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Shakespeare and the Mediterranean • 3

Antony and Cleopatra

Edited by Cristiano Ragni

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Part 1
Performance and (Self-)Representation in *Antony and Cleopatra*

2

"This stinking puddle of whoredom": Antony and Cleopatra and the Performance of Adultery

Pasquale Pagano

Abstract

The year 1547 saw the publication of the first *Book of Homilies*, which, together with the second volume of sermons (1563), was destined to become "the basic formularies of the Church of England" (Bray 2015, 9). The eleventh homily belonging to the first *Book*, whose title is *A Sermon against Whoredom and Uncleanness*, clearly states the necessity "to intreat of the sinne of whoredom and fornication, declaring vnto you the greatnesse of this sinne" (86). The aim of the present study is to read Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* in the light of the homiletic teachings which pervaded English culture over the years when Protestantism established itself in its theoretical framework. If Antony's downfall has been commonly read as his 'exorbitant' love for the 'exotic' Cleopatra (Gilles 1994), this essay suggests that such feelings are essentially adulterous and, according to Reformed teachings, the source of many evils. Hence, the Mediterranean Sea, across which Antony repeatedly sails, degenerates into "the outrageous sea of adultery" (Bray 2015, 96), while on its opposite banks the chaste and faithful Octavia counterweights the libidinous *regina meretrix* (Stanton 2014).

To what extent did Shakespeare follow and conform his work to the cultural and religious *milieu* of his time? Can the moral standards which the Protestant *Sermon* offers be applied also to *Antony and Cleopatra*? Based on the widely shared position that "preachers and players shared conceptual fascinations" (McEachern 2013, 100), this research aims to trace paths of convergence as well as of divergence between the early modern homily about adultery and Shakespeare's Roman play about Antony's extramarital relationship with Cleopatra.

Keywords: Adultery; *Books of Homilies*; Deadly Sins; Marriage; Reformation

1. Introduction

Although Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* is commonly included among love tragedies, the oxymoron of the two terms – love and tragedy – is far more arduous when referred to this Roman play. If on the one hand love is the natural feeling which

fuels the dynamics of comic production, when "in literature, [it] does encounter the forces of destruction it is generally in order to meet them head on and reverse them in a glorious moment of redemption" (Bates 2013, 195). According to general criticism, the love bond which unites and leads these tragic lovers seems to be of a peculiar nature not only as it is never totally explicit – as John Wilders claims when he states that "what [Antonio and Cleopatra] seldom express, however, is love" (2002, 1) – but it proves to be also exceptional if compared to Shakespeare's other great love tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*. What I will try to argue in this essay, instead, is that what imbues Antonio and Cleopatra's love is not only the intensity of the feeling, nor its unalike way to be expressed, but the condition of the two characters as adulterous lovers:

> Does *Antony and Cleopatra*, which scales the heights of tragic poetry, also ask its audience to laugh at the lovers it depicts, caught in their own self-deceiving passion? Perhaps the continued fascination of the play for us now depends on the undecidable character of its attitude to adultery. Is this the greatest love story ever told, or a record of reciprocal misrecognition – or both? (Doesn't love always involve a degree of overvaluation?) Is Cleopatra, as she finally claims, a wife in all but name (5.2.286–7) or a remarkably accomplished courtesan – or both? (Belsey 2013, 142)

The complex and often indefinable relationship between the vigorous Roman *triumvir* and the Egyptian Queen will be here analysed from the perspective of their status as extra-marital lovers: if *this* love "o'erflows the measure" (1.1.1)[1] and outdoes the bond of affection and mutual attraction of other couples, this paper aims to reconsider such uniqueness by situating it in the historical and religious discourse about adultery as well as in the light of the mutual exchange between dramatic performances and homiletic practice in English post-Reformation era. According to Bryan Crockett, "religious belief fuels cultural performances that rival the dramatic intensity of Elizabethan plays" (1995, 159). Similarly, Elizabeth Williamson and Jane H. Degenhardt have remarked such a fruitful interaction by stating that "the stage . . . both draws upon

1 All references to *Antony and Cleopatra* are from Shakespeare 2002.

and profoundly reconfigures existing religious signifiers” (2011, 2). Adultery, therefore, will not be addressed here in its social or legal perspectives; instead, this essay intends to read Antony and Cleopatra’s adulterous bond both in terms of its dramatic performance as well as its religious facet, as it was presented through the homiletic practice at Shakespeare’s time. From this perspective, the Mediterranean dimension and the symbolism of water in the play, which have been variously analysed in other scholarly works (Gillies 1994, Wilders 2002), will suggest interesting implications, as the *mare nostrum*, whose borders Antony ‘transgresses’ in order to encounter his fatally exotic mistress, turns into the “most filthy lake, foul puddle and stinking sink” (Bray 2015, 101).

2. “Bound thus to live together”: Marriage and Adultery in Reformation England

It is true that Antony and Cleopatra “stand up peerless” (1.1.41), but their being “exceptional people” (Wilders 2002, 1), as well as their incomparable love, is here studied according to what Stephen Greenblatt defined as “the sophisticated, lightly ironic intensity of middle-aged adultery” (2005, 147). For most of the dramatic action, in fact, Antony is a married man who has an extra-marital affair: when the scene opens, the male protagonist is immediately introduced through Philo’s comments about the General’s new condition: “His captain’s heart . . . is become bellows and the fan / to cool a gipsy’s lust” (1.1.6-10); some lines later, it is Cleopatra herself who evokes the problematic issue of Antony’s marriage by reminding us of Fulvia’s embarrassing presence: “thy cheek pays shame / when shrill-tounged Fulvia scolds” (1.1.32-3). Technically, Antony is a married man until the messenger announces to him: “Fulvia thy wife is dead” (1.2.124).

Despite the Roman setting of the play, we should never forget that *Antony and Cleopatra* was performed before and destined to an English audience, and a post-Reformation one, whose criteria to refer to marriage were essentially Christian. As Robert Miola pointed out, the ancient and peculiar past of the Roman setting needed to be reinterpreted by Shakespeare in the light

of contemporary issues and turmoil: "Roman violence had other significations for original audiences, imagining forth as well as familiar political and religious conflicts . . . Ancient Rome here changes into familiar landscape of Reformation England" (2002, 198). Therefore, the death of his wife makes Antony formally free to establish a new bond, since his former marriage constituted an *impedimentum ligaminis*, the impossibility to remarry "if one party were already married . . ., because Christian marriage . . . was by definition exclusive" (Lettmaier 2017, 471). Fulvia's death frees Antony from such an impediment and, only after some scenes, he himself highlights his freedom, when Agrippa suggests that he should marry Octavia in order to hold him and Caesar "in perpetual amity, / to make you brothers, and to knit your hearts / with an unslipping knot" (2.2.132-4); the General's new condition is doubly remarked by Agrippa's definition of Antony's being a "widower" (127) and his own response: "I am not married, Caesar. Let me hear / Agrippa further speak" (130-1). To this proposal, which Antony explicitly defines "good purpose that so fairly shows" (153), there is no formal obstacle and Antony himself declares his suitability by referring to the language of marital law: "May I never / To this good purpose that so fairly shows, / Dream of *impediment*!" (152-4, emphasis mine). The two men's shaking of hands formally brings about and celebrates the rite, which is appropriately concluded by Lepidus: "Happily, amen!" (162).

