The Monument Scene in *Antony and Cleopatra*: a Reinvention of the Balcony Scene in *Romeo and Juliet*?

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This paper investigates similarities between the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet* and the monument scene in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Much work has been done examining these scenes and plays individually,¹ but there has been little dedicated investigation into the ties between these plays, despite the fact that they are two of only three of Shakespeare’s dual protagonist plays. Although the textual problems with the monument scene in *Antony and Cleopatra* have long been noted,² this paper leaves them aside to examine the texts of both of these scenes as we have them, without delving into the complex discussions around the author’s preferred version. These are both vertical scenes, between lovers. The tone of the monument scene is far darker than that of the balcony scene, but there are a number of similarities between the two: the romantic dispositions of the men, the fear of the women and the pursuit of satisfaction which will be explored in turn in this essay. These dual protagonist plays explore similar concepts and the reinvention of the underlying structures of the balcony scene into the monument scene highlights the ties between the two plays. For all of the similarities, there are differences between these two scenes which will be lightly touched upon in this contribution in order to place the similarities in their wider contexts. While Juliet has been perceived as a weaker protagonist than Cleopatra, this essay begins to demonstrate that she may be seen to be as strong as the Queen of Egypt.


In order to understand the two scenes we must first situate them in their two different yet equally tragic plays. The balcony scene appears at Act ii.i whereas the monument scene is found in Act iv.xv. The balcony scene is concerned with the lovers meeting in a place where they can truly speak to one another and of their hopes for the future after the cryptic conversations of the masked ball. The monument scene actually serves the same function: as prior to this, communication between Antony and Cleopatra has been "masked". Cleopatra sends false word to Antony of her death in response to his furious reaction to the revolt of her sailors, which he believes she orchestrated. In this scene Antony and Cleopatra come together again and communicate plainly with each other and express their desires for the future. Despite the differences in the placing of the scenes and their outcomes, we can already begin to appreciate the resemblance which they bear to one another.

Unaware Lovers

Both of the scenes begin in the same way with the “upper party” i.e. Juliet and Cleopatra unaware of the closeness of the “lower party” i.e. Romeo and Antony. In Romeo and Juliet it is Romeo who is given the first speeches of the scene. He speaks on the theme of Juliet’s beauty, whereas in Antony and Cleopatra it is Cleopatra who speaks first and is concerned with her own condition and not her beloved’s. Although Romeo speaks first, it is Juliet who opens communication when she speaks loudly enough that the hidden Romeo might hear and he then makes his presence known to her:

I take thee at thy word.  
Call me but love and I’ll be new baptized.  
Henceforth I never will be Romeo. (lii.i.49-51)

This energetic and impatient style typifies Romeo’s speech throughout this scene. In Antony and Cleopatra however, Cleopatra is informed of Antony’s arrival by Diomedes and has to “Look out o’th’other side of your monument” (iv.xv.8). Juliet is surprised by the sudden appearance of Romeo whereas Cleopatra has to go and actively find Antony. It remains, however, that each woman is unaware of the proximity of her lover until their presence is made obvious to her, either by Diomedes’ words or Romeo’s impassioned plea.

Frightened Women

In both instances the upper party is frightened. Juliet repeatedly says that Romeo is not safe in the orchard and worries for his life, should he be discovered there: “the place death” (lii.i.64), “they will murder thee” (lii.i.70) and “I would not for the world they saw thee here” (lii.i.74). Juliet is worrying that the feud between the Capulets and the Montagues will cost Romeo his life, should he be discovered beneath the window of Juliet’s bedroom. As was demonstrated in the party scene, Tybalt is enraged by Romeo’s uninvited appearance at the Capulets’ party:

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This by his voice should be a Montague.
Fetch me my rapier, boy. What, dares the slave
Come hither, covered with an antic face,
To fleer and scorn at our solemnity?
Now by the stock and honour of my kin,
To strike him dead I hold it not a sin. (I.v.53-58)

