Shakespeare and the Mediterranean • 3

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Edited by Cristiano Ragni

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Shakespeare and the Mediterranean

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Contributors

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Amelia Platt recently graduated from the University of Cambridge with a degree in English. Her undergraduate final year dissertation explored the figure of the detective in 'Golden Age' crime fiction, focusing on the works of Ngaio Marsh and Dorothy L. Sayers. It explored how the detectives featured in these texts experience a 'crisis of authority' relating to their detecting, thus compromising the justice they seek to administer. She is due to begin a Masters in English Literary Studies at the University of York in September, where she hopes to continue her analysis of crime fiction.

Cristiano Ragni is Assistant Professor (RtdA) of English Literature at the University of Verona. After earning his Ph.D. in Comparative Literature at the University of Perugia and carrying out part of his research at the Warburg Institute in London, he was a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the Universities of Turin and Genoa. His main research interests lie in the relations between political thinking, theology, and theatre in the Elizabethan age, and in the receptions of classical antiquity in modern and contemporary literature. For the project *In the Margins of Theatre* (IMT) at the University of Verona, he is studying the *marginalia* that can be found in early printed English playbooks. Among his recent publications, besides essays in edited collections and peer-reviewed journals, are the book *La Nazione e il Teatro. Alberico Gentili, Shakespeare e l'Inghilterra elisabettiana* (2020), and the Italian editions of Christopher Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris* (2017), and *Hero and Leander* (2023). Dr Ragni is a member of the Editorial Board of *Skenè. Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies* and Managing Editor of the series *Skenè. Texts and Studies*.

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Introduction

Cristiano Ragni

1.

In Act 3 of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, the political and personal tensions between Antony and Octavius Caesar reach a critical juncture. Torn between his duties as a Roman leader and his love for Cleopatra, Antony faces mounting pressure as the triumvirate's alliance fractures. Octavius Caesar's strategic acumen and shrewd diplomacy highlight Antony's inner conflict and the deteriorating bond between Rome and Egypt. In 3.7, the clash between the two eventually becomes unavoidable:

> Antony Is it not strange, Canidius,
> That from Tarentum and Brundusium
> He [Octavius] could so quickly cut the Ionian Sea
> And take in Toryne? You have heard on 't, sweet?
> Cleopatra Celerity is never more admired
> Than by the negligent.
> Antony A good rebuke,
> Which might have well becomed the best of men,
> To taunt at slackness. Canidius, *we will fight*
> *With him by sea.*
> Cleopatra *By sea, what else?*
> (20-8; emphasis added)[1]

Both Antony and Cleopatra, as these lines demonstrate, are irresistibly drawn to the sea and agree to fight the Romans on the

1 All references to *Antony and Cleopatra* are from Shakespeare 1995 and will appear parenthetically in the text.

water. Attempts by members of their retinue to dissuade them from such an incomprehensible decision are to no avail: at Actium, as History teaches us, a naval battle will indeed take place, although with disastrous consequences for Egypt. "It is important", as Agostino Lombardo has noticed, "that Cleopatra, and she alone, supports Antony in his crazy decision: this is what makes them a world apart . . . and also unites them in their refusal to obey [that] reason . . ." (1971; trans. mine) which instead guides their enemy. This scene is not only functional to illustrate the opposition between Egypt and Rome on which the play is built,[2] but is also one of the many possible examples confirming how much the dimension of the sea is intrinsic to the dynamics involving the characters and the events that affect them. The sea in question is, of course, the Mediterranean, whose centrality in Shakespeare's – and, more generally, early modern Europe's – imaginary is well-documented.

From Fernand Braudel (1949) to Peregrin Horden and Nicholas Purcell (2000; 2020), from Peter Burke (2002) and David Abulaifa (2003) to Filippo DeVivo (2015), just to name a few, scholars have variously underscored the indispensable role played by the Mediterranean Sea in the early modern age as a crucial hub of economic, cultural, and political activity, facilitating extensive trade networks that connected Europe, North Africa, and the Near East, and enabling the exchange of goods, peoples, ideas, and technologies. The Mediterranean's strategic position allowed for the rise of powerful maritime empires, such as the Ottoman one and the Venetian Republic, which dominated trade routes and exerted significant influence over their territories. Consequently, the sea also served as a battleground for religious and political conflicts, including the Crusades and the struggle between Christian and Muslim powers. The bustling ports along the shores of this exceptional "arena of interaction, of encounters, and exchanges" (Burke 2002, 136), such as Venice, Constantinople, and Alexandria, stood out at the time as melting pots of diverse

2 For this, which is one of dominant themes of *Antony and Cleopatra*, see, among others, Granville-Barker 1925; Charney 1961; Schanzer 1963; Kott 1966; Thomas 1989; Sacerdoti 2007; Thomas Crane 2009; and Cantor 2017.

cultures; a multifaceted mosaic reproducing the vision, to put it in Braudel's famous words, of "ten, twenty or a hundred Mediterraneans" (2001, 14).

In Shakespeare's output, the Mediterranean Sea serves as a significant geographical and symbolic element, providing a rich backdrop for most of his narratives. "His Mediterranean scenarios", as Silvia Bigliazzi has put it in her Introduction to the first volume of the series, "span from Venice to Aleppo, from Athens to Alexandria, from Parthia to Algiers, encompassing Romans, Goths, Moors, Egyptians and Greeks, and raising questions of race, ethnicity, class, gender, civilisation and barbarism" (2022, 15). Oscillating as he does between re-evocations of the classical world and expressions of contemporary anxieties, Shakespeare "engages in a process of estrangement of the Mediterranean" – this is Geraldo de Sousa's well-known argument – "to suggest that this region, so familiar to his imagination, abuts strange, unknown worlds" (2018, 142). Simultaneously presented as *mare nostrum* and *mare illorum* (Pechter 2004), Shakespeare's Mediterranean thus stands outs as the natural setting for tackling the complexities of human experience and the tumultuous events that unfold in his stories.[3]

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the Mediterranean Sea plays a particularly vital role. Maybe more than in other works, as prominent scholars as Caroline Spurgeon, Wolfgang H. Clemen, and George Wilson Knight have famously noted, Shakespeare seems to have identified sea-related images – and, by extension, water-imagery – as being peculiar to this story. Integral to the idea of "vastness" that is one of the "dominating note[s] in the play" (Spurgeon 1935, 350), "the sea is . . . constantly present to the mind" (Clemen 1951, 159), evoked as "something more free and unfettered than earth (i.e. Rome)'s solidity" (Wilson Kinght 1931, 235). Changeable, slippery, and unfathomable, the sea does indeed stand out as the perfect element to give shape to what has been defined as the play's 'sense of instability', which dominates both its more explicitly political

3 Shakespeare and the Mediterranean is a well-frequented topic. Besides the forementioned studies, see also Vitkus 2003, Clayton, Brock, and Forés 2004, Cantor 2006, Stewart 2007, and Mentz 2009. For the latest contributions, see Bigliazzi and Stelzer 2022 and Ciambella 2023.

dimension and the intricate, personal dynamics between the two eponymous characters.[4]

The Mediterranean Sea's vast expanse serves as a conduit for the action and movement within the play, illustrating the geopolitical significance of maritime dominance. In this sense, Shakespeare's deft reuse of his classical sources allows him to turn this Roman play into an echo chamber of contemporary anxieties regarding not only England's emergence as a global power, but also the Ottoman threat in the Eastern Mediterranean (Barbour 2003; Cantor 2014). Throughout *Antony and Cleopatra*, the strategic importance of the Mediterranean is evident in the political manoeuvrings and alliances formed. Both Octavius Caesar and the dyad Mark Antony-Cleopatra understand the critical importance of securing the Mediterranean for their own political agendas. For Octavius Caesar, gaining control over the Mediterranean Sea and defeating Antony is not just a military victory, but a consolidation of his power and a step toward becoming the unchallenged ruler of Rome. To succeed in this endeavour, however, the 'solid' Roman leader needs to face two enemies, Antony and Cleopatra, who are continuously associated with and said to partake of the ungraspably 'liquid' nature of that same sea. From the very beginning of the play, the passion entangling the general who "bestrid[es] the ocean" (5.2.82) and his Egyptian "Thetis" (3.7.60) is described as a "dotage" which "overflows the measure" (1.1.1-2), to set whose "bourn" a "new heaven" and a "new earth" must be found (16-17). Besides the fascinating echoes of Giordano Bruno's philosophy identified by Gilberto Sacerdoti in these lines (2009),[5] what is especially striking is the association

4 On the water imagery in *Antony and Cleopatra*, see Granville-Barker 1925; Charney 1961; Lombardo 1971; Loomba 1989; Gillies 1994; Wilders 1995; and Dollimore 2010.

5 Gilberto Sacerdoti connects *Antony and Cleopatra*'s recurring idea of 'overflowing the measure' and Antony's mention of a "new heaven" and a "new earth" to the cosmological 'earthquake' that shook Europe between the sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries, suggesting that the play is influenced by Giordano Bruno's 1584 *Dialoghi filosofici*, where he had envisioned a new and profoundly antichristian infinite universe with a central core of boundless heat and creative energy that perpetually overflows, regenerating itself and producing the infinite diversity of life.

between Antony and Cleopatra's love with famous images from St John's Book of Revelation: it is indeed their apocalyptic and 'overflowing' passion that threatens to dissolve the Roman world, as Janet Aldeman has brilliantly put it, into the "dangerous and fecund waters" of the Mediterranean Sea (1992, 189). If Antony and Cleopatra's 'apocalyptic' project eventually fails, Rome's success too is not perceived as definitive (Loomba 1989; Thomas 1989; Cantor 2017). In the light of the forementioned 'sense of instability', the beginning of the Roman Empire itself bears subtle traces of impending failure: not only in 5.2 does Octavius Caesar himself acknowledge the menace that Cleopatra's dead body continues to exert, exclaiming that ". . . she looks like sleep, / As she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace" (345-7); but most importantly, as Paul Cantor notices, at Shakespeare's time "Roman as a term of distinction means primarily Republican Roman and . . . [therefore] with the death of the Republic, true Romanness . . . begins to die also" (1976, 27). The Mediterranean thus becomes a battleground where the destiny of empires is decided, reflecting the broader themes of ambition, power, and the inevitable rise and fall of great leaders and ideals.

Being repeatedly associated to both Antony and Cleopatra, the Mediterranean Sea mirrors their emotional and psychological states and strategic machinations, and their fates are unsurprisingly intertwined with its waters. Cleopatra, in particular, embodies the sea's enigmatic and multifaceted character. Her moods and behaviours are as changeable as the sea, and her "infinite variety" (2.2.247) stands out as a formidable and unpredictable force. Antony's oscillation between Rome and Egypt, between duty and desire, also reflects the restless and uncertain tides of the Mediterranean Sea. It is maybe inevitable, then, that the fortune of such inconstant leaders should sink in the waters of that same sea when, in 3.10, inconstancy-incarnate Cleopatra flees the battle without warning and Antony turns his own ship to follow her lover's flight:

> Scarus She once being loofed,
> The noble ruin of her magic, *Antony,*
> *Claps on his sea-wing and*, like a doting mallard,
> Leaving the fight in height, *flies after her.*

I never saw an action of such shame.
(3.10.18-22, emphasis added)

Images related to the sea's vastness and changeability are continuously used by Shakespeare to evoke the complexity of the characters' inner lives, their ambitions, and their vulnerabilities. The interplay between the characters and the sea reflects their struggles to navigate the treacherous waters of power, love, and, ultimately, their own destiny.

Vast though it is, in *Antony and Cleopatra* the Mediterranean Sea is also surprisingly small, separating but at the same time uniting the two opposing – if porous – worlds of Rome and Egypt. It is always remarkable to note how quickly characters move across the sea in this play:

MESSENGER Thy biddings have been done, and *every hour,*
Most noble Caesar, shalt thou have report
How 'tis abroad . . .
(1.4.34-6; emphasis added)

says a Messenger to Octavius Caesar in Rome, and other similar emissaries constantly sail back and forth between Rome and Alexandria bringing news as to what happens on the opposite shores of the Mediterranean. So near everything seems to be that Jan Kott has famously defined the play as "a tragedy about the smallness of the world" (1966, 172): "The world is small, because one cannot escape it. The world is small, because it can be won" (173). The tragedy for Antony and Cleopatra originates from the fact that the world they want to win appears increasingly disconnected from reality; an imaginary "little O" where they can rule together as god-like sovereigns – Cleopatra "o'erpicturing Venus" (2.2.207) "in the habiliments of the goddess Isis" (3.7.17) and Antony as a Herculean Mars (Caporicci 2016). This fantasy, building on classical Mediterranean mythology, culminates in 5.2 where, despite the defeat, Cleopatra, apparelled like a reigning "queen" (226), continues to dream of Antony as a Roman-Egyptian emperor:

CLEOPATRA I dreamt there was an Emperor Antony.
O such another sleep, that I might see

> But such another man!
> . . .
> His face was as the heavens, and therein stuck
> A sun and moon, which kept their course, and lighted
> The little O, the earth.
> . . .
> His legs bestrid the ocean, his rear'd arm
> Crested the world . . .
> (76-83)

These words clearly expose "the dissonance between the world of the play as it is and as Cleopatra would like it to be" (Lovascio 2020, 5), and are tinged with a particularly cruel irony since they are uttered after she has learnt of Antony's suicide and therefore knows that they are destined to remain but a dream on another "little [wooden] O".

"No grave upon the earth", Octavius Caesar eventually exclaims before Antony's and Cleopatra's dead bodies, "shall clip in it / A pair so famous" (5.2.358-9), and then commands "high order" (364) be seen in their public funeral. For the Roman Empire to be established, Antony and Cleopatra's Mediterranean fantasy must be stifled in a stone monument. And yet, as mentioned above, at the end of this play the audience is left with the idea that, as Ania Loomba has maintained, any order is precarious (1989, 124-30) and that the "wide arch / of the rang'd empire" might eventually "melt", as Antony had hoped (1.1.34-5). As Shakespeare and his audience knew, after all, that destiny was to come about precisely with the expansion of Rome's Mediterranean trades and its opening up to other peoples. If that political line had certainly implied the end of the empire, however, it had also given origin to the beginning of a *translatio culturae* that was not only much alive in the early modern age, but continues to this day.

2.

The Mediterranean Sea in *Antony and Cleopatra* is a geographical and symbolic setting, encapsulating the strategic importance of maritime control and the fluidity of political and personal relations.

Understanding the broadly-meant 'Mediterraneity' of the play is thus integral to understanding its "infinite variety" (2.2.247), to borrow Shakespeare's words, which entails the playwright's transformation of his classical sources with his unique poetic and dramatic style, but also the exploration of the complexities of love, loyalty, or the inexorable march of History. These aspects are all brilliantly discussed in Stanley Wells and Paul Edmondson's "Prologue", which opens the collection. The two scholars start considering Shakespeare's debt to Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives* and underscore the multiple ways in which he enhances the classical anecdotes with dramatic flair and thus emphasises the complex psychology of the tragedy's eponymous characters. Within the fluid Mediterranean setting serving as a useful metaphor for the vast and unpredictable nature of the human experience, Wells and Edmondson show how Shakespeare complicates the legendary status of Antony and Cleopatra: he draws, they argue, a complex canvas of human identities that oscillates between transcendence and vulnerability enhanced by the continuous interplay between their public personas and private interactions.

The volume's Part 1 ("Performance and (Self-)Representation in *Antony and Cleopatra*") comprises three essays by Pasquale Pagano, Sina Will, and Rita de Carvalho Rodrigues, respectively. Reading the play together with the *Sermon Against Whoredom and Uncleaness*, Pagano discusses the thematic connections between the two works, suggesting that Shakespeare may have been influenced by Protestant views on marriage and adultery in his depiction of Antony and Cleopatra's adulterous passion. Antony's transformation under Cleopatra's influence reflects a departure from his ethical and spiritual obligations, which is symbolised by the Mediterranean Sea as an easy backdrop of moral transgression: "By placing her on the opposite bank of the Mediterranean", Pagano argues, "Shakespeare allows Cleopatra to threaten and subvert the social and moral standards of Roman/Western society . . . thus transforming the Sea into a 'stinking puddle' from which the sin of whoredom, the cause and origin of many other evils, overflows" (79). At the same time, the gradual shift from initial condemnation of the couple to later sympathising with Antony, voiced by an exceptional observer as Enobarbus, highlights the tension between

moral judgment and admiration that runs through the play, which, as Pagano shows, ultimately appears to celebrate love's resilience against societal constraints.

Sina Will analyses the various references to classical mythology in the play instead and shows that they "not only serve the purpose of creating an ancient Mediterranean setting but also highlight the different ways in which the characters may approach the representation of personal identity" (106). While initially appearing to reinforce rigid self-images, a closer examination reveals that these references expose the shortcomings of using mythological figures as models for characters with human complexities and flaws. Particularly for Antony, Will contends, these references do not solidify his self-mythologisation but rather highlight his contradictory nature, humanising him in the process. In contrast, Cleopatra presents a different approach to effective self-representation: in act 5, her peculiar depiction of both herself and Antony highlights the potential of an imaginative language that does not seek to directly imitate or challenge classical Greek and Roman narratives. Instead, it aims to establish itself as a unique paradigm for future recollection.

Rita de Carvalho Rodrigues's essay explores the reasons behind the surprisingly infrequent mention of Cleopatra's name in the play and maintains that the issue seems to be connected to her identity as an Egyptian and an enemy rather than her gender, as has been sometimes argued. Building on Paul Cantor's idea of the Mediterranean Sea as the privileged site of a clash of civilisations, de Carvalho Rodrigues's analysis also considers the power and connotations of Cleopatra's name, suggesting that its avoidance may reflect the threat she poses to Roman male characters: ". . . her name means something. It represents her essence; it plays a big part in constructing her identity and, therefore, is undeniably charged with all the negative energy the men in the play associate her with" (118). Through a deft use of digital tools, de Carvalho Rodrigues thus brings to the surface the underlying conflicts and issues in the play as reflected in its own language.

Part 2 ("Shakespeare and His Contemporaries") comprises three essays which address the 'Mediterraneity' of *Antony and Cleopatra* by comparing it with a selection of narratives dedicated to the same

classical topics by some of Shakespeare's contemporaries. Both Jason Lawrence's and Amelia Platt's essays are welcome contributions to the scholarly debate that has been emphasising the similarities between Shakespeare's tragedy and earlier English closet dramas, such as Mary Sidney Herbert's *The Tragedie of Antonie* and Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedie of Cleopatra*, setting them against the backdrop of their shared historical source, Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*. By specifically comparing how these works deal with the issue of motherhood, Lawrence demonstrates that Shakespeare's portrayal of Cleopatra, which downplays her role as a mother, aligns closely with Plutarch's portrayal, much more than the earlier English playwrights' representations. These differences, Platt goes on to contend, are linked to Cleopatra's racial identity and the specific Mediterranean setting of the play: while Sidney and Daniel portray Cleopatra according to conventional Western standards of beauty, Shakespeare emphasises her 'otherness' and her connections with the Egyptian goddess Isis. In so doing, as Platt concludes, Cleopatra's peculiar motherhood is defined not so much in relation to individual children, as in terms of national identity, symbolically 'giving birth' to the myth of Egypt.

Lisa Hopkins's essay starts with the analysis of the influence played by the memory of Pompey the Great in *Antony and Cleopatra*, where his son Sextus is portrayed as the master of the Mediterranean Sea: Young Pompey is clearly meant to evoke his father, and he is also strongly associated with his ship. Building on the widespread early modern imagery of ships as symbolic objects representing ideas of statecraft and survival in adversity, Hopkins compares Young Pompey's invitation of the triumvirate aboard his galley in *Antony and Cleopatra* with a similar scene in *The Tragedie of Caesar and Pompey* (1607) and demonstrates that Shakespeare uses Pompey's galley symbolically, representing both a ship of faith and a ship of state, with Young Pompey exemplifying the loss of both power and prestige: "Ultimately the way Pompey sails his ship through the Mediterranean becomes a metaphor for the way we – and our rulers – all sail our own ships and try to keep them afloat in hazardous waters" (200).

In the last section ("The Actor's Point of View"), Dame Janet Suzman, a compelling interpreter of Cleopatra in Trevor Nunn's

1972 production for the Royal Shakespeare Company, expresses her views on what it means and what it takes to bring the Egyptian queen on the stage. Besides provocatively questioning the ability of Elizabethan boy actors to authentically embody Cleopatra's maturity and psychological depth, and thus arguing that these features seem to require a more experienced interpreter, Suzman's essay calls for a re-evaluation of how we perceive and interpret gender roles in theatre and the challenges faced by actors in portraying characters outside their own lived experiences.

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Prologue

1

Setting the Scene for *Antony and Cleopatra*

Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells

Abstract

This essay is based on the opening, key-note talk, co-presented to the Verona "Shakespeare and the Mediterranean" Summer School in August 2023. It aims to introduce the play through responding to six questions. We are interested in how Shakespeare set about writing *Antony and Cleopatra*, his play in relation to his main source material, how the play was originally performed, how Shakespeare conveys the legendary status of the famous lovers, how his play relates to his other works, and how it presents sexuality. We discuss the final moments of the play and throughout draw attention to its poetic riches, and possible performance choices.

Keywords: *Antony and Cleopatra*; identity; Plutarch; legendary status; sexuality

Throughout our collaboration on this introductory talk, we have appreciated time and again some of the many poetic riches of *Antony and Cleopatra*, its comedy as well as its tragedy, and we have thought about what we might see – and what we have seen – on stage when the play is performed. We have had in mind a number of questions. How did Shakespeare set about writing *Antony and Cleopatra*? How does Shakespeare's play relate to his main source material, and what might that reveal to us about his artistic project? How might the play have been performed in Shakespeare's own time? How does the play construct the identity of its legendary lovers? How might it be useful to relate the play to Shakespeare's other works? How does the play present sexuality? After focussing on these questions, this discussion will consider closely the play's final moments.

1. How Did Shakespeare Set About Writing *Antony and Cleopatra*?

All Shakespeare's plays have their own, strong, individuality. To that extent each play is an experiment, a fresh exercise of the creative imagination. At the same time, there are strong interrelationships among his plays which identify them as the products of a single mind. Shakespeare's imagination fed voraciously on books written by other people. One of his favourite sources was Sir Thomas North's translation, published in 1579, of *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* by the Greek historian Plutarch which, in the closing years of the sixteenth century, gave Shakespeare the basic material for *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*. A few years later, probably in 1605 or 1606, Shakespeare turned again to North's Plutarch for a new play centring on the life of Mark Antony, who figures prominently in *Julius Caesar*, and his mistress, Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt.

Although in narrative terms *Antony and Cleopatra* is a sequel to the earlier play, it is radically different in terms of structure, characterisation, poetic technique, and dramatic effect. The earlier play is self-consciously 'classical', linguistically austere, and compact in structure, to such an extent that its first three acts form a continuous stretch of action. By contrast, *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which the action shuttles constantly between Alexandria and Rome is romantic, sprawling, episodic, luxuriously poetic, and especially lyrical. It is also far more complex in its characterisation, and in its interest in the psychology of its leading characters.

The composition of the play presented Shakespeare with considerable and exceptional logistical challenges. He was working for a theatre company made up of about fourteen actors, all of them male. Yet the action of the play as he designed it involves over thirty named characters, along with an indeterminate number of extras in the form of courtiers, messengers, attendants, and servants. He knew as he plotted the play that he had only a limited number of boy actors – three or four at the most – so he had to lay out the action in such a way that no more than this number of female characters appeared on stage at the same time. In fact, the cast list of the complete play calls for adult actors in at least thirty-five roles, along with the four boy actors playing women: Cleopatra,

Octavia, Charmian, and Iras, as well as "a Boy who sings" (2.7.12-17)[1]. All this makes exceptional demands on the company, many of whom would have had to memorise and perform three or four different roles each. It meant that Shakespeare had to exercise great ingenuity in plotting the action so that no actor was required to be in two places at the same time. The potential for back-stage confusion was enormous.

2. How Does Shakespeare's Play Relate to His Main Source Material, And What Might That Reveal to Us About His Artistic Project?

When we look to Shakespeare's main source narrative in Plutarch's *Lives*, it is worth noting how the Greek historian understood his own mode of historical writing. "My aim", he declares:

> is not to write histories, but only lives. For the noble deeds do not always show men's virtues and vices; but oftentimes a light occasion, a word, or some sport, makes men's natural dispositions and manners appear more plain than the famous battles won wherein are slain ten thousand men, or the great armies, or cities won by siege or assault. (Plutarch 1964, 7-8)

It is easy to see how Plutarch's project and its resulting text would be attractive to a dramatist. Plutarch's emphasis on the way that character can be revealed by quirks of behaviour or idiosyncratic utterance must have made him especially congenial to Shakespeare, interested as he was in the psychology of individual characters. Plutarch delights in depicting intimate details of personal behaviour as well as historically significant action. His accounts of these historical "lives" are illuminated by lighter moments. The nineteenth-century poet and great critic of Shakespeare, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, admired the play's "numerous momentary flashes of nature countering the historic abstraction" (1960, 1.77), an effect of writing that Shakespeare already knew about – for example

1 Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from *Antony and Cleopatra* are cited from Neill 1994.

through his plays based on English history – and which would have resonated for him as he read his Plutarch.

To imitate is, to some extent, to admire. But there are moments when Shakespeare's dependency on North's translation of Plutarch is so close as to render Shakespeare open to the accusation of plagiarism. A conspicuous example is Enobarbus's famous description of Cleopatra which, as Michael Neill writes in his Oxford edition of the play, not only deepens our sense of the speaker's character but also "transforms the audience's sense of Cleopatra herself by her ability to evoke this response for Antony's normally sceptical and prosaic lieutenant" (1994, 191). Here is what Plutarch writes:

> Therefore when she was sent unto by diverse letters, both from Antonius himself and also from his friends, she made so light of it and mocked Antonius so much that she disdained to set forward otherwise but to take her barge in the river of Cydnus, the poop whereof was of gold, the sails of purple, and the oars of silver, which kept stroke in rowing after the sound of the music of flutes, hautboys, citherns, viols, and such other instruments as they played upon in the barge. And now for the person of herself: she was laid under a pavilion of cloth-of-gold of tissue, apparelled and attired like the goddess Venus commonly drawn in picture; and hard by her, on either hand of her, pretty fair boys apparelled as painters do set forth god Cupid, with little fans in their hands, with the which they fanned wind upon her. Her ladies and gentlewomen also, the fairest of them were apparelled like the nymphs Nereides (which are the mermaids of the waters) and like the graces, some steering the helm, others tending the tackle and ropes of the barge, out of the which there came a wonderful passing, sweet savour of perfumes that perfumed the wharf's side, pestered with innumerable multitudes of people. Some of them followed the barge all alongst the river's side; others also ran out of the city to see her coming in; so that in the end there ran such multitudes of the people one after another to see her that Antonius was left post-alone in the market-place in his imperial seat to give audience. And there went a rumour in the people's mouths that the goddess Venus was come to play with the god Bacchus for the general good of all Asia. (Plutarch 1964, 200-2)

And this is how Shakespeare alchemises North's already fine prose translation into a blank-verse speech of transcendent beauty:

> Enobarbus The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne
> Burned on the water; the poop was beaten gold,
> Purple the sails, and so perfumèd that
> The winds were lovesick with them; the oars were silver,
> Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
> The water which they beat to follow faster,
> As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
> It beggared all description: she did lie
> In her pavilion – cloth-of-gold of tissue –
> O'er-picturing that Venus where we see
> The fancy outwork nature; on each side her
> Stood pretty, dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
> With divers-coloured fans, whose wind did seem
> To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
> And what they undid did.
> Agrippa O, rare for Antony!
> Enobarbus Her gentlewomen, like the Nereides,
> So many mermaids, tended her i' th' eyes,
> And made their bends adornings. At the helm
> A seeming mermaid steers; the silken tackle
> Swell with the touches of those flower-soft hands,
> That yarely frame the office. From the barge
> A strange invisible perfume hits the sense
> Of the adjacent wharfs. The city cast
> Her people out upon her; and Antony,
> Enthroned i' th' market-place, did sit alone,
> Whistling to th' air; which but for vacancy
> Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,
> And made a gap in Nature.
> (2.2.198-225)

Shakespeare draws on Plutarch not just for material that is of major biographical significance but also for accounts of idiosyncratic behaviour on the part of Cleopatra that enrich our belief in her unique personality. An illuminating example of this is the episode early in 2.5 when Cleopatra expresses a wish to go fishing:

> Give me mine angle, we'll to the river; there,
> My music playing far off, I will betray
> Tawny-fine fishes, my bended hook shall pierce
> Their slimy jaws; and as I draw them up,
> I'll think them every one an Antony,
> And say 'Ah, ha! you're caught.'
> (2.5.10-15)

To which Charmian replies:

> 'Twas merry when
> You wagered on your angling, when your diver
> Did hang a salt fish on his hook which he
> With fervency drew up.
> (2.5.15-18).

