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Reworking "seeming trust" into "excellent falsehood" : the lying heroes of William Shakespeare's Dark Lady sonnets and Antony and Cleopatra

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REWORKING "SEEMING TRUST" INTO "EXCELLENT FALSEHOOD": THE LYING HEROES OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S DARK LADY SONNETS AND *ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA*

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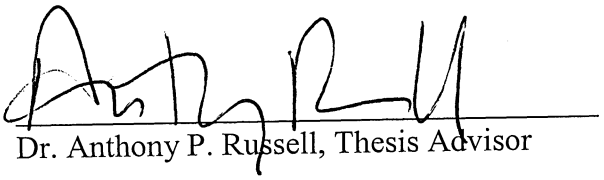
Abstract:

William Shakespeare reinvents the speaker of his Dark Lady sonnets as Antony of *Antony and Cleopatra*, with the former's hesitant appreciation of the benefits of a "lying," lustful relationship reconfigured into the latter's total embrace of an edifying, creative mutuality. This represents an important philosophical shift in Shakespeare's view of aesthetics: where in the Dark Lady sonnets, the speaker chastises himself for feeding his desire with lies and self delusions, Antony, his parallel, believes that the love he and his queen have created is somehow noble, even ideal. He rejects the "truth"— perhaps as the Romans would see it— in favor of an idealized love by way of an idealized self. This swing demonstrates a shift from poetry that strives only to represent some epideictic truth or fixed reality to that which extols the creation of the self as a supreme work of artifice, a malleable product shaped by will and belief.

I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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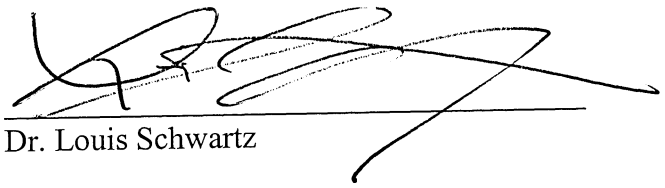

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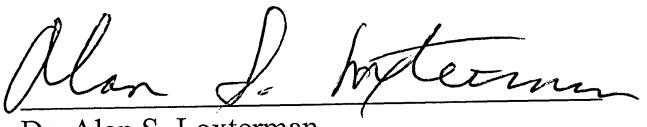

Dr. Alan S. Loxterman

REWORKING "SEEMING TRUST" INTO "EXCELLENT FALSEHOOD": THE LYING HEROES OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S DARK LADY SONNETS AND *ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA*

By

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In his Dark Lady sonnet sequence, William Shakespeare traps us inside the mind of a man struggling against a most worthy foe, his own uncontrollable lust for an unworthy lover. Perhaps unsatisfied, the poet stages this battle again some six or seven years later in his play *Antony and Cleopatra*. Witness how the sonnet speaker's descriptions of the dynamic between himself and his lady are mirrored in Philo's assessment of Antony and Cleopatra's relationship:

> But my five wits, nor my five senses can
> Dissuade one foolish heart from serving thee,
> Who leaves unswayed the likeness of a man,
> Thy proud heart's slave and vassal wretch to be. (141.9-12)

> Who taught thee how to make me love thee more,
> The more I hear and see just cause of hate?
> O, though I love what others do abhor,
> With others thou shouldst not abhor my state:
> If thy unworthiness raised love in me,
> More worthy I to be belov'd of thee. (150.9-14)

> *Philo* Nay, but this dotage of our general's
> O'erflows the measure. Those his goodly eyes
> That o'er the files and musters of war
> Have glowed like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
> The office and devotion of their view
> Upon a tawny front. 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.
> Look where they come:
> Take but good note, and you shall see him
> The triple pillar of the world transformed
> Into a strumpet's fool. Behold and see. (I.i.1-13)

Foolish hearts and strumpet's fools. If we did not know better, we might think these passages were taken from the same source and used to portray the same man. When Philo speaks of how Antony dotes excessively on Cleopatra, turning his "goodly eyes"

from war matters to rest "upon a tawny front," his captain's heart once fierce with war now just "the bellows and fan to cool a gypsy's lust," do we not hear echoes of the sonnet speaker's plight? Has he not turned his eyes and, more importantly, his verse away from a more decent pursuit, the immortalization of the Young Man in favor of the rather vulgar Dark Lady? Likewise, could the speaker's account of how neither his wits nor his senses can guide his "foolish heart" away from the Dark Lady, leaving him the empty shell or "likeness" of a man, unswayed by what he knows and sees, not just as easily spill from Antony's mouth after one of Cleopatra's several betrayals?

Both men desire women whom others deem unworthy. Both men work to deny the faults of their lovers, repeatedly remaking their deficiencies as perfections. And finally, both men come to an existential crossroads thanks to their respective obsessions with these dark ladies. The sonnet speaker is forced to consider the very quality of his verse when dedicated to his lying, whoring Dark Lady. Is his verse somehow fallen because it is generated by a passion for a debauched beloved, even "blindly" extolling her at times? Antony, in much the same manner, is made to confront the dulling of his own warrior sensibilities and the dissolution of his Roman self. Do his ties to Cleopatra cause him to make blunders which ultimately lead not only to his defeat in war, but also to his own death?

In the sub-sequence of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* dealing with the Dark Lady, the speaker, formerly consumed by a narcissistic, somewhat sexual obsession with a largely idealized young man, transfers his attention to someone who would seem to represent the very opposite—a dark-featured, openly wanton woman. Characterized by both her dark

appearance—"my mistress' eyes are raven black" (127.9), "black wires grow on her head" (130.4)—and her faithlessness—"in nothing art thou black save in thy deeds" (131.13)—this woman is rightfully referred to as "the Dark Lady" by most readers and critics. In sonnet after sonnet of this sub-sequence, the speaker alternately praises the lady for a unique beauty that others are blind to, or chastises her for abusing him with her infidelity. In these latter moments, the speaker also critiques himself for being blind to her physical and moral faults at various times, a slave to his own desire. When this destructive, unruly lust and reflexive self-loathing come to dominate the sonneteer's lines, a paralyzing threat to his own self is revealed; he seems palpably gripped by an anxiety that arises from the conflict between his furious longing for this unworthy beloved and its possible impact on the quality of his verse. After all, if the speaker's lover is unworthy, how can verse that frequently works to canonize her be anything other than corrupt?

It is this anxiety that tells us that the speaker is not unaware of the strain his passion is putting on his writing and his very self. No, by and large, it seems the sonnet speaker is completely self-aware, acknowledging the corrupted nature of his lady and their relationship, even pausing in moments like that presented in Sonnet 138 to welcome their moral frailties as a means of satisfying their lust for one another. Though the speaker, at times, rebukes himself for telling lies about the true nature of his beloved, (i.e., that she is fair and true when she is not) it is clear that the *meaning* conveyed through the poetry is more truth than fiction. The reader is always aware that the lady is flawed, (dark-haired, lying, and unfaithful), and that the relationship between the two is

infected with lust. More importantly, the speaker, despite his protestations about his lady's lack of truthfulness (as in Sonnets 147 and 150), also concedes, quite cheerfully, that bits of mutual dishonesty fuel the relationship, making it benefit each party (Sonnet 138). In other words, though the speaker and the lady may be untruthful to one another, in the end, each is fulfilled in that their lust, and perhaps their pride, is satisfied.

Antony, in a similar fashion, is obsessed with Cleopatra, another "dark lady." Just as Philo instructs us in the play's opening lines, we can easily "behold and see" a "pillar of the world" transformed into a "strumpet's fool." Thanks chiefly to the influence of Cleopatra, Antony rejects his Roman nature, turning away from a life as a matchless soldier and a respected leader. Antony's fascination with the tantalizing Cleopatra clouds his warring abilities, causing him to mishandle his conflicts with Caesar, which ultimately brings on his defeat. By the story's end, even Antony, who is usually blind to the troubles caused by the Egyptian queen, is able to acknowledge her role in his overthrow:

> All is lost!
> This foul Egyptian hath betrayed me:
> My fleet hath yielded to the foe, and yonder
> They cast their caps up and carouse together
> Like friends long lost. Triple-turned whore! 'Tis thou
> Hast sold me to this novice, and my heart
> Makes only wars on thee. (IV.xii.9-15)

As Antony ruefully laments that Cleopatra has betrayed him for a third time, allowing Caesar to triumph over him, it is important to notice how he is self-aware enough to recognize his lady's corrupted nature and its role in his ultimate downfall. At this instance of utter despair, Cleopatra is to Antony a "foul" betrayer deserving that only

wars, and not love, be made from his heart. Again, these lines seem entirely reminiscent of the sonnet speaker's disgust with the Dark Lady:

> My thoughts and my discourse are as madmen's are,
> At random from the truth vainly expressed;
> For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright,
> Who art as black as hell, as dark as night. (147.11-14)

However, Antony's contempt for his dark lady is, as always, short-lived. Time and time again, we see Antony on the verge of breaking away from Cleopatra, only to be drawn back by thoughts of their ideal, transcendent love. But is what exists between Antony and Cleopatra as much ideal love as sexual attraction? Yes, and it is what keeps him and his queen connected, and also what distinguishes Antony's situation from that of his fellow lover, the sonnet speaker. Through Antony and Cleopatra, Shakespeare allows the mutual dishonesty that handcuffed the sonnet speaker to his lady to blossom into a liberating creative mutuality, a shared vision of the lovers' supremacy. In doing so, the instability brought on by strong sexuality in the Dark Lady sonnets is defused, even exalted within Antony and Cleopatra's narrative as it powers the lovers to go beyond the confines of dull, restrictive reality.

