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Albert E. Clark

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SHAKESPEARE'S TREATMENT OF LOVE:
THE MATURE TRAGEDIES

BY

ALBERT E. CLARK, JR.

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Edward C. Peple

Director of Thesis

L. B. Gram

Chairman, Department of English

Josephine B. Evans

PREFACE

I would like to thank my thesis director, Dr. Edward C. Peple, and my reader, Mrs. Josephine Evans, for their guidance and assistance in this project. Their encouragement and understanding have been invaluable.

The machinery of criticism has been extensively applied to those plays in the Shakespeare canon often referred to as the mature tragedies: Othello, Macbeth, Hamlet, and Antony and Cleopatra. One seeking enlightenment in veritably any area of interest will find the means in the varied approaches which have proliferated through four hundred years of Shakespeare criticism. New and valid interpretations testify to a continuing need for insight into Shakespeare's art; nevertheless, the word "supererogatory" must surely have occurred to even the most resilient seeker after Shakespearean truth. A spate of learned articles and scholarly tomes inundate, and the burden is not lessened by the additional weight of the new critical semantics. Wandering through the maze of archetypes, architectonics, and abstruse analytical modes, one questing after a cogent discussion of Shakespeare's treatment of romantic love and marriage in the mature tragedies (King Lear has been excluded from this study, because the marriages in Lear do not fit into the plan of this paper) will find little material.

The dearth of criticism concerning love in the mature tragedies is inexplicable given Shakespeare's concern for the most intimate bond between men and

women. Interest has been tangential, as critics allude to the phenomenon of love only as it bears upon other dramatic interests. Even if Hamlet is primarily a tragedy of revenge, Othello a tragedy of jealousy, and Macbeth a tragedy of ambition, these plays are replete with love situations, and to minimize their importance is to preclude a total understanding of Shakespeare's dramatic intent.

Franklin M. Dickey is a critic who would relegate the love interests to a subordinate position. In Not Wisely but Too Well, Dickey writes, "When we turn to Shakespeare's tragedies, love is always an incidental theme."¹ This attitude does not, however, exclude using Shakespeare's treatment of love as an approach to the mature tragedies.

Much of the existing critical material concerning love in the mature tragedies distorts the image that Shakespeare intended to convey. What, one wonders, is the basis for alluding to Othello as the greatest lover in literature? The Macbeths' marriage does not persevere through the tragic progression of circumstance; yet, the view is not uncommon which maintains that the union does survive. Although criticism has been

¹Franklin M. Dickey, Not Wisely but Too Well, p. 8.

generous with the marriage of Claudius and Gertrude, the text of Hamlet reveals a relationship flawed by passion. A reading of Antony and Cleopatra does not support the opinions of the Egyptian school of criticism which apotheosizes the alliance of the two imperial lovers.

The absence of a unified approach to the treatment of love encompassing all Shakespeare's mature tragedies and the misconceptions in the available materials sustain one in the belief that an objective analysis of Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, and Antony and Cleopatra is a profitable exercise. These plays lend themselves to this study, as the existence in them of love and its allied forms, lust, jealousy, and idolatry, is indisputable.

Love is disastrous for those who labor in its bonds: Othello and Desdemona, Hamlet and Ophelia, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra, and the others are victimized by imperfections which taint and corrupt their loves, until the emotion bears little resemblance to its original image. C. H. Herford succinctly states the case for love in the plays of Shakespeare's mature tragic period, in Shakespeare's Treatment of Love and Marriage and Other Essays,

But the more penetrating sense of evil which becomes apparent in his tragic

period contributed to draw more prominently into the sphere of his art the disastrous aspects of the relations between men and women. But in some of his ripest and greatest work he drew love with implications, and under conditions, which sharply mark it off from the 'marriage of true minds.' It is unstable, or lawless, or grounded on illusion; and thus not merely succumbs easily to assault from without, but directly breeds and fosters tragic ruin within.²

Although Herford correctly evaluates the condition of love, the potential of his argument is attenuated by its brevity; even so, this brief statement and the analysis which follows properly indicate the direction to be followed.

Before beginning a consideration of those features in the relations between men and women that militate against love, it would be appropriate to define love as it is to be utilized in this paper. What is desirable is not a concept laden with psychological and semantic complexity but an attitude which should elicit a universal response of recognition. To strengthen the argument against criticism which allows that love continues, unthwarted by the atmosphere of tragedy, it is necessary to eschew the fantastic and embrace the credible.

²C. H. Herford, Shakespeare's Treatment of Love and Marriage and Other Essays, p. 11.

Love is universal and timeless. Even though the Elizabethan psychology of love differs from that of the twentieth century, certain conditions have always been recognized as conducive to the attainment and continuance of a relationship between a man and a woman. One cannot validly contend that the modern critic is incapable of understanding the Elizabethan mind: sixteenth-century attitudes are not impervious to twentieth-century insights.

Erich Fromm, distinguished author and psychologist, in The Art of Loving, presents several requisites to the ideal love state. Love must be reciprocated, as the capacity to love is as important as the need to be loved. Love should respect the integrity of both partners to a relationship and should be ever-renewing. Objectivity and a realistic appreciation of one's partner are indispensable in a bond between man and woman.³ Shakespeare's norm of love corresponds to Fromm's description.

Shakespeare, writes C. H. Herford, evinces a "bias for normality" in treating the subject of love in most of his plays. It should be noted that Herford was consciously excluding the mature tragedies from his observation. Normal love in Shakespeare " is a passion,

³Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving.

kindling heart, brain, and senses alike in natural and happy proportions; ardent but not sensual, tender but not sentimental, pure but not ascetic, moral but not cynical."⁴ Tested in this light, the loves of the mature tragedies deviate from the established norm, whether its origin is in Shakespeare, Fromm, or elsewhere.

Those features of love deleterious to the romantic and marital relations of the men and women in Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, and Antony and Cleopatra are complex, interwoven, and difficult to delineate. Any discussion must rely in part on the somewhat arbitrary categories deemed best suited to furthering the thesis consideration. The many traits which characterize love can be synthesized into the following issues: love as illusory; duplicity in love; love as impassioned and unregenerate; and isolation--the product of deficient love. A brief explanation will facilitate an understanding of each issue as it is to be employed in this paper.

Love in the mature tragedies is illusory. The emotions which characters identify as love cannot stand the test of love, as conceived in terms of realism, awareness, and objectivity. Lovers are drawn into a fragile unity fraught with delusion which, when dispelled

⁴Herford, p. 11.

and thwarted, dashes deception against inexorable reality. It is not love but the illusion of love which drives Othello to kill his wife. Shakespeare's lovers partake variously of idolatry, ego, and infatuation, in the belief that theirs is the pure emotion. Only the dregs of illusion excite Antony to the knowledge of Cleopatra's nature, and even then--as witnessed in the episode with Thidias, Antony's fears are soon quieted by his persisting delusion of happiness.

Illusion is a faulty perception of reality and unwillful; however, in the mature tragedies, other distortions--meditated acts of hypocrisy and manipulation--are apparent. Lover consciously manipulates beloved and cares not, or knows not, that such action is inimical to the integrity of a relationship. Hamlet's treatment of Ophelia in the "nunnery scene" is no more opprobrious than the acts of Ophelia herself. Lady Macbeth's ambition to see her husband king threatened then destroyed Macbeth's inner balance between good and his desire to please his wife. Her treatment of Macbeth augurs the decay of their marriage. Duplicity takes its toll in the four plays.

Excessive passion, degeneration from the natural order, was recognized by the Elizabethans and considered corruptive to human relationships. Impassioned love

occurs in Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, and Antony and Cleopatra. Shakespeare's moral system held that passion, or weakness, was the result of an imbalance in the relation of will and reason. Will unchecked by reason would corrupt and degenerate love.

Analysis of the four plays reveals the frequent occurrence of excessive passion. The ambition of Macbeth and his wife opposes them to the natural order and each other, as Macduff's cry, "He has no children," illustrates. Othello's total dependence on Desdemona which releases the growth in his soul has antecedents in the passion of his idolatry. Cleopatra's consuming love for Antony is identified with sorcery, associated with unnatural affection, as is Othello's love for his wife: Brabantio charges that magic was Othello's method.

Passion was believed to vitiate the regenerative powers of love; consequently, the end of loving not wisely or well was the dissolution of the alliance. The regenerative function is vital to the existence of love, but the unions of Shakespeare's mature tragedy do not enhance but waste the lives of those involved. Othello and Macbeth realize their ensuing damnation, and their respective situations can be imputed to the failure of love. Antony fails to shed his "Egyptian fetters," and Cleopatra dies aspiring to a noble love

she will probably never realize. Those arguing for the transformation in death of passion to love ignore Shakespeare's message: excessive passion debilitates.

Finally, isolation closes the course of love in tragedy. The bonds of affection, jeopardized by illusion, duplicity, and passion, cannot bear the stress of tragic circumstance and so are severed. Unable to avail themselves of any restorative contact, lovers retreat from each other into isolation. Ophelia, Desdemona, and Lady Macbeth retire to a world of delusions and half-thoughts. Macbeth and Othello lose their nobility, and Antony dies embracing thoughts of his former glory. Love is lost to all; none loved wisely or well.