The news reaches Cleopatra in 2.5, when she misinterprets the information that Antony is free:

> CLEOPATRA In state of health, thou says't, and thou sayst, free.
> MESSENGER Free, madam? No, I made no such report.
> He's bound to Octavia.
> (2.5.56-8)

The 'bound' is immediately made clear, since Cleopatra does not seem to understand what it consists in: "Madam, he's married to Octavia" (2.5.60). Her reaction is notoriously dramatic and ranges from furious rage to disbelief, so much so that, only a few lines later, she demands that the news be repeated several times and, incredulous, she asks for more ascertainment: "Is he married?"

(89), "He is married?" (97-8). Nevertheless, more than the Egyptian Queen's painful behaviour in acknowledging Antony's newly-acquired marital status, it is essential to remark that in terms of performative action, except for a few scenes in which Antony's *impedimentum ligaminis* is absent, his relationship with Cleopatra is an adulterous one, and we must agree on the fact that "extra-marital sex is a central issue in *Antony and Cleopatra*" (Belsey 2013, 140).

3. "Declaring unto you the greatness of this sin": Preaching against Adultery at Shakespeare's Time

Adultery does not resonate to the ears of contemporary secularised audience as soundly and intensely as to post-Reformation public, whose cultural background had been thoroughly, and often severely, affected by the political and religious turmoil of the shift from Catholicism to Protestantism in the years after Henry VIII's break with Rome:

> Shakespeare's culture is a predominantly religious one, and he therefore addresses these tragic concerns from the perspective of someone who is deeply cognizant of the religious beliefs and theological controversies of his day and fully engaged in examining their metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical dimensions (Diehl 2003, 88).

Unlike its European counterparts, English Reformation kept its political dimension, which made it essentially dependent on the monarchs' interference into matters which never remained exclusively religious; in other words, following the monarchs' and their supporters' decision to side with one church or the other, the new faith had to be spread pervasively and systematically throughout the population. If the publication of the *Book of Common Prayer* (7 March 1549) gave the Church of England "a standard liturgical form" (Swift 2013, 33), since it was established as "the country's only legal form of worship" (34), it was also necessary to sustain "the need for clergy to teach their congregations central elements of the New Church's doctrine" (Betteridge 2019, 5). Liturgy, whose canons and rites were definitively stabilized by the *Prayer Book*, had to be accompanied

by a consistently and extensively catechetical action, which the Reformers carried out by publishing the *First Book of Homilies*,[2] "a 'script' . . . by which English men and women could express their religious emotions, and by which those religious emotions could be mediated, moderated and controlled" (Bagchi 2015, 46).

The book, whose authorship is generally attributed to Thomas Cranmer, actually consisted of two volumes, after the publication of the second tome during the reign of Elizabeth I.[3] Largely dependent on the Reformers' insistence on the importance of preaching, which they regarded "as a principal means of grace both practised and commanded by Christ", and "determined that it should be restored to its rightful place in the church" (Hughes 1975, 7), the *Homilies* served the double purpose to catechise people during Sunday service, as well as to relieve unskilled preachers from the burden of adhering faithfully to the principles of the reformed creed. Far from being a mere collection of sample homilies, from which preachers could draw inspiration, the sermons were specially intended to be read aloud on Sundays in order to compensate for the priest's poor rhetoric; they

> ensured that the message from the pulpit was almost as uniform as the liturgy. Every minister without a licence to preach was bound to

2 Further references will be indicated as the *Homilies*.

3 The process of dissemination of the *Books of Homilies* followed the nonlinear development of the Reformation in England. Originally published during the reign of Edward VI, the first volume soon became a literary symbol of the Protestant faith as well as an instrument of unity and uniformity. The fortune of the book suffered a dramatic setback in the years of Catholic restoration: "During the years of Mary's reign, of course, a ban was put on evangelical preaching and, with it, the reading of the Cranmerian Homilies" (Hughes 1975, 10). Later, the Elizabethan settlement of the Anglican faith reappraised it: "In 1559 Elizabeth revised and reissued the first *Book of Homilies* (1547), of which Cranmer had been one of the principal authors, and in 1563 she issued an expanded version. A few preachers were licensed to compose their own sermons, but the vast majority were required to read theirs from the *Homilies*" (Crockett 1995, 15). The two volumes reached their final version only during the reign of James I, as the second book was "regarded as a separate collection, not being bound together with the first book until 1623" (Bray 2015, 16). For a more detailed account of Elizabeth I's recognition of the *Book of Homilies* and its usage, see Bond 1985.

> read one of the homilies every Sunday. Bishops who were especially conscientious – or especially distrustful of their clergy – sometimes required even licensed ministers to use the Homilies as a matter of course. Deviation from the script was strictly prohibited. (Bagchi 2015, 48)

The main concern of the present study regards the text which goes under the title of *A Sermon Against Whoredom and Adultery*, the eleventh in the first part of the collection, which, unlike most of the Cranmerian homilies of 1547, was "written by the same Thomas Becon who inveighed against whoredom" (Bond 1985, 192). By explicitly addressing "aboue other vices, the outrageous seas of adulterie, whoredom, fornication and vncleaness" (Bray 2015, 96),[4] the homily seems to illuminate aspects of the cultural and religious *milieu* in which Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* was composed.[5]

Did Shakespeare hear the homily? Did he draw inspiration from it in his composition of *Antony and Cleopatra*? These are, of course, problematic questions as are all those related to the genesis of Shakespeare's plays and their relation to the playwright's personal interests and beliefs. Although such issues have been considered

4 Further quotations from the text will follow the critical edition edited by Gerald Bray. The author also included textual emendations as well as the year and the edition "in which the change was made" (Bray 2015, "Introduction", 21). The original text, instead, will be used here.

5 The homily adheres to the traditional association of the sixth commandment with general sins regarding sexual behaviour, therefore it reads: "adultery, although it bee properly vnderstood of the vnlawfull commixtion (or joining together) [1559] of a married man with any woman beside his wife, or of a wife with any man beside her husband: yet thereby is signified also all vnlawfull vse of those parts, which bee ordeyned for generation" (Bray 2015, 96). The first book contains twelve homilies, six regarding dogmatic assertions and six about pastoral concerns, whose aim was to regulate everyday issues and "can be grouped together as warnings against anti-social behaviour" (Bray 2015, 13). The circulation and popularity of this specific homily must have been wide as "it was decreed as required reading from all English pulpits right up to the interregnum and because ministers, by virtue of the thirty-fifth article, were compelled to assent to its doctrinal substance . . . the homily can rightfully claim to be the best known and most popular expression of the English reformers' desire to suppress whoredom throughout the realm" (Bond 1985, 192).

central to the wider subject of 'Shakespeare and religion', David Scott Kastan's position clarifies the trajectories of the research when he says: "We may discover his characteristic habits of mind in his presentation of controversial materials, but his own faith cannot be teased out of his handling of the controversies. . . . It is the experience of belief that engages Shakespeare rather than the truth of what was believed" (2016, 7).

