

Excerpts from Plutarch's *Parallel Lives, the Life of Antony*
translated by Sir Thomas Browne

penelope.uchicago.edu/thayer/e/roman/texts/plutarch/lives/antony*.html

24 6 For there was simplicity in [Antony's] nature, and slowness of perception, though when he did perceive his errors he showed keen repentance, and made full acknowledgement to the very men who had been unfairly dealt with, and there was largeness both in (p191) his restitution to the wronged and in his punishment of the wrong-doers. Yet he was thought to exceed due bounds more in conferring favors than in inflicting punishments.

7 And his wantonness in mirth and jest carried its own remedy with it. For a man might pay back his jests and insolence, and he delighted in being laughed at no less than in laughing at others. And this vitiated most of his undertakings. For he could not believe that those who used bold speech in jest could flatter him in earnest, and so was easily captivated by their praises, 8 not knowing that some men would mingle bold speech, like a piquant sauce, with flattery, and thus would take away from flattery its cloying character. Such men would use their bold babbling over the cups to make their submissive yielding in matters of business seem to be the way, not of those who associate with a man merely to please him, but of those who are vanquished by superior wisdom.

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25 1 Such, then, was the nature of Antony, where now as a crowning evil his love for Cleopatra supervened, roused and drove to frenzy many of the passions that were still hidden and quiescent in him, and dissipated and destroyed whatever good and saving qualities still offered resistance. And he was taken captive in this manner. As he was getting ready for the Parthian war, he sent to Cleopatra, ordering her to meet him in Cilicia in order to make answer to the charges made against her of raising and giving to Cassius much money for the war.

2 But Dellius, Antony's messenger, when he saw how Cleopatra looked, and noticed her subtlety and cleverness in conversation, at once (p193) perceived that Antony would not so much as think of doing such a woman any harm, but that she would have the greatest influence

with him. He therefore resorted to flattery and tried to induce the Egyptian to go to Cilicia "decked out in fine array" (as Homer would say), and not to be afraid of Antony, who was the most agreeable and humane of commanders.

3 She was persuaded by Dellius, and judging by the proofs which she had had before this of the effect of her beauty upon Caius Caesar and Gnaeus the son of Pompey, she had hopes that she would more easily bring Antony to her feet. For Caesar and Pompey had known her when she was still a girl and inexperienced in affairs, but she was going to visit Antony at the very time when women have the most brilliant beauty and are at the acme of intellectual power. 4 Therefore she provided herself with many gifts, much money, and such ornaments as high position and prosperous kingdom made it natural for her to take; but she went putting her greatest confidence in herself, and in the charms and sorceries of her own person.

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26 1 Though she received many letters of summons both from Antony himself and from his friends, she so despised and laughed the man to scorn as to sail up the river Cydnus in a barge with gilded poop, its sails spread purple, its rowers urging it on with silver oars to the sound of the flute blended with pipes and lutes.

2 She herself reclined beneath a canopy spangled with gold, adorned like Venus in a painting, while boys like Loves in paintings stood on either side and fanned her. Likewise also the fairest of her serving-maidens, attired like Nereïds and Graces, were stationed, some at the rudder-sweeps, and others at the reefing-ropes. Wondrous odours from countless incense-offerings diffused themselves along the river-banks.

3 Of the inhabitants, some accompanied her on either bank of the river from its very mouth, while others went down from the city to behold the sight. The throng in the market-place gradually streamed away, until at last Antony himself, seated on his tribunal, was left alone. And a rumour spread on every hand that Venus was come to revel with Bacchus for the good of Asia. Antony sent, therefore, and invited her to supper; but she thought it meet that he should rather come to her.

4 At once, then, wishing to display his complacency and friendly feelings, Antony obeyed and went. He found there a preparation that beggared description, but was most amazed at the

multitude of lights. For, as we are told, so many of these were let down and displayed on all sides at once, and they were arranged and ordered with so many inclinations and adjustments to each other in the form of rectangles and circles, that few sights were so beautiful or so worthy to be seen as this.

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27 1 On the following day Antony feasted her in his turn, and was ambitious to surpass her splendour and elegance, but in both regards he was left behind, and vanquished in these very points, and was first to rail at the meagreness and rusticity of his own arrangements. Cleopatra observed in the jests of Antony much of the soldier and the common man, and adopted this manner also towards him, without restraint now, and boldly.

2 For her beauty, as we are (p197) told, was in itself not altogether incomparable, nor such as to strike those who saw her; but converse with her had an irresistible charm, and her presence, combined with the persuasiveness of her discourse and the character which was somehow diffused about her behaviour towards others, had something stimulating about it.