Shakespeare, then, in his mature tragedy dramatizes love between people ill suited to the experience. Employing love for tragic ends, Shakespeare introduces qualities alien to the "natural and happy proportions" of ideal love. Inadequacies may be difficult to discern at first, but eventually illusion, duplicity, and passion combine to afflict each couple. All the pain, the misery, and the frustration are emphasized but none of the pleasure and fulfillment. That Shakespeare, in his mature tragedy, departs from the normative love of the other plays is sufficient justification for a consideration of his treatment of love in Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth,

and Antony and Cleopatra.

One becomes interested in the quality of Othello's love for Desdemona from the beginnings of its descent into chaos. Only the assiduous analysis of Othello's opening scenes will reveal any flaws in Othello and Desdemona's love. The tendency is to pass over her father's warning: "Look to her, Moor." The critical faculties are lulled by Othello's account of his wooing Desdemona and by her expressions of affection for him. Their words create an illusion of love--a mirage of well-being which confounds the two lovers. Enthralled and separated by rapture, they cannot stand the trials of circumstance or the ministry of Iago.

Shakespeare has treated illusory love in his comedy, but in Othello the fancy of comedy yields to illusion which rends, separates, and then destroys. It is commonplace that the elation of first attraction must be tempered with awareness; however, Othello and Desdemona persist in their ignorances even as their marriage begs for the smallest illumination of intelligence. Harold Andrew Mason, in Shakespeare's Tragedies of Love, imparts an insight into the potential danger of illusion in love:

So the price of true love, the possibility

of its continuance, is eternal vigilance. For human existence-- in time--is an unbroken war on true love. To declare that the world is in a state of universal peace because one is happily in love is to fall into dangerous complacency and to substitute a delightful delusion for the waking state.⁵

Othello realizes only in his last moments that he has loved unwisely. The perceptive reader is afforded this insight from the nature of Othello's avowals of affection in the opening scenes.

One learns that Desdemona was initially attracted to the Moor by his exotic travels. The city-bred girl was "beguiled," not by Othello the person, but by a highly romanticized figure unlike the "wealthy, curled darlings" of Venice. She succumbed to the allure of one whose travel and adventure had taken him beyond the familiar:

Wherein of anters vast and deserts idle,
Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose
heads touch heaven,
It was my hint to speak. Such was my process.
And of the Cannibals that each other eat,
The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Grew beneath their shoulders.

(1. 3. 139-44)⁶

⁵Harold Andrew Mason, Shakespeare's Tragedies of Love, p. 143.

⁶All quotations from The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare. Sylvan Barnet, editor.

Othello has admirably defended himself against Brabantio's charges that sorcery--an instrument of illusion--had been used to enslave Desdemona to an unnatural relationship; nevertheless, Othello has raised additional cause for concern:

She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
And I loved her that she did pity them.
(1. 3. 166-67)

It is natural that Desdemona would be fascinated by the stories of adventure and great hardship, but that she gave him "a world of kisses" for his pains lends credence to the view that the basis of their love is not sound.

Shakespeare took great pains to impress upon his audience the illusory nature of Othello and Desdemona's love. The nature of Othello's protestations of love indicates a flaw in his affection. With the headiness of his newly-discovered longings, he addresses the Venetian Senate:

I therefore beg it not
To please the palate of my appetite
Nor to comply with heat--the young affects
In me defunct--and proper satisfactions;
But to be free and bounteous to her mind,
And heaven defend your good souls that you
think
I will your serious and great business scant
When she is with me. No, when light-winged
toys
Of feathered Cupid seel with wanton dullness
My speculative and officed instrument,
That my disports corrupt and taint my
business,

Let housewives make a skillet of my
helm,
And all indign and base adversities
Make head against my estimation.
(1. 3. 256-69)

Othello speaks of his love in only the most reverential manner, as if it were something sacred to him, but it is the exalted quality of his love which makes him vulnerable.

Shakespeare sympathetically renders Othello's simplistic faith in love, but at no time does Shakespeare allow his audience to forget the illusoriness of the emotion. When Othello arrives in Cyprus, he is met by his wife in the company of Montano, Governor of the island. Notwithstanding the possible threat of Turkish invasion--the officials would have had no means of knowing about its failure--Othello turns first to Desdemona:

If it were now to die,
'Twere now to be most happy; for I fear
My soul hath her content so absolute
That not another comfort like to this
Succeeds in unknown fate.
(2. 1. 187-91)

Passing over the dramatic irony of this statement, it is interesting to note that juxtaposed with Othello's promise before the Senate this scene reveals a violation of trust and belies the vow to subordinate affection to duty. Othello does not comprehend the nature of the

passion which grips him. Iago's function is possible because the illusion of love is so pervasive, perverting even Othello's martial instincts, that it can be superseded only by a complete denunciation of what in this scene he holds so dear.

Antony fails to reconcile his Roman values with those of Cleopatra's Egypt in Antony and Cleopatra. Shakespeare's portrayal is of one lost in a world of delight and enchantment. Far from the confines of his Roman existence, Antony yields to the allure of Egypt and her queen. Only with some difficulty can one perceive the illusory in Othello and Desdemona's love: their deficiency is obscured by mutual protestations of affection. The self-deception of Antony is remarked by many, including Enobarbus, Philo, and Antony himself. To allude to Antony's insight is not to condemn him for his blindness; the attractions of Egypt are undeniable, and he can only fitfully understand the nature of his bondage.

The allure of Cleopatra and Egypt works on Antony from the first. Enobarbus relates how Antony's imagination is stirred by the vision of Cleopatra upon the river Cydnus:

The barge she sat in, like a burnished
throne,
Burned on the water: the poop was beaten
gold;
Purple the sails, and so perfumed that

The winds were lovesick with them; the
 oars were silver,
 Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke
 and made
 The water which they beat to follow faster,
 As amorous of their strokes. For her own
 person,
 It beggared all description: she did lie
 In her pavilion, cloth-of-gold of tissue,
 O'erpicturing that Venus where we see
 The fancy outwork nature.

(2. 2. 193-201)

The very atmosphere of the scene, where "the winds were lovesick" and the waters "amorous," assures the inception of illusion, the essence of Egypt. One remembers the nature of Othello's adventure and finds it to be similar in kind and effect. Antony is enthralled but not by love.

Antony may have an intellectual understanding that the basis of his love is illusion: "Speak to me home, mince not the general tongue." To maintain the illusion of love, he, fearful of reality, challenges the Roman presence which is deleterious to his love:

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
 Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my
 space,
 Kingdoms are clay: our dungy earth alike
 Feeds beast as man. The nobleness of life
 Is to do thus; when such a mutual pair
 And such a twain can do't, in which I bind,
 On pain of punishment, the world to weat
 We stand up peerless.

(1. 1. 33-39)

"Freud would have characterized his desire as indulgence

in the pleasure principle to escape from reality."⁷

The absence of reality is illusion.

Even though Antony gives himself to rapture and destruction, reality sometimes pains his narcotized senses--"O, whither hast thou led me, Egypt": Cleopatra has deceived him; yet, she, too, has been the victim of her own deception. Cleopatra has constructed a verbal barrier of hyperbole and effectively isolated herself from reality. Seeking to exonerate herself from Antony's accusation of "cold-heartedness," Cleopatra pleads,

Ah, dear, if I be so,
From my cold heart let heaven engender hail,
And poison it in the source, and the first
stone
Drop in my neck: as it determines, so
Dissolve my life!

(3. 13. 158-62)

L. J. Mills, writing in the Shakespeare Quarterly, demonstrates the anatomical impossibility and specious logic of this passage and continues: "She has created a barrage of words that by excess of emotion and the deficiency of sense seem to denote complete devotion to Antony but which by the very excesses reveal the opposite."⁸ Another view would allow that illusory love has seduced

⁷William Rosen, Shakespeare and The Craft of Tragedy, p. 109.

⁸L. J. Mills, "Cleopatra's Tragedy," Shakespeare Quarterly, 11 (1960), p. 152.

her nobler aspirations.

Shakespeare's dramatic purposes in Antony and Cleopatra would not be served by stigmatizing Cleopatra's love for Antony. She demonstrates, not infrequently, that her love is more elevating than sensuality, lust, or deceit. True, she has only a negligible understanding of Roman virtue; she cannot understand Antony's sense of duty; she revels in possessing not the man but his greatness; however, the critical posture seeking to deny her the slightest genuine feeling for Antony is unacceptable and unconvincing. If the basis of her love is false, the emotional force she generates is real. Illusion characterizes her devotion to Antony.

Cleopatra, when confronted with the dying Antony, neither acknowledges nor accepts responsibility for his tragic fate. To Antony's, "I am dying, Egypt, dying," she returns nine lines of verse devoid of any consideration but self-interest:

I dare not, dear;
 Dear my lord, pardon: I dare not,
 lest I be taken. Not th' imperious show
 Of the full-fortuned Caesar 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.

(4. 15. 22-30)

The illusion of love persists through the remaining scenes and is not dispelled even as Cleopatra dies. Her conception of love parallels the visions of Othello, Desdemona, and Antony. Death brings the promise of the exotic and the unknown: the handmaidens of illusion.

Reason will not admit that the basis of the Macbeths' love is illusion. The royal couple would seem to share what Shakespeare's other lovers lack--genuine and well-founded affection, although one marvels at the rapid degeneration of their marriage. Hamlet, however, yields two relationships which merit some consideration.

Familiar arguments dismiss the importance of love in the dramatic workings of the play, but one remembers Ophelia's account of Hamlet's moment in her boudoir, the death of Gertrude inadvertently at the hand of her second husband, and the state to which Ophelia is brought by an unrequited love. Even if love is an ancillary consideration, love cannot be dismissed.

