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SHAKESPEARE'S PORTRAYAL OF HONOR IN HIS ROMAN PLAYS

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to explore the way in which Shakespeare portrays Roman honor in the plays *The Tragedy of Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Honor is a dominating, driving force in the Roman plays. Both Coriolanus and Antony are defined as well as divided by honor. Inside Coriolanus, there is a tension between the two halves of the concept of honor. Roman honor is something that is bestowed by others, but it is also self-imposed. Throughout the play, Coriolanus struggles to reconcile these two opposing and incompatible ideas, and his tragic conflict unfolds primarily in four major episodes in the play. From the way in which he reacts concerning the plebeians, his rival, his family and his fate, I conclude that he is unable to unite his personal honor with Rome's concept of honor. Antony, like Coriolanus, struggles to reconcile two opposing forces within him. He is caught between Rome and Egypt and must decide whether to live within the confines of Roman honor or to abide by his own personal code of honor defined by his love for Cleopatra. Due to his fidelity for Cleopatra, Antony is ultimately unable to maintain a full grasp on his Roman identity. Antony's death confirms his abandonment of Roman honor in favor of his own. Both Coriolanus and Antony are unfit for the worlds in which they are forced to live, and by analyzing Shakespeare's definitions of honor much of the complexity and depth of his characters is revealed.

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## Introduction

Honor is not an easy term to define. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, honor means “High respect, esteem, or reverence, accorded to exalted worth or rank; deferential admiration or approbation” (OED). This definition conveys the essence of the term, but Shakespeare shows in several of his plays that honor is also much more than reverence and admiration. There are many complexities and intricacies of honor, especially Roman honor – for in Shakespeare’s Rome honor is of the utmost importance – that Shakespeare explores in his Roman plays. I will be focusing primarily on *The Tragedy of Coriolanus* (1607-8) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606-7), but before both of these plays came *Julius Caesar* (1599). In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare establishes several implications of Roman honor that he expands on in his later plays. He links honor to politics, shows how it can be divisive, and explores the relationship between honor and dependency. To start with the latter, Caesar is only as honorable as the people of Rome deem him to be. He is entirely dependent on the Roman people for his worth, respect, and life. Furthermore, the relationship between a leader and the people whom he serves introduces the political sphere into the definition of honor. Lastly, Brutus proves with his assassination of Caesar that Roman politics and therefore Roman honor can often be conspiratorial and underhanded. Most importantly, one must note that all three of these facets of Roman honor are divisive, and it is this quality of Roman honor that Shakespeare exposes and expands upon in his later plays.

In addition to dependency, politics, deception, and divisiveness, Shakespeare also includes other aspects of Roman honor in both *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. In *Coriolanus*, he explores the way in which Marcus Caius defines his identity with respect to

his friends as well as enemies, and he places value on the importance of staying true to one's values so that word and action should not differ in their aims. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare introduces an entirely new dimension of honor in Antony's love for Cleopatra and Egypt's power over him that pulls him away from Rome. All of these factors that decide what makes a Roman man honorable inevitably divide the man on whom this honor is bestowed. In both tragedies, the main characters have an internal struggle caused by their inability to define honor in only one way. Coriolanus struggles to define honor independently of others even though other people are the source of his honor, and Antony struggles to define honor in his love with Cleopatra over his fidelity and duty to Rome, but he must sacrifice in order to do so. Both Coriolanus and Antony must eventually give up their lives in their tragic search for the honor that they can only find in death.

### ***Coriolanus***

Martius Caius Coriolanus prides himself on his sense of honor. In *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, Shakespeare tells the story of a Roman warrior who falls from grace in the eyes of the people. His inevitable downfall is the result of a powerful tension between two halves of the concept of honor that are constantly at war within him. Coriolanus' Roman honor can come in only two ways; it is either bestowed by others or self-imposed. He wants to believe that he is in complete control of his identity and that he is not dependent on others, especially the plebs, for his reputation, but his behavior often suggests that honor can only be found in the opinion of others. His inability to reconcile these two sources of his honor ultimately strips him of both his honor and his identity.

While Coriolanus is a great fighter for Rome, he does not identify with all of the Roman state. His attitude suggests that he believes he demonstrates true Roman values by fighting for his city and earning his living, and he strongly looks down on Rome's plebeians for failing to do the same. Coriolanus despises the lower class that, in his opinion, does not deserve the generosity of Rome's senators. He has trouble controlling his temperament when dealing with these citizens of Rome, and despite his heroism on the battlefield they succeed in banishing Coriolanus from Rome for the supposed treason with which he speaks out against them.

As the play opens, the audience is introduced to Caius Martius, the overly proud leader of Rome's army, as his rival Tullus Aufidius leads the Volscian army to attack Rome. Martius bravely attacks the Volscians in the city of Corioles and, as he has done many times before, singlehandedly wins the battle and causes Aufidius and his army to retreat. As a reward for his valor in battle, his friend Cominius gives him the title of Coriolanus and his mother Volumnia pushes him to run for Roman consul. In order to be elected by the people of Rome, Coriolanus must prove his worthiness by showing off the scars he has received fighting for them, but he initially refuses. Rome's tribunes, Brutus and Sicinius, conspire to turn the plebeians against Coriolanus by reminding them of his hatred for them. The tribunes succeed in prompting Coriolanus to go on a tirade against them and the plebeians concerning their worthlessness and disobedience. The people, in turn, demand that Coriolanus be put to death for his traitorous speech. At the urging of his friends Menenius and Cominius as well as Volumnia, Coriolanus returns to the marketplace to retract his harsh speech, but he once again ends up railing against the tribunes and plebeians. As a punishment, the citizens of Rome banish Coriolanus. As much of Rome rejoices in his

banishment, Coriolanus travels to Antium and seeks out his old rival Aufidius. In order to get revenge on Rome for exiling him, he offers to join Aufidius and attack Rome. When the time comes to execute the attack, however, Coriolanus' family begs him to spare Rome and he relents, knowing full well that his own death will ensue. Coriolanus returns to Antium having failed in his service to Aufidius, and the Volscians kill him in the marketplace. The play ends with Aufidius lamenting the death of Coriolanus and recalling his great honor and nobility.

