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## A Complicated Relationship Of Cleopatra And Antony

Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra has sparked debates between critics for centuries. A tragic love story, in which the protagonist's die triumphant, after relishing in their true and constructive relationship against the odds? Or the story of Egypt's greatest temptress; whose seductive ways lead both herself, and Rome's greatest military leader into a destructive relationship which inevitably leads to their demise.

Steppot claims 'The love of Antony and Cleopatra is destructive', and this is clear to see in the case of Cleopatra. Caught up in the game of playing with Antony, Cleopatra becomes a performer, becoming detached from her persona and losing her state of identity. 'if it indeed be love, tell me how much...' demonstrates Cleopatra's desire to have sweet nothings recited to her; her ambition to be longed for and loved, but remain unattainable, as illustrated by her following line: 'I'll set a born how far to be beloved', shooting Antony down in front of a room full of spectators, clearly showing her dominance and remaining to appear in control. Antony falls for Cleopatra in light of this allusive act, described as 'The triple pillar of the world transformed / Into a strumpet's fool'. This demonstrates the severity of Cleopatra's games, reminding the audience and reader of Antony's duties he's neglecting, and referring to Cleopatra as a 'strumpet's fool' (prostitute). This derogatory term used to describe Cleopatra demonstrates the discontent bystanders feel towards the destructive path Cleopatra is leading Antony down, locking him in a destructive relationship which will lead to his demise.

The relationship between Antony and Cleopatra, especially on Antony's side, is destructive and unhealthy. Antony is infatuated by this lady of so many facades; unpredictable and spontaneous, in her actions and emotions alike. Steppat claims: 'there is more interest in intercourse with wild animals than tame ones'. This sheds light to Antony's obsession with the idea of pursuing relations with Cleopatra. From the offset, she caught him off guard, turning down his invitation to dinner- 'Whom ne'er the word of "No" woman heard speak, / Being barbered ten times o'er, goes to the feast, / And for his ordinary pays his heart / For what his eyes eat only.'. The idea of Antony grasping for something unattainable encourages Antony to chase after it. The metaphor 'what his eyes eat only' portrays Cleopatra's ora of "look but can't touch", teasing Antony and sending him delirious. The obsession with Cleopatra becomes so strong, Antony neglects his new found marriage to Octavia- threatening to break the harmony now existing between himself and Caesar, demonstrated in the quote: 'I will to Egypt. / And though I make this marriage for my peace, / I th' East my pleasure lies.'. This antithesis draws light to Antony's new priority: Cleopatra. Risking it all to pursue his infatuation, and eventually ending in tragic deaths of both protagonists, the love of Antony and Cleopatra is clearly destructive towards Antony. demonstrated in the quote: 'I will to Egypt. / And though I make this marriage for my peace, / I th' East my pleasure lies.'. This antithesis draws light to Antony's new priority: Cleopatra. Risking it all to pursue his infatuation, and eventually ending in tragic deaths of both protagonists, the love of Antony and Cleopatra

Often viewed as a hostile, unpredictable character, the love Antony and Cleopatra have is in fact unconditional and constructive, especially to Cleopatra as a protagonist. Bernard J. Paris describes Antony and Cleopatra's relationship 'first as self destructive then as triumphant'. This is supported by Cleopatra's initial theatrical and bipolar approach to her relationship with

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Antony- substantially destructive in terms of ignoring her emotions. As the play progresses, so does her acceptance of her emotions, as supported by the quote: 'why did he marry fulvia, and not love her? / I'll seem the fool I am not. Antony will be himself'. The insinuation of Antony as a fool portrays Cleopatra's anger towards the situation, questioning Antony's motives. This also questions the Victorian practice of marrying for political, socioeconomic or societal gain, as Cleopatra asks 'why did he marry fulvia, and not love her?'. Cleopatra's acceptance of her love is further demonstrated throughout the play within quotes such as: 'Tis sweating labour / To bear such idleness so near the heart'. With a love which bears so heavy it weighs down her heart, the love which Antony and Cleopatra have is true and sincere- constructive and bountiful.

The love of Antony and Cleopatra, however, can be argued to be unconditional and constructive; most notably to Antony. The paradoxical phrase 'I laugh'd him out of patience; and that night / I laugh'd him into patience' demonstrates Cleopatra's power over Antony's feelings- toying with his emotions, riling him up before continuing to calm him. In a myth told by Lucretius, Mars is vanquished by love, and lies unarmed in Venus' lap and is wooed to peace. This tale of Gods is paralleled in Cleopatra's description of her night with Antony: 'I drunk him to his bed; / Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst / I wore his sword Philippan'. The imagery of role switching illustrates an idea of Cleopatra being the more dominant figure- demonstrated further by the phallic imagery of 'sword Philippan'. Antony's submissiveness to this show of masculinity portrays his content with the relationship, unphased by this demotion. Derek Marsh states 'their loves progress is traced in their growing awareness of the irrelevance of all other concerns in their lives. In this sense, love triumphs'. This idea is supported by Antony's ignorance towards others while Cleopatra's present. A perfect example of this occurs in Act 1 Scene 1, as the lovers enter the room, and Cleopatra questions the extent of Antony's love; to which Antony replies, surrounded by bystanders, 'There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd.'. This gives the impression Antony's love knows no bound- not knowing of his current wife, Fulvia, being dead at this point heightens the radicalism of this act. Risking the harmony of Rome, acting in this way whilst being married, and existing as the 'triple pillar of the world' demonstrates the legitimacy of this love. Writing in an era, and basing the novel around an era where the arrangement of marriages for political, financial or social gain is commonplace, leads their love to be viewed as constructive; unboundable, and true.

The relationship of Antony and Cleopatra, paradoxically, can be viewed as both destructive and constructive. Shakespeare creates an air of uncertainty surrounding the sincerity of Cleopatra's love, and to authenticity of the motives behind their relationship. On one hand, the relationship is one which defies the odds; building firm foundations for a genuine, constructive relationship, where true love rules. On the other hand, the relationship of Antony and Cleopatra can be viewed as toxic; one in which Antony is lead astray, by the greatest temptress the world had ever seen.