

A Kiss as an Erotic Gift from Cleopatra: Gift-Giving in *Antony and Cleopatra*

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Let's grant it is not
Amisss to tumble on the bed of Ptolemy,
To give a kingdom for a mirth [. . .].¹⁾

Shakespeare's characters habitually exchange gifts. At times, his metaphors raise gift-giving to an abstract or universal level by treating love, faith, and the world itself as something given or taken as a 'gift'. When Antony is said '[t]o give a kingdom for a mirth' in *Antony and Cleopatra* (1.4.18), gift-giving is clearly not a quotidian affair, but is instead an event that shakes the world.

Shakespeare's metaphors of gift-giving arise from the broad meanings that can be attributed to the word 'gift', such as 'present' or 'quality'.²⁾ These meanings have one root, as Lewis Hyde writes in *The Gift*: 'common to each of them [their sense of meaning] is the notion that a gift is a thing we do not get by our own efforts. We cannot buy it; we cannot acquire it through an act of

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- 1) *Antony and Cleopatra* (hereinafter *AC*), 1.4.16-18. Quotations from Shakespeare refer to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., gen. ed., G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).
- 2) Alexander Schmidt, *Shakespeare-Lexicon: A Complete Dictionary of All the English Words, Phrases and Constructions in the Works of the Poet*, 5th ed. (Berlin: Gruyter, 1962), 474.

will'.³⁾ A gift-giving economy thus differs from a money-driven economy by being a form of 'erotic' commerce - commerce based on 'eros', or 'the principle of attraction, union, involvement which binds together', which is opposed to 'logos', or 'reason and logic in general, the principle of differentiation in particular' (xiv). A wide range of gratuitous exchanges occurs in this economy built on emotional links, from those involving objects to those involving more psychological values such as gratitude, honour, love, and political support. Antony's exchange of the world for a mirth or, more precisely, love can be taken as an act of erotic gift-giving.

If this psychological commerce goes well, the giver and the recipient will maintain a harmonious relationship. If it goes awry, its psychological impact will undermine the psychic equanimity or social status of both the giver and the recipient. This occurs because whenever one person gives something to another, the recipient is required to reciprocate materially or emotionally. According to Malinowski, 'pure gifts', which are given without expecting anything in return, are rare and occur only in the presence of strong ties between the giver and recipient.⁴⁾ Gift-giving is thus inevitably an experience that bonds the recipient to the giver.

This paper focuses on the psychological function of gift-giving in *Antony and Cleopatra*, especially as it relates to the leading couple's struggle to maintain their autonomy while engaging in reciprocal relationships in both the political and personal spheres. In general, the psychological function of gift-giving has long been argued among scholars. Hyde, Marcel Mauss, and Natalie Zemon Davis emphasise the emotional networking function of the gift, while others,

3) Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), xi.

4) Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922; repr., New York: Dutton, 1960), 177-80.

such as Jacques Derrida, go so far as to conclude that 'the gift is the impossible' because any kind of gift-giving becomes a mere economic exchange as soon as it is recognised as gift-giving.⁵⁾ Although these critics have influenced a number of studies on gift-giving in Shakespeare's works,⁶⁾ only a few mention its role in *Antony and Cleopatra*. However, as Antony's words indicate at the beginning of this paper, gift-giving in this play involves grand-scale political and psychological commerce. This paper attempts to clarify the functions that gift-

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- 5) Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: Norton, 1990), originally published as *Essai sur le don in Sociologie et anthropologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950); Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000); Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 7, originally published as *Donner le temps: I. La fausse monnaie* (Paris: Galilée, 1991). About Derrida and gift-giving, see also *The Gift of Death*, trans. Davis Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), originally published as *L'éthique du don: Jacques Derrida et la pensée du don: colloque de Royaumont, décembre 1990*, réunis par Jean-Michel Rabaté et Michael Wetzell (Paris: Métailié-Transition: Diffusion Seuil, 1992).
- 6) For example, for *Timon of Athens*, Ken Jackson adopts Derridean analysis of gift-giving in "'One Wish" or the Possibility of the Impossible: Derrida, the Gift, and God in *Timon of Athens*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52 (2001): 34-66. William N. West also attempts Derridean analysis on *The Sonnets* in 'Nothing as Given: Economies of the Gift in Derrida and Shakespeare', *Comparative Literature* 48 (1996): 1-18. Jyotsna C. Singh refers to Derrida, Mauss, and Hyde in analysing *The Merchant of Venice* in 'Gendered "Gift" in Shakespeare's Belmont: The Economies of Exchange in Early Modern England', in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Dymphna Callaghan (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000), 144-58. There are other papers dealing with gift-giving in Shakespeare's works: on *Timon of Athens*, see also Coppélia Kahn, "'Magic of Bounty": *Timon of Athens*, Jacobean Patronage, and Maternal Power', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38 (1987): 34-57 and David Bevington and David L. Smith, 'James I and *Timon of Athens*', *Comparative Drama* 33 (1999): 56-87; on *The Merchant of Venice*, see also Sylvan Barnet, introduction to *Twentieth Century Interpretations of the Merchant of Venice: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Barnet (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 1-10; Marianne L. Novy, *Love's Argument: Gender Relations in Shakespeare* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), ch. 4; and Karen Newman, 'Portia's Ring: Unruly Women and Structures of Power', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38 (1987): 19-33.