This vividly told anecdote, which might strike us at first as being original to Shakespeare, in fact comes straight out of Plutarch, and illustrates the similar biographical modes of the two writers:

> Cleopatra straight commanded one of her men to dive under water before Antonius' men and to put some old salt fish upon his bait, like unto those that are brought out of the country of Pont. When he had hung the fish on his hook, Antonius, thinking he had taken a fish indeed, snatched up his line presently. Then they all fell a-laughing. Cleopatra, laughing also, said unto him: 'Leave us, my lord, Egyptians, which dwell in the country of Pharus and Canobus, your angling rod. This is not thy profession: thou must hunt after conquering of realms and countries.' (Plutarch 1964, 207-8)

But Shakespeare enhances the anecdote with his dramatising of Cleopatra's erotic imagination "Ah, ha! you're caught", and Charmian's witty response recalling Cleopatra's bait. Above all, the Cleopatra described by Plutarch is supremely confident of her power to captivate all who encounter her. "But yet", says Plutarch, "she carried nothing with her wherein she trusted more than in herself, and in the charms and enchantment of her passing beauty and grace" (1964, 201).

3. How Might the Play Have Been Performed in Shakespeare's Own Time?

To transfer so rich and complex a character as Plutarch's Cleopatra into a dramatic role to be played by a boy actor presented Shakespeare with an exceptional challenge which he accepted with such success that the role becomes the richest and most diverse piece of female characterisation in all his plays – perhaps in the whole of English drama – and the greatest challenge to its performer both in his time and in later ages.

Shakespeare was an immensely practical dramatist who was always conscious as he wrote of the needs of his theatre company and of the circumstances in which his plays would be performed. His company, originally the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which had become the King's Men in 1603 on the accession of James I, played in many different locations when on tour, and even in London, at the royal court in Whitehall, and at the inns of court, for the Gray's Inn and the Middle Temple where *The Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night, or what you will* were performed in 1594 and 1602 respectively. But its principal home from 1599 was The Globe, and it is clear that as he wrote *Antony and Cleopatra* Shakespeare had in mind its facilities, including the upper level where he locates Cleopatra's death scene, and even the area beneath the stage. He had used this in *Hamlet*, where the Ghost of Hamlet's father is heard in what is referred to as "the cellarage" (1.5.153)[2] and he uses it in the strange and enigmatic episode in *Antony and Cleopatra* – in act four scene three – in which soldiers hear 'strange music' on the night before the second battle. The scene has its origin in a passage from Plutarch which is rich in psychological suggestiveness. Here is what we read in Plutarch:

> Furthermore, the self-same night within little of midnight, when all the city was quiet, full of fear and sorrow, thinking what would be the issue and end of this war, it is said that suddenly they heard a marvellous, sweet harmony of sundry sorts of instruments of music, with the cry of a multitude of people, as they had been

2 Shakespearian quotations, apart from *Antony and Cleopatra*, are from Shakespeare 2005.

> dancing and had sung as they use in Bacchus' feasts, with movings and turnings after the manner of the satyrs. And it seemed that this dance went through the city unto the gate that opened to the enemies, and that all the troop that made this noise they heard went out of the city at that gate. Now such as in reason sought the depth of the interpretation of this wonder thought that it was the god, unto whom Antonius bears singular devotion to counterfeit and resemble him, that did forsake them. (Plutarch 1964, 274-5)

Now here is what Shakespeare makes of this episode:

> FIRST SOLDIER Brother, good night – tomorrow is the day.
> SECOND SOLDIER It will determine one way. Fare you well.
> Heard you of nothing strange about the streets?
> FIRST SOLDIER Nothing. What news?
> SECOND SOLDIER Belike 'tis but a rumour, good night to you.
> FIRST SOLDIER Well sir, good night.
> *Enter two other Soldiers meeting them.*
> SECOND SOLDIER Soldiers, have careful watch.
> THIRD SOLDIER And you – good night, good night.
> *They place themselves in every corner of the stage.*
> FOURTH SOLDIER Here we. An if tomorrow
> Our navy thrive, I have an absolute hope
> Our landmen will stand up.
> THIRD SOLDIER 'Tis a brave army,
> And full of purpose.
> *Music of the hautboys is under the stage.*
> FOURTH SOLDIER Peace, what noise?
> FIRST SOLDIER List, list!
> SECOND SOLDIER Hark!
> FIRST SOLDIER Music i' the air.
> THIRD SOLDIER Under the earth.
> FOURTH SOLDIER It signs well, does it not?
> THIRD SOLDIER No.
> FIRST SOLDIER Peace, I say!
> What should this mean?
> SECOND SOLDIER 'Tis the god Hercules, whom Antony loved,
> Now leaves him.
> FIRST SOLDIER Walk – let's see if other watchmen
> Do hear what we do.

Second Soldier How now, masters!
All (*speaking together*) How now?
How now? Do you hear this?
First Soldier Ay; is't not strange?
Third Soldier Do you hear, masters? Do you hear?
First Soldier Follow the noise so far as we have quarter.
Let's see how it will give off.
All Content. 'Tis strange.
Exeunt.
(4.3.1-29)

This short scene is enigmatic and mysterious. Shakespeare alchemises the music for revelry and dance mentioned in Plutarch – to use words from one of Ariel's songs in *The Tempest* – "into something rich and strange" (1.2.403). The Shakespearian music we hear signals something fateful for Antony, and perhaps is even prescient of his death: "Tis the god Hercules, whom Antony loved, / Now leaves him". And, like the watchmen at the beginning of *Hamlet*, the soldiers seek comrades to confirm that they have encountered something ghostly, unnatural, "some strange eruption to our state" (1.1.68). The episode illustrates the tonal shift that the critic G. Wilson Knight described in 1931, from "the material and sensuous, through the grand and magnificent, to the more purely spiritual" (1931, 204). This short scene is also revealing of how Shakespeare bodied forth the drama by making full use of the spatial opportunities of the Globe Theatre: here the "cellarage", the under-stage area. He used the upper-playing space for Cleopatra's monument, as we shall see later.

4. How Does the Play Construct the Identity of Its Legendary Lovers?

Antony and Cleopatra's reputation precedes them. Audiences go to a production expecting to see the bodying forth of two legendary lovers, expectations that we no doubt have in common with audiences of Shakespeare's own time. Shakespeare deliberately and characteristically sets out to complicate our hopes. It is difficult, perhaps nigh on impossible, for any actor to perform a legend. In order to create a sense of their legendary status, Shakespeare

includes intermittent references to transcendence and eternity – "Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch / Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space" (1.1.35-6), says Antony, reaching for power and command both personally and publicly. But then Shakespeare almost immediately disrupts the effect he has just achieved. Cleopatra punctures any resonant confidence we might have seen developing in Antony's stature. Her response is immediate and delivered on the half-line: "Excellent falsehood!" (1.1.41). This sudden undercutting of ego is an important characteristic of Shakespeare's style in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

But he regularly takes us in the opposite direction, too. Time and again the dialogue departs from the language of politics, control, and censure, and into the transcendent language of love. Consider, for example, the moment when Antony goes to see Cleopatra with the news of his wife Fulvia's death. Cleopatra tries to prevent him from speaking, but he interrupts her four times – which might easily provoke laughter in performance – and she then says she feels betrayed or, at least, pretends to be so: "O, never was there queen / So mightily betrayed! Yet at the first / I saw the treasons planted" (1.3.24-6). We never really know when Cleopatra is being truthful, or when she's only pretending, in order to stay in control. Perhaps the actor playing her needs simply to portray everything authentically in the moment, and let the audience decide what is 'true' and what is not. But then the dramatic texture – even during one of Cleopatra's characteristic outbursts – suddenly reaches towards transcendence:

ANTONY Most sweet Queen –
CLEOPATRA Nay, pray you seek no colour for your going,
But bid farewell, and go. When you sued staying,
Then was the time for words – no going then:
Eternity was in our lips and eyes,
Bliss in our brow's bent; none our parts so poor,
But was a race of heaven. They are so still,
Or thou, the greatest soldier of the world,
Art turned the greatest liar.
(1.3.31-9)

Having established a critical perspective for the audience, who already know about Cleopatra's sudden changes of moods, Shakespeare then surprises us by illuminating Cleopatra's hidden, inner life. She is nostalgic and looks back on their love as something immortal. But soon after her passing mention of "eternity", Cleopatra's poetic flight becomes prosaic again and she names Antony "the greatest liar".

Critics and actors often identify inconsistency as one of Cleopatra's palpable, theatrical behaviours. Many of her speeches make this easily possible in performance, for example her compact two-and-half lines of direction and observation: "Cut my lace, Charmian, come – / But let that be. I am quickly ill, and well, / So Antony loves" (1.3.72-3) – a gift to an actor who can bring any degree of emphasis to this sudden change of mood. When we pause to examine the meaning of those eighteen words we've just heard, we realise they are dazzlingly multi-layered and multi-directional. The implied stage-direction calls for Charmian to start cutting Cleopatra's lace – presumably around her bodice – but then to stop cutting, or perhaps Charmian never actually starts. The primary meaning of these lines is that Antony is as changeable in his love as Cleopatra is in her illness. But in saying this, Cleopatra simultaneously demonstrates that she herself is only pretending to be ill, "So Antony loves". In performance the moment can be portrayed as humorously histrionic, but we might also perceive beneath Cleopatra's apparent anger and hurt, a subtex of a wounded woman. The influential Anna Jameson (1794-1860), writing in 1832 in her book *Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical and Historical*, called Cleopatra an "enigma', a "glorious puzzle", and referred to this characteristic as a "consistent inconsistency" (qtd in Bate 1992, 270). But then, if we were to judge him by similar criteria, so too is Antony.

How might we solve these "glorious puzzles", or make sense of these enigmas, if, indeed, we can, or it be worthwhile to do so? Well, we might try by posing another question as part of our discussion.

5. How Might It Be Useful to Relate the Play to Shakespeare's Other Works?

An intertextual reading of *Antony and Cleopatra* with one of Shakespeare's other plays and one of his *Sonnets* might be useful in

deepening our understanding of Shakespeare's depiction of these two legendary lovers.

In *As You Like It*, Rosalind disguises herself as Ganymede in the Forest of Arden and woos Orlando with whom she is in love. The exchange between her and Orlando in act four scene one strikes a tone similar in some ways to the dialogues of Antony and Cleopatra:

> ROSALIND Come, woo me, woo me, for now I am in a holiday humour, and like enough to consent. What would you say to me now an I were your very, very Rosalind?
> ORLANDO I would kiss before I spoke.
> ROSALIND Nay, you were better speak first, and when you were gravelled for lack of matter, you might take occasion to kiss. Very good orators, when they are out, they will spit; and for lovers lacking – God warr'nt us! – matter, the cleanliest shift is to kiss.
> (4.1.64-73)

Rosalind is playing the role of Ganymede. Orlando is taking upon himself the role of a patient in need of a cure, having to imagine that the young man before him is really Rosalind. What these two pastoral lovers have in common with the high-political romance of Antony and Cleopatra – apart from their propensity to flirt – is that both are having to act being in love, whilst at the same time really being in love.

Shakespeare's Sonnet 138 can also be read in relation to his depiction of Antony and Cleopatra. It is Shakespeare's meditation on his own beloved, but the imagined speaker might also be Antony himself:

> When my love swears that she is made of truth
> I do believe her though I know she lies,
> That she might think me some untutored youth
> Unlearnèd in the world's false subtleties.
> Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,
> Although she knows my days are past the best,
> Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue;
> On both sides thus is simple truth suppressed.
> But wherefore says she not she is unjust,
> And wherefore say not I that I am old?

> O, love's best habit is in seeming trust,
> And age in love loves not to have years told.
> Therefore I lie with her, and she with me,
> And in our faults by lies we flattered be.

The sonnet conveys a shared language of love, tried and tested in the enabling fictions of what seems like a long-established relationship. Each party knows the truth about their beloved, and about themselves; each knows about the pain, the secrets, the vulnerabilities, and perhaps even the infidelities. But both parties know that these things are not to be spoken of: "on both sides thus is simple truth suppressed". And through the suppression of "simple truth" – in "seeming trust" – the relationship is fed, both through love, and through sex. The final couplet uses one of Shakespeare's favourite puns – "lie" and "lies" – meaning both untruths, and the act of lovers lying down together and, in the sonnet, on each other, in bed: "Therefore I lie with her, and she with me, / And in our faults by lies we flattered be".

Physical consummation momentarily overwhelms the enabling fictions of this relationship – and even seems to be enabled by them – and the sonnet ends with a lying-down, with love-making, and with the likelihood that the lies we have just read about will continue.

6. How Does the Play Present Sexuality?

The Forest of Arden and Shakespeare's *Sonnets* crackle with the language of love and sexuality. *Antony and Cleopatra* is a play about love, a play about the nature of human identity in love, and a play about the nature of identity in relation to theatre and poetry. It is also – and perhaps most emphatically – a play about identity in relation to sexuality.

The love affair of Antony and Cleopatra, adulterous on Antony's side, is the stuff of legend, and was already so to the play's original audiences. Shakespeare presents it on the largest possible scale. The action moves back and forth between sensual Egypt and austere Rome. One of Shakespeare's great achievements in it is to see the action from multiple perspectives as if through a series of lenses. The pleasure-loving sensuality of Mark Antony is contrasted with

the inflexible caution of Octavius Caesar; the lavish and loquacious sexuality of Cleopatra is contrasted with the demure reticence of Octavia (Caesar's sister whom Antony understandably but regrettably marries). The pleasure-seeking in Egypt is often palpably physical in stage pictures: feasting and drinking, drapes and cushions, so that actors can lounge about more or less horizontally, portraying a latent eroticism, or even a physical longing for sex. Pleasure-seeking through alluding to sex contributes to some of the play's humour. Cleopatra's maids, Charmian and Iras, jest bawdily with the Soothsayer about the length of their lovers' penises: "if you were but an inch of fortune better than I, where would you choose it?" asks Charmian, to which Iras replies "Not in my husband's nose" (1.2.60-2). Language itself becomes sexually active. Cleopatra instructs the messenger to "Ram thou thy fruitful tidings in mine ears" (2.5.24; "ram" being slang in Shakespeare's period for sexual intercourse, Williams 2006, 254).

Sexuality in relationship to identity plays an important part in Shakespeare's depiction of Antony's bungled suicide. The episode, closely derived from Plutarch, is one of the play's theatrical highlights, not only because of the brave demands it makes of the actor, the acting company, and the performance space, but also because of its sexual nature. When Eros turns the sword upon himself, Antony describes his own intended suicide. He believes Cleopatra to be dead and sees his own death as a consummation of their marriage which will occur beyond the grave: "I will be / A bridegroom in my death, and run into't / As to a lover's bed" (4.15.99-101). Antony then falls on his sword, but not managing to die, only fatally wounds himself. He is carried out by four or five actors at the end of 4.14, and into 4.15, where the text requires us to see him hoisted aloft to Cleopatra in her monument. Their enabling and loving fictions, and flirtations, enhance their final dialogue:

ANTONY O, quick, or I am gone.
CLEOPATRA Here's sport indeed! How heavy weighs my lord!
Our strength is all gone into heaviness –
That makes the weight. Had I great Juno's power,
The strong-winged Mercury should fetch thee up
And set thee by Jove's side. Yet come a little –
Wishes were ever fools – O, come, come, come,

They heave Antony to Cleopatra.
And welcome, welcome! Die when thou hast lived!
Quicken with kissing! Had my lips that power,
Thus would I wear them out.
All The Lookers On A heavy sight!
Antony I am dying, Egypt, dying.
Give me some wine, and let me speak a little.
Cleopatra No, let me speak, and let me rail so high
That the false huswife Fortune break her wheel,
Provoked by my offence.
(4.16.33-47)

A fatally wounded man, whose phallic sword has not penetrated him quite fully enough to enable the death he seeks, is called to "come, come, come". As Cleopatra says, "Here's sport indeed!" At the same time, Shakespeare calls attention to the utterly real demands of having to lift the actor playing Antony up to Cleopatra. Her "How heavy weighs my lord!" might even be a phrase she has used in their love-making, perhaps jokingly calling attention to Antony's increasing, middle-aged, physical proportions. Antony's searing "I am dying, Egypt, dying. / Give me some wine, and let me speak a little" is undercut by Cleopatra's "No, let me speak". It is brave indeed of Shakespeare to admit such invitations for laughter as he does at this point. In his dying moments Antony begs Cleopatra to temporize with Caesar but she promises that "My resolution and my hands I'll trust – / None about Caesar" (4.16.51-2). Antony makes a final, heroic speech, but it is Cleopatra who is talking as he melts and fades away. She mourns Antony's dissolution as a melting of "the crown o' the earth". Though the notion of detumescence underlies Cleopatra's punning reaction – "the soldier's pole is fall'n" – with the dead Antony before her, any hint of sexual word-play fades in the poetry of her image. The mood shifts into one of the greatest, high-tragic outpourings in all of Shakespeare:

Cleopatra Noblest of men, woot die?
Hast thou no care of me – shall I abide
In this dull world, which in thy absence is
No better than a sty? O, see, my women,
The crown o' th' earth doth melt.

Antony dies.
My lord!
O, withered is the garland of the war,
The soldier's pole is fall'n – young boys and girls
Are level now with men, the odds is gone,
And there is nothing left remarkable
Beneath the visiting moon.
(4.16.61-70)

7. Identity and Theatre: Final Moments

When Dame Judi Dench played Cleopatra for Sir Peter Hall at the National Theatre (Sir Antony Hopkins was her Antony) she said she was surprised to have been invited simultaneously by Hall and Terry Hands to undertake the role, describing herself as "a menopausal dwarf", but what emerged was a magnificent and multi-faceted interpretation. She talked about her need to find "a fifth gear" for the fifth act. Everything we have learned about Cleopatra continues to develop, transform, and to find its own, new pace and tone into and through act five. As she approaches her suicide, Cleopatra is required to portray Antony through her grief and in her memory. Her language is self-consciously heroic. She becomes the playwright, momentarily bodying Antony forth in her mind's eye, her captivating poetic description quickens and stimulates our memories of him. Have we seen the Antony she is evoking, or are her words merely fantastic, even desperate?

CLEOPATRA I dreamt there was an Emperor Antony –
O, such another sleep, that I might see
But such another man!
DOLABELLA If it might please ye –
CLEOPATRA His face was as the heavens, and therein stuck
A sun and moon, which kept their course and lighted
The little O o' th' earth.
DOLABELLA Most sovereign creature –
CLEOPATRA 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 dolphin-like; 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.
> (5.2.76-92)

Through her words Antony becomes larger than life in her mind's eye and greater than any possible stage depiction of him. What matters most is that the audience believe in her vision of him. She presents herself with an Antony whose heroism is made ideal and even god-like. And yet there is still the possibility of slippage into sexual playfulness, part of the humanity of the moment. Jane Lapotaire, who played the role for BBC television, recalls realising that in describing Antony's delights as "dolphin-like", Cleopatra might be remembering his form riding up and down on her body during their love-making, his back looking like a dolphin diving up and down on the waves.[3]

In the last twenty minutes of the play, Shakespeare mingles political tensions with theatricality, sexuality, and indeed spirituality. Only through Cleopatra's carefully stage-managed suicide will a consummation with Antony and a politically expedient escape from being imprisoned by Caesar be achieved. As she approaches death, Shakespeare draws attention to the complicated cultural resonance of boy actors playing female roles. The information from Dolabella that Caesar plans to send Cleopatra and her children – whom of course we do not see, if only because of the limited number of boys in the acting company – ahead of him, and there to display them to public ignominy, provokes from her an outraged vision of a pageant in which she imagines "some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / In th'posture of a whore" (5.2.220-1). The irony would have been acute when the original boy actor spoke these lines. He would, we must hope, have been well experienced, able to flirt self-knowingly with the audience, as well as being talented

3 This was part of a personal communication.

enough to bring stature and nobility to his role. Cleopatra prepares for her suicide as if it were a wedding combined with a coronation. Characteristically, Shakespeare comically undercuts the episode. A Clown brings her the basket of asps, the instruments of her death. ("Clown" means a rustic figure rather than a court jester). Cleopatra refers to the asp as the "pretty worm", a phallic worm "that kills [i.e. that can stimulate orgasm] and pains not" (5.2.242-3). This short but important and memorable episode with the Clown is quintessentially Shakespearian. The master is at work again, achieving an intense, tragic effect through the mixing together of tragedy and comedy.

The days of revelry are over. "Now no more / The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip", says Cleopatra (5.2.280-1). Imagining Antony waiting for her in Elysium, where, as he had said, "souls do couch on flowers", she addresses him for the first time as "husband", and – with obvious sexual word-play – "Husband, I come!" (5.2.286). Death is equated with love-making: "The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch / Which hurts, and is desired" (5.2.294-5). She is still capable of jealousy, fearing that if her maid Charmian dies first, Antony will "make demand of her". Caesar himself acknowledges Cleopatra's seductiveness even in death: "she looks like sleep, / As she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace" (5.2.344-6). This tragedy ends like a romantic comedy – and surreally – with the expectation of marriage beyond the grave.

Shakespeare had dramatised two love-death narratives by the time he came to write *Antony and Cleopatra*, his re-telling of the Ovidian story of the lovers Pyramus and Thisbe in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and his other pair of eponymous suicidal lovers, *Romeo and Juliet*. It is clear from his treatment of Plutarch that he was ready to break new ground in his adaptation of another love-death story. The deliberately mock-heroic tone of Pyramus and Thisbe – a tone unintended by its cast members, the tradesmen – makes it a highly comic contribution to the wedding celebrations of the Duke and Duchess of Athens. The bawdy humour within *Romeo and Juliet* ends with the death of Mercutio in act 3, and in the two final acts of the play Shakespeare dramatises the darkness closing-in on the two young lovers as time is running out. In contrast, he depicts the final moments of *Antony and Cleopatra*'s love-death story through multiple emotional and dramatic tones, and with a language which is

many-faceted in its resonance: rural comedy, spiritually transcendent, sexual, lyrical, romantic, and self-consciously theatrical.

In the depiction of Cleopatra's suicide, he changes a significant detail in Plutarch and emphasises another. In Plutarch, Cleopatra dies from the asp biting her on her arm. Shakespeare's Cleopatra holds the asp to her close against her heart, and asks: "Dost thou not see my baby at my breast, / That sucks the nurse asleep?" (5.2.308-9). It is possible that Shakespeare is consciously recalling his earlier love-death story, incidentally echoing something of the Capulets' Nurse feeding the baby Juliet. In the stage picture Shakespeare shows us Cleopatra demonstrating both a monstrous motherhood – her suckling child is a serpent – and the self-fulfilling prophecy we heard her make just after the death of Antony, in the same scenic location, when she says: "No more but e'en a woman, and commanded / By such poor passion as the maid that milks / And does the meanest chores" (4.16.74-6). Unlike Pyramus, Thisbe, Juliet, and Antony, Cleopatra does not die from being penetrated by a blade. But her death is linked linguistically in our memory to Antony's. And she, like him, expires – but in mid-sentence. Her words leading up to the moment of her death become breathy in scope, ending in open vowels, lingering and resonating, bearing comparison to the two elements which she has just claimed for herself: "I am fire and air – my other elements / I give to baser life" (5.2.288-9). The actor has ample freedom to speak her two-and-a-half lines in a variety of ways. The onomatopoeic language seems to imply that her breath is leaving her:

> Charmian O, break! O, break!
> Cleopatra As sweet as balm, as soft as *air*, as gentle.
> O, Antony! *Nay*, I will take *thee too*.
> *She applies another aspic to her arm.*
> What should I *stay* –
> *She dies.*
> (5.2.310-12; our emphases indicate the breathiness of Shakespeare's long, open vowels).

Charmian is left alone for a few moments, referring to Cleopatra with intimate colloquialism as "a lass unparalleled" (5.2.314) and in

the same breath noting that Phoebus (the sun) shall never again see Cleopatra's eyes. She closes the Queen's eye-lids.

And then there is a final moment of tonal disruption. Following Plutarch closely, Shakespeare draws special attention to Cleopatra's crown slipping as, presumably, her head falls under the weight of it once she's dead. "Your crown's awry", says Charmian, "I'll mend it, and then play –" (5.2.316-17). A few lines later, during Caesar's post-mortem investigation, the First Guard says of Charmian, "I found her trimming up the diadem / On her dead mistress" (5.2.340-1). "Trimming" is straight out of North's translation of Plutarch, "Charmion half dead and trembling, trimming the diadem which Cleopatra ware upon her head" (1964, 292). In placing emphasis on this detail, Shakespeare seems to be seeking to illuminate the humanity in the moment. Cleopatra, in seeking to monumentalise herself in her death, to become "marble constant", does not quite achieve it. Her crown slips – as in Plutarch – and Shakespeare wants carefully to draw attention to that slippage.

In a drama that resembles a screenplay to our modern eyes in part because it contains more scenes than any other Shakespeare play, and because it moves effortlessly from Rome to Alexandria and back, from sea to land, from barge to monument, Shakespeare creates a rich and multi-tonal space in which to body forth Antony and Cleopatra and their legendary status. The language and theatrical attention he lavishes on them are, we would like to suggest, revealing of Shakespeare's own sensibilities as a playwright. It is at once both kaleidoscopic and magnifying, supple, fluid, and yet crystallising and particularised. To engage with *Antony and Cleopatra*, and to appreciate something of the play's multiple riches, is to respond to one of the greatest of Shakespeare's invitations to us to be touched, empowered, and enlarged by his genius.

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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

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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
> 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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3

Misremembering the Classics: Self-Representation through Mythological Language in *Antony and Cleopatra*

Sina Will

Abstract

This essay analyses the function and effect of mythological references in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* in the context of the characters' sense of selfhood and the representation of their identity in the play. By examining their relationship to and manipulation of recollection in general and, more specifically, as it is reflected in the multitude of mythological references in act 4, the essay demonstrates that the confusion and inappropriateness of these references serve to highlight Antony's struggle with his non-self-identical subjecthood. In contrast, a different perspective on effective self-portrayal is offered by Cleopatra, whose representation of herself as well as of Antony showcases the possibilities emerging from an imaginative language which strives not to directly imitate or contest classical Greek and Roman narratives, but instead to set itself as a unique paradigm for future recollection.

