**Character List**

**Antony** - A once fierce and feared soldier who rules the Roman Empire along with Octavius Caesar and Lepidus. When the play opens, Antony has neglected his duties as a ruler in order to live in Egypt, where he carries on a highly visible love affair with Cleopatra. His loyalty is divided between the Western and Eastern worlds; he is torn between the sense of duty and the desire to seek pleasure, between reason and passion. While he feels the need to reaffirm the honour that has made him a celebrated Roman hero, he is also madly in love with Cleopatra.

Throughout the play, Antony grapples with the conflict between his love for Cleopatra and his duties to the Roman Empire. In Act I, scene i, he engages Cleopatra in a conversation about the nature and depth of their love, dismissing the duties he has neglected for her sake: “Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch / Of the ranged empire fall” (I.i.35–36). In the very next scene, however, Antony worries that he is about to “lose [him]self in dotage” (I.ii.106) and fears that the death of his wife is only one of the ills that his “idleness doth hatch” (I.ii.119). Thus, Antony finds himself torn between the Rome of his duty and the Alexandria of his pleasure. The geographical poles that draw him in opposite directions represent deep-seated conflicts between his reason and emotion, his sense of duty and his desire, his obligations to the state and his private needs.

Antony’s understanding of himself, however, cannot bear the stress of such tension. In his mind, he is first and foremost a Roman hero of the first caliber. He won his position as one of the three leaders of the world by vanquishing the treacherous Brutus and Cassius, who conspired to assassinate his predecessor, Julius Caesar. He often recalls the golden days of his own heroism, but now that he is entangled in an affair with the Egyptian queen, his memories do little more than demonstrate how far he has strayed from his ideal self. As he points out to Octavia in Act III, scene iv, his current actions imperil his honor, and without his honor—the defining characteristic of the Roman hero—he can no longer be Antony: “If I lose my honor, / I lose myself. Better I were not yours / Than yours so branchless” (III.iv.22–24). Later, having suffered defeat at the hands of both Caesar and Cleopatra, Antony returns to the imagery of the stripped tree as he laments, “[T]his pine is barked / That overtopped them all” (IV.xiii.23–24). Rather than amend his identity to accommodate these defeats, Antony chooses to take his own life, an act that restores him to his brave and indomitable former self. In suicide, Antony manages to convince himself and the world (as represented by Cleopatra and Caesar) that he is “a Roman by a Roman / Valiantly vanquished” (IV.xvi.59–60).

**Cleopatra** - The queen of Egypt and Antony’s lover. A highly attractive woman who once seduced Julius Caesar, Cleopatra delights in the thought that she has caught Antony like a fish. In matters of love, as in all things, Cleopatra favours high drama: her emotions are as volatile as they are theatrical, and, regardless of whether her audience is her handmaid or the emperor of Rome, she always offers a top-notch performance. Although she tends to make a spectacle of her emotions, one cannot doubt the genuine nature of her love for Antony. Shakespeare makes clear that the queen does love the general, even if her loyalty is sometimes misplaced.
The assortment of perspectives from which we see Cleopatra illustrates the varying understandings of her as a decadent foreign woman and a noble ruler. As Philo and Demetrius take the stage in Act I, scene i, their complaints about Antony’s neglected duties frame the audience’s understanding of Cleopatra, the queen for whom Antony risks his reputation. Within the first ten lines of the play, the men declare Cleopatra a lustful “gipsy,” a description that is repeated throughout the play as though by a chorus (I.i.10). Cleopatra is labeled a “wrangling queen” (I.i.50), a “slave” (I.iv.19), an “Egyptian dish” (II.vi.123), and a “whore” (III.vi.67); she is called “Salt Cleopatra” (II.i.21) and an enchantress who has made Antony “the noble ruin of her magic” (III.x.18).

But to view Cleopatra as such is to reduce her character to the rather narrow perspective of the Romans, who, standing to lose their honor or kingdoms through her agency, are most threatened by her. Certainly this threat has much to do with Cleopatra’s beauty and open sexuality, which, as Enobarbus points out in his famous description of her in Act II, scene ii, is awe-inspiring. But it is also a performance. Indeed, when Cleopatra takes the stage, she does so as an actress, elevating her passion, grief, and outrage to the most dramatic and captivating level. As Enobarbus says, the queen did not walk through the street, but rather

Hop[ped] forty paces . . .  
And having lost her breath, she spoke and panted,  
That she did make defect perfection,  
And breathless, pour breath forth.  
(II.ii.235–238)

Whether whispering sweet words of love to Antony or railing at a supposedly disloyal servant, Cleopatra leaves her onlookers breathless. As Antony notes, she is a woman “[w]hom everything becomes—to chide, to laugh / To weep” (I.i.51–52). It is this ability to be the perfect embodiment of all things—beauty and ugliness, virtue and vice—that Cleopatra stands to lose after her defeat by Caesar. By parading her through the streets of Rome as his trophy, he intends to reduce her character to a single, base element—to immortalize her as a whore. If Antony cannot allow his conception of self to expand to incorporate his defeats, then Cleopatra cannot allow hers to be stripped to the image of a boy actor “squeaking Cleopatra . . . / I’th’ posture of a whore” (V.ii.216–217). Cleopatra often behaves childishly and with relentless self-absorption; nevertheless, her charisma, strength, and indomitable will make her one of Shakespeare’s strongest, most awe-inspiring female characters.