Nevertheless, it is necessary to acknowledge that the *Homilies* largely contributed to shaping the cultural background at Shakespeare's time: their recurrent usage in the Sunday rites, together with the obligation to adhere strictly to their themes and message, moulded the thought of early-modern believers, who were regularly catechised about the new faith: "Attention to the sermon was enforced for schoolboys, at least, who would be tested individually each Monday on the content of the previous day's homily. The effect was deep and lasting" (Bagchi 2015, 49). Shakespeare must have been no exception and the warning message of the *Sermon Against Whoredom and Uncleaness* may have permeated his view in the dramatic representation of adultery in *Antony and Cleopatra.*

4. "Whereinto all kinds of sins and evils flow": Shakespeare and the Performance of Adultery.

In the above-mentioned essay about the same homily and its connections to Shakespearean drama, Ronald B. Bond already hypothesised the impact of early modern preaching on the playwright's production when he argued that "books of homilies must have been familiar to Renaissance playwrights and their audience. Shakespeare may have consciously or unconsciously echoed expressions found in the sermons in his plays, and it is possible that . . . many of his audience would have recognized or appreciated such echoes" (1985, 200).[6] Such hypothesis seems to

6 The scholar focused his attention mainly on Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, *Othello*, and *King Lear* as he stated that: "In these works one encounters the subtle operations of the Tudor play of mind, engaged with

produce further and fruitful intersections in relation to the play in question.

Shakespeare was extremely interested in the question of marriage and family relationships; this theme crosses his production thoroughly and, although it is generally related to comic performances, "it was a theme that interested him promiscuously, and it runs through genres" (Swift 2013, 103). Despite such transversality, the playwright also seems to question whether being married coincides with being in love, or whether passion and ardour may spring also outside the marital bond. When reading about the famous married couples of Shakespeare's plays we do doubt whether there is a possibility of being in love even far from the legal and social bonds of marriage; to what extent this is possible and to what final resolutions such derailment may lead is wonderfully and fatally depicted in many tragedies: "While Shakespeare's comedies were deeply influenced by the tradition of popular romance, where a happy ending meant lovers united in mutual love and marriage, the grand, tragic narratives of medieval love . . . had dwelt on extra-marital passion" (Belsey 2013, 140).

All Shakespeare's love tragedies cope with the incongruous association between love and marriage, but while *Romeo and Juliet* is characterised by Juliet's hasty request to embed the new-born love within the borders of the sacred bond – "If that thy bent of love be honorouble, / Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow" (2.2.143-144) – and *Othello* is obsessed with supposed unfaithfulness, *Antony and Cleopatra* stands out as it displays the only ascertained story of marital infidelity throughout the play, to the point that this made Greenblatt state: "[Shakespeare's] imagination of love and in all likelihood his experiences of love flourished outside of the marriage bond. The greatest lovers in Shakespeare are Antony and Cleopatra, the supreme emblems of adultery" (2005, 143).[7]

the volatile question of how whoredom and adultery should be answered" (1985, 192).

7 Stephen Greenblatt also theorised that the contradiction which often opposes love to marriage may be rooted in the playwright's personal story, a story of a distanced marriage, if not an unhappy one: the abundance of love affairs, of passionate and breath-taking scenes, which characterise Shakespeare's stage, when compared to the shortage of references to his own

Yet, the connection between the two texts should not be intended in terms of derivation of the play from the *Sermon*, but in the perspective of the cultural influence which English Renaissance preaching would exercise over literature and, in particular, drama: "We need not regard the official homily as a direct source of Shakespeare's treatments of whoredom and adultery . . . to acknowledge that, partly because of it, his dramatic explorations would have spoken to the common experience of his audience" (Bond 1985, 205).

One first and very remarkable element which the homily presents is the widely deleterious impact of adultery, in the sense that it proves to be offensive and dangerous not only in moral terms – "the great dishonour of GOD, the exceeding infamie of the name of Christ, the notable decay of true Religion" (Bray 2015, 96), reads the homily– but also on a public and political level: "the vtter destruction of the publike wealth" (96). Many times, throughout the play, the audience are reminded that what is performed on the stage implies much more than the personal vicissitudes of two lovers. Far from being private, Antony and Cleopatra's love is definitely more universal and unconfined; the foundations of the world are at stake, and from the very beginning we see Antony renounce his public responsibilities: "Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch / Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space!" (1.1.34-5); we all tremble along with Octavia when new and dreadful animosity between Antony and Caesar is prophesied by her in Act 3: "Wars ''twixt you twain would be / As if the world should cleave, and that slain men / Should solder up the rift" (3.4.30-2). Critics have often emphasised the political dimension of the play, which "is therefore not simply a background against which the love tragedy is played out but an inseparable part of it. Antony and Cleopatra seem to us larger than life because the

wife and marital life – with the only exception of the weird bequest of a bed to Anne Heathway in his will – sounds to Greenblatt as the most explicit evidence of Shakespeare's idea that the paths of love and marriage very often diverge: "It is, perhaps, as much what Shakespeare did *not* write as what he did that seems to indicate something seriously wrong with his marriage . . . Though wedlock is the promised land toward which his comic heroes and heroines strive, and though family fission is the obsessive theme of the tragedies, Shakespeare was curiously restrained in his depictions of what is actually like to be married" (2005, 126-7).

future of the known world appears to depend on their relationship" (Wilders 2002, 2-3).

The *Sermon* insists on the social dimension of adultery more than once; not only when the author expresses his concerns about the collective consequences of marital unfaithfulness – "How much is the public weal impoverished and troubled through whoredom!" (Bray 2015, 102) – but especially when he warns against the implications of public subjects' involvement in such a sin. By mentioning the biblical story of John, the Baptist, and his reproachful rebuke of King Herod Antipas's affair with his brother's wife, Herodias,[8] the homily's author states that "John knew right well how filthy, stinking and abominable the sin of whoredom is in the sight of God" (98); he unequivocally refers to Herod's role as a king, whose social commitment is of public importance. Since it is not permitted in the case of a public officer, the Protestant preacher seems to argue, adultery must be avoided by everyone: "If it be lawful neither in king nor subject, neither in common officer nor in private person, truly then is it no lawful in no man or woman of what degree or age they be" (98). When we turn to 1.1, we immediately perceive that the story has wider implications than the love affair itself; as in other cases, Shakespeare has the main theme introduced by minor characters, who comment on it:

> PHILO Nay, but this dotage of our general's
> O'erflows the measure. Those his goodly eyes,
> That o'er the files and musters of the war
> Have glowed like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
> The office and devotion of their view 5
> Upon a tawny front. His captain's heart,
> Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
> The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper
> And is become the bellows and the fan
> To cool a gypsy's lust.
> (1.1.1-10)

8 See Mark 6:17-29. Biblical references are from Jones, ed. 2000. *The Jerusalm Bible.*

The double reference to Antony's office (general/captain), as well as the explicit hint at his military ranks, collocate the relationship between the two protagonists in a larger horizon, which include his political position and social status. Antony's role is emphasised some lines later and assumes a planetary perspective when Philo defines him in relation to the world: "The triple pillar of the world transformed / Into a strumpet's fool" (1.1.12-13). Thus, political instability is immediately evoked in the play while the "tawny front" (6) and the "gipsy's lust" (9), by which Philo introduces Cleopatra and her lascivious implications over Antony's political status, make us agree on the fact that the "magnetism of Cleopatra is shown to be disastrous politically" (Wilders 2002, 41).