giving fulfils for the leading couple in the multi-faceted political love tragedy of *Antony and Cleopatra*. This paper consists of two sections. The first section analyses how Antony's generosity is portrayed and what effect it has on the whole tragedy. The second section examines how Cleopatra is portrayed in contrast to Antony in the descriptions of gift-giving.

I. Antony as a Proud but Failed Giver/Recipient

CLEOPATRA If it be love indeed, tell me how much.

ANTONY There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd.

CLEOPATRA I'll set a bourn how far to be below'd.

ANTONY Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth.

(AC, 1.1.14-17)

Antony is the most generous character in *Antony and Cleopatra*. At the beginning of the play, he suggests that Cleopatra should 'find out new heaven, new earth' in order to measure his love. By using not 'I' but 'thou' as the subject of his speech (17), he implies that it is not he, but Cleopatra, who will obtain such a 'new heaven, new earth'. His generosity, fuelled by love, becomes almost limitless, while Cleopatra wants to 'set a bourn how far to be below'd' (16). H. W. Fawkner depicts this lovers' quarrel as 'the war between a general economy (here Antony's) and a restricted one (here Cleopatra's)'.⁷⁾ 'General economy', a concept from Georges Bataille, means an economy in which 'energy, which constitutes wealth, must ultimately be spent lavishly (without return)'.⁸⁾ Since critics who mention gift-giving in *Antony and Cleopatra* deem the whole of

7) Harald William Fawkner, *Shakespeare's Hyperontology: Antony and Cleopatra* (London: Associated University Press, 1990), 32.

8) Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, trans. Robert Hurley, 2 vols. (New York: Zone, 1988), 1: 22. Originally published as *La part maudite* in 1967.

Egypt to be ruled by a spendthrift economy, Fawcner's interpretation of Cleopatra's economy as 'restricted' may, *prima facie*, look odd.⁹⁾ In fact, the opening conversation between Antony and Cleopatra actually denotes a difference in the couple's attitudes toward gift-giving: Antony's limitless generosity against Cleopatra's moderate one.

Because of his munificence, Antony literally attempts to give Cleopatra 'new heaven, new earth' in order to reciprocate her love. He promises her '[a]ll the East' (1.5.46), and in the middle of the play, he actually makes 'her [Cleopatra] / Of lower Syria, Cyprus, Lydia, / Absolute Queen' (3.6.9-11). In contrast, Cleopatra derides Octavius' orders for Antony to '[t]ake in that kingdom, and enfranchise that' (1.1.23), and she is not much interested in expanding her territory. Antony's kingdoms are 'gifts' in the sense defined by Hyde because Cleopatra acquires them through another's efforts rather than her own.

Antony wants to share his empire not only with Cleopatra, but also with his subjects. Before the outbreak of war, in order to reward only two hours' service from his servants (4.2.32), he hyperbolically expresses gratitude by taking their hands and stating: 'make as much of me / As when mine empire was your fellow too, / And suffer'd my command' (21-23). The servants are uncomfortable with Antony's deep gratitude (19), and Enobarbus even asks Antony not '[t]o give them this discomfort' (34). Antony tries to '[b]e bounteous' (10), but only confounds his fellows.

His excessive generosity not only embarrasses others, but it sometimes becomes even lethal. After Enobarbus' flight, Antony sends him all of Enobarbus' treasure 'with / His [Antony's] bounty overplus' (4.6.20-21). According to Hyde, '[t]he increase is the core of the gift, the kernel' in reciprocity (36) –

9) Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* (New York: Blackwell, 1986), 85-89; and William Fleisch, *Generosity and the Limits of Authority: Shakespeare, Herbert, Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 191.

that is to say, when the giver materially increases an object of exchange, doing so implies an increase in his/her feelings toward the recipient. This ‘overplus’ as a gift is Antony’s affection itself, unexpectedly given to Enobarbus. Overwhelmed by Antony’s generosity, Enobarbus imagines gifts Antony would have given if he had remained faithful: ‘[H]ow wouldst thou have paid / My better service, when my turpitude / Thou dost so crown with gold’ (4.6.31-33). Guilt-ridden by his inability to reciprocate, Enobarbus drives himself to death in return for Antony’s gift: ‘O Antony, / Nobler than my revolt is infamous, / Forgive me in thine own particular’.¹⁰⁾ Although he has no ill will for Enobarbus, Antony literally kills him with his kindness.

