

either Pendleton or Goldschmidt: he is in touch with Shakespeare's intentions. Yet his notion of "Come back, Little William, and tell us what you wanted" represents a theater of the mausoleum, floating free of history and especially of theater history. Fleissner's "true man from Stratford"—it's always useful, in such an argument, to evoke a geography of origins—is the Bard of High Culture, not Low; Verdi, not Cole Porter. Many theatrical venues, including the Bankside spaces where nobility mixed with the "base, common, and popular," get erased in his value-laden opposition. Indeed, Fleissner's ahistoricism enables him not only to enclose "Shakespeare" within protective barriers but to fly across centuries with the ease, if not the grace, of the falcon he names as *Shrew's* major taming device. To be sure, falconry is one of the rhetorical figures of taming, one Fleissner himself refers to as "manning the haggard," though without noting both the power relation and the gendered term that link bird to falconer. Yet in *Shrew*, as in any text, language is neither as transparent nor as stable as Fleissner might wish; rather, it has sociocultural effects that get played out on bodies: it allows Petruchio to deprive Katherine of food, drink, and sleep, in a campaign that frequently gets embodied on the stage. The contexts Fleissner calls up, however, effectively deny *Shrew's* actors any bodies at all—and certainly not sexed or gendered ones; in his account, sexuality and gender lie down together in a chaste procrustean bed called "common sense." As for his claim that I am "stagestruck," I will take that as a compliment, given both the context of his letter and that in which my essay appeared: a special issue of *PMLA* devoted to performance.

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Death Scenes in *Antony and Cleopatra*

To the Editor:

As impressed as I am with Lorraine Helms's learned and thought-provoking "'The High Roman Fashion': Sacrifice, Suicide, and the Shakespearean Stage" (107 [1992]: 554–65), for me its interpretation of *Antony and Cleopatra* goes wrong by giving an intriguing undercurrent an emphasis that distorts the total experience of an extremely complex play. In analyzing Shakespeare's presentation of Cleopatra's death, Helms overlooks the other deaths in the play. Because of these omissions, Helms's depiction of Shakespeare's attitude toward "the high Roman fashion" of suicide neglects

some of the complexities of Shakespeare's balanced vision.

Although Helms twice refers to Charmian and Iras as though she were analyzing Shakespeare's depiction of the deaths of *three* women, she makes no specific reference to the death of Iras or to Cleopatra's peculiar response to it. After seeing Iras die, Cleopatra says:

This proves me base:
If she first meet the curled Antony,
He'll make demand of her, and spend that kiss
Which is my heaven to have. (5.2.299–302)

Shakespeare does not allow his Cleopatra even in her dying moment to trust the unreliable Antony to be faithful. Moreover, the difference between Iras's death and that of her mistress contains another significant Shakespearean touch. Iras, like Enobarbus, dies from sadness; Cleopatra, like Antony, must use "a swifter mean."

The importance of the contrast is evident from Shakespeare's emphasis on it earlier. Shakespeare has Antony (4.14), Cleopatra (1.3), and Enobarbus (4.6) announce expectations of dying from broken hearts. Only Enobarbus and his Egyptian female counterpart, Iras, have such an honor. The contrast between Antony's almost comic death scene and Enobarbus's death by "swift thought" underscores Enobarbus's ability to command his heart to break, a force of will that Shakespeare's Antony lacks. The subsequent parallel with the deaths of Cleopatra and Iras serves to reinforce and complicate further the judgments made by the audience about the play's two central characters. Helms's essay, despite its strengths, overlooks these complexities.

Much can be said about Shakespeare's vision of Cleopatra and Antony. Here it must suffice to suggest that various aspects of Shakespeare's treatment of the two death scenes work to demythologize Cleopatra and Antony, even while the playwright is taking advantage of the figures' mythic status. Shakespeare drags out Antony's death scene, emphasizing that the great soldier is actually a man who could never stop talking—especially about himself. Antony's claim to be "a Roman, by a Roman / Valiantly vanquish'd" (4.15.57–58), almost exactly the same as Plutarch's "overcome . . . valiantly, a Romane by an other Romane," takes on a self-deluded and inglorious tone because it follows a Shakespearean addition—"Not Caesar's valour hath o'erthrown Antony, / But Antony's hath triumphed on itself" (4.15.14–15)—that makes it clear that Shakespeare's Antony, far from having learned from his experience, wants to deny Caesar credit for the victory while refusing to attribute any blame to himself.

