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# The Ambiguity of Antony and Cleopatra: Interrupting Phallogentric Schemes of Objectification through the Mutual Gaze

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The Ambiguity of *Antony and Cleopatra*:  
Interrupting Phallogentric Schemes of Objectification through the Mutual Gaze

By

Sydney Paluch

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Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for  
Honors in the Departments of English and Political Science

UNION COLLEGE  
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## ABSTRACT

PALUCH, SYDNEY An analysis of Simone de Beauvoir's theory of ambiguity as applied to William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra*.

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This thesis proposes an alternative to the male gaze, using Simone de Beauvoir's theory of ambiguity in order to understand the subversive sexual politics underlying Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra*. The concept of the male gaze was first identified in feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey's article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," which explains how film is explicitly constructed around the male gaze. Since the publication of Mulvey's article, feminist theorists such as Linda Williams and Mary Ann Doane have attempted to construct a feminine counterpart to the male gaze. Unfortunately, these theorists have typically concluded that such a gaze is possible by merely reversing the male gaze, substituting female desire for male. Although the female operating within such a theoretical scheme of male objectification gains prominence over the male, this is merely reversing the gender of power without reconstructing the system itself. I propose that there is an alternative, non-possessive gaze, which I define as the "mutual gaze", and identify in William Shakespeare's play *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra*. My thesis explicates this gaze by applying Beauvoir's theory of ambiguity to *Antony and Cleopatra*, showing how the play enables the subject to become both spectacle and spectator. Although Shakespeare's entire body of work provide opportunities for women to reclaim their ambiguity and freedom, *Antony and Cleopatra* has been

chosen for this thesis as it provides a plethora of these opportunities. This is because the Greco-Roman couple in Shakespeare's retelling are enacting what Beauvoir defines as an ideal relationship in her conclusion to *The Second Sex*. Since in original practice productions Cleopatra is able to be performed as one who "posits herself for herself" while "nonetheless continue[ing] to exist for him [Antony] as well", both halves of the original power couple are able to "recognize each Other as subject [and] remain an *Other* for the other" (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 766).



“Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have  
Immortal longings in me” (V.II.283)

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For my Mother,  
who taught me to never settle for normal

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# Introduction

Flourish. Enter ANTONY and CLEOPATRA  
-William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*

The two cool, ever logical leaders have fallen head-over-heels and into bed. With all the passion of two virgin lovers the aged pair “make the beast with two backs” (Shakespeare, *Othello*, I.I.126) as affairs of the state are seemingly tossed nonchalantly aside with their tunics. They find ambiguity in their athletically adulterous acts, forgoing logic for the friction of forms. While a casual viewer may dismiss this scene as nothing more than the coitus of lovers, upon closer inspection Cleopatra and Antony find far more than just the ecstasy of sexual exploration. Instead, their moments of intimacy reveal instances of Simone de Beauvoir’s theory of ambiguity. This theory essentially states that the subject is both Self and other, because the subject exists as Self to their Self, and Other to those around them. This ambiguity is an essential element of humanity that is denied to women in patriarchal societies because they are forced to remain as the ultimate and absolute Other. According to Beauvoir, “this is the fundamental characteristic of woman: she is the Other at the heart of a whole whose two components are necessary to each other” (*The Second Sex* 9). However, because women continually resist the imposition of patriarchal norms, they are able to create spaces where ambiguity can flourish. In this space, the “whole” that Beauvoir claims women are a necessary component of is established. By reading Shakespeare and Simone de Beauvoir’s work in conversation with each other we are able to realize such moments of ambiguity that would previously slip past unacknowledged. This is because a transformation occurs when ambiguity is acknowledged such that a reorganized, reconfiguration of the strict male/female binary takes place even within the

confines of patriarchal societies. Yet, this transformation cannot occur without the help of Beauvoir's theoretical example. Although the foundation of such ambiguity exists in the text of *Antony and Cleopatra* itself, the actual enactment of such ambiguity is dependent on performative choices.

I propose that within this theoretical conversation between Shakespeare and Beauvoir there exists the possibility of a feminist gaze that seeks to deconstruct the hierarchal power structures supposedly intrinsic to the act of gazing in a heteronormative and androcentric society. These power structures are identified in Laura Mulvey's article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". In this cornerstone of film theory, Mulvey's article defines what she calls the male gaze. This gaze is responsible for the eroticization of the female image in the performative realm, and has permeated virtually all aspects of Western society. Although Mulvey's article does focus specifically on the male gaze in cinema it is applicable to all aspects of the Western performative realm. This is because

even in the theater, a place where we pay money to let us believe for transitory moment, things that we know cannot be real, the minds of modern audiences are conditioned by the cinematic image. [...] [since] moving images are the most graphic and immediate form of access we have to reality. We think in cinematic images. (Gurr, "Staging at the Globe" 159)

The monopoly of the male gaze in media is particularly problematic as it reinforces the position of woman as the ultimate Other. This reinforcement creates a cyclical cycle in which women are "objectified as the Other in ways that

[are] both overtly despotic and insidious” and serve “as a rationale for their own subjugation” (Thurman, xiv). Just as Beauvoir demonstrates how women are kept as the ultimate Other in society as “a product developed by civilization” (*The Second Sex* 761) and are as a result denied ambiguity, so too does Mulvey depict how on-screen women are othered in a way that denies them ambiguity as well. This is because “freedom for all is denied when some are treated as things. (Marso, Simone de Beauvoir and Hannah Arendt: Judgement in Dark Times” 177). The male gaze is therefore operating as part of a combination of societal forces that serves to perpetuate the subordinate position of femininity by creating imagery to justify their subjugation. This “conflict will last as long as men and women do not recognize themselves as peers, that is, as long as femininity is perpetuated [in] such” (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 755) a way that ambiguity is denied. To end this conflict and allow for ambiguity Beauvoir claims that there must be “a collective change” that creates “a society where sexual equality is concretely realized” and “equality [...] asserts itself in each individual” (*The Second Sex* 761).

In order to achieve a radical restructuring of society as Beauvoir calls for the voyeuristic system of scopophilic gazing based on phallogocentric hierarchies must first be deconstructed. This can be accomplished by utilizing Beauvoir’s theory of ambiguity as a basis for an alternative system of spectatorship. Since this alternative gaze allows both the object and employer of the gaze to retain their humanity, I call this gaze the “Mutual Gaze”. Although numerous theorists from literary to political theory have attempted to discover such a theory, I assert

that the textual foundation for this gaze has existed within *Antony and Cleopatra* for nearly four centuries. However, this foundation for the Mutual Gaze remained undiscovered, since a Beauvoirian theoretical lens had not been applied to *Antony and Cleopatra*. Since the concept of the gaze is foundationally intrinsic to Beauvoir's theory of ambiguity because of its reliance on the interpretation of the Self through Other's perceptions, by applying such a theory to *Antony and Cleopatra* this thesis will reveal the reality of a truly Mutual Gaze. This theoretical conversation between Beauvoir and Shakespeare is essential to the current academic dialogue due to both the absence of any applicable alternative to the male gaze, and the rank objectification of the female body in modern media.

In order to analyze the elements and application of the Mutual Gaze, this thesis is divided into three chapters. Entitled "An Analysis of Ambiguity", the first chapter will lay the theoretical framework for the Mutual Gaze as enacted in *Antony and Cleopatra*. This will be done through the introduction of Simone de Beauvoir's own work, explication of the male gaze, a critique of several insufficient "female gaze" theories, and then the proposal of my own theory of the Mutual Gaze. The second chapter, "Ambiguity (In)Action: A Textual Analysis", will delve into the actual text of *Anthony and Cleopatra*. Here, Shakespeare immediately jumps into the "ethics of ambiguity" from the entrances and introductions in Act I Scene I, and themes of "seeing" and suicide in Act V Scene II. My analysis continues in the third chapter, "Ambiguity in 'Action!': A Film Analysis", which examines selected scenes in the 2014 Globe On Stage production of *Antony and Cleopatra*. This analysis of Shakespeare's text in action

is essential, as this play was created with the express intent of performance. It also serves to depict how performative choices can create the spaces for ambiguity that already exist in the text, or destroy such opportunities. This is essential, because although this thesis is exploring a strictly fictional work, the Mutual Gaze as depicted in this production of *Antony and Cleopatra* has the power to interrupt the repetition of phallogentric schemes of objectification in Western media. Both the recorded performance and textual studies are also done in tandem so that my theory of the Mutual Gaze does not exist in an academic vacuum.

Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates how a transformation occurs when ambiguity is acknowledged such that a reconfigured approach to the strict male vs female binary occurs even within the confines of patriarchal societies. However, this transformation cannot occur without the help of Beauvoir's theoretical example, since "*The Second Sex* is an appeal to its readers to carry out" a "radical transformation of the social imaginaries that permeate our lives" (Diagle 198). Although the foundation of such ambiguity exists in the text of *Antony and Cleopatra* itself, the actual enactment of such ambiguity is dependent on performative choices. As a result, the Mutual Gaze can be employed as an alternative to the objectification and dehumanization of the male gaze within theatrical venues that allow for recognition of the Other. Therefore, I propose that reading Beauvoir and Shakespeare in conversation with one another, in order to reconfigure the "social imaginaries" perpetuated by the male gaze, is an attempt at the radical transformation that Beauvoir calls her readers to enact. By



capturing the ambiguity in *Antony and Cleopatra*, we can interrupt the repetition of the patriarchal value systems that denies women the opportunity for ambiguity with the male gaze.

# Chapter 1

## An Analysis of Ambiguity

“Man must not attempt to dispel the ambiguity of his being but, on the contrary, accept the task of realizing it.”

— Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*

## I. *The Second Sex* and The Ethics of Ambiguity

A playwright, novelist, philosopher, existentialist: Simone de Beauvoir excelled in a variety of fields. However, although she wrote in a plethora of genres, her work is all built on a base of existentialism<sup>1</sup>, and as a result focuses on the individual in relation to society<sup>2</sup>. This philosophical approach is the base of the two books by Beauvoir that this thesis is built on: *The Second Sex* (1949) and *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947). I am using these two books in order to identify the Mutual Gaze in *Antony and Cleopatra* because Simone de Beauvoir's theorizing focuses on relational freedom and the enactment of ambiguity. Composed in France after World War II, Beauvoir's biography of the female experience was one of the main impetuses for the second wave of feminism. Chronicling the social, biological, philosophical, and political history of women, Beauvoir explores the question of "what is woman" and why "woman is [defined as] the negative" (*The Second Sex* 5). In contrast, the *Ethics of Ambiguity*, written just two years' prior, is not a specifically feminist book. However, its conceptualization of relational freedom is uniquely useful for feminist theory as it enables the deconstruction of the Self vs. Other binary<sup>3</sup>. This deconstruction is a

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<sup>1</sup> Beauvoir calls existentialism "a philosophy of ambiguity" in her *Ethics of Ambiguity* (2).

<sup>2</sup> . According to the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, existentialism is, "A philosophical theory or approach which emphasizes the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining their own development through acts of the will" (125).

<sup>3</sup> Although I am primarily utilizing *The Second Sex* for this thesis, Beauvoir's theory of ambiguity is originally established in her *Ethics of Ambiguity*, which may be referred to for more information on the subject. Since Beauvoir utilizes her conclusions from *The Ethics of Ambiguity* to craft the conditions of ambiguity that are the focus of *The Second Sex*, this thesis focuses on the later volume.

result of Beauvoir's conclusion that the actor is both Self and Other through the mutual dependence of living in relation to Other actors.

For the purpose of this thesis I am utilizing Beauvoir's theory of ambiguity from *The Ethics of Ambiguity* as played out through her definition of women as the absolute or ultimate Other from *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir's theory of ambiguity was specifically selected because it presents the conditions through which women are denied the opportunity to embrace what Diagle calls "an ambiguous encounter between ambiguous embodied beings" (Diagle 197). Therefore, Beauvoir's theoretic example as established in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and explicated in *The Second Sex* is the foundation of the Mutual Gaze, as it conceptualizes the mutual dependence and reclaimed ambiguity required for women to escape their position as the ultimate Other, even within the confines of patriarchal societies.

Although I am utilizing Beauvoir's writing as sources of feminist political theory, it is important to note that Beauvoir did not consider herself to be a political theorist. According to Deidre Bair's biography of Beauvoir, the French existentialist "has never written anything exclusively devoted to the explication of a personal political credo, and has always denied in the strongest language any interest or involvement in politics per se" (150). However, Beauvoir consistently focused on the expressly political issues of the individual in relation to society in her writing and activism<sup>4</sup>. Her political consciousness began in earnest after the Nazi occupation of France, and as a result Beauvoir, with her intellectual life-

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<sup>4</sup> See Sonia Kruks's *Simone De Beauvoir and the Politics of Ambiguity* for more on Beauvoir's political significance.

partner and lover Jean-Paul Sartre, founded *Les Temps Modernes* in 1945 (Marso, review of *Simone de Beauvoir and The Politics of Ambiguity* e1). The inherently political nature of Beauvoir's writing has been furthermore established through the work of Lori Marso, one of the main theorists whose scholarship this thesis is based on<sup>5</sup>. In her article "Thinking Politically with Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*", Marso explains how "even if we think about politics in its most conventional sense-as the art of governance, the study of how power works, or as the interaction between people and states-we notice that Beauvoir was always thinking about political questions". This political preoccupation may be identified throughout Beauvoir's body of work.

Building on this foundation, I propose that the "sophisticated and compelling theory of situated freedom" ("Thinking Politically with Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*"), identified in Beauvoir's work by Marso, can be utilized to read both political implications, and moments of ambiguity into *Antony and Cleopatra*. Furthermore, *The Second Sex* is particularly applicable as a political theory text when read "as a continuation of [...] *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, [by] unveil[ing] Beauvoir's continued concern with the political and, furthermore, her conception of the political agent as fundamentally ambiguous" (Diagle 197). Therefore, even though Beauvoir did not conceptualize herself as a political philosopher, her inherently political work may be used as a theoretical basis for understanding the subversive sexual politics underlying Shakespeare's plays.

