



EGYPT AND ROME AS THE SYMBOLS OF PLEASURE PRINCIPLE AND DUTY PRINCIPLE IN SHAKESPEARE'S *ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA*

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ABSTRACT



Values may change according to the time, place, people and context. But principles always remain constant. This paper focuses on the war between two contradictory principles, namely pleasure principle and duty principle. Pleasure principle is the result of the extreme domination of 'id' state and duty principle is caused by extremity of 'ego' and 'super ego' states. The paper discusses the symbolic representation of these principles in Egypt and Rome respectively in Shakespeare's play *Antony and Cleopatra*. Shakespeare proves through this play that people with the right principles undoubtedly taste success while pleasure principle entails failure. One has to strike a balance between these principles to have a happy life.

Keywords: *Values, Pleasure Principle, Duty Principle, Ego States.*

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INTRODUCTION

We hear the words 'right' and 'wrong' several times a day in our lives. The basic question one can ask is: how do we know what is right and what is wrong? Is there any scale which measures whether we are right or wrong? The answer is 'yes' there is. It is 'principled living.' Life based on principles is right and it leads to success. But if people follow wrong principles, they would definitely face their doom. Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* explores this concept and proves that life based on the right principles (Rome) wins, and life based on wrong principles (Egypt) fails. In this connection, Stephen R. Covey says, "The Character Ethic is based on the fundamental idea that there are 'principles' that govern human effectiveness – natural laws in the human dimension that are just as real, just as unchanging and unarguably 'there' as laws such as gravity are in the physical dimension ... principles are like lighthouses. They are natural laws that cannot be broken" (1).

Mark Antony, being one of the triumvirate, goes to Egypt. There he freely breaks the right principles and follows the wrong principle called 'Pleasure Principle' and consequently he faces his doom. Octavius, being in the same position as Antony, stays in Rome and follows 'Duty Principle.' He succeeds in his endeavours and comes out victorious. This article is a study of Pleasure Principle and Duty Principle practised respectively by Antony Octavius and their interplay. When there is a struggle between the two, which one would emerge victorious? Egypt stands as the symbol of pleasure principle and Rome stands for duty principle. This article also therefore tries to answer the questions: Even though Octavius is right in what he has done, why does he fail to win the hearts of the audience? Despite being wrong, why does Antony win their sympathy?

THE CONTEXT OF ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

In the earlier play, *Julius Caesar*, Mark Antony had formed a triumvirate with Octavius and Lepidus. In *Antony and Cleopatra* the triumvirate is in a state of disintegration, partly because Mark Antony – married at the play's opening to Fulvia and rebelling against Octavius – is infatuated with Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt (and the former mistress

of Julius Caesar). The play's action shuttles between Rome and Alexandria as Antony is torn between the claims of Rome – strengthened for a while by his marriage to Octavius's sister Octavia – and the temptations of Egypt. Gradually the rift between Antony and Octavius widens, and they engage in a sea-battle near Actium (in Greece), in which Antony follows Cleopatra's navy in ignominious retreat. The closing stages of the double tragedy portray Antony's shame, humiliation, and suicide after Cleopatra falsely causes him to believe that she has killed herself. Faced with the threat that Octavius will take her captive to Rome, Cleopatra too commits suicide. According to Plutarch, she was thirty-eight years old; as for Antony, 'some say that he lived three-and-fifty years, and others say, six-and-fifty.'

In *Antony and Cleopatra* the classical restraint of Julius Caesar gives way to a fine excess of language, of dramatic action, and of individual behaviour. The style is hyperbolic, overflowing the measure of the iambic pentameter. The action is amazingly fluid, shifting with an ease and rapidity that caused bewilderment to ages unfamiliar with the conventions of Shakespeare's theatre. And the characterization is correspondingly extravagant, delighting in the quirks of individual behaviour, above all in the paradoxes and inconsistencies of the Egyptian queen who contains within herself the capacity for every extreme of feminine behaviour, from vanity, meanness and frivolity to the sublime self-transcendence with which she faces and embraces death.