Before the play begins, Ophelia's sensibilities have been stirred by Prince Hamlet's amorous attentions. Ophelia has been "importuned with love/In honorable fashion"; consequently, she rejects the advice of her brother. To Polonius' demand that she refrain from seeing Hamlet, she responds,

He hath given countenance to his speech,
 my lord,
 With almost all the holy vows of heaven.
 (1. 3. 110-11)

Ophelia, however, is soon dominated by her father and renders filial obedience. Since Ophelia's affection for Hamlet does not end with the conclusion of Act 1, scene 3, the quality of her love is worth considering.

Ophelia has responded only tangentially to the essential Hamlet. Her first stirrings of love are illusory. She values Hamlet for his stature as a romantic-ideal: the Renaissance prince. That Ophelia had previously made Hamlet the subject of her fantasies is apparent from her reaction to his distraught state in the nunnery scene:

O what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
 The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye,
 tongue, sword,
 Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state,
 The glass of fashion, and the mold of form,
 Th' observed of all observers, quite,
 quite down!
 And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,
 That sucked the honey of his musicked vows,
 Now see that noble and most sovereign
 reason
 Like sweet bells jangled, out of time and
 harsh,
 That unmatched form and feature of blown
 youth
 Blasted with ecstasy. O, woe is me
 T' have seen what I have seen, see what I
 see!

(3. 1. 151-62)

Ophelia is "of ladies most deject and wretched," but,

while she witnesses the disintegration of a vision, she is blind to Hamlet's suffering. It is the nature of illusion to obscure, and Ophelia's love is sightless. Carroll Camden believes

Whatever the exact nature of Ophelia's malady of love . . . the symptoms which she exhibits are so clearly portrayed and most of them so easily recognized that the Elizabethan audience, we have reason to suppose, would at least see Ophelia as a girl suffering physically and mentally the pangs of rejected love.⁹

The exact nature of Ophelia's malady would appear to be illusion disappointed.

The tendency of Othello, Desdemona, Cleopatra, Antony, and Ophelia to subscribe to an idealized conception of love prompts one to challenge other relationships in the mature tragedies. Hamlet's professed love for Ophelia is not compatible with his treatment of her on several occasions. Gertrude "would hang" on King Hamlet; yet, "within a month" she had entered into a marriage with Claudius. The characters establish in their relationships a pattern of illusion which must thwart their quests for love by deficiency of awareness and objectivity.

⁹Carroll Camden, "On Ophelia's Madness," Shakespeare Quarterly, 15 (1964), p. 255.

Illusion is an erroneous perception of reality but does not necessarily involve the willful distortion of one's concepts or beliefs by another; however, deception is the conscious manipulation of another's thought and emotion. Perhaps the presence of illusion in love is inevitable--even necessary, but deceit and hypocrisy are alien to love. It is inaccurate to say that all love in Shakespeare's mature tragedy is rife with deception, although at least one character, Cleopatra, delights in beguiling her lover, but even the inoffensive lies of Desdemona and Ophelia, coming as they do at crucial junctures in their relationships, are inimical to love. Shakespeare would seem to be dramatizing the need for utter frankness between lovers and the consequences of even the inadvertent transgression.

Cleopatra's is the ability to captivate Antony. The progress of her trickery is marked from beginning to end by the observations of soldiers, courtiers, and servants and even by the words of the royal couple themselves. Cleopatra's process is degrading to herself, to Antony, and to their union. Cleopatra would

scheme and plot, and Antony seems powerless to resist. At times he realizes the nature of his Egyptian bondage, but each time Cleopatra prevails: Antony's thralldom is assured. Can such deception coexist with devotion? The question becomes crucial when, in the final scenes, Cleopatra bargains for her freedom with the memory of Antony's love.

Cleopatra's predilection for deceiving Antony is apparent from the beginning of Antony and Cleopatra. Before her court in Alexandria, she taunts Antony and lances his protestations of love with a condescension that belies his eloquent, "There's beggary in the love that can be reckoned." Assuming a pose in the first scene, Cleopatra says,

I'll seem the fool I am not. Antony
Will be--himself.

(1. 1. 41-42)

Through deceit, Cleopatra has found the means of holding Antony, keeping him from his former greatness. The immediacy with which Shakespeare includes this material and extends the motifs of hypocrisy and manipulation through the play dramatizes a flaw in Cleopatra's love. Cleopatra, insecure in her relationship and fearful of losing Antony, disparages Charmian's "cross him in nothing," with "Thou teachest like a fool: the way to lose him!"

With the news of Fulvia's death, Antony seeks audience with Cleopatra to announce his intention of returning to Rome. Cleopatra, anticipating the nature of the moment, gives him no chance to speak; Antony's every sentence is left dangling as Cleopatra charges him in turn with falsity, betrayal, inconstancy, and desertion. The mechanics of her artifice laid bare reveal one source of her mystery and charm. Enobarbus has prefigured this passage with an account of her wiles:

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.

(1. 2. 141-45)

The effect of such exposition is to alert the audience to the nature of Cleopatra's love. Shakespeare has juxtaposed the royal couple's avowals of devotion with a sequence of developments revealing dishonesty. The love that would "stand up peerless" does not seem destined to assume the virtues it presently lacks. "There is little that is appealing in the passion of Antony and Cleopatra,"¹⁰ notes Dickey in response to the events of Act 1.

¹⁰Dickey, p. 185.

To characterize all Cleopatra's treatment of Antony as coquettish or fanciful is misleading. The thinly veiled manipulation and hypocrisy of Act 1 take a turn in Act 3, scene 13, as Cleopatra negotiates with Caesar's emissary, Thidias, for her freedom. There are those critics who construe her actions as a charade designed to frustrate Caesar's purpose; however, Enobarbus, who has been both objective and perspicacious, believes that Antony is betrayed. This belief is shared by Antony who, alluding to his blindness, newly judges Cleopatra:

You have been a boggler ever;
 But when we in our viciousness grow hard
 (O misery on't) the wise gods seel our
 eyes,
 In our own filth drop our clear judgments,
 make us
 Adore our errors, laugh at's while we strut
 To our confusion.

(3. 13. 110-14)

Variant interpretations of the first part of Act 3, scene 13, can be justified because of the nature of the proceedings; therefore, it behooves one to note the events following Cleopatra's interview with Thidias. Enobarbus, Antony's loyal follower, deserts the Egyptian court for Caesar and Rome. He has seen "a diminution" in his "captain's brain"--Antony's reason is subordinated to his will. Antony reaffirms his faith in Cleopatra, not after receiving a

satisfactory explanation for her behavior, but in response to a grandiloquent speech.

Illusion and deception merge in the monument scenes of Acts 4 and 5. Cleopatra, acting in character, instructs Mardian to carry the message of her suicide to Antony and orders that it be worded "piteously." This deliberate lie climaxes Cleopatra's manipulation of Antony and causes his death. The course of deception ends only with the closing of Cleopatra's life; unable to delude Caesar and false to Antony's memory for having attempted to do so, Cleopatra takes her own life. Cleopatra's treatment of Antony is unequalled in the other mature tragedies. Others will delude and manipulate, but none engage in the excesses of Cleopatra.

The deceit which enters the marriage of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is neither as extensive nor as long-lived as the falsity in Antony and Cleopatra; in fact, Lady Macbeth's machinations can be effectively confined to one time sequence. Before the murder of Duncan, Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband with no regard for his judgment; marriage cannot countenance and survive such hypocrisy as hers. Having read her husband's letter, she embarks immediately on her course.

Lady Macbeth's resolve to have her husband king is apparent in her first scene:

Come, you spirits
 That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex
 me here,
 And fill me, from the crown to the
 toe, top-full
 Of direst cruelty! Make thick my
 blood,
 Stop up th' access and passage to
 remorse,
 That no compunctious visitings of nature
 Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace
 between
 Th' effect and it! Come to my woman's
 breasts,
 And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring
 ministers,
 Wherever in your sightless substance
 You wait on nature's mischief! Come,
 thick night,
 And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of
 hell,
 That my keen knife see not the wound it
 makes,
 Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the
 dark,
 To cry, "Hold, hold!"

(1. 4. 40-54)

Lady Macbeth would assume a role appropriate to the
 business of regicide. The melancholia culminating in
 her suicide testifies to a failure in the endeavor, but
 the images of blindness and darkness extend, not only
 to herself, but, ironically, to Macbeth and preclude
 the frankness which has heretofore marked their marriage.

Macbeth is not quick to follow his wife's

. . . look like th' innocent flower,
 But be the serpent under't.

(1. 5. 65-66)

He has recently won "Golden opinions from all sorts of
 people" and would enjoy his new and legitimate stature;

furthermore, Macbeth is torn by an inner conflict between conscience and ambition. Perceiving this and believing it to be a weakness of will, Lady Macbeth "spurs herself to greater heights of determination" and becomes "past master in the art of hypocrisy."¹¹ She cajoles him with taunts calculated to demean his love for her and his manhood:

What beast was't then
That made you break this enterprise to
me?
When you durst do it, then you were a
man;

(1. 7. 47-49)

Lady Macbeth has chosen to attack the crux of her husband's consciousness, his love for her and his manhood, and their marriage will suffer from her doing so. Now Macbeth assumes the hypocritical guise: "Make our faces vizards to our hearts, / Disguising what they are." Their courses will soon diverge, the inevitable consequence of hypocrisy in love.