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<sup>5</sup> As I am a student of Professor Marso, the theoretical basis of this thesis was crafted in her classes.

Nevertheless, utilizing Beauvoir's writing as a political theory text presents a delicate and challenging situation, since Beauvoir wrote in an exploratory, rather than prescriptive, fashion. As Marso explains, "it was never Beauvoir's desire to formulate a systematic philosophy" ("Thinking Politically with Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*"). This situation is also identified in Sara Heinamma's article "What is a Woman? Butler and Beauvoir on the Foundations of the Sexual Difference", which states that "Beauvoir is not trying to explain facts, events, or states of affairs, but to reveal, unveil, or uncover (*découvrir*) meanings" (20). Instead of a systematic philosophy, the French existentialist claims that in *The Second Sex* she is "describing the common ground from which all singular feminine existence stems" (Beauvoir, 279). By exploring the social construction of femininity and "situating women's freedom in the context of lived experience" (Marso "Thinking Politically with Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* "), Beauvoir therefore "explicates the meanings of woman, female, and feminine [...] presenting a phenomenological description of the sexual difference" (Heinamma 20). By doing so, Beauvoir is able to craft a "metaphysical literature that performs an appeal to ambiguous agents" (197) according to Christine Diagle's article "*The Second Sex as Appeal*". Such an appeal is uniquely possible through the exploratory style of Beauvoir's writing, since as previously stated, Marso explains how the French existentialist did not seek to "formulate a systematic philosophy". This is because Beauvoir does not attempt to force a prescriptive philosophy onto her reader, and instead enacts her own theory of ambiguity and freedom by approaching her reader as another free and ambiguous agent. By

enacting the ambiguity that she is depicting in her writings<sup>6</sup>, Beauvoir engages in meta rhetoric in order to demonstrate how freedom is relational.

I propose that this “appeal to ambiguous agents” also occurs in Shakespeare’s writing, as instead of writing in a prescriptive manner Shakespeare explores the confines of both freedom and gender<sup>7</sup>. Reading the two writers in conjunction allows for a reconfiguration of the strict male/female binary, since both are exploring the issue in a way that approaches the reader as an ambiguous agent. By doing so, both the female reader and onstage image respectively, are able to escape the position of ultimate Other they have been socio-historically relegated to. These entities are then able to escape this dehumanized position since the ambiguity that is an essential part of humanity is no longer denied to them.

Exploring how woman are posited as the ultimate Other is Beauvoir’s main aim in *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir endeavors to accomplish this exploration and debunk the “theory of the eternally feminine” (3) by examining the “Facts and Myths” surrounding femininity in Volume I, and “Lived Experiences” in Volume II<sup>8</sup>. These two volumes work in conjunction to support Beauvoir’s overall conclusion that women are kept as the ultimate Other from “the whole process by which femininity is manufactured in society” (Bryson 151). According to Beauvoir:

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<sup>6</sup> Diagle 197

<sup>7</sup> How both critical texts and Shakespeare’s work utilize prescriptive and descriptive elements is addressed in “Performing Gender in Shakespeare’s Plays” by Loyd Davis

<sup>8</sup> See Judith Butler’s “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*” for more on her critique of how Beauvoir categorizes sex and gender, through methods such as debunking this theory.

One is not born, but rather becomes, woman<sup>9</sup>. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine. Only the mediation of another can constitute an individual as an Other. (*The Second Sex* 283)

This quote begins the second volume of *The Second Sex* and serves to succinctly summarize the nearly three hundred pages Beauvoir has previously devoted to dismissing the historic, “biological, psychic, [and] economic” entities typically utilized as justification for women’s oppression. Instead, Beauvoir is claiming that the subjugated status of femininity that denies women the opportunity to engage in ambiguity is the inevitable result of how “civilization as a whole” defines the female condition.

She furthermore places the blame for trapping women as the absolute Other squarely on the shoulders of those who have designed society to function in this manner. This is because one is unable to constitute themselves as the Other, it is only the definition of another that can define one as the Other. However, although these historical causes are not the sole reasons for the oppression of women, they are important for understanding how society was constructed to subjugate femininity. As Beauvoir explicates, “history has shown that men have always held all the concrete powers; from patriarchy’s earliest times they have deemed it useful to keep woman in a state of dependence [...]

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<sup>9</sup> See Toril Moi’s *What is a Woman?* for more on how the categories of male and female as well as what Beauvoir identifies as the process of “becoming” have been interpreted by poststructuralist theorists.



she was thus concretely established as the Other” (*The Second Sex* 159). This state of dependence then became a Self-perpetuating entity as “it justifies all its privileges and even authorizes taking advantage of them” (*The Second Sex* 268). Meticulously deconstructing the biological and social justifications for the subjugation of women, Beauvoir explains how the state of dependence is created from the female’s childhood, as “she finds herself in the world differently from the boy; and a group of factors can transform this difference into inferiority in her eyes” (*The Second Sex* 287). By trapping women as the Other, masculinity is then constructed as the societal norm, whereas women are considered to be a deviation from that norm<sup>10</sup> since “woman is the negative” (*The Second Sex* 5). Since it is only the definition of another that can define one as the Other, women are “determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other” (*The Second Sex* 6). This idea became one of the foundations of modern feminist thought, with theorists such as Luce Irigaray later claiming that “the fundamental model of the human being remained unchanged; one, singular, solitary, historically masculine, the paradigmatic Western adult male, rational, capable” (7). It is through this process of differentiation that women have been socially constructed as the ultimate and absolute Other. Caught in this position, women are then denied the opportunity to embrace ambiguity.

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<sup>10</sup> “Humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself” (*The Second Sex*, 5).

However, although women are kept as the ultimate Other and are unable to achieve the status of the Absolute or Subject, all of humanity exists as both Self and Other according to Beauvoir. There is, therefore, a finite portion of oneself that may be perceived by others as you, although it is not “you”. Rather, it is others’ perception of the Being instead of the Being itself. Beauvoir states that this situation is universally true for all humanity; that we are not ourselves to others, and instead are constructed with our personal sentence existing congruently with others’ conceptualization of ourselves. Regardless of how much the Self sees one’s Self as an individual, others will ultimately be unable to formulate the same convictions because the rest of humanity will always see the Self as the Other. The state of being both Self and Other is the essence of Beauvoir’s theory of ambiguity. As ambiguity is defined by Beauvoir as an essential function of humanity, “man must not attempt to dispel the ambiguity of his being but, on the contrary, accept the task of realizing it” (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 13). Since “Beauvoir consistently theorizes freedom as always constrained and enabled by situation and only able to flourish when others are also free” (Marso, “Simone de Beauvoir and Hannah Arendt: Judgement in Dark Times” 167) ambiguity is furthermore an essential state for human interaction as one is only able “to grasp himself under their [other subjective individuals] gaze as an object” (*The Second Sex* 284). As a result, even men function as an Other existing through the perceptions of other unique Subjects. This function is necessitated by the very existence of the individual’s own subjectivity and uniquely human Self-awareness. As a result, “it is necessary that the Other be

another for itself, that its very subjectivity be affected by alterity” (*The Second Sex* 271). This is “the paradox of their [human’s] condition” (Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* 2) and “the primeval drama of every existent- that is, the drama of one’s relation to the Other” (*The Second Sex* 284). Since Beauvoir claims that “it is uniquely when he is fixed by the gaze of others that he appears to himself as a being” (idem.), one can only conceptualize the Self through the presence and subjectivity of others.

As a result, “Other” and “object” take on slightly variant but nevertheless quite similar definitions. Within a Beauvoirian etymological tradition, an object is something to be possessed and acted on with no will or individuality, whereas a subject is someone who cannot be possessed or acted upon, and instead possess both a will and individuality. The Other is intrinsically an object, as the Other’s subjectivity is stolen from herself, and she loses her individuality to the conflation of the individual to the othered whole. Nevertheless, it is essential for the subject to be both Self and Other in order to embrace the “ambiguity of their condition” (*The Second Sex* 859). As explicated by Marso:

Beauvoir sees us as inherently confined by our own subjectivity. The way an “other” sees the world is always opaque to us. Beauvoir contends that as unique individual subjects, we are trapped in our heads, certainly unable to know and maybe not even think from the standpoints of others. And yet we must find a justification for our own existence by recognizing the existence of others who also desire freedom. It need not matter what we know about them or their situations; what matters is that they, too, are free individuals; and

freedom for all is denied when some are treated as things. (Simone de Beauvoir and Hannah Arendt: Judgement in Dark Times” 177)

Therefore, Beauvoir’s theory of ambiguity allows for the conceptual possibility of transcending these formulated binaries encapsulated by the rigid dichotomy of Self/Other, through the process of being both Self and Other. Nevertheless, this ambiguity can only be achieved by “recognizing the existence of others who also desire freedom” (Marso 177). If such a recognition does not occur, ambiguity is impossible.

A lack of recognition is precisely why women are denied the opportunity to embrace Beauvoirian ambiguity and instead are kept as the ultimate Other. As a result of the “patriarchal system of values and meanings, which negates ambiguity through its determinations of the feminine and the masculine” (Diagle 197) women are “thus led to make her entire Self an object, to posit herself as the Other” (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 58). Once posited in this way, men are unable to engage in mutual recognition of “what appears to him to be Other than himself” (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 83). Without the opportunity for ambiguity, women are unable to transcend their immanence (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 506), since they “will never manifest any qualities other than passive ones” (387). The social prohibition on female transcendence is largely responsible for the continued subjugation of women, with “the value of muscular strength, the phallus, and the tool can only be defined in a world of values; it is driven by the fundamental project of the existent transcending itself toward being” (*The Second Sex* 68). Furthermore, as “transcendence distinguishes the human being”

(Simons, “Transcendence and Immanence in the Ethics Simone de Beauvoir”), women that are prevented from transcending due to a denial of ambiguous connections are unable to fully grasp the freedom of the human experience. Since “oppression is explained by the tendency of the existent to flee from himself by alienating himself in the Other that he oppresses for that purpose” (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 756), the inverse of oppression, freedom, is impossible for the Other that man projects his inadequacies and alienation onto.

This is problematic not only for women who are denied freedom, but for society as a whole since freedom can only be experienced in relation to others, according to Beauvoir.<sup>11</sup> As Marso explains in *Fifty-One Key Feminist Thinkers*, “Beauvoir recognized that there is *always* an ‘other’”, and as a result, “believed that freedom is experienced rather than utilized or owned, and it is realized only in encounter with others rather than isolation” (22). Although much of Western, liberal political philosophy has been devoted to the individualist conceptualization of freedom, “it is not true that the recognition of the freedom of others limits my own freedom”, as instead it is the “existence of others as a freedom [which] defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom (Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* 91). Yet since “to posit the Woman is to posit the absolute Other, without reciprocity, refusing, against experience, that she could be a subject, a peer” (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 266), women are prevented from experiencing such encounters. This type of relational freedom is a central ideal

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<sup>11</sup> “Liberation can only be collective, and it demands above all that the economic evolution of the feminine condition be accomplished” (*The Second Sex* 664)

throughout Beauvoir's body of work, and Nancy Bauer has even gone as far as to claim that "the goal of *The Second Sex* is to get women, and men, to crave freedom — social, political and psychological" (NY Times, "Lady Power"). This is because, "freedom is the source from which all significations and all values spring" (Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* 24)<sup>12</sup>, and as a result, "we are separate, individuated existences, yet our actions may acquire their meaning only through the presence of others" (7) as explained by Sonia Kruks's *Simone De Beauvoir and the Politics of Ambiguity*. If the recognition of the Other is prevented from occurring, then freedom as a contingent of ambiguity is also impossible.

To conclude, Beauvoir's theoretical example forms the foundation for the mutual gaze. Although her work is not traditionally read as a political theory text, doing so is reflective of her actual philosophical consciousness, as represented by Beauvoir's writing and activism. The "sophisticated and compelling theory of situated freedom" ("Thinking Politically with Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*"), that arises from the pages of *The Second Sex* can furthermore be used to read *Antony and Cleopatra*. This is because, Beauvoir writes in a manner that functions as "an appeal to ambiguous agents" (Diagle 197). By appealing to her readers in this way, Beauvoir is calling them to question the social and historical factors that posit women as the absolute Other. Although Beauvoir claims that all humanity is inevitably both Self and Other, women are stopped from even

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<sup>12</sup> In *The Bonds of Freedom: Simone de Beauvoir's Existentialist Ethics* however, Kristana Arp does claim that Beauvoir does not conceptualize freedom as the ultimate value.

becoming the subject or absolute within patriarchal power structures. As a result, women are prevented from engaging in the ambiguity, that is in itself, a basic feature of humanity. Without ambiguity, the ultimate Other is also unable to engage in freedom, as there can be no recognition between the Self and Other. However, when the Self and Other are able to embrace ambiguity, then the ultimate Other is rescued from her subjugated position, and freedom is experienced through these encounters. This recognition is first established through the act of looking or gazing, according to Beauvoir. Yet in order for gazing to award instead of deny ambiguity, it cannot be built on oppressive power structures. This is why the male gaze is problematic, as through it on-screen women are othered in a way that denies them ambiguity.

## II. Gaze Theories

The concept of the male gaze was first identified in feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey's article *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. Published in 1975, this article explains how the cinematic production is explicitly constructed around the tri-fold stares of the male gaze in order to enact the on-screen eroticization of the female figure (Kaplan 43). The first is the gaze of the camera. Although "technically neutral, this look [...] is inherently voyeuristic and usually "male" in the sense that a man is generally doing the filming" (Kaplan 43). The second gaze is the "look of the men within the narrative, which is structured so as to make women objects of their gaze" (Kaplan 43). Finally, the third gaze is "the look of the male spectator which imitates (or is necessarily in the same position

as) the first two looks” (Kaplan 43). These three looks are collectively known as the male gaze that together creates the “two contradictory aspects of the pleasurable structures of looking in the conventional cinematic situation” (Mulvey 11). The first aspect is scopophilic instinct, a “function of the sexual instincts” that “arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight” (Mulvey 11). This aspect is the primary instigation for female objectification through sexualized representation in film.

