

Welcome, my good Alexas.—Did I, Charmian,
Ever love Caesar so?

Char. O that brave Caesar!

Cleo. Be chok'd with such another emphasis!
Say the brave Antony.

Char. The valiant Caesar!

Cleo. By Isis! I will give thee bloody teeth,
If thou with Caesar paragon again

My man of men.

Char. By your most gracious pardon,
I sing but after you.

Cleo. My salad days,
When I was green in judgment:—Cold in blood,
To say as I said then!—But, come, away:
Get me ink and paper; he shall have every day
A several greeting, or I'll unpeople Egypt.

In strong contrast to this tremendous trifling, is the scene where she receives the messenger from Italy: with what half-prescient emotion she anticipates the evil tidings that cling to his tongue! With what shocking transitions Hope and Fear toss alternately, from her lips, promises full of gracious elegance, and coarse threats of personal violence, till they have lashed up a tempest in her torrid soul, to vent its impotent fury on the innocent cause of her anguish:

Mess. Madam, madam,—

Cleo. Antony's dead?—

If thou say so, villain, thou kill'st thy mistress;
But well and free,

If thou so yield him, there is gold, and here
My bluest veins to kiss—a hand that kings
Have lipp'd, and trembled kissing.

Mess. First, madam, he's well.

Cleo. Why, there's more gold. But, sirrah, mark! we use
To say the dead are well: bring it to that,
The gold I give thee will I melt, and pour
Down thy ill-uttering throat.

Mess. Good madam, hear me.

Cleo. Well, go to, I will;

But there's no goodness in thy face. If Antony
Be free, and healthful,—why so tart a favor
To trumpet such good tidings? If not well,
Thou should'st come like a fury crown'd with snakes
Not like a formal man.

Mess. Will't please you hear me?

Cleo. I have a mind to strike thee, ere thou speak'st;
Yet, if thou say Antony lives, is well,
Or friends with Caesar, or not captive to him,
I'll set thee in a shower of gold, and hail
Rich pearls upon thee.

Mess. Madam, he's well.

Cleo. Well said.

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In state of health, thou say'st; and, thou say'st, free.

Mess. Free, madam! no; I made no such report:
He's bound unto Octavia.

Cleo. For what good turn.

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Mess. Madam, he's married to Octavia.

Cleo. The most infectious pestilence upon thee!

[Strikes him down.]

—Hence,

Horrible villain! or I'll spurn thine eyes
Like balls before me; I'll unhair thy head;
Thou shalt be whipp'd with wire, and stew'd in brine,
Smarting in ling'ring pickle.

Mess. Gracious madam,

I, that do bring the news, made not the match.

Cleo. Say 'tis not so, a province I will give thee,
And make thy fortunes proud; the blow thou had'st
Shall make thy peace, for moving me to rage;
And I will boot thee with what gift beside
Thy modesty can beg.

Mess. He's married, madam.

Cleo. Rogue, thou hast liv'd too long.

[Draws a dagger.]

But the rude storm spent, this wrathful queen is as love-lorn and pitiful, in her tears and swooning sorrow, as any heart-wrung wretch of to-day :

Cleo. In praising Antony, I have disprais'd Cæsar.

Char. Many times, madam.

Cleo.

I am paid for 't now.

Lead me from hence—

I faint ! O Iras, Charmian !—'Tis no matter :—

Go to the fellow, good Alexas ; bid him

Report the feature of Octavia, her years,

Her inclination ; let him not leave out

The color of her hair :—bring me word quickly.—

Let him forever go—Let him not—Charmian,

Though he be painted one way like a Gorgon,

T' other way he's a Mars.—Bid you Alexas

Bring me word how tall she is.—Pity me, Charmian ;

But do not speak to me.—Lead me to my chamber.

Hazlitt says of Cleopatra that "she had great and unpardonable faults, but the beauty of her death almost redeems them." It would, indeed, quite redeem them, if we did not find the motive that prompted her death, "after the high Roman fashion," more plainly evinced in her haughty horror of being paraded through Rome, than in her anguish at surviving the lover whom she had, in a manner, murdered ; for a woman of equally intense passions, and less egotism, the last would have sufficed ; but with Cleopatra, Self was paramount to Love, and all the gods.

Antony, brought to the foot of the monument, mortally wounded, implores her to come down to him ; yet even at that moment of shocked surprise and overwhelming agony, she answers him thus—a selfish consideration uppermost even then :

I dare not, dear ;

(Dear my lord, pardon,) I dare not,

Lest I be taken. Not the imperious show
Of the full-fortun'd Cæsar ever shall
Be brooch'd with me ; if knife, drugs, serpents, have
Edge, sting, or operation, I am safe.
Your wife, Octavia, with her modest eyes
And still conclusion, shall acquire no honor
Demuring upon me.

Then, with the assistance of her women, "Cleopatra, stooping down her head, putting to all her strength to her uttermost power, did lift him up with much ado, and never let go her hold."

And thus, again, to Cæsar's messenger :

Know, sir, that I

Will not wait pinion'd at your master's court ;

Nor once be chastis'd with the sober eye

Of dull Octavia. Shall they hoist me up,

And show me to the shouting varletry

Of censuring Rome ? Rather a ditch in Egypt

Be gentle grave to me ! rather on Nilus' mud

Lay me stark naked, and let the water-flies

Blow me into abhorring ! rather make

My country's high pyramides my gibbet,

And hang me up in chains !