FREUDIAN PRINCIPLES

According to Freud, the 'id' is the source of all psychic energy, making it the primary component of personality. The id is driven by the pleasure principle, which strives for immediate gratification of all desires, wants, and needs. If these needs are not satisfied immediately, the result is a state of anxiety or tension. For example, an increase in hunger or thirst should produce an immediate attempt to eat or drink. The id is very important early in life, because it ensures that an infant's needs are met. If the infant is hungry or uncomfortable, it will cry until the demands of the id are satisfied.

However, immediate fulfilment of these needs is not always realistic nor even possible. If we



were ruled entirely by the pleasure principle, we might find ourselves grabbing the things that we want out of other people's hands to satisfy our own cravings. This sort of behavior would be both disruptive and socially unacceptable. According to Freud, the 'id' tries to resolve the tension created by the pleasure principle through the primary process, which involves forming a mental image of the desired object as a way of satisfying the need.

The ego is the component of personality that is responsible for dealing with reality. According to Freud, the ego develops from the id and ensures that the impulses of the id can be expressed in a manner acceptable in the real world. The ego functions in the conscious, preconscious, as well as unconscious mind. The ego operates based on the reality principle, which strives to satisfy the id's desires in realistic and socially appropriate ways. The reality principle weighs the costs and benefits of an action before deciding to act upon or abandon impulses. In many cases, the id's impulses can be satisfied through a process of delayed gratification. The ego will eventually allow the behavior, but only in the appropriate time and place.

The ego also discharges tension created by unmet impulses through the secondary process, in which the ego tries to find an object in the real world that matches the mental image created by the id's primary process.

The last component of personality to develop is the superego. The superego is the aspect of personality that holds all of our internalized moral standards and ideals that we acquire from both parents and society – our sense of right and wrong. The superego provides guidelines for making judgments. According to Freud, the superego begins to emerge at around age of five.

There are two parts of the superego: The ego ideal includes the rules and standards for good behaviours. These behaviours include those which are approved of by parental and other authority figures. Obeying these rules leads to feelings of pride, value, and accomplishment. The conscience includes information about things that are viewed as bad by parents and society. These behaviours are often forbidden and lead to bad consequences, punishments, or feelings of guilt and remorse. The

superego acts to perfect and civilize our behavior. It works to suppress all unacceptable urges of the id and struggles to make the ego act upon idealistic standards rather than upon realistic principles. The superego is present in the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious.

With so many competing forces, it is easy to see how conflict might arise between the id, ego, and superego. Freud used the term ego strength to refer to the ego's ability to function despite these dueling forces. A person with good ego strength is able to effectively manage these pressures, while those with too much or too little ego strength can become too unyielding or too disrupting.

According to Freud, the key to a healthy personality is a balance between the id, the ego, and the super ego. Carducci explains it further.

With the ego placed in the middle, and if all demands are met, the system maintains its balance of psychic power and the outcome is an adjusted personality. If there is imbalance, the outcome is a maladaptive personality. For example, with a dominant id, the outcome could be an impulsive and uncontrollable individual (e.g., a criminal). With an overactive superego, the outcome might be an extremely moralistic individual (e.g., a television evangelist). An overpowering ego could create an individual who is caught up in reality (e.g., extremely rigid and unable to stray from rules or structure), is unable to be spontaneous (e.g., express id impulses), or lacks a personal sense of what is right and wrong (e.g., somebody who goes by the book). (2).

THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE (EGYPT)

Now, for the love of Love and her soft hours
Let's not confound the time with conference
harsh

There's not a minute of our lives should
stretch

Without some *pleasure* now. (3)

Mark Antony, who is dominated by extreme 'id,' adopts the Pleasure Principle, becomes an 'amorous surfeiter' and commits the sin of dereliction of duty. 'The triple pillar of the world is transformed into a 'strumpet's fool' and 'becomes



bellows and the fan to cool a gypsy's lust' because of his lust for the queen of Egypt, Cleopatra. He follows her in such a way that every other character in the play knows that wherever Cleopatra goes Antony follows her. In Act 1 Scene 2, when Cleopatra enters the stage, Enobarbus says, 'Hush, here comes Antony!' It shows very clearly that both of them have merged into a single person in the name of love. In the words of Octavius,

... he fishes, drinks, and wastes
The lamps of night in revel; is not more
manlike
Than Cleopatra, nor the queen of Ptolemy
More womanly than he; hardly gave
audience
Or vouchsafed to think he had partners. You
shall find there
A man who is the abstract of all faults
That all men follow. (4)