Extraordinarily generous in giving, Antony does not ask much as a recipient. What he asks of Cleopatra is only her love, or, more precisely, her kiss. Whenever she hurts him, he seeks her kiss. When Cleopatra entreats Antony, pleading, ‘[f]orgive my fearful sails’ (3.11.55) after the Battle of Actium, he replies, ‘Give me a kiss. / Even this repays me’ (70-71). After being inflamed with Cleopatra’s flattery of Octavius, he forgives her, mentioning her kiss: ‘If from the field I shall return once more / To kiss these lips, I will appear in blood’ (3.13.173-74). Antony makes a hasty judgment about her mock death and attempts suicide himself, but for him, Cleopatra’s little kiss makes amends even for death: ‘Of many thousand kisses the poor last / I lay upon thy lips’ (4.15.20-21). Antony is satisfied with a minimum of gifts in return for the kingdoms he bestows and does not dwell on the issue of reciprocal gifts.

Antony’s generosity is often mentioned in this play. Generally, the Roman characters criticise his ‘habit’ of giving kingdoms. Octavius blames Ant-

10) *AC*, 4.9.18-20. It is not clear whether Enobarbus’s death is a suicide. Jacqueline Vanhoutte, however, is of the opinion that it is a suicide due to Antony’s generosity, because it is, in every sense, self-inflicted. See ‘Antony’s “Secret House of Death” : Suicide and Sovereignty in *Antony and Cleopatra*’, *Philological Quarterly* 79 (2000): 153-75.

ony for having 'given his empire / Up to a whore' (3.6.66-67), and Maecenas agrees with Octavius (95). Nevertheless, the Romans do sometimes admit his virtue. A Roman soldier compares Antony with Jove in terms of generosity (4.6.27-28), and Enobarbus praises Antony as a 'mine of bounty' (4.6.31). In Egypt, Cleopatra describes Antony as an all-giving, colossal figure who increases what nature has given as harvest: 'For his bounty, / There was no winter in't; an [autumn] it was / That grew the more by reaping.'¹¹⁾ Antony is a genuine giver; he increases gifts, gives when someone least expects it, and demands little in return.

As Hyde points out, before the arrival of the market economy, a 'big man' was someone remarkable in 'the dispersal of his gifts' (xiii). Karl Polanyi also points out that reciprocity had been among the driving forces of the economy before the Industrial Revolution.¹²⁾ Antony - the rarest spirit who '[d]id steer humanity' (5.1.31-32) - is the 'big man'. His generosity is the symbol of both his economic power and his virtue in the world prior to the money-driven market economy, wherein the psychological and social conflict surrounding the gift as an economic driver was greater than it is today.

Studies of early modern European culture suggest that men were often preoccupied by the bonds of obligation and gratitude in gift-giving. Davis's study on gift-giving makes it clear that they were 'chafed at the humiliation of begging favor and at the dissimulation and extravagant language of request and thanks' (125). For example, Montaigne was tired of committing himself to the giver in a reciprocal relationship filled with obligation and gratitude: 'I avoid subjecting myself to any sort of obligation, but especially any that binds me by a debt of honor. I find nothing so expensive as that which is given me

11) *AC*, 5.286-88. The bracket is original.

12) Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (1944; repr., Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), chaps. 4-5.

and for which my will remains mortgaged by the claim of gratitude'.¹³⁾ As Davis points out, it was painful for proud men of letters like Montaigne to flatter others in reciprocal relationships (74–75). They felt deprived of their own autonomy because they had to dramatise gratitude even though they were not willing to do so.

While Davis mainly focuses on French materials, gift-giving in Renaissance England was also a custom associated with various social rules, including courtesies and civility.¹⁴⁾ Davis finds a typical sixteenth-century quarrel about gift-giving in the first scene of *King Lear*, during which Cordelia refuses Lear's demand for limitless obedience in return for his gifts (71–72). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Shakespeare's Antony is likewise troubled by reciprocal relationships.

For Antony, 'honor is sacred' (2.2.85). In order to protect honour in gift relations, Antony repays his obligation to Pompey for his kindness toward Antony's mother, even before waging war against Pompey: 'I must thank him only, / Lest my remembrance suffer ill report; / At heel of that, defy him' (2.2.155–57). Antony's honour, however, is not due solely to a virtue shown in a reciprocal relationship; honesty is also an essential virtue for him (92–94). As Enobarbus implies (2.6.130), Antony always has his own way, for to sail under false colours is beneath his dignity. To protect his pride, Antony would rather avoid feigning gratitude.