The second aspect is a function of ego libido “developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego” through “identification with the image seen” (Mulvey 11). According to Jacques Lacan, the audience’s identification with the onscreen image is “nostalgically reminiscent” (Mulvey 8) of the mirror phase during which the infant child first recognizes himself in his own reflection. This moment is the “birth of the long love affair/despair between image and Self-image which has found such intensity of expression in film and such joyous recognition in the cinema audience” (Mulvey 8). Through the third gaze, the male spectator experiences “identification of the ego with the object on the screen through the spectator’s fascination with and recognition of his like” (Mulvey 9). By recognizing and misrecognizing himself in the onscreen “bearer of the look”, the male spectator may gain “control and possession of the woman within the diegesis” (Mulvey 14). However, “the gaze is not necessarily male (literally), but to own and activate the gaze, given our language and the structure of the unconscious, is to be in the “masculine” position” (Kaplan 42). It is the active role



which projects itself onto the world (Beauvoir 385) rather than the supposed passive image of the objectified subject which must be acted upon.

This is because, whenever a woman assumes a dominant, masculine position in film, she will typically be forced to sacrifice her stereotypically feminine characteristics. These characteristics are “not those of attractiveness, but rather of kindness, humaneness, motherliness. She is now often cold, driving, ambitious, manipulating, just like the men whose position she has usurped” (Kaplan 43). This is precisely what sequentially occurs in the portrayal of Cleopatra, at least according to the on-stage male spectators. As a result, the male gaze does not operate as a biological sex-specific position based on male vs. female anatomy, but rather a gender-specific one based on masculine vs. feminine attributes. This is because, as Beauvoir illustrates, femininity has been constructed as the absolute Other in the West. “If there are Other Others than the woman, she is still always defined as Other” (*The Second Sex* 163), and therefore that which is othered will typically take on stereotypically feminine attribute. Both men and women may occupy and identify with this position of the activator of the male gaze; however, they must operate according to the stereotypes of Western masculinity to do so. For example, as will be discovered in my textual analysis of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Demetrius and Philo ostentatiously occupy the position of male spectator. Yet although they perform the stereotypically male role, their engagement with a standard form of slanderous, feminine discourse forces them to abdicate their ownership of the male gaze. This analysis allows the disclosure of several previously hidden

aspects of this scene that occur during Antony and Cleopatra's long-awaited entrance onto the protruding proscenium.

Over the past thirty years since the publication of "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" a plethora of feminist and film theorists have attempted to construct a theory of the female gaze. The vast majority of these theorists have come to the conclusion that such a gaze is possible by merely reversing the male gaze, substituting female desire for male. This theory would place the sexualized male figure in the position of objectified object, stealing such an actor's subjectivity and dooming him to immanence at the bottom rung of a matriarchal power hierarchy. However, such a theory is insufficient for a non-possessive and non-dehumanizing gaze since these insufficient theories rely on the same dominant vs submissive power structures as the male gaze. As Beauvoir explains in *The Second Sex*, if objectifying power structures are perpetuated with merely the gender of the occupants switched, the man is still made into "an instrument" (728). If an individual is denied the opportunity for ambiguity, regardless of their gender, they will be prevented from embracing freedom. This has created a critical gap in media studies, as we lack an analytic framework that is not built on possession and objectification of the image. For example, Kevin Goddard's essay "Looks Maketh the Man: The Female Gaze and the Construction of Masculinity" examines how "masculine identity cannot be interpreted separate from the image of men projected by, or perceived to be projected by, women" (Goddard 24). Although this article attempts to "overcome the power struggle inherent in gender stereotyping" (idem.), it inevitably forces

the female viewer to reproduce the underlying masculine vs. feminine power dynamics of the male gaze. In “Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator”, Mary Ann Doane reasserts how women are forced to “masculinize” their form of spectatorship. She furthermore states that

It is quite tempting to foreclose entirely the possibility of female spectatorship, [since it] relies so heavily on voyeurism, fetishism, and identification with an ego conceivably only the image seen in masculine terms. And, in fact, there has been a tendency to theorize femininity and hence the male gaze as repressed, and in its repression somehow irretrievable (Doane 70).

As Doane illustrates here, female spectatorship is a tricky concept. This is because the entire Western conceptualization of gazing is built on a phallocentric model. Objectification of the feminine form has permeated our culture to such an extent that even fast food commercials commonly feature sexual innuendos and scantily clad women. Because this process of gazing has been constructed in a way that objectifies the female figure while privileging male “voyeurism, fetishism, and identification with a [masculine] ego” (idem.), space for female spectatorship has been virtually eliminated from mainstream media. Even Linda Williams’s classic “When Women Look” is only able to diagnose why women are unable to active the gaze without being “violently punished” (65). According to Williams, since mutual gazing “undermines the legitimacy and authentic subjectivity of” the male gaze, as a result, female spectatorship is “frequently turn[ed] it into a mere parody of the male look (61). These are just three examples of feminist discourse surrounding the female gaze, yet they are indicative of the overall

theoretical landscape. Although the female operating within such a theoretical scheme of male objectification gains prominence over the male actor through his objectification, this is not the achievement of actual power. Instead, it is merely flipping the gender of power without reconstructing the system itself.

Therefore, as the female seductively struts into such an objectifying position, she is merely adopting the male gaze. As previously mentioned, Mulvey identifies how women occupying such spaces are forced to lose their traditionally “feminine” characteristics, to gain more stereotypically “masculine” traits. Doane even goes as far as to describe such a woman as becoming a type of “transvestite” (70). This gender-cyborg is therefore not a “woman”, but rather a type of figurative drag-king, visually clothed in the characteristics of masculinity. Now the claim that a woman who adopts masculine characteristics becomes a type of visual “transvestite” here skirts dangerously close to biological essentialism. However, this is not the case. Rather, I claim that the masculine requirement for the activator of the male gaze regardless of biological sex serves to perpetuate phallogocentric power structures. In contrast, the activator of the Mutual Gaze is certainly permitted to express both masculine and feminine characteristics, but this subject is by no means required to express either. Furthermore, although a single male actor may lose his subjectivity and transcendence through the process of objectification, patriarchal structures do not lose their power even if a rare, individual woman occupies the position of wielder of the gaze. This is because, even if women do objectify, they still typically objectify characters that demonstrate male virility. This demi-god like

figure is the male counterpart of an idealized blonde-Barbie-bimbo-babe, complete with bulging muscles, a chiseled chin, and tousled hair to match.

Although the female activator of the gaze objectifies him through occupation of the heteronormative, Western male gaze, his physicality translates into the perpetuation of institutionalized, patriarchal power. Instead of deconstructing the male gaze, the female subject who occupies the position of activator of the gaze perpetuates phallogentric structures of hierarchal power based on a masculine vs. feminine gender binary. Although the male may possess the female through activation of the male gaze, the female is ultimately unable to possess the male. Even when she voyeuristically objectifies him, the institutionalized aspect of phallogentric power structures is inevitably regurgitated. This occurs even through the supposedly “female” gaze, due to an absence of Beauvoirian ambiguity. If then both the male and “female” gaze theories are ultimately based on objectification, what gaze is left for feminism? What possibilities can possibly be available outside of this strict binary? Frankly, if, as we have discovered, the gaze is built upon identification with the image seen as reminiscent of the mirror stage, and this identification is only possible through visually possessing the subject, there are no possibilities for a non-possessive gaze. Therefore, I propose that in order to create space within patriarchy to provide room for alternatives to the male gaze, the critic can employ Beauvoir’s theory of ambiguity as a tool for analysis. This critical lens enables a gaze based on an encounter of mutual humanity and agency, allowing for the transcendence of subjectivity as the actor becomes both Self and Other.

### III. The Mutual Gaze

The Mutual Gaze initially appears naively idealistic. After all, if it were simple to dismantle patriarchy, then gender inequality as enacted through the male gaze would be a distant memory. However, this is far from reality. There is far too much at stake for those precariously perched at the top of the figurative social ladder for such a system of androcentric oppression to be easily deconstructed. Yet eradicate it we must if society is ever to end the objectification of the female body, and of course, actually achieve equality. However, with equality as our aim this goal becomes more complex than simply ending the objectification of women would be. Instead of merely flipping the gender of the gaze the feminist critic must find a way that neither men nor women are reduced to an objectified position. The attainment of this monumental task can only be fully realized through the aforementioned application of ambiguity in order to allow the subject to become both spectacle and spectator.

The male gaze as defined by Mulvey makes the female inescapably subordinate, stealing all her power and autonomy by objectifying her. She is the ultimate Other in the performative realm because of this objectification. As previously stated, all current female gaze theories simply reverse this system, forcing the man to become a powerless spectacle. Although a woman is now “on top”, such theories simply perpetuate the same system of hierarchal power structures utilized by patriarchal constructions to ensure their autocratic perpetuation. However, the Mutual Gaze that I advocate in this thesis allows the object of the gaze to gain, instead of lose, power from their position as spectacle.

By being watched, such objects of another's gaze become empowered. By looking back, the subject becomes both spectacle and spectator.

Within this context, power actually becomes, not irrelevant, but rather not the overarching goal of the gaze. If power does remain the goal of the gaze, then there will always be one individual who is irrecoverably subordinate to the other. This is the main problem with the aforementioned gaze theories, the fact that they are ultimately based on subordinating the object of the gaze, creating the "cleaves" in interpersonal relationships Beauvoir abhors. Within this oppressive system, mutualism is both conceptually and physically impossible. By simply switching the gender of the gaze—but still basing the gaze on power through subjugating objectification and dominating possession—the gaze remains a tool of hierarchical power structures. Oppression is not eliminated, but rather simply redistributed from women to men. Therefore, even if an image seemingly operates in a manner which rejects objectification, if the image is "measured" by a qualification of power, then it is still stuck within the repetition of "the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form" (Mulvey 1). How then can the Mutual Gaze be enacted anywhere outside of the realm of abstract theorizing? How can the subject become both spectacle and spectator?

Instead of basing the gaze on power, possession, and the scopophilic instinct, we must instead base the Mutual Gaze on agency, mutualism, and Beauvoirian ambiguity. By basing the gaze on agency instead of power, the feminist critic is able to identify how the act of spectatorship becomes not a situation of possession but rather mutualism. Instead of possessing the

objectified woman, the audience spectator is invited into a relationship of mutualism. By retaining agency, the on-stage image, regardless of gender, is allowing the viewer the pleasure of looking. However, instead of the scopophilic instinct implicit to the male gaze, this pleasure of looking is based in Beauvoirian ambiguity. Since, as previously mentioned, Beauvoirian ambiguity allows the subject to become both Self and other, subject and object, “looking” at another is the foundational avenue for activating ambiguity. Although both scopophilic instinct and Beauvoirian ambiguity are based on the pleasure of looking, only ambiguity awards the spectacle agency through the ability to “look back” at the spectator through mutual invitation. This is because gazing within an encounter enacted between two free and ambiguous agents is “to invite the Other’s judgment of me (as an object); and it is to view the Other not just as a piece of my world, an object, but as being capable of responding to my appeal (as a subject)” (Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir Philosophy and Feminism* 160). Instead of a one-way, possessive situation where only the spectator is allowed subjectivity, if the gaze is instead based on agency the spectacle and spectator are able to engage in a mutually dependent relationship where neither can exist without the other. This mutual dependence is what enables the activation of the Mutual Gaze.

Since the roles of spectator and spectacle are then defined by the critic through their relationship to each other, neither party can exist without the presence of the other. Their mutual dependence is the visual representation of Beauvoirian ambiguity. Therefore, if being both Self and Other is the definition of



Beauvoirian ambiguity, and such ambiguity is essential for the enactment of the female gaze in which the spectacle becomes the spectator, then in order to be applicable in reality, this gaze must turn others into objects but not possessions. Just as within Beauvoirian ambiguity the subject becomes both Self and Other through the mutual dependency of gazing, by applying this theory to the theater the critic is able to identify how the actor becomes both spectacle and spectator through mutual dependence with the audience. This is because the lack of the fourth wall in Shakespeare's staging<sup>13</sup> allows for the possibility of the on-stage spectacle to reflect the gaze of the audience and become the spectator as well. Due to Elizabethan drama being performed on a thrust stage and including a plethora of audience interactions<sup>14</sup>, both actors and audiences are able to experience the humanity of the Other. Instead of being merely objectified, the image becomes both spectator and spectacle at the same time.

Because the goal of the perpetrator of this gaze is agency and mutualism as opposed to power, it then becomes essentially androgynous for all practical purposes. Whereas within the male gaze, it is the female spectator's "lack that produces the phallus as a symbolic presence" (Mulvey 1), essentially creating the "need" for phallogentric spectatorship, the Mutual Gaze eliminates this "need". Instead of a hierarchal system of possessive power, spectatorship becomes a partnered dance as both participants are afforded both pleasure and subjectivity.

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<sup>13</sup> Gurr's, "Staging at the Globe" explains how Shakespeare's stage did not have the invisible barrier that is known as the "fourth wall" in modern theater. Specific discussions on this matter may be found on page 168.

<sup>14</sup> See R.B. Graves, Stephen Greenblatt, and Andrew Gurr for more on the Shakespearean stage.

The onstage spectacle is the originally viewed object who affords visual pleasure to the spectator. Within the context of the male gaze the spectacle is then stuck as a static image; she is just viewed. However, as Beauvoir claims in the *Ethics of Ambiguity*, one can only exist through another's perception as an "object for others", a "nothing more than an individual in the collectivity on which [s]he depends" (Beauvoir 2). The spectacle is therefore only spectacle in the spectator's perception; but the spectator is also only spectator due to the spectacle's presence. This reveals the need for mutualism, as the two roles are dependent on one another for their very existence. Because of mutualism, a certain degree of equality between the two participants is established as a direct result of their dependence on the participation of the Other for their own Self-definition. The Mutual Gaze itself is made possible because of this mutual dependence since neither spectacle or spectators are able to obtain a dominant position over one another. Without the visual hierarchies that are innate to the male gaze, the Mutual Gaze allows for participants to experience an equal relationship with one another.