Indeed, in this discussion, I will argue that Shakespeare reinvents the speaker of his Dark Lady sonnets as Antony of *Antony and Cleopatra*, with the former's hesitant appreciation of the benefits of a "lying," lustful relationship reconfigured into the latter's total embrace of an edifying, creative mutuality. For Antony, the sort of "lying mutuality" praised by the speaker in sonnets like 138: "Therefore I lie with her, and she with me,/And in our faults by lies we flattered be," becomes a creative redrafting of reality, a means for Cleopatra and himself to imagine themselves as unparalleled, all-

powerful lovers. In turn, this passion allows Antony to become for us the perfect lover/warrior figure Cleopatra sees him to be, not a flawed, lusting *human* being. This represents an important philosophical shift in Shakespeare's view of aesthetics: where in the Dark Lady sonnets, the speaker chastises himself for feeding his desire with lies and self delusions, Antony, his parallel, believes that the love he and his queen have created is somehow noble, even ideal. He rejects the "truth"—perhaps as the Romans would see it— in favor of an idealized love by way of an idealized self. How does this swing affect our understanding of Shakespeare's message about the meaning of art? It demonstrates a shift from poetry that strives only to represent some epideictic truth or fixed reality to that which extols the creation of the self as a supreme work of artifice, a malleable product shaped by will and belief.

Before examining how Shakespeare transforms his Dark Lady sonnet speaker into his Antony, bringing with this transformation a host of issues concerning both identity and the nature of aesthetics, it is necessary to first briefly establish what the two men have in common. Both the speaker and Antony suffer from an uncontrollable yearning for a somehow non-traditional lover, a hunger that effectively jeopardizes that which each has been heretofore, a poet and a warrior respectively. But exactly how are these lovers' ladies non-traditional, and, more importantly, why is this significant?

First, both the Dark Lady and Cleopatra are non-traditional in that each fails to meet typical Petrarchan-styled standards for what is ideal and worthy in a lover. These beloveds are not honest, chaste, blonde-haired, blue-eyed lovelies whose purity and remoteness somehow work to inspire their lovers. Instead, they are deceitful, lascivious,

dark-featured women whose sexuality and accessibility effectively entice and engage their lovers. In short, the Dark Lady is no Young Man just as Cleopatra is no Octavia. These dark ladies are not meant to be worshipped from afar for their ideality, but enjoyed firsthand for the lusty pleasures each offers. And while the sonnet speaker does frequently maneuver to paint his Dark Lady as some new styled, darker version of perfection, it is usually in an effort to justify why he should spend his time on her. On the one hand, the Dark Lady is a new form of beauty sprung up from either the corruption of more traditional beauty by artifice (Sonnet 127) or the pity she feels for her cruel treatment of the speaker (Sonnet 132); on the other, she is traditionally beautiful, but judged by others to be insufficient because of her moral ugliness (Sonnets 131 and 132). Of course, later the sonnet speaker will call into question what his eyes have seen and what lines he has written—for example, "In faith I do not love thee with mine eyes,/For they in thee a thousand errors note;/But 'tis my heart that loves what they despise,/Who in despite of view is pleased to dote" (141.1-4)—but what seems to withstand all of the lover's wavering on the subject of his mistress is the fact that she is openly untrue and sexually permissive. So whether or not the Dark Lady is truly beautiful on the outside becomes less important when we recognize that it effectively matters little to the speaker—he cannot resist her regardless of her appearance or her treatment of him.

Cleopatra, too, has an irresistible quality that not only draws in Antony, but amazes others as well. By and large, the Egyptian queen is described as an unequalled, rare beauty who is equipped with the power to attract and affect all that surrounds her; she is a dangerously charming vixen who excels at using her attributes, largely sexual, to

acquire that which she wants. While the Romans are quick to label Cleopatra as a "strumpet" or a "whore," it seems her physical appeal is universally acknowledged and is best evidenced in the following speech by Enobarbus, a reliable teller of events in the play:

> 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 out work nature.... (II.ii.203-207)
>
> From the barge
> A strange invisible perfume hits the sense
> Of the adjacent wharfs. The city cast
> Her people out upon her; and Antony,
> Enthroned i' th' marketplace, did sit alone,
> Whistling to th' air; which, but for vacancy,
> Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,
> And made a gap in nature. (II.ii.217-223)

Here, Enobarbus's description of how Cleopatra looks the first time that Antony sees her emphasizes her ineffable nature. Her "person" or her physical appearance "beggar[s] all description," it makes any attempt to put into words how she looks meager. Moreover, the vision of Cleopatra laid out in her golden pavilion trumps even that presented by a painting of Venus which itself "out work[s] nature." In other words, Cleopatra seems to supercede both art and nature as her physical authority outdoes that of a piece of art which, in turn, would be more remarkable than mere nature. It is, in this astonishing manner, that, again according to Enobarbus, Cleopatra "ma[kes] a gap in nature," drawing out everything from the surrounding marketplace to view her, save for the air itself.

We get a less flattering version of the Egyptian queen in the following comments on Antony's surrender to her from Caesar and then Maecenas:

> No my most wronged sister, Cleopatra
> Hath nodded him to her. He hath given his empire
> Up to a whore, who now are levying
> The kings o' th' earth for war. (III.vi.65-68)
>
> [To Octavia] Welcome dear madam.
> Each heart in Rome doth love and pity you.
> Only th' adulterous Antony, most large
> In his abominations, turns you off
> And gives his potent regiment to a trull
> That noises it against us. (III.vi.91-96)

Obviously, the words of Caesar and Maecenas, spoken to comfort Octavia, the bride Antony forsakes for Cleopatra, demonstrate the Roman view that the queen is nothing more than a "whore" or a "trull"—a prostitute. And how has this temptress used her power over Antony? To not only lure Antony away from his faithful wife, but also to turn him against his fellow Romans, "nois[ing]" his forces against them.

How can it be that Cleopatra is perceived as both a superhuman beauty and a super-cunning whore. This seeming tension in characterization can be explained by remembering that the remarks disparaging Cleopatra found throughout the play come from those people with a vested interest in discrediting her and her relationship with Antony. Or, alternatively, we can venture that these ostensibly paradoxical assessments of Cleopatra are not as contradictory as they seem. As Julian Markels comments in his *The Pillar of the World: Antony and Cleopatra in Shakespeare's Development*, "'Greatness' and 'whore' both are accurate words for Cleopatra. But they do not cancel each other's meaning. Rather, each exerts its meaning inseparably from that of the other,

and together they make a single imaginative perception" (6). In both cases, Cleopatra is exceeding in nature; she has the power to affect remarkable change in others, whether they are Egyptians, Antony, or the air itself. Yet this power is, in both instances, somehow beyond the natural. After all, Cleopatra has an ability to nearly lure the air from the marketplace, creating a "gap in nature" that is not so unlike her supposed capacity to transform Antony, one of the most heroic and influential world leaders, into a cuckolded fool. John Holloway discusses Cleopatra's amazing vitality and attractiveness in his article "*Antony and Cleopatra,*" suggesting that it is her energy and rowdy embrace of life that causes others to be drawn to her in this way:

> It is [Cleopatra's] vitality that inevitably takes the form of an irresistible sexual fascination and life.... Whatever she does, her spirits and energy turn always one way; whether it is hanging a dead fish on Antony's rod as he fishes, out-drinking him, dressing him in her own clothes as he lies in drunken sleep, or roystering in disguise with him at night. What is more, this is exactly how he sees her. Planning this night-time prank, Antony makes it plain that for him, it is Cleopatra's vitality that makes her sexually irresistible; and that it does so with a nuance that leaves her an object of wondering admiration. (67)

Cleopatra's unique talent for integrating antithetical traits into her self is also supported by the fact that when she speaks, she is flawless despite her imperfections. For instance, the fairly objective Enobarbus also makes the following two claims about Cleopatra's perfection, timelessness, and insatiable attractiveness:

> I saw her once
> Hop forty paces through the public street;
> And having lost her breath, she spoke, and panted,
> That she did make defect perfection,
> And breathless, pow'r breathe forth. (II.ii.234-238)

> Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
> Her infinite variety: other women cloy

> The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
> Where she most satisfies; for vilest things
> Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
> Bless her when she is riggish. (II.ii.240-246)

According to Enobarbus, Cleopatra is capable of converting her own imperfection into perfection. More importantly, she is also invested with the power to charm others with the limitlessness of her person, "her infinite variety." As we shall see, it is this tendency of Cleopatra's to fuse disparate versions of herself into a superior, all enticing form that inspires the creative mutuality between her and Antony to arise. In the same way that the Egyptian transforms her own defects into perfection, she and Antony reconstruct their tawdry affair into an ideal union, a coupling of the gods.

Interestingly, the sonnet speaker also ingrains within his mistress a certain quality that "makes defect perfection" in Sonnet 130:

> My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
> Coral is far more red, than her lips red:
> If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
> If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
> I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
> But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
> And in some perfumes is there more delight
> Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
> I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
> That music hath a far more pleasing sound:
> I grant I never saw a goddess go,
> My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:
> And yet by heaven, I think my love as rare,
> As any she belied with false compare.

While much has been written about the fun that Shakespeare seems to have here working against typical sonnet conventions that praise the beloved's fair features, for my intents, this poem is important in that it demonstrates how the Dark Lady, like Cleopatra, exceeds

usual expectations of beauty despite representing their very opposite. In other words, though the speaker catalogues the various parts of his lady which fail to live up to traditional standards of beauty and delight—her eyes, lips, breasts, hair, cheeks, breath, and voice are far from Petrarchan in character—the Dark Lady, like Cleopatra, is excellent despite, or perhaps because, of her defects. The Dark Lady is no goddess. She is *real* and yet as "rare" or as precious as any graced with their lover's exaggerated praise or "false compare." More simply, in the world of sonnet sequences where beloveds are perfect, unobtainable objects of worship, the Dark Lady functions very differently—she represents reality.

And how do we compare the Dark Lady, this figure of reality, and Cleopatra, someone extraordinarily beyond reality? It seems that while Cleopatra overpowers both nature and art, standing as a sort of supernatural force who can transform defect into perfection, the Dark Lady is, in the instance of Sonnet 130, simply more perfect to the sonnet speaker with her imperfections. Both mistresses, therefore, are not only viewed as corruptive, but also possess dark features which are, in different ways, changed into something more remarkable than mere perfection.