This direct threat to Romeo’s life, coupled with the general threat he faces as a Montague gives credence to Juliet’s fear. Cleopatra on the other hand is afraid for her own life and not that of her lover: “I dare not, dear. / Dear, my lord, pardon. I dare not, / Least I be taken” (IV.xv.22-24). Cleopatra will not open the doors of her monument to admit the dying Antony. The current version of the monument scene is considered by Bernard Jenkin to be an imperfect one. It is suggested that in trying to follow North, Shakespeare wrote himself into a corner when the mechanics of heaving Antony aloft were considered, which is why we have the slightly out of place line “I dare not, dear” (IV.xv.22). However, for the purpose of this discussion what is important is Cleopatra’s fear. In both instances the upper party is afraid that someone will discover the meeting and either harm the lower party or, in the case of Antony and Cleopatra where the lower party is beyond harm, injure the upper party. The lower party is, in both instances, protected from fear: Antony because he is already dying and has nothing left to lose and Romeo because he is so in love that he no longer cares. At first glance, this suggests that fear is a womanly trait, but upon further consideration one comes to understand that it is because both Cleopatra and Juliet have something to lose: Cleopatra, principally, her life and Juliet her reputation. Cleopatra is as concerned with her reputation as Juliet. While Juliet wants to maintain an unsullied reputation in order to make a good marriage, Cleopatra wants to preserve her standing as a queen. She believes that if she is captured: “I shall see / Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / 'tth' posture of a whore” (V.ii.218-220). She desires to protect her image in her own eyes which is one of the most important factors weighing on her fear of being captured and led in triumph by Octavius. If she were to surrender, her character would become a comedic turn but as Octavius says at the closing of the play:

She shall be buried by her Anthony.
No grave upon the earth shall clip in it
A pair so famous. High events as these
Strike those that make them, and their story is
No less in pity than his glory which
Brought them to be lamented. (V.ii.357-362.)

By evading the purposes of Octavius and committing suicide, Cleopatra transforms herself in Roman thought from a defeated enemy into a tragic heroine. The fate of Juliet is ultimately the same, in so far as she and Romeo die by their own hands so as to escape

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6 The transformation of Cleopatra after her death can be found in Horace’s Odes where prior to her death Cleopatra is referred to as “frenzied”, “mad”, “wild delusions”, “accursed monster” but after she dies she is remade as “courageous”, “waxing bolder”, and “no craven woman she” (Horace, The Odes and Epodes, trans. by C. E. Bennett, William Heinemann Ltd., 1964, l. 37). By committing suicide Cleopatra sets aside her Oriental self in order to “do’t after the high Roman fashion” (V.xi.91). Geoffrey Miles, in Shakespeare and the Constant Romans, suggests that “[s]uicide, for Shakespeare’s Romans, is the final assertion of identity” (Geoffrey Miles, Shakespeare and the Constant Romans, Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 56). Cleopatra knowing the fate which awaits her in Rome chooses to die in a highly elaborate and staged manner which ensures that she will be remembered as Egypt’s queen and not Rome’s prisoner.
society's remembrance of them and Romeo's deeds. Both Juliet and Cleopatra are afraid that outside forces may come and ruin them.

Romantic Men

Considering lower party in both cases i.e. Romeo and Antony, one can say that they are both romantics. They both value love far more than death. Romeo's statement: “And what love can do, that dares love attempt; / Therefore thy kinsmen are no stop to me” (II.ii.68-69) demonstrates how filled with the idea of love he really is in believing that the Capulets are no danger to him. As the Petrarchan lover, Romeo sees danger not in the swords of his enemies, but in the eye of his beloved:

Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye
Than twenty of their swords. Look thou but sweet,
And I am proof against their enmity.