Antony's struggle to maintain his autonomy is clearly shown in his marriage to Octavia, given to him as a 'gift' by Octavius. Through her, Octavius and Antony build a male reciprocal relationship. Lévi-Strauss equates marriage with the exchange of women: '[T]he woman herself is nothing other than one

13) Michael de Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, trans. Donald M. Frame (London: Everyman's Library, 2003), bk. 3, sec. 9.

14) See also Patricia Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), ch. 2.

of these gifts, the supreme gift among those that can only be obtained in the form of reciprocal gifts'.¹⁵⁾ Following him, Gayle Rubin observes that the exchange of women is an essential factor upon which the social sex/gender system is built.¹⁶⁾ Antony and Octavius understand that Octavia is a crucial gift needed to sustain their male bond. For Octavius, the marriage of Octavia to Antony is decided by '[t]he power of Caesar, and / His power unto Octavia' (2.2.142-43), and she is '[a] sister I bequeath you' (149). Octavia has no say in this exchange.

According to Mauss, 'the giver has a hold over the beneficiary' through the gift (11-12). After Octavia is married to Antony, Octavius urges him: 'You take from me a great part of myself; / Use me well in't' (3.2.24-25). Even if Octavia is Octavius' property, he loves his sister 'so dearly' (2.2.150), and they share a strong emotional bond as the giver and the gift.

Antony, however, eventually returns the 'gift' in order to maintain his autonomy, even though he understands that the marriage is an 'act of grace' (2.2.146), or the most significant act of gift-giving. He abandons Octavia not only because he does not love her, but also because he is discontented with the reciprocal relationship with Octavius. Antony still loves Cleopatra (2.3.41), but he keeps pretending to love Octavia (3.2.62) so long as Octavius shows respect for him. However, when Octavius fails to return his grateful acknowledgement,

15) Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. James Harle Bell, John Richard von Sturmer and Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 65. Originally published as *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* (Paris: Mouton, 1967).

16) Gayle Rubin defines a sex/gender system as follows: 'a "sex/gender system" is the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied'. 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy"' in *Toward Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157-210 (159).

Antony, usually generous, becomes exceptionally displeased: ‘when perforce he could not / But pay me terms of honor, cold and sickly / He vented [them.] most narrow measure lent me’.¹⁷⁾ He even implies that it is natural for Octavia to love Octavius more than him (3.4.21–22). Antony, prompted by Octavius’ ingratitude and Cleopatra’s letters (3.3.38; 3.6.65–66), decides to break off the reciprocal relationship and go back to Egypt.

Octavius is infuriated because his precious gift, Octavia, has been ‘abus’d’ (3.6.86). As Mauss says, ‘there is no middle way’ in gift-giving, which means that people have only two choices: to give everything, including their kinswomen, or to begin hostilities (83–84). Understanding that, Antony prepares for war as soon as he arrives in Egypt (3.6.67–76).

However, when Antony chooses war instead of gratitude, his generosity-driven gift economy collapses. Before the war, Cleopatra’s love is far more psychologically valuable to him than kingdoms. It seems as though Antony does not cling to his empire, for after his loss in the battle of Actium, he asks Octavius ‘[t]o let him [Antony] breathe between the heavens and earth, / A private man in Athens’ (3.12.14–15). For him, ‘[k]ingdoms are clay’ (1.1.35) and, as Cleopatra says, ‘realms and islands were / As plates dropp’d from his pocket’ (5.2.91–92), or gifts to prove his generosity, not the objects of rule. He gives them to Cleopatra and their children (3.6.5–11). His choice of gift-giving, however, drives him into waging war in order to defend his kingdoms. The empire, which was given generously, is now dearly bought with blood. According to Scarus, ‘[t]he greater cantle of the world is lost / With very ignorance, we have kiss’d away / Kingdoms and provinces’ (3.10.6–8). For Antony, Cleopatra’s kiss is worth the empire, but the value of the kiss depreciates in a war economy that neglects the psychological value of gifts.

17) *AC*, 3.4.6–8. The bracket is original, and ‘he’ in the 6th line means Octavius.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony, like the early modern European man, is troubled by the problems of autonomy in gift-giving. In a sense, his attitude of giving generously without asking much in return and never subordinating himself to a reciprocal relationship ultimately undermines his generous gift economy and kills him. He may be proud, but he has become the unsuccessful tragic giver and recipient.

II. Cleopatra's Erotic Gifts and Death

CHARMIAN Madam, methinks if you did love him dearly,

You do not hold the method to enforce

The like from him.

CLEOPATRA What should I do, I do not?

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

CLEOPATRA Thou teachest like a fool: the way to lose him.

(*AC*, 1.3.6-10)

In contrast to Antony, Cleopatra begrudgingly offers her love. She never 'gives way' to her lover because she knows that giving him everything he wants is 'the way to lose him'. Cleopatra says to Charmian, 'If you find him sad, / Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report / That I am sudden sick' (1.3.3-5). Not giving enough is the way she 'makes hungry / Where most she satisfies' (2.2.236-37).