Why are the non-traditional natures of these women relevant to this discussion? Because to know how each dark lady, in her own way, "makes defect perfection" helps us understand why both the speaker and Antony are repeatedly drawn back to their mistresses, despite being aware of the dangers each represents. In other words, it is important to know something about the natures of the women who have the awesome power to make their lovers grapple with their very notions of self. While the sonnet

speaker will be driven by his desire to offer himself up as nothing in an effort to woo back his mistress—"For nothing hold me, so it please thee hold/That nothing me, a sweet something to thee" (136.11-12)—Antony releases himself from the role of heroic Roman warrior in favor of one which is even more idealized, that of a dream-Antony, a lover warrior. In other words, Antony prefers to be more "legend" than human, and Cleopatra helps fulfill this desire. But what does Antony forfeit by choosing to submit to Cleopatra's perfect, though artificial vision: "it is usually said that Mark Antony is confronted by a choice between the values represented by Cleopatra and those represented by Octavius Caesar; and that however inadequate either value might be, he resolves this conflict by choosing Cleopatra and giving up the world" (Markels 9). What we must remember, however, is that for Antony, the world has ultimately become the love that Cleopatra and he have created.

Beginning now with the sonnet speaker and his awareness of the "lying mutuality" he and his mistress share, it is first necessary to make the following qualifying statement: very little that is said in the poems dealing with the Dark Lady is stable or definitive. As mentioned earlier, the Dark Lady sonnets are rife with the tension created by conflicting assertions of fact: the Dark Lady is beautiful and not beautiful; the speaker happily and unhappily desires the Dark Lady despite her flaws; and the speaker accepts and rejects the fact that he is obsessed with a dishonest mistress. While it is easy to get frustrated in this swamp of inconsistencies, it does appear that there is a bit of essential truth to be found in the speaker's words, whether intentionally or not. It seems that in the moments in which the sonnet speaker is extolling his mistress and their love, he is simply

deceiving himself. More importantly, based on his very own words, as we will see below, the speaker *is aware* that he is lying since he does occasionally maintain that his lady has made his perceptions unreliable, his own eyes untrue. Though what the speaker swears to his mistress (and to himself) is often false, a means toward satisfying or justifying his lust, what he *writes* is true, and, in fact, belies his own concerns about his obsession with an unworthy beloved.

For example, despite moments like that found in Sonnet 131 where the speaker claims that to his "dear doting heart" the Dark Lady is "the fairest and most precious jewel" and "[her] black is fairest in [his] judgment's place," even he admits more times than not to the less than beautiful nature of his mistress, sometimes rather light-heartedly as in Sonnet 130 ("My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun"), but often more pessimistically:

> Thou blind fool love, what dost thou to mine eyes,
> That they behold and see not what they see?
> They know what beauty is, see where it lies,
> Yet what the best is take the worst to be. (137.1-4)
>
> O me! What eyes hath love put in my head,
> Which have no correspondence with true sight!
> Or if they have, where is my judgment fled,
> That censures falsely what they see aright? (148.1-4)
>
> O from what pow'r hast thou this pow'rful might,
> With insufficiency my heart to sway?
> To make me give the lie to my true sight,
> And swear that brightness doth not grace the day? (150.1-4)
>
> My love is as a fever, longing still
> For that which longer nurseth the disease,
> Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,
> Th' uncertain sickly appetite to please. (147. 1-4)

In these lines, the speaker wonders "what eyes hath love put in [his] head" that "behold and see not what they see" and "have no correspondence with true sight." In other words, how is it that his eyes, whether coerced by love (137.1 and 148.1) or the Dark Lady herself (150.1), "what the best is take the worst to be," or judge the devious mistress to be not unworthy, but admirable. In each of these instances, the speaker concedes that his beloved is not worthy, that his eyes mislead him into seeing her as sufficient when she is not. Because of this, the Dark Lady is able to wield a sexual power over him, tying him to her.

In these passages there is a tension: the speaker notes the Dark Lady's "insufficiency" but also claims that she has made him "give the lie to [his] true sight." How can this be? How can the speaker claim that the lady builds in him a feverish desire that "long[s] still/For that which longer nurseth the disease" by exercising a power which makes him blind to her faults, while simultaneously asserting that he sees those very faults? Either he sees her faults or he does not. Clearly, he is *not* the victim of misperception. In other words, in writing about how he is supposedly blind to what his mistress lacks, isn't he giving away the fact that he is aware of her flaws? The speaker knows that his Dark Lady is not fair, but in some cases he chooses to lie that she is, while at other times, he opts instead to acknowledge her unworthiness.

Why is the sonnet speaker playing this game? Because, this is one of the ways in which he seeks to absolve himself of the guilt associated with being involved in this degrading affair. The speaker wants to avoid admitting outright that he knows the Dark Lady is neither fair nor honest. This, after all, would mean that his desire for the lady is

rooted in simple, uncontrollable lust and nothing else. Otherwise, would he not be able to rationally resist her based on her unworthiness? Yes, but in truth, he cannot. So, instead, we find the speaker claiming, in simple terms, that it's her fault—she makes it impossible for him to see her for what she is; thus, he keeps on wanting her. But we as readers can clearly tell that this is a lie. As we have seen already, the speaker knows just whom he is involved with, yet he *chooses* to go forward in the affair, at times even begging his mistress to continue it (Sonnets 135 and 136 for instance), in order to feed his own sexual desire. And, all of this protesting about him being made blind to her faults is just a sign of the speaker's own discomfort with the notion that he is essentially a slave to his own lust. It shows us that the speaker is conflicted—driven to pursue an unworthy mistress while simultaneously compelled to make excuses for his continued pursuit of her.

We see, then, that in the Dark Lady sonnets, sexuality is cast in a negative light; it is a lusty demon that drives the speaker toward ruination. Sonnet 129, a poem appearing early in the Dark Lady subsequence, even before questions about the fairness and virtue of this beloved arise, deals entirely with the physical, psychological, and moral qualities of sexual desire:

> Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame
> Is lust in action, and till action lust
> Is perjured, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,
> Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust,
> Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight,
> Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,
> Past reason hated as a swallowed bait,
> On purpose laid to make the taker mad;
> Mad in pursuit, and in possession so,
> Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme,
> A bliss in proof, and proved, a very woe,
> Before, a joy proposed, behind, a dream.

All this the world well knows, yet none knows well
To shun the heav'n that leads men to this hell.

Here, both the speaker and his mistress are noticeably absent from the action of the poem as this account of desire unfolds in a somewhat impersonal manner, a fact that Carol Thomas Neely discusses at length in her article "Detachment and Engagement in Shakespeare's Sonnets: 94, 116, and 129." Indeed, according to Neely, these three sonnets stand out amongst the others of the sequence in that, in each instance, "...the beloved is absent from them, and the poet-lover himself is submerged; the poems are deliberately impersonal, general, immobile[,]" thus providing the speaker with a sense of detachment from "the immediate painful situation—to contemplate, hypothesize, 'fix it'" that inevitably proves futile (83).

Specifically in regard to Sonnet 129, Neely argues that desire, as presented by Shakespeare, "is distanced, depersonalized, analyzed in an unconventional way[;]" moreover, though "in action," lust is "absolute, unconditional, inalterable," a fact that is "conveyed through the numerous repetitions of the sonnet, which employs virtually all of the standard rhetorical figures of repetition" (91). In other words, it is Neely's opinion that lust functions in a paradoxical state of active inaction, mirrored by the way in which its trajectory from "pursuit to consumption to aftermath... is repeated in the same order three times in the first ten lines of the sonnet..." until its dramatic reversal in line 10—"Had, having, and in quest, to have extreme." Lust is constantly moving, yet it goes nowhere. This, in turn, reflects the way in which the poet's contempt for lust is tempered by the poem's end: "A bliss in proof, and proved, a very woe,/Before, a joy

proposed, behind, a dream." Neely concludes her discussion of this sonnet by asserting that

> The metamorphosis of "Th'expence of Spirit in a waste of shame" into "Before, a joy proposd, behind a dreame" is a model for and precursor of all the other metamorphoses in subsequent dark lady sonnets: ugliness into beauty, dark into bright, unworthiness into worthiness, sickness into health, lies into truth. Nothing is fixed in these sonnets. They describe with manic accuracy the corrupted and corrupting relationship in which the poet is entangled and, in their couplets, paradoxically and desperately justify it. (91)

Neely's reading of Sonnet 129 is useful in that it interestingly suggests that this poem can be read as a paradigm for the entire Dark Lady subsequence: lust is imagined not in terms that evolve from bad to good, but as a state in constant tension, ever oscillating between "Had, having, and in quest to have" "a joy proposed, behind, a *dream*" and, conversely, "the heav'n that leads men to this *hell*." After all, this is, in fact, how the speaker's desire for his mistress seems to operate.

In his article, "Sonnet CXXIX as a 'Dramatic' Poem," Richard Levin explores the dramatic aspects of this sonnet even further, arguing the following:

> The sonnet can be analyzed more fruitfully in dramatic terms, much as one would analyze a soliloquy in a play. If we are prepared to examine it from this perspective—to see it, that is, not as Shakespeare's 'disquisition' upon an abstract topic, but as an attempt to render the response, at once emotional and intellectual, of a certain kind of man in a concrete situation—then I believe it will be found to have an extremely effective structure, one which corresponds to the metrical divisions and also to our own experience of the poem. (177)
>
> Regarded in this light, the sonnet presents an easily understood dramatic situation: in it a man (the 'speaker' of these lines) is reacting with bitter disgust to a recent sexual encounter. (177)
>
> For the basic irony of the poem...is this dramatic demonstration that in this man (part of whom we must recognize in ourselves) the revulsion that lust always produces cannot long hold out against the pleasure that lust always

> promises. After the act of lust, he realized, in his disgust, that it was an expense of spirit, but this poem (or, rather, the action it renders) has been an expense of his disgust, and so there is now nothing more to keep this 'after' stage from fading into the next 'before' stage. (180)

In Levin's estimation, Sonnet 129 works to dramatize the relationship between the speaker and the Dark Lady, emphasizing how the former's revulsion for the latter cannot prevent him from continuing to seek out the pleasure she affords him.