[..]
My life were better ended by their hate
Than death prorogued, wanting of thy love. (II.ii.71-78)

For Romeo, a life without Juliet's love is not worth the living and therefore should best be ended upon the swords of the Capulets. All that matters to Romeo is love and, in the line prior to his saying he "were better ended by their hate", he states that he is “proof against their enmity“. These swiftly moving points of view are characteristic of the lover who is searching for the very best phrases to please his beloved. First Romeo attempts to appease his lover's fears and then, once he believes he has done so, he comes out with a hyperbolic statement. Although here this statement appears to be merely a part of Romeo's wooing, it is in fact exactly what he does; he kills himself for the absence of Juliet's love when he believes her dead. In a simple reading of Antony and Cleopatra, Antony does exactly the same thing as Romeo: he kills himself when he believes his lover dead. The reasons behind Antony's suicide are somewhat more complex as they are also tied up with his loss of honour, his defeat and his desire not to become Octavius’ captive. However, looking at the play romantically, it is the report of Cleopatra's death which finally pushes him to commit suicide. As soon as Mardian confirms Cleopatra's death, Antony responds with "Unarm, Eros. The long day's task is done / And we must sleep" (IV.xiv.35-36). As in Romeo's situation, it is the absence of his beloved that causes Antony's suicide. However, unlike Romeo, Antony does not do the job cleanly and has time to be informed that Cleopatra is in fact alive and to be taken to see her at her monument where he says:

I am dying, Egypt, dying. Only
I here importune death awhile until
Of many thousand kisses the poor last
I lay upon thy lips. (IV.xv.19-22)

Antony would put off death in order to love Cleopatra one last time. Although Antony recognizes that he is dying, he is determined to hold on to life long enough to kiss his beloved one last time. Cleopatra too, understands the importance of a kiss:

And welcome, welcome! Die when thou hast lived;
Quicken with kissing. Had my lips that power,
Thus would I wear them out. (IV.xv.39-41.)
After hauling Antony into the monument, Cleopatra's first instinct is to kiss him. The notion that her kisses could give Antony life is understandable within the context of the play as Cleopatra has repeatedly been characterized as a sorceress. For Antony, the final kiss is more important than death, but for Cleopatra the kiss gives (at least in her imagination) life. Cleopatra's life-giving kiss is in contrast to the kiss she gives Iras after Antony's death: "Have I the aspic in my lips? Dost fall?" (V.ii.292). This is a representation of one of the themes of both of the plays: love kills. Romeo believes himself protected against death while he loves and also is so eager to love that he risks death; Antony, meanwhile, knows that he is dying but would stay the time in order to love one last time.

**The Search for Satisfaction**

Another similarity between Antony and Romeo is that they both arrive at their beloved's "tower" seeking satisfaction. Romeo is looking for the affirmation of Juliet's love:

**Romeo.** O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?
**Juliet.** What satisfaction canst thou have tonight?
**Romeo.** Th'exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine.
**Juliet.** I gave thee mine before thou didst request it,
And yet I would it were to give again.
**Romeo.** Wouldst thou withdraw it? For what purpose, love?
**Juliet.** But to be frank and give it thee again;
And yet I wish but for the thing I have.
My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep; the more I give to thee,
The more I have, for both are infinite. (II.ii.125-135)

Juliet's question "What satisfaction canst thou have to-night?" demonstrates the multiple meanings that satisfaction could have in that context. Juliet is enquiring whether Romeo is looking for a reassurance of her love, a kiss or perhaps a more intimate encounter. "Tonight" suggests that there is already a possibility of future (sexual) satisfaction. Before this exchange, Romeo and Juliet have never spoken of marriage and therefore the satisfaction which Juliet believes Romeo seeks must be illicit. Juliet thought of marriage after the party, which suggests she sees marriage as an integral part of a relationship. At this point, however, she recognizes that Romeo's marital status could be a barrier to their relationship: "If he [Romeo] be married, / My grave is like to be my wedding bed" (I.v.133-134). This is another hyperbolic statement of a young lover, which is also prophetic as Juliet does "die" in her wedding bed. However, to return to the passage in question, as Romeo says, the satisfaction which he seeks is Juliet's vow of love. A rather more socially acceptable "satisfaction" than those which Juliet conjures up. However, as Juliet rightly says, she has already given Romeo her vow of love when she was speaking without knowing of his presence. This demonstrates that Romeo, in fact, was not really listening. Rather he was so enraptured by the idea of love that the actual words of his beloved were not heard by him. Now that he is in a proper conversation with her, she has ceased to be an idol and is now a person in Romeo's eyes. Juliet has given, by Romeo's own standards if he were listening, fulfillment yet she desires to give it again. Indeed, the love that Juliet offers Romeo is in her own words "infinite". While Romeo demands of Juliet that she give him satisfaction twice over, Juliet does not allow Romeo to give her the same gift:

