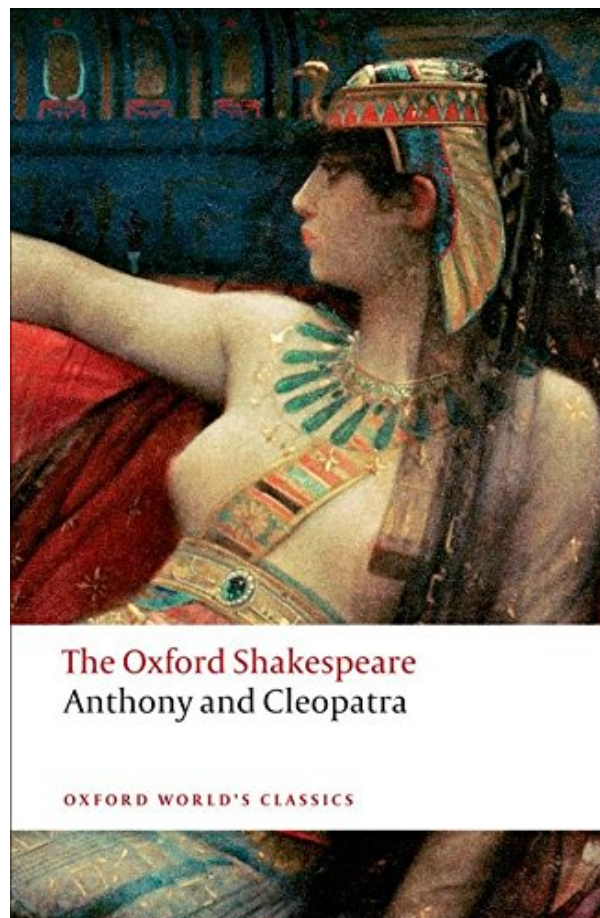
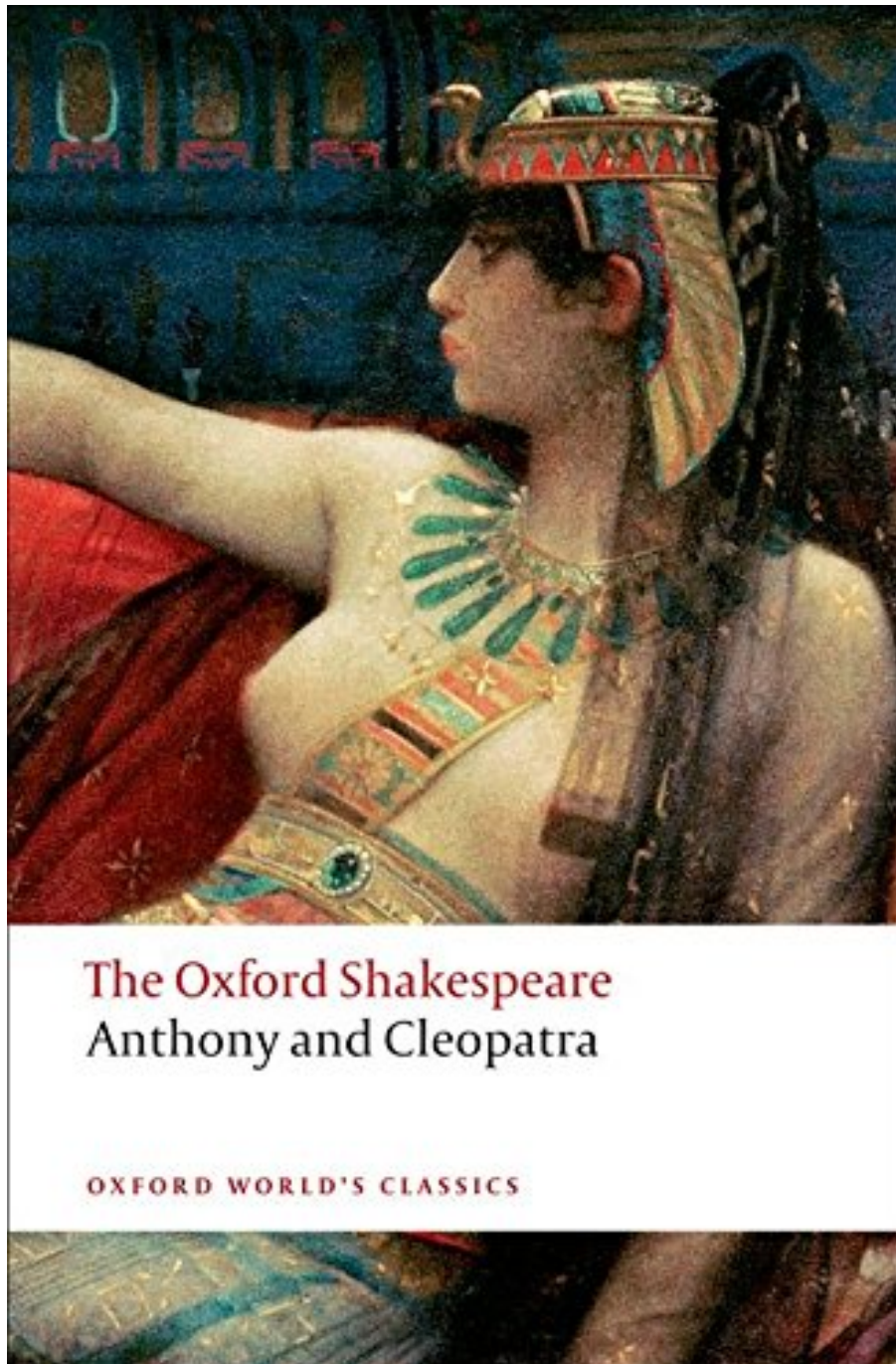