Like many others in the collection, the *Sermon* actually consists of three parts "so that they could be read over a few Sundays instead of all at once" (Bray 2015, 10): after supporting his reprimand against adultery with biblical quotations in the first part of the homily, the author goes on to focus on the condition deriving from falling "vnto old uncleaness and abominable living" (100). In the second part of the homily the author considers adultery in relation to other manifestations which derive from it: "whoredom to be that most filthy lake, foul puddle and stinking sink whereinto all kinds of sins and evils flow, where also they have their resting place and abiding" (101); as in a dynamic of hideous filiation, more and various evils are rooted in marital unfaithfulness, which the preacher listed in a sequence of questions as follows:

> For hath not the adulterer a *pride* in his whoredom? As the wise man saith: "They are glad when they have done evil and rejoice in things that are stark naught." Is not the adulterer also *idle*, and delighteth in no godly exercise, but only in that his most filthy and beastly pleasure? Is not his mind abstract and utterly drawn away from all virtuous studies and fruitful labours, and only given to *carnal imaginations*? Doth not the whoremonger give his mind to *gluttony* that he may be the more apt to serve his lusts and carnal pleasures? Doth not the adulterer give his mind to *covetousness* and to polling and pilling of other, that he may be the more able to maintain his harlots and whores, and to continue in his filthy and unlawful love? Swelleth he not also with *envy* against other, fearing that his prey should be allured and taken away from him?

> Again, is he not *ireful* and replenished with wrath and displeasure, even against his best beloved, if at any time his beastly and devilish request be letted? (Ibid., my emphasis).

If we follow the author's inventory of evils and types of behaviour deriving from adultery, we obtain a list which progressively includes pride, idleness, carnal imaginations (lust), gluttony, covetousness (avarice), envy, wrath. Adultery, in other words, is the source of the most dreadful and repugnant depravities: the seven deadly sins. Although the order preferred in the *Sermon* does not follow the traditional arrangement,[9] the explicit reference to capital sins coherently suits "the pastoral functions of giving and receiving catechetical lessons and preparing for the meditative introspection needed for confession" (Newhauser 2012, 5).

The condition of adulterers described by the homily as "bondslaves and miserable captives to the spirit of darkness" (101) sounds like Antony's self-deploring comment after losing in the crucial battle in 3.13:

> But when we in our viciousness grow hard –
> O, misery on 't! – the wise gods seel our eyes,
> In our own filth drop our clear judgments, make us
> Adore our errors, laugh at 's while we strut
> To our confusion.
> (3.13.116-20)

Does such similarity correspond to a general sense of self-reprobation, or is it to be scrutinised from a closer perspective, which makes the Roman general much more comparable to the condition of the adulterer described in the *Sermon*? Does Antony, in other words, commit the seven deadly sins and in what sense? To what extent are they rooted in his adulterous relationship with Cleopatra?

Antony's path throughout the play is generally viewed as a descending parable: from the very beginning, when we are informed that sometimes "he is not Antony / He comes too short of that great property / Which still should go with Antony" (1.1.58-60), to the

9 For a more detailed discussion about the arrangement of deadly sins in medieval and early modern theology see Sweeney 2012.

"miserable change now at my end" (4.15.53), the General progresses through a "dizzying succession of defeats and victories, quarrels and reconciliations that follow upon Actium and culminate in Antony's death . . . an experience of self-loss or self-violation" (Kahn 1997, 118). The analysis which follows intends to retrace and interpret this process of loss of identity as the consequence of his being an adulterer, in the light of the *Sermon*'s doctrine about the seven deadly sins, in the same order as they are suggested in the homily.

The first and foremost sinful feature that the adulterer shows is, according to the *Sermon*, pride, "the chief of the seven deadly sins" (Hassel 2015, 257); it is also the only sin for which the homily quotes the Bible (Proverbs 2:14). Antony frequently boasts himself throughout the play, especially when he needs to compare his military power to Caesar's. How not to interpret his unreasonable insistence on fighting at sea as a clear and fatal expression of his pride? In vain does Enobarbus try to dissuade him from the desperate enterprise: "Their ships are yare, yours heavy" (3.7.38); even after the tragic loss at sea, Antony's proudly proclaims his self-confidence: "Fortune knows / We scorn her most when most she offers blows" (3.11.74-5). This is more than a manly competition, since Antony's need to assert his identity largely depends on Cleopatra's manipulative power: "His surrenders to her wily charms, combined with her perceived betrayals, impel him to reassert his masculinity and his Roman identity precisely through his emulous bond with Caesar" (Kahn 1997, 116). As a consequence of such a disrupting influence, Antony often has to assert his identity: while, on the one hand, "Antony's proper 'self' compromised by the perceived lust and luxury of the East, he can only be described as 'transform'd', as 'not Antony' (1.1.12, 59)" (Bates 2013, 210), on the other, he often feels the urgency to proclaim this identity pompously: "Have you no ears? I am / Antony yet" (3.13.97-8). In addition, frequently in the play, he reminds us of his vaunted ancestry – including divinities like Mars, Hercules, and Atlas (Caporicci 2016) –, which fuels his ego by making him sound exaggeratedly bold: "The next time I do fight / I'll make Death love me, for I will contend / Even with his pestilent scythe." (3.13.197-9).

Reformed preachers insisted that the sin of adultery also deteriorates manly vigour and makes the sinner "delighteth in

no godly exercise" (Bray 2015, 101); in other words, the adulterer commits the capital sin of sloth, which corresponds to "physical or spiritual laziness, leading to culpable inactivity" (Hassel 2015, 329). The magnetic force which Cleopatra exercises over him is unequivocally defined by Antony as the cause of his indolence: "I must from this enchanting queen break off. / Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know, / My idleness doth hatch." (1.2.135-7); this greatly contrasts his Roman industriousness to the point that he laments that "we bring forth weeds / When our quick mind lie still" (1.2.115-16), thus admitting that the Egyptian Queen's presence interferes with his political as well as personal responsibilities: he is "drawn away from all virtuous studies and fruitful labours" (Bray 2015, 101), as the *Sermon* puts it. "Neither Alexander nor Caesar", Ania Loomba noted, "allowed their sexual liaisons to distract them from their imperial enterprise, and both returned home to conduct other missions of conquest" (2002, 117). Instead, had it not been imposed to him by the contingencies of his role and Fulvia's death, Antony would not have departed from Egypt, nor from the comfortable condition of Cleopatra's palace: "The beds i'th'East are soft; and thanks to you / That called me timelier than my purpose hither, / For I have gained by't" (2.6.50-3), he replies to Pompey's amazement when the latter finds him back in Rome. Not only does Antony's will seem to be undermined by Cleopatra's attraction, but his own strength and bodily energy too, which are part of the Roman concept of virtue: "Cleopatra, doubly Other in terms of gender and culture, shakes the very foundations of *virtus* in Antony" (Kahn 1997, 116) and keeps him away from his duties, "tied up . . . in a field of feasts" (2.1.23).