Applying the readings of Sonnet 129 by both Neely and Levin to our discussion, then, we can better appreciate how lust is the motor propelling the relationship between the speaker and his dark lady, and how this truth disturbs him. It does not, however, stop him from pursuing the lady; instead, it only manages to yield, in my opinion, his protestations about his "perjured eye," as well as his more limited admissions about their lying mutuality. Still, does the speaker's talk of madness and lying verse detract from poems' truth? No, as we have seen, the speaker's self-awareness alerts reader to the "truth" of the matter.

Does the sonnet speaker ever embrace his lust for the Dark Lady or admit to the lying spirit of their relationship? Does he drop the guise of being blinded to her faults, a victim of her deception? Indeed, and this is just what portends to Antony's later embrace of creative mutuality. In Sonnet 138, then, we find the speaker in this important moment of honesty, explaining how both he and his mistress benefit from "lying":

> When my love swears that she is made of truth,
> I do believe her though I know she lies,
> That she might think me some untutored youth,
> Unlearned in the world's false subtleties.
> Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,
> Although she knows my days are past the best,
> Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue:

On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed:
But wherefore says she not she is unjust?
And wherefore say not I that I am old?
O! love's best habit is in seeming trust,
And age in love, loves not to have years told:
Therefore I lie with her, and she with me,
And in our faults by lies we flattered be.

In this poem's opening lines, the speaker openly admits to believing his mistress when she swears she is true, even though he knows she lies. As put forth earlier, we clearly have evidence here of a man who knows what is true about his lady, despite declaring that he is blind to it. Not only does the speaker know that his mistress lies, that she speaks what is not true, but, with help of a pun on the word "lies," he also acknowledges her questionable sexual pursuits, that she "lies with" or beds others. The speaker goes on to explain in greater detail the mutuality of their lying relationship. What lies does each lover tell? Of course, the speaker lies that his mistress is true. In return, the Dark Lady lies not only that she is true as well, but also that her lover is a naïve, "untutored youth," "unlearned in the world's false subtleties." In short, the Dark Lady feeds the speaker's vanity, ignoring the fact that his "days are past the best."

From this, the speaker, perhaps reading the audience's mind, wonders why he and his mistress keep up this pretense. Why does his mistress not admit that "she is unjust"? And, likewise, why does the speaker not acknowledge that he is old? As answer, he then confesses that they both benefit from "believing" the other's lies, producing a somewhat sordid exchange of truth for pleasure. Indeed, these lies fulfill two purposes. First, and most obviously, these lies allow the lovers to sustain their affair, satisfying their lust. Were the speaker and his lady to address the others' faults directly, that she is

promiscuous and he is old, the relationship would, no doubt, suffer. Second, these lies help the lovers become what each would wish to be. As the speaker explains in the last lines of the sonnet, the Dark Lady wants to seem trustworthy just as he wants to seem young. Therefore, when the pair, again in the double sense, "lie" together, they become within the world of their relationship what they truly are not—they are "in [their] faults"—her wantonness, his age—"flattered" by the lies they tell each other. Later, Shakespeare will push the limits of this idea, allowing the "excellent falsehoods" Antony and Cleopatra swear to each other to actually become truths for them. In doing so, the oppressive tension created for the speaker by his sexual desire for the Dark Lady is tempered in *Antony and Cleopatra* as the lovers' sexuality does not yield guilt nor anxiety; instead, it is a natural part of their relationship.

Foreshadowing this transition, in Sonnet 138, we have the sonnet speaker describing a sort of lying mutuality that exists between himself and his lady. In his essay, "Loves of Comfort and Despair: A Reading of Shakespeare's Sonnet 138," Edward A. Snow examines in detail the idea that, along with this feeling of mutuality, there is a certain optimistic realism embedded in this poem that "... leaves us with the impression of the two lovers no longer laboring under but resting upon, even buoyed up by the deceptions they practice on each other..." (479):

> For in addition to locating the threshold that separates *Othello* from *Antony and Cleopatra*, the sonnet passes over it, to achieve something of an epiphany. We come upon it, within either the sonnet sequence or Shakespeare's work as a whole, not as a field of conflicts, but as a moment of repose. The grounds for cynicism and despair in Shakespeare's romantic vision are the stuff of the poem, but it manages to transform them into something workable, even strangely affirmative and idealistic. And this transformation is accomplished through the minutest semantic

> and syntactic adjustments. Indeed, if one can generalize from the sonnet, then no more separates what is most negative from what is most positive in Shakespeare than a subtle distinction in tone. (462)

In the argument that follows, Snow uses line-by-line analysis to support his claim that the tone established and sustained in Sonnet 138 is "gentle, resolved, lovingly acceptant" (463), analyzing variances between the 1599 and 1609 versions and comparing it to several of Shakespeare's dramas, notably *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, in the process.

Snow's work is useful here because it complements my point that the sonnet speaker is aware of how his relationship with the Dark Lady is based on a lying mutuality, and it also establishes the poem's tone as optimistic, even idealistic. Snow begins by addressing the poem's opening lines, particularly how the speaker can claim to "believe her though he knows she lies"—a logical impossibility—he concludes that here "belief *is* a matter of love, or at least presupposes it... and it has to do with the person of his beloved rather than her professions" (464). A brief excerpt from Snow's explanation of lines one and two works nicely to illustrate his overall point:

> The intimate, almost complacent tone is simultaneously a seduction and a provocation: what should be logical contradiction is presented as if it were matter-of-factly intelligible; what seems an obvious piece of self-deception communicates lucidity and peace of mind.
>
> Yet beneath the sonnet's apparent offhandedness, fine and crucial distinctions are being made. The mistress swears that she is *made of truth*, not that she is "true" or "telling the truth"; the speaker believes *her*, not her vows or lies. The continuing life of a relationship can depend on, may even consist in the gap between what one is and what one says, or what one says and what one means in the saying of it. And—as if really to take her at her word, more literally even than she intends—if she is *made* of truth, even her lies must be true, or manifest her truth; such lies, properly understood, may elicit belief rather than undermine it. (463)

Here, in explaining the "logical contradiction" of the speaker's words, Snow argues that it is an essential belief in the lady, not her words, that allows the speaker to continue in the relationship. In other words, it seems that this critic is suggesting that there exists such a strong bond between what is and what is said, or perhaps what is meant by what is said, that, in effect, to say something is to make it true. Thus, when the Dark Lady says that she is *made* of truth, she *is* in the speaker's eyes, regardless of what is actually known to be true. In so doing, we see signs of what will become Cleopatra's own affinity for "excellent falsehoods," her ability to make belief out of doubt.

According to Snow, the speaker and his lady tell lies to one another and then credit them with belief; this, in turn, weaves the lies together to establish a "true," fulfilling private world that even Donne might appreciate. In this way, Snow believes that "the sonnet establishes an emotional continuum where everything is ultimately a matter of 'belief'" (472), that for the speaker and his lady, truth is just what they make it. As a result, we arrive, with his reading of later lines, at a certain feeling of mutuality:

> The speaker's convoluted reasonings and quixotic generosity on the question of intent arrive at a truth, a reality, that may be closed to a more "realistic" view of things; they communicate to us not an isolated consciousness but a relationship, a mutuality, in which (I think) we believe. (470)

Clearly, Snow is of use to us because he helps establish a means for understanding the sort of lying give and take in which the speaker and his mistress engage. Whether fully accepting Snow's point that these lovers create their own truth by simply believing what it is they say to one another, or assuming, as I do, that the pair enjoy the benefits of their lies more than they actually "believe" them, mutuality is undeniable. Indeed, even Snow

admits that in the later lines of Sonnet 138, the poem "draws back into a simpler, externally situated mutuality... but without really annulling what has gone before," (470). More importantly, Snow's reading of the poem effectively conveys how we find a sort of sanguine acceptance in the speaker's words. Despite the many variations in attitude found in the Dark Lady subsequence, it is here, when discussing how a lying mutuality benefits him and his lover, that the speaker seems uniquely content. More importantly and thanks to Snow's analysis, we see the groundwork for Antony and Cleopatra's creative mutuality being laid here by Shakespeare; later, this invulnerable fealty to a personal, self-created reality will unite and ennoble the Egyptian, another "made of truth," and her lover Antony.

Returning to our sonnet speaker, Sonnet 140 shows us how the mutuality exalted in Sonnet 138 can be destabilized when the lady fails to do her part. In doing so, it also provides support for the notion that the speaker does not necessarily believe the lies he tells, as Snow posits, so much as he needs them:

> Be wise as thou art cruel, do not press
> My tongue-tied patience with too much disdain:
> Lest sorrow lend me words, and words express
> The manner of my pity-wanting pain.
> If I might teach thee wit, better it were,
> Though not to love, yet, love, to tell me so;
> As testy sick men, when their deaths be near,
> No news but health from their physicians know.
> For if I should despair I should grow mad,
> And in my madness might speak ill of thee.
> Now this ill-wresting world is grown so bad,
> Mad sland'rers by mad ears believed be.
> That I may not be so, nor thou belied,
> Bear thine eyes straight, though thy proud heart go wide.

Here, the poet tells the Dark Lady to mindfully temper her disdain for him since it could likely force him to speak frankly about the pitiless treatment he receives from her. Despite the fact that she does not love him, the poet wants his lady to at least lie that she does. In fact, if he could teach the lady but one thing, it would not be to *actually* love him, but to simply *swear* that she does. He goes on to warn that he might go mad and "speak ill of" her, saying things that would easily be believed in this corrupt world. He concludes with, "That I may not be so [mad], nor thou belied,/Bear thine eyes straight, though thy proud heart go wide" (13-14)—in other words, "so I will not go mad and tell lies about you, seem faithful even though you are not."

The very illogic of this statement—that if the lady fails to seem true, the poet will go mad and tell lies (which are in fact truths) about her—shows how, as we have seen before, he blurs the line between what is true and what is false. Obviously, the speaker knows that the lady is untrue—such knowledge is the only thing that would lead him to warn her that she would be best served by matching her performance to his, telling him she loves him, even though she does not. The speaker, then, promotes his mistress' lying that she loves him in exchange for his not "speaking ill of" or revealing the truth about her. The lovers' lying mutuality is again reinforced. The speaker can hear that he is loved, though he is not, while the Dark Lady can escape "slandering," though she deserves it. From this, we confirm what was imagined in Sonnet 138, that the speaker is content to base his love for the Dark Lady on appearances and lies.