Carol J. Carlisle, in "Hamlet's 'Cruelty' in the Nunnery Scene," notes that generations of stage Hamlets see Hamlet's cruelty as being partially engendered by Ophelia's duplicity and entrapment, including her lie about the presence of her father.¹² Ophelia's betrayal

¹¹Catharine B. Boyd, "The Isolation of Antigone and Lady Macbeth," Classical Journal, 47 (1952), p. 146.

¹²Carol J. Carlisle, "Hamlet's 'Cruelty' in the Nunnery Scene," Shakespeare Quarterly, 18 (1967), pp. 129-40.

removes one of the last supports of Hamlet's trust in goodness and is instrumental in causing her madness--a prominent theme of her madness is the lady's impurity in love. Shakespeare's mature love adheres to a pattern in which deception, coming at a crucial moment in the relations between men and women, precipitates disaster for lover and beloved alike. Shakespeare's artistry is above formulae, but the existence of certain patterns is evident.

Instances of a child's disobeying his parents are not without precedent in Shakespeare--Juliet's contending with her father, and so one can be justifiably critical of Ophelia's acquiescing to her father's command that she forsake Hamlet. Hamlet has given her no cause to doubt the genuineness of his feeling; in fact, he has been the true figure of Renaissance love, having "given countenance to his speech . . . with almost all the holy vows of heaven." Yet Ophelia is quick to obey Polonius' charge that she deny Hamlet her company:

I shall obey, my lord.
(1. 3. 136)

She would betray Hamlet at a time when he, charged with grief and alienated from the Danish court, needs her desperately. His sigh in her closet, confusing Ophelia and perplexing Polonius, is the result of Ophelia's

promise to deny all access and to repel all letters. She has obeyed her father to a fault.

Ophelia's betrayal of Hamlet's love is, of course, a form of deception--a deception which extends into the nunnery scene: Act 3, scene 1. Having surrendered to her father's will, Ophelia now submits to a role in a ruse; ever obedient, she assumes a devotional posture while Claudius and Polonius, "lawful espials," conceal themselves behind the arras. She would return Hamlet's "remembrances," tokens of his devotion: "Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind." Hamlet's response, "Are you honest," is appropriate, for "here she is, a tool for her father and king, talking as though there has been merely a lover's quarrel, the responsibility for which has been Hamlet's!"¹³ Twenty-five lines later, Hamlet asks her father's whereabouts, and Ophelia, who cannot reveal her deception, lies. Hamlet detects her falsity. Disillusionment colors his remaining lines in the nunnery scene and can be reasonably attributed to Ophelia's betrayal and lie. Hamlet is to dismiss Ophelia from his thoughts. The promise of love--Gertrude will reveal her hope that Ophelia would be Hamlet's wife--is broken.

¹³Leo Kirschbaum, "Hamlet and Ophelia," Philological Quarterly, 35 (1956), p. 387.

The pattern of deception in Shakespeare's mature tragedy does not end with Ophelia. Critical opinion exonerates Gertrude from complicity in the murder of King Hamlet; therefore, Claudius must have concealed from her his part in the king's murder--a pose he had to adopt early in their courtship. In Othello, Iago conceals from his wife, Emilia, his intentions concerning the purloined handkerchief. Finally, one remembers the manner in which Othello and Desdemona elope and wed. Her father's warning alerts Shakespeare's audience to the possibility of future transgressions:

Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to
see:
She has deceived her father, and may thee.
(1. 3. 287-88)

Mason observes:

But as with Juliet so here we must allow for the weight given by Shakespeare to the sin of disobedience to parents and add to it our own uneasiness over the degree of deliberate deception inevitably involved.¹⁴

And Desdemona, entertaining Cassio without Othello's permission, compounds her error with a lie: she denies her loss of the handkerchief. All Othello's fears are confirmed, and chaos results. Again a love is lost for

¹⁴Mason, p. 84.

want of honesty. Frankness would seem to be a sine qua non of love.

It would be misleading to characterize love in Shakespeare's mature tragedy as illusory or lovers as deceitful. Illusion and deception are only manifestations of a fundamental problem: the source of affections is tainted in Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, and Antony and Cleopatra. Love, to be properly understood, must be tested by Elizabethan standards of nature and psychology, related in the excellent works of Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture, Spencer, Shakespeare and The Nature of Man, Campbell, Shakespeare's Heroes: Slaves of Passion, and Dickey, Not Wisely but Too Well. Passion--excessive emotion, will--would seem to be both the basis of love and motivation of character. Herford has defined the "Shakespearean norm of love" as "a passion, kindling heart, brain, and senses alike in natural and happy proportions."¹⁵ These natural and happy proportions are violated in the mature tragedies.

Elizabethan psychology held that man's highest faculty, reason, governed the blind strivings of his

¹⁵Herford, p. 18.

passions. In natural balance, the passions--the will--were restrained by reason, but an imbalance might effect a reversal in the natural order, hence, a will contrary to nature. Once a passion blinded and perverted reason, other passions would follow in rapid succession leading to the degeneration of man's soul and the dissolution of human and divine relationships: the Elizabethan tragedy of the hardened heart.

Romantic love was considered by the Elizabethans to be a passion, and, when properly subjugated by reason, could perfect the soul; however, excessive or unnatural love, blinding the reason and perverting the will, was as reprehensible as hatred or envy. Unrequited love commonly led to melancholia; excessive sexual indulgence might result in loss of manliness. Dickey discusses Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium:

The test of love therefore is the degree in which it partakes of the divine harmony and goodness, which is the true beauty of the universe. The pleasures and sensations which are so impetuous and irrational that they jar the mind from its stability and unbalance a man are not to be mistaken for love.¹⁶

¹⁶Dickey, p. 23.

By the standards of Elizabethan psychology, love in Shakespeare's mature tragedy is contrary to nature, defying the norm of "divine harmony and goodness": evil, not good, inevitably proceeds from this love.

Excessive passion, inimical to love, is the core of marriage and romance in the four plays. The characters in these dramas fail to achieve realistic love. Excessive passion, creating an imbalanced disposition in which will bridles reason, is contrary to nature; consequently, lovers commit acts and display tendencies which the Elizabethans would consider unnatural, e.g. Desdemona's lack of filial and connubial circumspection. Since excessive passion debilitates the soul and fosters ruin in human relationships, love in these tragedies lacks those restorative and creative functions generally imputed to that emotion. In fine, passion, the unnatural, and the unregenerate can be observed in the several alliances, thereby facilitating a fuller understanding of Shakespeare's attitude toward love.

The relation of Macbeth to his wife and the unlawful ambition issuing from their alliance are the central concerns in Macbeth. Had their love been of a finer quality, Macbeth would never have murdered Duncan or compounded regicide with further iniquity. The crucial events in the play proceed from Macbeth's

accepting his wife's counsel: passions follow passion. The nature of Lady Macbeth's motives, whether selfish or selfless, are unimportant, for she loves her husband; yet, from this love, she draws the emotional force which blinds her husband's reason and hastens him on his course. Love and tragedy are inseparable. Shakespeare, even if unconcerned with the nature of wedded love, could not have written a more damning brief against marriage.

In contrasting Macbeth's reaction to the prophecy with that of his wife, Shakespeare invites speculation as to the appropriate response within the marital covenant to a suggestion of such import. Macbeth's reaction in Act 1, scene 3, is natural. He finds his "seated heart" knocking against his ribs, "against the use of nature." To kill one's king is to disrupt natural order, and Macbeth is understandably perturbed. It is not inevitable that he should pursue the crown; as G. B. Harrison notes, Macbeth's "loyalty and his ambition are evenly balanced until he comes into the presence of his wife."¹⁷ He establishes his dependence on and love for his wife in the endearments, confidences, and immediacy of his letter to her. One can infer that Lady Macbeth's counsel will be crucial to any decision

¹⁷G. B. Harrison, ed., Shakespeare: Major Plays and The Sonnets, p. 832.

her husband may make.

Lady Macbeth finds the prospect of her husband's kingship attractive, but unlike Macbeth, who tempers ambition with conscience, she instantly declares:

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and
 shalt be
 What thou art promised.
 (1. 5. 15-16)

Lady Macbeth's cry to be unsexed betrays the intensity of her passion and her willingness to be removed from compassion, consolation, and companionship--all that is human and natural. In her ambition to see Macbeth king, she unwittingly sows those seeds of evil which will breed discord in her marriage and decay in her soul. "Woman is the normal symbol of life and nourishment," writes Irving Ribner, "the dramatist by this reversal can emphasize the unnaturalness of the contrarities to which Lady Macbeth appeals."¹⁸ Allying herself with "those spirits that tend on mortal thought" and distorting her feminine nature, she must eventually stand alone.

Macbeth's soliloquy of Act 1, scene 7, reveals an inner conflict between his conscience and his ambition. He has contemplated the crime of regicide and is appalled by the possible consequences. When Lady Macbeth enters,

¹⁸Irving Ribner, Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy, p. 161.

he declares: "We will proceed no further in this business." She had anticipated this hesitancy, and, wrongly attributing her husband's pangs of conscience to a weakness of will, she augments her plan to have him crowned. Shakespeare's purpose in contrasting the reactions of this husband and his wife to the prophecy is apparent. Lady Macbeth's willfulness and domination of her husband, manifestations of unnatural passion, violate the established order in relations between men and women. The traditional function of love is creative, yet Lady Macbeth draws on sources which are not symbolic of life and growth but of death and destruction:

I have given suck, and know
 How tender 'tis to love the babe that
 milks me:
 I would, while it was smiling in my face,
 Have plucked my nipple from his boneless
 gums,
 And dashed the brains out, had I so
 sworn as you
 Have done to this.