3 There was sweetness also in the tones of her voice; and her tongue, like an instrument of many strings, she could readily turn to whatever language she pleased, so that in her interviews with Barbarians she very seldom had need of an interpreter, but made her replies to most of them herself and unassisted, whether they were Ethiopians, Troglodytes, Hebrews, Arabians, Syrians, Medes or Parthians.

4 Nay, it is said that she knew the speech of many other peoples also, although the kings of Egypt before her had not even made an effort to learn the native language, and some actually gave up their Macedonian dialect.

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28 1 Accordingly, [Cleopatra] made such booty of Antony that, while Fulvia his wife was carrying on war at Rome with Caesar in defence of her husband's interests, and while a Parthian army was hovering about Mesopotamia (over this country the generals of the king had appointed Labienus Parthian commander-in-chief, and were about to invade Syria), he suffered her to hurry him off to Alexandria. There, indulging in the sports and diversions of a young man

of leisure, he squandered and spent upon pleasures that which Antiphond calls the most costly outlay, namely, time.

2 For they had an association called The Inimitable Livers, and every day they feasted one another, making their expenditures of incredible profusion. At any rate, Philotas, the (p199) physician of Amphissa, used to tell my grandfather, Lamprias, that he was in Alexandria at the time, studying his profession, and that having got well acquainted with one of the royal cooks, he was easily persuaded by him (young man that he was) to take a view of the extravagant preparations for a royal supper.

3 Accordingly, he was introduced into the kitchen, and when he saw all the other provisions in great abundance, and eight wild boars a-roasting, he expressed his amazement at what must be the number of guests. But the cook burst out laughing and said: "The guests are not many, only about twelve; but everything that is set before them must be at perfection, and this an instant of time reduces. For it might happen that Antony would ask for supper immediately, and after a little while, perhaps, would postpone it and call for a cup of wine, or engage in conversation with some one.

4 Wherefore," he said, "not one, but many suppers are arranged; for the precise time is hard to hit." This tale, then, Philotas used to tell; and he said also that as time went on he became one of the medical attendants of Antony's oldest son, whom he had of Fulvia, and that he usually supped with him at his house in company with the rest of his comrades, when the young man did not sup with his father.

5 Accordingly, on one occasion, as a physician was making too bold and giving much annoyance to them as they supped, Philotas stopped his mouth with some such sophism as the: "To the patient who is somewhat feverish cold water must be given; but everyone who has a fever is somewhat feverish; therefore to everyone who has a fever cold water should be given." The fellow was confounded and put to silence, whereat (p201) Antony's son was delighted and said with a laugh: "All this I bestow upon thee, Philotas," pointing to a table covered with a great many large beakers.

6 Philotas acknowledged his good intentions, but was far from supposing that a boy so young had the power to give away so much. After a little while, however, one of the slaves

brought the beakers to him in a sack, and bade him put his seal upon it. And when Philotas protested and was afraid to take them, "You miserable man," said the fellow, "why hesitate? Don't you know that the giver is the son of Antony, and that he has the right to bestow so many golden vessels?"

7 However, take my advice and exchange them all with us for money; since perchance the boy's father might miss some of the vessels, which are of ancient workmanship and highly valued for their art." Such details, then, my grandfather used to tell me, Philotas would recount at every opportunity.

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29 1 But Cleopatra, distributing her flattery, not into the four forms of which Plato speaks, but into many, and ever contributing some fresh delight and charm to Antony's hours of seriousness or mirth, kept him in constant tutelage, and released him neither night nor day. She played at dice with him, drank with him, hunted with him, and watched him as he exercised himself in arms; and when by night he would station himself at the doors or windows of the common folk and scoff at those within, she would go with him on his round of mad follies, wearing the garb of a serving maiden.

2 For Antony also would try to array himself like a servant. Therefore he always reaped a harvest of abuse, and often of blows, before coming back (p203) home; though most people suspected who he was. However, the Alexandrians took delight in their graceful and cultivated way; they liked him, and said that he used the tragic mask with the Romans, but the comic mask with them.

3 Now, to recount the greater part of his boyish pranks would be great nonsense. One instance will suffice. He was fishing once, and had bad luck, and was vexed at it because Cleopatra was there to see. He therefore ordered his fishermen to dive down and secretly fasten to his hook some fish that had been previously caught, and pulled up two or three of them. But the Egyptian saw through the trick, and pretending to admire her lover's skill, told her friends about it, and invited them to be spectators of it the following day.

4 So great numbers of them got into the fishing boats, and when Antony had let down his line, she ordered one of her own attendants to get the start of him by swimming onto his

hook and fastening on it a salted Pontic herring. Antony thought he had caught something, and pulled it up, whereupon there was great laughter, as was natural, and Cleopatra said:

"Imperator, hand over thy fishing-rod to the fishermen of Pharos and Canopus; thy sport is the hunting of cities, realms, and continents."