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ROMEO. Lady, by yonder blessed moon I vow,
That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops –

JULIET. O swear not by the moon, th’inconstant moon,
That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.

ROMEO. What shall I swear by?

JULIET. Do not swear at all,
Or if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,
Which is the god of my idolatry,
And I'll believe thee.

ROMEO. If my heart’s dear love –

JULIET. Well, do not swear. (II.i.109-116.)

She constantly interrupts his attempts to declare his love and therefore she does not derive the same satisfaction from Romeo as he requests of her. Her satisfaction is rather derived from her dominance of him, as Carolyn E. Brown has noted. Juliet increasingly dominates and trains Romeo to perform as she desires him to.7

Antony too is seeking satisfaction. In his case it is the opportunity to kiss Cleopatra one last time. A kiss which Cleopatra readily grants once her personal safety is assured by drawing Antony up. Cleopatra’s bliss in this scene is bittersweet, by informing Antony that she has killed herself, Cleopatra hoped to make him realize the depth of his love for her, he does realize it and so commits suicide: in so doing he deprives Cleopatra of him. Cleopatra’s scheme has worked: she has Antony’s love again but at the cost of his life. Once Romeo is satisfied he is dismissed: “Dear love, adieu” (II.i.136). Antony meanwhile stays and tries to protect Cleopatra:

ANTONY. I am dying, Egypt, dying.
Give me some wine, and let me speak a little –

CLEOPATRA. No, let me speak, and let me rail so high
That the false huswife Fortune break her wheel,
Provoked by my offence –

ANTONY. One word, sweet queen:
Of Caesar seek your honour, with your safety. Oh!

CLEOPATRA. They do not go together.

ANTONY. Gentle, hear me.
None about Caesar trust but Proculeius.

CLEOPATRA. My resolution and my hands I’ll trust;
None about Caesar. (IV.xv.43-52)

By giving Cleopatra his advice (as poorly as it turns out in the end), Antony is showing his care of Cleopatra. Antony is trying to give Cleopatra more than satisfaction, he is trying to give her safety but Cleopatra cuts him off and will not let him speak, much as Juliet cuts off Romeo’s wilder flights of romantic fancy. But whereas Romeo is being fanciful, Antony is being highly practical in trying to assure his beloved’s survival. Cleopatra meanwhile echoes Romeo in her fanciful speech. In both plays satisfaction is sought and achieved; but while Romeo must be given his satisfaction twice, Antony once he has obtained his, is concerned with protecting his beloved.

Conclusion

7 Brown, “Juliet’s Taming of Romeo”, p.338.
In conclusion the balcony scene in *Rome and Juliet* and the monument scene in *Antony and Cleopatra* have a number of striking similarities: the unknown entrance of the man, the fear of the woman, the men rating love more than death and the seeking and fulfillment of satisfaction. There exist a great many more parallels between these two scenes and these two plays, which have yet to be fully explored. Further exploration of these plays in conjunction with Shakespeare’s other dual protagonist play, *Troilus and Cressida*, would allow for a greater understanding of the development of Shakespeare’s dramatic style. This paper, however, has sought to explore only the similarities between the monument scene and the balcony scene and to suggest that in some ways the monument scene can be considered as a recycling or reinvention of the balcony scene.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