Antony and Cleopatra's relationship includes, of course, sex, but their intercourse is often referred to as lust. Among the seven deadly sins, lust marks the play the most explicitly; the term appears five times and is likewise associated to both lovers, who do not seem to differ much in their lasciviousness: while Cleopatra is metaphorically epitomised by lust – Octavia is an impediment "'tween his lust and him" (3.6.62), says Caesar –, Antony is "ne'er-lust-wearied" (2.1.39).[10] The insistence on the libidinous peculiarity of Antony

10 See also 1.1.10, 2.1.22, and 3.67.

and Cleopatra's liaison serves the purpose, if necessary, to reinforce the dissimilarity between their relationship and marriage, in the sense that while the sacred bond does include sexual intercourse, here sex is perverted and vitiated to the point that it becomes the distinctive trait of the play. Although the Reformation rejected the traditionally Catholic profession of marriage as a sacrament, the two faiths never excluded sexual activity from the nuptial tie, and both insisted on the sinfulness of extra-marital sexuality.[11] It is true that Protestantism emphasised the importance of sex as "both the proof and the articulation of the reformed reinvention of marriage" (Swift 2013, 84), and that the Reformers' insistence on marital sex as "a minor sacrament" (83) marked the confessional shift from one faith to another, but neither of them ceased to condemn adultery as a sin:

> By taking as his central figure a foreign queen who was already a symbol of wanton sexuality and political seduction in European culture, Shakespeare comments on a long tradition of writing in which sexual passion expresses, but also sabotages, imperial ambition . . . an Egyptian wanton, as the very antithesis of a chaste Roman wife (Loomba 2002, 112).

Adultery also affects Antony's bodily functions and his appetite. Not only does the play often include moments of joyful conviviality, even before war,[12] but the play states a long-standing association between Egypt and food, which traces back even to Julius Caesar who, according to Pompey, "grew fat with feasting there" (2.6.64). Furthermore, Antony's attraction to the Queen is presented in terms

11 Although the Catholic teaching about marriage preferred the ideal of virginity over married life, it "held [it] as a sacrament" (Swift 2013, 68); the Reformation, on the other hand, inextricably associated marriage to sexual intercourse and, by opposing it to adultery and marital unfaithfulness, preachers fostered the Protestant idea of marriage as a necessity against lust: "The reformed treatment of sexual activity is marked by a close consideration of the physical body. The logical consequence of the reformed celebration of married – legitimate – sexual activity is an intense attention to the physical depravities of illegitimate sexual activity" (Swift 2013, 82).

12 "Come, / Let's have one other gaudy night. Call to me / All my sad captains. Fill our bowls once more. / Let's mock the midnight's bell" (3.13.187-9), says Antony to incite the soldiers to fight.

of gluttonous desires; thus, while the General is unmanageably hungry, Cleopatra is his "Egyptian dish" (2.6.128) as well as a talented cook: "Other women cloy / The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry /Where most she satisfies" (2.2.246-8). Tzachi Zamir has included eating among "the communicative acts that invest this affair" (2007, 131); however, I would like to argue that the way in which the play refers to food and eating is more than a convivial activity, rather, it accounts for Antony's sinful dependence on Cleopatra, which also invests his appetite. Even Pompey is aware of Antony's weakness and wishes "Epicurean cooks / Sharpen with cloyless sauce his appetite / That sleep and feeding may prorogue his honour / Even till a Lethe'd dullness" (2.1.24-27).

In a couple of scenes Shakespeare presents Antony in a particularly benevolent perspective, especially in his relationship with his comrades and soldiers. Despite the hostile fate, he seems to retain his generosity and leadership, mainly when he intends to remunerate them for their loyalty and self-denial. He is ready to let the soldiers have his possessions after the loss in Act 3: "My treasure's in the harbour. Take it" (3.11.11), and when he sees Scarus bleeding, he promises: "I will reward thee / Once for thy sprightly comfort, and tenfold / For thy good valour" (4.7.14-16). Such generous and altruistic acts appear to partly contradict the presentation of Antony as avaricious, as the *Sermon* intends the adulterer; nevertheless, when in Act 4 fate seems to assist him again, by leading his army towards an unexpected victory, his generosity collapses and decays into vulgar lasciviousness so much so that he is willing to let Scarus have Cleopatra: "Behold this man. Commend unto his lips thy favouring hand. Kiss it, my warrior" (4.8.22-23). The Egyptian Queen is easily traded and exchanged for the soldier's allegiance to his leader; once again, this makes Antony appear similar to the adulterer described in the *Sermon*, who uses his goods only in order to "maintain his harlots and whores" (Bray 2015, 101). Antony's avarice is also one of the causes of the grudge among the triumvirs: not only does he claim his possessions and accuses Caesar of unjustness – "having in Sicily / Sextus Pompeius spoiled, we had not rated him / His part o'th'isle" (3.6.25-27) –, but he is unwilling to share the spoils of his own military campaigns when Caesar exacts them:

> ANTONY . . . but then in his Armenia
> And other of his conquered kingdoms, I
> Demand the like.
> MAECENAS He'll never yield to that.
> (3.6.36-8)

Antony's relationship with Caesar implies a sense of great rivalry, which makes their political and military views diverge as in a challenge of power: together with pride – and strictly associated to it – stands Antony's envy. As if in front of a magical mirror, Antony asks the soothsayer to predict "whose fortunes shall rise higher, Caesar's or mine?" (2.3.15), but when the fortune-teller warns him against Caesar's superiority – "Thy lustre thickens / When he shines by" (26-7) –, Antony peevishly admits that he cannot cope with him:

> He hath spoken true. The very dice obey him,
> And in our sports my better cunning faints
> Under his chance. If we draw lots, he speeds;
> His cocks do win the battle still of mine
> When it is all to naught, and his quails ever
> Beat mine, inhooped, at odds.
> (2.3.32-7)

Furthermore, Antony shows his resentful envy in a way that adheres to the *Sermon* even more faithfully. According to the homily, the adulterer does indeed prove to be envious when "fearing that his prey should be allured and taken away from him" (Bray 2015, 101); Antony performs a similar reaction when he catches Cleopatra in the act of having her hand kissed by Thidias:

> To let a fellow that will take rewards
> And say "God quit you!" be familiar with
> My playfellow, your hand, this kingly seal
> And plighter of high hearts! O, that I were
> Upon the hill of Basan, to outroar
> The hornèd herd!
> (3.13.128-3)

Finally, Antony acts angrily in several circumstances even though he generally looks rather patient and indulgent to Cleopatra's capricious behaviour: in 1.3, when he is about to "give breathing to his purpose" (15) to leave Egypt and return to Rome, Cleopatra interrupts him five times, but he tolerates her unwearyingly, and amiably calls her "my dearest queen" (18) and "Most sweet queen" (32). Over the play, they quarrel several times and even though the General swears to leave her more than once, he repeatedly forgives her. Nevertheless, things rapidly change after the tremendous defeat at sea in Act 3: when Antony surprises Cleopatra offering her hand to Caesar's messenger, Thidias, as a sign of her surrender and submission, he goes literally mad and after asserting his authority – "I am Antony yet" (3.13.97) – he orders to whip him. "Replenished with wrath and displeasure" (Bray 2015, 101), his rage turns him into a ferocious torturer, who commands: "Whip him, fellows, / Till like a boy you see him cringe his face / And whine aloud for mercy" (3.13.104-6).