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30 1 While Antony was indulging in such trifles and youthful follies, he was surprised by reports from two quarters: one from Rome, that Lucius his brother and Fulvia his wife had first quarrelled with one another, and then had waged war with Octavius Caesar, but had lost their cause (p205) and were in flight from Italy; and another, not a whit more agreeable than this, that Labienus at the head of the Parthians was subduing Asia from the Euphrates and Syria as far as Lydia and Ionia.

2 At last, then, like a man roused from sleep after a deep debauch, he set out to oppose the Parthians, and advanced as far as Phoenicia; but on receiving from Fulvia a letter full of lamentations, he turned his course towards Italy, at the head of two hundred ships. On the voyage, however, he picked up his friends who were in flight from Italy, and learned from them that Fulvia had been to blame for the war, being naturally a meddling and headstrong woman, and hoping to draw Antony away from Cleopatra in case there should be a disturbance in Italy.

3 It happened, too, that Fulvia, who was sailing to meet him, fell sick and died at Sicyon. Therefore there was even more opportunity for a reconciliation with Caesar. For when Antony reached Italy, and Caesar manifestly intended to make no charges against him, and Antony himself was ready to put upon Fulvia the blame for whatever was charged against himself, the friends of the two men would not permit any examination of the proffered excuse,

4 but reconciled them, and divided up the empire, making the Ionian sea a boundary, and assigning the East to Antony, and the West to Caesar; they also permitted Lepidus to have Africa, and arranged that, when they did not wish for the office themselves, the friends of each should have the consulship by turns.

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31 1 These arrangements were thought to be fair, but they needed a stronger security, and this security Fortune offered. Octavia was a sister of Caesar, older than he, though not by the same p207mother; for she was the child of Ancharia, but he, by a later marriage, of Atia. Caesar was exceedingly fond of his sister, who was, as the saying is, a wonder of a woman.

2 Her husband, Caius Marcellus, had died a short time before, and she was a widow. Antony, too, now that Fulvia was gone, was held to be a widower, although he did not deny his relations with Cleopatra; he would not admit, however, that she was his wife, and in this matter his reason was still battling with his love for the Egyptian. Everybody tried to bring about this marriage. For they hoped that Octavia, who, besides her great beauty, had intelligence and dignity, when united to Antony and beloved by him, as such a woman naturally must be, would restore harmony and be their complete salvation.

3 Accordingly, when both men were agreed, they went up to Rome and celebrated Octavia's marriage, although the law did not permit a woman to marry before her husband had been dead ten months. In this case, however, the senate passed a decree remitting the restriction in time.

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33 1 After this settlement, Antony sent Ventidius on ahead into Asia to oppose the further progress of the Parthians, while he himself, as a favour to Caesar, was appointed to the priesthood of the elder Caesar; everything else also of the most important political nature they transacted together and in a friendly spirit. But their competitive diversions gave (p211) Antony annoyance, because he always came off with less than Caesar.

2 Now, there was with him a seer from Egypt, one of those who cast nativities. This man, either as a favour to Cleopatra, or dealing truly with Antony, used frank language with him, saying that his fortune, though most great and splendid, was obscured by that of Caesar; and he advised Antony to put as much distance as possible between himself and that young man. "For thy guardian genius," said he, "is afraid of his; and though it has a spirited and lofty mien when it is by itself, when his comes near, thine is cowed and humbled by it."

3 And indeed events seemed to testify in favour of the Egyptian. For we are told that whenever, by way of diversion, lots were cast or dice thrown to decide matters in which they

were engaged, Antony came off worsted. They would often match cocks, and often fighting quails, and Caesar's would always be victorious.

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6 1 But the dire evil which had been slumbering for a long time, namely, his passion for Cleopatra, which men thought had been charmed away and lulled to rest by better considerations, blazed up again with renewed power as he drew near to Syria. And finally, like the stubborn and unmanageable beast of the soul, of which Plato speaks, he spurned away all saving and noble counsels and sent Fonteius Capito to bring Cleopatra to Syria.

2 And when she was come, he made her a present of no slight or insignificant addition to her dominions, namely, (p219) Phoenicia, Coele Syria, Cyprus, and a large part of Cilicia; and still further, the balsam-producing part of Judaea, and all that part of Arabia Nabataea which slopes toward the outer sea. These gifts particularly annoyed the Romans. And yet he made presents to many private persons of tetrarchies and realms of great peoples, and he deprived many monarchs of their kingdoms, as, for instance, Antigonus the Jew, whom he brought forth and beheaded, though no other king before him had been so punished.