(1. 7. 54-59)

Perhaps Lady Macbeth's utterances against the natural order inspire awe, but they are not admirable. She represents those forces which would subvert the natural and beneficent tendencies of love, and, in accord with the nature of marriage in the mature tragedies, Macbeth allows his wife to overrule him for an evil purpose.

Isolation marks the end of affection in Macbeth and Shakespeare's other mature tragedies, but before

man and woman become separate, love grows progressively less capable of regeneration. The revitalizing quality of love is vitiated as man and woman can no longer avail themselves of any restorative process. The marriage of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is true to this pattern.

Macbeth allows himself to be cajoled by his wife's emotional appeals into a submissive--unnatural--position, but, with his admonition, "Bring forth men-children only," he assumes a different role:

I am settled, and bend up
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.
(1. 7. 79-80)

Macbeth's will has subverted his reason in a pathological dilemma familiar to Elizabethan moralists and psychologists who "frequently discuss the commonly accepted psychology of the hardened heart, in which the sinner becomes so fortified and confirmed in the custom of sin that it becomes a habit, corrupting one's human faculties."¹⁹ Macbeth's condition is the end-product of a reaction between his all-consuming love for his wife and her impassioned ambition to have him king.

¹⁹Dolora G. Cunningham, "Macbeth: The Tragedy of A Hardened Heart," Shakespeare Quarterly, 14 (1963), p. 41.

Parallel with Macbeth's loss of honor and respect is the disintegration of his marriage. Macduff's cry, "He has no children," in Act 4, tells of a union bereft of its creative function. Macbeth and his wife, who initially enjoy intimacy and harmony, are wrenched apart to pursue diverging courses: the one to further iniquity, the other to delusions and suicide. Macbeth's comment upon his wife's death comes from the weariness of one alienated from the sources of affection: "She should have died hereafter." Dolora G. Cunningham, in "Macbeth: The Tragedy of A Hardened Heart," discussed "an important resemblance between the pattern of Antony and Cleopatra and Shakespeare's use of the psychology of the hardened heart in Macbeth:"

The tragic outcome of Antony and Cleopatra is as firmly shaped as that of Macbeth by the failure to alter misguided affections and

destructive choices. Both plays end in tragedy because the heroes and heroines give their hearts completely to those things (worldly glory, worldly love) which, however attractive, are defined in the plays as unworthy of such ultimate allegiance and as destructive of the proper state of man, and because they fail to turn back their loyalties to that which is considered worthy of being loved by human beings.²⁰

All this for love.

One becomes interested in the quality of the love of Othello and Desdemona from the beginnings of its fragmentation. When tested by the psychology of passion, or indeed by modern analysis, their love evinces unnatural and unregenerate characteristics. The implications of Desdemona's violating Renaissance precepts of feminine conduct cannot be dismissed as insignificant violations of propriety: her actions reveal an imperfection in her love. Othello, too, by his actions lends credence to the allegation that his love was flawed. Othello's rapid descent into lust and bestial rage demands an explanation beyond the tradition that evil was present in his soul only from the formation of his alliance with Iago. Since the tragedies of Othello and Desdemona are inseparable from their marriage, the quality of their affection must provide further insight into

²⁰Dolora G. Cunningham, "Macbeth," Shakespeare Quarterly, 14 (1963), p. 47.

Shakespeare's treatment of love.

Desdemona ruins Othello. By violating the established norms of decorum, she unwittingly provides Iago with the material necessary to prosper the evil in her husband's soul; thus,

a climate of opinion would be established, so that motivation for Othello's furious rage would have been more explicit to the playgoer of the seventeenth century than to his twentieth-century counterpart who is unfamiliar with these attitudes, and who also tends to hold a romantic belief in the all-conquering power of true love.²¹

During her courtship, Desdemona displays the same willfulness that promises her undoing as a wife. Before the Venetian Senate, Othello characterizes his wife as having been the aggressor in their pre-marital relations:

She wished she had not heard it; yet she
wished
That heaven had made her such a man.
She thanked me,
And bade me, if I had a friend that
loved her,
I should but teach him how to tell my
story,
And that would woo her.

(1. 3. 161-65)

Furthermore, she had relayed her confidence in an atmosphere of unchaperoned intimacy which was "highly irregular in Venice, where girls of good family were

²¹Margaret Loftus Ranald, "The Indiscretions of Desdemona," Shakespeare Quarterly, p. 41.

closely watched and even married women were little better off."²² No less telling against Desdemona is the disobedience implicit in her elopement.

The sum of Desdemona's indiscretions is that they manifest the triumph of will over reason. She had allowed the passion of her love to overrule the sensibility she should have had as a Venetian girl of breeding. Brabantio's characterization of the match attests to the corruption of natural order which must be associated with such a union:

A maiden never bold,
Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion
Blushed at herself; and she, in spite of
nature,
Of years, of country, credit, everything,
To fall in love with that what she feared
to look on!
It is a judgment maimed and most imperfect
That will confess perfection so could err
Against all rules of nature, and must be
driven
To find out practices of cunning hell
Why this should be.

(1. 3. 94-103)

Desdemona, Brabantio has observed, had gone against nature in effecting a match with Othello: a match which Venetian society would surely condemn. With Brabantio's final charge, "Look to her Moor, if thou hast eyes to see: / She has deceived her father, and may thee," the perceptive reader is constrained to anticipate further

²²Ranald, p. 133.

evidences that Desdemona's love is flawed.

Events move so rapidly that very little is known of Desdemona's wifely conduct prior to the "handkerchief scene"; however, she apparently brings to her marriage the same imprudence and willfulness that she displayed as a maiden. Entertaining Cassio without Othello's permission and not wholly obeying her husband, Desdemona becomes an increasingly easy mark for Iago. Othello and Desdemona's performance in the handkerchief scene exemplifies the legacy of their love turned unregenerate. Before examining the crucial confrontation, one should consider the quality of Othello's affection.

Shakespeare presages Othello's fall from the beginning of the play. By establishing an atmosphere antipathetical to genuine emotion and by having the Moor unconsciously suggest on different occasions his inability to love well, Shakespeare makes plausible the protagonist's rapid descent from nobility. The hostility of Venice pervades the opening scene. Beneath Brabantio's window, Iago informs Desdemona's father that his daughter, "your white ewe," is "even now, now, very now" being mounted by an "old black ram"--Othello. Alfred Harbage observes

Never have famous lovers in literature been first obtruded upon our attention in circumstances of such indignity. The

ultimate impression made upon us
by the love of Othello and Desdemona
stems in a measure from the initial
impression it has canceled.²³

The societal and anthropological deviations in such
a union are motifs which are to be amplified in the
further discourse of numerous characters.

To the onus attached to their love must be added
the burden of Othello's own remarks concerning his
desire. He makes love a reason for being. Before
the Venetian Senate, he has told of Desdemona who "gave
me for my pains a world of kisses," and in Iago's
presence Othello says,

For know, Iago,
But that I love the gentle Desdemona,
I would not my unhoused free condition
Put into circumscription and confine
For the seas' worth.

(1. 2. 24-28)

Juxtaposed with Othello's consuming love of his wife is
the allusion to a free condition now circumscribed.
From his seventh year, he has known only the broil of
battle and wears the robes of civilization uneasily.
Mark Van Doren poetically evaluates the Moor's enforced
restraint:

²³ Alfred Harbage, William Shakespeare: A
Reader's Guide, p. 342.

The jungle in Othello's soul is ever enemy to his garden. The ordered rows of his princely manner are in constant danger of being overwhelmed by a wild-beast growth, savage in its strength and monstrous in its form.²⁴

The psychology of passion held that idolatrous love was unnatural, and the progression of events in Othello proves the doctrine: passions follow passion. The advent of jealousy, while cleverly wrought by Iago, is the inevitable consequence of Othello's love. Othello does not seek Desdemona's response to Iago's allegation, but if he had, there is little reason to assume her defense would have eased the pain in his soul. Before the handkerchief scene, she has been judged:

O curse of marriage,
That we can call these delicate creatures
ours,
And not their appetites!
(3. 3. 267-69)

The imperfection of love is evident in the handkerchief scene: love, now unregenerate, lacks the redemptive qualities of mutual devotion.

Shakespeare in Act 3, scene 4, affords an opportunity to observe the Moor in his fallen state. Characteristic of the corruption in Othello's mind is his willingness to believe anything about his wife if it is disgraceful

²⁴Mark Van Doren, Shakespeare, p. 201.

enough. Dramatic tension is heightened by Desdemona's inability, or unwillingness, to comprehend the monster in her husband's mind. That each is unable to understand the other indicates the condition to which their marriage has been brought.

Othello begins the scene with an abrupt challenge to Desdemona's fidelity in marriage; his comment on her hand:

This argues fruitfulness and liberal
heart,
Hot, hot, and moist. This hand of yours
requires
A sequester from liberty; fasting and prayer;
Much castigation; exercise devout;
For here's a young and sweating devil here
That commonly rebels.

(3. 4. 39-42)

Yet Desdemona chooses to ignore the implication that she has violated her marriage vows; she speaks instead of Cassio:

I cannot speak of this. Come now,
your promise!
I have sent to bid Cassio come speak
with you.

(3. 4. 48 ff.)

"Desdemona's lack of understanding arises from the policy she says she will adopt to save Cassio";²⁵

My lord shall never rest;
I'll watch him tame and talk him out of
patience;

²⁵Ranald, p. 134.