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About the Author

Michael Neill is Associate Professor of English at Aukland University.

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About the Author

Michael Neill is Associate Professor of English at Auckland University.

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Multifaceted

By Jon Chambers

To some, Shakespeare's greatest tragedy, to others a closet drama and even a problem play, Antony and Cleopatra seems to possess, like its heroine, 'infinite variety'.

Despite its obvious ability to enthrall and perplex, the play has had a relatively impoverished stage history. Reasons for its lack of success are, again, varied: it is 'unactable'; its most successful post-war Cleopatras (Peggy Ashcroft and Judy Dench) have been 'too English' to suggest exotic allure, etc. Michael Neill's edition does a thorough job charting the play's troubled stage life, even if his performance section is overlong and not well integrated into his discussion. I, for one, found the composite review notices (often synthesising two or three individual reactions into a single response) almost suffocating in their detail. Those readers particularly interested in past productions and their reception, however, will be spared much trawling through press cuttings.

This edition's real strength lies in its formidable and wide-ranging Introduction, often drawing upon radical recent criticism (by the likes of Janet Adelman and Jonathan Dollimore). Some of the more rewarding ideas include the play's relationship to mythic archetypes (Omphale and Hercules, Mars and Venus); Antony's wrestling with (male) identity; Roman constructions of 'otherness'; and the play's parallels with other Shakespearean tragedies - especially with its 'successor and companion piece, Coriolanus'.

This is yet another Oxford Shakespeare with a baffling bibliography, however. Despite making fullest use of a book by the above-mentioned author Janet Adelman, she is not listed here. (Unlike Styan Thirby, whose unpublished annotations of C18 editions earn him four entries.) Puzzling.

At times dense and challenging, the author's fondness for Scottish dialect words can obfuscate further (the term 'eldritch humour' appears three times). Nonetheless, Neill's Antony is indispensable to any serious student of the play.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

The 'h' edition

By HH

Michael Neill's Oxford edition risks being remembered for a single distinctive feature: the insertion of an 'h' into Antony's name. His arguments for this on pp. 134-35 are not convincing. Neill claims that 'Anthony', the Folio spelling, "corresponds to the most common modern form of the name". Even if this is the case, which I doubt, I cannot see that it constitutes reason enough for such a wilful deviation from custom. As far as Folio spelling is concerned, adherence to its practice elsewhere would give us a play called Twelfth Night, and a title-hero called Troilus. E. G. Withycombe's "Oxford Dictionary of Christian Names" (1977) helps to account for the 1623 compositors' practice: "The intrusive h in the spelling Anthony was a late development, and seems not to appear before the late 16th C. It may have been the result of false etymology, for Camden (1605) derives the name from Greek". There might have been a supporting clue here, had Neill chosen to pursue it, for at 3.13.39 Antony is associated with a "blown rose", in contrast, perhaps, to the "blossoming Caesar" of 4.13.23. Could Shakespeare's "lesse Greeke" have extended to an awareness of Camden's false linkage of the name with a flower? Possibly, or possibly not. But Miss Withycombe sensibly continues: 'The h is of course silent, but there is some danger of spelling pronunciation (already in use in U.S.A.), and the older spelling is to be preferred.' There is a real danger that Neill's insertion of the 'h' will prompt first-time student readers to sound that unnecessary letter. For those already familiar with the play its presence is a perpetual irritant.

The extra letter in the hero's name presages an expansiveness that is, overall, this edition's besetting

weakness. The Introduction is packed with interesting ideas, exploring such devices as hyperbole, paradox, and anti-climax in terms that are often witty and just. For instance, at the end, Shakespeare draws "a superb theatrical climax out of seeming anticlimax, in much the way that Cleopatra herself transforms the most abject defeat into the paradoxical victory that renders the triumphant Caesar 'ass unpolicied'" (p. 99). Good use is made of passages from Montaigne on the discontinuity of human identity. But what kind of reader really needs a 130-page critical introduction, especially when the commentary replicates many of the same points? Even serious scholars will find Neill's intro tiresome eventually.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

what I needed for HON 171

By Daniel D'Souza

Haven't read the full thing yet, but the annotations are useful.

There is a really long introduction/forward if you like that sort of thing.

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