3 But the shamefulness of the honours conferred upon Cleopatra gave most offence. And he heightened the scandal by acknowledging his two children by her, and called one Alexander and the other Cleopatra, with the surname for the first of Sun, and for the other of Moon. However, since he was an adept at putting a good face upon shameful deeds, he used to say that the greatness of the Roman empire was made manifest, not by what the Romans received, but by what they bestowed; and that noble families were extended by the successive begettings of many kings.

4 In this way, at any rate, he said, his own progenitor was begotten by Heracles, who did not confine his succession to a single womb, nor stand in awe of laws like Solon's for the regulation of conception, but gave free course to nature, and left behind him the beginnings and foundations of many families.

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53 3 But Cleopatra perceived that Octavia was coming into a contest at close quarters with her, and feared lest, if she added to the dignity of her character and the power of Caesar her

pleasurable society and (p259) her assiduous attentions to Antony, she would become invincible and get complete control over her husband. She therefore pretended to be passionately in love with Antony herself, and reduced her body by slender diet; she put on a look of rapture when Antony drew near, and one of faintness and melancholy when he went away.

4 She would contrive to be often seen in tears, and then would quickly wipe the tears away and try to hide them, as if she would not have Antony notice them. And she practised these arts while Antony was intending to go up from Syria to join the Medes. Her flatterers, too, were industrious in her behalf, and used to revile Antony as hard-hearted and unfeeling, and as the destroyer of a mistress who was devoted to him and him alone.

5 For Octavia, they said, had married him as a matter of public policy and for the sake of her brother, and enjoyed the name of wedded wife; but Cleopatra, who was queen of so many people, was called Antony's beloved, and she did not shun this name nor disdain it, as long as she could see him and live with him; but if she were driven away from him she would not survive it.

6 At last, then, they so melted and enervated the man that he became fearful lest Cleopatra should throw away her life, and went back to Alexandria, putting off the Medes until the summer season, although Parthia was said to be suffering from internal dissensions. However, he went up and brought the king once more into friendly relations, and after betrothing to one of his sons by Cleopatra one of the king's daughters who was still small, he returned, his thoughts being now directed towards the civil war.

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54 1 As for Octavia, she was thought to have been treated with scorn, and when she came back from Athens Caesar ordered her to dwell in her own house. But she refused to leave the house of her husband, nay, she even entreated Caesar himself, unless on other grounds he had determined to make war upon Antony, to ignore Antony's treatment of her, since it was an infamous thing even to have it said that the two greatest imperators in the world plunged the Romans into civil war, the one out of passion for, and the other out of resentment in behalf of, a woman.

2 These were her words, and she confirmed them by her deeds. For she dwelt in her husband's house, just as if he were at home, and she cared for his children, not only those whom she herself, but also those whom Fulvia had borne him, in a noble and magnificent manner; she also received such friends of Antony as were sent to Rome in quest of office or on business, and helped them to obtain from Caesar what they wanted. Without meaning it, however, she was damaging Antony by this conduct of hers; for he was hated for wronging such a woman.

3 He was hated, too, for the distribution which he made to his children in Alexandria; it was seen to be theatrical and arrogant, and to evince hatred of Rome. For after filling the gymnasium with a throng and placing on a tribunal of silver two thrones of gold, one for himself and the other for Cleopatra, and other lower thrones for his sons,

4 in the first place he declared Cleopatra Queen of Egypt, Cyprus, Libya, and Coele Syria, and she was to share her throne with Caesarion. Caesarion was believed to be a son of the former Caesar, by whom Cleopatra was left (p263) pregnant. In the second place, he proclaimed his own sons by Cleopatra Kings of Kings, and to Alexander he allotted Armenia, Media and Parthia (when he should have subdued it), to Ptolemy Phoenicia, Syria, and Cilicia.

5 At the same time he also produced his sons, Alexander arrayed in Median garb, which included a tiara and upright head-dress, Ptolemy in boots, short cloak, and broad-brimmed hat surmounted by a diadem. For the latter was the dress of the kings who followed Alexander, the former that of Medes and Armenians.

6 And when the boys had embraced their parents, one was given a bodyguard of Armenians, the other of Macedonians. Cleopatra, indeed, both then and at other times when she appeared in public, assumed a robe sacred to Isis, and was addressed as the New Isis.

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60 1 When Caesar had made sufficient preparations, a vote was passed to wage war against Cleopatra, and to take away from Antony the authority which he had surrendered to a woman. And Caesar said in addition that Antony had been drugged and was not even master of himself, and that the Romans (p275) were carrying on war with Mardion the eunuch, and

Potheinus, and Iras, and the tire-woman of Cleopatra, and Charmion, by whom the principal affairs of the government were managed.