His bed shall seem a school, his
board a shrift;
I'll intermingle everything he does
With Cassio's suit.

(3. 3. 22-26)

Certainly Desdemona's cause is just, and as a new bride she has every reason to believe that Othello will accede, but her plan to plague him with talk of Cassio suggests an immoderation not unlike her previous willfulness. To apply the formula of passion once again, Desdemona's excessive advocacy of Cassio's cause smacks of a will to dominate: a reversal of natural order. The passions which motivate her are blind, and the inability to see her husband's affliction is her tragedy.

The ensuing lines centering around Othello's handkerchief--symbolic of their love-- are important. Desdemona's lie cannot be dismissed as temporization. The deception of the one and the insistence of the other reveal the state of their affections:

Des Is't possible?
Des Indeed? Is't true?
Oth Most veritable. Therefore look to't
well.
Des Then would to God that I had never
seen't!
Oth Ha! Wherefore?
Des Why do you speak so startingly and
rash?
Oth Is't lost? Is't gone? Speak, is it
out o' th' way?
Des Heaven bless us!
Oth Say you?
Des It is not lost. But what an if it
were?

Oth How?
 Des I say it is not lost.
 Oth Fetch't, let me see't!
 Des Why, so I can; but I will not now.
 This is a trick to put me from my
 suit.

(3. 4. 68 ff.)

Desdemona does not know what Othello thinks she has done; yet, in the previous scene he had made a reference to his forehead, as he has made a remark about the "young and sweating devil" in Desdemona's palm. She should have some misgivings. Instead, lacking frankness and sympathy, she lies and attempts to turn the discussion to Cassio. Mason asks: "Do we not get the impression that Desdemona is living in a water-tight compartment, a self-created paradise of one, rather than in the sensitive give-and-take of a human partnership?"²⁶

Yes.

The progression of events continues with additional examples of the Moor's fallen state. His reactions to the belief that he has been betrayed are revealing. He engages in an elaborate bit of pretense in which Desdemona is a prostitute, Emilia is a madam, and he is a customer. More disturbing is the imagery of his vengeance, for these pictures hint at flaws which existed before the onset of jealousy:

²⁶Mason, p. 145.

I will chop her into messes! Cuckold
me!

(4. 1. 200)

"There is an indignant sense of personal affront, of an outrage to his dignity and his personal rights almost something like his property rights."²⁷ Othello has previously referred to Desdemona in proprietary terms. Employing the images of falconry, he says,

If I do prove her haggard,
Though that her jesses were my dear
heartstrings,
I'd whistle her off and let her down
the wind
To prey at fortune.

(3. 3. 259-62)

Othello's conception of love is ego-centric--irreconcilable with the tenets of the genuine emotion.

Shakespeare in Othello has induced an attraction between a man and a woman which defies sociological, anthropological, and ultimately cosmological norms. Since the initial attraction was possible, presumably a mature relationship could have been realized. It was not. A conspiracy of contingencies militated against that occurrence, and the tragedy is that the dissolution was from within. Desdemona violated the accepted standards of conduct and in doing so forced the Moor to

²⁷John Holloway, The Story of the Night, p. 38.

see in her the truth of Iago's insinuations. The celerity with which Othello succumbs to his ancient's efforts and his rapid degeneration nurture the thought that the lower view of human nature had a peculiar attraction for the Moor, a view which must have touched his love from its beginnings. As in Macbeth, Shakespeare has held out to his characters the experience of love, and they have forfeited its promise.

William Shakespeare took the plot of his Antony and Cleopatra from North's translation of Plutarch's Lives of The Noble Grecians and Romans, Compared. Although he treated the passion of the two lovers sympathetically, Shakespeare preserved the traditional theme that the imperial lovers were wasted by their lust. Antony remains a man weakened and finally destroyed by an affection of great force and intensity. Cleopatra, as the woman who dominated him, continues to be both amorist and artificer. Together, they encourage each other in that which debilitates and degrades. A large body of criticism holds that Antony and Cleopatra through their rebelling against the strictures of Roman values become transfigured in a transcendent vision of love; however, the actions and statements of the royal couple, supported by the observations of other characters, reinforce the established moralist estimation.

The familiar argument that Antony's love is ennobling is attenuated by his actions and their effect

on his mental and moral strength. Shakespeare makes clear that Antony is "the noble ruin" of Cleopatra's magic. He allows passion to overrule reason and so forsakes the greatness which was his wont. Eschewing his proper place as triumvir, Antony abandons himself to the pleasures of Egypt. Intellectually he understands what must be the consequence of his Egyptian interlude, and yet he strives to continue his alliance with Cleopatra. Taken by some as proof of love's ability to override mundane consideration, his actions indicate rather the blindness and weakness associated with unbridled passion. Shakespeare begins his thorough treatment of Antony's complex relationship with Cleopatra in the first scenes.

Philo's speech of Act 1, scene 1, introduces an Antony already enthralled and weakened from participating in the Egyptian revels. Once the greatest of men, he is characterized in terms which must create an unfavorable impression for reader and audience alike:

Nay, but this dotage of our general's
 O'erflows the measure.
 His captain's heart,
 Which in the scuffles of great fights hath
 burst
 The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper
 And is become the bellows and the fan
 To cool a gypsy's lust.

(1. 1. 1 ff.)

Philo's criticism that Antony's heart "reneges all temper," indicating will's supremacy over reason, is justified in the arrogance of Antony's challenge to Roman duty:

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the ranged empire fall!

(1. 1. 33-34)

Cunningham evaluates the quality of Antony's desire:

The extravagant terms in which they speak of their love in this scene document the opening statement, reveal in action of language the immensity of their abandonment to sensuality, and repeatedly drive home the point that their passion is great enough to submerge all reason.²⁸

Disdaining "conference harsh"--the reality of the outer world, Antony would know "What sport tonight?"

One finds little that is admirable about Antony's relationship with Cleopatra by the end of Act 1. There is a rightness in Octavius' summary of Antony's Egyptian activities:

He fishes, drinks, and wastes
The lamps of night in revel; is not more
manlike
Than Cleopatra, nor the queen of Ptolemy
More womanly than he.

(1. 4. 4-7)

²⁸Dolora G. Cunningham, "The Characterization of Shakespeare's Cleopatra," Shakespeare Quarterly, p. 12.

Antony's tragedy is more poignant for his realizing the debilitating nature of his bond with Cleopatra. Act 1 and the remaining acts are interspersed with his resolutions to break the "fetters" of his Egyptian servitude; however, Antony's continued presence in Alexandria and inability to divorce himself from Cleopatra testify to the baselessness of his resolve. Passion, weakening and unmanning, has extinguished the divine light of reason.

If his suicide is excepted, Antony regains his former stature only once during the play. Antony's ascendancy occurs with his leaving Egypt and its queen. Genuinely moved by the news of his first wife's death, with senses reawakened at the knowledge of Pompey's opposition, he returns for a brief interval to duty. In Rome, he takes a second wife, Octavia, sister to Octavius, the second of the triumvirate. Rosen²⁹ subscribes to the image of Antony warring between noble self and all-consuming passion for Cleopatra:

If Antony is to return to his public role and regain his manhood, he must throw off Cleopatra and her influence. He can regain his manhood only through self-mastery; if he yields to passion, he is unmanned.²⁹

Antony yields. He finds himself unable to renounce

²⁹Rosen, p. 112.

Cleopatra, and, unable to resolve the basic conflict between Rome and Egypt, he forsakes Octavia and returns to Alexandria.

Antony prepares for a confrontation with Caesar's forces at Actium. Against all reason, he decides to engage Octavius' superior naval forces in a sea encounter. Cleopatra seconds his unwise decision and replies "Sink Rome" to Enobarbus' admonition that she should stay behind during the forthcoming battle:

Your presence must puzzle Antony;
 Take from his heart, take from his
 brain, from's time,
 What should not then be spared. He
 is already
 Traduced for levity; and 'tis said in
 Rome
 That Photinus an eunuch and your maids
 Manage this war.

(3. 7. 10-14)

This shame to Antony's manhood is soon justified. When Cleopatra flees Actium at the moment of Egyptian victory, he, unreasoned by lust, follows her. Passion, debilitating all that was good in Antony, now cripples even his martial instincts. He has not been true to his nature.

The judgment of Antony's former friends is harsh but fair, for if he had been himself "it would have gone well." Scarus observes that Cleopatra has enthralled Antony and intimates that sorcery was her method: Antony has become the "noble ruin of her magic."

Scarus continues:

I never saw an action of such shame;
Experience, manhood, honor, ne'er
before
Did violate so itself.

(3. 10. 21-23)

Shakespeare could have chosen a very different vehicle to convey the image of Antony transcendent in love, if that was his purpose. Life, strength, hope, all that is traditionally associated with love, have no place in Antony's moment of defeat. His desire for Cleopatra has vitiated his strength, tarnished his image, and transformed hope into despair. Antony, having "offended reputation," asks "O, whither hast thou led me, Egypt?" His plaintive speeches are witness to his melancholia and loss:

Egypt, thou knew'st well
My heart was to thy rudder tied by th'
strings,
And thou shouldst tow me after. O'er
my spirit
Thy full supremacy thou knew'st, and that
Thy beck might from the bidding of the gods
Command me.

(3. 11. 57-61)

Yet Cleopatra quiets his fears; however, he will again have cause to believe that she has betrayed him.