Cleopatra cautiously acts on the principle of reciprocity. The uncertainty of give-and-take peppers the conversation between the lovers in Act I, Scene iii, in which the word 'give' is used six times (1.3.9, 14, 21, 57, 68, 74); Antony asks her to 'give true evidence to his love' (74), but Cleopatra insinuates that she cannot trust his love because he has deserted Fulvia (75). Unlike Antony, who gives the fugitive soldier the 'overplus', Cleopatra gives nothing to those who hurt her. In granting the messenger an audience in Act II, Scene v, she repeat-

edly promises him some fortune, such as gold and pearls, to remunerate his efforts (2.5.27-35, 42-46, 49), only on the condition that he informs her of good news about Antony. On hearing the bad news of Antony's marriage, she strikes the messenger and orders him to withdraw it:

Say 'tis not so, a province I will give thee,
 And make thy fortunes proud; the blow thou hadst
 Shall make thy peace for moving me to rage,
 And I will boot thee with what gift beside
 Thy modesty can beg. (AC, 2.5.68-72)

Although she is distressed, she states that she can only give him the gift that his 'modesty can beg' (72). Her attempt to 'set a bourn' (1.1.16) in gift-giving is clearly displayed in these scenes.

Cleopatra's principle of gift-giving stems from her idiosyncratic position as the Queen of Egypt in two respects. First, on a political level, her right to give and take autonomously symbolises her supremacy as a queen. As a queen, Cleopatra can give and take anything that she wants: she acts freely, even arbitrarily, in her gift relationships with male characters (2.5.27-35, 42-46, 49; 3.3.4-6). Her enormous power in gift-giving derives from her status as the only monarch of Egypt with no male guardian who can give or take her. In protecting this privileged status, she is aware that she should not be made an exchangeable 'gift' like Octavia. Even in conversation with her lover, she uses political vocabulary to express vigilance against being a gift. In quarrelling with Antony, she cries, 'Oh, never was there queen / So mightily betrayed! yet at the first / I saw the treasons planted' (1.3.24-26). The two political words 'betray' and 'treason' both derive from the Latin verb '*trado*', which means 'to hand over'. Cleopatra's consciousness as the 'giver of herself' is also implied in her speech

regretting her irresponsible action: 'These hands do lack nobility that they strike / A meaner than myself, since I myself / Have given myself the cause' (2.5.82-84).

Second, on a religious level, Cleopatra regards herself as a unique figure loved by and identified with the pagan gods, who bind human beings in reciprocal relationships.¹⁸⁾ On the one hand, the grudging attitude of the gods is frequently mentioned in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Both Charmian and Agrippa refer to their tight-fistedness (1.2.67-69; 5.1.32-33). Enobarbus cynically advises Antony to 'give the gods a thankful sacrifice' (1.2.161) in return for Fulvia's death, which freed Antony. Antony also hopes that the gods will recompense his subjects for their faithfulness (4.2.33). After Antony's death, Cleopatra herself states that the gods deserve criticism because they took Antony from her.

It were for me

To throw my sceptre at the injurious gods,

To tell them that this world did equal theirs

Till they had stol'n our jewel. (*AC*, 4.15.75-78)

On the other hand, as the queen of Egypt, Cleopatra identifies herself with these reciprocal gods. She is bound to Phoebus and has become 'black' by receiving his 'amorous pinches' (1.5.27-9). Enobarbus compares her to Venus (2.2.200), a love-giving goddess. Octavius mentions that Cleopatra, dressed as Isis, 'gave audience' to the Egyptian people (3.6.16-8); this scene implies that Cleopatra considers her meeting with the people as a kind of divine gift.

18) In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the pagan images are frequently used, and especially, Antony and Cleopatra are conspicuously associated with pagan gods. About this, see Janet Adelman, *The Common Liar: An Essay on Antony and Cleopatra* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), ch. 2 and Anne Barton, *Essays, Mainly on Shakespearean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 119-20.

Cleopatra's 'freedom' in gift-giving was a rare privilege for women in early modern Europe. According to Davis, their right to exchange gifts or to express gratitude freely was limited; they could not create their own autonomous reciprocal relationships because of 'the requirement of endless obedience that could arise in any mode of exchange' (150). These female troubles with gift-giving were exaggeratedly described in literary works, such as Christine de Pizan's story of Griselda (78-79) and Shakespeare's *King Lear* (71-72).¹⁹⁾ Compared to these other literary examples, the descriptions of Cleopatra's privilege seem peculiar.