According to the *Sermon*, wrath spoils the soul and the mind of the adulterer "even against his beloved, if at any time his beastly and devilish request be letted" (Bray 2015, 101), as Antony does when he bursts into rage against Cleopatra and starts to doubt his insensible choices:

> You have been a boggler ever.
> But when we in our viciousness grow hard –
> Oh, misery on't! – the wise gods seel our eyes,
> In our own filth drop our clear judgments, make us
> Adore our errors.
> (3.13.115-9)

He reacts even more ferociously after the final loss in Act 4 when, believing to have been betrayed by Cleopatra, Antony threatens her: "But better 'twere / Thou fell'st into my fury, for one death / Might have prevented many" (4.12.37). What has provoked such a rapid change? Anger, Antony admits, accompanied by disappointment and frustration: as his qualities are being undervalued by Caesar – "He makes me angry with him" (3.13.146) –, Antony has turned furious, which makes him also extremely vulnerable and weak to the eyes of his enemies. Thus, Enobarbus exhorts Caesar to take advantage of

Antony's present mood: "To be furious / Is to be frighted out of fear, and in that mood / The dove will peck the estridge (3.13.200-202); similarly, Maecenas warns against the risks of being angry: "When one so great begins to rage, he's hunted / Even to falling . . . Never anger / Made good guard for itself" (4.1.8-11).

5. "This stinking puddle of whoredom": the Performance of Adultery Across the Mediterranean

In 2.3, after hastily bidding Octavia farewell, Antony decides to go back to Cleopatra: "I will to Egypt" (37). Perhaps never in the play is his struggle more sincere than in this short soliloquy, which ends with the well-known words: "I'th' East my pleasure lies" (2.3.39). Through such metonymy, which also recurs many times in the play (e.g. 3.11.51; 4.15.43; 4.15.76; 5.2.114), Antony creates an explicit reference to Cleopatra herself by referring to the country she rules over. At the same time, he also creates a strong association between his pleasure and a specific place; Antony's pleasure, in other words, is geographically located not in Rome, but in Egypt. As general criticism has frequently pointed out (Wilders 2002; Bates 2013, Loomba, 2002), the whole play presents a dichotomic structure which radically opposes these two locations not just in terms of contrasting geography, but as two cultural systems of values: masculine/feminine, common good/demands of feelings, military rigour/intensity of emotions, to mention but a few. Yet, what apparently seems to be a relationship based on opposing contrasts should, instead, be viewed more in terms of recurrent transgression from one side to another and vice versa. The Mediterranean Sea, therefore, more than a divisive presence, which separates Rome from Alexandria, ends up being a place of contravention and violation of confines, "a region of boundary and crossing par excellence" (de Sousa 2018, 137). The abundant number of scenes, which frequently disrupts the unity of the play, is, according to John Wilders, the very first performative symbol of such transgression: "[w]ith its constant shifting from one part of the Mediterranean to another and its time-span of ten years, *Antony and Cleopatra* clearly violates these principles and thereby offended contemporary educated tastes" (2002, 12).

If highlighting the Mediterranean setting of this play is rather superfluous, since the audience may easily perceive that "the action shuttles throughout the Mediterranean" (Barbour 2003, 56), it results necessary, instead, to study and reflect on the multifarious suggestions which the *mare nostrum* arises within the play, especially if considered from a cultural point of view. As Richmond Barbour has maintained, "*Antony and Cleopatra* posits the alternate 'oriental' danger to 'western' discipline: absorption and effeminacy. Testing the nomadism of power . . . among forty-seven scenes, with regular recursions to Alexandria and Rome" (2003, 56). Is the theme of adultery, so far examined in the play, reinforced by the fact that "this most detestable sin" is committed not in the homeland, but "I'th'East"?

According to John Gillies, "the sea is Antony's symbolic element" (1994, 116), but the sea itself – the Mediterranean – generates a strong sense of inconsistency and danger in the play, first in terms of military and political action. Enobarbus' insistence on opposing Caesar on land sounds like tragic doom since Antony is notoriously unready for such a trial: "No disgrace / Shall fall you for refusing him at sea, / Being prepared for land" (3.7.38-40). Does Antony's stubbornness – "By sea, by sea" (40) – not sound, once again, like a sign of his pride, which eventually will lead him to his tragic loss? It surely does, and the sea, as Gillies noted, turns out to be "fatal" (1994, 116) for Antony, whose double attempt to wage war by sea ends in defeat.

Military defeat also corresponds to self-degradation, to the loss of Antony's own identity and moral values, which occurs because of his transgression with Cleopatra, whom Antony often blames for his misfortunes. It is precisely because of Cleopatra that the sea acquires the status of "chimeric, formless, endless, uncertain, phantasmal" (Gillies 1994, 117); her presence across the sea – even 'at' sea while the masculine game of war is being played (3.10) – makes the Mediterranean a threatening place to Antony, the place of his self-loss, since "under Cleopatra's barbarizing influence, Antony, progressively unmanned, flagrantly flouts republican values and codes" (Nyquist 1994, 98). All the epithets which are recurrently attributed to the Egyptian Queen contribute to render her identity elusive, fleeting, and, ultimately, ambiguous, to the point that her

'otherness' famously baffles even Enobarbus's accurate portrayal – "It beggared all description" (2.2.208). She is the "eroticized, chaotic 'other'" (Nyquist 1994, 96), whose orientalism is rendered through a threatening mixture of "luxury, decadence, splendour, sensuality, appetite, effeminacy and eunuchs" (Gillies 1994, 118); in this sense, she epitomises the 'Mediterranean' world, which "oscillates between stable and unstable, known and unknown" (de Sousa 2018, 139). Cleopatra's alterity is conveyed through the several terms by which she is labelled, each emphasising her race and nationality (1.1.10), her semi-goddess identity (2.2.210), her seductive power (1.2.135), yet one stands out and connects, once more, the play to the *Sermon*: 'whore'.

