

# Significance of Butterfly Effect in the Play ‘Antony and Cleopatra’

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**Abstract:** *The complex happenings in the world seem chaotic with no rules at all. Creation and destruction appear to happen randomly with no fixed frame. Every human or every creature in the Universe falls into this erratic play impartially. But the truth is far beyond from what we see or hear or feel but less beyond from what each of us least do. The tiniest of the trivial things we do or the little things which we rarely talk about or given a thought about will have a tremendous effect which human eyes needn't always see or witness. The little things we do might appear insignificant as it gets habituated across time but everything we do takes us to a totally different story. So are the major shape shifters in world history that started with something unbelievably ludicrous and insanely accidental. Something small or slight that is not worth mentioning in the book of history has evolved into a long unforgettable history like the story of Antony and Cleopatra. The story that marked the doom of the powerful kingdoms in history sprung with the love play between the powerful rulers of Rome and Egypt.*

**Keywords:** Love, War, Chaos, History, Pattern

## 1. Introduction

### 1) Play of love

*“No grave upon the earth shall clip in it  
A pair so famous.  
Come, Dolabella, see  
High order in this great solemnity.”<sup>[1]</sup>*

The history that begins with the story of love between a powerful Egyptian queen and a dynamic Roman statesman has withstood time and ages. This flawless love paves a way for setting up a different trajectory across the timeline of Egypt, Rome and the world itself. In Act-1, the intense love that rings between Antony and Cleopatra is portrayed when Antony defines their love to be beggared of any description as the definition of love cannot equal his love for her. Both fall in love with each other as they are blinded from the cloud of future. They choose to sing and dance in the rain of love rather than to rule their kingdoms. As Tennyson quotes, 'tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all'. Except that they weren't ready to lose in love.

*“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.”<sup>[2]</sup>*

### 2) Ink of twilight

*“Fair is foul, and foul is fair  
Hover through the fog and filthy air”<sup>[3]</sup>*

As the fair days of love pass by, the foul air seems to evade into the atmosphere slowly through the news of Fulvia's death. Though this news comes as a disguise in blessing for the two, it creates uproar in the entire Rome. The absence of his wife provides an enormous space for Antony to fully delve into the world of love with Cleopatra. The latter's restlessness and assumptions over Antony's melancholic face suggest her fear of leaving Antony to Fulvia before he breaks out the demise of Fulvia to her. Once Antony leaves for Fulvia's demise, restless Cleopatra laments over the brief

departure of Antony while she strikes up a conversation with Charmian.

*“O Charmian,  
Where think'st thou he is now? Stands he or sits he?  
Or does he walk? Or is he on his horse?  
O happy horse, to bear the weight of Antony!  
Do bravely, horse, for wott'st thou whom thou mov'st?  
The demi-Atlas of this earth, the arm  
And burgonet of men. He's speaking now,  
Or murmuring “Where's my serpent of old Nile?”  
For so he calls me.”<sup>[4]</sup>*

### 3) Sport of tie

Meanwhile in Rome, Octavius and Lepidius study the careless acts of Antony who is ready to forego his own kingdom while falling a prey to Cleopatra who otherwise should have been in Rome with the two fighting against Pompey. It creates a chaos among the ruling party. When the triumvirs met at the Roman Senate, Agrippa suggests Antony to marry Octavia, Octavius' sister as a sign of establishing peace among them.

*“To hold you in perpetual amity,  
To make you brothers, and to knit your hearts  
With an unslipping knot, take Antony  
Octavia to his wife, whose beauty claims  
No worse a husband than the best of men,  
Whose virtue and whose general graces speak  
That which none else can utter. By this marriage,  
All little jealousies, which now seem great,  
And all great fears, which now import their dangers,  
Would then be nothing. Truths would be tales,  
Where now half-tales be truths.”<sup>[5]</sup>*

This further adds fuel to the fire for Cleopatra when she could hardly live over his temporary departure to Rome. Cleopatra on enquiring the personality of Octavia with the messenger concludes that Antony will not fall in love with such kind of nature. Cleopatra's immediate contentment

over their mismatch is seen when she decides to employ the messenger back. Her foresight turns out to be true when Antony readily returns to Cleopatra leaving Octavius furious. Antony, on his return to Egypt thrones Cleopatra with few kingdoms and this act enrages Octavius and Agrippa.

#### 4) Heist of solidarity:

*"For as to the stage, love is ever matter of comedies, and now and then of tragedies; but in life it doth much mischief; sometimes like a siren, sometimes like a fury."*<sup>[6]</sup>

Love is kind until it sprouts war. Furious Octavius decides to fight against Antony. Meanwhile, when Enobarbus attempts to convince Antony to fight Octavius by land since their army consists of heavy ships and muleteers instead of mariners, Antony decides to fall a prey to Cleopatra's stern words of choosing sea over land as she has sixty ships to defeat Octavius.