Through this mutualism, the Gaze now allows for the spectator and spectacle to recognize themselves in each other. Within the male gaze, Mulvey maintains that this recognition, which is reminiscent of the Freudian mirror phase of infancy, is what enables the visual possession of the spectacle. Within the male gaze the spectator is only able to recognize themselves in either the possessive masculine or eroticized feminine figure. This also occurs in the insufficient female gaze theories, as a masculine female dominates a

subordinate man. However, through the mutualism of the aptly named “Mutual Gaze”, the spectator is able to identify with the spectacle through recognition of themselves.

This mutualism may be explained through a metaphor of windows and mirrors. Whereas within the male gaze the spectator engages in the act of gazing in order to look in a “mirror” at their own projected reflection in the spectacle, within the Mutual Gaze the spectacle and spectator instead view each other through a window. This is an important distinction from the “mirror-like” recognition of the male gaze. When one looks in a mirror the reflected image is obviously one’s Self. In the male gaze, the image functions as a type of mirror that the viewer can write themselves onto through narcissistic scopophilia. However, when one looks through a window at another person, the original viewer does not see their own image reflected through the glass as they would if looking in a mirror. Instead, when one looks through a window they will see a small bit of their own reflection, but that “small bit” is inevitably secondary to the image of the person standing on the other side of the window. The Mutual Gaze works in the same way as this window. The spectator looks at the onstage spectacle who is looking back at them and is unable to superimpose their own reflection on this onstage individual through narcissistic scopophilia. The only thing of the spectator’s that can be recognized in the individuality of the spectacle is their shared humanity. As a result, this shared humanity is the small bit of their own reflection that the spectator sees in the spectacle, just as if they were looking through a window. Instead of an exercise in Self-reflective narcissism,

spectatorship instead becomes a situation of identifying the shared similarities between two mutually dependent individuals. Once the spectator recognizes themselves in the spectacle, the spectacle is awarded subjectivity as one is only able “to grasp himself under their [other subjective individuals] gaze as an object” (*The Second Sex* 284). As previously stated, Beauvoir maintains that “to invite the Other’s judgment of me (as an object); and it is to view the Other not just as a piece of my world, an object, but as being capable of responding to my appeal (as a subject)” (Bauer, *Simone de Beauvoir Philosophy and Feminism* 160). In this encounter there is then a shared recognition between the spectator and the spectator of their mutual humanity and status as agents with agency.

Once the spectacle gains subjectivity to the spectator, they are the able to assert their agency. Within the lexicon of political theory agency is simply the ability of an agent to act in a given situation (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). As a result of this definition, “agency” within theatrical productions exists with specifically existentialist connotations in order to activate the Mutual Gaze. This is because not only is the Mutual Gaze based on Beauvoir’s existentialist concept of ambiguity, but because of the voyeuristic basis of the theater. Characters create the audience’s reality thorough their actions, just as existentialism proposes that “reality” can only be created through an agent’s agency and action. The spectator can only understand a character’s characterization based on what they are, which is communicated through their onstage actions. In other words, the onstage character is able to define themselves to the spectator through their actions. Since “it is uniquely when he

[the subject] is fixed by the gaze of others that he appears to himself as a being” (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 284), by being looked, at both participants in this encounter engage in the mutual recognition of ambiguity and freedom. Through the onstage process of “becoming”, the woman in particular is able to retain the freedom of “becoming” that is denied to her. This is because as Beauvoir outlines in *The Second Sex*, the process of becoming a woman is not self-definition for the woman, but rather a process of conforming to the social norms of femininity. Although it should be a process of self-definition in which the subject may exercise their existential freedom of choice, because of how society has constructed femininity, women are denied this freedom. The stage on which the Mutual Gaze is employed can therefore become a place where women are able to reclaim the process of “becoming”. This reclamation can occur because the onstage woman is able to engage in self-definition with an audience that looks back as an equal actor in their mutual relationship of recognition.

However, such self-definition occurs in tandem with the requirement for Beauvoirian ambiguity that the Self can only exist through the perception of others. This is a deepening of the aforementioned mutualism that is a cornerstone of the Mutual Gaze. The spectacle exists because the spectator views them, while at the same time the spectacle defines themselves to the spectator through their onstage actions. This is in contrast to the spectator activating the male gaze, which defines the spectacle through their own Self-recognition in an image, as reminiscent of the mirror phase from childhood. The elements of original practice Shakespearean performance allow for this to

happen because the lights are on in the audience as well as the stage. Because of this illumination and lack of a theatrical fourth wall, the onstage and offstage individuals are both able to exist as Self and Other because they can actually see one another.

Onstage, such agency is manifested through several methods. The first is a character's ability to control their destiny. Within the context of the male gaze, the spectacle loses this ability as they exist for nothing more than the viewers' voyeuristic pleasure. In order to manifest agency, the spectacle must regain this ability to control their own destiny. This ability may also be termed as "empowerment". Since agency and empowerment are nearly synonymous concepts, within this context we are able to appreciate why characters who are unable to control their own destiny in at least some manner are typically those characters that are objectified as a result. Of course, the onstage character is in a play; their destiny has been predetermined by the playwright long before the character sets foot onstage. However, since the audience of an original practice production engages in a unique theatrical experience that both "maintains an ironic distance from the action or words on stage", while "also losing that distance (Lopez, 34), this predetermination becomes fairly irrelevant. To activate agency, characters need only to appear to control their own destiny through their onstage actions. The second way in which agency is manifested in the theater is through a character's ability to define their space. This is primarily accomplished through the character who is able to move the onstage action forward. The character's ability to move the action forward is the physical expression of Beauvoir's

definition of transcendence. Since transcendence is typically reserved for men within the male gaze as opposed to the immanence women are relegated to<sup>15</sup>, the spectacle must transcend their immanence to become a spectator as well. The final and most crucial element is the on-stage spectacle's ability to look back at the audience, to break down the invisible fourth wall and break free from the bonds of objectification. Through this act of looking back at the audience, the spectacle becomes both spectacle and spectator, and the Mutual Gaze is activated.

Because the subject must be able to look back at the audience, original practice productions of Renaissance drama are particularly adept at enacting the Mutual Gaze. This is because of the two main elements of original practice, namely audience interaction that dissolves any semblance of a "fourth wall", and the actors "doing it with the lights on" (American Shakespeare Center). Since the onstage characters often interact with the audience, they are able to easily create a mutually dependent relationship. Without a fourth wall there is also no way to engage in narcissistic Self-reflection and objectify the onstage spectacle. Secondly, since the lights are on in the audience as well as onstage, the spectator and spectacle are able to see one another. As a result of this illumination, the onstage spectacle is able to look back, and both parties are able to become both spectacle and spectator. Because of these two elements, recorded performances of original practice productions are also able to capture

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<sup>15</sup> See *The Second Sex*, "his going beyond into the world; the male is still the only incarnation of transcendence", and "man wishes to possess that which he is not; he unites himself to what appears to him to be Other than himself" (Beauvoir 83).

the Mutual Gaze. By placing the viewer in the audience and recording both the onstage and offstage action, recorded performances allow for the viewer to witness the Mutual Gaze in action.



## Chapter 2

# Ambiguity (In)Action: Textual Analysis

“Sir, sometimes, when he is not Antony,  
He comes too short of that great property  
Which still should go with Antony”

-William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra* (I.I. 55-57)

## I. Introduction to the Text

The *Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra* is one of Shakespeare's later works, first performed circa 1607 by the King's Men at either the Blackfriars Theater or the original Globe Theater (Leeds 115). The first print version was in the Folio of 1623 (idem.), and Thomas North's English translation of Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* (1579) was Shakespeare's main source material. Overall, the play centers on the political and interpersonal relationship between Cleopatra, Antony, and the major antagonist Octavius Caesar.

Historically, the play covers the time from immediately before Antony's return to Rome from Egypt, to Cleopatra's suicide during the Final War of the Roman Republic (Rich & Shipley). This historical context is important for establishing the setting, since the play occurs in the two contrasting worlds of Rome and Egypt. These two countries are set in binary opposition to each other, with Rome as the representative of civilized reason and order, and Egypt as the sensual representative of barbaric disorder. However, as illustrated in *Shakespeare Tragedy and Gender*,

on the one hand, the play works through a structure of binary oppositions (Rome/Egypt, history/poetry, male/female) of which Cleopatra is a function, and, on the other hand, Cleopatra and the play's own poetic language which shares some of the qualities associated with Cleopatra, work to undermine or overflow systematicity, and thereby to gesture toward something beyond the play's scene of representation. (Garner & Sprengnether 246)

As has been well established,<sup>16</sup> *Antony and Cleopatra* is replete with these conflicting binaries. Through the tension between these binaries, Shakespeare establishes the conditions that allow for the Mutual Gaze to later be constructed in performance and, identified by the critic, within the text of *Antony and Cleopatra* itself. He does this by deconstructing the stereotypical gender binaries of Western civilization, and allowing the actors moments where they can look back at the audience. Such moments of audience acknowledgement are a particular hallmark of Shakespeare's work<sup>17</sup>; however the frequency of references to the act of gazing or seeing in *Antony and Cleopatra* is unique. These references serve to create an environment of rich metatheatricality that allows for an encounter in which the ambiguous agent may become both spectacle and spectator. To examine these moments, this chapter is a textual analysis that focuses on several scenes that activate the Mutual Gaze, especially Act I Scene I and Cleopatra's suicide in Act V Scene II. Although there are many scenes throughout this play that depict moments of Beauvoirian ambiguity, I have chosen to analyze these two scenes as they serve to encapsulate the entirety of the play.

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<sup>16</sup> See Sara Deat's *Antony and Cleopatra: New Critical Essays* Gil Jonathan's "Narcissus in Thy Face': Roman Desire and the Difference It Fakes in *Antony and Cleopatra*", *Antony and Cleopatra: Language and Writing* by Virginia Mason Vaughan and 'Antony and Cleopatra' in *Context: The Politics of Passion* by Keith Linley among many other critical sources

<sup>17</sup> Audience asides are common in Shakespeare's work. Characters that use this form of audience interaction include Iago from *Othello*, Richard from *Richard III*, Lance in Act II Scene III of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and many more.

## II. Act I Scene I: Entrances and Introductions

The text of *Antony and Cleopatra* opens with a deconstruction of gender, centered on the gossip of Demetrius and Philo in Act I Scene I. In this opening moment, two of Antony's fellow Romans are criticizing his interactions with the Egyptian Queen, Cleopatra. Since these whispers would be more appropriate within wine-sodden cellars than the Queen of the Nile's court, this opening serves to immediately imply that *Antony and Cleopatra* contains paradoxical players. These characters specifically invert the roles assigned to them by societal pressures. This is achieved through the reconfigurations of both the Self vs Other and male vs female binaries permitted by Beauvoirian ambiguity through the Mutual Gaze. By spewing slanderous gossip, the two soldiers are not only disrupting standard gender roles by engaging in a practice outside their stereotypical gender performance, but also the standard expectations of their position. Demetrius and Philo are not only men, but soldiers speaking out against their leader. Thus, their actions serve to de-legitimize military culture by questioning both its masculine and authoritative basis. By engaging in the stereotypically feminine pursuit of gossiping, Demetrius and Philo are, in essence, "playing" at being women. This is a significant and self-aware moment for two reasons, one located in the text itself and the other in terms of the critical parameters of this analysis.

Within the text, the two male gossips' loose lips occur around the subject of Antony's own supposed loss of masculinity. I assert that, by attempting to cast their leader as the vilified and feminine Other that must be conquered, Demetrius

and Philo are engaging in the unconscious masculine impetus to demonstrate what Beauvoir calls their “transcendence against immanence” (*The Second Sex* 108). As they engage in the stereotypically feminine activity of gossiping, these actions then ironically force them to assume the immanence they are attempting to flee from. In regard to Beauvoir’s ethical theory of ambiguity, this moment is highly paradoxical. Upon initial analysis Demetrius and Philo appear to unabashedly lose their opportunity for ambiguity, as their actions portray the two warriors as unable to be both Self and Other. They vilify their own leader for his association with the dreaded double-other: a woman of darker complexion. In the words of Philo himself,

Nay, but this dotage of our General’s  
 O’erflows the measure. Those his goodly eyes  
 Have glowered 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 gispy’s lust. (I. I. 1-10)

This “dotage of our General” is in regard to the absurd infatuation Antony has for the last Ptolemaic pharaoh of Egypt, Cleopatra herself. Although “dotage” may be appropriate in certain instances, Demetrius and Philo specifically explain that

Antony's infatuation has gone far beyond the demands of diplomacy by claiming that it "O'erflows the measure".

This statement then exists as a sharp criticism of the two gossips' hierarchal superior. Within a geographical context, "O'erflows" is reminiscent of the Nile, the lifeblood of Egypt. Covering one of the three cycles in the Egyptian calendar, the flooding of the Nile as the river "o'erflowed" its "measure" of sandbanks served to fertilize the farmland. The implications of this analogy apply equally to both Cleopatra and Antony as Demetrius and Philo fail to specify if it is Antony's own "dotage" that "o'erflows" or rather, if it is Cleopatra herself whom his "dotage" "o'erflows". The ancient Egyptians believed that the Nile flooded due to the goddess Isis' tears for her dead husband, Osiris. Considering that Cleopatra was typically depicted as Isis in paintings and sculptures, this conclusion also equates Antony with Osiris, king of the Egyptian gods. Occurring early in the text, this analogy of the Nile additionally serves to foreshadow the infamous barge scene referenced in Act II Scene II 220-260, when Enobarbus recalls Cleopatra majestically gliding down the Nile. Finally, "o'erflows" also functions as a double entendre referencing male ejaculation. In order to enact the previously mentioned "beast with two backs" as their passion would dictate, Antony must "o'erflow the measure" in order to imitate coitus with the object of his "dotage".