One of the most defining characteristics of Coriolanus is his pride. He is too proud to associate himself with Rome's lowly plebeians, and his hubris directly results from his exalted sense of honor. Coriolanus believes strongly that his unmatched valor in war places him far above Rome's plebeians on the social scale. Coriolanus is the most honorable military warrior, but he cannot recognize the power of the plebeians. In his essay *Lenten Butchery: Legitimization Crisis in Coriolanus*, Michael D. Bristol suggests that Coriolanus is characterized by radical, voluntaristic, and proprietary individualism that makes him disgusted by the public square. His virtues are his downfall. (Holderness 138-144). Coriolanus does not care about the plebeians because they are not warriors and he therefore designates them as worthless and unworthy of his support. He does not understand the politics of the situation because he only truly understands war. As Alexander Welsh says of Coriolanus in his book, *What is Honor?* "In truth, the man's principles attach him to a world that does not exist" (Welsh 82).

If he refuses to recognize the plebeians as worthy of his attention, Coriolanus cannot live in the republic of Rome where much of the power rests in the hands of the people. And since he is solely a man of war and cannot unify his values on the battlefield with the

political values he needs to be a functioning member of Roman society, then he is unfit for the world in which he lives. While Coriolanus may seem to be more Roman than anyone else in the play due to his extreme valor and overwhelming sense of honor, in many ways he fails to be Roman as well because he lacks respect for the Roman people; he is a poor orator in a city that demands public speaking skills, and eventually he turns on Rome and nearly attacks his own people. In Robert S. Miola's essay on the play in his book *Shakespeare's Rome*, he says, "By focusing on a figure who embodies uncompromisingly the Roman ideal of honor, Shakespeare exposes the paradoxes inherent in the civilized community, including the differences between private virtue and public good" (Miola 165). In terms of public good, no warrior has done more for Rome than Caius Martius. He constantly defends Rome, having warded off Tullus Aufidius and his forces eight times, and he is the biggest reason why all of the citizens of Rome, even the plebeians, are living lives of freedom. Coriolanus has undoubtedly done his part for the public good of Rome. On the other hand, his private virtue is apparently more important to the people of Rome than the service he has provided. Although he may have a right to consider himself to be far above the people of Rome in rank and status, they run him out of Rome following the direction of Sicinius and Brutus because he did not respect them enough. In private versus public life, Coriolanus is two different people.

Rome's tribunes, Brutus and Sicinius, recognize Caius Martius's disdain for the common people and use it to their advantage in a scheme to be rid of him. Since Menenius and the Roman senate have convinced Coriolanus to run for consul, he must gain the favor of the plebeians. The tribunes know that this responsibility is the last thing Coriolanus desires, and they seize the opportunity to remind Rome's citizens of how Coriolanus truly

feels about them, and what he will do once he has power over them. Sicinius and Brutus are accurate in their whisperings about Coriolanus' character, as Coriolanus proves time and time again when tested. Even before the tribunes prompt him to voice his opinion on the plebs, he remarks to Brutus, "Your people/ I love them as they weigh" (2.2.68-9). Coriolanus does not believe he should care for the plebs any more than they deserve. He scoffs at the idea of showing off his scars in order to make better their opinion of him so that he can be Rome's consul. Coriolanus has trouble understanding why he should have to show off to these people who do nothing for him in return. He says, "To brag unto them 'Thus I did, and thus',/ Show them th'unaching scars, which I should hide,/ As if I had received them for the hire/ Of their breath only!" (2.2.144-7). Coriolanus does not wish to hide his scars because he is not proud of them; they define him. He just does not think the people are worthy of his time or flattery. Even though he may pretend not to care what others think, as he demonstrates by refusing to waste his time trying to impress the plebeians, Coriolanus places a lot of value in the opinion others have of him. In Act 3, scene 1 when Brutus and Sicinius call him a traitor and declare that he is guilty of treason, Coriolanus gets whipped up into a rage. He becomes so angry because the tribunes have tainted his god-like image and are trying to strip him of the honor that took him years to earn. In this moment of weakness Coriolanus reveals that he is more conscious of his image and how others perceive him than it seems. As Simmons writes, "Coriolanus needed to be unquestionably virtuous in the eyes of the public" (Simmons 19) because he depends on them to reinforce his identity and honorability. He also suggests that Coriolanus is "a public hero without a public [who] cannot know himself except in the applause of others" (Simmons 30).

His inability to forge relationships with others causes serious problems for Coriolanus. Even among his friends and family, Coriolanus seems to be distant from everyone. The audience rarely sees him spend time with his wife or his son, and his mother sees him as more of an ideal than an actual person. Volumnia sees in Martius Caius the potential for endless glory and honor, but there is not much to their relationship outside of that facet. In *Shakespeare's Political Drama*, Alexander Leggatt writes, "Other people are not quite real to him, so relationships are difficult" (Leggatt 191). This assertion is most directly applicable to Coriolanus' relationship with the plebeians. In his eyes the plebs are barely even people. Coriolanus does not see individual Romans when he looks at the plebeians; he can only conceive of them as a group or mob of worthless leeches on the people who run and protect Rome. Even when he wants to thank the old man who gave him shelter when he was injured, Coriolanus cannot remember the man's name. His forgetfulness should not be surprising because he is truly unable to separate individual people from "the people" of Rome. This transience of the Roman people is important because if Coriolanus could see the plebeians as actual people, then he would be much more likely to allow their opinions to influence him, and they would not be so easily dismissible. However, since they are more of an idea in his head than actual Roman citizens, he has no reservations about his negative conceptions of them.

The reason Coriolanus is eventually run out of Rome is because the plebeians turn on him. In John Alvis's book entitled *Shakespeare's Understanding of Honor* he says, "Prudence always defers to boldness, as one can see when he refuses to petition the plebs" (Alvis 106). He is unable to control his anger; even when given a second chance to flatter the people, he cannot remain calm long enough to appear to care for their needs. Instead,

he belittles them just as the tribunes predicted he would. In Act 3, Scene 1, Coriolanus declares, "They know the corn/ Was not our recompense, resting well assured/ They ne'er did service for't. Being pressed to th'war,/ Even when the navel of the state was touched,/ They would not thread the gates. This kind of service/ Did not deserve corn gratis" (3.1.123-128). He does not see any reason to respect them when they beg for more grain while doing nothing to deserve it. Though they are conscripted to the army, they refused to fight when Rome was under attack. Yet, despite their cowardice and laziness, they constantly make requests of the senate. In Coriolanus' ranting throughout the scene, he also says, "In soothing them we nourish 'gainst our Senate/ The cockle of rebellion, insolence, sedition,/ Which we ourselves have ploughed for, sowed, and scattered/ By mingling them with us, the honoured number that lack not virtue, no, nor power, but that/ Which they have given to beggars" (3.1.73-8). Coriolanus' hatred of the plebeians is deep-seated in his mind. He sincerely believes that the more those with power in Rome give in to the demands of the plebeians, the more power is lost to them. He does not think that the honorable upper half of Rome should have anything to do with the rebellious, worthless lower half. In J.L. Simmons's book, *Shakespeare's Pagan World: The Roman Tragedies*, he writes, "When Coriolanus fails to keep the Roman voice free from the plebeians, Rome becomes uninhabitable" (Simmons 48). He is unable to separate the glory of his honor from its political implications. Coriolanus cannot stand to see the people of Rome in a position of power over him like the situation in which he must bear his scars to gain their favor for consul. He reacts in accordance with his ideal of honor, by venting his true feelings of them, which causes them to exile him from Rome.