Keywords: *Antony and Cleopatra*; classical reception; Greek and Roman mythology; identity

> Humanity had to inflict terrible injuries on itself before the self – the identical, purpose-directed, masculine character of human beings – was created, and something of this process is repeated in every childhood. (Horkheimer and Adorno 2020, 26)

In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a collection of 'philosophical fragments', Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno trace the intertwinement of enlightenment and myth throughout the history of western human civilisation. One of their central arguments is that, with the development of individual subjecthood, humans have undergone a continuous process of self-subjugation, since an 'enlightened' view of the world already contains the repressive domination of man over his own nature. In their criticism of modern

(i.e. bourgeois) enlightenment, they assert that it intrinsically contains a mythical element, as this mode of human cognition is limited to the identification of always identical, repeated, and thus mythical characteristics. This is why, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, the supposedly enlightened western individual is trapped in a continuous cycle within which "the temptation to be rid of the ego has always gone hand-in-hand with the blind determination to preserve it" (ibid.).

This vacillation between the compulsion to act as an "identical, purpose-directed, masculine character" and the temptation to succumb to self-forgetfulness in his relationship with Cleopatra represents a central conflict for Mark Antony in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. While the play is to a large degree concerned with Cleopatra's "infinite variety" (2.2.236)[1] and the intangible fluidity of her personality, it just also poses important questions regarding Antony's character, most importantly regarding his establishment of a self. Shortly before his suicide, he is indeed confronted with the inability to constructively form his own identity, observing: "Here I am Antony, / Yet cannot hold this visible shape" (4.15.16-18).

In this essay, I will examine the way in which the production of identity and the appropriation of individual and cultural processes of recollection interact in Shakespeare's play, thereby informing our understanding of the characters' sense of selfhood. Although I focus mostly on Antony, the strategies with which both he and Cleopatra manipulate memory and self-image must be read with and against each other. By highlighting the mismatched nature of Antony's allusions to classical Greek and Roman mythology in a final attempt at autonomous self-representation before his death, I argue that this way of framing selfhood is exposed as inadequate for the construction of a stable identity. Rather, the deconstruction of this Roman mythical narrative points to the non-self-identical nature Antony is anxious to suppress. This, in contrast, is positively portrayed by Cleopatra through an imaginative act of recollection unburdened by classical paradigms in the last act of the play. Finally,

1 All references are from Shakespeare 2020 and will appear parenthetically in the text.

a contrasting model of dialectic self-representation emerges in Cleopatra's use of language, which is opened up to the multifaceted possibilities of human experience unconfined by a mythical subsumption of the present under the past.

1. Recollection and (Dis-)location of Identity in *Antony and Cleopatra*

In the final chapter of her publication on nostalgia in the Elizabethan drama, Kristine Johanson asserts that idealised conceptions of the past in Shakespeare's plays do not solely focus on framing "the past as a refuge against the future's inevitable decline", which would be the most common function of nostalgia in life and literature, but that, additionally, "the idealised past possesses rhetorical force because it turns the nostalgic towards the future" (2022, 171). As long as collective or individual identity is rooted in the history and tradition of a group of people, or in the recollection of one's personal experiences, the way in which this past is dealt with can never be wholly apolitical. Perhaps the most famous Shakespearean instance of memory and recollection becoming powerful political tools can be found in another Roman play, namely in Antony's funeral oration for the assassinated Julius Caesar (*Julius Caesar* 3.2). By cleverly manipulating his plebeian audience into accepting a version of recent history and of Caesar's character that fits his own political agenda, he gains control over the past in a way that allows him to exert control over Rome's future – as Jonathan Baldo puts it: "For Mark Antony, the past is as pliable as his audience, never hardening into anything as fixed, unvarying, and immobile as a statue" (2018, 155). As Baldo goes on to remark, the character of Mark Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra* exhibits a similarly irreverent attitude towards memory, refusing to "honour and respect ancestry and memory of the dead in the Roman way" by preferring a more carefree life in Egypt, which, "[u]nlike the more historically minded Rome . . . is a place of epicurean excess leading to pleasurable oblivion" (158). This disregard for the historical continuity upon which Roman ideals of glory and virtue rest constitutes a conscious choice on Antony's part, as he makes clear right from the outset of

the play: "Let Rome in Tiber melt and the wide arch / Of the ranged empire fall. Here is my space." (1.1.38-9).

Of course, this strategy of self-forgetting only serves Antony as long as he is not confronted with a present failure or shortcoming resulting from his distancing himself from Roman ideals. After impulsively following Cleopatra's retreating ship and losing the sea battle despite his earlier advantage, he is overcome by shame at his literal and figurative loss of self-control, declaring "I have fled myself" (3.11.8) and mourning the decisions, not least his relationship with Cleopatra, which he and his fellow Romans perceive to have set him on a stray path. Remarkably, he then continues to emphasise how far he has fallen from his past self by twisting the historical facts of his famous victory over Brutus and Cassius at Philippi. While Octavius Caesar did not live up to the Roman ideals of masculinity and showed his inexperience in battle by keeping "[h]is sword e'en like a dancer" (3.11.37), Antony, according to his own account, himself "struck / The lean and wrinkled Cassius, and 'twas I / That the mad Brutus ended" (3.11.38-9). The casual audacity with which Antony constructs this "revisionary history" (both Cassius and Brutus committed suicide) is made all the more obvious, at least to a knowledgeable audience, by the fact that he "even seems to confuse his Roman history, conflating Brutus with his ancestor who feigned madness before driving the Tarquins from Rome" (Johanson 2022, 168). It is this farce which has, according to Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1939, 4.68-9), earned that ancestor the cognomen *brutus* – meaning "[d]evoid of intelligence or feeling, irrational, insensitive, brutish" (*OLD*, s.v. *brutus* 2a). Antony takes Brutus' name and ancestry too literally much in the same way that he seems unable to utilise the more subtle or complex possibilities of mythological and historical references, as I will elaborate.

In such moments of crisis, it becomes obvious that Antony's sense of identity, despite grand declarations of his disregard for Rome's history and his legacy within it, is still deeply intertwined with his past achievements as a paragon of Roman martial virtue. This selfhood, however, is shown to be constructed in an inherently unstable way because idealised conceptions of the past, such as Antony's nostalgic recollection of his victory at Philippi, are staged as untrustworthy tools of political manipulation in the play, "thereby destabilising

discourses familiar both on stage and off stage and insisting on the fictiveness of the idealised past" (Johanson 2022, 165). I argue that part of the reason why Antony suffers from an unstable sense of self and loss of control over his own narrative is due to his desire to believe in the 'fictiveness' of the history he has constructed about his person, despite being either unable or unwilling to manipulate himself into this idealised version of Mark Antony.

A somewhat different case can be made for Cleopatra, who is at least Antony's equal in terms of rewriting her personal history to better fit her own narrative. This is most obviously illustrated in her recollection of her youth and past relationships with men in act 1.5. In this scene, she asks Charmian whether she did "[e]ver love Caesar so?" (1.5.78), then reproves her for implying that she did when Charmian cites Cleopatra's own words back at her: "O, that brave Caesar! . . . The valiant Caesar!" (1.5.79-82). Cleopatra then discounts her own strong past affections for Caesar by referring to the time of their relationship as her "salad days, / When I was green in judgment, cold in blood, / To say as I said then" (1.5.88-90). Having Antony be compared to Caesar neither serves the image of Antony she wants to portray nor the part of the devoted and passionate lover she has taken on in their relationship, which, as Tzachi Zamir has argued, is acted out as a "performative model of love" (Zamir 2011, 133). Similarly to Antony, Cleopatra is consciously re-adjusting her own personal history to fit the narrative that seems most useful to the self she is presently projecting. Whereas Antony does not acknowledge this act of retelling and simply presents his version of Philippi as fact, Cleopatra's approach is rather to reframe her relationship with Caesar through a different perspective. Implicitly, she acknowledges that Charmian's account of her past emotional experience is true, while at the same time distancing herself from this past self that no longer fits her current self-concept.

Therefore, she does not flee from herself – as Antony perceives himself to have fled his idealised, supposedly stable former identity – but rather playfully reinvents her identity in ways that produce future possible selves. Whereas such "infinite variety" (2.2.236), in Enobarbus' terms, could be taken as an absence of true selfhood or identity, Katherine Eggert has demonstrated that it is precisely the freedom to play different roles which allows Cleopatra to become a

generative source of "theatrical delight" throughout the play, defining theatre as "a place where the future comes to happen" (2000, 149; 146). If Antony is defined, both by himself and by the other Roman characters, by knowledge of his past glories and the potential for present greatness that is thereby demarcated, Cleopatra embraces her own multiplicity and is less restricted by preconceived notions of a stable and self-identical nature. Of course, the expectation of her volatility – often formulated in a misogynistic manner (e.g. "gypsy", 1.1.10; "Triple-turned whore", 4.12.15) – can be detrimental to her interests, as when Antony accuses her of having betrayed him after the battle of Alexandria. Yet, just like the "serpent of old Nile" (1.5.25), which she remembers being affectionately called by Antony, Cleopatra is able to shed skin after skin as soon as an old pattern no longer serves her. If each of these transformations constitute a delightful sort of theatrical "betrayal" (Eggert 2000, 149), the last act of self-confirmation through conscious self-betrayal is enacted in her suicide, or rather, in her proposed goal of becoming "marble-constant" (5.2.293) through the enaction of her own death. These strategies of self-remembering and self-forgetting employed by the characters, as will be discussed in the following sections, translate into different approaches towards self-fashioning their legacies in anticipation of their respective deaths in the last two acts of the play.

2. Dislodging Memory: Antony's Jumbled Self-Mythologising

With the beginning of act 4, the play begins to feature ever more traditionally tragic characteristics. Even before Antony's final defeat in battle, a foreboding tone is set by the strange music heard by his soldiers at night, who suspect it to be "the god Hercules, whom Antony loved, / Now leaves him" (4.3.21-2), as well as by Enobarbus' death after having betrayed Antony (4.4.9) and the omen of swallows nesting in Cleopatra's sails that her augurs do not know how (or dare) to interpret. From the point of Antony's defeat up until his suicide, his language has noticeably shifted to employ an increasing number of references to Greek and Roman

mythology. The first of these follows a string of insults and threats hurled at Cleopatra, who has quickly left the scene again:

> The shirt of Nessus is upon me. Teach me,
> Alcides, thou mine ancestor, thy rage.
> Let me lodge Lichas on the horns o' th' moon,
> And with those hands that grasped the heaviest club
> Subdue my worthiest self. The witch shall die.
> (4.12.48-52)

Antony's identification with Hercules is an expected one, and – at first glance – his allusion to the hero's death by the poisoned shirt of the centaur Nessus given to him by his wife, Deianeira, seems fitting. This is the first instance in which Antony likens himself to his mythological forefather, but not the first time that Hercules is mentioned in the play. Before, the comparison is directly drawn once by Cleopatra ("How this Herculean Roman does become / The carriage of his chafe", 1.3.102-3), and Hercules is mentioned twice by soldier characters ("By Hercules, I think I am i' th' right", 3.7.84; for 4.3.21, see above). In contrast to Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*, the equation is much more subdued and seems less forced by Antony himself:

> Now it had been a speech of old time that the family of the Antonii were descended from one Anton, the son of Hercules, whereof the family took name. This opinion did Antonius seek to confirm in all his doings, not only resembling him in the likeness of his body . . . but also in the wearing of his garments. (Spencer 1964, 177)

It is worth noting that the three mentions of Hercules outside of Antony's speech in act 4 are either mocking his connection with the hero or subverting it. By sarcastically calling him a "Herculean Roman", Cleopatra does not intend to praise his military achievements or elevate his heroism onto a mythological plane. Instead, as Clayton G. MacKenzie argues, she is referring to his relapse to a Roman sense of duty by returning to Rome after the death of Fulvia, assuming "that his choice has been made, that he is for 'Roman Virtue' and not 'Egyptian Vice', that he loves Fulvia and not her" (1990, 311). As in Plutarch's description above, the comparison to Hercules is most relevant in its theatrical aspect, reducing it to a

comical performance and "thus calling into question the reliability of such an association, while also highlighting the somewhat vain nature of Antony himself" (Caporicci 2016, 92). While the soldier's interjection "By Hercules, I think I am i' th' right", contradicting Antony's fatal military decision to fight Caesar by sea, does not draw a direct line between Antony and Hercules, the invocation of Hercules in this context highlights Antony's human fallibility. Finally, the link between the two is symbolically broken by the Second Soldier interpreting the music of the hautboys as Antony being deserted by his patron hero.[2]

From the outset, then, the analogy is not a functional one, humanising Antony and his flaws rather than successfully mythologising him. In that light, the purpose of his speech after the last battle, calling on Hercules as his ancestor and role model, seems much less straightforward. Upon closer inspection, the identification of Cleopatra with Deianeira does not fully align either: if Antony truly believes her to have betrayed him deliberately, Deianeira's naively good intentions in giving Hercules the shirt of Nessus substantially undermine this allegation. Deianeira is not a witchlike character such as Circe or Medea, who would better fit Antony's attempt to mythologically slander Cleopatra. He confuses this narrative further by jumbling together different Herculean myths, referring to his "fury" and "rage" (4.12.46; 49), which might even enable him to kill his lover. However, Hercules' fit of mad fury resulting in the killing of his wife and children, as dramatised in Euripides' *Heracles* or Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, does not represent the kind of justified rage Antony claims for himself in this scene. Instead, it is a divinely induced killing frenzy that ends not in righteous satisfaction, but in tragedy and the hero's miasma. Thus, neither reference seems appropriate to Antony's situation: he at once "lacks the guiltlessness and the pathos of a dying Hercules" (MacKenzie 1990, 314) as well as a true commitment to his threat of murderous rage, which is only verbalised and in no way physically acted upon (Caporicci 2016, 93).

2 In addition to these direct allusions to Hercules, Heather James cites the implicit parallel between an emasculated Antony as the "bellows and fan / To cool a gipsy's lust" 1.1.9-10) and "Hercules unmanned by Omphale, humiliatingly discovered in her clothes" (1997, 129).

MacKenzie views this failure to evoke a coherent analogy with Hercules as a "transmigration from Roman military to Egyptian love ethic" (1990, 314). I propose that it also cleverly demonstrates Antony's last-ditch effort to return his shaken selfhood to a stable identity, perhaps most easily found in an icon of Graeco-Roman masculine virtue and a personal mythical forefather. The attempt (along with Antony's bungled suicide) must ultimately fail because this identity constitutes a nostalgic construct which might never have existed in the first place, at least not in Shakespeare's play (Sullivan 2005, 88). Moreover, the confused references to classical mythology in act 4 lend themselves to analysis on a meta-poetic level concerning the role of intertextuality and originality in an early modern drama such as *Antony and Cleopatra*, especially when contrasted with Cleopatra's approach to immortalising herself in the last act of the play.

Discussing Shakespeare's contested use and knowledge of textual material from classical antiquity may seem repetitive if not entirely redundant at this point, so I will refrain from repeating the finer details of this heated scholarly debate. For the sake of lending any sort of credibility to the argument that Antony's self-fashioning after classical tradition is parodied by his inapt usage of it, not Shakespeare's own lack of learnedness, I will point to Colin Burrow's insightful proposition that "[a] large part of the creativity of Shakespeare lies in his willingness to overlayer one shard of 'the classics' with another . . . to misremember, and to reinvent what he has read" (2004, 24). As a prime example for this Shakespearean principle of "over-determination" in which multiple and possibly conflicting perspectives on his classical sources overlap each other and create an ambivalent effect, Burrow cites the mechanical's play mocking the story of Pyramus and Thisbe in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, originally found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (2015, 204). If one accepts that this imaginatively irreverent treatment of classical tradition is a conscious act of creative freedom on Shakespeare's part, there is no reason to assume why he should not transfer this technique onto his characters in order to reference and perhaps even parody his own poetic practice. The interpretation that the dramatic purpose of these mythologically allusive passages might have been aimed at creating an ambivalent effect rather than

drawing up a strictly cohesive symbolism can be corroborated by taking into consideration the perspective of Shakespeare's less educated audience. As Camilla Caporicci asserts, "even without knowing much about the original myths, the spectator would still be able to perceive their ambivalent use and conceptualise them accordingly" (2016, 89).

Besides Hercules, Antony is also compared to Ajax and/or his father, Telamon, as well as Aeneas in the scenes before his death. Notably, the other more obvious connection next to Hercules is missing here: the Roman god of war, Mars, who poses a counterpart to Cleopatra's Venus (2.2.237) or Isis (3.6.18). In the previous acts, the comparison is drawn more often than any other and is strongly connected to the Roman masculine ideal Antony is held to by himself and other characters. However, as Caporicci points out, Antony's likeness to Mars is relativised from the outset of the play as a representation of his former glory rather than his current self (2016, 90). Already in the fourth line, Philo bemoans that his general's "goodly eyes, / That o'er the files and musters of the war / Have glowed like plated Mars" (1.1.3-5) are now turned towards Cleopatra instead. When Enobarbus is asked by Lepidus to speak to Caesar in a "soft and gentle" manner, Enobarbus replies that he shall rather "entreat him / To answer like himself . . . / And speak as loud as Mars" (2.2.3; 4–7). Unsurprisingly, it is again Cleopatra who, upon learning of his marriage to Octavia, puts a subversive spin on the mythological analogy by relating Antony to a figure who is "painted one way like a Gorgon, / The other way's a Mars" (2.5.144-5). As MacKenzie emphasises, the military element of the metaphor is missing here, with Antony as Mars being defined by the absence of the monstrous, Gorgon-like in his attributes – and therefore rather by "the whole spectrum of potential human excellences" (1990, 322). Instead of verbally limiting his identity to a certain ideal by expecting him to be "like himself", a self that is tied to Roman martial virtues, she allows her idea of him to encompass both the terrible things she associates with him at this moment[3] as

3 As MacKenzie also notes, Antony's one side is *painted* like a Gorgon, "the stress lying tellingly in the sense of imaginative artifice that, to a large extent, defines the personal mythologisation of both hero and heroine" (1990, 323-4).

well as the potential for everything opposite of that. In her mind (in contrast to Philo), his love for her cannot only coexist with his potential to live up to her idea of the god Mars, but the analogy even becomes predicated on their love.

Following the argument that we are witnessing the deconstruction of the martial ideal Antony fails to live up to throughout the play, it seems fitting that he is finally stripped off this role along with his armour, assisted by Eros, upon hearing of Cleopatra's death:

> The sevenfold shield of Ajax cannot keep
> The battery from my heart. O, cleave, my sides!
> Heart, once be stronger than thy continent;
> Crack thy frail case. Apace, Eros, apace!
> No more a soldier. Bruisèd pieces, go.
> You have been nobly borne. – From me awhile.
> (4.14.48-53)

Just like the famous shield, the comparison to Ajax is manifold. Firstly, it seems to add yet another warlike mythological character to the ones already discussed. At the same time, the analogy is immediately negated – even the shield that has kept Ajax from being wounded throughout the battles described in the *Iliad* could not be of any use to Antony now. The "battery" is coming from within and cannot be fought off, just as Ajax ultimately falls not in battle against any Trojan or Greek soldier, but by his own hand after having succumbed to grief and/or madness (depending on the source). However, whereas Ajax has to give up "his" (i.e. Achilles') armour against his will, losing his sanity and his life as a result, Antony strips off his armour and military identity consciously. And in contrast to Ajax, he is unable to properly execute his suicide by himself, thus failing at becoming self-identical even in the moment of his death (Sullivan 2005, 104).[4]

This dislodged analogy with Ajax is apprehended by Cleopatra in the preceding scene. Again, there seems to be a confusion of

4 There may be an additional layer of bathos to the comparison. Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin remarks that Shakespeare also uses "Ajax" as an insult; this occurs most prominently in *Troilus and Cressida*, where "the character is so strongly ridiculed by Thersites that the very name becomes an insult", but as a pun on "a jakes (privy)", it can also be found elsewhere in his plays (2016, 7).

related, but separate traditions of Greek mythology. Directly following Antony's references to his Herculean fury, Cleopatra seems to allude to Hercules, Ajax, Ajax' father Telamon, as well as the Calydonian[5] boar all at once: "Help me, my women! O, he's more mad / Than Telamon for his shield; the boar of Thessaly / Was never so embossed." (4.13.1-3). Of all those named above, Telamon himself is the strangest choice for characterising Antony. In Ovid's account, he barely figures in the boar hunt; in one of the two instances, he is just listed as being present ("nec Telamon aberat", Ov. *Met.* 8.309; "Telamon was also there"), and in the other he trips and falls in an attempt to follow the fleeing boar into the woods ("persequitur Telamon studioque incautus eundi pronus ab arborea cecidit radice retentus", 8.378; "Telamon did attempt to follow, and in his eagerness, careless where he went, he fell prone on the ground, caught by a projecting root"). Aside from his connection to Ajax and the allusion to the boar, which – rather hyperbolically – allows Cleopatra to describe Antony's rage as animalistic, surpassing even the monstrous boar's capacity for destruction, the analogy seems far-fetched.[6] Why should Antony not instead be "more mad" than, say, Meleager for his spear? If Shakespeare had wanted to highlight themes of passionate love, martial prowess, betrayal, fury, and vengeance, he might have been a more fitting pick.

What must be taken into account is that the comparison is drawn by Cleopatra, who is once again making use of mythological references in the unorthodox manner typical of her. Here, her desperation over Antony's anger seems very real. At the same time, she is keeping the theatrical performance going, which has been

5 Since no "boar of Thessaly" exists that is known to us in the context of a mythological boar hunt, Cleopatra can only be referring to the Calydonian boar in relation to Telamon, although Mount Calydon is strictly speaking located in ancient Aetolia, not Thessaly. It is likely that Thessaly is used as a metonymy for central Greece in this case.

6 Another rather trivial link between the Calydonian boar and Antony can be found in Pausanias, who mentions that "[t]he ancient image of Athena Alea, and with it the tusks of the Calydonian boar, were carried away by the Roman emperor Augustus after his defeat of Antonius and his allies" (8.46.1). However, since Shakespeare probably has not read Pausanias, this is very likely nothing more than an interesting coincidence.

a central element to her relationship with Antony throughout the entire play. She is desperate, but not desperate enough to actually kill herself because of the rift between them, so she immediately orchestrates her staged suicide. It is a tactic we have already seen her employ in the past: whenever Antony is angry at her, she dramatises her remorse and cleverly adapts her words and actions according to what she apprehends will fit his own narrative and thus pacify him (1.3.105-8; 3.11.57-9). Instead of contradicting, provoking, and teasing him, as she tends to do at other times, she takes to mirroring his own perceived desires and feelings in critical situations.[7]

This pattern of behaviour may give insight into why Cleopatra uses such a disparate analogy in the first place – she is simply mirroring Antony's 'mythological' language in the previous scene and in this way affirms his attempt at performing as a hero of the classical tragic or epic tradition. At the same time, by directly comparing him to Telamon and a boar instead of more flattering characters like Mars, Hercules or even Ajax, she is (consciously or unconsciously) subverting his attempt at creating a mythological foil with which he seeks to stabilise his identity. Furthermore, the reference could be even read as a subtle way of establishing dominance over Antony in terms of effective self-representation. After all, the famous twist in the myth of the Calydonian boar is brought on by the female huntress, Atalanta – in Ovid, this happens immediately after the description of Telamon's clumsy fall. She is the first to draw blood from the boar by firing an arrow below its ear, thereby putting the men of the hunting expedition to shame (Ov. *Met.* 380-9). Similarly, Antony feels dishonoured by Cleopatra's faked suicide since it means that she has overtaken him in pre-empting Caesar's triumph over them:

> Since Cleopatra died
> I have lived in such dishonor that the gods

7 Zamir argues that Cleopatra "indirectly manifests her love" through acts of affirming his self-image as after Actium, when she takes on "guilt that she knows she does not have to take on" or when she shows her "willingness to endorse the other's ideal self-narrative" in the way she chooses to portray Antony after his death (2011, 144f.; 139).

> Detest my baseness. I, that with my sword
> Quartered the world and o'er green Neptune's back
> With ships made cities, condemn myself to lack
> The courage of a woman – less noble mind
> Than she which, by her death, our Caesar tells
> "I am conqueror of myself".
> (4.14.66-73)

In this vein, if not as a successful equation of Antony with great heroes of classical tradition, the allusion to Telamon and the Calydonian boar can be interpreted as a way to showcase the inadequacy of mythological analogies for capturing the deeply human tragedy of the lovers', especially Antony's, downfall. If Cleopatra here is subtly casting herself as Atalanta, this also gives insight into the complex method she employs for crafting her self-image. Charles Martindale reminds us that "[t]he play . . . is much concerned with a contestation of authority, with who controls interpretation, as characters seek to establish their own version of events" (2004, 91). This proves true for the careful way in which Cleopatra goes about constructing her own immortal legacy. Certainly, Antony plays a prominent part in her own self-representation, but even as she adopts his narrative, she refuses to edit her own voice out of it – even if it is heard only implicitly, in absence and in the opening-up of possibilities instead of a limiting self-attribution to figures of classical mythology.

A final explicit comparison of himself and Cleopatra to mythological characters is made by Antony following the reference to Ajax a few lines before he orders Eros to kill him. The analogy of the couple as Dido and Aeneas is delivered in future-directed and ecstatically competitive terms, illustrating Antony's eagerness to "o'ertake" (4.14.54) his lover in death:

> Eros! – I come, my queen. – Eros! – Stay for me.
> Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,
> And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze.
> Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops,
> And all the haunt be ours. – Come, Eros, Eros!
> (60-4)

At first glance, the close entanglement of Antony's drive for – in psychoanalytical terms – Eros and Thanatos is aided in its dramatic effect by the mention of the most famous couple in early Roman mythology, which Antony is certain will be surpassed by him and Cleopatra. Once more, however, the functionality of this image quickly caves in upon closer inspection. After all, in the *Aeneid*, there is no such happy reunion of Dido and Aeneas in the underworld as Antony imagines. Unmoved by the excuses Aeneas offers upon meeting her in the Mourning Fields, Dido does not even spare him a look and, "still his foe" ("atque inimica", Verg. *Aen.* 6.472), hurries off to rejoin her former husband in a grove. It does not take much to outbid this frosty couple, then, leaving Antony's claim for his relationship with Cleopatra as a more passionate and immortal kind of love than theirs to fall somewhat flat. On the other hand, it should be remembered that the *Aeneid* plays no small role in the large-scale orchestration of Augustan propaganda setting in after Actium. This ideological machinery is already anticipated by both Antony and Cleopatra in the last two acts, throughout which the prospect of being led in triumph by their enemy becomes an ever-looming source of dread (4.14.24; 5.2.135; 254-8). For all their grand performances, Caesar remains the one character throughout the play who firmly holds control over the threads of the narrative – after all, his remain the final words. Characterising him and Brutus as "indistractible" types of characters – in contrast to a distractible and distracting Antony in both plays – Baldo asserts that they are able to "resist the fundamental conditions of their own existence as theatrical characters" (2018, 150). Neatly wrapping up the story by re-establishing stability and order in the Mediterranean (Come, Dolabella, see / High order in this great solemnity", 5.2.436-7), Caesar already anticipates his own representation as a unifying emperor. His place, it seems, is in the history books and epics rather than on stage.

In this light, the dislodged analogy to Dido and Aeneas can hold power for Antony's self-representation precisely because it calls into question the authority of the Vergilian source on the tradition of the *Aeneid*. Heather James convincingly argues that Antony and Cleopatra represent characters who "seek control over their representation and interpretation throughout the play and resist

literary-political commodification by Octavius and his scribes" (1997, 119). While Cleopatra, the orientalised "strumpet" (1.1.14), "whore" (3.6.77), "witch" (4.12.52), and general Other of the play, receives the brunt of external representation imposed upon her in a derogatory gendered manner, Antony appears to suffer more deeply from it in his sense of identity. By taking part in imposing onto Antony the image of a ruggedly masculine hero (1.4.64-81), together with all the corresponding moral and social expectations that go along with it, Caesar has managed to turn this Roman brand of "hard pastoral, georgic, and epic" nostalgia against him as he "damagingly constructs his remembrance of the heroic Antony from fresher images of Antony's divergence from it" (James 1997, 128). Thus, subverting the expectations set by the authority of the *Aeneid*, an epic propagating core values framed as inherent to a morally superior Roman selfhood by Octavius Caesar, can signify a liberation not only from the shackles of this narrow morality, but also from the Augustan narrative itself. In this revision of the Vergilian tradition, James identifies a "habit of appropriating myths . . . analogous to Shakespeare's own imitative practice: Shakespeare returns to the books that normally lend authority, historical precedent, and iconographic material to the court, and uses them as sources to diverge from the dominant political usage" (1997, 150).