These readings of Sonnets 138 and 140 establish the lying mutuality present between the speaker and his mistress as well as the problems that ensue when this

balance is disrupted. As a result, we see how, in these instances, the speaker is uniquely aware of lying and its benefits. He does not, as we have seen in other sonnets, work to couch his lying about the Dark Lady in excuses about his eyes' blindness. Instead, he openly embraces how lies help to facilitate this affair, and, as Snow points out, the tone the speaker takes is fleetingly content and accepting. Why? Because, as we have seen, these lies allow the lovers to enjoy one another freely, being better versions of themselves, fairer and younger. There is no fantasizing that this love is pure or ideal, but it is satisfactory—it satisfies their lust. Here, we do not find the speaker feigning that he is blind to his mistress' deficiencies or complaining that he is trapped by desire in a destructive relationship. Quite the contrary, when the speaker bluntly describes the lying mutuality that he and his mistress enjoy, it stands as strikingly honest and unadorned. In other words, whereas in other sonnets, we as readers must see the truth of the situation through the speaker's very denials of it, here we are directly told the truth by the speaker himself. As we now turn our attention toward Antony, we will see how this mutuality between lovers becomes less about "lying" and more about creating the truth, making a more satisfying reality.

As we have already seen, the common ground for the sonnet speaker and Antony is that both men are involved with non-traditional beloveds who inflame within them an intense sexual desire. What's more, during the course of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony, like the speaker before him, is seen to rebel against his attraction to his mistress, recanting his love for her while pointing out its harmful powers. However, Antony's resolve to break away from his dark lady is even more short-lived than that of the sonnet

speaker. He is always drawn back to Cleopatra, actively working to dismiss her faults and to laud the idealness of their love. Within the play, we never find Antony in a moment like that of Sonnet 138, where he accepts the fact that the relationship he and Cleopatra share is based in something less than grand love. For Antony, there is no lying mutuality, as he and his lady are not simply fibbers setting out to fabricate a façade to temporarily justify their lust and feed their vanity. Instead, Antony and Cleopatra are true believers in the love they espouse to each other. We might even say that the pair slip into Snow's "gap between what one is and what one says" (463), creating for themselves a private world where their love is supreme despite their personal weaknesses.

In her book *The Common Liar: An Essay on Antony and Cleopatra*, Janet Adelman discusses how these two lovers work to achieve a love that is beyond belief, in a sense creating a romantic fiction for themselves that surpasses any real truth, in fact, uprooting it completely. Adelman argues persuasively that it is the tension produced between Antony and Cleopatra's actions—the fickleness and the betrayals—and their words—the genuine proclamations of affection—that actually provokes the reader's belief in their love in the end:

> But what do we make of a play in which our modes of vision lead us to several contradictory meanings? *Antony and Cleopatra* insists that we take the lovers simultaneously as very mortal characters and as gigantic semidivine figures. In this play, more than in any other, Shakespeare does not choose to suit the words to the action, the action to the words. We see Antony bungling not only Actium but even his own suicide; and then Cleopatra gives us her version of the emperor Antony. What do we do when the claims of the language and the action are in conflict?...
>
> The crisis in belief is present to some degree in many of Shakespeare's plays; but it is absolutely central to *Antony and Cleopatra*. It is built into

> the presentation of character, the dramatic structure, and even the poetic texture: for hyperbole, the characteristic verbal mode, appeals precisely to our belief in what we know to be impossible. Our response to this crisis is as fully part of the play as the response of the characters on stage: I shall therefore be particularly concerned with the means by which Shakespeare assures both our uncertainty and our final hesitant leap of faith. (11-12)

In other words, according to Adelman, Shakespeare persuades us to believe that Antony and Cleopatra are mythic-sized lovers, not fools, by eliciting our faith in them through his poetry, simultaneously in spite of and because of its unbelievability: "If we come to believe in the assertions of the poetry, it is, I think, precisely because they are so unbelievable" (110).

Adelman's handling of how Shakespeare makes skeptical believers of us all is useful to this discussion as it helps explain, too, how it is that both lovers, but especially Antony, come to be skeptical believers in their own love as well. In other words, while Adelman goes to impressive lengths to explain how it is that we as readers choose against our own better judgment to champion *Antony and Cleopatra* as a love story rather than a cautionary tale, we can press her message further, using it to explain how and why Antony chooses to love his Dark Lady, despite knowing better also.

While I contend that Antony and Cleopatra forge a creative mutuality, a shared belief in the power and scope of their love that makes it true for them, Adelman helps explicate how the pair can believe in something, the sublimity of their love, that irrefutable facts would seem to surely disprove. Remembering how in Act I, scene I, Antony's actions "approv[e] the common liar, who/Thus speaks of him in Rome," (59-61), Adelman wonders:

> If the liar's speech is verified in Antony's deeds, is he nonetheless a liar? Is truth itself the common liar?
>
> Throughout the play, the audience hears characters ask apparently unanswerable questions and watches them discuss one another without reaching any accord. We listen to a series of reports and judgments which are neither true nor false, or are both together, until even the concepts of truth and falsity lose their meanings. Shakespeare is not dallying with us only to confuse us. He is instead deliberately playing with these dramatic techniques in order to draw us into the act of judging. In effect, we are forced to judge and shown the folly of judgment at the same time: our double responses are an essential part of the play. (39)

Our hero Antony falls prey to Adelman's double responses as well, and it is here that we witness him choose the fiction as his truth, preferring to stay with Cleopatra in times where "truth" would reasonably lead him to abandon her altogether.

In order then, to arrive at just how Antony and Cleopatra utilize creative mutuality to carve out an eternity for both themselves and their love, we must first look at several notable instances of Adelman's "double response" theory played out in our hero. After all, it is in these crucial moments when Antony opts to reinvest in a relationship that appears to be spent that we see him create, with Cleopatra's help, the spectacle of their love. As aforementioned, there are several instances in the play in which Antony sees the folly of his ways—how his best interests would be served by leaving the Egyptian queen—and yet, in all cases, he quickly reverses and recommits to her instead. Let us begin with Antony's first resolution to leave the queen, coming on the heels of the news of his wife Fulvia's death.

After lamenting the loss of such a fine woman as the warrior Fulvia, "There's a great spirit gone!" (I.ii.123), Antony realizes, "I must from this enchanting queen break

off:/Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know,/My idleness doth hatch" (I.ii.129-131). Clearly Antony is aware here that his time spent "idle" with the queen, away from more important matters of state, is breeding "harms" and "ills." Though his confidante Enobarbus balks at Antony's wish to be gone from Egypt and Cleopatra at this moment, citing the nature of Cleopatra's love as reason for them to remain—"her passions are made of nothing but the finest part of pure love" (I.ii.148-149), Antony's stands firm (for an instant)—"Would I had never seen her!" (I.ii.154).

But, in what will become a pattern of behavior for Antony, his determination to leave Cleopatra will evaporate as soon as she comes on the scene to, in some way, plead her case for the superlative character of their love. Here, she enters, feels there's something amiss—"O, never was there queen/So mightily betrayed! Yet at the first/I saw treasons planted" (I.iii.24-26), and then sweeps into a glowing testimonial of how she and Antony's love *used* to surpass all others:

> 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, none our parts so poor
> But was a race of heaven; they are so still,
> Or thou, the greatest soldier of the world,
> Are turned the greatest liar. (I.iii.33-39)

The queen's message is clear. She wants to hear no pretext for Antony's going—if he must leave, then he should say goodbye and go. The time for words, Cleopatra goes on, was back when Antony pleaded to stay by her side—there was "no going then." Back then, she tells, they were like perfect lovers, "a race of heaven," their body parts—lips,

eyes, and brows— infused with eternity and bliss. And, she concludes, they still are so, or he, "the greatest soldier of the world" is turned "the greatest liar."

Antony is moved: "Hear me, Queen:/The strong necessity of time commands/Our services awhile; but my full heart/Remains in use with you," (I.iii.42-44). Though he must go, his duties as soldier and grieving husband call him back to Rome, his heart stays with Cleopatra. Is this the same man, who only a few dozen lines before vowed to "break off" from the queen? What is it in Cleopatra's testimony that causes this change of heart? The easiest answer is simply the nature of Cleopatra's rhetoric and her ability to remind Antony of the prefect love they share. Antony's love for her is reinforced by the way in which her words work to exalt both themselves and their love. Here, they are heavenly creatures, eternal and blissful.

And who, according to this Dark Lady, originally spoke these words? Antony himself. Cleopatra seems here only to be reminding her now wayward lover of what he has pledged to her in the past. Indeed, this is why, at the end of her speech, we find the queen daring Antony to tell her any different. If these words are not true, she declares, then Antony the great soldier has turned into Antony the great liar. And this is a possibility that Antony can in no way accept. Unlike the sonnet speaker, Antony has not told lies in order to keep his lady happy, simply transforming the truth into exaggerated, pretty fancies to further his lust along. Instead, he and his lady, as epitomized in this scene, rework the unpretty, uncomfortable truth into an alternative reality. Cleopatra most succinctly captures the necessity of such inventing after Antony's famous "Let Rome in Tiber melt speech" when she remarks, "Excellent falsehood!" (I.i.40), showing

her appreciation for the glowing rhetoric Antony had produced for her. Calling on the lying mutuality of the sonnet speaker before her, Cleopatra appreciates the power of a good lie; indeed, this instance was even used by Snow in his aforementioned treatment of Sonnet 138 to credit his thesis:

> Yet beneath the apparent cynicism of "Excellent falsehood!" there is genuine acceptance on the part of someone for whom the distinction between common lies and ennobling, passionately embodied fictions is more important than the Roman-minded difference between truth and falsity. (466)

Antony, as we will continue to see, is also blessed with this capability, aptly described by Snow, to call upon "common lies" and "ennobling, passionately embodied fictions." It is my belief that Antony, too, chooses to believe these fictions—he must—in order to trade the dreary confines of mortality for the divine:

> We hear the music of the god Hercules departing from Antony: and this invisible masque of withdrawal asserts the presence of the mythological realm in the human as powerfully as the masques and visions in the romances. The distinction between man and god is blurred. And if Hercules participates in the human realm, the lovers begin to participate in the divine: Cleopatra is like Venus or Isis and Antony like Mars. This insistence on the analogy between the human and the mythological, so foreign to the tragedies, is in fact and anticipation of the romances; for, in the last plays, precisely this sense of the participation of the mythic in human life becomes essential. Here, as in the romances, the characters themselves are on the way to becoming larger than life. (Adelman 80)

Adelman's explanation here of how both Antony and Cleopatra begin to participate in the realm of the gods, thus becoming "larger than life" or immortal, illustrates the effects of the lovers' creative mutuality or fiction making. In other words, by believing in the pre-eminence of their love, despite all doubts, Antony and Cleopatra afford themselves a great advantage—a love immortal. In much the same way, when we as readers choose to

believe, too, in the supremacy of Antony and Cleopatra's love, embracing a fiction, Shakespeare succeeds in privileging art over reality.

