



## Her infinite variety

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**Maecenas:**

Now Antony  
Must leave her utterly.

**Enobarbus:**

Never, he will not:  
Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety. Other women cloy  
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry  
Where most she satisfies. . . .

[Antony And Cleopatra Act 2, scene 2, 232–237](#)

Marc Antony, in a bid to make peace with his fellow triumvir Caesar Augustus, has agreed to marry Caesar's sister. Caesar's friend Maecenas concludes that Antony will now have to give up his infamous affair with Cleopatra, the queen of Egypt, but Enobarbus replies that this is impossible. Unlike other women, he claims, Cleopatra can never grow "stale" with "custom" (familiarity); her charms never fade, they only, in their infinite variety, grow more compelling with time. Enobarbus turns out to be correct; though Antony might sincerely intend to break with Cleopatra, her hold on him overwhelms all considerations of state, and soon he returns to her.

Enobarbus's paean to Cleopatra's erotic power recalls Hamlet's description of how his father enthralled his mother. "Why, she would hang on him," he recalls, "As if increase of appetite had grown/ By what it fed on" ([Hamlet](#), Act 1, scene 2). But Hamlet makes no claims to his father's "infinite variety." Variety, allegedly a hallmark of the female nature, was often feared and derided; women's changefulness threatened woosers and husbands alike. In Cleopatra, however, variety becomes a species of excitement, a power to hold on to a lover by keeping love fresh.

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