Antony's 'voluptuousness' is further stressed by Octavius when he contemptuously says that Antony tumbles on the bed of Ptolemy, gives his kingdom just for a mirth, sits and keeps the turn of tippling with a slave, reels the streets at noon and stands the buffet with knaves that smell of sweat. Even his enemy Pompey knows about 'lust wearied Antony' and says that Mark Antony, in Egypt, always sits at dinner, and will make no wars without doors. Antony's own close friend Enobarbus proudly proclaims that courteous Antony had never said the word 'no' to any woman. He had a weakness for women but for Cleopatra he became a slave which in turn became his tragic flaw.

People like Octavius try to free him from the strong folds of Egypt. So he gives his own sister in marriage to Antony and tries to make him stay in Rome. But the bond that seemed to cement their friendship has in fact corrupted it. Antony's heart is tied to the rudder of Cleopatra by the strings of love. So Antony says in Act 2 Scene 3,

...I will to Egypt;
And though I make this marriage for my
peace,
I'th' East my *pleasure* lies. (5)

As predicted, Antony leaves Octavia and Rome, and travels to Egypt in pursuit of pleasure. He

gives a legitimate chance to Octavius to fight against him and stand the chance of winning the war.

The other grave error committed by Antony is that he knows well that he is strong on land but because Cleopatra wants to see a fight on water, he goes to war on the sea. Many people warn him not to fight by sea but he turns a deaf ear to them. Having entered the war, he could have at least continued to fight but 'like a dotting mallard, leaving the fight in height, [he] flies after her.' He thus has a grave weakness like a tragic hero. With regard to tragic hero and tragic flaw, M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham explain,

Aristotle says that the tragic hero will most effectively evoke both our pity and terror if he is neither thoroughly good nor thoroughly bad but a mixture of both; and also that this tragic effect will be stronger if the hero is 'better than we are,' in the sense that he is of higher than ordinary moral worth. Such a man is exhibited as suffering a change in fortune from happiness to misery because of his mistaken choice of an action, to which he is led by his hamartia – his "error" or "mistake of judgment" or, as it is often, although misleadingly and less literally translated, his tragic flaw. (6)

It is true that Antony is not all that bad as we have observed so far. He has his noble side too. He is acknowledged as a brave soldier by all including Octavius. He maintains close friendship with Enobarbus and others, forgives Cleopatra and several others many a time, wins wars for Rome and advises his fellow soldiers to support Octavius when in defeat. Still, he has no escape because he has committed the fifth deadly sin 'Lust' inspired by his 'id' and must therefore face doom.

THE DUTY (REALITY) PRINCIPLE (ROME)

Living in Rome and being a descendent of Julius Caesar, Octavius learns to be a thorough politician who always craves to be the sole emperor of Rome. In this process, he becomes a one hundred percent duty minded person. 'Ego' and 'super ego' dominate his personality. For the sake of his position as one of the triumvirate and to avoid confrontation with another of the triumvirate, Mark Antony, he suppresses his love for his sister Octavia and gives



her in marriage to Antony knowing well that Antony's heart lies in Egypt with Cleopatra. It is not a marriage of love but a political game plan to strengthen Octavius and give him reason to fight against Antony. One may feel that it is wrong of Octavius to indulge in politics. But being a politician and nursing the ambition to be the sole emperor of Rome, he thinks it is fair to do politics in order to succeed.

Octavius stays in Rome all the time and takes care of the state affairs. He gets rid of Lepidus, who is considered a fool even by Mark Antony, by imprisoning him for life. He wages wars against Pompey and wins them. When Egypt rises against him, he very intelligently calculates the moves of Antony and finally wins over him. All this, he is able to achieve because he is a duty minded man.

He is not as cruel as he is portrayed by many critics when it concerns Cleopatra. If we ignore his intensions, we have proof of his forgiveness for Cleopatra. Cleopatra herself (mis)understands his intensions and commits suicide, but Octavius pays due respect to her mortal remains and orders a fitting funeral for her.