James' reading that Antony's misappropriation of classical material constitutes an effective way of deconstructing fictions imposed on him by others gives important insight into jumbled instances of mythological referencing discussed in this essay. However, one important aspect underlying these passages and much of act 4 should not be overlooked: the inadvertent comedy undercutting the prolonged tragic production of Antony's death. It becomes most apparent in the double-entendre and confusion around Eros' (failed) assistance in the suicide and in the awkward hoisting up of Antony's wounded body onto Cleopatra's platform, both scenes which regularly invite audience laughter in productions of the play (Potter 2006, 513f.; 519). Similarly, just as various scholars have described his suicide as "bungled" or "botched" (Vanhoutte 2000, 154), so could his "bungled" references be seen as a failed attempt to adhere to the self-constructed role as a tragic hero such as Hercules or Ajax. Antony's own awareness of the danger of

becoming an object of ridicule and debasement is one of his driving motives behind his suicide in the first place, describing to Eros his most feared scenario as being led in triumph by Caesar in Rome, "his face subdued / To penetrative shame" (4.14.87-8). In light of this, Jennifer Vanhoutte's criticism that scholars casting his death as one great comic farce exhibit an overtly undifferentiated and unsympathetic reading of his character seems justified (2000, 154f.). Contextualising the suicide ambivalently within the spectrum of Early Modern and ancient Roman sensibilities on the topic, she asserts that "Shakespeare does not idealize or ridicule Antony's suicide; instead, he depicts it in agonizing detail" (162).

In other words, Antony dies not a hero of a classical tragedy, going out in a flash of singular pathos, but as a manifold, utterly human character. And to be human, as is exemplified so famously throughout all of Shakespeare's plays, means also to hold the capacity for representing conflicting concepts within one's selfhood at the same time. Limited to a mythological, self-affirming language, Antony's language of self-expression may translate to his audience as unimaginative, or, in the worst case, ridiculous in its susceptibility to bathos. However, this inability to reduce himself to mythological archetypes ultimately constitutes his triumph; he is immortalised not as a Herculean Roman, a frenzied Ajax or a failed Aeneas, but as a liberated Antony, "peerless" (1.1.45) and non-identical even to himself.

3. Cleopatra – "genuine classic"?

In the context of intertextual references to classical mythology, Charles Martindale has opened up the question of whether Shakespeare could be titled, in A.D. Nuttall's words, a "genuine classic" in comparison to his more conventionally classicist contemporaries such as Marlowe and Milton.[8] Instead of adopting their more heavily referential mode of receiving ancient Greek and Roman literature, Martindale argues that Shakespeare was

8 This refers to a lecture titled "Shakespeare – genuine classic?" that I had the pleasure of attending at the *Shakespeare and the Mediterranean* Summer School organised by the Skenè Research Centre, Verona in August 2023.

able to process his mythological material with less reverence and thus more imaginatively and authentically despite, or precisely because of, the lack of classical learnedness attested to him by Ben Jonson (Silk 2005, 246). The passages cited by Martindale from *Antony and Cleopatra* to contrast with contemporary writers are all lines delivered by Cleopatra: her first monologue and the lines containing her resolution to be "marble-constant" in the last act of the play (5.2.1-8; 289-4) as well as her speech "I dreamt there was an emperor Antony" in the same scene (5.2.93-113). In this last section, I will take the liberty to apply the dichotomy of "classicising" vs. "genuine classic" within the play in order to examine Cleopatra's strategy of (self-)representation, which is fundamentally different from Antony's, as outlined above.

Moving on to act 5, the sudden lack of allusions to classical myth is striking. This is in line with Caporicci's observation that Shakespeare places remarkably little emphasis on the connection between Cleopatra and deities such as Isis or Venus explored more in-depth in his ancient sources (2016, 97). While the connection is drawn – most famously in Enobarbus' monologue in act 2, in which he describes Cleopatra's appearance on the river Cydnus as "[o]'erpicturing that Venus" (2.2.237) – there is no direct equation of the two. By evoking a "new and unrivalled mythology of the senses" (MacKenzie 1990, 321), Enobarbus' description of the queen transcends the symbolic realm to which a mere comparison with the archetypical goddess of love and beauty would otherwise confine her.

In her eulogy for Antony, Cleopatra does not even invoke the gods (Roman or Egyptian) as in the final moments of Antony's death (4.15.40-2). The poetic vision she conjures up in order to immortalise her "emperor Antony" is as imaginative as it is full of unique metaphors (e.g. "His delights / Were dolphin-like", 5.2.108-9). When she asks Dolabella whether he thinks that "there was, or might be, such a man / As this I dreamt of" (5.2.115-16), her question concerns not only what she holds as truth regarding her loving view of Antony, but implicitly also refers to the singularity of his greatness. In the personal mythology Cleopatra constructs for Antony post-mortem, conventional, i.e. classical, modes of representation such as comparisons with gods or heroes cannot

live up to the very human individual that Antony is to her. To her, his splendour is "past the size of dreaming", to imagine "[a]n Antony were nature's piece 'gainst fancy" (5.2.120-2). She refuses to confine him to a symbolic realm in her description, thus making him irreducible to prefabricated paradigms. In MacKenzie's words, Antony becomes "a myth that is unprecedented and free of the shackles of Classical mythology" (1990, 326). I would go one step further and argue that he is even liberated from the compulsion to exist within the narrow margins of identical Roman selfhood at large. Through Cleopatra's eulogy, who "commits his memory to a world of half-realities and dream" (MacKenzie 1990, 325), Antony's identity is finally opened up to the multiplicity that he has tried and failed to repress in his lifetime.

What to make, finally, of Cleopatra's own suicide and her wish to become "marble-constant"? As Sullivan has pointed out, the erotic overtones of Cleopatra's death, which she frames as a teleological act of consummating her marriage with Antony, complicate this idea of self-identity in death: "For Cleopatra, the non-singleness of being is seen as being's very condition, and it is foregrounded in her masterfully theatrical suicide" (2005, 105). Her death is future-directed in the sense that it does not mark a stop to her generativity of imagination, instead opening it up to the possibilities of a performative act transcending earthly life. The invoked likeness to archetypes such as Roman or Egyptian goddesses simply marks the abundance of these possibilities, "revealing the full spectrum of her many-faced divinity", as Caporicci puts it, "which is at the same time symbolic and highly literal" (2016, 98).

Returning once more to Adorno's and Horkheimer's dialectic model of myth and enlightenment referenced at the beginning of this essay, one may argue that (perhaps paradoxically) it is crucial for Cleopatra to incorporate the idea of a "marble-constant" element into her identity – if only as another possibility to be contradicted and rendered non-self-identical. Moreover, I propose that there is a meta-poetic dimension subverting her claims for marble-constancy: the fact of her immortalisation in the play itself. Spoken in Shakespeare's own words, "[n]ot marble nor the gilded monuments / Of princes" will lend fame to her, but "powerful rhyme", i.e. Cleopatra's representation in the play, must naturally appear as a more appropriate medium

for capturing a "living record of [her] memory" (Sonnet 55, 1-2; 8). Until the very end, Cleopatra keeps exploring and expanding the theatrical possibilities of life – and death. Her suicide, albeit carefully orchestrated, retains a sense of sensuous spontaneity in the way she decides to put another asp onto her arm ("Nay, I will take thee too", 5.2.372) and in the incompleteness of her last verse. The performance of her death is based not on narrow conventions set by classical (or other literary) paradigms of suicide, but rather constitutes a final act of self-assertion that encompasses the full possibility of human experience often attributed to Shakespeare's writing itself. Thus, Cleopatra becomes a "genuine classic" in her own right, immortalised within and beyond the limitations of the play.

4. Conclusion

In many ways, *Antony and Cleopatra* is concerned with the creation and unravelling of myth and history – individually as well as on a larger scale. References to figures and stories from Greek and Roman mythology not only serve the purpose of creating an ancient Mediterranean setting, but also highlight the different ways in which the characters may approach the representation of personal identity. The density of classical references in act 4 illustrates the importance of such paradigms for the construction of an idealised Roman masculine selfhood which Antony strives for and struggles with throughout the play. While these references at first glance may seem like a way of affirming such rigid forms of self-conception, a closer look at the passages discussed in this essay reveals another possible perspective on their function in the play: by being set up as disparate analogies which do not fit the image they are meant to portray, the audience is drawn to the inadequacy of mythological figures as foils for characters with human flaws and complexities. Especially in Antony's case, instead of achieving a coherent self-mythologisation, they rather act as destabilising moments for a self-identical characterisation and thus succeed in humanising him as a contradictory individual.

In act 5, Cleopatra demonstrates an alternative approach to self-representation and to mythologising Antony that does not

attempt to reduce herself or her lover to archetypes from classical mythology, but instead ventures for a legendary status by setting themselves up as inimitable moments in history, unequal to anyone else and even to themselves as they were in life. In this affirmative staging of such theatrical ingenuity, the same underlying poetics of literary immortalisation can be recognised that run through Shakespeare's other plays and sonnets and that are so fundamental to the afterlife and reception of the bard himself.

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4

"Name Cleopatra as she is call'd in Rome": (Un)Hiding Cleopatra's Name in *Antony and Cleopatra*

Rita De Carvalho Rodrigues

Abstract

This essay explores the reasons behind the lack of Cleopatra's name in the Shakespearean play *Antony and Cleopatra*. In particular, the investigation attempts to uncover why Cleopatra's name appears only twenty-eight times in a text of 23,848 words. It does so by showcasing a deep literary and linguistic analysis of the play's text, specifically, character speech, to decode which expressions and terms are used to address, mention, or refer to Cleopatra and why characters choose them. Firstly, it argues that a patriarchal context combined with an 'Egyptian-enemy' perception fuels the rage that leads Cleopatra not to be called by her own name by the men in the play. This argument also analyses the ambivalence that characterises Antony's speech towards Cleopatra. Secondly, it argues that Cleopatra's name carries fearlessness and power, whether through its commanding sonority or possible associated superstition. The word 'Cleopatra' is charged with strength and intensity that arguably threatens most men in the play, which unmistakably leads to an avoidance of her name. These arguments work together in building the idea that there are relevant substantial reasons that could explain why Cleopatra's name is ultimately hidden in the play

Keywords: Shakespeare; Mediterranean; Cleopatra; Digital Humanities; Linguistics; Drama Studies

1. Introduction

It seems only fitting to be shocked after learning that out of the 23,848 words that constitute the text of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra,* only twenty-eight of those words are the name 'Cleopatra'. After all, she is the protagonist of the play; her name is in the very title of the tragedy. Then why does it appear only twenty-eight times in such a lengthy play? Notably, her male co-protagonist's name, 'Antony', appears 133 times. What could explain this tremendous contrast? This essay explores the imbalance between the use of

Cleopatra's first name and the use of other characters' first names in an attempt to uncover the possible reasons behind the prevailing alternative terms and expressions used to address Cleopatra.

Firstly, it is important to clarify that "a 'form of address' may be considered as any word or phrase regularly used vocatively and formulaically which is indicative of social relationships" (Replogle 1967, 14). In this essay, different forms of address regarding Cleopatra and other characters will be considered for analysis and interpretation, such as their first names (like 'Cleopatra', 'Antony', 'Caesar'), terms of social indication or rank (like 'Queen', 'Egypt', 'Lady', 'Lord'), terms of endearment ('my love') or even insults ('gypsy', 'witch'). When looking at these terms, it becomes possible to uncover the gap in the use of first names between Cleopatra and other characters – mainly Antony and Caesar.

As Robert D. Hume claims, ". . . characters are sharply differentiated by their language," in the sense that each character has its own style of language, specific ways of constructing a sentence, and even a preference for certain words (1973, 281). Exploring why Cleopatra's name seems to be hidden in the play's text is relevant in that finding the primary alternatives for her name that characters use sheds light not only on their own language style but also on the depth of Cleopatra's character. Hume follows, ". . . the distinctively personal speech of each individual contributes to our apprehension of his character" (281). Thus, examining the terms each character attributes to her provides insight into why her name is being avoided. Those reasons, in turn, will help construct the depth and power of Cleopatra's figure and presence in the play.

2. Research Methodology

As a reader – especially a first-time reader of the play – it is hard to focus on the use of any specific word or even how many times one or the other appears in the text. Actually, it is more than likely that the average reader, reading solely for enjoyment purposes, will not notice how frequently a particular word is uttered in a text. Therefore, it may come as a surprise that the word 'Cleopatra' appears only twenty-eight times during the play. The idea itself is

hard to grasp when discussing a play with the word 'Cleopatra' in its title. Regardless, the fact stands that Cleopatra's name consists of only 0,12% of the play's text – no possibility of claiming against it; this is what the numbers show.

These numbers were calculated using The Folger Shakespeare API Tools to select the complete text of *Antony and Cleopatra*, followed by inserting it in the Voyant Tools, which provided graphs and tables of all the top words in the text. For further analysis, the play's text by character was also selected in The Folger Shakespeare API Tools (and later inserted in Voyant) in order to investigate the differences between Cleopatra and Antony's individual linguistic presence throughout the play.

Nonetheless, while recognising how unnatural it seems that Cleopatra's name appears only twenty-eight times in the text, it is crucial to keep in mind that that number is not an exact representation of the number of times Cleopatra is referred to and/or addressed during the play. In order to get a clear picture of the total instances in which Cleopatra is central in a dialogue or character interaction, research calculations used the different tables in Voyant to include – besides the name 'Cleopatra' – all equivalent expressions and terms, such as 'Queen', 'Egypt', 'Lady', 'Madam', 'Majesty', and so forth. Additionally, it was part of the methodology to verify if those equivalents truly referred to Cleopatra in all those instances. Arguing that the number twenty-eight is a fair representation of Cleopatra's presence in the play and concluding that she, as a character, is somehow hidden or given less importance can be easily contested, and it is not what this essay defends.

3. Lines of Inquiry

This essay argues that regardless of how many times Cleopatra is referred to or mentioned in dialogue, it remains an uncontested fact that she is called by her own name only twenty-eight times (and some of those times, it is Cleopatra who is referring to herself). On the contrary, 'Caesar' and 'Antony' are the two most used words in the text – 134 and 133 times, respectively, almost quintupling Cleopatra's name. But why is this relevant? What meanings could

lie behind Cleopatra's name being hidden in the text (and by contrast, Antony and Caesar being abundantly on display)?

This essay presents two distinct arguments as attempts to explain why this happens. The first one arises by questioning whether this could be a sociological issue related to gender norms. It questions how differently the 'powerful' men in the play, Caesar and Antony, are referred to *versus* how Cleopatra is mentioned. Moreover, it intertwines the avoidance of Cleopatra's name with the differences in treatment between Cleopatra, an Egyptian woman, and other female characters, especially Fulvia and Octavia, two Roman *matronae*. While focusing on the possibility of a deeper sociological reason behind this situation, or even hints of a geographical prejudice, this argument requires a thorough consideration of the literary techniques employed by Shakespeare in the writing of each character's text. Thus, the patterns in Antony's language while addressing or referring to Cleopatra as her lover are investigated.

The second argument elaborates on the power of Cleopatra's name, what it represents, and how the intensity behind its utterance could be directly related to its (maybe) conscious avoidance. It is undeniable that Cleopatra's powerfulness as a purely confident woman, a queen, a representation of the 'otherness' that was not the Roman world, threatened the men in the play in more ways than one. The argument follows that many personal, spiteful, prejudicial reasons engraved in the other characters' personalities may lead to her name's literary presence being diminished. It investigates a possible phonetic connection and even the possibility of a superstitious connotation regarding the avoidance of Cleopatra's name by certain characters. Nonetheless, the argument stays aware of its limitations, for instance, because Cleopatra's servants could not call her simply by her name, which would be unthoughtful and disrespectful. While this is one of the apparent reasons that explains some of the absence of Cleopatra's name, as a reason itself, it is irrelevant for this essay because it is a motive shared by other characters – Antony and Caesar's servants cannot also call them by their names.

As Hume explains, ". . . it should be plain that in *Antony and Cleopatra,* language is not merely the vehicle of the action; rather, it parallels and reinforces the conflicts of the play, indicates what

is going to happen and helps tell us why" (1973, 300). Therefore, it seems only fitting to focus on language – analysing linguistic traits in each character that may help us understand the underlying conflicts and issues in the play reflected in the play's text.

4. From "my dearest queen" to "triple turned whore"

As an attempt to get closer to the total number of times Cleopatra's character is referred to, addressed to, or mentioned in the play, research calculations led to a rough estimate by adding to the name *Cleopatra* almost every possible alternative. With every added term, the estimated number reached 146 instances – correspondingly 0,61% of the play's text.

Firstly, it needs to be pointed out that, even after adding all the alternative terms to Cleopatra's name – in this study, only 'Cleopatra', 'Queen', 'Egypt', 'Lady', 'Madam' and 'Majesty' were considered as alternatives – that still surpasses the use of Antony's name alone (all other alternatives excluded) by only thirteen instances. By accepting the number 146 as the total of instances where Cleopatra is mentioned, then the number of times the word 'Cleopatra' is chosen for reference corresponds to 19.2% of all the times she is addressed or mentioned. Thus, this calculation reinforces that Cleopatra's name does not even prevail in the handful of ways the play's characters choose to address her.

Furthermore, research calculations, in an attempt to expose contrasts, show a rough estimate calculated for Antony's case. If we add to the 133 times Antony's name appears in the text, most alternatives for his name, such as 'Sir', 'Lord' and 'Mark', a number around 260, 270 is reached as an estimated total. Adding every 'Sir', 'Lord' and 'Mark' would correspond to 286 mentions, but that number cannot be used as a reference without considering a margin of error of at least twenty 'Sir's and 'Lord's belonging to someone else, in this case, Caesar. Still, if that margin of error is taken into account, that leaves the total still as roughly 100 more mentions of Antony than Cleopatra – 1,2% of the play's text. Antony's name alone appears, as stated previously, 133 times, corresponding to 0,56% of the play's text. Surprisingly, Caesar surpasses Antony by

one appearance, making his name the top word in the play – with a total of 134 times correspondingly 0,56% of the play's text.

Another relevant strategy used to depict discrepancies in name use between characters is looking specifically at the contrasts presented in Antony's speech towards Cleopatra. Of all the twenty-eight times Cleopatra's name appears in the play, Antony is responsible for only seven of those. On the contrary, Cleopatra's top word is 'Antony', with thirty-five utterances. Even if we add, in Antony's speech, to Cleopatra's name all the other alternatives ('Egypt', 'Queen', 'Lady'), the total of times Antony addresses and mentions her becomes an estimate of thirty-two times – which is still not enough to surpass Cleopatra's use of his own name. Similarly, if we added all the alternatives for Antony's name, as 'Sir', 'Lord' and 'Mark', the number thirty-five would only go up, easily surpassing Antony's thirty-two mentions of Cleopatra. Author Teresa Fanego argues that Cleopatra and Antony, by using their first names to address each other, illustrate the "closeness of their relationship" (2005, 30). Besides, Fanego also states that even though Antony uses Cleopatra's name significantly less than Cleopatra uses Antony's, "his affection for her becomes clear from his frequent use of endearments, a form of address which became more common from the seventeenth century onwards" (31). This sustains that Antony's love for Cleopatra can hardly be measured by the number of times he says her name because he uses other "terms of endearment." But does this rightfully explain why he rarely uses her name?

Antony resorts to an endless array of terms and expressions to refer to Cleopatra. It is essential to highlight the striking difference between the terms of endearment he uses when he is satisfied with her and when everything is going according to plan and the radically opposed, insulting terms he uses when things start to go wrong – or more explicitly when Cleopatra allegedly does something with which he is not happy about. As Hume points out, ". . . after his final defeat Antony rails against Cleopatra . . . calling her 'foul Egyptian,' 'triple turned whore,' 'charm,' 'gypsy,' 'spell,' and 'witch'" (1973, 295). The way he speaks to her when he is not angry is dramatically different. He then uses terms like 'my dearest queen' (1.3.22) and 'most sweet queen' (1.3.40).

As far as discrepancies between Cleopatra's speech towards Antony and his towards her are concerned, Fanego mentions that "although in principle the relationship between husband and wife, or between two lovers of the opposite sex, was founded on mutual love and respect, it was not an equal one" (2005, 29). It is undeniable that inequality often surrounds a romantic relationship, especially a heteronormative one – and especially one set many centuries ago, even more so a non-official asymmetrical relationship like Antony and Cleopatra's. Antony is married, Cleopatra is his mistress. There is a power imbalance sustained easily by the fact that Cleopatra is the one who, unconventionally, holds all the power in the relationship, when as far as Rome is concerned, Antony should be the powerful one and should not let himself be controlled by Cleopatra. Exhibit A, Antony follows Cleopatra, leading him to lose the Battle of Actium and Exhibit B, he wishes to kill himself when he learns of her death. Traditionally and old-fashionably, Antony should have all the power; for one thing, he is the man in the relationship, an illustrious, *married* Roman general – first to Fulvia, then to Octavia. As far as Antony's men are concerned, Cleopatra is *just* his mistress, regardless of their acknowledging of her charm and appeal.

Moreover, when it comes to Cleopatra's allure, Shakespeare could not put in the play explicit descriptions of her "physical charms." Hume claims that, in order to capture Cleopatra's "magic spell" and transpose into the text what exactly made her so appealing to men, Shakespeare had to devote lengthy descriptions of her – the prime example being Enobarbus' monologue – or intricate expression as alternatives for direct identification (1973, 288):

> Enobarbus I will tell you.
> The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne,
> Burnt on the water. The poop was beaten gold,
> Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
> The winds were love-sick with them
> . . .
> (2.2.216-20)

Besides, it is also important to keep in mind that part of Cleopatra's "magic spell" was also due to the fact that she was seen as a symbol of the unknown. It is known that the Mediterranean "stands as the

geographic centre of Shakespeare's imagination" (Cantor 2006, 897). Cleopatra herself, in representing Egypt, part of her "magic spell" is essentially that "otherness" characteristic of the Mediterranean site (Stelzer 2022, 26) that allows her to be fetishized by almost every man in the play, as the monologue shows. In the following argument, it will also be proved how her "otherness" worked as a double-edged sword. As quickly as it is labelled a "magic spell" in a most sensual and ethereal way, it easily transforms into harmful prejudices and stereotypes through the distorted Egyptian-enemy-like lens.

However, it is essential to remember that this is not as simple as stating that Cleopatra's name is used less simply because she is a woman. Even though it could seem that way based on the fact that her male co-protagonist's name appears 105 times more than hers, the gap cannot be merely reduced to that. Considering other female characters in the play like Fulvia and Octavia, for example – two Roman women that, despite not being of the same rank as Cleopatra, represent Antony's marital prospects, directly opposed threats to Cleopatra. As author, Manfred Weidhorn argues, ". . . though seductress of the greatest Romans, (Cleopatra) had been treated by them . . . as a gypsy, a low-class concubine, an Oriental Siren, and not with dignity accorded a Roman matron like Fulvia or Octavia" (1969, 305). Manfred's statement suggests that she is not treated with the same dignity as Fulvia or Octavia, which uncovers a more significant issue that surpasses gender and enters a deeper realm. A realm of perhaps not-so-subtle racial discrimination. This is clearly a symptom of the general geographical conflict between the Roman and Egyptian civilizations, and it is fairly evident through the fact that Cleopatra's "magic spell" is of no use to her because she will always represent the enemy. Which ultimately leads to a drastic difference in treatment between her and the other (Roman) women in the play.

Take Fulvia's case, a female character not even awarded with stage presence. Her name appears fourteen times in the play. Fulvia's name appears *half* the number of times Cleopatra's name appears. When Enobarbus learns about Fulvia's death, in a matter of 4 sentences, he and Antony manage to use her name a total of *three* times:

ANTONY **Fulvia** is dead.
ENOBARBUS Sir?
ANTONY **Fulvia** is dead.
ENOBARBUS **Fulvia**?
ANTONY Dead.
(1.2.172-6)

In Octavia's case, another female character who barely appears in the play, her name appears twenty-three times. How can it be possible that Cleopatra's name only surpasses that by five more instances? Weidhorn would argue that Cleopatra, despite her high rank, is not treated with the same respect and ceremony as Roman women (1969, 305). Overall, the aforementioned reasons help decode the disparity of how Cleopatra is addressed. The patriarchal context that fuels the rage and negative feeling that most male characters hold toward her has a clear reflection on the terms used to mention or describe her, much like the fact she is an Egyptian, not a Roman. As Hume asserts, "the Roman world is coldly rational and proper; the Egyptian is emotional, at once exalted and degraded" (1973, 282). If the Roman civilization is determined to be 'rational' and 'proper', then Cleopatra is, for them, the opposite. Cleopatra's Egyptian "otherness" is ultimately what fuels the hostility that characterises the ways in which she is addressed. Despite her being a symbol of sensuality and viewed almost as a celestial being, as far as most of them are concerned, she is the root of all evil – a true male manipulator. That sexist distorted lens through which Roman men view Cleopatra, combined with sleeping-with-the-enemy rage coming from her relationship with Antony, leads to several different expressions used to address her in lieu of her name, further explored in the following argument.

5. "Sink Rome, and their tongues rot / That speak against us!"

The second argument proposed in this essay sustains the fact that Cleopatra represents a threat to most of the characters in the play, especially Roman men, and Antony's own supporters. This is directly connected with the lack of the word 'Cleopatra' within all the different ways she is addressed throughout the play.

According to author Jeri Tanner, "… names reveal personal feelings, cultural attitudes, and social structure" (1987, 164). Cleopatra's name encompasses personal feelings, whether it is love, anger, contempt, or fear; it reveals cultural attitudes insofar as her name is directly tied to the word *Egypt*, to many men, equalling *enemy* – when someone uses her name, people know who and what she represents; and, finally, her name reveals social structure – she is Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt. If there is a female name in Shakespeare's plethora of female characters that evokes all of these elements, it is Cleopatra's.

Established thus far that the Mediterranean site is at the core of Shakespeare's imaginary realm, Paul Cantor also explains, "In particular, the clash of civilizations turns out to be (the author's) fundamental formula for tragedy" (2006, 902). Therefore, having also established that Cleopatra *is* Egypt and Egypt *is* Cleopatra, it follows that the conflictive dynamic between Antony and Cleopatra's relationship and the Roman men who insist on their separation mirrors that of the geographical disputes at stake. Conflicts inadvertently translate into language, as all other sociological phenomena do. Consequently, her name means something. It represents her essence; it plays a big part in constructing her identity and, therefore, is undeniably charged with all the negative energy the men in the play associate her with.

Although it is incessantly acknowledged in the character's dialogues the ethereal beauty of Cleopatra and her almost otherworldly qualities, she is equally insulted as much. Antony's men, as Linda Bamber states, ". . . do not approve of Antony's romantic sojourn in Egypt . . ." (2013, 83). Cleopatra is seen as a menace, an active impediment to Roman general Antony's pathway to glory in his 'fights' with Caesar. She is a powerful threat to the men even in war, evident in the conversation she has with Enobarbus where she states she will rightfully go to war as any man would:

> CLEOPATRA Sink Rome, and their tongues rot
> That speak against us! A charge we bear i'th' war,
> And as the president of my kingdom will
> Appear there for a man. Speak not against it,
> **I will not stay behind.**
> (3.7.19-23)

This line clearly illustrates just how powerful Cleopatra was. She demanded and decided her own fate; she held the power to control her own decisions.

