
The Role of Ahenobarbus in Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra"

In 'Antony and Cleopatra' Enobarbus is a trusted follower and close friend of Antony's, who has the freedom of speaking openly about personal issues that Antony confides in him about. Although he has limited influence over Antony when compared with the Queen of Egypt, Cleopatra, overall Enobarbus has an extremely important role in the play, acting as the face of the audience, as well as being used by Shakespeare to build tension through the subtle foreshadowing in Enobarbus' dialogue.

Enobarbus' most important role in the play is taking the job of a narrator whilst continuing to be a character which Shakespeare does skillfully and successfully. Enobarbus is the voice of reason and explains what is going on in certain scenes. In Act 4 Scene 2, Cleopatra speaks aside to Enobarbus, questioning what Antony is doing. Enobarbus explains that he is trying "to make his followers weep". Of course, Enobarbus isn't really explaining to Cleopatra what is happening (unless she hadn't read the script beforehand), he is actually informing the audience of Antony's real intentions. The fact that Enobarbus uses the word "followers" to describe Antony's crying servants, and he himself isn't crying, reinforces the idea that Enobarbus is more than just a follower. As Enobarbus is a friend of Antony's as well as a follower, he is able to voice his own opinions, and, due to the fact he is not infatuated with a female or the idea of ruling the Roman Empire, he gives us a clear overview of each character's personalities. Enobarbus is also used commonly by Shakespeare for dramatic irony, increasing the effectiveness of the play further.

Along with the soothsayer in 'Antony and Cleopatra', Enobarbus occasionally creates a lighter atmosphere within the play when Shakespeare cleverly uses humor to allow the audience a break from the politics, love and war that fills the rest of the performance. Shakespeare uses satire when Enobarbus mocks Lepidus for being intoxicated in Act 2 Scene 7 when he ironically calls him a "strong fellow" and in Act 3 Scene 2 when he and Agrippa ridicule Lepidus, expressing "how he loves Caesar!" and "adores Mark Antony!". To both a Shakespearean and modern audience this is a humorous scene in the play. In the past, critics have disapproved of Shakespeare commonly giving this feature to his secondary characters: in 1710, Charles Gildon wrote "Grief and Laughter are so very incompatible that to join these two would be monstrous". Nicholas Rowe also wrote in 1709 that "the generality of our audiences seem to be better pleased with it than with exact tragedy" however "the severer Critiques among us cannot bear it". Despite critics often finding fault with it, it does make Enobarbus an extremely important character in the play as, by making the audience like him through his sense of humor and his

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relatability, he sets himself up as a minor tragic character which heightens his downfall and therefore increases the effectiveness of the tragic play, 'Antony and Cleopatra'.

Shakespeare skillfully foreshadows future events such as the fate of the hero and heroine of the play, Antony and Cleopatra, through Enobarbus. This makes Enobarbus an essential character as through him the audience receives subtle hints to what is going to happen next. Enobarbus is aware of the fragility of the marriage between Antony and Octavia, which is also tying the friendly relationship between Antony and Caesar together. From this he recognizes that "the band that seems to tie their friendship together will be the very strangler of their amity", due to the fact that Antony "will to his Egyptian dish again". The use of the disrespectful words 'Egyptian dish' imply that Cleopatra is simply a meal that will not last forever, possibly referring to her past lovers, none of whom had stayed. Before Antony's first fight against Caesar, in Act 3 Scene 7 Enobarbus explains to Cleopatra that her presence in the camp will be a distraction to Antony: "If we should serve with horse...a soldier and his horse". Through imagery of a male a female horse, Enobarbus foreshadows the fact that Cleopatra being involved in his fight will sacrifice Antony's triumph. Moreover, Enobarbus also hints at the upcoming Battle of Actium, which takes place after Caesar declares war against Cleopatra, when he says Antony and Caesar will "grind the one the other".

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Roman views on friendship are based on multiple critics. Aristotle recognized that a friendship is based on certain terms: pleasure, utility or virtue, whilst others believed that friendship only survived if there is something to be rewarded with from it, and it is over when it is no longer useful to/pleasant for the 'participants'. Enobarbus is an indispensable character for proving the existence of true friendship. By doing this, he also sets himself up for an intensified downfall, despite being a secondary character. In spite of Enobarbus' betrayal of Mark Antony in Act 4 Scene 6, he dies in Act 4 Scene 9 from guilt and heartbreak. Although Shakespeare never

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clarifies why Enobarbus sinks to the floor and dies, we are able to infer that he ended his life due to the culpability of abandoning his friend. Enobarbus' last words are "O Antony! O Antony!" which reinforces the poignant moment of his death and alludes to Antony being the last person on his mind. The repetition of Antony's name also draws attention to Enobarbus' desperation for forgiveness. The tragic passing of a likable character would have affected the audience in a negative manner and also begins the downfall of Antony – Shakespeare uses Enobarbus to foreshadow future events even through his death.

Enobarbus is vital in expressing certain Roman views. Shakespeare communicates female ideals through the character of Enobarbus, specifically in Act 1 Scene 2. Having found out his wife, Fulvia, has died, Antony reveals the news to Enobarbus. His most valuable soldier then explains that this is fortunate for Antony, that "when old robes are worn out, there are members to make new". Enobarbus then proceeds to describe Fulvia as an "old smock" and Cleopatra as a "new petticoat". This metaphoric representation of Antony's deceased wife and Egypt's Queen as items of clothing that are easily removed suggests women are simply objects that men can discard of whenever they like. A Shakespearean audience would not have reacted as though this was such a terrible attitude towards women – they experienced women getting married as young as 12 years old and believed wives belonged to their husbands. However, a modern audience would not react so kindly to this as, in the present day, women are equal to men. Furthermore, Enobarbus reports to Menas that Octavia is "of a holy, cold and still conversation". Octavia is an obedient and therefore ideal wife (despite later being illustrated as lifeless due to her statue-like physicality), however Enobarbus openly insults her, calling her quiet and gentle, however also dull.

Despite the harsh descriptions of Fulvia, Octavia and Cleopatra, in Act 2 Scene 2, Shakespeare quotes almost directly from Plutarch through Enobarbus' character to describe his and Antony's first meeting with Cleopatra after she arrived sitting on the barge like it was a "burnished throne". Enobarbus explains to Agrippa and Maecenas how the "pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids" fanned Cleopatra and how the Queen made even the winds fall for her. These two juxtaposing descriptions of Cleopatra highlight Enobarbus' importance in displaying Roman ideas on woman, however it also shows how, when Cleopatra travelled up the river Cydnus, she was a goddess, not a woman.

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