

More Plays Off the Page: *Antony and Cleopatra*

"Here is the most spacious of [Shakespeare's] plays....it has a magnificence and magic all its own, and Shakespeare's eyes swept no wider a horizon", says Granville-Barker in his preface to **ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA**. Here is a play that encompasses huge distances both geographical and emotional. However, the Globe theatre allowed, indeed invited, such rapidly changing scenes, locations, and leaps of time. In historical time the action takes 10 years -- from Fulvia's death in 40 B.C. to Cleopatra's, August 29, 30 B.C. Shakespeare compresses it to days.

Shakespeare had written a play about idyllic romantic love a dozen or so years before in **ROMEO AND JULIET**. Now in 1606, at the height of his poetic powers, he writes a play of the consuming passion of two characters who have already experienced the gamut of human emotions, of the impact upon one another of two complex characters -- one a Roman and one an Egyptian. They are not only prototypes of man and woman, but symbols of two contrasting worlds.

So what kind of a hero is Antony? Shakespeare had already written a play in which the young Antony had vanquished the assassins of Julius Caesar. Here we are concerned with the ruin that overtakes a great soldier who had ruled one third of the world and now has **allowed** his passionate lust to dominate his life and obliterate his sense of duty. Somehow Shakespeare manages to give Antony's ruin an air of grandeur. How does he do that? Is Antony tragic? Can we have sympathy for him?

Cleopatra was a character well known in Shakespeare's time from Chaucer to Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's **LIVES** (1529). Shakespeare changes her from Plutarch's queen, the wily sovereign bent on maintaining dynastic power, to the epitome of feminine sorcery. This Cleo can let Egypt go to wrack and ruin if only she can spend ambrosial days and nights with her lover. Is there anything tragic about her? How has Shakespeare developed her character? As always in Shakespeare, the minor characters are fully fleshed, never abstractions. Octavian: cold, calculating, the politician; Octavia: chilly, very correct in her behavior; Enobarbus the soldier who can be sentimental; even the asp -- bearer (not Asperger). Our job will be to find their humanity no matter how swift their "hour upon the stage."

Please note that this is not a sit-down "lit crit" course. We aim to get out of our seats, get the gorgeous words in our mouths, and see what the playwright tells us to do as we try to recreate as best we can the conditions of his Globe Theater. No memorization or acting experience necessary; just a desire to see what is in the play from the inside, rather than from the outside.

You need not have taken the fall "Off the PAGE" class, **CAESAR AND CLEOPATRA**.

TEXT: *ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA*, Folger Library, Mass Market, paperback ed. Simon and Schuster, 2010. ISBN # 978 074 348 285 1. On Amazon or at Labyrinth in Princeton. Around \$5.99. It is important that we all have the same text, so we may all "be on the same page." (Mention E. F. or my name at Labyrinth so you'll get the proper text.) **PLEASE HAVE READ ACT I, SCENES 1 THROUGH 3 FOR THE FIRST CLASS.**

LEADER: Barbara Herzberg has an extensive theatre background, has taught English and drama, and directed plays for many years. She has been a course leader for Evergreen since its inception.

WEDNESDAYS: 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., 8-10 weeks: Beginning March 11 (no class on 4/8)

LOCATION: Monument Hall, Maximum 20 seats