Antony And Cleopatra: Conflict In A Play

The play Antony and Cleopatra, written by William Shakespeare, there is a sharp contrast between the Roman and Egyptian worlds. By evaluating the aspects of conflict between these cultures it will demonstrate that Antony and Cleopatra are victims of their circumstances.

The extreme conflict of politics set against pleasure needs to be considered. Antony is a ruler and triumvir of Rome. He based most of his actions on politics which lead to success. However, once he fell in love with cleopatra his mindset was altered. When Philo says “Nay, but this dotage of our general’s O’erflows the measure.” it becomes evident that Antony’s values have shifted from those of a Roman to the value of pleasure comparable to an Egyptian. He neglects his duties to please Cleopatra. It is due to Antony being pleasure-driven that he forgets his nature and descends into chaos and becomes a victim of circumstance.

In addition to the contrast between politics and pleasure, cleopatras seduction has driven Antony away from his duties. Antony is aware he is being trapped when he says, “These strong Egyptian fetters I must break, Or lose myself in dotage.” Showing that if he does not break away from these pleasures he will lose himself in foolish infatuation. Antony is aware that this new lifestyle which Cleopatra has obligated him to has made him soft. Antony lacks his roman values and therefore needs to rebel against cleopatras seduction. Theses contrasts lead to internal conflict between the individuals and inevitable makes them victims of this conflict.

The second conflict -rational versus irrational thinking- results in Antony and Cleopatra being victims their societal divisions. Antony’s final decline and submission to the soothsayer’s prediction appears to when he abandons his men to follow Cleopatra which results in Egyptian defeat. Romans are usually rational and logical but, in this scene, Antony goes against all common sense and ignores the pleading of his men. Antony thereafter is a traitor and an outcast. In a previous scene during a conversation Octavia Antony says, “If I Lose Mine Honour, I Lose Myself”. In this statement he makes it clear that is his roman values are lost he will fall away into mayhem. Therefore, when he abandoned his men, he lost his honour -a praised roman quality- and turn out to be a victim.

Finally, another conflict of equal importance is cleopatras character traits in comparison to the qualities of a true roman wife. Later in the play Enobarbus mentions the good, roman qualities of Octavia. “Octavia is of a holy cold and still conversation” he makes it obvious that Cleopatra is the opposite of what a roman wife should be. The relationship between Antony and Cleopatra was doomed from the start. Roman citizens would never accept cleopatra as Antony’s wife. Antony is forced to choose between Egypt and Rome due to his society’s pressures and opinions. Antony and Cleopatra are victims of the conflicts between these contrasting worlds.

In conclusion by consider the factors of conflict and the contrasts between Egypt and Rome. It has been established that Antony and Cleopatra are unfortunately victims of their surroundings.