Moreover, as Tanner cleverly points out, Shakespeare ". . . emphasized the use of names and their function to individualise, to show conflict, to provide motives, and to aid in the interpretation of his drama" (1987, 164). In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the way characters address each other plays a pivotal role in understanding where conflict lies. For example, as explained previously, Antony changes his tone toward Cleopatra when he is angry at her, which is reflected in the different terms he uses to address her. In the span of a few scenes, he can go from referring to her as 'my dearest queen' (1.3.22) and 'most sweet queen' (1.3.40) to 'gypsy' (4.12.30) and 'witch' (4.2.51). Antony avoids uttering Cleopatra's name when he is furious with her and trades it for insults. Likewise, Caesar refers to Antony as 'most noble Antony' (3.2.31) right after he pleasingly marries his sister Octavia; however, after Antony leaves Octavia for Cleopatra, he "cannot bear to speak his name" (1987, 168). This example shows us two things: one, Octavia's abandonment affects the way Caesar addresses Antony, but Cleopatra also suffers as collateral damage. Caesar knows Cleopatra is the real reason why Antony left his sister, hence his contempt and rage towards Cleopatra. Secondly, and most importantly, it exemplifies how personal feelings, whether love or anger, directly affect the words we choose to label other people and, therefore, it makes sense that Cleopatra's name is much avoided in big scenes like Antony's verbal fight with her after the Battle of Actium or after the messenger incident.

Additionally, characters choose to avoid using Cleopatra's name by recurrently using metonymy and synecdoche – two literary styling techniques used to make one thing refer to another and use a part to stand for the whole, respectively. Metonymy is probably the most frequent, with the highly repeated substitution of the name 'Cleopatra' with the word 'Egypt'. As author Virginia Vaughn carefully explains, ". . . she is Egypt insofar as she is Egypt's ruler: she is a regal part for the whole" (2016, 85). An example of the use of synecdoche is 'tawny front' (1.1.6). Here, the author of the play is choosing to have Cleopatra referred to as whole by a part – her face. There are other instances of metonymy used to address or

refer to Cleopatra, especially ones more insulting like the word 'gypsy', ". . . derived from 'Egyptian' as a term of contempt, . . . used again when Antony thinks Cleopatra has betrayed him" (86). This is relevant insofar as it shows Antony's dramatic switch of terms to refer to Cleopatra, as explored in the previous argument. This also ties in with the fact that feelings play a huge part in how characters address each other. According to Tanner, ". . . in the play, epithets and descriptions, usually hyperbolic, evoke images of falling and rising, disgust and adoration, weakness and strength, and decay and growth" (1987, 168).

In Vaughan's work on the role of language and writing in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the author explains Cleopatra's use of harsh sounds, such as 'k', to underline her scorn for a particular character (2016, 81). The example used by Vaughan is the verse "I hear him mock / the luck of Caesar", where the 'k' sound exposes her anger towards him. Following a similar line of thought, it could be argued that Cleopatra's name has a similar harsh quality – the 'p' sound. The letter 'p' and the open 'a' vowel followed by the 'tr-' sound create a commanding sonority with undeniably powerful connotations. Thus, from a certain point of view, it could be argued that Cleopatra's name is also avoided because of its sonority. The sonority of her name carries power, strength, and intensity. It symbolises her identity as a ruler, and in conversations where she is being diminished or even insulted, it would not work. Therefore, the fact that Antony and Caesar, or even other characters such as Enobarbus, avoid her name can be – besides all the reasons listed previously – also associated with her name's powerful sonority.

Moreover, as Tanner interestingly points out, ". . . characters may refrain from pronouncing a name so that they will not attract the bearer's thoughts or curses" (1987, 164). In fact, "while in Rome, Antony never uses Cleopatra's name either because he fears her curse or because he knows that she can be cursed if named" (172). Finally, this could potentially be one of the reasons Cleopatra's name is not pronounced as much as other names in the play, like *Antony* and *Caesar* –the play's language indicates that they are the most powerful (Hume 1973, 282). Certainly, one could think that, based on the fact that their names are the two most used words in the play. Everyone in the play repeatedly addresses them by their

own names, but for Cleopatra, characters use "epithets ranging from disdain to idolatry" (1987, 171). Even if some 'Caesar's are alluding to Julius Caesar, the importance it attributes to the Caesar 'dynasty' is clear. However, it is intriguing to wonder if the constant use of their names, as opposed to alternatives, directly symbolizes power. From that point of view, Cleopatra's name shows two disadvantages: not only is she a woman and they are men, but she is an Egyptian woman, and they are two respected Roman generals. Once again, it is evident that Cleopatra's "otherness" does not work in her favour. The bigger question remains if, even with all of that in mind, we can really claim their names stand through the test of time as powerful as Cleopatra's.

6. Conclusion

It is safe to say that there are a number of reasons that could explain the lack of Cleopatra's name throughout the play. Whether they truly are the reasons behind the avoidance of her name, we cannot know for sure. There is no way of knowing the author's true intention. Nevertheless, as Tanner reminds us, in the play, Shakespeare ". . . uses names to characterise, to reveal cultural attitudes, prejudices, and superstitions, to show conflict or concord, to enhance themes, and to add humorous and serious dimensions to his dramatic narrative" (1987, 173). Therefore, we know the author carefully and consciously chooses where and when to put each name and form of address. Whether we can find the true reasons that explain why characters choose other expressions to address Cleopatra, it must stand that Shakespeare intentionally creates and applies each character's name in each and every circumstance.

The only thing left for researchers to do, as Vaughan astutely remarks, is to ". . . study the text itself as carefully as we can and make our own judgements about its meaning" (2016, 55). By enumerating possible reasons for the lack of Cleopatra's name in *Antony and Cleopatra*, this essay uncovered different meanings behind the action of choosing to (or not to) use Cleopatra's name. First and foremost, as part of the research, numbers showed that the word 'Cleopatra' is pronounced only a striking twenty-eight times throughout a

lengthy play of 23,848 words. The first argument presented as to why this happened stood on the fact that it could be related to a deeply rooted issue of sociological nature. The immediate reaction in finding out Cleopatra's name appears twenty-eight times could be asking how many times Antony's name appears, hoping there might be an interesting contrast. The answer, 133, leads to our following line of inquiry, arguing that the inconsistency could be related to gender. Since Caesar's name also appears even more than Antony's, it is only natural to follow that, even in language, men seem to be paramount. However, research found that Fulvia and Octavia's names, the two Roman women whom Antony is at some point married to in the play and have little to no stage time, are used almost as many times as Cleopatra's. These findings show that the avoidance of Cleopatra's name cannot be solely explained by evoking gender but instead is strongly connected to the fact that she is an Egyptian woman – the enemy.

After carefully analysing the ambivalent nature of Antony's language while addressing Cleopatra, with the intention of uncovering the discrepancies in language use within an unbalanced romantic relationship, the second argument focuses on the power of Cleopatra's name. As Tanner explains in the aforementioned quote, names in Shakespearean plays reveal "cultural attitudes, prejudices, and superstitions". 'Cleopatra' is a charged word, a symbol of power. A powerful queen whose presence threatens everyone in the play, particularly the male characters. The argument employs the different connotations of Cleopatra's name, whether phonetic or superstitious, to explain the intensity of its utterance, which, in turn, exposes the complexity of meanings behind the avoidance of Cleopatra's name.

Regarding further questions, there are many that could be pertinently explored in the matter of the play's lack of Cleopatra's name. It would be relevant to conduct an in-depth analysis of every instance her name is used, followed by analysing every time an alternative is used, in order to compare which characters choose to use her name and in which contexts the same characters tend to choose alternatives, or even if the characters who choose the alternatives are different from the ones who use her name. Furthermore, it could also be relevant to conduct a similar analysis

to Antony's name, or even Caesar's, in order to truly uncover the drastic differences in the use of male and female names. Both these analyses can assist in finding the answers to questions such as is there a difference in the terms chosen to address characters when they are a part of the conversation *versus* when they are not present?

In conclusion, this essay sheds some light on the possible reasons behind the lack of Cleopatra's name in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* through an analysis of the play's text and different character's speeches. Hopefully, Cleopatra's name was somewhat redeemed in this essay since, according to calculations, it was used a total of 148 times.

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Part 2
Shakespeare and His Contemporaries

5

"All the unlawful issue that their lust / Since then hath made between them": Children and Absent Motherhood in Early Modern English Cleopatra plays

Jason lawrence

Abstract

Recent criticism on *Antony and Cleopatra* has started to argue for a closer correspondence between Shakespeare's play and the English closet dramas (*The Tragedie of Antonie* by Mary Sidney Herbert, and *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* by Samuel Daniel), which preceded it by a decade or more. This essay explores the relationship between these three plays, and their common historical source in Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's "Life of Marcus Antonius", through the specific comparative lens of their dramatic treatment of motherhood and children. It demonstrates that the conspicuous absence of emphasis on Cleopatra's role as a mother in Shakespeare is actually closer to the characterization of the Egyptian queen in Plutarch than are the earlier English plays, both of which highlight the maternal aspect more strongly, particularly in the relationship between Cleopatra and her oldest son Caesarion in Daniel's play, in both its original and revised forms. The essay also examines the puzzling absence of any sustained reference to Octavia's status as a historically significant mother in the three English plays, particularly in *Antony and Cleopatra*, despite the centrality of this role in Plutarch's account of her character.

Keywords: motherhood; Shakespeare; Plutarch; Daniel; Sidney Herbert

This essay examines the relationship between three Early Modern English plays that focus on the figure of Cleopatra through the specific comparative lens of their treatment of motherhood and children. In addition to the undisputed prose 'source' for all of these plays, Sir Thomas North's translation (via Jacques Amyot's 1559 French translation) of Plutarch's "Life of Marcus Antonius" from *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes Compared*, first printed in 1579, Geoffrey Bullough also includes complete texts of two recent English closet dramas, Mary Sidney Herbert's *The Tragedie*

of Antonie (1592; 1595), a verse translation from French of Robert Garnier's *Marc-Antoine* (1578; 1585), and Samuel Daniel's companion play *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* (1594; 1599), in the fifth volume of *The Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (1964). Bullough designates the earlier play as merely an "analogue", and the later one as a "probable source" for Shakespeare's *Tragedie of Anthonie, and Cleopatra* (c.1606; 1623) [hereafter *Antony and Cleopatra*]. In the past decade or so, however, critics have started to argue for a closer correspondence, suggesting that "Shakespeare's play appears in dialogue with the coterie dramas", exhibiting "a significant degree of continuity with the works of the closet dramatists" (Cadman 2015, 2 and 5). Yasmin Arshad agrees that "Shakespeare's play is also more like the closet dramas that preceded it than has been previously considered" in order to argue that his "Cleopatra was influenced by Mary Sidney's and Daniel's Cleopatras" (Arshad 2019, 179).

One key aspect of this perceived influence is expressed primarily by means of contrast rather than continuity: the vexed issue of Cleopatra's status as a mother in *Antony and Cleopatra*. In *Imagining Cleopatra: Performing Gender and Power in Early Modern England* (2019), Arshad traces the development of the handling of Cleopatra's motherhood in the earlier plays by the Countess of Pembroke and Daniel:

> The conflict between the role of a mother and a queen touched on in *Antonius* [the title of Sidney Herbert's play when first printed in 1592] with the Egyptian queen's wrenching goodbye to her children before her suicide -is made central in *Cleopatra*. In Daniel, the focus shifts more specifically to her son, Caesario, allowing for a more sympathetic and detailed treatment, with Cleopatra actively trying to save him. (2019, 75)

In another recent comparative analysis of *Cleopatra in Italian and English Renaissance Drama* (2019) Anna Maria Montanari similarly identifies "motherly love" as "a trait of Cleopatra's characterization that Daniel enhances", suggesting that the queen's "role as loving mother, in conflict with her instincts as a ruler, is part of the complex characterization of the principal" (2019, 191 and 193) in *The Tragedie of Cleopatra*. In contrast to this earlier dramatic treatment, Arshad argues that "the most significant departure from Daniel

in *Antony and Cleopatra* is in the idea of the Egyptian queen's motherhood. Shakespeare mentions Cleopatra's children only in passing, whereas Daniel's tragedy centres on her motherhood", as, in the later play, "Shakespeare's Cleopatra, unlike Daniel's and Mary Sidney's Cleopatras, shows no emotion towards her children" (2019, 198-9). Given the emphasis placed on the Egyptian queen's fraught maternal role by both Sidney Herbert and Daniel, it is perhaps surprising that, in this regard, Shakespeare is in fact much closer to the characterization and account of Cleopatra in North's Plutarch than are the earlier English dramatic representations: "The Life of Marcus Antonius" is full of references to mothers and their children, including three historically and dynastically important figures who are included or at least mentioned in *Antony and Cleopatra*, but the maternal role is only really emphasized in one case, and this is conspicuously *not* the queen of Egypt. Strikingly, in Shakespeare's play, in addition to the apparent lack of emotion that Cleopatra herself might display to her offspring, neither of these other historical women is identified as a mother. This essay therefore sets out to explore the significance of and attitudes towards children exhibited in Plutarch and all three of the Early Modern English Cleopatra plays, addressing in particular the phenomenon of what might be referred to, developing the terminology and work of Coppelia Kahn (1986) and Mary Beth Rose (1991), as absent motherhood in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

The first historically significant mother to be identified in Plutarch's "Life of Marcus Antonius" is Fulvia, Antony's wife at the start of Shakespeare's play, specifically in relation to Claudia, her daughter by her first husband Clodius. It soon becomes clear that, for Plutarch, wives and children play an important role in the formation of (often temporary) strategic and dynastic alliances in "The Life": shortly after the founding of the second Triumvirate and even before the battle of Philippi, in an attempt to alleviate tensions between Antony and Octavius despite their uneasy truce, it is proposed by Roman soldiers that "Caesar should mary Claudia, the daughter of Fulvia, and Antonius wife" in order to "have this friendship and league betwixt them confirmed by mariage" (Bullough 1964, 269). Historically this marriage did happen but soon ended in divorce, and it is not referred to again in "The Life", with no indication that

Fulvia's later uprising again Octavius, alluded to in the opening act of *Antony and Cleopatra*, is in any way connected to her brief period as Caesar's mother-in-law; Plutarch instead suggests that Antony's wife "who being of a peevish, crooked and troublesome nature, had purposely raised this uprore in Italie, in hope thereby to withdraw him from Cleopatra" (277). After Fulvia's death and Antony's hastily arranged marriage to the recently widowed Octavia, the sister of Octavius Caesar, the upbringing of "his other children which he had by Fulvia" (283), two young sons Antyllus and Iullus Antonius, is passed on to his new wife. Both sons are referred to by name in Plutarch, and the older boy is also mentioned in Daniel's *Tragedie of Cleopatra*, where his unfortunate fate at the hands of Octavius is paralleled with that of Caesarion, Cleopatra's son by Julius Caesar, but neither he nor Fulvia's other children by Antony or her previous husbands are ever acknowledged in *Antony and Cleopatra*: this is the first instance of a persistent absence of a focus on motherhood in Shakespeare's play.

The next example is even more conspicuous, given the repeated prominence that Plutarch gives to Octavia's nurturing role as both mother and stepmother in "The Life of Marcus Antonius". In *Antony and Cleopatra* Octavia is reduced initially solely to the role of mediator between her new husband and her brother, and then to the role of hapless abandoned wife: across the four scenes in which she appears in Shakespeare's play, Octavia speaks only 35 lines in total (Montanari 2019, 233), whilst she is merely referred to by name in both Sidney Herbert's and Daniel's plays, with considerably less attention paid to her in all three English Cleopatra plays than in Plutarch's account (Arshad 2019, 199). Octavia does undertake the sensitive role of go-between in Plutarch, meeting her husband at Tarentum to persuade Antony that she can intercede on his behalf with her brother, as dramatized in 3.4 in Shakespeare's play, but the historian emphasizes the significant detail that "Octavia at that time was great with child, and moreover had a second daughter by him" (Bullough 1964, 282), having already given birth to a girl before moving to Athens with her husband. Octavia's intervention with her brother is successful (temporarily), leading to "Antonius also leaving his wife Octavia and litle children begotten of her, with Caesar, and his other children which he had by Fulvia" (283)

as he heads off for a military campaign in Syria, where he fatefully rekindles his romance with the Egyptian queen. The betrayal and mistreatment of his wife causes a further, terminal rift between husband and brother, dramatized in the second half of 3.6 of *Antony and Cleopatra*, where Octavia arrives in Rome believing Antony to be still in Athens, only to discover from Octavius that he is already back in Egypt. Even here her response focuses more on her conflicted situation, being stuck between brother and husband, than on her marital abandonment: "Ay me most wretched, / That have my heart parted betwixt two friends, / That does afflict each other!" (3.6.76-8).[1] The mistreatment of his sister seems to upset Octavius more than it does her in both Plutarch and Shakespeare, but again important elements of the characterization of Octavia in "The Life", 'the love of Octavia to Antonius her husband, and her wise and womanly behavior' as a mother, are completely ignored in the English dramatization:

> Caesar commanded her to goe out of Antonius house, and to dwell by her selfe, because he had abused her. Octavia aunswered him againe, that she would not forsake her husbands house, and that if he had no other occasion to make warre with him, she prayed him then to take no thought for her: for sayd she, it were too shamefull a thinge, that two so famous Captaines should bringe in civill warres among the Romanes, the one for the love of a woman, and the other for the jelousy betwixt one an other. Now as she spake the worde, so did she also performe the deede. For she kept still in Antonius house, as if he had bene there, and very honestly and honorably kept his children, not those onely she had by him, but the other which her husband had by Fulvia. (Bullough 1964, 289-90)

This emphasis on Octavia's role as an honorable and generous mother and stepmother (to Iullus Antonius, whilst the older son Antyllus is with his father by this point) is repeated throughout Plutarch's "Life", including at the very end, when she also assumes the care of Cleopatra's children with Antony, as will be discussed at the end of this essay, so it is important to consider not only why Shakespeare

1 All references to *Antony and Cleopatra* are from Shakespeare 2011 and will appear parenthetically in the text.

might have decided to ignore this central aspect of her historical character in his play, but also why the playwright seems to have made all of his dramatic characters oblivious to her motherhood too. In *Antony and Cleopatra* neither Octavius nor his sister ever mention these two daughters in relation to Antony's neglect of her, and, in one of the strangest moments in the play, Antony himself seems to forget the historical existence of his legitimate Roman children. In the final scene of act 3, when the Roman general enters to witness Cleopatra's overly warm reception of Thidias, Octavius's messenger to Egypt, Antony is driven into a terrible rage, reprimanding the queen for her lack of "temperance" (3.13.125), taunting her about previous Roman relationships with both Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great (3.13.120-4), and, most tellingly, blaming her for his own conduct towards his virtuous wife:

> You were half blasted ere I knew you. Ha?
> Have I my pillow left unpressed in Rome,
> Forborne the getting of a lawful race,
> And by a gem of women, to be abused
> By one that looks on feeders?
> (3.13.108-12)

If the verbal abuse of the Egyptian queen's overt sensuality here is characteristic of the Roman values Antony seems to invoke and endorse only when he is angry with her (as he does again even more bitterly in 4.12), specifically contrasting her with his chaste Roman wife who is figured as "a gem of women", it still seems odd that Shakespeare should choose to permit him no recollection of the legitimate children ("lawful race") that, historically, he had already conceived with Octavia (and abandoned) by this point in the play. Significantly, it will be by means of one of these daughters ("Antonia, so fayer and virtuous a young Ladie") that eventually "Of Antonius issue came Emperors", as is noted in the margin of North's Plutarch (Bullough 1964, 317). The historical information outlined in the brief genealogy at the end of "The Life", that the emperors Claudius and then Caligula would be direct descendants of Antony and Octavia's younger daughter's marriage to Drusus, the son of Octavius's wife Livia, is used in Daniel's *Tragedie of Cleopatra* (1599) as the basis for a prophecy, and curse, on the childless Octavius, delivered in

the reported words of Caesario, Cleopatra's son by Julius Caesar, shortly before his assassination:

> And thou *Augustus* that with bloudie hand,
> Cut'st off succession from anothers race,
> Maist find the heavens thy vowes so to withstand,
> That others may deprive thine in like case.
> When thou mayst see thy prowde contentious bed
> Yeelding thee none of thine that may inherite:
> Subvert thy bloud, place others in their sted,
> To pay this thy injustice her due merite.
> If it be true (as who can that denie
> Which sacred Priests of *Memphis* doe fore-say)
> Some of the of-spring yet of *Antony.*
> Shall all the rule of this whole Empire sway;
> And then *Augustus,* what is it thou gainest
> By poore *Antillus* bloud, or this of mine?
> Nothing but this thy victory thou stainest,
> And pull'st the wrath of heaven on thee and thine.
> (4.1018-33; qtd in Bullough 1964, 432)

In the extensive final revision of *Cleopatra* for his *Certaine Small Workes* volume in 1607, Daniel chooses to introduce on stage for the first time the character of Caesario, alongside his mother at the beginning of the play. Her oldest son then reappears alone on the way to his execution in act 4, after the fatal betrayal by his tutor Rodon, where he delivers a slightly amended version of this prophecy directly, rather than as reported speech: perhaps surprisingly, though, its impact in the revised 1607 version is diminished at this point by the playwright's decision to switch the initial direct address to Octavius at the start of the first verse paragraph, where Caesario tellingly uses the later imperial title, into the third person: "And he that thus doth seeke with bloudy hand, / T'extinguish th' ofspring of anothers race" (4.3.44-5).[2]

The centrality of the maternal relationship between the Egyptian queen and her oldest son in the original and revised versions of Daniel's *Cleopatra* highlights by contrast the marginalization of

2 All references to *The Tragedy of Cleopatra* are from Daniel 1607 and will appear parenthetically in the text.

Caesarion and his half-siblings in Shakespeare's later play. It is, however, striking that her son by Julius Caesar is the only child to whom Shakespeare's Cleopatra ever refers directly (5.2.19) and by name: in response to Antony's vicious verbal attack on her in 3.13, where he accuses her of being "cold-hearted" (3.13.164) towards him, Cleopatra is moved to defend her fidelity in the strongest terms she can summon:

> From my cold heart let heaven engender hail,
> And poison it in the source, and the first stone
> Drop in my neck: as it determines, so
> Dissolve my life! The next Caesarion smite,
> Till by degrees the memory of my womb,
> Together with my brave Egyptians all,
> By the discandying of this pelleted storm
> Lie graveless till the flies and gnats of Nile
> Have buried them for prey!
> (3.13.165-73)

The invocation of her son Caesarion in relation to the fading "memory of [her] womb" is the only time that Cleopatra acknowledges her maternal role explicitly in the play, but, even here, in an extraordinary image of the summoning of a poisonous hail storm which will liquefy and leave unburied the entire Egyptian race, she can only envisage the boy's death and dissolution until eventually he is consumed by "the flies and gnats of Nile". This is presumably one of the moments referred to when Arshad suggests that, in contrast to Daniel's queen, Shakespeare's Cleopatra shows "no emotion towards her children" (2019, 199) in the play, but I would argue that this powerful image, where she is desperately imagining the death of her eldest son alongside her own should she ever be unfaithful to Antony, demonstrates instead a strong emotional attachment to both Caesarion and her Roman lover. Antony's trite three-word response to the queen's emotionally affecting speech ('I am satisfied') feels almost deliberately bathetic.

This momentary privileging of Caesarion to the exclusion of all her other children in *Antony and Cleopatra* is an aspect of Cleopatra's characterization which Shakespeare might have inherited directly from Daniel's play, where the relationship

between the queen and her oldest son, specifically in terms of the conflict between the roles of mother and monarch, "is made central" (Arshad 2019, 75). This struggle is apparent from Cleopatra's long opening soliloquy, where the queen muses on the reasons she might have to continue living after the suicide of Antony, with the concern for her children's futures exemplified in the rhyme of 'wombe' with "tombe":

> 'Tis sweete to die when we are forc'd to live,
> Nor had I staide behind my selfe this space,
> Nor paid such intr'est for this borrow'd breath,
> But that hereby I seeke to purchase grace
> For my distressed seede after my death.
> It's that which doth my deerest bloud controule,
> That's it alas detaines me from my tombe,
> Whiles Nature brings to contradict my soule
> The argument of mine unhappy wombe.
> You lucklesse issue of a wofull mother,
> The wretched pledges of a wanton bed,
> You Kings design'd, must subjects live to other;
> Or else, I feare, scarce live, when I am dead.
> It is for you I temporize with *Caesar*,
> And stay this while to mediate your safetie:
> For you I faine content and soothe his pleasure,
> Calamitie herein hath made me craftie.
> (1.74-90; qtd in Bullough 1964, 409-10)

Bullough chooses to include a full text of the lightly revised edition of *The Tragedie of Cleopatra*, printed in 1599 in Daniel's *Poeticall Essayes*, in the fifth volume of the *Narrative and Dramatic Sources*, rather than the original version of the play first printed with *Delia and Rosamond Augmented* in 1594. There are some notable differences in this soliloquy in the earlier text, where the queen's decision to remain alive is more obviously and urgently borne from her trepidation about what Octavius will do to her children after her suicide ("But that I feare, *Caesar* would offer wrong / To my distressed seede after my death"; 1.73-4):

> O lucklesse issue of a wofull Mother,
> Th'ungodly pledges of a wanton bed,

> You Kings design'd, must now be slaves to other,
> Or else not bee, I feare, when I am dead.
> (Daniel 1594, 1.79-83)

The revised version also tones down some of the language from the original, where Cleopatra's children are now the "wretched" rather than "ungodly" products of their mother's "wanton" bed, and face the risk of becoming "subjects" rather than "slaves" to another ruler, should they live at all after she has gone ("scarce live" rather than "not bee"). Common to both versions, though, is the stark reminder that these children are "Kings design'd": this is significant, as it is the only moment in Daniel's play where the queen even acknowledges the existence of her other sons, in addition to Caesarion, whom she will later describe as "the jewell of my soule I value most" (4.866). Historically, the Egyptian queen bore two sons by Antony, Alexander (Helios) and Ptolemy (Philadelphus), both of whom are mentioned by name, alongside their half-brother Caesarion, in Plutarch and Shakespeare's accounts of the contentious Donations of Alexandria, but Daniel gives no further indication of their historical existence. In the final revision of the play for the 1607 *Certaine Small Workes*, where Cleopatra's soliloquy is moved to the beginning of act 2 after the staging of her moving parting from Caesario in act 1, which had originally only been reported by Rodon in act 4 of the 1594 and 1599 editions, even this brief acknowledgement of their existence is erased, as the lines about "Kings" in the plural are removed altogether. Even more conspicuous in its absence from all the versions of Daniel's play, and indeed *Antony and Cleopatra*, as will be discussed shortly, is any recognition of the fact that Cleopatra also had a surviving daughter with Antony, Cleopatra Selene, Alexander Helios's twin sister.

The only other occasion that Caesarion is mentioned by name in Shakespeare's play is at the start of 3.6, where Octavius disdainfully describes the Donations of Alexandria to Maecenas and Agrippa, making it abundantly clear that he does not believe that Cleopatra's oldest child is the son of his own adopted father Julius Caesar:

> Contemning Rome, he has done all this and more
> In Alexandria. Here's the manner of 't:
> I' th' marketplace, on a tribunal silvered,

> Cleopatra and himself in chairs of gold
> Were publicly enthroned. At the feet sat
> Caesarion, whom they call my father's son,
> And all the unlawful issue that their lust
> Since then hath made between them.
> (3.6.1-8)

He also pours scorn on the children that Cleopatra has subsequently borne with Antony, pointing out that they are merely the products of their parents' "lust", and implicitly contrasting their illegitimate status as "unlawful issue" with the "lawful race" (3.13.110) that Antony might have had with his Roman wife Octavia (and indeed already had historically by this point). Maecenas's shock that this distribution of kingdoms amongst the queen of Egypt and her male children was staged publicly derives directly from Plutarch's "Life", where the historian suggests that

> the greatest cause of their malice unto him, was the division of landes he made amongst his children in the citie of Alexandria. And to confesse a troth, it was too arrogant and insolent a part, and done (as a man would say) in derision and contempt of the Romanes' (Bullough 1964, 290).