Understandably, then, Cleopatra's privilege is threatening to the male characters in a patriarchal system. Even though Cleopatra has 'given herself over to Antony, she remains autonomous and manages to subjugate Antony. When she cannot obtain what she wants, she orders men to do so on her behalf. When Alexas makes a joke about Herod, Cleopatra answers back '[t]hat Herod's head / I'll have; but now, when Antony is gone, / Through whom I might command it?' (3.3.4-6). This implies that Cleopatra takes Antony's devotion for granted. Male characters' discomfort with her power is insinuated throughout the play. Enobarbus teases Antony about her compelling orders (1.2.173-75), and the Romans severely criticise her (1.1.10-13; 1.4.5-7; 3.6.60-68). Antony himself is conscious of his subordinate position; while admitting that he is her subject in front of Cleopatra (1.3.43-44, 69-70), he is troubled by her control over him when she is away (1.2.116-17).

Cleopatra's coercive power to incite men is partly due to her feminine charm, which is the 'erotic' power that lubricates gift-giving as a form of psychological commerce. Antony, a generous and chivalrous man '[w]hom ne'er

19) On female identity and obedience, see also Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 79.

the word of “No” woman heard speak’ (2.2.223), cannot decline Cleopatra’s request in front of her. Although this erotic power may apparently arouse men’s desire to dominate, women do not have to be completely obedient to men, as long as their power functions well. According to Menas, ‘they [fair women] steal hearts’ (2.6.101); compared to the word ‘take’, the word ‘steal’ connotes violation and cunningness. This implies that feminine charm endows women with the power to transgress the rule that men use to possess and subjugate women. In a strict sense, Cleopatra is not ‘fair’, since her complexion is ‘black’ (1.5.28), but she is unarguably irresistible and therefore beyond the rule.

Cleopatra exploits her erotic power consciously in political negotiations, intertwining it with her privilege in gift-giving. When Antony first meets Cleopatra, who is dressed as beautifully as Venus (2.2.200–201), she refuses Antony’s invitation but asks him to be her guest at a banquet (219–22). She tries to gain dominance over Antony by becoming the first to give a feast or by being the originator of a reciprocal relationship, luring him with her beauty. Furthermore, Cleopatra regards kisses as ‘erotic’ gifts to facilitate talks with kings and other negotiation partners; when she meets the messenger, she tells him that she has utilised kisses in politics:

but well and free,
If thou so yield him, there is gold, and here
My bluest veins to kiss – a hand that kings
Have lipp’d, and trembled kissing. (*AC*, 2.5.27–30)

According to Greenblatt, Queen Elizabeth I politically controlled her subjects by dangling kisses and romances before them and treating them like Petrarch-

an lovers who commit themselves to their mistress.²⁰⁾ Some critics say that Shakespeare created Cleopatra partly to resemble Elizabeth I.²¹⁾

In the end, however, Cleopatra's feminine charm undermines her autonomy in gift-giving, especially with regard to her political plight. As long as she is a powerful queen, she can enjoy her privilege; once her power begins to ebb, her autonomy weakens. The scene of her negotiation with Octavius after losing the battle of Actium is heavily shadowed by this decline. Cleopatra, in considering the future of Egypt, decides to enter into a reciprocal relationship with Octavius, but this relationship is obstructed by Antony and finally collapses. In negotiation, Octavius orders his messenger, Thidias, to tell Cleopatra that he will give her what she wants (3.13.65-69), for a gift relationship with her also avails him (3.12.27-33). Here, Octavius is the first to give, and Cleopatra plays the part of an obedient recipient. They exchange kisses as gifts; she expresses her gratitude by kissing Octavius' 'conqu'ring hand' (3.13.75), and Thidias asks her to '[g]ive me grace' to kiss her (81-82) in return for this. While Thidias is kissing her hand, Cleopatra even attempts to enhance its erotic value under the guise of humbling herself by alleging that Octavius' father, Julius Caesar, was fascinated with an 'unworthy place' (82-85), her hand. To begin an erotic commerce with Octavius, she must permit Thidias, as a 'Jack of Caesar's' (103), to kiss her, concealing her contempt for 'the scarce-bearded Caesar' (1.1.21); for Egypt, she is willing to succumb to being a supplicant of gifts of favour.

20) Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 164-69.

21) Helen Morris, in 'Queen Elizabeth I "Shadowed" in Cleopatra', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 32 (1969): 271-78 and Keith Rinehart, in 'Shakespeare's Cleopatra and England's Elizabeth', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 23 (1972): 81-86, point out that *Antony and Cleopatra* reflects the Elizabethan court, especially the behaviour of Elizabeth I. See also Leonard Tennenhouse, *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres* (New York: Methuen, 1986) 146; and Kenneth Muir, 'Elizabeth I, Jodelle, and Cleopatra', *Renaissance Drama* 1 (1968): 197-206.