Part of the way in which Coriolanus is dependent on others for his identity involves his military exploits themselves as opposed to their after effects. With each man Coriolanus kills on the battlefield, he grows more confident and becomes more brazen, and his scars serve as reminders of his courage and skill. Though he may not want to show them off, his scars are what the people want to see because they are the proof of Coriolanus' military honor; they are the only visible evidence one can see and judge. Nobody is more proud of this fact than Volumnia. She sees in Coriolanus only his military honor and loves him for it. In speaking to Virgilia, she proclaims, "Hear me profess sincerely: had I a dozen sons, each in my love alike, and none less dear than thine and my good Martius', I had rather had eleven die nobly for their country than one voluptuously surfeit out of action" (1.3.17-21). In her mind, Coriolanus is only the product of the victories and the honors he gains from battle. The plebeians share similar virtues, though not quite as sinister as Volumnia's. They wish to see Coriolanus' scars for reassurance that he is worthy of being a consul. From both points of view, Coriolanus is only as honorable as the scars he has accumulated while serving in the Roman army. Luckily for Coriolanus, he has many. When Volumnia hears that Coriolanus is wounded in Act 2 she thanks the gods for it, and Menenius responds, "So do I, too, if it not be too much. Brings a victory in his pocket, the wounds become him" (2.1.108-110). These words from Menenius reinforce the idea that Coriolanus' wounds are what make him Coriolanus. Miola appears to agree, for he writes, "Martius proves his Romanitas through military exploits, each scar a sign of constancy and courage, a symbol of his identity" (Miola 169).

On his own Coriolanus is nothing, but he can never accept that fact. One would think that since he depends on others for his honor, then he would have no problem showing off

his scars to the plebeians to win their approval. However, he refuses to admit to himself that he needs the plebs, or anyone else for that matter, to verify what he considers to be his inherent honor and nobility. Coriolanus may know very well that he is Rome's best, most honorable soldier, but he cannot reconcile his fighting on the battlefield with Roman society and politics. The people of Rome rightfully demand proof of his heroism in the form of his scars, but Coriolanus refuses to participate in this custom because doing so would be an admission of his dependence on people whom he considers to be below him for the valor and honor that, in his mind, he earned alone. Furthermore, Coriolanus encounters a problem because he feels less virtuous when he must ask for reward because "Roman honor lies in the voices of the people," (Simmons 30). Coriolanus would like to be free from his reliance on the people of Rome to recognize his worth, but without them he discovers his honor is worthless.

As the most valiant Roman warrior, Coriolanus defines himself by his actions both on and off the battlefield. He could never be a consul or politician of any kind for Rome because his mind and body are devoted entirely to war, honor, and glory. War is everything to him, whereas the people see war only as a temporary necessity or a vehicle for peace. Coriolanus is hardwired to be hostile; so, it should come as no surprise that he has trouble controlling his temper. In the opening scene of the play, Sicinius asks, "Was ever man so proud as this Martius?" (1.1.243) To which Brutus responds, "The present wars devour him! He is grown/ Too proud to be so valiant" (1.1.248-9). As Coriolanus returns from battle after battle victorious, his already inflated sense of pride grows even larger. His brutality is helpful in wartime, but in times of peace he has nowhere to direct it other than at the people of Rome. Alvis writes, "So congenial to his temperament is strife

that one can hardly conceive of a peaceable Coriolanus” and “Coriolanus must fight always or, having no other occupation, he is nothing” (Alvis 113). Coriolanus’ status as a soldier defines him, and his honorability is grounded in his deeds on the battlefield.

Coriolanus cannot reconcile his own nature with the nature of Rome. Tension exists between the demands of his own honor and those of Rome, and Coriolanus is more loyal to himself than to the city. For that reason, he values personal honor over a comfortable life (Miola 170-191). If Coriolanus were to devote himself to the honor of Rome, than he would have to control his hubris and accept the responsibilities that would come along with his position as a Roman consul. However, to do so would mean that he would diminish his own sense of honor, and his decision to accept exile rather than continue to live in Rome in peace shows that he cares first and foremost about his own honor. Furthermore, he prefers times of war to times of peace, and he knows that by leaving his own city he will have more opportunity to do battle rather than to rest listlessly and aimlessly about Rome. “His real objection is to the compromising of his own identity,” writes Leggatt, “To do what his predecessors have done, because they have done it, is to surrender the individual to the office, the man to the role” (Leggatt 193). Coriolanus refuses to give up his honor for the good of Rome.

The most defining aspect of Coriolanus’ honor is that it is derived from the recognition of others. He depends on his friends as well as his enemies for his identity. Even the name “Coriolanus” is an honor bestowed upon Martius Caius for his heroic fighting in the city of Corioles. Cominius announces, “Therefore be it known,/ As to us, to all the world, that Caius Martius/ Wears this war’s garland [...] and from this time,/ For what he did before Corioles, call him/ With all th’applause and clamour of the host,/

Martius Caius Coriolanus" (1.10.57-65). By publicly praising Coriolanus and giving him this new title, Cominius makes Coriolanus even more honorable in the eyes of Romans, and along with this new honor comes an increased responsibility on the part of Coriolanus to maintain it. Leggatt writes of this scene, "Cominius insists that his deeds must be recognized: 'Rome must know/ The value of her own.' The name Coriolanus is a gift, a reminder of his dependence on other people for his identity. Without an audience to either be the victims of or the celebrators of his deeds, Coriolanus is nothing.

Coriolanus' quest for self-imposed honor culminates in his abandonment of and exile from Rome. Without the Roman people to be witnesses of his power, he seeks out the only other person he know who respects and fears him – Tullus Aufidius. Coriolanus cannot return to Rome after turning against it, and the only honorable thing left for him to do is to face certain death by partnering with Aufidius. According to John Alvis, Coriolanus "reveres his own honorific surname because he believes it memorializes a moment of self-sufficiency, and he seeks to perpetuate this condition of autonomous nobility," however, "his conception of nobility requires that his worth be recognized by others, either directly in the form of praise, or indirectly through submission to his superior power" (Alvis 108). In other words, Martius values the name "Coriolanus" as he measures his own honor by emulation since he constantly weighs his own value against that of others. He travels to Antium knowing that he is a greater warrior than Aufidius and he believes correctly that Aufidius will submit to him when he offers to help him in plotting the destruction of Rome. The trouble with this plan is that Coriolanus fails to fulfill his duty to Aufidius.

