

Octavia. He listens to Cleopatra's words and decides to fight at sea, however he would be better on land. On the other hand, his passion is not voluntary. He tries to resist it - by marrying Octavia, he tries to give politics a higher priority than love - but fails. As a result, the spectator - or reader - cannot but feel compassion for him, even if he more or less 'deserved' his terrible end. Cleopatra, even if many traits of hers are unpleasant (she mistreats the unfortunate messenger who announces the marriage of Antony and Octavia, and she is particularly mean to her rival) deserves our compassion too. Shakespeare creates in her a character that is much more likely to awaken pity than the Cleopatra described in Plutarch, the main source of the play. According to an article from Josette Hrou, 'Antony and Cleopatra: sources and influences' (2000) [1] although Shakespeare followed very carefully the historical events described by Plutarch, he took some liberties with his source, especially in the treatment of Cleopatra's character. Plutarch describes her as a woman without scruples, manipulative, ready to do anything to keep her throne. To her, Antony was nothing more than a puppet she had to seduce for political reasons. She did not care about his person but only about his power. In Shakespeare's play, she is truly in love with Antony. When he is away, she asks for mandragora, 'That (she) might sleep out this great gap of time', while 'My Antony is away' (Act I, scene V). We do not see any reason why she should feign in the presence of Charmian. This true passion makes us sympathise with her.

Now it is the time to discuss how the catharsis is portrayed in Othello and what methods used to convey it. Firstly, Shakespeare's tragic heroes are often portrayed as the victims of their own excesses of self-deception. They are seen as the preys to manipulative characters such as Iago, in Othello. Othello wins Desdemona's affections with charm and the use of storytelling, yet is unable to discern Iago's similar techniques, so that he listens to Iago all the same as Desdemona to him. Perhaps one aspect of these heroes' struggle with self-understanding is that they suffer from inner conflict: Othello is tormented by the gap between Iago's lies and what he knows Desdemona to be, Antony hesitates between Egypt, where his passions lie, and Rome, seat of his military responsibilities.

To some extent, the heroes all display the flaw of hubris, or overweening pride. Othello believes he has the right to dispose of Desdemona. In a sense that she is his wife, he feels responsible for her 'sins' and Shakespeare here demonstrates also the morals of the society at this time. Women were 'properties' of men and their wishes and desires were simply ignored. They were supposed to keep their husband's name clear and demonstrates an outmost respect for the family's honour. Despite the heroes' inevitable downfall, Shakespeare emphasises that they are noble to the end: Cassio calls Othello 'great of heart', Caesar says of the grave of Antony and Cleopatra that 'No grave upon the earth shall clip in it/ A pair so famous'. Othello is seen as the tragic hero - as he was a noble, military captain, a brave warrior with a company of noblemen who respected him and called him 'My lord', however his pride was hurt and it turned him into a villain in a sense that he is unable to overcome his jealousy and desire to murder his wife. The audience feel no sympathy with him as they tend to side with Desdemona for she is the real victim in this conflict. Othello loses the reader's respect and perhaps, gains it again after committing suicide, however it does give audience the feeling of catharsis as it is still seen as if Othello asks for forgiveness whereby taking his own life and brings the ultimate redemption upon his soul.

In a conclusion, Shakespearean tragedies end with a strong sense of forgiveness and almost give the reader the alternative endings as to what might have happened if they overcame their tragic flaws and had a more merrier life afterwards. In both plays, W. Shakespeare utilises catharsis as the main principle of such tragedies, however upon analysing both - Antony and Cleopatra and Othello, it is seen, that the former offers a great feeling of the 'tragic pleasure', whereas the latter portrays