Antony, however, is enraged at finding Thidias kissing her. He lays claim to the exclusive right to kiss her hand:

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! (*AC*, 3.13.123-26)

Here, Antony requires obedience from Cleopatra as a woman and a lover, not as a queen. He even devalues her queenship by implying that she is as exchangeable as Octavia (106-09). As the proud 'giver' of Cleopatra, Antony prevents her from expressing gratitude to Octavius by whipping Thidias (131-33). Cleopatra, whose power is now on the decline, has no choice but to 'stay his time'.²²⁾ She may have controlled Antony by wielding her erotic power, but her autonomy in gift-giving is now threatened by him.

Cleopatra's autonomy is further weakened after the defeat of Egypt and Antony's death. Nevertheless, she uses this difficulty to her advantage. Resolved to die, she beguiles Octavius into believing that she has no intention of killing herself through a feigned display of attention to trivial female presents. In her interview with him, she deliberately has Seleucus reveal her hidden wealth and pretends that she has fallen so low that she cannot keep giving her

22) *AC*, 3.13.155. According to John Wilders, editor of *Antony and Cleopatra*, The Arden Shakespeare Third Ser. (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), 222, this line is interpreted in two ways: 'I must wait him for recover' or 'I must wait for his final defeat'. Both Michael Neill, editor of *Anthony and Cleopatra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), and David Bevington, editor of *Anthony and Cleopatra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), take the interpretation closer to Wilders' former reading.

‘immoment’ gifts to Roman ladies without Octavius’ permission.²³⁾

Say, good Caesar,
That I some lady trifles have reserv’d,
Immoment toys, things of such dignity
As we greet modern friends withal, and say
Some nobler token I have kept apart
For Livia and Octavia, to induce
Their mediation [. . .]. (*AC*, 5.2.164–70)

Since autonomy in gift-giving symbolises the queen’s power, her complaint demonstrates that she no longer has the privilege of building a reciprocal relationship by herself. She purposely bolsters the image of an obedient, captive woman to outwit Octavius.

Cleopatra has no choice but to die in order to protect her autonomy as a

23) There are two different readings of this scene. On the opinion that Seleucus betrays Cleopatra, see Brents Stirling, ‘Cleopatra’s Scene with Seleucus: Plutarch, Daniel, Shakespeare’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15 (1964): 299–311; A. P. Riemer, *A Reading of Shakespeare’s Antony and Cleopatra* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1968), 71–72; and Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare’s Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 153–54. On the opinion that Cleopatra and Seleucus play a trick, see Horace Howard Furness, ed. *The Tragedie of Anthonie, and Cleopatra* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1907), 352; and John Dover Wilson, ed., *Antony and Cleopatra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), xxxv and 238; Harold Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 1: 201; and Wilders, 285–86. The latter reading is persuasive for three reasons. First, Cleopatra probably lies to Octavius when she states that she will contact Octavia (169) after announcing that she cannot meet ‘dull Octavia’ (55). Second, she calls Octavius an ‘ass / Unpolicied’ (307–6) before she dies. Regarding this, see also Richard A. Levin, ‘That I Might Hear Thee Call Great Caesar “ass unpolicied”’, *Papers on Language and Literature* 33 (1997): 244–46. Third, as Wilders points out in his note on Act V, Scene ii, line 134, Cleopatra seems to prevent Octavius from leaving the room deliberately in order to show him her inventory.

queen. She is afraid to be made 'an Egyptian puppet' in his triumph (5.2.208), which shows that she places great value on her autonomy. She is losing her autonomy partly because her feminine charm has no effect on Octavius. Although she enhances her erotic value and flatters him with dangling kisses, he decides to lead her in triumph.²⁴⁾

The decline of her erotic power is symbolically portrayed in relation to the pagan gods, her former protectors; she feels that the emotional ties between her and the gods are being broken. In Cleopatra's death scene, Charmian invokes Phoebus: 'golden Phoebus never be beheld / Of eyes again so royal' (5.2.317-18). Phoebus loved Cleopatra and gave her 'amorous pinches', but now he gives her nothing. Charmian also assumes that the gods must be crying for Cleopatra's death, but the gods are lost to her view and that of her queen, and she cannot see their tears: 'Dissolve, thick cloud, and rain, that I may say / The gods themselves do weep' (299-300). Before her suicide, Cleopatra thinks that the gods first bring fortune to people but then dismay them through misfortune.

I hear him [Antony] mock
The luck of Caesar, which the gods give men
To excuse their after wrath. (5.2.285-87)

For Cleopatra, human beings are at the mercy of the fickle gods, who give and take arbitrarily. The luck of Caesar, as well as her luck and that of Antony, is just a gift from them which may someday be rescinded.