At first Coriolanus does not waver in his course when Menenius begs him to give up the attack on Rome, but when Volumnia, Virgilia, and his son Young Martius kneel before

him they manage to change his mind. His mother gets through to him in the best way possible by appealing to his honor rather than simply begging for mercy. She tells her son that if he goes through with his plan to destroy Rome then his legacy will read, “ ‘The man was noble,/ But with his last attempt he wiped it out,/ Destroyed his country, and his name remains abhorred’ ” (5.3.146-9). Upon hearing Volumnia’s words Coriolanus understands that if he destroys Rome he would also destroy the honor that he has received from his service to Rome. He therefore chooses to die with honor by once again saving his city as well as his reputation. Because he relinquishes his attack, however, Coriolanus loses the upper hand over his former enemy. Without the reverence of Aufidius, Coriolanus has nobody left who is able to confirm his honor. Before killing him, Aufidius says to Coriolanus, “Ay, Martius, Caius Martius. Dost thou think/ I’ll grace thee with that robbery, thy stol’n name,/ ‘Coriolanus’, in Corioles?” (5.6.90-2). Aufidius strips Coriolanus of his honorific title, and he continues, “Name not the god, thou boy of tears” (5.6.103) when Coriolanus reaches out to the heavens. At these words, Martius is again stirred up into frenzy as he shouts back that he had never before been insulted in such a manner. At this moment in the play, Martius Caius has nowhere left to turn. Nobody around him will recognize or respect him for his greatness because there is nobody left in whom he can see it reflected. Once the last shred of his identity is taken from him, Coriolanus not only loses his name, he loses his life.

Welsh says of Coriolanus, “For the hero, word and deed must be inseparable” (Welsh 77). Throughout his dealings with the plebeians, Coriolanus proves that he refuses to betray his identity by speaking anything other than what he believes. Even though his friends have warned him that if he fails to please the people of Rome he could be executed

or exiled, he cannot sincerely flatter the plebeians because he would be lying, and Coriolanus is far too honorable to be a liar. In the opening scene of Act 3, Menenius says, "His nature is too noble for the world./ He would not flatter Neptune for his trident/ Or Jove for's power to thunder. His heart's his mouth./ And, being angry, does forget that ever/ He heard the name of death" (3.1.255-9). Menenius is quite accurate in his characterization of his friend. Coriolanus does not fear death nearly as much as he fears loss of his identity. Volumnia tries to convince him to flatter the plebeians once more in Act 3, scene 2 by saying, "Now it lies you on to speak to th'people/ Not by your own instruction, nor by th'matter/ Which your heart prompts you, but with such words/ That are but roted in our tongue, though but/ Bastards and syllables of no allowance/ To your bosom's truth (3.2.53-8). She encourages him to speak with words that are not from his heart and that only matter on the surface, and she argues that he can maintain his honor because the words will not really mean anything. Even though he eventually gives in to his mother, his response to her pleading defines the way he feels about lying. He replies to her, "I will not do't,/ Lest I surcease to honour mine own truth,/ And my body's action teach my mind/ A most inherent baseness" (3.2.120-3). Coriolanus demonstrates with these words that he derives much of his sense of honor from his truthfulness, and he believes that if he betrays himself by lying even this once, he will forever be tainted and less himself because of it. He strongly believes that it is wrong to do one thing and say another.

Just as he cannot say something he does not truly believe in, nor can he do something that is not upheld by his own ideals. Coriolanus is so true to himself that he would rather face death than do or say something that runs contrary to his identity. He fails to attack Rome in the end after seeing his family because he knows deep down that he

is Roman, and despite his best efforts he could never follow through with the destruction of his own city. Coriolanus' final act of mercy maintains his identity and therefore his honor. John Alvis writes, "Volumnia says her son's honor can be maintained only if he spares the city and Coriolanus relents only after she has made this point (5.3.132-148)" (Alvis 119). Even though he knows he faces death if he backs down, Coriolanus stays true to his character; he would rather lose his life than his honor. Coriolanus opposes lying because he does not want to lose part of his identity. He also wants his due recognition for his actions and not his words. In his criticism on Coriolanus, Welsh expands on this theory by writing, "Coriolanus believes it is false and shameful to have ulterior motives for his actions [...] He deserves his fame, but the more famous he becomes, the more he needs to reject the imputation that he purposes to be famous" (Welsh 75). Coriolanus expects the people of Rome to recognize him as being above them. It should not matter that he dislikes them, he deserves their respect and admiration for all of the service he has done for Rome. It is important to him that they know his deeds, but he will not go as far to show off his deeds in the form of his scars. He needs to maintain that he fought for Rome, for honor, and for glory rather than to win the favor of the plebeians. He is a warrior more for the sake of being a warrior than to be hailed for it; yet at the same time, he needs to be recognized by others in order to maintain his honor and noble stature. In his essay, Miola asserts that Coriolanus fails as a politician in Rome and therefore fails in his civic duty as a Roman citizen, but he proves more honorable because his speech is not self-serving or scheming. To have honor in Rome, one must acquire both personal integrity and public reputation, but "He who strives for honor and fame must serve the fickle and foul-mouthed god of popular opinion" (Miola 177). Coriolanus clearly has a great deal of personal integrity, but

he lacks in public reputation in the eyes of the tribunes and plebeians. Miola's argument holds up in that respect, but Coriolanus proves that in his quest for honor he was not forced to serve the "fickle and foul-mouthed" people of Rome. Instead, he maintains his principles and dies both honorable and famous by refusing to serve anyone but himself and his ideals.

In *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, Shakespeare explores the consequences of Roman honor taken to its extreme. Throughout the play, Coriolanus struggles to reconcile these two opposing and incompatible ideas, and his tragic conflict unfolds primarily in four major episodes in the play. From the way in which he reacts concerning the plebeians, his rival, his family and his fate, one can conclude that he is unable to unite his personal honor with Rome's concept of honor. No matter how badly Coriolanus wants his honor to be self-imposed, if there is nobody around to affirm it then it does not exist. Coriolanus learns through his experience with the plebeians, Aufidius, and his mother that Roman honor is always dependent on others. He makes a costly mistake in trying to be independent of Rome by distancing himself from the people and trying to keep his honor and reputation independent of those around him because, as he eventually learns, they are the true source of his identity, which his surname aptly demonstrates. Coriolanus' failure to unite the two sources of Roman honor means that he must accept his dependency on others and give up his overpowering sense of self that was previously founded on his supposed self-sufficiency. In giving up his own identity in exchange for honor and an untarnished legacy, Coriolanus has no choice but to give up his life as well.

