

Politics and Love in Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra

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Although the political struggles in Antony and Cleopatra are often treated as backdrops to the supposedly more engaging love affair between the two title characters, these struggles permeate the entire play, and give the love story its heightened sense of importance and tragedy. The relationship between Antony and Cleopatra would not have attained its renown and immortality had they not had been extremely powerful and public figures. The conflict between public duty and personal desire is the underlying theme of the play, and how the characters [respond](#) to this conflict is what imbues the play with suspense and interest. This conflict is most clearly seen in Antony who is caught between his role as a triumvir of Rome and his love for the Egyptian Queen. By allowing his all-consuming passion to overwhelm his sense of responsibility, he loses his half of the empire to [Octavian](#). Octavian, on the other hand, consistently places the interests of the state before his own. Although he is calculating, shrewd, and unscrupulous, all of his thoughts are devoted to the ruling of Rome; politics is his one interest, and power his only obsession. Cleopatra as ruler is often treated secondarily to Cleopatra as seductress and lover. While

most of the obvious power struggle is between Antony and Octavian, one cannot ignore Cleopatra's involvement. Throughout the play, and particularly at the end, she demonstrates an acute political awareness as she does her utmost to secure what is best for Egypt. In a play with three powerful figures it is expected that political motivations be never far from the foreground or from the characters' minds.

Antony's conflict is succinctly described at th...

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...ads and embodies.

Question of politics and duty are present throughout Antony and Cleopatra, and the love story cannot be considered independently of them. The private emotions of the characters are influenced by the public world that they inhabit, and their actions are not only the actions of individuals, but also of powerful leaders.

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