Although the *Sermon Against Whoredom and Uncleanness* explicitly deals with adultery, the text constantly substitutes the term with the noun 'whoredom'. Throughout the three parts of the homily, it is repeated sixty-seven times; seven times the author mentions the noun 'whore/whores', two times the synonym 'harlot', and nine times the text refers to the adulterer as a 'whoremonger'. Such abundance of references leads the listener to identify the sin of adultery with whoredom, to the point that even though the homily's aim is to warn against any sort of illicit sexual intercourse, the substitution is a precise harbinger of discriminating allusions. The *Sermon* seems to highlight adultery exclusively as a male subject's fault caused by a female one, an act of extramarital sex in which a male subject has an illicit intercourse with a woman, whose reputation is conveyed by the denigratory definition of 'whore'. The sin against which the *Homily* roars is thus charged with gender-oriented instances according to which the female subject is constructed as a seducing, dangerous, and lascivious 'other', especially if compared to a legitimate wife: "For when this most detestable sin in once crept into the breast of the adulterer so that *he* is entangled with unlawful and unchaste love, straightways his true and lawful wife is despised; her presence is abhorred; her company stinketh and his loathsome . . . for her husband can brook her no longer" (Bray 2015, 102, emphasis mine).

The Rome/Egypt dichotomy too, upon which *Antony and Cleopatra* is geographically and culturally built, is strengthened by the presence of women who live on both sides of the Mediterranean:

a Roman wife (Fulvia/Octavia) and an Egyptian mistress, who represents "primarily a threat to accepted bourgeois domestic and marital codes" (Nyquist 1994, 96). Yet, while in the case of Fulvia, her unexpected death is received by Enobarbus as a possibility to legalise the illicit relationship between Antony and Cleopatra – "when old robes are worn out, there are members to make new" (1.2.171) –, Shakespeare introduces Octavia in such a way that her presence emphasises the Egyptian Queen's otherness: when Caesar's sister is first introduced, she is said to be "admired" (2.2.126) by Agrippa, who celebrates "her virtue and … general graces" (2.2.138). Even more strikingly, Octavia's very first words depict her as a pious and devout woman, who intercedes for her husband's sake: "All which time / Before the gods my knee shall bow my prayers / To them for you" (2.3.3-5). Obedient to her brother's will, faithfully devout to her husband, weak, mild, and ambassador of peace (3.4.29-30), not only is Octavia Fulvia's best successor as a wife, but she functions as a fatal mirror from which the distorted and uncanny image of Cleopatra emerges: while on the Roman bank of the Mediterranean chaste and obedient women long to see their men return home safely, and are ready to pay the homage of their respect and submission to them, across the sea lives a dangerous and lascivious queen, who challenges male authority and even his virility. Highlighting the Mediterranean perspective of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, therefore, necessary implies, as Mary Nyquist has put it, "to demonstrate the *interplay* of discourses on the 'other' – colonialist, religious, constitutional, sexual in early modern European representations of 'barbaric' female ruler" (1994, 88).

Cleopatra's otherness is also performed through the use of the offensive term 'whore', which, as Kay Stanton has argued, "for women . . . functions in hegemonic use in a roughly similar way as the word 'nigger' does for blacks and the word 'queer' used to do for homosexuals: to keep troubling individuals grouped in their marginalized place and to insist that the place is a vulgar, degraded one from which they can never escape" (2014, 18). In discussing the recurrence of the word in Shakespeare's works, Stanton lists four repetitions in this play (21), although it "contains many near-synonyms for 'whore' applied to Cleopatra" (29). When Caesar first calls her like this (3.6.68), he is speaking to his sister, Octavia;

as in a choir, Roman male voices harmonise with each other in praising her as "my most wronged sister" (66), "most wretched" (78), "lady" (92), "madam" (93) while, by explicitly calling Cleopatra "whore" (68) and "trull" (97),[13] she is constructed as the cultural – and dangerous – 'other'. Yet, what is expressed in Act 3 through an explicit offence is actually a recurrent theme in the play, as when Caesar, for example, mentions the risks for Antony's health: "If he filled / His vacancy with his voluptuousness, / Full surfeits and the dryness of his bones / Call on him for't" (1.4.25-28); since "[o]ne of the effects of syphilis was thought to be the drying up of the bones" (Wilders 2002, 115n27-8), Caesar connects once again Cleopatra to prostitution and sexual corruption. By calling her 'whore', or by merely implying it, the play contributes to give an image of Cleopatra which is associated to danger, sin, and temptation; the threat, then, is strengthened by the performative comparison with Octavia, whose presence emphasises the Egyptian Queen's otherness by performing one more dichotomy: wife/whore. "In what case then", comments the Sermon, "are those adulterers which for the love of an whore put away their true and lawful wife against all law, right, reason and conscience?" (Bray 2015, 103).

The threat does not regard merely the marital bond established between Antony and Octavia, but challenges the capitalistic empire ruled by these men, who share, as Nyquist put it, "Greek bourgeois ideals of femininity and monogamy against their counterparts in 'barbarian' societies, female promiscuity and lasciviousness, which include, inevitably, a lust for power" (1994, 89). Therefore, if "each heart in Rome does love and pity" Octavia (3.6.94), Antony – like the prodigal son (Luke 15:30) – has squandered his goods and possessions with the prostitute Queen by giving her "his empire" (3.6.67) and "his potent regiment" (97). Similarly, the *Sermon* expresses concerns about the economic consequences of whoredom: "What patrimony, what substance, what goods, what riches doth whoredom shortly consume and bring to naught!" (Bray 2015, 102).

The epithet 'whore' does not appear in *Antony and Cleopatra* in an exclusively negative meaning; scholars like Stanton (2014), for example, have discussed its powerful resonance in the play by

13 A synonym of 'whore', as stated by John Wilders (2002, 192n97).

studying Cleopatra's definition of *regina meretrix* in terms of the play's connection with the Dionysian origin of the tragic genre, the Egyptian myth of Isis, and from a psycho-sexual point of view. What I argue here, instead, is that the term proves to be a further interesting and stimulating intersection between *Antony and Cleopatra* and the *Sermon Against Whoredom and Uncleanness*, so much so that it underlines Cleopatra's otherness by leveraging "the misogynistic stance of Greco-Roman-influenced Western Judeo-Christian cultures that all women are degraded by being, or potentially being, whores . . . a weapon used to justify male dominance and exclusively male social, legal, moral, political, economic, verbal, creative, and religious authority" (Stanton 2014, 86). By placing her on the opposite bank of the Mediterranean, Shakespeare allows Cleopatra to threaten and subvert the social and moral standards of Roman/Western society, represented by a faithful and pious wife. As Ania Loomba put it, "Shakespeare harnesses a long history and wide geography to early modern English anxieties about women's power, foreigners, and empire" (2002, 112), thus transforming the Sea into a "stinking puddle" from which the sin of whoredom, the cause and origin of many other evils, overflows.