## ***Antony and Cleopatra***

Unlike Marcus Caius Coriolanus, Mark Antony does not always stay true to himself in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Coriolanus holds on to his identity even if it means exile or death, but Antony is unable to think for himself when Cleopatra is involved. He consequently loses his Roman honor by ceasing to be himself, for as Antony says, "If I lose mine honour, I lose myself" (3.4.22-3). The reverse of that statement proves to hold more truth than the original. Antony is thought to be honorable because of his power, military prowess, and masculinity, all of which have exalted him to a god-like figure in the eyes of other Romans as well as Cleopatra. He loses this sense of honor as the play progresses by failing to balance his public duty with private needs, and placing his love for Cleopatra before himself and his people, which causes others to falter in their respect and admiration for him.

Antony is constantly divided between personal honor and Roman honor. In order to maintain his Roman honor, he must have a soldier's mentality and place the wellbeing of Rome before his own. He would have to be mindful of his duties and participate wholeheartedly in the politics of Rome however duplicitous they may be. Antony prefers to follow his own code of personal honor, defined by fidelity to Cleopatra and disregard for Roman politics, that he believes attaches him to a higher world. He is too strong-willed and romantic to adhere to all of the rules and customs of Rome, and he embraces Cleopatra and Egypt as a way of escaping the pressure and responsibility that accompanies his life in Rome. In Egypt, he can lose himself in love, leisure, and passion while enjoying bountiful feasts and drinking all night. Egypt offers the pleasures that he cannot take part in while in Rome without consequence, but only Rome offers power. Antony has enjoyed the best that Roman honor has to offer but he has also seen its underbelly. Similarly, he sees all of the

wonderful things he can only have in Egypt but he also sees its shortcomings. Antony struggles throughout the play to hold on to his Roman honor while staying faithful to his own as well as Cleopatra, but he cannot hold on to both forever. With each decision he makes he comes closer to having to make a choice, and in the end he chooses personal honor.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the audience essentially witnesses the fall of Antony. The first time we see Antony he is in Egypt and he receives news that his wife Fulvia has died and Rome requires his service. Cleopatra dramatically parts with Antony while in Rome, Caesar and Lepidus discuss how Antony has changed as well as the approaching civil war with Pompey, who wants his share of power in Rome. In order to prevent Caesar and Antony from quarrelling, Caesar's follower Agrippa suggests that they become brothers through the marriage of Antony and Caesar's sister Octavia. Both Caesar and Antony agree to the marriage, and when a messenger tells Cleopatra the news she is incensed and severely beats him. She then has her servants give her a report of Octavia so that she can assure herself that Antony's new wife pales in comparison with her. Meanwhile, the triumvirs of Rome offer a treaty to Pompey that he accepts so as to avoid battle. Antony, Caesar, Lepidus, and Pompey celebrate the peace treaty on Pompey's boat with a feast, but the peace is short-lived.

Caesar and Lepidus wage war against Pompey while Antony is away, and once Caesar has no more use for him he imprisons Lepidus and denies him the spoils of war. Antony prepares to attack Caesar for speaking out against him and taking power, and Caesar prepares to attack Antony for dividing the empire. At first, Caesar's forces win over Antony's at sea, but Antony retaliates on land and drives Caesar's forces to retreat. In their

final battle by sea, the Egyptian fleet defects to Caesar and Antony's forces are defeated. He blames Cleopatra for forcing him to retreat and threatens her. She responds by locking herself in a monument and tricking Antony into thinking she killed herself in order to quell his anger toward her. Consequently, Antony believes that she is dead and kills himself in turn but not before he finds out that she lied about her death, and he spends his last moments outside of her monument in Alexandria. In the final act, Caesar plans to parade Cleopatra around as the spoils of his victory, but she kills herself before he can carry out his scheme. Although Antony is not alive in the last act of the play, the audience can still feel his presence in the words and actions of Cleopatra.

From the first scene of Act 1, Antony's shortcomings as a triumvir become apparent. In response to Demetrius' observation that Antony seems not to esteem Caesar as he should, Philo says, "Sir, sometimes when he is not Antony/ He comes too short of that great property/ Which still should go with Antony" (1.1.59-61). From this short conversation along with Antony's careless attitude in the opening scene, we can already assume that Antony has been neglecting his duties as one of Rome's leaders. This episode is also one of the first instances in the play in which Antony is revered as more than just a mere man. Philo suggests that Antony should always have a certain quality about him that makes him stand out among others. Most likely, Romans look at Antony and see him as a product of the honor he has acquired as a great leader throughout the years along with the overwhelming power and command that he often has over others.

If Antony's honor is derived mostly from the recognition of others, then Octavius Caesar's opinion of Antony is one of the most important factors contributing to his identity. Antony's friends and followers echo Caesar's opinion of Antony in that they all knew how

manly he once was, but he has grown soft and more feminine and given to pleasures since he became involved with Cleopatra. Caesar describes the old Antony:

Antony

Leave thy lascivious wassails. When thou once  
Was beaten from Modena....  
...Did famine follow, whom thou fought'st against –  
Though daintily brought up – with patience more  
Than savages could suffer. Thou didst drink  
The stale of horses, and the gilded puddle  
Which beasts would cough at....  
...It is reported thou didst eat strange flesh,  
Which some did die to look on; and all this –  
It wounds thine honour that I speak it now –  
Was borne so like a soldier that thy cheek  
So much as lanked not. (1.4.55-57, 59-63, 68-71)

The Antony that Caesar remembers in this passage was a fearless warrior who sustained himself on things like horse urine, disgusting flesh, and tree bark in order to survive, and never once complained about the suffering. This image is starkly contrasts the indulgent Antony whom the audience sees time and time again – the one who engages in excessive eating and drinking in Egypt and no longer sacrifices for Rome. Janet Adelman writes, “Scarcity is the ground of masculine selfhood, as Caesar defines it [...] As in *Coriolanus*, the

hungry self is the manly self; not eating permits the fantasy of entire self-sufficiency, the escape from the body and its effeminizing need” (Holderness 82). Unfortunately for Antony, he fails to be self-sufficient as a result of Cleopatra’s unmatched influence over him, and his love for her clouds his judgment on more than one occasion. Adelman also notes Antony’s struggle to maintain his masculinity: “The masculinity of the sword – the masculine selfhood that defines itself by rigid differentiation from the female – has increasingly seemed too constraining for Antony’s fluid desires” (Holderness 84). As Antony continues to give in to his desires, he grows less and less honorable in the eyes of Caesar, Enobarbus, and other Romans. Rome, for Antony, represents the harsh conditions that Caesar values; it is a place of seriousness, struggle, and constant work. He would rather spend his time in Egypt fishing and relaxing, and finding honor in love rather than scarcity.