But in the following burst, addressed to one of her women, and repeated in detailed offensiveness, the better to strengthen her own timid purpose, speaks all the woman—the sumptuous Sybarite to whom coarseness of association or diet was immeasurably worse than the profoundest moral degradation of "purple and fine linen :

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* * Now, Iras, what think'st thou ?

Thou, an Egyptian puppet, shalt be shown

In Rome, as well as I : mechanic slaves

With greasy aprons, rules, and hammers, shall

Uplift us to the view ; in their thick breaths,
Rank of gross diet, shall we be enclouded,
And forc'd to drink their vapor.

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Saucy lictors

Will catch at us, like strumpets ; and scald rhymers
Ballad us out o' tune ; the quick comedians
Extemporally will stage us, and present
Our Alexandrian revels ; Antony
Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness.

The death scene imparts additional and gorgeous vividness to our vision of Cleopatra ; it proves indisputably that coquetry is not with her a merely convenient art, acquired and cultivated for a purpose, but part of her very being. *Effect*, even in the "article of death," is her ruling passion. It is not enough that she should give up grandly her illustrious ghost ; she must die picturesquely, berobed and jewelled ; and her success is, as ever, perfect : the glorious legend of the "Venus of the Nile," robed in imperial vestures, crowned, and dead—looking like sleep, "as she would catch another Antony in her strong toil of grace," is splendidly emblazoned on the panes of fancy, in imperishable dyes.

Two delicate touches of the "pure womanly" throw a mournful tenderness over the last moments of the unhappy queen. One is her allusion to the grand triumph of her life, the adventure of the Cydnus, in which she likens this dreadful setting-forth to that first journey to her lover :

Show me, my women, like a queen :—Go fetch
My best attires ;—I am again for Cydnus,
To meet Mark Antony :

* * * * *

Give me my robe ; put on my crown.

* * * Quick !—Methinks I hear
Antony call.

And again :

Char. O eastern star !

Cleo. Peace, peace !

Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep ?

Here it is not only "the contrast between the beauty of the image and the horror of the situation" which produces so touching an effect, but the reproduction, with startling reality, of the very sensations experienced by Cleopatra in the act of *suffering* this quick and "easy way to die." Had not Shakspeare written thus, we should be sure that none but a mother could with such reality conceive of the luxurious, dreamy, half-unconscious languor, peculiar to her most beautiful office, and which, through an image as tender as it is subtle, conveys to our minds the only idea we can associate with the death of Cleopatra—a voluptuous, intoxicated sleep, rather than death.

We are tempted to transcribe a few condensed expressions of character, scattered throughout the play, as affording the truest index to Cleopatra's distinguished peculiarities. For examples of her coquetry :

Cleo. Where is he ?

Char. I did not see him since.

Cleo. See where he is, who's with him, what he does—

I did not send you.—If you find him sad,
Say I am dancing ; if in mirth, report

That I am sudden sick : Quick, and return. [*Exit ALEX.*]

Char. Madam, methinks if you did love him dearly,
You do not hold the method to enforce
The like from him.

Cleo. What should I do I do not ?

Char. In each thing give him way, cross him in nothing.

Cleo. Thou teachest like a fool—the way to lose him.

Char. Tempt him not so too far; I wish, forbear.
In time we hate that which we often fear.

Ant. I must be gone.

Eno. * * * * *

* * Cleopatra, catching but the least noise of this,
dies instantly; I have seen her die twenty times upon
far poorer moment. I do think there is mettle in death,
which commits some loving act upon her, she hath such
a celerity in dying.

Ant. She is cunning past man's thought.

Eno. Alack, sir, no; her passions are made of nothing
but the finest part of pure love. We cannot call her
winds and waters sighs and tears; they are greater
storms and tempests than almanacs can report: this can-
not be cunning in her; if it be, she makes a shower of
rain as well as Jove.

Cleo. Cut my lace, Charmian, come!—
But let it be;—I am quickly ill, and well.
So Antony loves.

To the monument!—
Mardian, go tell him I have slain myself;
Say that the last I spoke was Antony,
And word it, pr'ythee, piteously. Hence,
Mardian; and bring me how he takes my death.

I know, by that same eye, there's some good news.
What says the married woman?—You may go;
'Would she had never given you leave to come!
Let her not say 'tis I that keep you here—
I have no power upon you; hers you are.

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Ant. Cleopatra,—

Cleo. Why should I think you can be mine and true,
Though you in swearing shake the throned gods,
Who have been false to Fulvia? Riotous madness,
To be entangled with those mouth-made vows,
Which break themselves in swearing!

Ant. Most sweet queen,—

Cleo. Nay, pray you, seek no color for your going,
But bid farewell, and go. When you sued staying,
Then was the time for words—no going then;
Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
Bliss in our brows' bent.

And finally these speaking portraits:

Ant. Fye, wrangling queen!

Whom every thing becomes—to chide, to laugh,
To weep; whose every passion fully strives
To make itself in thee fair and admired!

O this false soul of Egypt! this grave charm,
Whose eye beck'd forth my wars, and call'd them home.

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety: Other women
Cloy th' appetites they feed; but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies; for vilest things
Become themselves in her.