Shakespeare follows Plutarch's account of the Donations quite closely at points in this scene, including, for the only time in the play, the naming of Cleopatra's two sons with Antony, specifically in relation to the kingdoms gifted to them by their father:

> I' th' common showplace where they exercise.
> His sons he there proclaimed the kings of kings.
> Great Media, Parthia, and Armenia
> He gave to Alexander; to Ptolemy he assigned
> Syria, Cilicia, and Phoenicia. She [Cleopatra]
> In th' habiliments of the goddess Isis
> That day appeared, and oft before gave audience,
> As 'tis reported, so.
> (3.6.12-19)

The phrase "the king of kings" in Octavius's speech comes directly from North's translation, and had already been used in *The Tragedie of*

Antonie by Mary Sidney Herbert, who acknowledges in the Argument that, as a supplement to Garnier's play as the principal source for her translation, "*the history [is] to be read at large in* Plutarch *in the life of Antonius*" (Bullough 1964, 359). In act 4 of Sidney Herbert's play Octavius Caesar and Agrippa are equally outraged by the Donations of Alexandria, suggesting that "never *Rome* more injuries receiv'd" than when Antony gifted these kingdoms to his sons "The king of kings proclaiming them to be" (4.1441 and 4.143; qtd in Bullough 1964, 393). Sidney Herbert's line is a direct recollection of North's phrasing rather than Garnier's original ("Et comme par edict, Rois de tous autres Rois"; 1585, 99*v*), and it is possibly a direct influence on Shakespeare, who here utilises the same verb, which is not present in North. Unlike in Plutarch and Shakespeare, none of the "Children *of* Cleopatra" are named directly in Sidney Herbert's play, although they are included amongst the list of "*The Actors*" and do briefly appear on stage in the final act; the Countess of Pembroke's *Antonie*, however, is the only English Cleopatra play which seems to be aware, albeit only by metaphorical inference, that Cleopatra and Antony had a daughter together as well as two sons:

> What monstrous pride, nay what impietie
> Incenst him onward to the Gods disgrace?
> When his two children, *Cleopatras* bratts,
> To *Phoebe* and her brother he compar'd,
> *Latonas* race, causing them to be call'd
> The Sunne and Moone? Is not this follie right
> And is not this the Gods to make his foes?
> (4.1419-25; qtd in Bullough 1964, 392)

Octavius's contemptuous description of Cleopatra's two children as "bratts" might here imply their illegitimacy (though, if it does, this is watered down considerably from the French original, where Garnier's Cesar describes them explicitly as twins born from adultery, "iumeaux d'adultere"), but he appears more angry that Antonius has dared to challenge the Roman gods by associating these children with their twin gods Phoebe and Phoebus, the progeny of Latona's adulterous liaison with Jupiter: Antony and Cleopatra's first-born offspring, Cleopatra Selene and Alexander Helios, are also female-male twins named after the moon and the

sun respectively. In retaining the image of "Diane" and "Phebus" from the French in Caesar's speech, the Countess of Pembroke is the only English dramatist implicitly to acknowledge the existence of Cleopatra Selene, and also to suggest her presence at the Donations of Alexandria, something which is not specified even in Plutarch's account, where only the male children are mentioned by name.

The first reference to children in Sidney Herbert's play, in Antonius's long opening soliloquy, is the sole occasion, in any of the English Cleopatra plays, that Octavia's role as a mother is recognised, however briefly. The defeated Roman general reprimands himself for the fact that his 'wanton love' for Cleopatra has caused him to neglect "Thy wife *Octavia* and her tender babes" (120-122), confirming the observation in the Argument that Antonius had "*made his returne to Alexandria, againe falling to his former love, without any regarde of his vertuous wife* Octavia*, by whom nevertheless he had excellent children*" (qtd in Bullough 1964, 358). It is noteworthy that Sidney Herbert retains Garnier's designation of these children as exclusively her offspring ("De ta femme Octavie, et de sa geniture"; 1585, 78*r*), with no acknowledgment from Antonius of his own paternity, but the English playwright does intensify the reference to her children at the start of the play by adding the adjective "tender" and choosing the word "babes" in place of the original "geniture", which she also later uses to translate the French "enfançons". The "tender babes" of Octavia (and Antony) are thus paralleled with the children of Cleopatra and Antony in the following act, when, on her first appearance in the play, the Egyptian queen laments to the absent Roman what she has sacrificed for his love:

> And did not I sufficient losse sustaine
> Loosing my Realme, loosing my libertie,
> My tender of-spring, and the joyfull light
> Of beamy Sunne, and yet, yet loosing more
> Thee *Antony* my care, if I loose not
> What yet remain'd? thy love alas! thy love,
> More deare then Scepter, children, freedome, light.
> (2.2.404-10; qtd in Bullough 1964, 369)

Cleopatra's earliest reference to her children in the play is translated directly from Garnier ("ma tendre geniture"; 1585, 82*v*),

with the repetition of 'tender' in the English play here highlighting both a comparison and contrast with the neglected children of Octavia: Cleopatra acknowledges the children as her own, but only to indicate at this point that her love for Antony is "more deare" to her than they are. Her initial response to Antonius's anger at her apparent betrayal is framed in strikingly similar terms to Shakespeare's Cleopatra in 3.13, with the Roman's false accusation of infidelity inspiring an impassioned defence, which invokes the Egyptian elements to punish her if she has been disloyal:

> Rather sharpe lightning lighten on my head:
> Rather may I to deepest mischiefe fall:
> Rather the opened earth devoure me:
> Rather fierce *Tigers* feed them on my flesh:
> Rather, ô rather let our *Nilus* send,
> To swallow me quicke, some weeping *Crocodile.*
> And didst thou then suppose my royall heart
> Had hatcht, thee to ensnare, a faithles love?
> (2.2.393-400)

The unusual combination of invoking a destructive storm with a desire for self-dissolution in the earth as a form of retribution in Pembroke's Cleopatra's speech suggests that this might have been a direct, if unacknowledged, influence on Shakespeare's image of the venomous hailstorm in the later play, where, as demonstrated earlier in this essay, the Egyptian queen envisages her own death alongside that of Caesarion and her subjects, should she ever betray Antony. The intense struggle between the queen's love for Antonius and love for her children is revisited later in the scene in the brief stichomythic exchange between Cleopatra and her maid Charmion (instead of both Charmion and Eras in Garnier), who urges the queen to focus on her maternal role for the sake of her male children with Antonius and their dynastic inheritance:

> CHARMION Live for your sonnes.
> CLEOPATRA Nay, for their father die.
> CHARMION Hardharted mother!
> CLEOPATRA Wife, kindhearted, I.
> CHARMION Then will you them deprive of royal right?

> Cleopatra Do I deprive them? No, it's dest'nies might.
> (2.2.555-8)

Arshad has suggested that in the earliest English Cleopatra play there is a "conflict between the role of a mother and the role of a queen" (2019, 75), but, for the majority of the play, the dramatic tension in fact derives primarily from the conflicting roles of mother and "wife", as Charmion herself perceives when she continues to rebuke the Egyptian queen, challenging her claim that she has shared a "wively love" ("amour coniugal") with Antonius:

> Charmion Our first affection to ourselfe is due.
> Cleopatra He is my selfe.
> Charmion Next it extends unto
> Our children, frends, and to our country soile.
> And you for some respect of wively love,
> (Albee scarce wively) loose your native land,
> Your children, frends, and (which is more) your life,
> With so strong charmes doth love bewitch our witts.
> (2.2.587-93; qtd in Bullough 1964, 372-3)

Pascale Aebischer has argued, with regard to Sidney Herbert's translation of Garnier,

> that the most significant cluster of revisions accrues precisely around Cleopatra's status as a wife, the holiness of her love and her illicit sexuality. Contrary to expectation, Pembroke's interventions amount to a pretty much systematic denial of Cleopatra's wifeliness and a toning down of allusions to her sexuality and the sanctity of her love (2012, 230).

One such example of this perceived refutation of "wifeliness" is apparent in the extract above: Garnier's Cleopatre refers to Marc-Antoine directly as her husband ("mon espoux est moymesme"; 1585, 85*v*), which is rendered in English merely, but more affectingly, as "He is my selfe". If this "less wifely" (Aebischer 2012, 233) Cleopatra is evident in Sidney Herbert's translation of the French for much of the play, there is a significant alteration by the time of the entreaty to the dead Antonius in her moving final speech; this follows on closely from "the Egyptian queen's wrenching

goodbye to her children" (Arshad 2019, 75) at the start of the final act, where the "Children *of* Cleopatra" appear in the company of their tutor Euphron, who is tasked with keeping them safe after their mother's death, despite vainly trying to persuade her that she should go on living for their sakes, as Charmion has done earlier in the play. None of the children are named in either Garnier's play or the English translation, so it is unclear whether Caesarion and Cleopatra Selene would have been included here alongside her sons by Antonius, Alexander and Ptolemy ("This great *Antony* your father was"; 5.1855), but, for the first time in the play, a strong sense of Cleopatra's maternal instinct and concern is vividly conveyed: this is exemplified in the queen's sudden switch from addressing them as her "children" ("enfans") to the more loving and intimate "babes" ("enfançons"), and in the comparison of her own maternal grief to that of the "weeping *Niobe*" (5.1887) immediately after they part from her with a despondent "Madame Adieu". It is only after this affecting farewell to their shared children, the "knot of our amitie" which binds their "holy mariage", that the Countess of Pembroke's Cleopatra can finally recognise and acknowledge the link between the roles of mother and wife in addressing her Roman husband for the last time before her intended suicide:

> *Antony* by our true loves I thee beseeche,
> And by our hearts sweete sparks have set on fire,
> Our holy mariage, and the tender ruthe
> Of our deare babes, knot of our amitie:
> My dolefull voice thy eare let entertaine,
> And take me with thee to the hellish plaine,
> Thy wife, thy frend: heare *Antony,* o heare
> My sobbing sighes, if here thou be, or there.
> (5.1945-52; qtd in Bullough 1964, 405)

In Daniel's companion play, *The Tragedie of Cleopatra*, which begins where Sidney Herbert's play ends, immediately after the suicide of Antony, the dramatic attention does switch to the central conflict between the roles of queen and mother, rather than that between wife and mother, as in the earlier English work. Aebischer describes Daniel's eponymous queen as "an intrinsically royal and majestic figure whose intense anxiety for her children is second only to her

deep . . . concern for the welfare of her country" (2012, 234). His Cleopatra does certainly demonstrate apprehension about the fates of her male children in her opening soliloquy, as discussed earlier in the essay, but this assertion requires some qualification, as, for the remainder of the play in both its original and especially its revised version, the queen's "intense anxiety" as a mother manifests itself solely with regard to the safety of her oldest son Caesario, who, although half-Roman, is conspicuously not the son of the recently deceased Antony, as her desperate appeal, via Proculeius, to Octavius, the adopted heir of Julius Caesar, indicates:

> No other crowne I seeke, no other good.
> Yet wish that *Caesar* would vouchsafe this grace,
> To favour the poore of-spring of my bloud.
> Confused issue, yet of Roman race.
> If blood and name be linckes of love in Princes,
> Not spurres of hate; my poore *Caesario* may
> Finde favour notwithstanding mine offences,
> And *Caesars* blood, may *Caesars* raging stay.
> (2.2.347-54; qtd in Bullough 1964, 416)

Despite this plea for mercy for her son, whom she still hopes will be permitted to accede to the throne of Egypt after her death, Cleopatra clearly does not trust Caesar, and so decides to send Caesario away to India in the company of his tutor Rodon, who soon betrays her by having the boy sent to Rhodes "Pretending that *Octavius* for him sent, / To make him King of Egipt presently" (4.1.972-3). The queen seems to anticipate the futility of this attempt to protect her "precious Gem", as, in Rodon's report of her parting words, she movingly demonstrates her vacillation in deliberating whether it is worth severing the maternal knot binding her to him by sending Caesario away from Egypt if he is already fated to die:

> O my divided soule, what shall I do?
> Whereon shall now my resolution rest?
> What were I best resolve to yeelde vnto
> When both are bad, how shall I know the best?
> Stay; I may hap so worke with *Caesar* now,
> That he may yeelde him to restore thy right.

> Go; *Caesar* never will content that thou
> So neere in bloud, shalt be so great in might.
> Then take him *Rodon,* go my sonne farewell.
> But stay; there's something else that I would say:
> Yet nothing now, but ô God speede thee well,
> Lest saying more, that more may make thee stay.
> Yet let me speake: It may be tis the last
> That ever I shall speake to thee my Sonne.
> Doe Mothers use to part in such post haste?
> What, must I end when I have scarce begunne?
> Ah no (deere hart,) tis no such slender twine
> Wherewith the knot is tide twixt thee and me:
> That bloud within thy vaines came out of mine,
> Parting from thee, I part from part of mee:
> And therefore I must speake. Yet what O sonne?
> (4.1.933-53; qtd in Bullough 1964, 430)

These lines remain virtually unchanged in the revised version of 1607, with a single line added to the end of the queen's speech ("Though I have made an ende, I have not done"), but their dramatic impact is intensified by being transferred from act 4 to the opening scene of the play, where they are delivered directly by Cleopatra to her son (1.1.101-122; Daniel 1607, 10*v*), with the character of Caesario introduced as part of the dramatis personae for the first time. Arshad suggests that, in moving this parting scene between mother and son to the first act, "Daniel was able to make Cleopatra's desperation to save Caesario and her struggle to part with him the immediate focus of the play" as "the Egyptian queen's motherhood and suffering are foregrounded more deeply in the 1607 *Cleopatra* than in any of the earlier editions"; she also observes that the playwright's "most important revisions and restructuring in *Cleopatra* are to elements of the story that do not appear in Shakespeare" (2019, 92-3). Whilst the initial assertion is incontrovertible, the final observation implies that Daniel might have undertaken these extensive and significantly more stage-worthy revisions to his closet play as a direct response to the appearance of *Antony and Cleopatra*. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that Shakespeare might plausibly have influenced Daniel directly: even if the composition of *Antony and Cleopatra* can speculatively be ascribed to late 1606, there is no record of any contemporary performance of

the play in either the public theatre or at court, and the earliest direct allusion to it is Edward Blount's entry on the Stationer's Register in May 1608, after the appearance in print of the revised *Cleopatra* in the *Certaine Small Workes* of 1607.

Montanari acknowledges that "the role played by Shakespeare's tragedy on the modified text of 1607 remains controversial" (2019, 200), but the direct influence of Daniel's original version of *Cleopatra* on Shakespeare seems far less contentious. This is most apparent in the final scene of *Antony and Cleopatra*, at the start of which, following the earlier English play rather than North's Plutarch, where the queen "demaunded the kingdome of AEgypt for her sonnes" (Bullough 1964, 311), Cleopatra pleads to Octavius via Proculeius to allow the crown of Egypt to be passed on specifically to her son Caesarion, to whom she refers directly for only the second and final time in the play:

> If your master
> Would have a queen his beggar, you must tell him
> That majesty, to keep decorum, must
> No less beg than a kingdom. If he please
> To give me conquered Egypt for my son,
> He gives me so much of mine own as I
> Will kneel to him with thanks.
> (5.2.15-21)

Later in the scene, when Octavius and Cleopatra meet briefly on stage for the only time, the victorious Roman seems to offer to protect all of the queen's children, but his words make it clear that this is more a threat than an act of kindness:

> . . . but if you seek
> To lay on me a cruelty by taking
> Antony's course, you shall bereave yourself
> Of my good purposes, and put your children
> To that destruction which I'll guard them from.
> (5.2.124-8)

However, once the enamoured Roman Dolabella has revealed to Cleopatra that Octavius, despite his earlier offer, already intends to send her and her "children" in triumph to Rome "within three days" (5.2.197-8), a detail taken directly from North's Plutarch, she accepts

that she has no alternative but to take her own life, even if this will put the futures of her children in jeopardy.

The Egyptian queen's intensely moving suicide in Shakespeare's play is indebted directly to both Sidney Herbert, as Cleopatra alludes to her marriage to Antony for the only time ("Husband, I come!"; 5.2.279), and particularly to Daniel, where the Nuntius's account to the Chorus of the death of the queen and her faithful attendants emphasizes her pyrrhic victory over Caesar, by invoking the first encounter between Antony and Cleopatra in his direct address to the river Cydnos:

> Well, in I went, where brighter than the Sunne,
> Glittering in all her pompous rich aray,
> Great *Cleopatra* sate, as if sh' had wonne
> *Cæsar*, and all the world beside this day:
> Even as she was when on thy cristall streames,
> Cleere *Cydnos* she did shew what earth could shew,
> When *Asia* all amaz'd in wonder, deemes
> *Venus* from heaven was come on earth below.
> Even as she went at first to meete her Love,
> So goes she now at last againe to find him.
> But that first, did her greatnes onely prove,
> This last her love, that could not live behind him.
> (5.1456-67; qtd in Bullough 1964, 442-3)

Shakespeare's Cleopatra similarly calls for her "best attires" so that she can transport herself "again for Cydnus, / To meet Mark Antony" (5.2.224-5) for one last time in death:

> Give me my robe. Put on my crown. I have
> Immortal longings in me. Now no more
> The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip.
> Yare, yare, good Iras, quick. Methinks I hear
> Antony call. I see him rouse himself
> To praise my noble act. I hear him mock
> The luck of Caesar, which the gods give men
> To excuse their after wrath. Husband, I come!
> Now to that name my courage prove my title!
> (5.2.272-80)

As in the original version of Daniel's play, Plutarch's comparison of Cleopatra to the Roman goddess of love at her first meeting with Antony, so memorably described in Enobarbus's dramatization of North's translation as "o'erpicturing that Venus where we see / The fancy outwork nature" (2.2.207-8), is evoked again in Charmian's fond designation of her mistress as the "Eastern star" (5.2.300). At the very end of the play Shakespeare's Cleopatra comes to share a striking parallel with the playwright's earlier poetic representation of the goddess: at the conclusion of his narrative poem *Venus and Adonis* (1593), Venus's frustrated erotic desire for Adonis metamorphoses into a touching maternal affection for the flower that has emerged from the dead boy's blood, which she wants to protect and nurture as Adonis's son:

> Here was thy father's bed, here in my breast.
> Thou are the next of blood, and 'tis thy right.
> Lo, in this hollow cradle take thy rest:
> My throbbing heart shall rock thee day and night.
> There shall not be one minute in the hour
> Wherein I will not kiss my sweet love's flower.
> (Shakespeare 2016, 1183-8)

Moments before her death, the equally sensual Cleopatra similarly demonstrates an uncharacteristic maternal feeling towards the "mortal wretch" (5.2.295) she places at her breast: "Peace, peace! / Dost thou not see my baby at my breast, / That sucks the nurse asleep?" (5.2.300-2).

This image of the poisonous asp at Cleopatra's breast, rather than on her arm as in both North's Plutarch and Daniel's play, is too much for the dying Charmian, whose heart breaks as she adjusts the dead queen's crown just as Dolabella and the Roman guards enter, but, for the audience, it emphasizes by marked contrast how seldom we have witnessed any genuine maternal concern and consideration for her actual children in the play.

There is no indication of what will happen to Cleopatra's children in the immediate aftermath of her death at the end of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Whilst this may not be as bleak a vision as the ending of Shakespeare's contemporaneous *Chronicle Historie of King Lear*, printed in 1608, which a-historically witnesses "the

extinction of the royal bloodline at the end of the play", where "the king is dead, as are all of his daughters, none of whom have left children" (Schwyzer 2006, 40), there is an immediate dramatic precedent for the focus on the demise of an entire historical dynasty in the Argument of Daniel's play. Following Plutarch's matter of fact reports that Caesar has both Antyllus, Antony's oldest son with Fulvia, and Caesarion put to death, Daniel highlights that the assassination of the latter signals the end of the Ptolemaic dynasty:

> *Caesario* her sonne, which she had by *Julius Caesar* (conveyed before unto India, out of the danger of the warres) was about the same time of her death, murthered at Rhodes: trained thither by the falshoode of his Tutor, corrupted by *Caesar*. And so, hereby came the race of the *Ptolomies* to be wholy extinct, and the flourishing rich kingdome of Egypt utterly overthrown and subdued. (Qtd in Bullough, 1964, 407)

This interpretation of history may suit the dramatic purpose of Daniel's *Tragedie of Cleopatra*, where the queen herself and the two philosophers Arius and Philostratus seem fully cognizant of Egypt's impending dynastic doom, but it is not entirely true historically. Like Shakespeare after him, Daniel willfully chooses to ignore the end of Plutarch's "Life of Marcus Antonius", where the historian details what happens to Antony's children after the death of their father:

> Antonius left seven children by three wives, of the which, Caesar did put Antyllus, the eldest sonne he had by Fulvia, to death. Octavia his wife tooke all the rest, and brought them up with hers. (Bullough 1964, 317)

Plutarch also emphasizes that, with the exception of Caesarion, "for Cleopatra's children, they were very honorablie kept" and raised by Octavia. While he does not record what happened to her two sons by Antony, Alexander Helios and Ptolemy Philadelphus, strikingly he does reveal that Octavia "maried Cleopatra, Antonius daughter, unto Juba, a marvelous courteous and goodly Prince". This is the only occasion that Cleopatra Selene is referred to and named in "The Life", and it is noteworthy historically because, through the intercession of her powerful Roman stepmother, Cleopatra's sole daughter is married to King Juba II, who is restored to the throne

of Numidia and then Mauretania by Augustus, and reigns with her husband as Queen Cleopatra Selene II until her death. Their son in turn succeeds his father, and rules for around twenty years as the last Roman client king of Mauretania: whilst the deaths of Cleopatra and Caesarion do signal the end of the reign of the Ptolemies in Egypt, as Daniel's play repeatedly emphasizes, the queen's grandson by her frequently forgotten daughter Cleopatra Selene keeps alive their dynastic name in a north African kingdom, where he rules as Ptolemy of Mauretania. For this, the dead Cleopatra has her former rival, Antony's long-neglected Roman wife, solely to thank, not that there is any sustained indication of Octavia's significant maternal role in any of the Early Modern English Cleopatra plays. The key absent mother in *Antony and Cleopatra* is, therefore, not Cleopatra herself, but rather "dull Octavia" (5.2.54), historically the mother of Mark Antony's two dynastically important daughters, and also the generous stepmother to his other surviving children, by both Fulvia and the more celebrated Egyptian queen.

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6

Cleopatra, Motherhood, and the Mediterranean

Amelia Platt

Abstract

This chapter explores the differing presentations of Cleopatra's motherhood across William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607), Mary Sidney's *The Tragedy of Antoine* (1595) and Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedy of Cleopatra* (1599). Sidney's and Daniel's plays spend considerable time dwelling on Cleopatra's identity as a mother, with both keen to emphasise Cleopatra as a loving mother. Such characterisation forms a key part of these texts' attempts to present Cleopatra as a more sympathetic figure. Contrastingly, Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* removes most of the references to Cleopatra being a mother. Such changes in the presentation of motherhood can be linked to questions of Cleopatra's racial identity, and the setting of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Sidney and Daniel both have Cleopatra ascribe to conventionally Western standards of beauty. In comparison, Shakespeare highlights how Cleopatra's racial identity is inextricably linked to the Mediterranean setting of the play. This chapter posits that there is a connection between both Shakespeare's changing of Cleopatra's identity as a mother and her identity in terms of race. Ultimately, this chapter will argue that Cleopatra's status as a mother is not completely obscured from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, rather it is simply transformed. Cleopatra's motherhood becomes defined in terms of the nation, 'giving birth' to the myth of Egypt.

Keywords: Motherhood; Mary Sidney; Samuel Daniel; William Shakespeare; Cleopatra

1. Introduction

The concept of 'motherhood' in the Early Modern period was polysemous - containing multiple meanings and attitudes. On the one hand, being a mother was considered an elevated state with women encouraged to aspire to such a status - arising from Mother Mary giving birth to the son of God (Dunworth 2013, 10). However, the act of giving birth also constituted an enactment of the punishment of Eve, suggesting an inherent sinfulness to motherhood (ibid). There

was thus a sort of doubleness inherent to the concept of 'motherhood', with it being understood as something both virtuous and corrupt. This doubleness is also seen in how motherhood was associated with both power and vulnerability. Janet Adelman points to motherhood as a source of fear within the Early Modern period, with the mother not being seen as a whole and separate person, but rather imagined through her body parts which are regarded as having the power to make or unmake the world, and self for their child (1992, 4). The mother figure was a potential source of great power – power that existed outside the male domain and was therefore a source of concern. Yet, while the mother figure could be powerful, she was also a figure in need of protection. The 'mother' is always human, because whatever else it signifies, the signifier always foregrounds the physical vulnerability of the maternal body (Dunworth 2013, 20). Dunworth notes how the mother brings together conflicting and complex ideas: the figurative and the corporeal, the symbolic and real human experience (28).

Crucial also to understanding the figure of the mother in Early Modern England is a recognition of how the mother figure was used as an allegory for the political state of the kingdom. Loving intimacy between mother and child comes to embody the proper relationship between subject and state, just as the relationship between husband and wife was used as an analogy for that between God and the nation (Dunworth 2013, 32). The fact that motherhood as a concept in Early Modern England included all these possible understandings highlights how maternity must be understood as fundamentally performative, with the maternal body functioning as a prime space for cultural conflict (Moncrief and McPherson qtd. in Laoutaris 2008, 17). In this regard, it little surprises that such multifaceted concept should be somehow investigated on the English stages in plays such as William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607).

For much of the twentieth century, *Antony and Cleopatra* was regarded as distinct from all other English adaptations of the Antony and Cleopatra story (Cadman 2015, 10). Instead, when studied in relation to two contemporary plays based on the same story, such as Mary Sidney's *The Tragedy of Antoine* (1595) and Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedy of Cleopatra* (1599), it is possible to notice that all three plays do in fact show, through the character of Cleopatra,

a shared preoccupation with motherhood. Sidney's and Daniel's place similar emphasis on Cleopatra's identity as a mother by making numerous references to her children, who even feature on stage, in the attempt to turn her into a more sympathetic figure. In *Antony and* Cleopatra, if references to Cleopatra as a mother and to her children are generally sparce, Shakespeare's insistence on the queen's racial identity – inextricably linked, as will be discussed below, to the Mediterranean setting of the play – end up shifting her from a mother in the conventional sense (existing within the domestic domain) to being the mother of a nation.

2. Motherhood *vs* Wifedom

Mary Sidney's *The Tragedy of Antonie* is a translation of the French Catholic playwright Robert Garnier's work, *Marc-Antonie* (1578), a play deeply marked by the internal divisions of France in the sixteenth century, where the figure of Cleopatra was used to explore the political responsibilities (and indeed failures) of the ruler towards a war-torn country (Aebischer 2012, 225). *Marc-Antonie* takes the overthrow of Brutus and Cassius as its starting point, with Antony returning to Alexandria and restarting his relationship with Cleopatra. Octavius, in response, takes arms against Antony. After Antony loses to Octavius at sea, he begins to suspect Cleopatra, who in turn conceals herself within the monument. Believing her to be dead, Antony mortally wounds himself. The play ends with Cleopatra and her ladies lifting Antony into the monument and Cleopatra promising that she will follow Antony to the grave.