6. Enobarbus between the Pulpit and the Stage.

Although the story of *Antony and Cleopatra* and the *Sermon Against Whoredom and Uncleaness* intersect at many and interesting crossroads, one peculiar aspect seems to make the two texts diverge: while the latter expresses very harsh comments about extra-marital affairs, defining adultery as "this most detestable sin" as well as "most abominable", such remarks are absent in Shakespeare, whose story of the licentious relationship between the married Roman triumvir and the Queen of Egypt still arouses admiration and enthusiasm. Thus, unlike the *Sermon*, while showing adultery in an explicit way, the play does avoid commenting on the moral aspect of the story, which remains undecided. In this regard, John Wilders has argued that "Shakespeare's judgement of his characters is less easy to discern" (2002, 38), and that "any attempt to determine the opinion of the

author is necessarily difficult if not impossible" (39). Shakespeare, on the other hand, was not a preacher, and Renaissance drama had long abandoned the didactic aim of its medieval counterpart; therefore, it is not surprising if such ambivalent positions sound like "an inevitable simplification of a challenging complex work" (41). When it comes to the problem of religious matters, then, the quest for Shakespeare's own position seems even more complicated since while looking for hints of his faith, one inevitably forgets his peculiar "use of a habitual technique, that of presenting oblique or parodic versions of scriptural events familiar to the audience through Bible-reading, sermons, church windows, emblem books, and the like" (Kaula 1981, 211). In this regard, Shakespeare also distanced himself from its main source, Plutarch's *Parallel Lives of the Greek and Romans*, which he read in the English version of Sir Thomas North. The voice of the Greek biographer, who "frequently comments on and judges the major character" (Wilders 2002, 58), is muted in the play, which makes the playwright's position even less detachable. Yet, the character of Enobarbus stands out as he frequently performs as a preacher through his sermon-like unequivocal comments. It is precisely through the character of Enobarbus – I would like to argue – that "cross-fertilization of Reformation sermons and Renaissance plays" (Crockett 1995, 7) occurred most evidently in *Antony and Cleopatra*. When Cleopatra turns to him when she needs to take a decision after the loss of Act 3, Enobarbus's bare comment – "Think, and die" (3.13.1) – resonates as a fatal *memento mori*, which invites the listener to consider the situation gravely, and when he is asked to give a moral interpretation of the event, he does not hesitate to blame Antony "that would make his will / Lord of his reason" (3.13.3-4). Just like the Roman adulterer, who has allowed his passion (will) to subjugate his reason, analogously, the *Sermon* admonishes the adulterer: "And what more dishonour can we do to ourselves than through uncleanness to lose so excellent a dignity and freedom and to become bondslaves and miserable captives to the spirits of darkness?" (Bray 2015, 100).

Enobarbus's position reverberates on many occasions throughout the play, but it is in Act 3 that it acquires a peculiar performative dimension since he starts speaking aside. While the audience witness Antony's progressive fall towards the ultimate defeat, the soldier's

voice recurrently catechises them about the consequences of his choice: "'Twas a shame no less than was his loss" (3.13.10-11); "I see men's judgment are / A parcel of their fortunes, and things outward / Do draw the inward quality after them" (3.13.31-3); "Sir, sir, thou art so leaky / That we must leave thee to thy sinking" (3.13.67-8); "When valour preys on reason, / It eats the sword it fights with" (3.13.204-5); from this perspective, Enobarbus acts like more than "an ironic and detached commentator" (Wilders 2002, 59). Nevertheless, in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Enobarbus's role is as complex as the play itself, since he himself "changes his mind" (39), regrets leaving Antony and eventually calls him "nobler than my revolt is infamous" (4.9.22).

In Act 5, Caesar's voice joins Enobarbus' expressions of praise, and he too eventually celebrates Antony's valour:

> thou my brother, my competitor
> In top of all design, my mate in empire,
> Friend and companion in the front of war,
> The arm of mine own body, and the heart
> Where mine his thoughts did kindle.
> (5.1.42-6)

At the end of the play, it is always Caesar who gives voice to the audience's awe: "She shall be buried by her Antony. / No grave upon the earth shall clip in it / A pair so famous" (5.2.357-9).

In conclusion, as for the whole play, these characters' remarks coexist with the sense of admiration towards the two grand protagonists; far from being a sign of Shakespeare's indecisiveness, this feature epitomises the necessity for Renaissance drama to adapt and reinterpret cultural and social issues in a new and innovative way. Despite the similarities, then, which allow us to read *Antony and Cleopatra* in the light of the *Sermon Against Whoredom and Uncleaness*, and despite scholarly consensus about the fact that "both in their manner of delivery and in their effects on audiences, Tudor/ Stuart sermons were performances" (Crockett 1995, 8), we must acknowledge that the cross-fertilisation of dramatic and religious discourses does not imply identification, each of them keeping its distinctive nature.

7. Conclusion

In *Antony and Cleopatra* Shakespeare staged the love story between a married man and woman: shortly after the death of his first wife, Antony gets married again, but his passion for Cleopatra brings him back to his mistress; general criticism has usually agreed on labelling this as an adulterous relationship. The comparative analysis of *Antony and Cleopatra* and the *Sermon Against Whoredom and Uncleaness* has shown interesting connections which allow us to argue that, although the homily cannot be included within Shakespeare's direct sources, its contents and message are nonetheless reverberated in the play. Early modern audience, who attended the performance of Antony's "loss of his very identity" (Kahn 1997, 116) as a consequence of his lustful attraction to Cleopatra, may have recognised in the play echoes of the Protestant teachings about the indissolubility of matrimony as well as about the moral risks of extra-marital sexual affairs: "Since the Reformation", Crockett has argued, "stage play and the Reformation sermon perform the same work – helping audiences adjust to and control the peculiar ambiguities of the early modern period – the two modes can be evaluated in the same terms" (1995, 3). Accordingly, the present study has attempted to read *Antony and Cleopatra* in the light of the Christian teaching about marriage epitomised by the *Sermon.*

What the male protagonist goes through is an ongoing process of withdrawing from his public and family duties under the influence of the Queen of Egypt, who repeatedly attracts him and fatally opposes him to Caesar (Kahn 2013). Also, from the perspective of the early-modern preaching about adultery, against which the *Sermon* catechised contemporary churchgoers, Antony distances from himself, from his spiritual dimension as well as from his virtuous conscience. This hyperbolic path of decadence corresponds to an act of "exorbitant" transgression (Gillies 1994, 114), which is largely dependent on Cleopatra, the "inconstant 'eastern' other, speaking for, and from, another world" (Barbour 2003, 66). When read in the light of the suggestions encouraged by the *Sermon Against Whoredom and Uncleaness*, the Mediterranean Sea, the main setting of the play, does then become the symbol of such a cultural as well

as moral contravention, the sea/puddle from which an overflowing mixture of sins spring.

Among those who express their criticism towards the sins committed by Antony and Cleopatra more openly is Enobarbus, who "acts as a commentator on the characters and action of the play" (Wilders 2002, 39). However, if until Act 3 he pronounces *his* homily against the "licentious manner of living" (Bray 2015, 103), he ends up voicing his admiration for Antony and regrets forsaking him (4.9.21-25). This coexistence of moral judgment towards the two lovers and expressions of general sympathy and admiration for them is, in the end, what differentiates *Antony and Cleopatra* from the *Sermon* the most.

Shakespeare was a poet, not a preacher: although the cultural and religious context of his time certainly imbued his plays (Crockett, 1995), he always reinterpreted it through his own poetical voice and inspiration. Even though the *Sermon Against Whoredom and Uncleaness* highlights interesting and various intersections with *Antony and Cleopatra*, therefore, through its protagonists Shakespeare let love flourish unconstrained, a love which "bears it out even to the edge of doom" (Sonnet 116.12), a "marriage of true minds", against which no authority may "admit *impediments*" (1, my emphasis).

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