It is understandable that Helms does not treat Antony's death. A more important problem in her essay is her neglecting Shakespeare's parallel deflation of the tragic grandeur of Cleopatra's death scene. Helms does not notice the ways in which Shakespeare has Cleopatra view the greatness of death in negative terms: according to Cleopatra, Antony will applaud her death not because she will join him but because she will frustrate Caesar (5.2.283–85). This view is in keeping with her real reason for seeking death—not to fulfill her love for Antony but to avoid having to witness “Some squeaking Cleopatra boy [her] greatness / I' the posture of a whore” (5.2.219–20). Before these revelations, Shakespeare allows Cleopatra to express a surprising philosophy:

[T]is paltry to be Caesar:
Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave,
A minister of her will: and it is great
To do that thing that ends all other deeds,
Which shackles accidents, and bolts up change;
Which sleeps, and never palates more the dung,
The beggar's nurse, and Caesar's. (5.2.2–8)

Cleopatra is saying here that, since all human beings are subject to Fortune, Caesar is no better off than she and Antony are—consequently that life for all people consists of eating dung and that the only way to achieve greatness is to master Fortune by committing suicide. Her continuing belief that life is valueless threatens to cause the audience to deny *her* value.

Moreover, in the same scene, Shakespeare has Cleopatra behave in an anything but noble manner toward Seleucus when he tells Caesar that she has withheld half her riches. She threatens to scratch Seleucus's eyes and, typically, asks for pity (5.2.175–78). Unlike Plutarch, Shakespeare leaves Cleopatra's anger without justification, by having Seleucus reveal the truth reluctantly and only on her demand. In short, the behavior of Shakespeare's Cleopatra is inconsistent with her desire to conform to “the high Roman fashion,” and Helms weakens the effectiveness of the essay by not confronting this reality. Shakespeare does not have Cleopatra act so as to “make death proud” to take her. Her last words, “What should I stay—” (5.2.312), suggest that her ultimate reason for death is merely her inability to answer the question, Why should I live?

This analysis does not deny the value of Helms's insights about Shakespeare's depiction of the deaths of women. I do contend, however, that, in order not to distort Shakespeare's characteristically complementary vision, it is important not to isolate his depiction of the death of Cleopatra from his depiction of the deaths of Iras, Enobarbus, and Antony, not to separate his

view of his heroine from his view of his hero, not to overlook the complexities of his attitude toward “the high Roman fashion” of dying and of living.

RICHARD L. NOCHIMSON
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Reply:

Richard L. Nochimson is quite right: the three paragraphs in which I discuss Cleopatra's death scene do not exhaust the complexities of “Shakespeare's characteristically complementary vision.” Surely it needs no ghost come from the grave to tell us that. Having made the unwarranted assumption that my essay is a literary critic's interpretation of *Antony and Cleopatra*, he goes on to correct it with his own, which he finds more nearly adequate to what he calls “the total experience of an extremely complex play.”

Nochimson and I are not engaged in the same enterprise. His is the interpretation of literature, and mine is the exploration of the actor's job of work. We are both interested in Shakespeare's characters, but for Nochimson they are the novelistic inhabitants of a text whence the critic brings them to be judged: Antony lacks “force of will”; Cleopatra behaves “in an anything but noble manner toward Seleucus.” For me they exist theatrically, emerging from the choices that actors make in working on their roles. These choices respond to the script and the historical circumstances in which it is read, rehearsed, and performed. My essay speculates on the options that the conditions of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage gave the actors who first played Lavinia and Cleopatra.

I would be surprised indeed if, while pursuing my explicitly delimited purposes, I had fortuitously accounted for the “total” range of historical and contemporary experience available to readers, actors, and audiences of any of the plays I discussed, much less the unquestionably complex *Antony and Cleopatra*. If Nochimson has done so to the satisfaction of others besides himself, he is due their gratitude.

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Paul Laurence Dunbar's Literary Dialects

To the Editor:

The larger part of Marcellus Blount's very informative article, “The Preacherly Text: African Ameri-