Other instances of Antony looking beyond his doubt about Cleopatra and their love in order to paradoxically renew it—Adelmans' "double response" mechanism in effect—are present in the play as well. For instance, in Act III, scene xi, Antony commands that his ships follow a fleeing Cleopatra's during a battle at sea with Caesar, effectively losing the contest. In the face of the Egyptian queen's apparent betrayal, Antony laments, "I am so lated in the world that I/have lost my way forever," (3-4) and "I have fled myself," (7). But soon, Cleopatra is on the scene, presenting a most pitiful appearance: "Her head's declined, and death will seize her, but/Your comfort makes the rescue," (III.xi.47-48). Here, Cleopatra uses not grand words but grand melodrama—she is near "death" after all—to remind Antony of their love's power. When faced with the loss of Antony, she apparently crumbles, although by Enobarbus's earlier account, she "dies" quite frequently: "Cleopatra, catching but the least noise of this, [your departure], 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," (I.ii.141-146). All puns about the second meaning of "die"—to experience orgasm—aside, clearly Antony's dark lady is accustomed to dying, a practice she apparently partakes in frequently to keep her lover engaged.

So despite still wondering, "O, whither hast thou led me, Egypt?" (III.xi.51) and admitting to her:

> Egypt, thou knew'st too 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. (III.xi.56-61)

Antony agrees to pardon her as she requests, even consoling: "Fall not a tear, I say; one of them rates/All that is won and lost. Give me a kiss;/Even this repays me," (III.xi.69-71). How soon he forgets even his own words explaining his self-destructive ties to her: "You did know/How much you were my conqueror, and that/My sword, made weak by my affection, would/Obey it on all cause," (III.xi.65-68). Again, Antony's first response is to doubt Cleopatra, to question why she would lead her fleet away from battle, and by wondering, thus to question the character of their bond as well. But, Antony's second or double response comes as he chooses to accept the queen again, allowing her kiss to repay him the battle's loss. Antony's doubt provokes his faith in much the same way that our own belief in the lovers is renewed, according to Adelman, despite doubt and with the help of persuasive rhetoric and melodrama.

Still, another significant example of Antony's inability to truly break with Cleopatra comes in Act III, scene xiiii, as he is sent into a rage when he finds her pledging support to Caesar, even allowing his messenger, Thidias, to kiss her hand. What is important here to notice is just how Antony taunts Cleopatra about her wantonness and her ability to swap loyalty quickly:

> *Antony*. You were half blasted ere I knew you.--Ha!
> Have I my pillow left unpress'd in Rome,
> Forborne the getting of a lawful race,
> And by a gem of women, to be abus'd
> By one that looks on feeders?

Cleopatra. Good my lord,--

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

Cleopatra. O, is't come to this?

Antony. I found you as a morsel cold upon
Dead Caesar's trencher; nay, you were a fragment
Of Cneius Pompey's; besides what hotter hours,
Unregist'red in vulgar fame, you have
Luxuriously pick'd out:--for I am sure,
Though you can guess what temperance should be,
You know not what it is.

Cleopatra. Wherefore is this?

Antony. To let a fellow that will take rewards,
And say 'God quit you!' be familiar with
My playfellow, your hand; this kingly seal
And plighter of high hearts!--O that I were
Upon the hill of Basan, to outroar
The horned herd! for I have savage cause;
And to proclaim it civilly were like
A halter'd neck which does the hangman thank
For being yare about him. (III.xiii.105-131)

Antony's tirade is riddled with attacks upon Cleopatra's character. He says she was "half blasted" or worn out before he even knew her, a "cold morsel," a "fragment" left on the lips of other men. He also mocks that, though she can "guess what temperance should be," she has no idea what it really is. These insults seem fueled by Antony's jealousy of the fact that his queen allowed Caesar's man to lay a kiss upon her hand as they all point out her sexually permissive ways, her "hotter hours" in "vulgar fame."

These words seem reminiscent of the sonnet speaker before him, when, in a moment of frustration with his lady, he taunts her with truths about her blackness. Indeed, Antony even works to assert that he has been blinded, again just like the speaker before him, to his mistress's foulness. He claims that "the wise gods" have "seel[ed]" his eyes, dropping his "clear judgments" in his own "filth." The result? He has come to adore his own errors, apparently his love and trust in Cleopatra. Antony even concludes his rant with the observation that he is well-suited among "the horned herd"—that he is cuckolded in other words.

What is Cleopatra's response to all of this? She is oddly quiet, even submissive throughout most of Antony's invective, only interrupting his words with short phrases like, "Good my lord." But as Antony winds down, Cleopatra questions, "Have you done yet?" (III.xiii.153), perhaps signaling that she is ready to respond to her lover's accusations, having tired of listening patiently. And what is the queen's response? Does she deny any of what Antony has said? That she's a whore? A boggler—a turncoat? No. Instead, she simply asks her lover, "Not know me yet?" (III.xiii.157). This is a large question, indeed. Clearly, she is suggesting that to "know her" would be to know that she would not betray him with Caesar, and yet, this is just what Antony has seen her do, and will see her do again, in the play. She, like the Dark Lady before her, functions as one of Snow's "mades of truth"—constructions of conflicting yet adhering realities. Hence, to truly know the queen would be to know that she is a whore and a betrayer, but to accept her despite this, remembering that she somehow manages to turn defect to perfection.

And in this scene, she does just that, as she works to calm Antony with the following rhetoric-filled speech meant to demonstrate to him the power of her love:

> *Antony.* Cold-hearted toward me?
>
> *Cleopatra.* 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! The next Caesarion smite!
> Till, by degrees, the memory of my womb,
> Together with my brave Egyptians all,
> By the discandying of this pelleted storm,
> Lie graveless,--till the flies and gnats of Nile
> Have buried them for prey!
>
> *Antony.* I am satisfied. (III.xiii.158-167)

As we have seen before, Cleopatra soothes Antony by producing an amazing testament of her love for him. Here, the Egyptian queen describes what would happen if she stopped loving him: her cold heart would engender poisoned hail, which would drop down to smite first her, then her son, Caesarion, and finally all of Egypt itself. With this, a picture of a love so mighty that its end would trigger the deaths of all in the queen's land, Antony is satisfied. Satisfied is an important word here because, this is, time and time again, what Antony wants to be by Cleopatra—satisfied not only physically, but rhetorically. He needs for Cleopatra to demonstrate how their relationship is awe-inspiring, above all others. Otherwise, it would be impossible for Antony to justify why he continues to stay with his mistress, overlooking his duties elsewhere, jeopardizing his reputation as a soldier, and, of course, neglecting her

repeated trespasses against him. Antony wants to believe that he and Cleopatra share in a mythic-sized love and feels satisfied or relieved when her rhetoric bears this out, erasing his doubts about her nature and re-establishing their creative mutuality. With his heart and mind fulfilled by the triumphant, romantic world he and Cleopatra create for themselves, Antony, in turn, is free to pursue sexual satisfaction with his queen as well. In this way, rhetorical satisfaction breeds sexual satisfaction for Antony, but without the guilt and anxiety that so plagued the sonnet speaker.

Looking now at perhaps the most dramatic example of Cleopatra's ability to transform Antony's rage back into love, we go to Act IV, scene xii. Here, we find Antony again cursing Cleopatra and her turncoat behavior after her final betrayal in the battle at Alexandria,

> Betrayed I am.
> O this false soul of Egypt! This grave charm,
> Whose eye becked forth my wars, and called them home,
> Whose bosom as my crownet, my chief end,
> Like a right gypsy hath at fast and loose
> Beguiled me, to the very heart of loss[,] (24-29)

and even making vows that she will die for her treachery: "The witch shall die:/To the young Roman boy she hath sold me, and I fall/Under this plot: she dies for't," (47-49). Has Antony truly been "beguiled" by Cleopatra? It seems hard to concede this to Antony as we have witnessed him repeatedly acknowledge and then subsequently deny her dubious loyalty. He appears to have been as deceived by Cleopatra as the sonnet speaker is by the Dark Lady in sonnets where he deems his eyes faulty, all the while admitting the truth of what he sees by his very denial of it.

