FAVOURITE SHAKESPEARE MONOLOGUES AND DUOLOGUES OF PROFESSIONAL ACTORS
#esufestivalofspeaking

Lizzie Hopley

My favourite Shakespeare speech is Cleopatra's description of Antony from *Antony & Cleopatra* Act 5, Scene 2.

His legs bestrid the ocean. His reared arm
Crested the world. His voice was propertied
As all the tunèd spheres, and that to friends.
But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,
He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,
There was no winter in 't, an autumn 'twas
That grew the more by reaping. His delights
Were dolphinlike; they showed his back above
The element they lived in. In his livery
Walked crowns and crownets. Realms and islands were
As plates dropped from his pocket.

Antony has killed himself and Cleopatra is about to be captured by Caesar. She is describing Antony to a servant and Shakespeare stops the plot for it. It seems the whole world stops for it.

The speech contains my favourite Shakespeare line also: "His delights / Were dolphinlike; they showed his back above / The element they lived in." It's a comment on how terribly ordinary the world is and how important (and rare) it is to be extraordinary. That's why Cleopatra loved Antony. Of course, no one matches this description, not even Antony and she knows it. But her need for it to be true breaks your heart.

It says so much about the human condition and the habit we have of grieving for the ideal as well as the truth. That she shares these extraordinary images with a servant is even more extraordinary - it's a terribly private moment and we believe her words all the more. As a result of this speech, both their deaths become a tragedy and a triumph. Also, who'd seen a dolphin at this point in Elizabethan England? What an image to give an audience!

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