The woman who beguiled Antony is presented in terms singularly inappropriate to foster the judgment that hers was a love transcendent. Cleopatra can be said to have

well lost the world by ignoring a good many things to the contrary. As she is characterized by others and by her deeds and words, she appears to be a magnificent individual dominated by a passion every bit as destructive as Antony's. The Roman denunciations of her character do not hold the key to her mystery. Shakespeare did not waste his abilities on a slattern; yet, there is also a danger in seizing upon Enobarbus' accolade to the exclusion of all else:

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety.

(2. 2. 237-38)

Cleopatra, as Shakespeare intended her, is best discovered through a consideration of the things she said and did and of the end to which she was brought.

Cleopatra's love for Antony has none of the inviolability and serenity of a lawful union. Mention has been made of the unfavorable light cast upon her during the opening scenes, and she does little to belie these condemnations. Her reaction to Antony's intended departure stems in part from an ever-present fear that she will be deserted. An unquiet mind was considered symptomatic of an imbalance between reason and will, and Cleopatra's history more than justifies the postulate that her reason has long been subservient to her will. Like all Shakespeare's lovers, she is beset by a mind

divided against itself.

Cleopatra's behavior during Antony's absence is self-characterizing. She complains about the void in her life and fills her days with thoughts of Antony; yet, she can conceive of him only in terms of herself. Employing the simile of angling, she pictures herself drawing in fish and says,

I'll think them every one an Antony
And say, 'Ah, ha! y' are caught!'
(2. 5. 13-14)

This and similar passages are enlightening, for Cleopatra tends to think of her lover as a magnificent possession. Her supremacy over Antony and the means through which she attained this station are prominent motifs in the play, and they are not supportive of the contention that her love is ennobling. In a similar passage, she has reveled in recollections of former conquests:

Broad-fronted Caesar,
When thou wast here above the ground,
I was
A morsel for a monarch; and great Pompey
Would stand and make his eyes grow in my
brow;
There would he anchor his aspect, and die
With looking on his life.
(1. 5. 29-34)

Thoughts of hooking Antony evoke other memories of their relationship. She relates how she once led him through a series of contrary emotions:

I laughed him out of patience; and
 that night
 I laughed him into patience; and the
 next morn,
 Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his
 bed;
 Then put my tires and mantles on him,
 whilst
 I wore his sword Philippan.
 (2. 5. 19-23)

It is the nature of the woman to dominate, and her affection, unmanning Antony, is both unnatural and destructive. Shakespeare would not have presented this if creating an exalted passion. Dickey states that Cleopatra's love appears rather less than perfect, for Shakespeare would make of her "almost a symbol of willful lust in middle age."³⁰

Antony and Cleopatra's love cannot tolerate the stress of their immoderate lives. Resentments come between them when each most needs the other's support. Love, now unregenerate, falters as Antony vows Cleopatra's death, and she flees in fear to the Monument. Affection's restorative function is vitiated by the failure to alter misguided feelings and destructive choices.

After his second defeat, Antony understandably believes himself betrayed. Salient among the emotions of pain and remorse welling up from his decision to die is rage: his determination to kill Cleopatra is his

³⁰Dickey, p. 188.

sole reason for staying his own death:

For when I am revenged upon my charm,
I have done all.

(4. 12. 16-17)

In a rare moment of insight, he admits that passion has obscured all: the effect of his lust is brought painfully home:

Betrayed I am.
O this false soul of Egypt! This grave
charm,
Whose eye becked forth my wars, and
called them home,
Whose bosom was my crownet, my chief
end,
Like a right gypsy hath at fast and loose
Beguiled me, to the very heart of loss.

(4. 12. 24-28)

Antony, mistakenly believing Cleopatra dead, is true to his vow: he seeks the "sleep" of death. Too late to prevent a suicide attempt, he learns that she yet lives, and he is carried to her place of hiding. Antony dies there embracing thoughts of his "former fortunes" as "the greatest prince o' th' world." Rosen finds when "Shakespeare's tragic heroes face death, they render their final and best estimate of themselves; they embrace what is most meaningful in their lives."³¹ Significantly, Antony's thoughts are of a time before Cleopatra entered his life. Such is his vision of love.

³¹Rosen, p. 112.

Cleopatra's final moments are surcharged with the kind of vitality and mischanneled energy which have marked her life. She tardily recognizes the worth of Antony, but, as Mills expresses her tragedy, the illumination is "too little and too late."³² There is little to support the view that Cleopatra is transfigured in the final moments of life. Dickey states in a valuable passage the problem Cleopatra bestowed on future critics:

Since it is fairly clear that passion causes the downfall of the royal lovers, critics, whose ethical systems do not admit that so rapturous a love can be degenerative, maintain that if Antony and Cleopatra lose the world, the world is well lost. What they lose, even life itself, is dross in this view compared to the passionate glory of love. The play is beyond good and evil and conventional morality is too paltry a measure by which to judge the great and terrible passion of these imperial lovers. This interpretation, which is that of such important scholars as A. C. Bradley, R. H. Case, Mark Van Doren, and G. Wilson Knight, sees the love which drives Antony and Cleopatra to death as a purifying flame 'the eternal diadem' of life. At its extreme this criticism sees the play as an almost mystical exaltation of passion and Antony and Cleopatra as canonized martyrs to love.³³

Cleopatra, even in her "infinite variety," is unable to find either within herself or her love the means to escape

³²Mills, "Cleopatra," p. 161

³³Dickey, p. 177.

completely the worldly bond.

Cleopatra has been passion's slave in life and continues so in death. She does not give up hope for a future until Caesar's "purposes" are "leveled at." Never does she measure herself by a moral standard or admit responsibility for the destruction of Antony. She would be free of the "base" elements but has fear that Iras will take Antony's first kiss in eternity. In many ways still the old Cleopatra, she relishes the thought of making a fool of yet another Caesar:

Poor venomous fool,
 Be angry, and dispatch. O, couldst
 thou speak,
 That I might hear thee call great Caesar
 ass
 Unpolicied.

(5. 2. 305-07)

Her instinct is to dominate, even in death as she did in life; she looks

As she would catch another Antony
 In her strong toil of grace.
 (5. 2. 346-47)

The passion of Antony and Cleopatra is equal to the pageantry of Shakespeare's play. Shakespeare's most complete treatment of love in his mature tragedy is that of a bond, splendid and magnificent, which is flawed by the excesses of destructive emotion. The hero and heroine glory for a while in their lust but pay heavily

for the illusions by which they would live. When "the long day is done" and "the torch is out," their love is dead, smothered by its excesses.

Love in Hamlet is not the consideration that it is in the other plays and, consequently, has neither the intensity nor the scope of that emotion in Othello, Macbeth, or Antony and Cleopatra. Hamlet could possibly have been spared the agonies of isolation if he had received some support from Ophelia, but this is speculation: she had nothing to give. Instead, Hamlet condemns her to a nunnery, in Act 3, scene 1, and so banishes her from thought, as he fully attends to his desire for revenge. His "I loved Ophelia" (5. 1. 269) is only a reaction to Laertes' hyperbole. Ophelia, during the delusions of her final moments, evinces the melancholic hysteria of one spurned in love; however, the undermining of her sensibilities can be more meaningfully attributed to the delicacy of her emotions than to a true love unrequited. In Denmark, "where evil things run to seed and good things wither,"³⁴ their love sickened and died, even as it was being born. However, one love does thrive in tainted Denmark.

The marriage of Claudius and Gertrude is important for its bearing upon Hamlet. Their union provides further

³⁴Herford, p. 38.

motivation for Hamlet's revenge and occasions several remarks by him which lend insight into his "mystery." In the context of this study, Claudius and Gertrude's marriage is noteworthy, because it is Shakespeare's sole sustained treatment of love in Hamlet. Unfortunately, little is known of their marriage exclusive of remarks by the Hamlets, father and son. Hamlet I has obvious reasons for disdaining the relationship, and his son is quick to adopt his father's perceptions. From the statements made by these two and from the actions and statements of Gertrude, some little can be learned.

The atmosphere of Denmark appears well suited for sustaining an unnatural love relationship: a ghost walks; a brother murders his brother; a young man is driven to kill his king; and a young girl takes her own life. From this central ulcer of regicide, says John Wain, an "infection spreads outwards. Every relationship, every enterprise is touched with disease."³⁵

The ghost of Hamlet I, whose information is accurate as to fact, opines that Claudius is a figure of lust:

Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate
beast,
With witchcraft of his wits, with
traitorous gifts--
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the
power

³⁵John Wain, The Living World of Shakespeare,
p. 149.

So to seduce!--won to his shameful
 lust
 The will of my most seeming-virtuous
 queen.
 O Hamlet, what a falling-off was there,
 From me, whose love was of that dignity
 That it went hand in hand even with the
 vow
 I made to her in marriage, and to
 decline
 Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were
 poor
 To those of mine.
 But virtue, as it never will be moved,
 Though lewdness court it in a shape of
 heaven,
 So lust, though to a radiant angel
 linked,
 Will sate itself in a celestial bed
 And prey on garbage.

(1. 5. 42-57)

If the ghost's exhortation is to be credited, lusting Claudius has seduced with unnatural "wit and gifts" the "most seeming-virtuous queen." The imagery of witchcraft and lust would have created in the minds of Shakespeare's audience an unfavorable impression. Sorcery and passion, infractions of natural order, have been applied to other unions--unions which have succumbed to the inner ravages of misguided affection. The ghost's characterization of Claudius and Gertrude's marriage receives additional support.