#### 5) Enchantment of bewitchery

*"You must except, nevertheless, Marcus Antonius, the half partner of the empire of Rome, and Appius Claudius, the decemvir and lawgiver; whereof the former was indeed a voluptuous man, and inordinate..."*<sup>[7]</sup>

The next scene rushes to the plain near Actium where Enobarbus and Scarus laments over the unforgivable portrait of the succumbed Antony following Cleopatra along with the sixty ships fleeing from the battlefield during the war. Their flight leads the army down to complete defeat.

*"She once being loof'd,  
The noble ruin of her magic, Antony,  
Claps on his sea-wing and, like a doting mallard  
Leaving the fight in height, flies after her.  
I never saw an action of such shame.  
Experience, manhood, honor, ne'er before  
Did violate so itself."*<sup>[8]</sup>

#### 6) Pinch of wisdom

*"...yet make it keep quarters; and sever it wholly from their serious affairs, and actions, of life; for if it check once with business, it troubleth men's fortunes, and maketh men, that they can no ways be true to their own ends."*<sup>[9]</sup>

Witnessing the immediate celebration of Antony with Cleopatra in spite of the irreparable collapse, Enobarbus leaves Antony in order to join Octavius. Enobarbus realizes that being loyal to Antony is no more worth the pain as the latter has lost the power of judgment. After the next battle, Antony narrates the mishappening in the battlefield where Cleopatra's fleet yielded to Caesar thus dawning a terrible defeat to Antony. He realizes that falling in love with Cleopatra has been the greatest tragedy of all. He curses Cleopatra for her treachery and treason and this brings her to total collapse.

#### 7) Plot of deceit:

*"Away, and mock the time with fairest show.  
False face must hide what the false heart doth  
know."*<sup>[10]</sup>

Charmian who tries to soothe Cleopatra advises the latter of locking herself up in the monument in order to convey Antony that she is dead. As this might make him fall in love with her all over again, Cleopatra gives orders to Mardian to send him the deadly words of death. When Antony starts repenting for his errors of warring against his kingdom for the sake of Cleopatra, Mardian breaks through to give him the news of Cleopatra's death. The fairest show they toyed with in order to pull Antony back to Cleopatra ricochets and destroys the further plot of the story.

#### 8) Cure of death

Antony commands Eros to kill him but the latter kills himself as he cannot kill his emperor. Antony falls on his sword as he finds no meaning in living in the world where Cleopatra is absent. Before death embraces him completely, Alexas, who on Cleopatra's commands, enters with the news that Cleopatra is not dead and has locked herself up in the monument. Antony orders the guards to carry him to the monument where Cleopatra resides. He asks Cleopatra to side with Dolabella as he is more reliable than Octavius. Antony dies and Cleopatra orders the guards to bury him in Roman fashion. Dolabella enters and Cleopatra decides to kill herself rather than be with Octavius. She orders the Clown for a worm that will rather kill her and not pain her. Iras dies after kissing the lips of Cleopatra as her lips had the asp. Cleopatra's fear of Iras reaching Antony in the next world sooner than she does hastens her deadly act of applying the asp to her breast. She dies followed by Charmian applying an asp before Octavius' arrival. After all, *"All is fair in love and war."*<sup>[11]</sup>

## 2. Conclusion

*"Everything I know, I know because of love."*<sup>[12]</sup> A passionate and unyielding love story between two rulers that turned out to be an unforgettable history in the world led to war and destruction. A destructive spell of charm and love that wrecked the marital life between Antony and Fulvia eventually leading to her death, that marred the relationship among the triumvirs of Rome, that flared up the hostility between Rome and Egypt, that made Antony lose his power of judgment at the most crucial time of war, that allowed Enobarbus to choose another master over Antony, that made Antony a laughing stock during war, that pushed Charmian into framing a sly plot, that forced Mardian to be the scapegoat of their plot, that killed Eros, Iras and Charmian and that killed Antony and Cleopatra themselves are the string of events that sprouted from the tiniest act of love. The microscopic incidents that sounded insignificant led to a big event followed by another bigger event and went on until it ruined both the protagonists themselves and the kingdoms which acted as the major shape shifter in the timeline. Everything appeared to happen randomly and disorderly but it had a pattern sprouting from each of the tiniest actions that triggered a bullet elsewhere. Though the whole history can be wrapped up with the term 'love', the small events need to be put behind the lens in order to get a

bigger picture of the greatest events in history. Each of the smallest actions of even the least significant characters made immense impact somewhere, someplace else. The loop of thoughts, words and actions worked and over time it weaved a story worth mentioning in the books of history. One act of love that formed infinite ripples of plots and sub plots entered the eternal books of world history. Shakespeare thus has drawn the butterfly effect into this play without even knowing that a pattern existed behind the chaos.

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## Author Profile



**Merrin Antony** has earned her Masters Degree in English Literature from PSG College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore. Her passion is to teach young minds and carve them into better human beings. Her dream is to publish a book. She is an ex-author of

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