With the next sentence in this exchange between Demetrius and Philo, Shakespeare depicts Antony's fluid and ever changing nature. By doing so, the playwright illustrates how a strict categorization system that relies on power

hierarchies, such as the male gaze, would be insufficient for analyzing the Roman general. The word “measure” further implies a quantifiable aspect to Antony’s affection, a subtly explicit theme that underlies Cleopatra’s own demands for Antony to quantify his love several lines later. Although this metaphor suggests the unquantifiable extent of Antony’s affection, it is a theme that is often repeated throughout the five acts of *Antony and Cleopatra*. The repetition of this specific theme, that Antony’s affection is quantifiable, installs uneasiness in the reader over Antony’s true intentions from the first moment of the play. These fears will later become justifiable, when Antony appears to abandon Cleopatra for Octavia in Act II Scene II.

Mimicking the implicit equation of Cleopatra with the Egyptian goddess Isis occurring a mere line before, Philo then explicitly equates Antony with the Roman god of war and agriculture, Mars. Since Antony has been called “general” from the beginning, he is now vilified for supposedly abandoning militaristic culture for “the lascivious pleasing of a lute” (Richard III, I.I.10). However, the second implication of the Mars analogy is equally applicable, in a far more nuanced manner. Like Anthony’s own split nature, this mythological allusion also has two equal sides, that of conquest above and below the bed. The imagery of agriculture is rampant throughout *Antony and Cleopatra*, specifically when describing the fertile, lush lands of Egypt and by extension Cleopatra. Antony then assumes the role of conquer of such lands since “He plowed her, and she cropped” (II.II.23). As a result, Antony is occupying the hyper masculine “warrior

male” role explicated by Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*<sup>18</sup>. By utilizing this mythical allusion to Mars in describing Antony, Shakespeare is able to immediately characterize the Roman general as a malleable character, often changing and uncomfortable with the stringency of binaries.

However, suspending belief that the title of “*Antony and Cleopatra*” has revealed certain romantic plot-twists, at the moment the audience is unaware as to what the two gossiping gentlemen are referring to as the object of Antony’s “dotage”. Could it be Antony’s lust for power and prestige? The vast land of Egypt? Cleopatra’s toppling towers of treasure? As the production progresses these three possibilities are revealed to, in fact, all be true since Shakespeare is purposefully vague as to if *Antony and Cleopatra* truly love each other, or if their love is a performance. This self-conscious metatheatricality resurfaces continually throughout the production, serving to remind the audience that they are gazing at a performance aware of its theatrical status. This is due to the theatrical conventions of Shakespeare’s era. The first of these conventions is the light that plays were performed in. Since productions took place under various forms of artificial and natural light, as explored by R. B. Graves in *Lighting the Shakespearean Stage*, both the audience and on stage actors were able to see each other. The second theatrical convention that created an atmosphere of

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<sup>18</sup> “He wants to conquer, take, and possess; to have a woman is to conquer her; he penetrates her as the plowshare in the furrows; he makes her his as he makes the earth he is working: he plows, he plants, he sows: these images are as old as writing; from antiquity to today a thousand examples can be mentioned. “Woman is like the field and man like the seeds,” say the Laws of Manu. In an André Masson drawing there is a man, shovel in hand, tilling the garden of a feminine sex. 12 Woman is her husband’s prey, his property” (*The Second Sex* 171)



metatheatricality in Shakespeare's Globe was the existence of a thrust stage. This type of stage, combined with the bawdy atmosphere of the Early Modern theater, encouraged audience interaction, as documented by Andrew Gurr<sup>19</sup>. Finally, the self-conscious dialogue frequently utilized by Shakespeare serves to highlight these conventions. Such metatheatricality has a secondary purpose as well: to introduce the concept of spectatorship. Therefore, Shakespeare has written this opening exchange between Demetrius and Philo in a way that immediately introduces the Mutual Gaze as the audience experiences Antony through the two soldiers' perspectives. Through the intimacy of confiding their treasonous gossip with the audience, Demetrius and Philo are engaging in a mutually dependent relationship with the audience.

Because the Mutual Gaze has been activated, Cleopatra is able to use this space to reconfigure the male vs female binary through her entrance, which occurs a few lines after Demetrius and Philo's conspiratorial conversation. Ruling in a time when women were to be seen and not heard, Cleopatra defies linguistic conventions to claim the role of vocal instigator as the first to speak. Cleopatra furthermore utilizes this moment to claim control over Antony. Not only must the Roman general publically profess his love for the Queen of the Nile, he must further justify its extent. "If it be love indeed, tell me how much" (I.I.14), Cleopatra demands, requiring exactitude of emotion before expressing her own affection for

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<sup>19</sup> Gurr has written extensively on Shakespearean staging conditions, see *The Shakespearean Stage, Play going in Shakespeare's London, Staging in Shakespeare's Theaters, The Shakespeare Company 1594-1642, Rebuilding Shakespeare's Globe*, and *Moving Shakespeare Indoors: Performance and Repertoire in the Jacobean Playhouse*.

Antony. Yet this moment contains more than merely Cleopatra becoming the accountant of affection, meticulously quantifying Antony's love. This statement is a challenge, an affirmation of Cleopatra's active transcendence from the biological barricades of immanence<sup>20</sup>. Instead of a passive princess who must qualify her own love, Cleopatra actively ascends to the level of transcendence by going beyond her existence to demand the quantification of her own reciprocated love. By doing so, the Queen is reconfiguring the strict male vs. female binary, even within this patriarchal society. Instead of masculine figures holding a monopoly on authority, Cleopatra is able to assume power and authority even while retaining her stereotypically feminine attributes. This is a historical reality, since Cleopatra ruled Egypt as a queen, as opposed to her predecessor Hatshepsut who attempted to minimize her female biology to rule as a pharaoh (Wilkinson 180).

By embracing expressions of femininity while displaying authority, Cleopatra is able to de-gender the stereotypically masculinized concept of authority. Although this may not appear particularly subversive to a modern audience accustomed to leaders like Angela Merkel, Theresa May, and Margaret Thatcher, for the majority of history women have not been allowed to hold such positions. Therefore, Cleopatra does reformulate the male vs female binary by coupling femininity with authority, but does so within the demands of patriarchy by remaining expressly feminine. Cleopatra is able to maintain this authority in part because of the classical allusions to various goddesses she is surrounded

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<sup>20</sup> See Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, 83 and 108.

by. As a queen of Egypt, Cleopatra often appeared as the goddess Isis in iconography, even going as far as to claim to be the reincarnation of Isis according to some accounts. According to Egyptian mythology, Isis was the representation of the throne, and the mother of the pharaohs (Witt 7). Thus by making herself analogous with Isis, Cleopatra is able to not only legitimize her royal reign, but also place herself above other pharaohs. The equation with Isis allows Cleopatra to transcend the standard categorical limitation of Egyptian pharaohs to not only be a child of the gods, but to be a goddess herself. Therefore, the entrances in Act I Scene I serve as encounters that begin to establish a relationship of ambiguous freedom between Shakespeare's characters and his audience. This relationship is further explicated in Cleopatra's suicide in Act V.

### III. Seeing and Suicide

In her final monologue before her death Cleopatra constructs her legacy while addressing the question of spectatorship. She orders Iras her attendant to,

Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have  
 Immortal longings in me: now no more  
 The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip:  
 Yare, yare, good Iras; quick. Methinks I hear  
 Antony call; I see him rouse himself  
 To praise my noble act; I hear him mock  
 The luck of Caesar, which the gods give men  
 To excuse their after wrath: husband, I come:

Now to that name my courage prove my title!  
 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.  
 Farewell, kind Charmian; Iras, long farewell.  
 [Kisses them. IRAS falls and dies]  
 Have I the aspic in my lips? Dost fall?  
 If thou and nature can so gently part,  
 The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch (V. II. 271-286)

This passage is strikingly similar to Shakespeare's previous suicide scene in *Romeo and Juliet*. Both contain the same double suicide, brought on by the woman's fake death. However, whereas Juliet quickly embraces the point of a "bare bodkin", Cleopatra instead waits several scenes, securing her immortal legacy before departing for the afterlife. The delay depicts how Cleopatra exists outside of her relationship with Antony as well, since she "'posits herself for herself" (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 766), instead of "know[ing] and choose[ing] herself not as she exists for herself but as man defines her (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 156). By underlining how Cleopatra is not defined solely by her relationship to men, the mutuality as opposed to interdependence of their relationship is displayed. This mutuality is a tangible depiction of what Beauvoir describes as an ideal relationship, since the woman is able to concurrently "exist for him as well" (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 766). This is because the couple are not co-dependent, and both can exist outside of the relationship since they are

able to encounter each Other through recognition of each other's freedom. In this textual moment, Shakespeare is creating the space to activate the Mutual Gaze. Furthermore, by prolonging her suicide Cleopatra is displaying the political motivations that underwrote her relationship with Antony. Although in this passage she claims that she is departing from this world in order to join her "husband", this is only because all other political attempts have failed. She is embracing death since she cannot bear to become Caesar's trophy paraded through the streets of Rome. Instead of saving her life, Cleopatra instead chooses to save her legacy.

By focusing on her costume in the final moments of her life, Cleopatra is installing another metatheatrical moment into the text. She needs her robe and crown as these are the indicators of her position. Even though the robe and crown do not have any inherent value, because both are symbolic representatives of royalty they are able to bestow authority and the right to rule. Derived from Cleopatra's costume, this metatheatrical moment explicates the performative nature of ruler's roles. Through this allusion, Shakespeare is able to create a self-conscious space for the performative nature of the monarchy to be examined.

By placing the asp on her breast, Cleopatra is inverting the myth of motherhood. Instead of giving life through nursing, her life is instead taken by the bite of this poisonous snake. Because she is unable to give life, her association with Isis is deconstructed. Since Cleopatra derived her authority to rule from the narrative that she was the reincarnated Isis, the deconstruction of this

association serves to undermine Cleopatra's political authority over Egypt. As a result, royalty is further cast as a performative concept, a role which one may step in and out of. Since Cleopatra's entire identity is the "Queen of the Nile", the deconstruction of her authority to rule throws her identity into doubt. Although the reader has just spent five acts with Cleopatra, we are left without knowing who she really is in her "infinite variety" (II. Scene II 240). All we have is the immortal image of her in royal robe and crown that "Age cannot wither [...] nor custom stale (Act II Scene II 240-241), preserved as a political performance.

Furthermore, this maternal moment is significant because Shakespeare scrubbed all other references to Cleopatra's offspring from his script, even though she actually had four children. Three of these children were fathered by Antony. Yet by removing all offspring from his play, Shakespeare uses Cleopatra as a symbol for both life and death in a deconstruction of binaries, and the destruction of the Ptolemaic dynasty. In doing so, Shakespeare was able to appease the benefactor of the Kings Men, King James I. Since James assumed the English throne after the English Queen Elizabeth died without an heir, he is typically considered to be represented by Octavius in the narrative, with the Queen of Egypt the textual representative of the Queen of England (Rose 379). By editing history so that the Ptolemaic dynasty ends with Cleopatra in order to make room for the rationality of Rome, Shakespeare is alluding to how the Tudor dynasty ended with Queen Elizabeth in order to make room for King James I. Therefore, this absence of motherhood which highlights the maternal moments in

Act V is actually a political maneuver employed by Shakespeare to flatter King James.

As Shakespearean scholars Wortham, Dusinger, and Bosman have claimed<sup>21</sup>, Shakespeare creates an allegory with James cast as a type of new Octavius Caesar. Readings that utilize this interpretation tend to come from a new historicist background, which can easily be pushed beyond the point of verifiable facts as in H. Neville Davie's *Jacobean Antony and Cleopatra*. However, considering the plethora of similarities between James I and Caesar, as well as Cleopatra and Elizabeth, it is probable that Shakespeare did indeed create "an analogy between Augustus's *pax Romana* and the aspirations of King James I to be an influential peacemaker in Europe" (Bevington 6). This allusion is important because it strengthens the merging of Rome and England, placing the world of *Antony and Cleopatra* in a malleable "never never world" (O'Dell 192). Placed in this malleable world, the Rome vs Egypt dichotomy is underwritten as an us vs them mentality, as England cast much of the rest of the world as barbarians. By forming the social-political setting of his play with this xenophobic consciousness, Shakespeare is depicting the social construction of nationalism.

Cleopatra also uses her final breaths to reflect on the nature of death. Throughout her life she has fled from death, ordering the demise of her family in order to secure her own safety. Yet now she embraces the afterlife, preferring death to life as Caesar's prize. This contrast of her final moments to the rest of her life is highlighted by the irony in her last lines. After kissing her handmaidens,

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<sup>21</sup> Wortham, 22-3; Dusinger, 232; Bosman, 288.

she is surprised that they die so quickly, astonishingly exclaiming “Have I the asp in my lips? Dost fall?”. Cleopatra then goes on to conclude that “If thou and nature can so gently part / The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch” (V. II. 285-286). Through this observation, Cleopatra remarks on the fragility of life, and how traveling to the next world is a relatively easy journey, a mere “pinch”. Death is also recast as her lover and sanctuary from the shame of Rome.

These lines are an example of dramatic irony for two reasons, the first being Cleopatra’s own terror of death throughout her life, and the second Antony’s inability to commit suicide. Although Cleopatra’s servants die after the mere kiss of one who has been bitten by an asp, the great general is unable to properly stab himself. Instead, he is forced to die an agonizingly slow death in the previous scene. The dramatic irony of these lines serves to conflate Cleopatra with death, strengthening the association previously established by the image of her “nursing” the asp. Through the symbolic association of Cleopatra with death, Shakespeare is subtly reconfiguring the gender binary. This is because war, fighting, and essentially “bringing death” upon others was considered to be exclusively men’s work. Yet by placing Cleopatra in this role with Antony being unable to complete the stereotypical expectations of masculinity, Shakespeare undermines the gender binary.

#### IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, a textual analysis of *Antony and Cleopatra* reveals how Shakespeare created scenes in which a reconfiguration of the strict male/female



binary can occur when ambiguity is acknowledged within his script. This deconstruction of the gender binary occurs from the first lines of Act I Scene I with the conversation between Demetrius and Philo, and continues throughout the play. Attempting to emasculate their leader Antony, they are instead “playing” at being women, by engaging in the stereotypically feminine activity of gossiping. This gossip centers on how Antony’s “dotage” “o’erflows the measure”, two statements that have multiple layers of meaning. This phrase also serves to characterize Antony’s fickle nature, deconstructing the idea of biological essentialism. Shakespeare then chooses to include several allusions to the Roman god Mars, a theme that is often repeated throughout the play.

Self-conscious metatheatricality also resurfaces continually throughout the production, serving to remind the audience that they are gazing at a performance aware of its theatrical status. Since the theater is illuminated the actors are looking back at the audience as well, and as a result, metatheatricality introduces spectatorship. Therefore, Shakespeare has written this opening exchange between Demetrius and Philo in a way that immediately introduces the Mutual Gaze as the audience experiences Antony through the two Romans’ perspectives. Through the intimacy of confiding their treasonous gossip with the audience, Demetrius and Philo immediately activate the Mutual Gaze even in the text, because they are engaging in a mutually dependent relationship with the audience. Because the Mutual Gaze has been activated, Cleopatra is able to use this space to reconfigure the male vs female binary through her entrance. She

does this by claiming linguistic control over Antony, and coupling authority with femininity.

Cleopatra's reconfiguration of stereotypical gender roles by acknowledging ambiguity continues in her final monologue in Act V Scene II. In this scene the Queen constructs her legacy through her "immortal longings". Continuing an entire act after Antony's demise, Cleopatra is not defined in relation to her man, but rather as an individual entity. Furthermore, the image of Cleopatra with the asp on her breast serves to invert the myth of motherhood. Because she is unable to give life, her association with Isis is deconstructed, further categorizing authority and the right to rule as a performance. The performativity of the monarchy is further emphasized through Cleopatra's focus on her clothing. An absence of motherhood in *Antony and Cleopatra* highlights the maternal moments in Act V, and was likely a political maneuver employed by Shakespeare to flatter King James. Cleopatra also uses her final breaths to reflect on the nature of death. Using dramatic irony to contrast male vs female approaches to death in this play, Shakespeare undermines the gender binary.

## Chapter 3

# Ambiguity in “Action!”: Film Analysis

“I know that a woman is a dish for the gods,  
if the devil dress her not”

-William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra* (V.II.276)

I. Ambiguity in “Action!”: The Mutual Gaze in the Globe’s 2014  
Production of *Antony and Cleopatra*

Although not as popular as some Shakespearean plays such as *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra* is, nevertheless, often performed. With a plethora of performances to choose from, the Globe’s 2014 performance is unique because it is recorded performance, a type of media that has risen to prominence since the turn of the twenty first century. Typically, the production will tape one performance which is then broadcast to select theaters, and sold for home consumption as well. This form of media therefore not only allows the viewer to situate themselves in the actual audience of the performance, but also be awarded the opportunity to dissect scenes through multiple viewings. As such, the critic is able to discover layers of meaning that may not be initially apparent from a cursory viewing. This is the first reason the 2014 Globe production of *Antony and Cleopatra* was chosen for this thesis, to utilize the attributes of a recorded performance. The second reason is this production focuses on the gaze of the audience.

Since the Globe utilizes original performative practice, audience interaction as well as mutual gazing is highlighted. Since the actors perform in broad daylight both the spectacle and spectator are able to engage in the Mutual Gaze since they can quite literally see one another with the house lights left on. However, although this production of *Antony and Cleopatra* does enact the Mutual Gaze, elements of this gaze are also present in other original practice productions of Shakespeare. The foundation for this gaze is furthermore already

present in the original text of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Therefore, although the Globe's 2014 production of *Antony and Cleopatra* does enact the Mutual Gaze through specific staging conditions, these conditions can also exist in other original practice productions as well as the text itself. What makes the Globe's 2014 production unique is that it combines all of these elements that may exist in other original practice productions and texts in order to create a reconfiguration of patriarchal politics that allows for space to explore this non-possessive gaze. Since this is a Globe On Screen recorded performance that films the audience as well as the actors, the audience becomes a mutual participation in the theatrical production.

Yet what exactly is an original practice performance? Simply put, it is a performance that attempts to resurrect the theatrical conventions of a given play's time period. It is the theatrical result of what Stephen Greenblatt identifies as "a desire to speak with the dead" (1), and what I identify as the visual enactment of new historicist theory. Within a Shakespeare context, original practice performances attempt to utilize the theatrical practices of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. Although a plethora of companies engage in original practice,<sup>22</sup> the Globe stands paramount among them all. Built at the same spot as the King's Men's original globe on the bank of the Thames, "the Globe is a monument to an understanding of Dramatic performance as the embodiment of a textualized 'past' expectantly (or inertly) awaiting the chance to speak" (Worthen 117). Worthen's description here of the impetus behind the reconstructed Globe

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<sup>22</sup> Such as the American Shakespeare Center, Original Practice Shakespeare Festival, and Shakespeare Tavern Playhouse.

is important because it illustrates how original practice is built on intention instead of actuality. Although original practice performances may be as historically accurate as possible, there is no possible way to actually resurrect every little aspect of Shakespeare's original productions.

Instead, original practice productions are intending to create as historically accurate production as possible. This inevitable failure to ever truly recreate Shakespeare's original productions is what led Andrew Gurr to remark immediately after the completion of the Globe that, "the new Globe is not more than a test-tube, the basis for experiments aimed at getting a better idea of how Shakespeare expected his plays to be staged" ("Staging at the Globe" 159). I am utilizing this understanding of original practice for this thesis as the staging conditions of the Early Modern theater serve to create an environment of Beauvoirian ambiguity where the Mutual Gaze may flourish. Since original practice productions "mean not sitting passively but sharing the play in performance with the actors" (Gurr, "Staging at the Globe" 168), both audience and actors are awarded agency and are able to enact the Mutual Gaze by looking back at one another.

Directed by Jonathan Munby, the 2014 Globe version of *Antony and Cleopatra* ran from May 17<sup>th</sup> to August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014. Starring Clive Wood as Antony and Eve Best as Cleopatra, one show was also broadcast through the Globe On Screen. Overall, the production closely follows Shakespeare's original text, with several slight but significant deviations. These deviations from the technical

text<sup>23</sup>, such as the added musical interlude at the opening of this production, serve to strengthen the Mutual Gaze through increased audience interaction, and a focus on the act of gazing. In this chapter, I will be exploring how these deviations enhance the Mutual Gaze, focusing specifically on the overture that is added to the Globe's production, and Act I Scene II when Cleopatra enters dressed in nothing but a bedsheet.

### I. Music and the Mutual Gaze

The Mutual Gaze is established before the production begins as a result of how the theater itself is constructed. Since there is no curtain on the Globe stage, audience members enter the amphitheater in full view of the set. Because the Globe is a thrust stage, the groundling portion of the audience can cluster close around three quarters of the stage. Some audience members in the recording can even be seen propping their elbows or a snack up on the stage. This casual proximity to the actors forces the audience to view them through the Mutual Gaze as the actor looks back. With the onstage spectacle illuminated through "the high windows [...] candles and perhaps cressets" (Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage* 216) the audience is able to see the actor as possessing the same agency as the audience. This forces both spectacle and spectator to acknowledge the humanity of the Other. On this stage in particular, the audience is treated to a rich visual display of royal colors. The stage itself is bathed in blood red and gold, two colors

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<sup>23</sup> Although I categorize these extra-textual elements as "deviations" from the actual script, it is important to note that these extra-textual elements would likely have been part of the original staging. See Gurr's work for more on this matter, particularly *The Shakespearean Stage*.

that are repeated throughout the Egyptian cast's costuming. This may be seen in the below image I.



Image I

Without even the warning of a house speech, several musicians wander onto the stage, and strike up a tune. These characters are clothed in nondescript tunics of red and white, clothing that is specifically missing any sort of hints as to the wearer's socio-economic status or even time period. This lack of visual cues is particularly important, as this musical interlude is not part of Shakespeare's actual script. However, music may have been part of Shakespeare's original performance, as suggested by David Mann who claims that "Shakespeare exploited the full range of musical resources available to him throughout his career" (67-68). However, such instrumentation differed depending on the location of the production according to Gurr. In the fourth edition of *The Shakespearean Stage 574-1642* he claims that "Blackfriars with its famous consort of musicians" was different from the "music in the amphitheatres [...] [which] was more limited, commonly introduced as a song with or without accompaniment [or a] flourish of trumpets' (228, 118). Since productions at the Globe were performed inside of an open air theater, music would have been typically been a cross between the type Gurr refers to as "more limited" and the



“music in the amphitheaters”. However, since music does not exist in the script of *Antony and Cleopatra* itself, the overture in the Globe’s 2014 production was added by director Munby. Since this overture is a fabrication, even the audience members who are familiar with Shakespeare’s script are forced to become novices, as the musicians are devoid of any illuminating hints.

Bursting onto the boards, a currently unnamed woman brings a boundless energy before the audience. Dressed in virginal white, this woman is the one leading the action, as the musicians quickly move out of her path. Behind her comes a man, dressed in a contrasting dark robe and following her every move. Although he too is seemingly caught in a dance of ecstasy, his movements are touched with a hint of reserve, demonstrating that not only is he more advanced in years than the woman, but is a stranger to these revelries. As such, he is unable to direct the action of the performance to the extent that she instinctively does. Moving about the stage, he circles her, like a moon caught in the gravitational pull of a grandiose planet. This circling creates a visual representation of their relationship, with him reliant on her. However, this relationship is complicated through their costuming. This is because their clothes serve to undermine the apparent power dynamic that has been established through the couple’s movements. With shawls draped around both their shoulders the wild flapping of their arms seems to emulate the frantic flap of birds’ wings. This visual metaphor, combined with the white/dark dichotic symbolism, serves to cast the woman as prey, and the man as predator through their costuming.

Such an interpretation initially appears to recast the woman's action and man's inaction as one directed by him insisted of her, as his slow steps are rather those of the hunter. However, I propose that this complication allows us as an audience to appreciate the Mutual Gaze. Rather than just one individual possessing the power in this performance, they instead cast off such stifling binaries to embrace an equitable distribution of power. They accomplish this by embracing mutualism through Beauvoirian ambiguity. By existing as both Self and Other, the couple are able to construct a mutual relationship in which both possesses agency. As they circle each Other with eyes locked, the audience is able to see both participants become both spectacle and spectator. This is because she cannot perform without an audience, and he cannot look without having someone to look at.

Therefore, they are both performing roles for the other, existing through the other's perception and becoming an object even as they are able to retain their own subjectivity. This is demonstrated by how in this brief moment the woman is in fact the one who directs the action through her agency. Yet, this does not detract from the man, as he does not lose his agency through his predatory vantage point. Rather, they are codependent on each other: she cannot direct the action without having others to direct, he cannot circle without having a gravitational pull. Both transcend the immanence of being only a spectacle by gaining the status of spectator as well. As the two characters look at one another, they are demonstrating a performance of the Mutual Gaze, as the spectacle and spectator become each Other simultaneously. Therefore, in the

very first moments of this performance, the audience is treated to an exhibition of ambiguity in action.

This visual demonstration of the theoretical concept of Beauvoirian ambiguity is further demonstrated through the couple's costuming. As previously mentioned, the woman is wrapped in white, accented only by a contrasting scarf of blood red. This scarf serves to tie her to the musicians and related scenery, locating her firmly within the spectacle of the stage. However, the white she is wrapped in is not the virginal clothes of a bride. Instead, both she and the man are presented in various stages of undress, their white garments the underclothes typically relegated to moments of intimacy. As a result of this costuming choice, the audience is then led to understand that this onstage romp is not merely the result of over-exuberance or overindulgence of alcohol, but rather the intimate throes of the aftermath of coitus. Within the theoretical confines of the male gaze, this revelation would cast the woman as merely prey of the phallus, receptacle of both seed and spectatorship. However, because of the Mutual Gaze she is not merely an inanimate object, regulated to the static position of immanence through objectification. Instead, when analyzed through Beauvoir's theory of ambiguity, the onstage woman gains agency from this position as she is the one directing the action.

The couple gain their agency by transcending the immanence of spectacle. Not only is the stage populated with other performers gazing at the couple through a metatheatrical perspective, there is also the audience's gaze. Thus in this moment, the couple are allowing themselves to be seen, gleaning

agency instead of objectification from this position. Since both characters look back at the audience as well as each other, neither is forced into objectification, and instead they retain their subjectivity. By utilizing the act of coitus to deconstruct the public vs private dichotomy, the couple become both spectacle and spectator through their assertion of agency onstage. This is a specific choice unique to this production as this entire scene does not exist in Shakespeare's text. Although the original script certainly does not prohibit the Globe's interpretation, the text begins with a mere requirement of "a room in CLEOPATRA'S palace, enter DEMETRIUS, and PHILO". Philo's opening line of "Nay, but this dotage of our general / O'erflows the measure" (I. I. 1-2) does not even occur until about five minutes into the 2014 Globe production, whereas the interplay between this couple occurs about a minute in. Therefore, the specific choice to costume this couple in the clothes of coitus and have the woman direct the action serves to set the stage with ambiguity. The Mutual Gaze is present from the production's conception, constructing the fictional world brought to life before the eyes of the audience.

Following this first couple come a collection of Cleopatra's other attendants, birthed from the belly of backstage (Taylor 2). These attendants in similar stages of undress join her, following along in a barely choreographed dance of released inhibitions. Clapping and stomping, the gathering of men, women, and eunuchs are led by the original woman, who is later revealed to be Charmian in Act I Scene II. This may be seen in the below image II.



