

position of Antony at the opening of the play is emphasised: Alexandria is not beleaguered, Ventidius still controls twelve legions, and Caesar, notwithstanding some touches at his 'coldness,' is practically assumed to be quite ready for a family reconciliation through the offices of Octavia.

In the meeting of Octavia and Cleopatra there is certainly no 'French decorum.' This Dryden justifies as follows:—

The French poets...are strict observers of these punctilios: they would not, for example, have suffered Cleopatra and Octavia to have met; or, if they had met, there must only have passed betwixt them some cold civilities, but no eagerness of repartee, for fear of offending against the greatness of their characters, and the modesty of their sex. This objection I foresaw, and at the same time contemned; for I judged it both natural and probable that Octavia, proud of her new-gained conquest, would search out Cleopatra to triumph over her; and that Cleopatra, thus attacked, was not of a spirit to shun the encounter: and 'tis not unlikely that two exasperated rivals should use such satire as I have put into their mouths; for, after all, though the one were a Roman, and the other a queen, they were both women.

Scott however appears to disagree with Dryden on this point: he writes that Octavia's 'scolding scene with Cleopatra seems too coarse to be in character, and is a glaring exception to the general good taste evinced throughout the rest of the piece.' I must leave the question open for the reader to determine: to me the scene, though conventional, appears not objectionable.

The scene between Antony and Ventidius in