Mary Sidney belonged to a powerful family, both in terms of its aristocratic and literary status. The Pembroke family name was synonymous with literary heritage, wealth, acres, a great house, political power, and social hierarchy (Purkiss 1998, xiv). An understanding of Sidney's family is important because we can see it influencing her decision to translate Garnier's play. Mary's brother, the poet Philip Sidney, had famously begun to translate the Psalms into English, with Sidney completing the project after Philip's untimely death. Working on Garnier's play thus gave Sidney her own translation project, becoming an important part of her self-

fashioning as the sister and literary heir of Philip Sidney (xx). The act of translation was also well-suited to Sidney's identity as a female writer. Even though Tina Krontiris has argued that Sidney's use of translation shows her reluctance to appear assertive (1998, 158), her work does in fact reveal Sidney's abilities to draw out themes which were evidently important to her. That said, it is certainly true that translation provided a safety net for Sidney, allowing her to push back against any claims that she was overstepping as a female author. If controversy arose over any part of the finished article, she could simply deny it was her own work, and say it was in the original text. When it comes to the actual translation, Sidney's version is close to Garnier's original, with the two having very similar line-by-line content. Stylistically though, there are significant differences with Sidney transforming Garnier's twelve-syllable alexandrines into an equivalent number of pentameter lines, which allowed for more natural, and powerful speeches (Aebischer 2012, 230). These stylistic changes especially impact the characterisation of Cleopatra, making her more believable and sympathetic (229). Transforming Cleopatra into a more sympathetic figure was a key concern for Sidney. Indeed, as will be explored below, Sidney's presentation of Cleopatra as a mother is partly used to invoke the audience's empathy for her. Translation thus provided Sidney with multiple advantages, both in terms of her identity as an author, and when it came to the specifics of working with the story of Antony and Cleopatra (Waller 2020).

While discussing the play's wider context, it must be noted that *The Tragedy of Antonie* is a closet drama: that is, a play which was likely never performed, or at any rate not in front of a paying public (Purkiss 1998, xvii). Instead, it would have been read aloud to a circle of friends. This genre once again aligned well with Sidney's identity as a female author. Court performances and private stagings of plays within the aristocratic household were seen as less controversial than those performed publicly – they did not attract the same kind of moral panic (Raber 2001, 83). By using this genre, Sidney was thus seeking to ensure that her work is not objectionable, heading off any potential challenges to her ability to write and publish as a woman. That said, the closet drama genre also had its own unique strengths. Aebischer explains that the closet drama form sought

moral edification by presenting debates in dramatic dialogue rather than through the visual contemplation of bodies in conflict, grief or death (2012, 231). This form suited Sidney well, especially allowing her to mount a defence of Cleopatra as a mother and consider more broadly what it meant to be a 'good mother.'

The ending of *The Tragedy of Antonie* is pre-determined: everybody knows that Cleopatra will commit suicide. Sidney's play focuses on the fact that, in so doing, Cleopatra leaves her children behind to fend for themselves. The children in Sidney's play are given no names. The *dramatis personae* simply refer to them as 'Children of Cleopatra' (359).[1] However, the historical record tells us that Cleopatra had four children: Caesarion (son of Julius Caesar), Alexander Helios, Cleopatra Selene II and Ptolemy Philadelphus (all children of Marc Antony). The *dramatis personae* serves to indicate, from the play's very beginning, that Cleopatra's love for Antony will win out her love for her children. The 'Children' lose all individual identity and significance, paling in comparison to Antony, who is placed at the top of the cast list, above even Cleopatra herself. Cleopatra's love for Antony is presented as outweighing the love she feels for her children, with her death a symbol of this ultimate commitment. Realising the controversial nature of this decision, Sidney attempts to justify and explain Cleopatra's choice. She paints Cleopatra as a flawed, but essentially loving and sympathetic mother. Such a presentation is seen in the following passage where Cleopatra rebuffs accusations that she has betrayed Antony, instead asserting her constancy and presenting herself as a faithful wife:

> And didst thou then suppose my royall heart
> Had hatcht, thee to ensnare, a faithles loue?
> And changing minde, as Fortune changed cheare,
> I would weake thee, to winne the stronger, loose?
> O wretch! ô caitive! ô too cruell happe!
> And did not I sufficient losse sustaine
> Loosing my Realme, loosing my libertie,
> My tender of-spring, and the ioyfull light

1 All references are from Sidney 1595 and will appear parenthetically in the text.

> Of beamy Sunne, and yet, yet loosing more
> Thee *Antony* my care, if I loose not
> What yet remain'd? thy love alas! thy love,
> More deare then Scepter, children freedome, light.
> (2.399-410)

Concepts such as sovereign power or the loss of freedom are all here presented as inferior to Cleopatra and Antony's relationship. Instead, great emphasis is placed on Antony's love in these lines: "thy love, alas! Thy love" (2.409). The repetition of the word "love" emphasises just how significant the loss of Antony is to Cleopatra. Not even her "children" are placed high in the list, with Cleopatra placing the responsibility of kingship above them. At the same time, however, the fact that her "children" are mentioned is crucial. It suggests that Cleopatra is not only aware of her responsibilities towards them but, crucially, that she is defaulting on such responsibilities. What is so effective about the presentation of Cleopatra's motherhood in Sidney's play is that it does not shy away from complexity. There is no suggestion from Sidney that she does not love her children. It is simply that she does not love her children as much as their father.

The domestic dimension, and how one defines themselves within it, is of crucial importance to the text. The love that Cleopatra feels for Antony is used to present Cleopatra as firmly situating herself within the domestic, committed to occupying the role of the loving wife above all else. This fulfilment is shown in the following lines: "'Live for your sons. Nay for their father die'/ Hardhearted mother! Wife kindhearted" (2.555-6). Sidney uses the technique of stichomythia to effectively contrast Charmion and Cleopatra's differing opinions on what constitutes a fulfilment of the domestic. For Charmion, Cleopatra's decision to commit suicide and leave her children at the mercy of Rome represents a betrayal of her domestic responsibilities. Findlay explains how Cleopatra's attendants, "citing her responsibilities to the kingdom, her dynasty, and to herself as an individual, claim that complete self-abandonment to Antonie is self-abuse" (2009, 132). Crucially, it is a form of self-abuse that causes significant damage to others, from her children to Egypt itself. Yet, Cleopatra rejects such a categorisation: in fact, she presents her actions as fulfilment of her domestic duties to Antony. She wishes to

show that the abandonment of her children is not an action rooted in a lack of love, but more an unavoidable 'side-effect' of her great love for her husband. "If she is to be noble in her end", Laoutaris explains, then she must relinquish her parental claims. In other words, her death will be decidedly an unmaternal, that is to say, an unnatural act (2008, 255). It is not then that she is a "Hardhearted mother!" (2.556) as Charmion labels her, but rather that she is simply more of a "Wife kindhearted" (ibid.). Interestingly, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare will make Charmion have an aspiration to motherhood. Such characterisation maybe said to function as an implicit reference to Sidney's translation, which has Charmion mount the strongest opposition to Cleopatra's neglecting of her motherly duties (Hopkins 2004, 26). In this light, Cleopatra's suicide eventually fulfils her desire for Antony, and at the same time signals her rejection of her responsibilities to her children, dynasty, and kingdom (Findlay 2009, 142).

Sidney again emphasises this characterisation of Cleopatra as seeing herself primarily as the wife of Antony rather than as the mother of their children at the end of the play, when Cleopatra does indeed dedicate her suicide to Antony:

> Antony by our true loves I thee beseech
> And by our hearts sweete sparks have set on fire
> Our holy marriage, and the tender ruthe
> Of our deare babies, knot of our amitie:
> My dolefull voice thy eare let entertaine,
> And take me with thee to the hellish plaine,
> Thy wife, thy frend: heare Antony, ô heare
> My sobbing sighes, if here thou be, or there.
> (5.1945-52).

Here, Cleopatra mourns her and Antony's passion, "hearts sweete sparks have set on fire" (1946). The metaphor suggests an unquenchable, dangerous love. These 'sparks' of passion are now out of control, destroying not only the couple but also those around them, including their children. Cleopatra significantly refers to her relationship with Antony as a "holy marriage" (1947). This imposes a level of conventionality and perhaps respectability onto the couple's relationship (Antony is of course married to Octavia), showing once

again Sidney's desire to rehabilitate Cleopatra and make her into a more sympathetic and acceptable figure. In the forementioned passage, it is also Cleopatra's self-awareness to stand out. She does not idealise her passion for Antony but deplores it, well aware of how it has disrupted her responsibilities, both familial and sovereign. Cleopatra mournfully adds: "Our deare babies, knot of our amitie" (1948). The metaphor "knot of our amitie" emphasises the children's significance – they are the literal product of Antony and Cleopatra's relationship, born of their 'entwining.' This image of the "knot of our amitie" wistfully envisions the classic family unit, now completely overwhelmed by Cleopatra and Antony's passion. We are, thus, presented with a figure unbalanced in her willingness to sacrifice her children and country for her obsessive love for Antony (Raber 2001, 63). While Shakespeare's Cleopatra, as will be discussed below, will use her death to regain her status as a queen and uphold Egypt's independence, Sidney's Cleopatra only uses death to further the image of herself that she has been attempting to project throughout the whole play, that of a loyal and constant wife to Antony (Cadman 2015, 8). In an act of love, she takes Antony's flawed suicide and re-enacts it, elevating it in the process. She becomes a vessel onto which thoughts of the great, heroic Antony are projected.

In Sidney's *The Tragedy of Antonie*, Cleopatra's children are not just referred to, but they also appear on stage. This is seen in the following passage where Cleopatra is bidding them farewell:

> CLEOPATRA Farewell, my babes, farewell my heart is clos'd
> With pittie and paine, my selfe with death enclos'd
> My breath doth faile. Farewell for evermore,
> Your Sire and me you shall see never more.
> Farwell sweet care, farewell.
> CHILDREN Madame, adieu.
> (5.1865-9)

Cleopatra's use of the term "babes" emphasises the children's vulnerability but also suggests that this is how they will forever be remembered within Cleopatra's mind—young children needing her protection. This focus on their vulnerability serves to illustrate Cleopatra's guilt. She is aware that she is abandoning her children at a time of acute need when their status is most vulner-

able. The possessive pronoun "my" also stands out, illustrating the close connection that Cleopatra feels with her children. Furthermore, the lengthy goodbye, with the word "farewell" repeated five times, signals Cleopatra's inability to let go of her children, and the deep-seated affection she feels for them. The line "with pittie and paine . . . my breath doth faile" also emphasises Cleopatra's emotional vulnerability. The alliteration of "pittie and paine" audibly suggests a failing breath. The goodbye is, therefore, both mentally and physically draining. Sidney has Cleopatra's children reply directly to this goodbye: "Madame Adieu" (5.1869). By providing the children with a voice, Sidney makes it impossible for both Cleopatra and us as readers to deny their presence. The same is also true of Daniel's *The Tragedy of Cleopatra*, where Cleopatra's identity as a mother is made prominent by her multiple interactions with her son Caesarion, a key character within the play. Contrastingly, in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra,* it is very easy to forget about Cleopatra's children, as they are neither seen nor heard talking with Cleopatra on stage. Having the children reply to Cleopatra also adds credence to the idea of a close relationship between mother and children, further erasing the image of Cleopatra as a dangerous seductress, in favour of one more focused on Cleopatra as a loving wife and mother. Yet, while Sidney's play does this, it still restrains from presenting motherhood as some powerful natural impulse that overcomes all, instead revealing that for Cleopatra, allegiance to loving her husband triumphs over allegiance to her child (Krontiris 1998, 160).

Overall, then, Mary Sidney's presentation of Cleopatra emphasises the integral role that motherhood plays in defining female identity in the period. We are never allowed to lose sight of Cleopatra's status as a mother – the text includes multiple references to the fact, with much of the text's tension coming from the fact that Cleopatra *fails* as a mother. For Sidney, this failure is a problem – it complicates Cleopatra's position as a tragic heroine and endangers the ability of an audience to feel sympathy for Cleopatra. Accordingly, Sidney focuses on acknowledging and justifying such 'failures'. She presents Cleopatra as torn between her love for her children and the passion she feels for Antony, a passion which eventually wins out.

3. Sacrificial Motherhood

Like Sidney's play, Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedy of Cleopatra* is heavily invested in a presentation of Cleopatra as a loving mother. Daniel's Cleopatra is torn between her deep and abiding love for her children, which manifests in a desire to keep them close and an awareness that to safeguard them properly, she must send them away. As previously mentioned, Cleopatra's identity as a mother is most prominently explored through interactions with her son Caesarion, who features as a character. Context-wise, Mary Sidney was Daniel's literary patron, a fact which helps explain the close structural connections between their respective works. Daniel's play literally continues Sidney's play: it opens with Cleopatra enclosed in the monument, mourning Antony's death, and Octavius's attempts to draw Cleopatra out of the monument so that she can be taken to Rome and triumphantly displayed. After resisting these attempts, Cleopatra has an asp smuggled into the monument and thus takes her own life. The play focuses on Cleopatra's attempts to secure his safety by sending her son Caesarion away with the tutor Rodon, demonstrating motherly strength and self-sacrifice in the process. Yet, this decision is shown to be ultimately futile, with Rodon eventually betraying Caesarion and handing him over to Caesar.

Like Mary Sidney, then, Daniel focuses on Cleopatra's conflicted sense of duty. Yet, for Daniel's Cleopatra, this conflict is less between her children and her love for Antony, and more between her love for children and her responsibilities as queen. She declares:

> Bloud, Children, Nature, all must pardon me.
> My soule yeeldes Honor up the victory,
> And I must be a Queene, forget a mother,
> Though mother would I be, were I not I;
> And Queene would not be now, could I be other.
> (1.94-8)[2]

Cleopatra here expresses her preference for the dimension of motherhood. Her motherly instincts are strong. Cleopatra

2 All references are from Daniel 1599 and will appear parenthetically in the text.

longs to embrace the role of mother, but the duties of ruling prevent her from doing so. She presents her decision to commit suicide as completely unnatural: "Bloud, Children, Nature, all must pardon me". "Bloud" is particularly significant, referring to the unique familial relationship between mother and child, which Cleopatra sees herself as destroying. The roles of Queen and mother are presented then as incompatible – performing one successfully requires the sacrificing of the other one.

Contained within the above lines is arguably a veiled reference to the unmarried and childless Elizabeth I (Kewes 2012). Elizabeth had been on the throne for more than forty years when *The Tragedy of Cleopatra* was published. Daniel's characterisation of Cleopatra as divided between being a woman and ruler, would for contemporary audiences, particularly brought to mind Elizabeth I (Arshad 2019, 75). Elizabeth herself acknowledged her own divided identity in her famous speech at Tilbury: "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king" (qtd in Thackeray and Findling 2012, 325-6). These references to Elizabeth I allow Daniel to respond to English Protestants' fear of a succession crisis. The 'failure' of Elizabeth I to be a mother was increasingly seen in the later stages of her reign as a failure of queenship. Elizabeth's critics saw the lack of a Protestant heir as endangering England, by increasing the likelihood of a civil war and a Spanish invasion (Arshad 2019, 77). Significantly, Cleopatra's striking utterance, "And I must be a Queen, forget a mother" was removed in later editions of Daniel's plays (1.98). After the death of Elizabeth I, the conflict between being a queen and a mother was no longer a key issue for English elite culture (98). Overall, then, Daniel suggests that for Cleopatra, similar to the real-life Elizabeth I, her identity as a mother is inextricably tied up with her identity as a Queen. The failure of one will inevitably cause the failure of the other. Furthermore, for Cleopatra, it is no small failure. Her affair with Antony makes her children appear as threats in the eyes of Rome. It is for this reason that Egypt's heir Caesarion must die – an event which ensures Egypt's ruination, and its subordination to the Roman Empire. Daniel, then, uses Cleopatra to explore the possibility of England's destruction, resulting from a similar failure of motherhood.

Daniel's depicting of Cleopatra's frenzied (and ultimately) doomed attempts to protect her children allow for some of the play's most heartfelt moments. For instance, we have the following passage where Rodon explains how Cleopatra entrusted her son to him:

> For unto me did Cleopatra give
> The best and deerest treasure of her blood,
> Lovely Cesario, whom she would should live
> free from the dangers wherein Egypt stoode.
> And unto me with him this charge she gave,
> Here Rodon, take, convoy from out this coast
> This precious Gem, the chiefest that I have,
> The jewell of my soule I value most.
> (4.859-66)

The semantic field relating to jewellery is crucial: "treasure . . . jewell" establishes Caesarion's importance to Cleopatra. Jewellery is associated with luxury and great material wealth. Yet, the material connotations of the image are subverted here, with the language being used instead to describe a great emotional connection between mother and son. Caesarion is shown to be Cleopatra's greatest possession, far greater in value to her than all her trappings of wealth. However, this language also serves as a reminder of Cleopatra's status as the Queen of Egypt, illustrating again the impossibility of her being able to leave the demands of queenship behind. The scene continues with Rodon detailing how Cleopatra addressed her son:

> Then unto him, O my deere Sonne (she saies),
> Sonne of my youth, flie hence, O flie, be gone,
> Reserve thy selfe, ordain'd for better daies,
> For much thou hast to ground thy hopes upon.
> Leave me (thy wofull Mother) to endure
> The fury of this tempest heere alone:
> Who cares not for her selfe . . .
> (4.886-902)

What Daniel presents here is the image of the sacrificial mother. Cleopatra is willing to give up everything for her children: "Leave me (thy wofull) Mother to endure,' and suffer isolation for the sake of

her children. With the characterisation of "wofull Mother", Cleopatra seems to again be adopting a pre-defined role, one that links motherhood to heightened female emotion. There is a melodramatic feel to proceedings, with Cleopatra enduring the "fury of this tempest" alone. "Tempest" connotes an overwhelming force, with no room left for escape. Cleopatra thus is caught up in the eye of a storm facing the loss of both her crown and life. Such disasters are faced bravely for the sake of her children. Cleopatra's trust in Rodon is also emphasised in this passage "*Rodon* will see thee safe, *Rodon* will guide . . . Rodon (my faithfull servant) . . . And O good Rodon" (1599, 4.895-7). The emphasis on Cleopatra's trust makes the scene all the more painful, as we know how it will be betrayed. Recounting this meeting with Cleopatra, Rodon's shame is acute as he remembers the depth of Cleopatra's love, once again emphasising Cleopatra's deep motherly affection.

The intensity of Cleopatra's grief can also be seen in the fact that she sees Caesarion as a crucial part of herself. Bidding her son goodbye Cleopatra says:

> Yet let me speake: It may be tis the last
> That ever I shall speake to thee my sonne.
> Do Mothers use to part in such post haste?
> What, must I end when I have scarce begunne?
> Ah no (deere heart) tis no such slender twine
> Wherewith the knot is tide twixt thee and me:
> That bloud within thy veins came out of mine,
> Parting from thee, I part from part of me:
> And therefore I must speake. Yet what I sonne?
> (4.945-53)

Cleoptra wonders if all mothers are used to parting so quickly: "Do Mothers use to part in such post haste?". She invokes the customary behaviour of mothers in order to judge her own "mothering'". Cleopatra also points to the close connection between mother and child – "That bloud within thy veins came out of mine" – with mother and child sharing the same "blood". The line also highlights the important role that mothers play within society. Cleopatra presents herself as providing Caesarion with his blood, his life force: "That bloud within thy veins came out of mine".

Daniel's play also suggests that Cleopatra's identity as a mother is crucial to how she sees herself. She declares to Caesarion: "Parting from thee, I part from part of me" (952). Caesarion is an intrinsic part of Cleopatra – she cannot exist without him. The repetition of "part" further emphasises the fact that Cleopatra is now lacking something, she has been left "unhole". Significantly, Caesarion is fundamental to Cleopatra's sense of self. This closeness challenges our expectations. When it comes to relationships in the home, we might expect father-son relationships to be given greater emphasis than mother-son, especially in a scene like this where matters of kingship and inheritance are being discussed. After all, the father and son bond is the bond that drives the house on ensuring its future. Here, though, such a bond is supplanted by one which exists between mother and son. The focus here is not just on the affection between the two, but also public matters of kingship and lineage. Perhaps this is again driven by Cleopatra being a ruler of a nation, she is occupying a typically masculine role and therefore must be attuned to matters of kingship and inheritance.

It is worth underscoring the fact that Cleopatra's motherly love seems mostly directed towards Caesarion. As the oldest boy, Caesarion is Cleopatra's heir. Furthermore, his father is Julius Caesar, which gives Caesarion a potential claim to being the ruler of the Roman Empire. Accordingly, Cleopatra's great love for Caesarion can be seen emerge from a desire for Egypt to become even greater. This idea that Cleopatra's love for Caesarion is tied up with her thoughts about nationhood is seen in the following quotation, where Cleopatra exclaims:

> Then let him stay, and let us fall together
> . . .
> let us divide our starres. Go, go my sonne
> Let not the fate of Egypt find thee here.
> (4.917-22)

The conflicted state of Cleopatra's mind is clear here. At first, Cleopatra considers keeping Caesarion with her. Movingly, she imagines them dying together. In this shared death, they will

provide comfort to one another. This imagining is especially poignant with hindsight – Cleopatra and Caesarion both do die, but alone. However, Cleopatra ultimately resolves to "let us divide our starres". The "starres" refer to the two of them as brilliant figures, referencing their role as rulers of Europe. Therefore, we can see how Cleopatra's motherhood is wrapped up in ideas of nationhood. Cleopatra wants to preserve her son, but she also wants to preserve Egypt: "Let not the fate of Egypt find thee here". If Octavius kills both Cleopatra and Caesarion then Egypt will be left without a ruler. In Sidney's play, as has been discussed above, Cleopatra's love for Antony won out against her love for children. Daniel too suggests that Cleopatra's love for her children becomes a secondary concern but here it would seem to be the demands of nationhood that wins out.

By emphasising Cleopatra's extreme sense of grief over the loss of her children, Samuel Daniel attempts to make Cleopatra far more sympathetic in the eyes of readers and audience members. The fact that Cleopatra leaves her children (and has also helped precipitate their downfall) adds to the poignancy of these scenes. She is struck by her interlinked failures as mother and ruler but is left powerless to reverse them. Seeing Cleopatra's loving maternal nature assures us of her natural femininity and makes her less of an unnatural, dangerous, and frightening figure. That said, the love that Cleopatra feels for her children is still shown to be secondary, being less important than her responsibilities towards Egypt. This focus on how demands of nationhood, coalesce with the demands of motherhood will be picked up and further developed by Shakespeare in *Antony and Cleopatra.*

4. 'Western Cleopatra' *vs* 'Mediterranean Cleopatra'

In comparison to Sidney and Daniel's works, Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* affords far less emphasis on Cleopatra's identity as a mother. This different approach on Shakespeare's part can be understood by analysing another key difference among the three plays: namely, the presentation of Cleopatra's beauty and allure. In Sidney's and Daniel's plays, Cleopatra is presented as decidedly

Western, with no real acknowledgement of her Mediterranean racial identity. Contrastingly, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Cleopatra's identity is shown to be inextricably linked to the Mediterranean setting of the play. Cleopatra is the 'other' par excellence – with her exotic, alluring and crucially 'foreign' beauty and personality captivating all other characters (Norman 1958; Sanchez 2021).

Plutarch's *The Life of Antonius* – a source which Sidney, Daniel and Shakespeare all likely knew and used – famously describes Cleopatra entering Cydnus with these words: ". . . aparrelled and attired like the goddesse Venus, commonly drawn in picture: and hard by her, on either hand of her, pretie faire boys apparelled as painters doth set forth god Cupide" (North 1579, 274). Plutarch compares Cleopatra to the goddess Venus, suggesting the idea that everyone will understand the frame of reference of what is presented as a universal comparison, "commonly drawn in picture". However, this frame of reference is not universal at all, but specifically Western. The Egyptian Cleopatra is thus being described in purely European/Western terms, starting a tradition that would be continued by both Sidney and Daniel.[3]

In *The Tragedy of Antonie*, Sidney followed Garnier's description of Cleopatra closely, which emphasised the tropes of whiteness derived from both Petrarchan love poetry and the ubiquitous Catholic iconography (Aebischer 2012, 225). However, Sidney's identity as a female author also potentially contributed to such a presentation of Cleopatra. Like her choice to opt for a translation, there is the possibility that Sidney made her Cleopatra white because the alternatives would have been too threatening to the narrow circumstances that allowed Sidney to exist as a female writer (MacDonald 2002, 64). By depicting their heroines as white,

3 Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* too makes significant use of Plutarch, especially in Act 2, Scene 2 when Enobarbus provides us with a description of Cleopatra's arrival at Cydnus. One key change comes with "O'er-picturing that Venus where we see / The fancy outwork nature: on each side her" (Shakespeare, 1606, 2.2.207). The model of Venus fails to provide adequate description, with Cleopatra's beauty being far greater, 'over-powering' any Western imagining. The line, therefore, speaks more broadly of Shakespeare's commitment to focusing on the Mediterranean context of Antony and Cleopatra.

early modern female authors were able to emphasise the propriety of their authorship, by affiliating their speaking voices with dominant racial cultures, even as they challenged dominant social constructions of gender and sexuality (ibid.). We can see Sidney using a Western framework of beauty to describe Cleopatra in the following passage, in which Eras questions the Queen:

> Why with continuall cries
> your griefull harmes doo you exasperate?
> Torment your selfe with murthering complaints;
> Straine your weake brest, so oft, so vehemently?
> Water with teares this faire alabaster?
> With sorrowes sting so many beauties wound?
> Come of so many Kings, want you the hart
> Bravely, stoutly, this tempest to resist?
> (2. 417-24)

Cleopatra emerges here as highly emotional, with "straine your weake brest" connoting a vulnerable femininity in need of protection. Such emotion doesn't provide Cleopatra with any agency – she is simply passively crying. Yet, most striking here is the metaphor, "Water with teares this faire alabaster". Alabaster is a white stone. Thus, this metaphor coupled with the adjective "faire" heavily suggests that Sidney's Cleopatra is white (Cadman 2015, 6). Sidney further leans into the presentation of Cleopatra as white with the following passage:

> Nought liues so faire. Nature by such a worke
> Her selfe, should seeme, in workmanship hath past.
> She is all heau'nly: neuer any man
> But seeing hir was rauish'd with her sight.
> The Allablaster couering of her face,
> The corall couller hir two lips engraines,
> Her beamy eies, two Sunnes of this our world,
> Of hir faire haire the fine and flaming golde,
> Her braue streight stature, and her winning partes
> Are nothing else but fiers, fetters, dartes.
> (2. 709-18)

In the above lines, the multiple references to the "light" emphasise the idea of Cleopatra as being white. However, the presentation of Cleopatra's whiteness seems to become here more complex than is immediately apparent. Cleopatra is made to look like the perfect embodiment of the Renaissance ideal of beauty, with alabaster, coral and gold all being cosmetics (Aebischer 2012, 226). Her hair is golden, her lips are red, and her eyes shine bright. The Petrarchan lady's white-and-red beauty is a mask that can be put on for political and sexual purposes and that can be easily washed off or removed (228). Such an argument suggests a degree of agency to Cleopatra's 'whiteness' with it possessing an intense power: "She was heav'nly . . . / But seeing hir was ravish'd with her sight." Cleopatra's beauty is given a divine quality, with it overpowering the onlooker. However, who does this agency belong to? The verb "engraines" suggests Cleopatra's passivity. She is not painting her lips; it is something that is being done to her. Cleopatra is thus rendered as an object, being passively manipulated. She doesn't seem to have much choice when it comes to being made up. Furthermore, the idea of being 'made up' connotes vulnerability – Cleopatra's make-up and the power it entails by making her beautiful can easily be taken away, with makeup being transient. Implicit in the idea of Cleopatra's makeup is the idea that she is not white, that her 'whiteness' is a mask. If we accept this potential reading of the scene, it raises the interesting possibility that Sidney is subtly acknowledging Cleopatra's racial identity as being non-Western. Ultimately, though, by 'making' Cleopatra white the passage once again serves to uphold a European/Western idea of beauty, arguably suggesting that the alternative is inferior by comparison and must be put 'right'.

