare has presented the lovers more attractively, while the opposite is true of Caesar. In Plutarch, though Antony is magnanimous, bountiful, courageous and convivial, he is also cruel, lecherous and corrupt. Shakespeare's Antony is far more noble. Cleopatra is perhaps surprisingly well presented in Plutarch as enchanting and exotic (see **Extended commentaries**) and also intelligent; the intense realisation of her as a **paradoxical** union of contradictory qualities is Shakespeare's own response to what he found in his source. Shakespeare has conceived Octavius very much as Antony's opposite; whereas in Plutarch he is said to have a weakness for women, in Shakespeare he is abstemious, censorious and cold. His political virtues are presented by the dramatist in such a way that they almost suggest a human limitation.

The principal characters are the subject of comment in the **Detailed summaries**, while the presentation of the lovers, particularly of Cleopatra, is discussed in detail in **Extended commentaries**. Shakespeare's dramatic construction and design are illustrated here with reference to what is Shakespeare's single most striking invention, his development of the character and role of Enobarbus.

The character of Antony's lieutenant Enobarbus contributes to the drama in a number of ways. Sympathetic to Antony from the start, his loyalty and fellow feeling help to establish the humanity of his captain in the course of the action. When at the beginning Antony says he wishes he had never met Cleopatra, instead of agreeing with him, Enobarbus offers the rejoinder that, had that been the case, Antony would have missed 'a wonderful / piece of work' (I.2.154–5). He does not share, therefore, the perspective of his fellow Roman soldiers Philo and Demetrius in the opening scene. In fact he is obviously enjoying life in Egypt and contributes to the relaxed humour of the Egyptian court, with appreciative comments, too, on Cleopatra.

When Antony says of Cleopatra, 'She is cunning past man's thought', Enobarbus disagrees: 'Alack, sir, no; her passions are made of / nothing but the finest part of pure love' (I.2.146–8). In their

### QUESTION

Shakespeare's Romans are significantly clarified in comparison with their originals in Plutarch; how then are we to account for the fact that his play produces an experience of greater complication, interest, penetration and depth than can be derived from a reading of Plutarch?

conversations at the beginning, and indeed in his role throughout, it is as if Enobarbus represents an ordinary reflection of something in Antony himself, as in a mirror. His wit and humour in response to the announcement of Fulvia's death – though eventually Antony silences him with 'No more light answers' (I.2.177) – anticipate the jovial side of Antony that will manifest itself in the galley scene.

Before the triumvirs meet, the diplomatic Lepidus tries to persuade Enobarbus to keep Antony calm and cool. Enobarbus will have none of it, saying he much prefers that Antony should speak his mind. He is forthright himself when he reminds Antony and Caesar that there will be time enough to quarrel after they have disposed of Pompey. To Antony's rebuke, 'Thou art a soldier only. Speak no more' (II.2.111), he boldly replies, 'That truth should be silent I had almost / forgot'. He is established here as an honest figure who gets to the heart of things and is not afraid to speak his mind.

His appreciation of Egypt and its queen, together with his wit and humour, makes him the perfect vehicle for the exotic description of Cleopatra given to his peers from Caesar's entourage. Coming as it does from him, this picture acquires a special authority. Though he is not a subtle politician, he is not without tact when he tries to stop Pompey making remarks to Antony about Julius Caesar's relations with Cleopatra. He then tells Pompey that he does not like him much but is prepared to give him his due. Pompey acknowledges his 'plainness' (II.6.78), his honesty in speaking.

In a witty exchange with Pompey's lieutenant Menas, Enobarbus is loyal to Antony, but frankly says that 'He will to his Egyptian dish again' (II.6.124) and predicts that the marriage to Octavia will prove a cause of friction between Caesar and Antony rather than a bond. He joins in the merrymaking on board Pompey's galley, and mocks the hung-over Lepidus the morning after. Before Antony and Caesar come to blows, he is established as a truthful, honourable, witty and worldly fellow who is clear-sighted in his political and personal judgements.

When it comes to the conflict, he tries unsuccessfully to persuade Cleopatra not to be present personally in Antony's camp and he argues forcefully against the decision to fight by sea. He reports the



### CHECK THE FILM

Despite differences in their rank, the relationship between Enobarbus and Antony as fellow soldiers is more than that of master and servant. There is a natural sympathy between them that may be called a product of male bonding. This is very apparent in the 1972 BBC film version.



### QUESTION

Enobarbus is equally at home in Rome and Egypt; he is not like the censorious Roman soldiers who open the play, nor does he judge Antony as do Pompey and Caesar. He moves easily between the two poles of the main antithetical divide. How, therefore, can his character and role be accounted for by those who see the play turning on the opposition between Roman and Egyptian values?

World events	Shakespeare's life	Other literary works
<p>1517 Egypt falls to the Ottoman Turks</p> <p>1543 Copernicus challenges accepted views on astronomy (formulated in Ptolemaic Egypt) and his work is banned by the Catholic Church</p> <p>1558 The French capture Calais, ending 210 years of English possession</p> <p>1565 Sir John Hawkins brings tobacco to England</p> <p>1576 First theatre in England opens at Shoreditch</p> <p>1581 Conversion to Roman Catholicism is deemed treason in England</p> <p>1582 Plague breaks out in London</p> <p>1583 Newfoundland is claimed for Elizabeth I by Humphrey Gilbert</p>	<p>1557 John Shakespeare marries Mary Arden</p> <p>1564 Born in Stratford-upon-Avon</p> <p>1582 Marries Anne Hathaway</p> <p>1583 A daughter, Susanna, is born</p> <p>1585 The twins, Hamnet and Judith, are born</p>	<p>1516 Thomas More, <i>Utopia</i></p> <p>1532 Niccolò Machiavelli, <i>The Prince</i> (published posthumously)</p> <p>1578 Robert Garnier, <i>Marc Antoine</i> (in French)</p> <p>1579 Thomas North translates Plutarch's <i>Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans</i></p>

World events	Shakespeare's life	Other literary works
<p>1588 Spanish Armada defeated</p> <p>1593–1606 Ottoman expansion into Europe halted by prolonged war with Austria</p> <p>1595–1603 Tyrone's rebellion in Ireland</p> <p>1596 Francis Drake perishes on an expedition to the West Indies</p> <p>1598 First mention of the game of cricket</p>	<p>late 1580s – early 1590s Shakespeare probably writes <i>Henry VI</i>, parts 1, 2 and 3, and <i>Richard III</i></p> <p>1592 Shakespeare acting in London</p> <p>1592–4 Writes <i>The Comedy of Errors</i></p> <p>1594 Writes exclusively for the Lord Chamberlain's Men</p> <p>1595 <i>Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>, <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> and <i>Love's Labour's Lost</i> are thought to have been completed by this time. Writes <i>Romeo and Juliet</i></p> <p>1596–8 <i>Henry IV</i>, parts 1 and 2, written</p> <p>1598–9 Globe Theatre built at Southwark</p> <p>1599 <i>Henry V</i> completed</p> <p>1600 <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>, <i>Much Ado about Nothing</i> and <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> printed. <i>Twelfth Night</i> and <i>Julius Caesar</i> probably written</p> <p>1600–1 <i>Hamlet</i> written</p>	<p>1590 Christopher Marlowe, <i>Dido, Queen of Carthage</i></p> <p>1592 Garnier's <i>Marc Antoine</i> translated into English</p> <p>1594 Samuel Daniel, <i>The Tragedie of Cleopatra</i></p>