Antony’s disrespect and lack of concern for both Octavius Caesar and Rome make it impossible for Caesar and him to rule together. When he is with Cleopatra in Egypt, Antony ignores messages from Caesar concerning the political happenings in Rome, and when he is in Rome he behaves as though he does nothing wrong and Caesar has no cause for worry. In order to gain Caesar’s love and trust, Antony agrees to marry his sister Octavia, but he shows no signs of planning to leave Cleopatra. Furthermore, Antony shrugs off Caesar’s accusation that he failed to keep his word when he did not lend Caesar arms or aid in a time of need by saying that he merely neglected the request because he was too caught up in other things. Clearly, Antony is not living up to the standards expected of him and he is doing a poor job of leading Rome, but his love for Cleopatra blinds him to his shortcomings and hubris; he maintains that he has not violated his honor even though the evidence

shows that he has. Antony responds to Caesar's complaint, "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" (2.2.96-9). Antony believes that he is being honorable by admitting his mistake, and therefore his power, of which his honor is the source, has not been diminished. He cannot see that even if he admits to having done Caesar and Rome an injustice, that injustice does not go away just because he recognizes it and his honor is diminished each time he fails in his duty.

Octavius Caesar is a constant foil to Antony throughout the play. He represents the ruthlessness, war-like attitude, and duplicity that define Rome whereas Antony refuses to confine himself to such a lifestyle. Caesar has no problem marrying off his own sister to a man that he knows to be unfaithful – Antony proved to the public when he was married to Fulvia that marriage does not prevent him from being with Cleopatra – but he does so anyway to advance his political status. He knows that Antony will not leave Cleopatra's side even if he does marry Octavia, and Enobarbus is right in saying, "Never. He will not [leave Cleopatra.]/ Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale/ Her infinite variety" (2.2.139-241). Caesar sees his own sister merely as a tool to placate Antony while Caesar continues to amass power. He wages war with Pompey even though they had come to an agreement and uses Lepidus only as long as he needs him, throwing him in prison on false charges of treason once he is no longer useful. Caesar is more than willing to betray his family and friends if it will benefit him and bring him closer to ruling Rome alone. He is the epitome of Roman honor, a quality that distances him from Mark Antony even more than just politics. Antony, despite poor decisions he makes, never gets ahead by underhanded means, which is why he tends to value personal honor over Rome's ideal.

The scene in which Octavius marries off his sister is only one of several that expose Roman honor as duplicitous. In scene 7 of Act 2, Pompey and his followers host a feast on his ship for the Roman triumvirs and their followers. Pompey's subordinate Menas disagrees with the peace treaty and suggests to Pompey that they set out to sea and kill Antony, Lepidus, and Caesar while they have the chance. Pompey responds, "Ah, this thou shouldst have done/ And not have spoke on't. In me 'tis villainy,/ In thee 't had been good service. Thou must know/ 'Tis not my profit that does lead mine honour;/ Mine honour, it. Repent that e'er thy tongue/ Hath so betrayed thine act" (2.7.70-75). Pompey's speech reveals that he would have been fine with Menas' plan if it had been carried out without his knowledge. He claims that because he now knows about it, his honor prevents him from seeing the act through. If Pompey were truly honorable, then he would disagree with Menas' scheme whether or not he had knowledge of it. He proves that his Roman honor is fickle by stopping Menas' from killing the triumvirs only for the reason that he would be accountable and it would tarnish his image. Pompey's duplicity does not differ much from Caesar's in that they both will say and do whatever they feel is necessary to get ahead as long as their political reputations are intact. Antony differs from Caesar and Pompey by refusing to adhere to the corrupt politics of Rome and searching for a purer form of honor with Cleopatra.

Antony does not realize the consequences of his split allegiance between Rome and Egypt until it is too late for him to do anything about it. He desires to have both, but in striving to do so he is ultimately left with neither. Antony foolishly believes he can hold on to his Roman honor that he has earned with his valor as a soldier long after he has ceased to fight for Rome. He prefers the company of Cleopatra to the politics of Rome. As opposed

to the pre-Cleopatra Antony who was the ideal of Roman honor and masculinity, “the post-Cleopatra Antony has lost his ‘captain’s heart’ to debauchery. To Rome Antony is a shadow of greatness, lost in lechery and licentiousness, a sexual servant to a lustful ‘gypsy’ ” (Hiles 128). Since the days of his time in the military, Antony has grown lethargic, selfish, and hedonistic. In Egypt, he is able to immerse himself in a world of pleasure with grand feasts, a beautiful woman by his side, and a break from the pressures and responsibility that come with Roman politics. The only thing that keeps him from staying in Egypt permanently and leaving Rome behind is that he does not want to give up his power that is grounded in Rome. In Egypt, Cleopatra is in charge and Antony would be forced to share power or submit to hers. On the other hand, in Rome he could have power matched only by Caesar and his honor would be completely intact, but he would have to resist the allure of Egypt and give up the pleasures to which he has become so attached.

Cleopatra’s influence over Antony is most prominent in the end of Act 3 when Antony fights Caesar at sea. Antony’s decision to fight Caesar by sea is a poor one, as his soldiers are well aware. Enobarbus and Camidius try to dissuade him from following through with his plan but Cleopatra encourages him. Antony’s excessive pride blinds him to the complete lack of strategy involved in fighting an enemy who is dominant by sea with men who are the best fighters on land. He cannot accept the words of the soothsayer who predicted that Caesar would be more fortunate than he. Throughout his life in Rome, Antony has been victorious and revered for it; so, failure to him does not here seem like an actual possibility. The stubbornness of his tactics results from his desperation to be better than Caesar. Dollimore writes, “As effective power slips from Antony he becomes obsessed with reasserting his sense of himself as (in his dying words): ‘the greatest prince o’ th’

world,/ The noblest' (4.20.54-5)" (Holderness 99). In his mind, Antony must be better than Caesar in every respect, so even if he did fight and beat him on land, the knowledge that he may have lost to Caesar by sea would torture him. When asked why he insists on fighting by sea, Antony replies, "For that he dares us to't" (3.7.29). Despite Enobarbus' pleas and sound reasoning in attempts to persuade Antony to reconsider his attack, Antony remains insistent on fighting at sea. He appears to have lost the ability to listen to logic because he is so consumed with his image as opposed to Caesar's. Antony again puts his private needs ahead of the public whom he should be serving and protecting – in this case his soldiers. He and Cleopatra "try to claim glory based on a purely private endeavor without public benefit" by taking on Caesar in this rash, unwise manner (Alvis 170).