SYMBOLICAL REPRESENTATION OF PLACES AND PEOPLE

The two places Rome and Egypt stand symbolically for the two principles, duty and pleasure. People of Rome are led by extreme 'ego' and 'super ego' states. Rome is the place for pursuit of duties. In the play, being in Rome means being responsible and carrying out one's duties. When Antony leaves Egypt and comes to Rome, Octavius welcomes him saying, "Welcome to Rome" and reminds him of his prestigious position as one of the triumvirate and makes him aware of his duties and responsibilities. It is a clear suggestion to abandon 'id' and embrace the 'ego' state. Being in Rome, Antony performs only acts of honour like settling the contentious matter with Lepidus and holding talks with prominent people of the state.

Egypt stands for pleasure, love, beauty and grandeur of Cleopatra which are the result of extreme state of 'id.' Even when Julius Caesar comes to Egypt, he fell in love with Cleopatra and had children by her. Similarly when Antony comes to Egypt, he cannot resist the temptations of Egypt and falls a prey to the charms of Cleopatra. All that he

and others do in Egypt is playing, having fun, fishing, and love making. We do not have even a single instance their giving importance to duty. 'Ego' and 'super ego' states are completely ignored in Egypt. Even when Antony is married to Octavia, he feels that his pleasure lies in Egypt and he returns to Egypt in pursuit of pleasure. Shakespeare very intelligently shows us the inner nature of the characters who stand for pleasure and who for duty. Characters like Antony, Cleopatra and Enobarbus stand for the 'Pleasure Principle' and characters like Octavius, Lepidus, Agrippa and Pompey stand for the principle of 'Duty.' Shakespeare shows us the struggle between these two principles in which Pleasure loses and Duty wins. But by the end of the play the reader is moved to pity for Antony, Cleopatra and Enobarbus, and would rather love them more than the characters that stand for duty. The sympathies of the reader are with the pleasure loving people because Antony and Cleopatra rise from 'Eros' (Sexual Love) to 'Agape' (Celestial Love) and Enobarbus' love for Antony rises from mere obedience to 'storge' (love between friends). They become perfect lovers who transcend social barriers and do not hanker after the approval of their peers. Both Antony and Cleopatra, even though they are not legally married and have their life partners, sacrifice their kingdoms and their honour for the sake of love. But unfortunately they pay dearly for their actions and face death.

People like Octavius and Agrippa who stand for duty win the struggle but lose the hearts of the readers because they degenerate from responsibility to selfishness. Caesar wants to be the sole emperor of Rome and so he sacrifices his sister Octavia, wages wars against Pompey unlawfully, arrests Lepidus unjustly, and craves for power and authority. With his prudence and political acumen, he gets what he wants but loses everything else in the process. Antony, in spite of his voluptuousness, wins true followers like Enobarbus and Eros. Caesar has none such. By the end of the play the readers experience pity for Antony and Cleopatra but only fear Caesar. We know that pity begets love, and fear hatred. So the readers hate Caesar and love Antony. The law of emotion is like the law of death. Death is above all reasons. It can occur at any time. So do emotions of



various kinds. Emotions of pity and fear can overwhelm anybody and at any time. The audience realize that, like Antony and Cleopatra, they too are guilty of committing errors, and so they feel that these lovers should not be punished at the end of the play. On the other hand, they see Octavius as a cruel punishing authority. The audience therefore do not approve of his actions.

CONCLUSION

Egypt is the place for fun, enjoyment, play, voluptuousness and care free life. Antony who has experienced the atrocities of war throughout his life naturally gets attracted to this place and the queen of the place, Cleopatra. His 'id' takes over his 'ego' and 'super ego' states and propels him into the sweet embrace of Cleopatra. He loses the world or rather 'the world well lost' him. The reader feels that the world can be lost more than ten times for the sake of the warm embraces of Cleopatra.

Rome, on the other hand, is dominated by people who are led by the 'ego' and 'super ego' states. The extreme domination of 'ego' in Octavius makes him win the land but lose the hearts of people. One can consider oneself a failure if one loses people. In this sense, even Octavius is a failure. Therefore, the over domination of any ego state can turn fatal to a person. A proper balance should be maintained among these psychic agencies. One should enjoy freedom with responsibility. A duty minded person should also seek fun and enjoyment. A proper balance is the key to success.

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