Still, in this rage, Antony cannot be soothed by his queen's words as before, answering her coquettish "Why is my lord enraged against his love?" (IV.xii.31) with venomous threats to give her what she deserves, "blemish[ing] Caesar's triumph," (IV.xii.32-33). As a result, Cleopatra takes the advice of her lady Charmian and sends false word of her own suicide to Antony as a means of renewing his love for her:

> *Antony.* Hence, saucy eunuch, peace!
> She hath betrayed me and shall die the death.
>
> *Mardian.* Death of one person can be paid but once,
> And that she has discharged. What thou wouldst do
> Is done unto thy hand. The last she spake
> Was "Antony! Most noble Antony!"
> Then in the midst a tearing groan did break
> The name of Antony; it was divided
> Between her heart and her lips: she rend'red life,
> Thy name so buried in her.
>
> *Antony.* Dead then?
>
> *Mardian.* Dead.
>
> *Antony.* Unarm, Eros. The long day's task is done,
> And we must sleep. [To Mardian] That thou depart'st hence safe
> Does pay thy labor richly: go.*Exit Mardian.*
> The sevenfold shield of Ajax cannot keep
> The battery from my heart. O, cleave, my sides!
> Heart, once be stronger than thy continent,
> Crack thy frail case! Apace, Eros, apace.
> No more a soldier. Bruised pieces, go;
> You have been nobly borne.—From me awhile. *Exit Eros.*
> I will o'ertake thee, Cleopatra, and
> Weep for my pardon. So it must be, for now
> All length is torture: since the torch is out,
> Lie down, and stay no farther. Now all labor
> Mars what it does; yea, very force entangles
> Itself with strength. Seal then, and all is done.
> Eros!—I come, my queen.—Eros!—Stay for me.
> Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,
> And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze:

> Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops,
> And all haunt be ours.—Come, Eros, Eros! (IV.xiv.25-54)

How quickly Antony's fury is converted into renewed love as Mardian, Cleopatra's messenger, tells of her "death." No doubt, Antony is particularly moved to hear how his lover uses her last words to call out his name—"Antony! Most noble Antony!"—a cry broken only by the groan that buries her words "between her heart and lips," interring them within her. So moved, Antony disarms, claiming to be "No more a soldier," and then he sweeps into a speech promising to draw his life to a close now so as to be reunited with Cleopatra. He even calls out that he comes for his queen and requests that she stay for him, so that they may come together again in the next life, to walk "hand in hand," making even Dido and Aeneas jealous of their happiness together.

What a change of heart from a man who just moments earlier was vowing to kill the Egyptian himself for her repeated betrayals. Again, we see how Cleopatra has managed to reel Antony back in with a grand demonstration of her love for him. Clearly, Cleopatra understands, like the speaker of Sonnet 138, the power of words, how just *saying* something can equate to *doing* it, somehow making it real. She, in the several examples addressed above, constructs with her words the vision of an ideal love shared between Antony and herself. Do we know this love to actually be ideal? The actions of the play would suggest not, as Cleopatra, like the Dark Lady, is hardly trustworthy, honest, or faithful, while Antony, lest we forget, is a betrayer as well, marrying another to gain political advantage and then quickly turning into adulterer. Still, as Adelman advised, the actions of the play do not suit the words (11); the love

that Antony and Cleopatra create with their words—Shakespeare's poetry—*is* ideal, and it is what they choose to believe for themselves.

As we have seen, Antony often overlooks the fact that Cleopatra is prone to betrayals, that she lacks worthiness. Instead, he gladly accepts her platitudes about the perfect nature of their love as a means of justifying its continuation. Why? Because he simply cannot deny his love for Cleopatra; his doubt ironically works as a catalyst for renewed belief. Thus, he accepts the more noble version of their bond—ideal love. Indeed, he too can conjure up a lovely portrait of their relationship:

> 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 weet
> We stand up peerless. (I.i.33-39)

With this, Shakespeare gives us a revered ruler who feels that it is his duty in life not to govern the Roman Empire, but to love Cleopatra. Antony even goes so far as to suggest that ruling over lands, lowly earth that sustains man and beast alike, pales in comparison to that act which truly engenders nobleness in man—creating a remarkable love. This "triple pillar of the world" envisions the love that he shares with Cleopatra as the righteous force which separates him from the ordinariness of life. Were he to stay Roman-minded, with thoughts only of empire and warring, Antony, in his own estimation, would deprive himself of the ultimate bounty in life—his own "space." It is in this space, this self-created private world, that Antony and Cleopatra's love reigns supreme, allowing them to "stand up peerless" or unmatched in glory. Antony has a

longing for all things grand in scope, so despite the challenges he has faced in loving his queen, our hero chooses the creative mutuality offered by her, a love unparalleled: "If we are finally convinced of Cleopatra's love—and I think we are—we have had to develop a faith nearly as difficult as Antony's, a faith in what we cannot know" (Adelman 24).

By contrast, the speaker of the Dark Lady sonnets, as we have seen, does not believe the relationship he shares with his mistress is an ideal one, despite the cheery mention of lying mutuality in Sonnet 138, and neither does the reader. While the speaker says he and his lady find satisfaction lying about each others faults, such contentment seems temporary. Since the lovers do not truly believe the lies they tell each other, we as readers are hardly convinced that their affair will be kept afloat for long. In other words, the fiction the speaker and his Dark Lady create together is unstable. The speaker is never able to overcome his doubts about his mistress as Antony does; rather, the lies he tells to camouflage her all too apparent faults simply reinforce his uncertainty about her and their relationship. Consequently, the speaker is doggedly tormented by the notion that he is a prisoner of his passions—for example, he even asserts that "desire is death" in Sonnet 147. Unlike Antony who ultimately frees himself from Roman-minded mores and creates a fulfilling private space with his lover, the sonnet speaker fails to deliver himself from the misery his lust generates. It is this inability to create a belief in the supreme authority of his love, for either himself or the reader, that fundamentally separates the sonnet speaker from Antony. With all this in mind, we might then wonder why Shakespeare rewrites the affair between his sonnet speaker and the Dark Lady into

the text of *Antony and Cleopatra*? Why does he make the mutuality shared by Antony and Cleopatra more creative than lying, more about exalting love than concealing lust?

As we have seen so far in this discussion, within several of the Dark Lady sonnets, there is a move by Shakespeare to reveal the truth rather backhandedly—by having his sonnet speaker admit to the truth by denying that he is able to perceive it. Further, the speaker, in sonnets like 138, openly admits that his relationship with the Dark Lady is furthered by the lies they tell one another, lies they are both aware of, lies they accept as "true." So, it seems that the lady, as well as the speaker himself, fails to be true, though, ironically, in the verse we have pointing to this lying mutuality is the very picture of truth. My claim here builds off of those expressed by critics like M.L. Stapleton who contend that "these twenty-six sonnets intersect with one another so that certain terms lose their meaning from sheer repetition: beauty, will, truth/true, false, fair, foul, black, swear, sin, sight, blind, best, worst, just, eye, heart, lie, love, hate. Will unwittingly challenges the notion of belief itself" (228). Indeed, in her article "'My False Eyes': The Dark Lady and Self Knowledge," Stapleton deals with the relationship between the sonnet speaker's view of self and his poetry as she argues that he lies about the character of his mistress and that this deception reflects the instability of his own identity:

> Will's panic at the incompatibility of love, talent, and self-knowledge constitutes one of his most distinctive features. Shakespeare apparently knew that a text "simultaneously asserts and denies the authority of its own rhetorical mode," because he uses his narrator to do both. Ultimately, all we can know about Will is that he is a liar, especially concerning the dark lady. (214)

> As Will deconstructs himself, he self-destructs. The lie to be unraveled is that the dark lady is evil and that Will is a reliable narrator; we might conclude from these sonnets that neither premise is true, and that Will knows it. (230)
>
> Unreliable Will is a creature of fiendish ambiguity who distinguishes himself as a teller of lies.... Discontented Will remains aware of himself as someone without true sight, doomed to wander as random from the truth vainly expressed. (230)

In support of this argument, Stapleton states that the speaker, whom she refers to as Will, disparages his mistress out of frustration with the fact that she rejects him, taking up with the Young Man. She then goes on to connect this deconstruction of the beloved through dishonesty to a deconstruction of his own self. Thus, the speaker's supposed need to undermine his mistress is tantamount to self-destruction according to Stapleton.

Stapleton's argument is helpful to us as it demonstrates how the speaker is an unreliable narrator, "Unreliable Will," who lies about the character of his mistress. At the same time, there is "Discontented Will," who, in her words, is aware that he lacks "true sight." While Stapleton believes the lies being told are more about the Dark Lady being unfairly belittled than generously praised, her reading does point to a certain duality--there is a speaker who tells lies and a speaker who knows that it is lies that he speaks.

In the final sonnet dealing with the Dark Lady, Sonnet 152, we find the speaker lamenting that he has spent much time swearing against the truth—in other words, we find Stapleton's Discontented Will scolding Unreliable Will:

> For I have sworn deep oaths of they deep kindness,
> Oaths of thy love, thy truth, thy constancy,
> And to enlighten thee gave eyes to blindness,
> Or made them swear against the thing they see,

For I have sworn thee fair: more perjured eye,
To swear against the truth so foul a lie. (9-14)

But has the speaker been swearing against the truth or telling it? Is Sonnet 152 entirely convincing? Though we have seen the speaker tell lies across several Dark Lady sonnets, we have also seen him admit to the truth of the matter, as he does so here. More importantly, we have seen the truth of the speaker's situation reveal itself through the *false* words he writes. In other words, while the speaker may be the "more perjured eye," his verse is not. This, in turn, shifts attention from the nature of the beloved to the nature of the verse itself. It privileges what is written over what is written about.

Critic Joel Fineman, who has spent much time analyzing the nature of Shakespeare's "perjured eye," offers a very different view of lying in the Dark Lady sonnets. In his book *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in the Sonnets*, Fineman argues that Shakespeare, in his sonnet sequence, invents an original form of poetic subjectivity that, in grounding itself in the linguistic as opposed to the visual, associates the poet's conception of *self* with that which is unstable—duplicitous language. Specifically, this new poetic subjectivity arises as the paradox of praise associated with the Dark Lady sub-sequence works to eclipse the poetry of praise associated with the Young Man sub-sequence. No longer, according to Fineman, does the poet present through epideictic language an image of his beloved that acts to reflexively refer back to himself and his poetry. Instead, as enacted in the narrative of Shakespeare's sonnet sequence, the poet ceases to engage in strictly visual poetics, to be "the mirror and the lamp" to the ideality of his beloved, at the moment when the object of his affection fails to be worthy of not only this desire, but her presentation in poetry.