Image II

Joyful in their mindless exuberance, the group exhibit their ecstasy following what has presumably been a prolonged progression of feasting and fucking. By allowing the audience to view them in such a state these attendants are reclaiming possession of their own image. This allows the attendants to transcend their presumptive roles as immanent spectacle and gain a degree of subjectivity. Furthermore, these attendants are wrapped in white, the signifiers of virginity within the Western conceptual tradition. The point of value and honor for women, virginity as symbolized through this costuming is highly ironic as these characters are portrayed as newly released from the intimacy of coitus. Although not explicitly stated as such, it is strongly suggestive of an orgy, as symbolized by the underclothes worn in this dance of intimacy and ecstasy.

By serving as a dramatic tool to demonstrate the main tensions encapsulated in *Antony and Cleopatra*, this dance also displays the Rome vs. Egypt dichotomy. This dichotomy sets Rome in cultural and political opposition with Egypt, depicting a common trope in dramatic literature, the idea that rational thought and wild emotions are inevitably opposed. This theme can be traced

throughout much of the western literary tradition, from the binary opposition constructed between the wild Dionysius and “rational” Pentheus in *The Bacchae*, to the civilization vs barbarism represented in *Jekyll and Hyde*<sup>24</sup>. This trope underlines the vast majority of stereotypical binary oppositions, such as male vs. female, head vs. heart, dominant vs subordinate, and civilization vs barbarism. Because the emotional, irrational, and barbarous half of such dichotomies are typically gendered as female and intrinsically subordinate, the perpetuation of such binaries serves to reinforce the repetition of phallogentric objectification and the male gaze. As such, I propose that because the Globe specifically enacts this dichotomy through the opening sequence, that the realm of Rome is designated as the domain of the male gaze, whereas in Egypt the Mutual Gaze is allowed to operate. This is because Antony and Enobarbus integrate themselves into the social fabric of Egypt, and therefore deconstruct the binary between the two countries. By deconstructing this binary, Shakespeare throws all other binaries into question, since they are all established from the same foundational binary of order vs. disorder. The tension between the two conflicting worlds of Rome and Egypt is depicted through the intrusion of a pair of outsiders into the Egyptian dance of ecstasy.

Clothed with the somber air of importance and worldly matters, these two men are immediately apparent as the representatives of rational Rome. This is signified by their stiff black collars, edged with white frills and buttoned up to the chin. Although these costumes are not historically accurate in reference to the

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<sup>24</sup> Beauvoir is particularly concerned with binaries, as they “eliminate” ambiguity and create “cleaves” (*Ethics of Ambiguity*, 7-8)

tunics and togas of Rome in 30 BC, they are reflective of Tudor outfits. However, Romans dressed in starched ruffles instead of togas would not have been unduly jarring to an early modern audience, since “Elizabethan plays, especially those of ‘classical’ theme and setting, were often acted in contemporary dress” (Smith 240). As a result, as O’Dell illustrates “the play sits in a never-never world, neither fully Elizabethan nor fully Roman” (192). I assert that the merging of these two cultures is primarily illustrated through costuming. This merge is in fact a logical choice, considering that *Antony and Cleopatra* was staged by the King’s Men in order to boost the legitimacy of King James’ I reign. By ostentatiously casting rational Rome as the supposed victor over the barbarity of Egypt, Shakespeare at least appears to praise “national solidarity, social order and strong rule” (Rose 379) in order to support the absolute monarchy of King James I.

The stark nature of the Romans’ black costumes stands in contrast to the malleability of the other characters’ draped white robes, in a visual demonstration of the Rome vs Egypt dichotomy. Dressed in black from nearly head to toe, these men appear as metaphorical mourners, grieving the “emasculatation” of Antony. This costuming choice also serves to ironically demonstrate the transition from the male gaze of Rome to the Mutual Gaze of ambiguous Egypt. This transition is symbolized by one of Cleopatra’s female attendants quickly “seducing” the younger of these two men. She exuberantly removes his black jacket to reveal the white undershirt, placing it on her own shoulders. As a result of his gazing at the dance he has been drawn in, and is now a participant in the dance as well.

This is the same process the audience undergoes, as by gazing they become drawn into the spectatorship of the Mutual Gaze. Instead of a somberly clothed spectator relegated to the sidelines he is invited into the dance, physically exhibiting the transition of spectator to spectacle of the Mutual Gaze. As a result, the onstage actor becomes a surrogate for the offstage audience as the audience is able to identify with him through this transition. This turn from Rome to Egypt is also demonstrated by Antony. However, the other soldier from Rome chooses to remain as a spectator, stiff in his sensible jacket. Later revealed to be Philo, by choosing to watch rather than engage, this rational Roman demonstrates that by remaining as a spectator an individual is unable to activate the Mutual Gaze.

In contrast to Philo's perpetuation of the male gaze, Charmian is activating the Mutual Gaze by venturing across the invisible constraints of what would be the fourth wall in the contemporary theater. Climbing into the audience she ventures four seats back, and gyrates in front of a male audience member. Teasing with the toss of her tantalizing hips, this woman may be seen as making herself into a sexualized object for the gratuitous gaze of another. Instead of staying onstage, she has chosen to cross the fourth wall, increasing her objectification by increasing her opportunity to be seen as a specifically sexualized creature. Yet is she though? Is she further increasing her sexualization through proximity, or is something else entirely happening? If this scene is operating under the male gaze, then she would be caught as an immanent spectacle. However, since the Mutual Gaze is at work, rather than



increasing her dehumanization she is instead becoming a spectator as well as spectacle. For as Charmian flips her hair onto this selected audience member, he too is being looked at. He too is becoming a spectacle. Likewise, she is becoming a spectator through her role as spectacle.

This gaze is simultaneously daring, challenging and inviting, as she encourages others to have the opportunity to gaze upon her through the invitation encapsulated by her own defiant gaze. Rejoining her compatriots onstage, Charmian continues to lead the action as the dance consistently intensifies. Amidst this revelry, two men choose to watch rather than participate. The first of these is the man who orbited Charmian at the beginning of the production, and a similarly middle-aged companion. Reclining on pillows at the edge of the dance, these two men, subsequently revealed to be Enobarbus and Alexas respectively, are onstage spectators. However, although they are spectators, like Philo before them, the two are also an integral part of the performance and therefore are able to become both spectator and spectacle. Their presence serves to demonstrate how by actively gazing the spectator, is defined by his existence in the spectacle's perception, and therefore becomes both spectator and spectacle as well. Without a spectacle to gaze at the spectator role cannot exist, just as without a spectator one cannot be a spectacle. The two roles are interdependent, just as Enobarbus and Alexas are engaged in a mutual relationship with the dancers.

Yet all good things must come to an end, as the onstage capering continually intensifies a dark figure slips on to stage left. Philo has returned, and

he impatiently taps on Demetrius' shoulder. Since Demetrius is once more clothed in his own Roman jacket, this costuming serves to foreshadow Antony's character trajectory, as both the general and lowly Demetrius has been turned from the freedom of Egypt back towards the responsibility of Rome. This is symbolized by Demetrius's repossession of his tunic from the Egyptian woman, a move that Antony will also emulate when he removes his own tunic from Cleopatra's bedchamber to return to Rome. However, much as Antony is no longer able to entirely turn away from Egypt, Demetrius is also unable to completely return to the rigidity of Rome. Although he has donned his dark jacket again, it remains unbuttoned to reveal the loose, free, white undershirt underneath. This undershirt serves to visually symbolize how Demetrius has begun to embrace the freedom of Egypt, even though the masculine restraint of Rome has been superimposed on him. Dropping to the floor like floppy corpses, the dancers lounge in disjoined heaps, sunk into the stupefaction of intoxication and intercourse. Safe in the assurance that the other onstage characters are drunk beyond reason, Demetrius and Philo use this opportunity to fall into gossiping about Antony. By engaging in such gossip the two Romans upset the stereotypes of masculinity, but also the standard expectations of their position. Demetrius and Philo are not only men, but soldiers speaking out against their leader. Their actions serve to de-legitimize military culture by questioning both its masculine and authoritative basis. By engaging in the stereotypically feminine pursuit of gossiping, Demetrius and Philo are, in essence, "playing" at being women. Through these layers of metatheatricity

Shakespeare is able to create a space for the reformulation of gender binaries, and allow for Beauvoirian ambiguity to be activated.

Finally, the titular characters appear onstage, utilizing their entrance to embrace the Mutual Gaze and reconstruct the male vs. female binary. With a sword slung over her shoulder, Cleopatra charges downstage to a chorus of emphatic ululation. Thrusting the sharpened steel into the stagnant air, Cleopatra has claimed this phallic symbol from Antony, a signifier of his supposed emasculation within her powerful hands. She remains in this position for a brief moment, allowing the audience to view her before she moves out of the way for her pursuer Antony. Unlike her court, Cleopatra is fully dressed, but not in the threads of stereotypical femininity. Instead, the jewel of the Nile is in pants! Although this trouser transgression is decidedly masculine, above them Cleopatra wears a frilly shirt and brightly colored cape. By mixing the garb of both women and men, Cleopatra is immediately demonstrating how she refuses to be reduced by either the constraints of stereotypical femininity or the male gaze. Behind her comes Antony, recreating the actions performed by their closest confidants Charmian and Enobarbus at the top of the show. He too transgresses the boundaries of performative gender, wearing a woman's apron over his tousled tunic and trousers. With his unbuttoned robe, and laurel wreath, Antony would appear to be now abandoning his dominant role through the freedom of fantasy. This costuming may be seen in the below image III, as Cleopatra mocks Antony with his own sword that she has confiscated from him.



Image III

He is now the subordinate, occupy the role of passivity stereotypically reserved for the feminine partner. The colors of his costuming are particularly important here since he is dressed in the red and golds of Egypt, utterly rejecting the somber blacks and blues Roman characters wear. This stands in contrast to Enobarbus, who, although dressed in an unbuttoned robe like his commander Antony, retains the Roman color palette. Since there is a mere handful of colors used throughout the entire production, namely red, gold, white, black, and blue, the fact that Antony's costume for his first entrance entirely rejects Roman colors demonstrates how he has let the rational society of Rome. Within a traditional narrative this rejection of Rome and adoption of the feminine apron would emasculate Antony, forcing him into a position of feminized immanence. However, because Shakespeare wrote both Cleopatra and Antony as characters who transgress gender boundaries, this is not a situation of "either/or" but rather "both". By embracing Beauvoirian ambiguity, both Cleopatra and Antony are able to display elements of masculinity and femininity, and embrace the freedom of the encounter.

## II. Gender Performativity: Boy Players and Cross Dressing

However, gender bending through costuming is not just enacted by Eve Best and Clive Wood in this particular scene. Rather, Shakespeare chosen to linguistically encapsulate references to gender ambiguity throughout the text of *Antony and Cleopatra*. One such moment is in Act I Scene II, immediately before Cleopatra reenters.

ENOBARBUS: Hush! here comes Antony.

CHARMIAN: Not he; the queen.

*Enter CLEOPATRA*

CLEOPATRA: Saw you my lord?

ENOBARBUS: No, lady.

CLEOPATRA: Was he not here?

CHARMIAN: No, madam.

CLEOPATRA: He was disposed to mirth; but on the sudden

A Roman thought hath struck him. Enobarbus!

ENOBARBUS: Madam?

CLEOPATRA: Seek him, and bring him hither.

Where's Alexas?

ALEXAS: Here, at your service. My lord approaches.

CLEOPATRA: We will not look upon him: go with us.

*Exeunt (I. II. 80-92)*

In this section, Enobarbus quickly quiets Cleopatra's attendance as the queen enters. Originally misidentified as Antony, Cleopatra's entrance demonstrates the

transient nature of the process of gazing, as well as the performativity of gender. A concept created by queer feminist theorist Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), gender performativity is an explication of gender as a social construct. A type of theory of knowledge, gender performativity harkens back to Beauvoir's assertion that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (*The Second Sex* 247). Building on Beauvoir, Butler claims that "gender proves to be performance—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed" (25). She further explained her theory in a subsequent interview, stating that

When we say that gender is performed, we usually mean that we've taken on a role; we're acting in some way [...] To say that gender is performative is a little different. For something to be performative means that it produces a series of effects. We act and walk and speak and talk that consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman...we act as if that being of a man or that being of a woman is actually an internal reality or simply something that is true about us. Actually, it is a phenomenon that is being produced all the time and reproduced all the time. We act and walk and speak and talk in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman. ("BigThink" 2011)

Essentially, participants in society are socialized into a certain set of mannerisms and affects that present a certain set gender to the world. However, the very nature of the theater deconstructs this social indoctrination of cisgender

orientation, highlighting how gender is socially constructed as opposed to biological destiny.

When Cleopatra is misidentified as Antony, she is demonstrating how gender is performative. This performance visually reiterates the previous mentions in the text of how Cleopatra and Antony are mistaken for each other by their attendants, since the couple frequently dresses in each other's clothes. This sense of gender confusion relies solely on the performative aspects of gender; a sense which is heightened considering that this is a recorded performance. Not only are these characters exploring the confines of performative gender themselves, the actors playing them are quite literally performing. Such metatheatricality is further self-consciously emphasized because in Shakespeare's theater actresses simply did not exist.

This is because in Elizabethan and Jacobean theater women were not allowed onstage, a socio-historical fact that allows modern actors to deconstruct the strict male vs female binary. Instead of women, "boy players" whose voices had not yet dropped played the female characters in Shakespeare's Globe (Gay 160). Using boys to play women brings a critical self-consciousness to the on-stage performance of gender, as Shakespeare specifically brings the audience's attention to this gendered discrepancy between the actor and character. Self-deprecating references to the male biology of the boy player are common throughout Shakespeare's body of work, and are mentioned specifically in one of Cleopatra's final speeches. Fearing that after she is brought back to Rome as Caesar's prize she "shall see / Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness /

l'th' posture of a whore" (V. II. 215-17), Cleopatra brings attention to the fact that in Shakespeare's theater a "squeaking Cleopatra" would be uttering this condemnation. In the Jacobean theater, these lines were "said by a boy. Defying his female garments" (Dusinberre, "Boys Becoming Women" 2). This is a moment that, according to Dusinberre, Shakespeare is able to show how "the sexual identity of the actor is erased in the act of performance, thus mirroring a social truth about gender itself, that it is a fiction which men and women learn and participate in, but which has no innate stability" (Dusinberre, "Boys Becoming Women" 11). To apply Dusinberre's argument to this analysis of ambiguity, I assert that Shakespeare highlights the social construct of gender by awarding Cleopatra a moment of ironic self-reflection. Although this self-conscious irony would presumptively undermine the illusion of reality the typical modern theater attempts to construct, "the audience in *Antony and Cleopatra* participate in the play's awareness of its own theatricality" (Dusinberre, "Squeaking Cleopatras" 67). Because Shakespeare wrote with an ironic awareness that his heroines would be played by boy players, he constructed these roles as ideal spaces for exploring the performativity of gender and engaging in the Mutual Gaze by deconstructing the male vs female binary. As a result, there is a tension between Cleopatra taking a position of power while presenting as "female" but being played by a boy player.