Octavius Caesar - The nephew and adopted son of Julius Caesar. Octavius rules the Roman Empire with Antony and Lepidus. Relations between Caesar and Antony are strained throughout the play, for the young triumvir believes that Antony squanders his time and neglects his duties while in Egypt. Ambitious and extremely pragmatic, Octavius lacks Antony’s military might as a general, but his careful and stoic reasoning enables him to avoid Antony’s tendency toward heroic or romantic folly. Destined to be the first Roman emperor (later renamed Caesar Augustus), he symbolizes “Western” values in the play, which stand opposed to the exotic lures of Cleopatra’s “East.”

Ocatavius Caesar is both a menacing adversary for Antony and a rigid representation of Roman law and order. He is not a two-dimensional villain, though, since his frustrations with the ever-neglectful
Analogy seem justified. When he complains to Lepidus that he resents having to “bear / So great weight in [Antony's] lightness,” we certainly understand his concern (I.iv.24–25). He does not emerge as a particularly likable character—his treatment of Lepidus, for instance, betrays the cruel underside of Caesar’s aggressive ambitions—but he is a complicated one. He is, in other words, convincingly human. There is, perhaps, no better example of Caesar’s humanity than his conflicted feelings about Antony. For a good deal of the play, Caesar seems bent, rather ruthlessly, on destroying Antony. When he achieves this desired end, however, he does not relish the moment as we might expect. Instead, he mourns the loss of a great soldier and musters enough compassion to be not only fair-minded but also fair-hearted, commanding that the lovers be buried beside one another.

Enobarbus - Antony’s most loyal supporter. Worldly and cynical, Enobarbus is friendly with the subordinates of both Pompey and Caesar, yet stays faithful to his master even after Antony makes grave political and military missteps. He abandons Antony only when the general appears to be completely finished.

Marcus Aemilius Lepidus - The third member of the triumvirate and the weakest, both politically and personally. Lepidus’s rather desperate attempts to keep the peace between Caesar and Antony fail when Caesar imprisons him after the defeat of Pompey.

Pompey - The son of a great general who was one of Julius Caesar’s partners in power. Pompey is young and popular with the Roman people, and he possesses enough military might to stand as a legitimate threat to the triumvirs. He fancies himself honorable for refusing to allow one of his men to kill the unsuspecting Caesar, Antony, and Lepidus when they are his guests.

Octavia - Octavius Caesar’s sister. Octavia marries Antony in order to cement an alliance between the two triumvirs. She is a victim of Antony’s deception, and her meekness, purity, and submission make her the paradigm of Roman womanhood, and Cleopatra’s polar opposite.

Charmian and Iras - Cleopatra’s faithful attendants.

The Soothsayer - An Egyptian fortune-teller who follows Antony to Rome and predicts that his fortune will always pale in comparison to Caesar’s.

Dolabella - One of Octavius Caesar’s men. Dolabella is assigned to guard the captive Cleopatra.

Agrippa - One of Octavius Caesar’s officers. Agrippa leads the retreat from Antony’s unexpectedly powerful forces.

Camidius - A general in Antony’s army. After the battle in which Antony follows Cleopatra’s lead and flees, Camidius surrenders and defects to Caesar’s side.
**Ventidius** - A Roman soldier under Antony’s command. Ventidius leads the legions to victory against the kingdom of Parthia. Although a competent fighter, he cautiously decides not to push his troops further into battle, for fear that winning too much glory would sour his relationship with Antony.

**Scarus** - A brave young soldier serving under Antony. Scarus garners fantastic wounds in the battle against Caesar’s army, and begs for the opportunity to win more.

**Proculeius** - One of Caesar’s soldiers, who proves untrustworthy.

**Diomedes** - Cleopatra’s servant. She employs Diomedes to bring to Antony the message that she has not committed suicide but is still alive.

**Eros** - An attendant serving Antony. Eros’s love for his master compels him to refuse Antony’s order that Eros kill him.

**Menas** - An ambitious young soldier under Pompey. During the dinner party that Pompey hosts for the triumvirate, Menas asks for permission to kill Caesar, Antony, and Lepidus, which would result in the control of the world falling into his master’s hands.

**Seleucus** - Cleopatra’s treasurer, who betrays his master.

**Clown** - An Egyptian who brings a basket of figs containing poisonous snakes to Cleopatra.

**Decretas** - One of Antony’s soldiers.