Failing to exercise her erotic power in gift-giving, Cleopatra attempts to deny its source, her feminine charm. Her feminine traits, however, are so persis-

24) According to Adelman, '[t]he younger Caesar is apparently immune to Cleopatra's charms' (134).

tent that she cannot abandon all of them, and they become entangled with her non-feminine traits in her death scene. On one hand, to be ‘marble-constant’ (5.2.240), she tries to cast off her feminine traits, which are associated with caprice: ‘I have nothing / Of woman in me’ (238-39). On the other hand, she demonstrates them, calling Antony’s name (312) and becoming jealous of Iras, who may meet her lover in the other world prior to her arrival (300-303). She also pretends to be a mother feeding a baby, applying the asp to her breast (309-10).

This entanglement shows that Cleopatra stands on the threshold between life and death. Her effort to assume a purely spiritual existence symbolises her ‘[i]mmortal longings’ (5.2.281) for divinity in the afterlife, while her feminine traits represent her earthliness. This liminal condition becomes crystallised in her kiss, a phenomenon of transition through the lips, or the margins of the human body. Cleopatra’s kiss becomes a boundary-crossing ritual between life and death. Before her suicide, she kisses her faithful subjects, Iras and Charmian:

I am fire and air; my other elements

I give to baser life. So, have you done?

Come then, and take the last warmth of my lips. (AC, 5.2. 289-91)

The ‘warmth’, a symbol of life, flows out from her lips through a kiss, but it is soon transformed into ‘[t]he stroke of death’ (295), for the giver of the kiss is making a transition into the other world and exercising the power to blur the boundary of life. After these lines, Iras dies merely because she receives Cleopatra’s kiss, which surprises Cleopatra: ‘Have I the aspic in my lips? Dost fall?’ (293). The erotic pleasure of a kiss is followed by the lethal poison. Cleopatra gives Charmian ‘leave / To play until doomsday’ (5.2.231-32) in return for

helping her get dressed and kisses her, but Charmian's grief is too deep for her to survive her queen.

In this scene, Cleopatra appears to deliver her lethal kisses happily, for she regards herself as performing the role of a god. She likens her kiss to 'a lover's pinch' (5.2.295). This expression recalls the 'amorous pinches' that Phoebus gave her; she compares herself to gods giving gifts. Cleopatra first gives a kiss and then death, just as the gods give pleasure '[t]o excuse their after wrath' (287). Watching the gods forsaking her, Cleopatra, as the absolute queen of Egypt, identifies herself with the capricious gods again by bestowing her last lethal kisses.

After imitating the gods, Cleopatra attempts to escape from the principle of reciprocity that has bound her to the pagan gods. Casting off her role as queen for a moment, she seeks one last gift as a lover - Antony's kiss: 'that kiss / Which is my heaven to have' (302-03). She had always begrudged Antony her kisses when she had to control her gift-giving; now, she tries to indulge herself in the pleasure of her lover's kisses. She imagines how Antony will 'spend' his kisses for her subjects in heaven (302). This indicates that she approves of his limitless gift-giving and that she also imagines heaven as a place governed by a generous gift economy, where the gods are not grudging and she does not need to mind her earthly duties concerning reciprocal relationships. In heaven, Antony's love is '[a]s sweet as balm, as soft as air' (311). There is no need to 'set a bourn' because his love spreads like air or scent 'past the size of dreaming' (97).

Cleopatra, however, knows that the gods are not generous enough to fulfil her wish unconditionally. She can only realise her dream in exchange for making 'death proud to take us' (4.15.88). As Octavius praises, Cleopatra 'being royal, / Took her own way' (5.2.336-7). She kills herself to obtain Antony's kiss through her own will as she used to, never 'giving way' to Octavius. The

end of the play portrays a kiss as a gift worth risking one's life for, as Antony believed. For Cleopatra, this world is 'not worth leave-taking' (298), but the value of Antony's kiss is inestimable. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, while each of them acts proudly in gift-giving, Cleopatra's cautious principle of gift-giving clashes with Antony's generosity. In the end, the two principles finally harmonise in the precious gift of a kiss in the afterworld.

Conclusion

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, gift-giving serves to contrast the characters of the leading couple; Antony's generosity and Cleopatra's reciprocity are both linked to their tragic ends through the imagery of gifts, by highlighting major factors in this play, such as gender, love, political power, social order, and religion. Some of the gifts mentioned by the characters, such as Antony's pearl for Cleopatra and Cleopatra's kisses, would have actually been exchanged on stage and given visual pleasure to the audiences. Other gifts, such as Antony and Cleopatra's first exchange of invitations, recounted by Enobarbus, may have appeared only in speech, evoking mirabilia and items of luxury absent from the stage. Examining gift-giving in Shakespeare's plays will encourage modern readers not only to analyse the structure of the plays in book form, but also to consider the more material aspects of the plays: how they were staged, performed, and designed to please the audiences in Renaissance England.