As Enobarbus predicted, Antony's naval battle against Caesar's seasoned forces is a complete failure. Antony still stood a chance until Cleopatra deserted him and retreated with all sixty of her ships. Scarus narrates the scene, "She, once being luffed,/ The noble ruin of her magic, Antony,/ Claps on his sea-wing and, like a doting mallard,/ Leaving the fight in height, flies after her. I never saw an action of such shame./ Experience, manhood, honour, ne'er before/ Did violate so itself" (3.10.18-23). For Antony to retreat from any battle is bad enough, but he loses much more respect for doing so because he is following Cleopatra's lead. With this action, he shows himself to be the exact opposite of the man he used to be who was loved and respected by Rome. When dealing with Caesar, Antony makes one mistake after another. As Simmons writes, "Honor represents an acknowledgement of intrinsic worth; if he is recognized as the foremost man, it must be because he is the foremost man" (Simmons 133). Antony cannot live in a world where he is second to Caesar, and he is so afraid to lose his honor at the hands of Caesar that in trying

to avoid doing so he loses it by his own hands. He insists on fighting Caesar by sea in an attempt to prove that he is the best man in all respects, but this action only leads to a humiliating retreat in which Antony becomes even less of a man in the eyes of his followers. Scarus speaks the words that make clear what before had only been suggested when he says that Antony's experience, manhood, and honor are violated like never before. However, in violating his Roman honor, Antony stays faithful to his personal honor that he defines primarily by his fidelity to Cleopatra. By staying by her side in retreat he demonstrates that he values personal honor over Roman honor, but he is yet to understand the costliness of his decision.

All the little things Antony has done to undermine his honor – wasting the days with Cleopatra instead of dealing with the affairs of Rome, fishing, or drinking all night on Pompey's ship and making peace with the enemy only so Caesar can kill him later – these actions all culminate in this scene. Antony finally proves his skeptics to be right by demonstrating his unworthiness in his position to lead and his submissiveness to Cleopatra. "The Romans view her influence on Antony as compromising his and their masculinity. When Antony decides to fight by sea at Cleopatra's urging, Camidius complains, 'our leader's led,/ And we are women's men' (3.7.68.69)" (Hiles 145). Antony violates experience by adopting a strategy that he knows to be poor and then failing to follow through with it and fight to the end. He violates manhood by relinquishing his ability to make his own decisions and following Cleopatra in retreat, as a male duck would chase the female. Lastly, by allowing Cleopatra's influence over him to undermine his experience and manhood, Antony shows himself to be unworthy of that precious honor with which he equates his life. Camidius responds to Scarus by saying, "Had our general/

Been what he knew himself, it had gone well" (3.10.25-6). The Antony who has foolishly entered into a naval battle with Caesar only to flee by following Cleopatra's example is not the man whom his friends know him to be. If Antony had stayed true to his Roman self and acted like the man who he is supposed to be – a Roman military warrior and leader – there is no doubt that his side would have emerged victorious. Instead, he places his allegiance to Egypt over his allegiance to Rome, and in doing so he abandons his Roman honor.

A crucial part of Antony's downward spiral comes in the form of Enobarbus' abandonment. He has long been skeptical and weary of Antony, but after Antony's defeat he has finally had enough. In the last lines of Act 3, Enobarbus says, "I see still/ A diminution in our captain's brain/ Restores his heart. When valour preys on reason,/ It eats the sword it fights with. I swill seek/ Some way to leave him" (3.13.199-203). Enobarbus realizes that Antony is most brave when he does not think his plans through, as he has just witnessed. In addition, he knows that Antony is so concerned with his valor and with restoring his honor that he has lost the ability to reason, which makes him an ineffective captain. Enobarbus can no longer be in the service of someone in whom he has lost faith as a leader, and despite his love for Antony he resolves that he must leave so as not to follow Antony to his demise. Once Enobarbus leaves him for Caesar, Antony begins to behave more like his old self and no longer loses admiration. He says of his abandonment, "O, my fortunes have/ Corrupted honest men! Dispatch. Enobarbus!" and sends his former soldier's treasure after him to Caesar's camp (4.5.16-7). At last, Antony takes responsibility for his actions, unlike earlier when he blamed Cleopatra for retreating with her ships even though, as Enobarbus pointed out, Antony was under no obligation to follow. Antony recognizes that he caused Enobarbus to leave him by putting his own

desires before the wellbeing of his men. Once Antony comes to terms with his faults, then he is able to begin earning back his lost honor. Enobarbus recognizes the change in Antony when he receives his treasure, and regrets having ever left as he says, "A am alone the villain of the earth,/ And feel I am so most.... I fight against thee? No, I will go seek/ Some ditch wherein to die" and he does just that (4.6.30-1, 37-8). Antony then proves his valor by leading his troops to a victory as they battle against Caesar's army on land and push them back to his camp.

Unfortunately, the independent Antony we see in the middle of Act 4 is short-lived. Once again, he fights Caesar at sea and once again, Cleopatra's forces abandon him. After his defeat, Antony flies into a rage at Cleopatra calling her a "foul Egyptian" and a "Triple-turned whore" (4.13.10, 13). He is quick to blame her for his loss and deflect responsibility for failure. In her dissertation, Mary Elizabeth Hiles writes, "When all is going well, Antony sees Cleopatra as the much-loved center of his life; in defeat he blames and vilifies her" (Hiles 130). When Antony defeated Caesar's troops on land, he had Cleopatra kiss his wounds as a way of sealing the victory, but now that he has lost he would rather blame her than himself for the defeat. He is quick to forget himself and becomes a slave to his passions when he is unable to rise above Caesar's greatness. Whether in victory or defeat, Cleopatra remains the center of Antony's attention. When she is not around, he is able to focus on his honor and Rome, but in her presence his honor comes second. Hiles also says, "Instead of the Roman ideal of honor, Antony posits a nobility based on his and Cleopatra's glorious passion" (Hiles 130). I agree that Antony is governed by his passion with Cleopatra, but it is not in place of the Roman ideal of honor. Instead he alters his conception of honor to include his love with Cleopatra. Antony tells Eros, "Here I am

Antony,/ Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave,/ I made these wars for Egypt, and the Queen—/ Whose heart I thought I had, for she had mine” (4.15.13-6). Antony may have made the wars for Cleopatra, but the main reason he fought with Caesar was for his own sake. He wanted to prove to Cleopatra that he is better than Caesar, but the reason he says he cannot hold the shape of Antony is because he failed in his attempts to beat Caesar and has consequently lost the honor that made him the Antony he once was. He has fallen so far that after this last defeat Antony realizes the only way he can reclaim his past honor and glory, and perhaps more importantly his love, is in the afterlife.