> The verbal word of Shakespeare's sonnets is both like and unlike the visual word, the *imago*, of the traditional Renaissance sonnet, and this because it is a simulacrum that in a double way dissimulates the likeness it bespeaks. On the one hand, Shakespeare's sonnets "give the lie to my true sight" because they truly speak against a strong tradition, not only poetic, of linguistic idealization for which words in some sense *are* the things of which they speak. On the other hand, for just this reason, compared to the iconic, autological discourse of visionary speech, compared to words that in themselves will ontologically present their referents, Shakespeare's merely verbal words, that merely represent the things of which they are the sign, will seem a kind of semiotic "lie." That is to say, because they are "linguistic," Shakespeare's verbal words are, in comparison to an *imago*, essentially or ontologically at odds with what they speak about. This is how these words are thematized in Shakespeare's sonnets, as fallen words that have lost their visionary truth. (15)

In other words, according to Fineman, when the speaker chooses to make the Dark Lady and not the Young Man the object of his poetry, he moves from the realm of presentation to *re*presentation, from using visual language to present an ideal image of his beloved to using verbal language to represent the false nature of his lover. In doing so, the poet is forced to acknowledge the fact that representation through language cannot successfully present the beloved—that language is inherently unstable and, therefore, any representation rooted in the verbal and not the visual is necessarily given to instability as well:

> Representation, stressing and registering itself *as* representation, calls up and evokes as something absent the truthful presentation it confesses truly it is not. There is therefore, as Shakespeare develops it, a structural pathos built into representation. The "re" of representation effects the loss of presentation; it is responsible for that loss because representation is not only achieved over the dead body of the presence it repeats, but, more actively, this very repetition is what transforms such ideal presence into something of the past. (297)

Here, Fineman is asserting that the speaker of the Dark Lady sonnets, in calling attention to the verbal as opposed to visual quality of his language by objectifying the lying mistress and not the true friend, emphasizes the artificial or constructed quality of his verse. Just as the Dark Lady fails to embody the ideality of the past—she is no Young Man after all—so too does the speaker's poetry fall short of presenting a stable, unequivocal view of reality. In other words, in that the poet chooses to employ the paradox of praise to characterize a false mistress, he foregrounds "[t]he "re" of representation[,] effect[ing] the loss of presentation" (297).

Unlike Fineman, who works hard to assert that words cannot effectively represent truth because of their innate instability, I maintain that these sonnets do just that. Though the speaker talks of lies and seeing falsely, the audience is always aware of the truth. More importantly, so too is the speaker. As we have seen, Sonnets 130 ("My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun"), 138 ("When my love swears that she is made of truth"), and 141 ("In faith I do not love thee with mine eyes") all work to reveal the fact that the speaker is perfectly capable of perceiving the Dark Lady accurately. The Dark Lady is nothing like the typical, fair Petrarchan beloved, and yet the speaker's love for her is greater than any she belied with false compare. He knows the Dark Lady lies to him and is unfaithful, and yet he chooses to believe the lies she tells him. And the speaker notes a thousand errors in the Dark Lady's appearance, and yet his foolish heart loves her anyway. Whether choosing to believe lies or loving an object riddled with errors, there seems to be a sort of affection for paradox built into the speaker and the Dark Lady's relationship. Fineman might insist that this reliance on verbal paradox

undermines the ability of the speaker's words to present the truth, but it does not. Instead, it points us toward the idea of "excellent falsehood" presented in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the belief that a truth can be created wherever there is strong conviction to support it.

It seems, then, that we have established that, despite all protestations to the contrary, truth is embedded within the Dark Lady sonnets. What the poet *writes* is true, regardless of what he *says*. Art, then, works here to represent the truth. Again, though critics like Fineman might wish to convince us that words are too unstable to properly convey what is true, especially about that which is essential—the self, we can clearly resist such arguments. After all, do we not as readers understand the "truth" of the speaker's situation? In other words, are we ever fooled by the poet's "lies"? Do we believe that his lady is fair, or do we know otherwise? The answer is obvious as the poet backhandedly lays the truth about his affair before us, for better or for worse.

But what of Antony? Does his story impart to us some essential truth, one about which this hero is aware? Yes and no. While it seems at first glance that Antony fails to own the more smarmy underpinnings of his relationship with Cleopatra, thus turning a blind eye to the "truth" of their love, we have come to discover, with the help of Adelman's reading of the romance, that the pair create a true lie for themselves to live through:

> The play teaches us that there are different modes of belief for different kinds of statement. It forces us to acknowledge a fundamental paradox of the human imagination: that occasionally truth can be told only in lies. Cleopatra's dream is her lie in the way of honesty; it is the central paradox of the play that we must both deny it and find it true. Like the other assertions of the impossible, it remains in the unverifiable domain of the

> true lie. And however impervious to logic this domain is, it occasionally comes closer to our experience than the tidy categories of logic can. There are lies and dreams that are more true than truth itself; the hyperbolical version of their story which the lovers present at the end of the play is one of these lies. The poetry in which the lovers create their version of the story may be only true lies; but the paradoxical true lie may be the only sort of truth available to us in this world. (164)

Antony is a believer in the myth of perfect love that both he and his mistress routinely champion. Because he prefers a beautiful fiction to the ugly truth, it appears that in *Antony and Cleopatra* art becomes less about what is real and more about what is satisfying as epitomized by our hero's retreat away from truth toward artifice.

How? As witnessed by Antony's choice to transform himself into Cleopatra's vision of what he is, a noble, perfect lover-warrior, the truth is remade. While in reality, Antony is indeed a lover-warrior, he is by no means completely noble or perfect. Quite the contrary, he is addicted to Cleopatra, swept up in a consuming love that makes him a completely ineffectual, somewhat pathetic warrior. Antony knows he has suffered a "miserable change" (IV.xv.51), especially from the Roman perspective, but he cannot resist the lure of Cleopatra. Unlike the Dark Lady poet, Antony never has to accept himself as the flawed Antony, the drudge to a destructive passion. There is no *lying* mutuality for this lover as Cleopatra's "excellent falsehoods" have given birth to creative mutuality. So, as the genuine Antony fades, the dream-Antony emerges.

As we have seen throughout the course of the play, Cleopatra has manipulated Antony by playing to his need to be outstanding, whether it is as a lover or a warrior. Her words, art in and of themselves, have always had the power to educe a reality for Antony. Cleopatra calls forth the grandness of their love, despite her duplicity and, without delay,

Antony is consumed once again with their "perfection." While the Dark Lady poet can admit that the pretty lies he and his mistress tell each other are self-serving, Antony has chosen to overcome his doubts about his love and make the truth what he and his love would wish it to be. Antony is charmed by Cleopatra's words—she speaks and, thus, transforms reality. She says that their love is supreme, so it is. She says that she is true, so she must be. And, lest we forget, Cleopatra, too, is a believer in the fiction they create.

As Antony lay dying then, he hopes that once again Cleopatra will turn fiction, wish, into reality. Antony instructs Cleopatra to overlook his current state and recall only "the prince o' th' world." Cleopatra is, of course, game and quickly names Antony the "noblest of men" and the world without him "dull" and "no better than a sty" (IV.xv.59-62). With this, Antony drifts away, hopefully appeased. Going still further, Cleopatra later summons the dream-Antony, no longer for his benefit, but for hers:

Cleopatra. I dreamt there was an Emperor Antony.
O, such another sleep, that I might see
But such another man.
Dolabella. If it might please ye—
Cleopatra. His face was as the heav'ns, and therein stuck
A sun and moon, which kept their course and lighted
The little O, th' earth.
Dolabella. Most sovereign creature—
Cleopatra. His legs bestrid the ocean: his reared arm
Crested the world; his voice was propertied
As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends;
But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,
He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,
There was no winter in't: an autumn 'twas
That grew the more by reaping. His delights
Were dolphinlike, they showed his back above
The element they lived in. In his livery
Walked crowns and crownets: realms and islands were

As plates dropped from his pocket.
Dolabella. Cleopatra—
Cleopatra. Think you there was or might be such a man
As this I dreamt of?
Dolabella. Gentle madam, no.
Cleopatra. You lie, up to the hearing of the gods.
But if there be nor ever were one such,
It's past the size of dreaming; nature wants stuff
To vie strange forms with fancy, yet t' imagine
An Antony were nature's piece 'gainst fancy,
Condemning shadows quite. (V.ii.76-99)

As John F. Danby writes in his "*Antony and Cleopatra*: A Shakespearian Adjustment," "This, of course, is again the past catching fire from the urgent needs of the present, flaring in memory and imagination as it never did in actuality" (57). Here in Cleopatra's dream, Antony is a demigod with a body made up of the heavens, moon, and sun, who straddles the earth, ruling over it masterfully, speaking music to his friends and roaring thunder to his foes. It would seem that Cleopatra has completely recreated Antony. She has satisfied Antony's last request, conjuring this description of an unparalleled Emperor Antony. He is a titan so majestic and far-reaching in description that a sober Roman, Dolabella, denies that such a man could exist. And indeed Dolabella's seeming skepticism is reasonable given that our last glimpse of Antony is one of a conquered man who fails even to succeed in taking his own life.

Yet, Cleopatra's response to Dolabella is riddle-like. She feels that this dream-Antony must exist because the human imagination lacks the power to create someone so supernatural. Still, the queen goes on to say that to create an Antony such as this would be a triumph of nature over fancy or imagination, apparently because a human, a product of nature, dreamed it so. Thus, it appears Cleopatra, who did after all dream this vision

of Antony, has valued herself as that piece of superior nature with the capability to create this Antony beyond imagination. Has Cleopatra established her own identity as demigoddess of nature, mistress of imagination, by glorifying Antony through recreation? Cleopatra's final romantic envisioning of Antony demonstrates the fact that her conception of him is beyond the real, perhaps even beyond imagination.

The sonnet speaker has become Antony. Along the way, lying mutuality has become creative mutuality—the little lies told to mask the truth have become "true lies" that are the truth. In return, this true lie, or constructed reality, that Antony and Cleopatra embrace allows the pair to become the best versions of themselves, triumphant and superhuman: "Both lovers become each other and themselves: and, in their infinite variety, they virtually become all the world besides.... our lovers lose their boundaries and absorb everything into themselves" (Adelman 145). It would seem that Shakespeare is of Antony and Cleopatra's mind, that there is no essential truth, only what we make of it.

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