During his first appearance, Hamlet imparts his adverse reaction to his mother's second marriage. The terms he chooses to characterize her behavior are not flattering and are to be reinforced in a later scene by the ghost. Gertrude "would hang" on Hamlet's father,

"as if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on." Wanting "discourse and reason," she had posted with "most wicked speed . . . to incestuous sheets." Shakespeare does present a seemingly congenial marriage; however, Alfred Harbage cautions against underestimating the stimulus this marriage imparts to Hamlet's melancholia:

That the thought of an adulterous mother might prove lethal seems beyond the ken of those who think Hamlet's mood inadequately motivated: The importance of the theme in the play can scarcely be overestimated.³⁶

Gertrude, in a rare introspective moment, supports the substance of the ghost's exhortation and Hamlet's soliloquy. She attributes her son's disposition to "our o'erhasty marriage."

A precipitous remarriage by a woman of middle age was likely to be regarded by the Elizabethans as evidence of passion's supremacy rather than love's genuine expression. Hamlet, confronting Gertrude in her chamber, verbalizes the common sentiment:

You cannot call it love, for at your age
The heyday in the blood is tame, it's
humble,
And waits upon the judgment, and what
judgment
Would step from this to this?
. . . reason panders will. (3. 4. 69 ff.)

³⁶ Alfred Harbage, Shakespeare and The Rival Traditions, p. 250.

The credibility of his diatribe would be attenuated but for the accuracy with which he expresses the psychology of his time and Gertrude's acquiescing to the validity of his charge. Gertrude has previously been either unwilling or unable to confront the nature of her second union. She had taken it for granted that her son would accept her and Claudius as one--the Court did, but, as Hamlet pursues his intention to reawaken her lulled senses, she pleads,

O Hamlet, speak no more
 Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul,
 And there I see such black and grained
 spots
 As will not leave their tinct.
 (3. 4. 89-92)

But with the weakness characteristic of passion, Gertrude returns to Claudius.

Three sources militate against the notion that love was the primary bond between Claudius and Gertrude. Shakespeare's dramatic logic is faithful to the ancient wisdom that only evil can come of evil: they cannot escape the consequence of "the primal eldest curse." Gertrude's tragedy is her excessive passion, a passion which dominates reason and hinders judgment. Only as poison courses through her body and she hears her husband lie, does she fully face the evil in her love and the destruction she has courted in giving herself to a man like Claudius. As with Antony, Othello, and the

others, the knowledge comes too late. Love has run its course.

To what end are Shakespeare's lovers brought? The position that Shakespeare employed a flawed and debilitating kind of love is enhanced by a consideration of the conclusions of the affairs. Shakespeare's universe was an ordered one, and never could transgressors against the natural order elude the consequences of their actions. The cost to a love governed by one of the passions is the dissolution of that love. Man becomes emotionally isolated from woman, husband estranged from wife. If the success or failure of any process--and love is a process--can be determined by the result, the condition of alienation which characterizes the ultimate state of love is a telling argument against the view which will not allow that such could happen to Shakespeare's most magnificent creations.

The destruction of the Macbeths' marriage is more poignant than the dissolution of any other relationship in the four plays. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, who initially enjoy the most intimate counsel, withdraw into isolation as their marital bond is severed from within. Boyd captures some of the pathos of their plight:

There is something peculiarly tragic in the scenes in which Macbeth and his wife appear alone. It is the tragic common knowledge of wrong, the consciousness of violation of the laws of God and man, the full awareness of the insecurity of power gained by evil; and it is accompanied by a falling apart in loneliness of this sinful man and his sinful wife.³⁷

The Macbeths' similar decisions to renounce human feeling become an obstruction to their ability to care for each other. They do not share a scene together after Act 3, scene 4. In effect, they are lost to each other before the banquet scene.

Nowhere in Macbeth is the sense of the couple's isolation so much in evidence as at the moment when Lady Macbeth's death is announced; however, the effects of misguided affection are visible prior to this. Macbeth has drawn more and more within himself, prompting his wife to ask, "Why do you keep alone?" Rosen believes that "of all Shakespeare's tragic figure, Macbeth is the most isolated."³⁸ Macbeth, losing touch with all others, despairs inwardly. His wife, wanting the intimacy and sanctuary of marriage, unable to share her fear and guilt, becomes a creature apart from all others. An attendant describes the pangs of loneliness:

³⁷Boyd, p. 177

³⁸Rosen, p. 84.

Since his majesty went into the field I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her nightgown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon't, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep.

(5. 1. 4-9)

Unable to expel the disease within, Lady Macbeth, bereft of the comforts of lawful love, chooses a lonely death.

Macbeth greets the news of his wife's death with an "absolute weariness of soul."³⁹ Concern is now pointless:

She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such
a word.

(5. 5. 17-18)

He cannot grieve: Life is "a tale told by an idiot" and "is fallen into the sear." Shortly thereafter, Macbeth dies--alone.

An image of Hamlet grieving for Ophelia is difficult to evoke. Hamlet, while once genuinely devoted to her, gives Ophelia up to the Danish Court after the nunnery scene so that he may be free to pursue his desire for revenge. His peculiar view of human nature and his role as minister of vengeance preclude any alliance. Such is the nature of his world that Hamlet must complete his task alone.

³⁹Willard Farnham, Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier, p. 128.

Ophelia escapes painful reality and enters the world of delusion. Alienated from Hamlet and unable to turn to a single source for comfort, she finds the refuge of insanity. Her behavior during the interlude before her death shows her inability to reconcile conflicting feelings about Hamlet. The valentine song of her madness is of a lady rejected by her lover. The daisies of her flower language represent dissembling in love. The ultimate value of her situation is its similarity to the fates of both Lady Macbeth and Desdemona. Lady Macbeth is last seen in the loneliness of insanity, and Desdemona, to a lesser degree, retreats from reality and takes refuge in thoughts of a remote heaven.

Othello and Desdemona are never able to transcend their fatal ignorance of each other. Prodded by Iago, Othello becomes progressively more isolated from his wife. As Hamlet does to Ophelia, Othello vents the foulness in his mind against Desdemona; unlike Hamlet, Othello never asks for help. Desdemona, wounded by his hostilities, seeks mental cover. Mason notes,

She has retreated from the stress of reality into simpler attitudes, and in this semi-slumber many thoughts wander in and out of her mind without asking permission of the waking self.⁴⁰

⁴⁰Mason, p. 152.

Their love fails them. She dies by his hand, and he dies blind to the fact that one does not kill for love. Othello, for all his contrition, never confronts the knowledge that he, not Iago, is responsible for "this heavy act." The "pearl"--cast away--is irretrievable. Their love is dead.

Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra love with a passion so intense that it is difficult to distinguish between the awesome force which governs their lives and the end to which they are brought. The splendor of their final moments tends to obscure the reality that there is no rapprochement: Antony dies embracing thoughts of former glory; Cleopatra does not exclude the possibility of continued existence. One should note as a meaningful contrast that immediately following his second defeat Antony's instinct is to have Cleopatra's life, and she, fleeing in fear, incarcerates herself in a monument. This alienation is the legacy of their illicit love. Dickey observes: "Not only do both lose their kingdoms and their lives, but both suffer from the fact that their love turns to ashes before the play is over."⁴¹ A last-minute reconciliation could serve only to considerably narrow the play's tragic scope--something which Shakespeare clearly would not do.

⁴¹Dickey, p. 196.

In this paper on Shakespeare's treatment of love in his mature tragedy, the temptation was to speculate on the playwright's personal attitude towards love during the period when the dramas were written; however, the better approach has been to eschew biographical considerations and to examine the four dramas as entities: the results have been gratifying. The subject of love has remained relatively untouched by the recent intensive activity in Shakespearean criticism; yet, Shakespeare was concerned with love--the most sacred bond between a man and a woman.

From the fanciful affairs of his comedy, Shakespeare turned to the disastrous unions of the tragedies. He chose to treat a negative and deficient kind of love in Othello, Macbeth, Hamlet, and Antony and Cleopatra. This is not to say that Shakespeare has condemned the emotion of love; in each instance, he indicated that the relation was flawed and corrupted from within by illusion, deceit, or unlawful passion and, therefore, could not survive in a moral universe.

Shakespeare's art was faithful to the Elizabethan psychology of passion. With will's triumph over reason, the moral excesses combined to militate against the realization of love. Those qualities which mark the

unions of the four plays are illusion, deceit, passion, and isolation. In a section devoted to each, this project has demonstrated that the allied passions destroyed from within the bonds of love. The delusion unable to withstand the test of reality; the deception coming in a moment crucial to love's survival; the excessive and degenerative passion: all are detrimental to love.

Although love is a major consideration in only one play--Antony and Cleopatra, understanding Shakespeare's dramatization of love enhances the appreciation of his art. The defects of principle by which the characters would love are those by which they live. With the vitiation of love's creative and restorative function, the lovers enter worlds apart from each other. Isolation--the essence of tragedy--is the nemesis of love and life.

So, Shakespeare's men and women loved neither wisely nor well. Love was not their tragedy, but when ambition, jealousy, and lust corrupted their lives, the promise of love was forfeited by all.

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VITA

Albert E. Clark, Jr. was born on October 13, 1946, in Washington, D.C. He grew up in Falls Church, Virginia, where he attended public schools. In 1970 he received the BA degree from the University of Richmond.

In the fall of 1971, Clark entered the University of Richmond where he is currently completing the requirements for the MA degree in English. He plans to teach English at the college level.