For Antony, death is the only way to escape the dishonor that now defines him. Before asking Eros to kill him, he says, “Since Cleopatra died/ I have lived in such dishonour that the gods/ Detest my baseness” (4.15.55-7). Of course, as he says this Antony is under the impression that Cleopatra has already taken her own life. If he had said that he wished to die because of the misery he felt from living without her, then I would believe that he wished to die only to be reunited with her. However, Antony specifically cites his baseness and dishonor before resolving to end his life, which suggests that he understands that only in death will he be remembered for the honorable Roman he used to be rather than the captain who lost his manhood and valor for the sake of Egypt. Eros shows him the way he must carry out the sentence by killing himself when Antony asks him to do the deed for him. Antony then stabs himself, but lives to discover that Cleopatra is still alive after his botched attempt at suicide. Simmons asserts, “The false news of Cleopatra’s death quickly restores love and a chance for honor,” for honor and love in Antony’s eyes are bound together (Simmons 148). Similarly, Alvis writes, “By the end of the play, Antony has proven his personal fidelity to Cleopatra and that plus his ability to

take his own life suffices, in his opinion, to confirm his Roman honor” (Alvis 171). I agree that his actions concerning Cleopatra confirm Antony’s honor, but the honor he dies with is not Roman. By dying in Alexandria with Cleopatra, he confirms his abandonment of Roman honor and Roman values. Furthermore, the fact that he could not successfully kill himself in the Roman way also supports the idea that he has ceased to be Roman and embraces Egypt. Antony is happy to die by his own hand next to Cleopatra’s monument. He sincerely believes that he has atoned for his many faults by taking his life, and he asks Cleopatra to remember him not for his mistakes, but for his nobility. He dies with stoicism by choosing a noble suicide in preference to ignoble defeat by another. With his dying words, Antony says,

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. Now my spirit is going;  
I can no more.

(4.16.53-61)

Antony does not successfully die a soldier’s death, but he does receive his due honor after his passing. Upon hearing the news, Caesar weeps and declares that the death of so great a

man should have shaken the very earth itself since half of the world died along with Antony. Furthermore, once Cleopatra dies Caesar buries the two of them together and laments, "No grave upon the earth shall clip in it/ A pair so famous" (5.2.349-350). His words suggest that Antony will be remembered as a legend rather than the unmanly lover he turned into towards the end of his days.

Interestingly, *Antony and Cleopatra* continues for one more act after the death of Antony. The events of Act 5 justify Antony's decision to leave Rome behind. While Cleopatra is still confined in her monument, Caesar attempts to trick her into coming with him. He tells her that he has no sinister plans for her and that he will treat her well, but secretly he plans to parade her through Syria to Rome as his captive and a symbol of the Roman empire's triumph. Caesar once again demonstrates the duplicity and treachery that characterize Rome. Antony tells Cleopatra that she can trust Caesar's follower Proculeus, but Proculeus also lies to her about Caesar's intentions by telling her that she will be treated kindly and with generosity. Once Cleopatra realizes what is in store for her, she follows Antony's lead by choosing death over a life of degradation in Rome. She embraces Antony's personal honor with her suicide as she chooses to be with Antony in the afterlife rather than be Caesar's slave. Even though Antony may have lost to Caesar in life, he wins against Caesar in death. His faithfulness to Cleopatra pays off in the end, and he and Cleopatra both appear to have made the right decision in choosing love over Rome.

Antony chooses Egypt over Rome because he is happier when he is with Cleopatra than he is when he is working in Rome. Egypt, for Antony, is a more excellent place than his own land. He values the opportunity only Egypt provides for love, fun, and excess over the war, responsibilities, and deception offered in Rome. The only time Antony and

Cleopatra encounter problems in their relationship is when Rome interferes. For example, Cleopatra gets upset at the mention of Fulvia and Octavia because she does not want to think about Antony with other women in Rome. Additionally, the only time Antony gets angry with Cleopatra is when she interferes with the wars he is waging in Rome. But when Rome is out of the picture and Antony and Cleopatra are together, they could not be happier. They feel that their love is so strong that it places them above everyone else, and it does; in death they are remembered for their passion and greatness.

Throughout *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare never defines Antony at any one point in the play. Instead he gives the audience snapshots of the different sides to his character and leaves us to come to our own conclusions about him. Antony spends the entirety of the play searching for some kind of balance between honor and love, personal accountability and pleasure, and Rome and Egypt. In the end, he never finds a balance because it does not exist as long as he lives. As a Roman captain and leader, he could never waste away his days in Egypt with Cleopatra. By neglecting his duties as a triumvir and warrior he loses the honor that he once held so dear, but he gains personal honor through his time spent with Cleopatra. Once the Roman people fail to see Antony as honorable, he loses his identity that was based on his Roman honor. Without this honor Antony is not the same man Rome knew him to be, and his decisions to fight with Caesar's navy and follow Cleopatra's lead confirm this change to his men. Antony is not satisfied unless he is more powerful than his rivals, a quality that is ever-present in his constant emulation of Caesar. His death grants him the power he sought after, and it also indicates that he chooses Egypt over Rome in the end. While he partially recovers his Roman honor by dying a soldier's death, he decides to fall on his sword primarily because he wants to be reunited with

Cleopatra in the afterlife. His personal honor wins out over Roman honor by allowing him to hold on to his masculinity as well as his passion and love for Cleopatra.

## **Conclusion**

In both *The Tragedy of Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, the ideal of Roman honor is either unattainable or unwanted. Coriolanus and Antony both desire to be honorable on their own terms, but personal honor comes at a price. In Coriolanus' attempt to prove to himself that his honor is self-imposed, he is exiled by the people of Rome and murdered by his enemy. Likewise, Antony's search for personal honor ultimately results in the disappearance of his Roman identity and his death brought about by his love for Cleopatra. Even though Antony succeeds in defining honor on his own terms with his fidelity to Cleopatra, while Coriolanus fails to find honor except for in the eyes of others, both of these Romans die for it. The constant tension pulling on them, whether between self-imposed honor and dependent honor, or between Roman honor and personal honor, makes both Coriolanus and Antony divided men. Shakespeare's Roman heroes are certainly defined by honor, but their honor is embedded in tragedy.

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