The English playwright creates a space for exploring performativity by writing the boy actor's body as a site that rejects the traditional constraints of gender. This realm "is based on an idea of gender identity as costume: put it on,



take it off" (Dusinberre, "Boys Becoming Women" 2). For the Early Modern audience, gender identity was a transient located not in the actor's genitals but rather in their costuming. Through the "blurring of gender boundaries" (Singh 99) the boy player's "biological identity becomes unimportant, it is as though it ceased to exist" (Dusinberre, "Boys Becoming Women" 2). As a result, "gender identity was a fiction, generated between player and audience" (idem.). Although critics such as Dusinberre have questioned if the same sense of gender incongruity has remained now that women are played by women, these moments of gender performativity are spaces to reformulate and reorganize the strict male vs female dichotomy. Due to this reformulation the Mutual Gaze is activated through the ambiguity of gender identity.

Since Shakespeare's text solidifies the malleable nature of gender through its self-conscious allusions to boy players a strict hierarchy of power relations based on gender is untenable. This is because there is not a strictly masculine male to subordinate a strictly feminine female in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Rather, the couple blur the categories of gender and embrace the "ambiguity of their condition" (Beauvoir 859) as both have masculine and feminine attributes. The constantly changing and performative nature of gender is further underlined through Cleopatra's own constantly changing and performative temperament. As Act I Scene II demonstrates, although she enters desperately searching for Antony, within a mere few lines she will not even look at him as he enters. Blurring these categories creates an inhospitable environment for the male gaze, rendering its innate objectification impotent.

This is because the power hierarchy of dominant male over submissive female has been interrupted through the textual references to the boy players and cross dressing of the main characters. The male gaze is therefore unable to be activated because there is no way to engage the tri-fold stares of the male gaze in order to enact what Kaplan has called the “on-screen eroticization of the female figure” (Kaplan 43). The second look of the male gaze in particular is rendered impotent since there is no way for an onstage male figure to make an onstage woman the object of his objectifying gaze as the categories of gender have been blurred. This in turn prevents the audience from identifying with the look of the possessive male and objectify the woman through his gaze. Since power is not located solely within the masculine figure who objectifies the feminine figure, power is instead distributed between onstage characters regardless of gender. This redistribution of power may be redefined as “agency”, and is the direct enabler of the mutual gaze.

The reconfiguration of the strict male vs female binary that undermines any attempts at activating the male gaze is further strengthened through crossdressing. As previously mentioned, the female parts in Elizabethan and Jacobean theater were performed by boy players. However, in *Antony and Cleopatra* there is also specific references to the couple’s cross dressing in their character life as well. As Act I Scene II demonstrates, Cleopatra and Antony are often mistaken for each other, as they are prone to wearing one another’s garments. For a modern audience, the mistaken identity that surrounds Cleopatra as she enters during Act I Scene II is a reference to the character

cross dressing. Not only has she previously worn Antony's sword, women are now played by women in the modern theater. However, for Shakespeare's original audiences this moment of mistaken identity would be underwritten by a double cross dressing, since Cleopatra would have been played by a boy, while occasionally cross dressing as a man. These multiple layers of metatheatricality create the opportunity to reconstruct the male vs female dichotomy, because gender has already been shown to be a transient and malleable social construct. Dusiñberre explains in "Squeaking Cleopatras" that Shakespeare needed to employ a plethora of methods to "help realize the sensuality of Cleopatra" (54). Because of the double crossdressing, Shakespeare utilized a team of secondary characters as one such method to further create the illusion of her beauty. With biological women barred from playing the part,

Shakespeare's Cleopatra had to be acted by a boy, and this did everything to determine, not his view of the character, but his presenting of it, he does not shirk her sensuality, he stresses it time and time again; but he has to find Other ways than the one impracticable way of bringing it home to us. (Granville Barker 435)

Another "way" that Shakespeare employed to linguistically create Cleopatra's beauty was the use of secondary characters. When Octavius is told of her great charm, or Enobarbus relates to the audience the striking image of the Queen of the Nile on a barge, these characters are being utilized to construct the myth of Cleopatra. Enobarbus's retelling in particular has become perhaps the most famous lines from the play. He states that "Age cannot wither her, nor custom

stale / Her infinite variety: Other women cloy / The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry / Where most she satisfies" (Act II Scene II 240-243). By linguistically constructing Cleopatra in this way through the gaze of others, Shakespeare is able to overcome the authenticity problem of boy players. However, like many of the male-created myths identified by de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, this myth emphasizes the physical appearance of the female figure. Yet because the audience is receiving such imagery through the gaze of another, even an emphasis on physical beauty is unable to objectify her since it is mediated. Instead, the myth of Cleopatra's beauty as established through the secondary character's stories deconstructs the performativity of gender, and reinforces the Mutual Gaze by reconfiguring the male vs female binary.

The manner in which Act I Scene II is performed in the Globe's 2014 production serves to heighten an exploration of the aesthetics of performative gender through the gaze and costuming. Clothing is an important part of enacting the Mutual Gaze, for as Beauvoir explained, "dressing is not only adornment: it expresses, as we have said, woman's social situation" (*The Second Sex* 574). On her first line Cleopatra rushes out from the belly of backstage, clad in only a bedsheet. This costume may be seen in the below image IV.



#### Image IV

The virginal white of this sheet serves to heighten the irony that the queen has traveled far from an unbroken hymen. So the first level of this costuming is irony, a shade which twists the immediate associations gleaned from gazing, and encouraging viewers to question the other immediate associations implicit in the act of gazing. The bedsheet also serves as a source of universality, as all of the audience has presumably had the universal experience of being wrapped in a bedsheet, at least once in their lives. This universality serves as a point of connection, a way for the object of the viewer's gaze to see their own reflected humanity in the women they are gazing at. As previously mentioned, this is a complication of the mirror phase derived from psychoanalysis, as the object of the gaze becomes not a mirror, but rather a window. Through this window the viewer may see themselves reflected, but such reflection does not overwrite the humanity and autonomy of the individual being looked at. This is the employment of Beauvoir's theory that one is both "Self and Other" simultaneously when gazing.

Furthermore, this bedsheet allows an exploration of intimacy and the erotic to occur onstage. Whereas the image of a woman wrapped only in this single sheet would typically be reserved for the centerfold of a "men's magazine" or regulated to the realm of intimacy behind closed doors, here this image is quite literally front and center. Instead of relegating herself to private chambers, Cleopatra stares defiantly back at the audience, both daring and inviting them to gaze on her in naught but a bedsheet. Doing so further emphasizes the power she

possesses in ruling over her court. Personal control over her own image is furthermore highlighted in the following act when Alexas mentions how others “dare not look at you / But when you are well pleased” (III. III. 3-4). Therefore, by making the personal political in this way, Cleopatra boldly returns the Mutual Gaze of the audience. With the lights on to reveal her full figure, Cleopatra becomes a spectator of the spectators.

However, although the Mutual Gaze is dependent on original performance productions of Shakespeare, such productions are in themselves a farce. Although countless hours of meticulous research contribute to the creation of these historically situated productions, original performance productions are not true reconstructions of how the plays would be performed in Shakespeare’s era. This is because of the shifting socio-economic factors that have not only made paper readily available, but also allowed women on the stage. As a result, actors are able to read complete scripts instead of just their own “parts”<sup>25</sup>, and women are no longer played by boy players<sup>26</sup>. As such, original performance productions add another player of metatheatricality, as they are “playing” at being accurate historical reconstructions. Since the presence of modern actors occupying the space of a supposedly accurate historical reconstruction creates a palatable tension between reality and theatrical creation, this additional layer of metatheatricality highlights the inherent fiction of gazing.

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<sup>25</sup> See *Shakespeare in Parts* by Tiffany Stern and Simon Palfrey, for additional analysis of the partial scripts given to actors in the Early Modern world.

<sup>26</sup> With the exception of all-male production companies such as Propeller. However, such companies do not necessarily adhere to other tenets of original practice, which is why they have not been previously discussed.

### III. Conclusion

To conclude, the Globe's 2014 recorded performance of *Antony and Cleopatra* utilizes original performative practice to create the conditions that activate the Mutual Gaze. With the house lights left on, both the audience and actors can see their shared humanity with the other, as the spectacle becomes both spectacle and spectator. This occurs in the two significant deviations from the text in the 2014 production and is primarily communicated through costuming. The first of these deviations is the musical prologue that occurs before Demetrius and Philo fall to gossiping. Furthermore, the Mutual Gaze is established before the production begins as a result of how the theater itself is constructed. Since there is no curtain on the Globe stage, audience members enter the amphitheater in full view of the set. With the theater open to the sky, actors and audience members are in full view of each other, forcing both spectacle and spectator to simultaneously adopt the other's role and reckon with their shared humanity. Not only is the stage populated with other performers that look at one another through a metatheatrical perspective, there is also the audience's gaze. Since characters look back at the audience as well as each other, neither is forced into objectification, and instead they retain their subjectivity. Furthermore, the entrance of Cleopatra and Antony functions in a manner that deconstructs the male vs. female dichotomy. This is done through both titular characters' costuming, which assumes several stereotypical trappings of the opposite gender, with Cleopatra in pants and Antony in an apron. This deconstruction of gender binaries is intensified in the next scene in Act I. During

Cleopatra's entrance she is clad in only a bedsheet, yet mistaken for Antony.

This moment of misidentification is a metatheatrical moment that self-consciously references the boy player who would have played Cleopatra in the Jacobean theater.



## Conclusion

High events as these

Strike those that make them

- William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra* (V.II. 3844)

In conclusion, I would like to briefly summarize, and then further comment on the significance of this work, and how it may be applied to both other theatrical productions and the political realm. I have endeavored in this thesis to provide an alternative to the male gaze that functions without resorting to the possession of the image. Since the position of objectified image is typically reserved for women as outlined in Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", I turned to Beauvoir's theory of ambiguity as a foundation for filling the critical gap that is left without a workable alternative to the male gaze. By taking the conditions of relational freedom and ambiguity from Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and *The Second Sex*, we are then able to utilize mutual relationships and encounters between ambiguous agents as the basis for crafting a truly mutual form of gazing. When put into conversation with Shakespeare's work, my theory of the Mutual Gaze is then able to craft relationships through which the theater may function as a stage for relational freedom. This conversation is particularly apparent in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Yet, is the mutual gaze applicable beyond the confines of the Globe?

As often mentioned in this thesis, original practice Shakespearean productions provide unique staging conditions in which the Mutual Gaze can be established. However, can other productions utilize this gaze if they are not performed with the staging conditions of the Early Modern Theater? I believe there is the conceptual possibility for other productions to indeed function without automatically reverting to the male gaze; however, there are several

considerations that must be taken into account in order for this to be accomplished.

The first is the audience interaction that is an essential basis for the Mutual Gaze. Without this interaction, the humanity of both ambiguous actors is unable to be fully experienced. As a result, I do not think that it would be possible for a production to operate under the mutual gaze without any sort of audience interaction. However, audience interaction is not the sole property of the Renaissance stage. Many quintessentially contemporary productions have embraced audience interaction, such as in *The Lion King*, or *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. As a result, audience interaction is a necessary, but not particularly challenging element for a modern production. A lit amphitheater, the second essential element from original practice, is unfortunately more challenging to reproduce for contemporary sensibilities. Although with the flip of a switch, it is undoubtedly easier to artificially illuminate an audience now than it was in Shakespeare's day, the contemporary theater-goer is often unaccustomed to a bright viewing experiences. There are exceptions to this tendency; however such exceptions tend to be considered avant-garde. Yet, just as audience interaction is essential for activating the Mutual Gaze, so too is an illuminated audience.

Since avant-garde theatrical pursuits tend to be more comfortable with audience interaction and illuminated viewers, these considerations raise the possibility that experimental theater may also be able to easily enact the Mutual Gaze. However, it is also important to note that independently these elements are unable to activate the Mutual Gaze. A production that meticulously operates

according to the conventions of the Early Modern theater, and yet is also based on a script that rejoices in subjugating power structures, will be unable to embrace ambiguity. The Mutual Gaze is therefore more than “the sum of its parts”, as by combining these elements we are able to create a new entity, free from the possession of objectification. Therefore, I believe that the mutual gaze can be enacted in contemporary productions other than *Antony and Cleopatra*, if these essential elements are properly performed.

The theater has always been an inherently political entity. From the role of Greek theater in promoting the development of Athenian civil life, to Donald Trump’s recent twitter meltdown at the *Hamilton* cast, the theater is a space where the political drama can unfold. Since the stage reflects the conditions of humanity back at the viewer, we are able to see and experience our own social conundrums dramatically portrayed. Just as Beauvoir claimed to not be political while imbibing her writings with intense political significance, the theater may not initially appear to be an ostentatiously political entity, while serving as a fertile ground for nurturing social justice. The theater is not a safe space for objectification and bigotry; it is a place where the audience and actor may experience freedom through their shared encounter. Under the Mutual Gaze, we can continue to create these conditions of freedom, bringing Beauvoirian ambiguity from the strictly theoretical world into our lived experiences and political interactions.

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