The way that Cleopatra is physically described in Daniel's *The Tragedy of Cleopatra* also aligns with a distinctly Western model of beauty. In the following lines, Dolabella is enraptured by Cleopatra's beauty, which stands out even amid great distress:

> What, can untressed locks, can torne rent haire,
> A weeping eye, a wailing face be faire?
> I see then, artlesse feature can content,
> And that true beautie needs no ornament.
> (3.2.719-22)

What first strikes us about this passage is the focus on Cleopatra's vulnerability, with the alliteration of "w" in "A weeping eye, a wailing face be faire?" echoing the act of crying, through the soft, breathy effect of the repeated "w." Despite Cleopatra's dishevelled appearance, 'untressed locks,' her beauty still enthrals, 'true beautie needs no ornament.' At first glance, then this passage does not seem to offer much in terms of understanding Daniel's presentation of Cleopatra's racial identity. The passage seems very much modelled on the work of the poet Francesco Petrarca. In Petrarca's poetry, the love interest Laura was always presented in 'parts' – her beauty as a woman was broken down via blazons into specific sections to be praised (Vickers 1981, 266). Prominent examples include hair, hands, foot and eyes. Similarly, with the passage here, Cleopatra's appearance is analysed in parts, 'hair', 'eyes' and 'mouth.' Daniel adopts here the Petrarchan insistence on the individual fragments of the beautiful female body. Additionally, Dolabella is describing Cleopatra's beauty here to Octavius, Cleopatra is not present. This too shows an aligning with Petrarchan conventions – specifically, the trope whereby the female figure is objectified, and rendered voiceless (Vickers 1981, 277). This commitment to Petrarchan conventions of writing about female beauty, in turn signals a further commitment to Western models of appearance and female beauty. Furthermore, the critic, Kim F. Hall suggests 'whiteness in traditional Petrarchan display is so ubiquitous that it escapes attention' (1996, 466). This ubiquity, Hall suggests should not mean that we lose sight of 'how significant whiteness is to Petrarchan beauty' (ibid). We can see this with the above passage – there are no immediate phrases that immediately foreground race in our minds, and yet the whole passage shores up Cleopatra's whiteness and 'Western' beauty through the commitment to Petrarch's conventions of writing. We are not meant to dwell on Cleopatra's racial identity here because Daniel clearly intends it to be a given – she is white.

Cleopatra's visual appearance features prominently in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, but in a much more complex way than in the other two works discussed so far. Throughout the play, Shakespeare's Cleopatra is presented as deeply preoccupied with her appearance, being well aware of the importance of

projecting beauty. The famous scene between Cleopatra and the Messenger in 3.3, for example, reveals her deep-seated insecurities about the way she looks:

MESSENGER She creeps.
Her motion and her station are as one.
She shows a body rather than a life,
A statue than a breather.
CLEOPATRA Is this certain?
MESSENGER Or I have no observance.
CHARMIAN Three in Egypt
Cannot make better note.
CLEOPATRA He's very knowing;
I do perceive't. There's nothing in her yet.
The fellow has good judgment.
CHARMIAN Excellent.
CLEOPATRA Guess at her years, I prithee.
MESSENGER Madam,
She was a widow.
CLEOPATRA Widow! Charmian, hark!
MESSENGER And I do think she's thirty.
CLEOPATRA Bear'st thou her face in mind? Is't long or round?
MESSENGER Round even to faultiness.
CLEOPATRA For the most part, too, they are foolish that are so.
Her hair, what colour?
MESSENGER Brown, madam, and her forehead
As low as she would wish it.
CLEOPATRA There's gold for thee.
Thou must not take my former sharpness ill.
I will employ thee back again; I find thee
Most fit for business. Go make thee ready;
Our letters are prepared.
(3.3.19-37)[4]

Cleopatra is desperate here to find out as much as she can about Octavia so that she might be reassured that she is more attrac-

4 All references are from Shakespeare 2005 and will appear parenthetically in the text.

tive. Shakespeare brings out the comedy of the scene, through Cleopatra's increasingly contradictory responses to the Messenger. She goes from being delighted at finding out that Octavia is a widow, "Widow! Charmian, hark!" to horrified at discovering Octavia's younger age. Her change in attitude is illustrated through her sudden shift in questioning, "Bear'st thou her face in mind," as she attempts to steer the conversation away from the focus on Octavia's youth. The scene illustrates the importance of beauty to Cleopatra – she is very much aware of the fact that she is an ageing woman, with her beauty declining. Overall, the scene cements the importance of appearance, suggesting that for all of Shakespeare's Cleopatra's brilliance, much of her power depends on her identity as an attractive woman. Cultivating and projecting beauty is thus most definitely a focus of Shakespeare's Cleopatra.

As was the case with Sidney and Daniel's plays, such questions of her visual appearance become closely tied up with questions of racial identity. In terms of the performance history of *Antony and Cleopatra,* for much of the first half of the twentieth century, Cleopatra's look was formalised in terms of whiteness – typically, pale-skinned, red-haired, and scantily clad (MacDonald 2002, 51-52). Over time, this presentation of Cleopatra began to be challenged, by critics such as Ania Loomba, who described Cleopatra as 'the non-European, the outsider, the white man's ultimate "other" leading the way (qtd in Aebischer 2012, 221). Carol Rutter offers a similar understanding of Cleopatra's racial identity arguing that the "play offers no one 'whiter' than the anti-sensualist, utterly sterile, imperialist Octavius; no one 'darker' than the constantly 'becoming' Cleopatra, whose 'infinite variety', like the Nile's, can't be mapped, contained, bounded" (qtd in Thompson 2021, 123). Of course, historical context is important when it comes to exploring Cleopatra's racial identity. For Shakespeare, and his contemporaries, the terms "Egypt" and "Egyptian" did not indicate any one race but instead conjured up images of various people, like gypsies, Jews, and Muslisms, who were all regarded as dark-skinned and seen as connected to the Moors (Loomba 2002, 115). All these groups were characterised by disguise, trickery, and gender inversion, threatening English rule and Christian faith (Thompson 2021, 126). The racial other, then, was automatically connected with something dangerous.

In this regard, evidence of Cleopatra's 'otherness' can indeed be found at the very beginning of Shakespeare's play, which opens with the Roman soldier Philo deploring what he sees as Antony's complete subjugation to Cleopatra: "The office and devotion of their view Upon a tawny front" (1.1.6) The adjective, "tawny" points to Cleopatra not being white. Including such an adjective makes clear that the soldiers' distrust of Cleopatra is acutely wrapped up in her non-whiteness, with the soldiers despairing that Antony has fixated his exemplary Roman self on the 'other.' The quotation also shows a complete devaluing of Cleopatra's identity. She is not being referred to by name or even seen as a real person – the focus is completely on her 'exotic otherness'. The negative labels attached to Cleopatra immediately present her racial identity in a negative light and establish a link between Cleopatra's race and her 'dangerous' sexuality. Philo imagines Cleopatra as a malevolent 'other' not bound by traditional conventions of femininity, able to dominate and control men. This connection between sexual domination and race is sustained elsewhere in *Antony and Cleopatra.* Food imagery is used throughout the play to suggest Cleopatra's status as a sexually available and desirable woman; she is described as Antony's "Egyptian dish" (2.6.126) and a "morsel" that he found left on Caesar's plate (2.13.117) (Loomba 2002, 125). Yet, crucially, Cleopatra is not just a treat to be consumed by Roman men. She also threatens to overwhelm them as illustrated by, "making hungry where she most satisfies" (2.2.243-4), and by comparing Antony to a fish which she intends to catch, 'And say "Ah ha, you're caught" (2.5.12-15) (ibid.). In other plays produced in the period, dark-skinned women are allowed to pay homage to white men, but in English drama, they cannot be whitened and cannot be invited to join the Christian family. Thus, the dark skin of Shakespeare's Cleopatra, and the fact that she revels in it, and crucially that Antony is ensnared by it, is especially striking (ibid.). Cleopatra then is not just simply a racialised other – she possesses her own power. Overall, Cleopatra straddles the line between conquest and weapon, and it is often unclear as to what role she belongs to or is operating under. Yet, clearly established (at least in the minds of the Romans) is the fearful link between Cleopatra's racial identity and her desire to dominate men.

Shakespeare presents Cleopatra as understanding her racial identity in a very different way from the Roman soldiers. She does not attempt to hide her blackness but instead embraces it. Cleopatra playfully presents her dark skin here as arising from the sun's attention. Like the soldiers, Cleopatra openly acknowledges her blackness relatively early on in the play, declaring, "Think on me, that am with Phoebus' amorous pinches black, / And wrinkled deep in time?" (1.5.26-7). The dark skin that Cleopatra identifies as arising from Phoebus's rough sexual play was typically understood as being the result of a cosmic accident when the chariot of the sun and the mighty winged horses which drew it veered out of their normal course under the poor management of Phoebus's son Phaeton (Macdonald 2002, 64-5). In her retelling of the story, Cleopatra gets rid of Phaeton. Phoebus alone determines Cleopatra's racial identity, through his loving touch. In her reinterpretation of the myth, Cleopatra's racial identity is defined not by misfortune, but by a god's desire for her. As such, Cleopatra's changing of the myth shows her rejection of authoritarian and imperialist applications of the myth (65-6). Her racial identity is not a defect that must be apologised for, nor is it a sign of sinfulness (as Philo suggests) but instead something within which she exists confidently.

These depictions testify to how much Shakespeare moved away from the Petrarchan model of beauty used by Sidney and Daniel. Yet, at the same time, Shakespeare invites ambiguity. Returning to the messenger scene, let's focus on the following lines, where Cleopatra invites the messenger to: "My bluest veins to kiss" (2.5.28). 'Blue blood' was typically used to characterise old and aristocratic families, as well as to allude to the blue appearance of the veins of individuals with a fair complexion as compared to those of dark skin (Oxford English Dictionary 2023, "blue blood (n.), Etymology"). Cleopatra's reference here, then, emphasises her royal status, but it complicates matters by possibly suggesting that her complexion was fairer than we might have imagined. Most importantly, it reveals how Shakespeare was far from consistent when it came to the presentation of Cleopatra's racial identity in *Antony and Cleopatra,* demonstrating a certain indecision when it comes to the colour of Cleopatra's skin (MacDonald 2002, 45). McDonald offers a convincing explanation for such inconsistency:

> I believe the play is finally so convinced of the cosmic import of Cleopatra's racial difference from the Romans that it cannot be bothered to be consistent about her skin colour. Its view of what her race means is so large as to render mere consistency of physical description irrelevant. Her fluctuating colour is of a piece with the double gender Plutarch ascribes to the queen-goddesses of Egypt: a performative announcement of her royal prerogative (2002, 60)

The focus then is less on the specifics of Cleopatra's racial identity, but rather on how it foregrounds Cleopatra's difference from the Romans. McDonald sees this as helping to facilitate Cleopatra's powerful identity as Queen of Egypt, an identity which seems to transcend mere mortal understandings, 'goddesses'. Even though it is not possible to come to a wholly satisfactory conclusion regarding the racial identity of Cleopatra in Shakespeare's version, what is crucial to underline is the fact that, by emphasising the Mediterranean context of the story, Shakespeare properly acknowledges the possibility of Cleopatra's being non-white, establishing discussions about Cleopatra's racial identity that are simply not present in Sidney and Daniel's versions. As we will see, such discussions will prove key to understanding Cleopatra's identity as a mother in Antony and Cleopatra, with Shakespeare's presentation of Cleopatra's motherhood furthering the feeling of essential difference between Cleopatra and the Romans, as highlighted by McDonald above.

4. Mother of a Nation

As previously mentioned, little mention of Cleopatra's identity as a mother is made in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Cleopatra's children are rarely talked about, nor do they appear on stage, unlike in Daniel and Sidney's plays. How we are meant to interpret this difference is not completely clear. Just as we saw with Shakespeare's presentation of Cleopatra's racial identity, there is more than one understanding available to us. At first glance, the fact that Cleopatra's children are barely mentioned within the play would at first seem to uphold the Roman view of Cleopatra as an unnatural and cruel woman, with her 'otherness' used to explain her lack of maternal instinct.

This idea that Shakespeare presents Cleopatra's motherhood negatively can be seen through his frequent association of Cleopatra with serpent imagery. Such imagery possesses negative connotations, when considered in light of its Christian context, being associated with the fall of mankind and the rise of sin (Kuriyama 1977, 325). By associating this imagery with Cleopatra, Shakespeare suggests that Cleopatra is unnatural and dangerous. This serpent imagery directly intersects with Cleopatra's presentation as a mother. For instance, te asp that Cleopatra uses to commit suicide has been the focus of multiple critical studies. The critic Kuriyama in one such study, identified the asp in the play as both a 'legal phallus' and a 'baby at her breast' (1977, 330). Cleopatra is adopting the traditional role of here the mother, breastfeeding her baby but the image is a perverted one. Rather than Cleopatra providing life to an infant, the 'suckling child' is killing her. Cleopatra's motherhood is thus presented as something corrupted – her actions with the asp becoming a perverse reflection of the natural processes of motherhood (breastfeeding). Furthermore, the asp as a 'legal phallus,' also has connotations of sexuality. Indeed, we might see Cleopatra's sexuality (the asp as a phallus) as overtaking her commitments as a mother (the asp as a breast-feeding baby). Overall, then, one could certainly make the case, that Shakespeare (from the imagery he utilises to describe her) presents Cleopatra as a bad, non-existent mother. Furthermore, we can gesture to Shakespeare's canon more widely, across which there are not many examples of exemplary mothers. Mothers are frequently absent from Shakespeare's texts, or if present, depicted as dangerous, e.g., Lady Macbeth and Volumnia.[5] The few 'good' mothers presented, tend to experience great suffering, e.g., Hermione in *The Winter's Tale.*

5 Lady Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's most famous mothers, infamously remembered for her ruthless assertion that she "would take that baby while it was smiling at me, pull my nipple out of its mouth, and smash its brains out, if I had sworn to kill it as you have sworn to do this deed" (Shakespeare 1606, 1.7.56-57). Yet, it is worth noting that her famous lines about smashing her baby's head are nothing more than hypotheticals- a fantasy of infanticide that we never see realised. This ambiguity of Lady Macbeth's status as a mother is indicative more broadly of Shakespeare's approach to motherhood across his works.

Within much of this criticism exists the implication that mothers who cannot be categorised as 'exemplary' are not really mothers at all (Dunworth 2013, 3), suggesting Shakespeare had very fixed ideas around what constituted being a good mother.

However, it is worth challenging the overly simplistic interpretation (as presented above) that Shakespeare mistrusts mothers, seeing them only as 'bad'. Carol Thomas Neely, for instance, highlights the multiple possible reasons why mothers were absent in Shakespeare.

> The rarity of mothers [in Shakespeare's plays] may reflect or confirm demographic data showing that Renaissance women frequently died in childbirth. It may embody the social reality that patriarchal culture vested all authority in the main parent; making it both logical and fitting that he alone should represent that authority in the drama. It may derive . . . from generic conventions: the uncommonness of mature women in the genres of comedy, history play and tragedy. Or it may result from a scarcity of boy actors capable of playing mature women in Shakespeare's company. (Qtd in Dunworth 2013, 6)

Thus, there are potential dangers to focusing too closely upon absent mothers as evidence of misogyny, with the demands of the dramatic form and theatrical conventions being possible mitigations (ibid.). Furthermore, there is a convincing argument to be had that motherhood does feature in *Antony and Cleopatra*, albeit in a different way from Sidney and Daniel's texts. Throughout the play, motherhood is presented as being intrinsically connected to nationhood and place. Cleopatra's death in *Antony and Cleopatra* seems at face value to mark Rome's total triumph, with Egypt no longer challenging Rome's stability. Representing passion, Cleopatra seems set against cold Roman reason (Wisniewski 2001, 152). Her death would seemingly, therefore, point to the triumph of not only the Roman Empire but the Roman way of thinking over the Egyptian context.

However, such a reading of Cleopatra's death risks oversimplification. Like so much of the play, this is a moment characterised by ambiguity. Cleopatra's retreat into the monument could be interpreted as Cleopatra resisting the public's gaze, hoping to

secure privacy for her final moments. Yet, the critic Adelman argues that the 'retreat' into the monument serves as an act of resistance, allowing Cleopatra to rob Ceasar of his triumph, by preventing him from being able to arrange how events will be remembered (qtd in Cadman 2015, 8). Within the monument, Cleopatra can stage her death and legacy, in one final act of resistance to Rome. Furthermore, it is worth remembering here that *Antony and Cleopatra* stands out amongst Shakespeare's tragic canon, for giving a woman the final and climactic death (Stirling 1964, 127). The final focus is not on Antony, but on Cleopatra, affording her death even greater significance. Dying, Cleopatra embraces the identity of Egypt:

> *Enter* Iras *with a robe, crown, &c.*
> Cleopatra Give me my robe. Put on my crown. I have
> Immortal longings in me. Now no more
> The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip.
> (5.2.275-7)

Her directives, 'Give me my robe, put on my crown,' show her adopting the markers of queenship, with Cleopatra asserting her identity as Queen of Egypt. The stage directions tell us that Shakespeare wanted the robe and crown to be real objects exuding a presence on stage – not just symbolic markers of power. In the space of the tomb, Cleopatra can define her image – attiring herself in her robe, crown and jewels and dying as a free queen of Egypt, rather than being led through the streets of Rome as Antony's imperial trophy (Cadman 2015, 8). Cleopatra is not a cowed figure here but triumphant, stunning everyone with the majesty of her appearance. In her splendour, Cleopatra finally becomes the Cleopatra that was earlier promised to us in Enobarbus's speech in 2.2. Cleopatra effectively gives 'birth' to a new image of Egypt – an Egypt no longer broken in defeat, but glorious and triumphant. In doing so, she reveals her awareness that a self-authored death would strike at the very heart of an ideological programme that relies heavily on public recognition of such rites (Laoutaris 2008, 240-241). Parading a captured Cleopatra through the streets of Rome would have powerfully demonstrated imperial Rome's power, but as the mother of Egypt, Cleopatra acts to prevent that.

The significance of the serpent imagery used for Cleopatra has been discussed above in terms of how it might fit with the idea of her as a 'bad' mother. Yet, if we consider the above conversations around Cleopatra's death, there is another possible interpretation. As previously mentioned, Cleopatra dies cradling an asp to her breast, with the language decidedly maternal, "Dost thou not see my baby at my breast / That sucks the nurse asleep?" (5.2.308-9). Cleopatra casts herself as a loving mother here, attentively caring for her children. If we consider how for much of the play, the asp has been used as a stand-in for Cleopatra, and more broadly Egypt, the line takes on extra meaning, with Cleopatra in effect nursing Egypt. Such a reading would support the argument that Cleopatra gives birth to the myth of Egypt. Cleopatra's suicide resists the traditions of Roman suicide (by the sword), dying instead from the asp's poison (Thompson 2021, 132), further supporting the argument that her death works as a repudiation of Roman culture and superiority.

Moreover, it is possible to see the connection between motherhood and nationhood as existing throughout *Antony and Cleopatra*, with the monument scene cementing this link. Cleopatra is repeatedly compared to the goddess Isis. Significantly, one comparison comes from Octavius Caesar himself, when he angrily discusses Cleopatra's and Antony's crowning of themselves and their children: "she In th' habiliments of the goddess Isis / That day appear'd" (3.6.16-17). Connecting Cleopatra and Isis further reinforces the idea of Cleopatra as defending Egyptian identity. Isis was believed to be the dominant strength behind the Mediterranean, known as the goddess of 'Mother Nature' (Wiśniewska 2001, 156). Isis who was regarded as the mistress of the Earth, sea and world of the dead, tended to be depicted with a double crown and was worshipped as the ideal mother (ibid). In the final scene monument scene then, Cleopatra is not just dressing up as the Queen of Egypt with her crown, but as the mother goddess herself. Her racial identity and identity as a mother, thus, may be said to work together for Cleopatra, allowing her to give birth to the glorious legend of Egypt.

6. Conclusion

Motherhood is a concept that has always exercised a particularly strong hold over the cultural imagination. Even today motherhood tends to be regarded as something completely natural, uninformed by the society around us (Dunworth 2013, 4). A mother's love tends to be regarded as something so strong and seemingly universal that it must owe something to nature. As such, very little flexibility is afforded to the concept of mothering – society tends to believe that there is only one way to be a good mother (ibid). Comparing Sidney, Daniel and Shakespeare's Cleopatras pushes back against such a view – highlighting how there are in fact multiple ways to be a mother. Mary Sidney and Samuel Daniel both feel in their texts the need to provide some explanation for Cleopatra's treatment of her children. They seek to offer mitigations to suggest that Cleopatra can be viewed as a good mother. Shakespeare is less interested in offering up such justifications. It would be wrong to say that motherhood doesn't feature in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*: in fact, the focus has simply changed. Shakespeare is less interested in Cleopatra as a mother of individual children but as the mother of a nation. This connection between motherhood and nation is further established by Shakespeare's complex and detailed presentation of Cleopatra's racial identity, which crucially commits to the Mediterranean context by exploring the possibilities of a non-white Cleopatra. In her death, Cleopatra gives birth to the myth of Egypt thus ensuring that despite Egypt's actual defeat, imperialist Rome will not be able to triumph.

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7

"The sea is mine": Pompey the Pirate

Lisa Hopkins

Abstract

Although Pompey the Great makes only a peripheral or incidental appearance in most surviving early modern plays, there were others which are now lost in which he clearly figured more prominently, and his memory haunts both *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which his son Sextus is master of the sea. Young Pompey is clearly intended to evoke his father, but he is also strongly connected to his ship. There is an onstage boat in two scenes of the 1607 *The Tragedie of Caesar and Pompey*, and when Young Pompey tells the triumvirate "Aboard my galley I invite you all" (2.6.80) we are clearly invited to imagine the subsequent scene as taking place onboard. Ships were resonant objects in the early modern imaginary which could be used to figure a variety of ideas such as statecraft and survival in difficult circumstances. This essay argues that *Antony and Cleopatra* makes symbolic use of Pompey's galley, which can be seen as both a ship of faith and also a ship of state, with Young Pompey himself illustrating how to lose both power and glamour.

Keywords: Galleys; government; faith; ships; spectacle

I am not given to talking in the theatre, but whenever I go to see *Julius Caesar* and hear the question "Knew you not Pompey?" (1.1.38),[1] I always have an absurd urge to shout out "No, I've never met him. Do please tell me something interesting about him". There are in fact quite a lot of interesting things to say about Pompey. He had five wives, only one short of Henry VIII. He conquered Jerusalem, purged the Mediterranean sea of pirates, and was awarded three triumphs for victories in three different continents before he was forty. According to Plutarch, he was nicknamed Alexander because of his resemblance to Alexander the Great (2017, 120), and he also achieved the soubriquet 'the Great' on his own account, which was more than either Julius Caesar or Augustus ever did. Above all he

1 All references to *Julius Caesar* are from Shakespeare 2017 and will appear between brackets in the text.

came to stand for the high ideals of the Roman republic which Julius Caesar threatened and which Augustus destroyed.

Pompey the Great was a significant and resonant figure in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. Freyja Cox Jensen observes that

> The clash between Caesar and Pompey afforded lessons both for individuals and the nation as a whole, and was presented as an admonitory tale by several writers seeking to draw attention to the political parallels between ancient history and the contemporary situation. The wars between the *populares*, led by Caesar, and Pompey's *optimates* were the most significant and protracted of the civic upheavals which afflicted Rome, and represented a state of affairs abhorrent to many English writers; Rome, with its martial traditions and bloody history, provided a warning for an England lately delivered from the threat of Spanish invasion and facing an uncertain future under an aged, heirless queen. (2012, 126)

Information about Pompey was available from a number of different sources, including Plutarch's *Lives*, but in contrast to Switzerland, where the French-language *Tragédie Nouvelle appelée Pompée* was published in Lausanne in 1579,[2] in most surviving English early modern plays he makes only a peripheral or incidental appearance, which is the reason I feel I've never met him. In *Henry V*, Fluellen says "If you would take the pains but to examine the wars of Pompey the Great you shall find, I warrant you, that there is no tiddle-taddle nor pibble-pabble in Pompey's camp" (4.1.69-72).[3] In *Measure for Measure* the name of Pompey Bum is a deliberate incongruity; in *Love's Labour's Lost* Pompey features (unusually) as one of the Nine Worthies; and in both Fletcher's *The False One* and Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam* we either hear of or see the fate of Pompey's severed head. Even in the anonymous 1607 *Caesar and Pompey* (admittedly also known as *Caesar's Revenge*) Pompey dies in Act 2, and although the full title of Kyd's *Cornelia* is *Pompey the Great his Fair Cornelia's Tragedy* Pompey himself is dead before the play begins.

2 I'm very grateful to Anne-Marie Miller-Blaise for alerting me to this.

3 All references to *Henry V* are from Shakespeare 1995 and will appear between brackets in the text.

It is a different matter when it comes to plays we no longer have; Domenico Lovascio notes on *The Lost Plays Database* that "A storie of Pompey" was performed at Whitehall by the Children of Paul's on Friday 6 January 1581, but the only hint of what it contained is that it required "one great citty, A senate howse and eight ells of dobble sarcenet for curtens and .xviij. paire of gloves". There are also lost plays about *Caesar and Pompey* and Lovascio suggests that Pompey may have figured too in the lost *Ptolemy* (2017); of those which survive, however, only Thomas Lodge's *The Wounds of Civil War* and Chapman's *Caesar and Pompey* really show us the man, and the latter of these was not published until 1631 and seems never to have been acted. Moreover, Lovascio notes that "in all the extant early modern English plays featuring him as a character, Pompey mainly serves as a foil for Caesar, and whenever his name appears in the title of a play, Caesar's also does" (ibid.).

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, however, we hear quite a lot of Pompey considering that he is dead, because his son Young Pompey (in fact the younger of his two sons, but the play does not remind us of that) is a significant character. Young Pompey's role is a relatively simple one for this complex play: he is master of the sea. The first we hear of him is when Antony tells Enobarbus that ". . . Sextus Pompeius / Hath given the dare to Caesar and commands / The empire of the sea" (1.2.190-2).[4] Soon after this we hear that Young Pompey is on the move when Antony says,

> Sextus Pompeius
> Makes his approaches to the port of Rome;
> Equality of two domestic powers
> Breed scrupulous faction.
> (1.3.46-9)

Thereafter Young Pompey is consistently associated with the sea and is also particularly connected with pirates, as when a Messenger announces,

4 All references to *Antony and Cleopatra* are from Shakespeare 1995 and will appear between brackets in the text.

> Caesar, I bring thee word
> Menecrates and Menas, famous pirates,
> Makes the sea serve them, which they ear and wound
> With keels of every kind. Many hot inroads
> They make in Italy – the borders maritime
> Lack blood to think on't – and flush youth revolt.
> No vessel can peep forth but 'tis as soon
> Taken as seen; for Pompey's name strikes more
> Than could his war resisted.
> (1.1.47-56)

The link between the two "famous pirates" Menecrates and Menas and Young Pompey is only implicit and circumstantial at this stage, but we will soon find Menas and Young Pompey in company together and the Messenger's insinuation will be amply confirmed. Young Pompey's power seems to be more than can be accounted for by the use of brute force, however; not only does his name – or/and that of his father – "strike" apparently autonomously (to a greater extent indeed than if battle were given) but he seems to be almost symbiotically connected with "the borders maritime", which are personified as "lack[ing] blood" as a result of Pompey's pet pirates "ear[ing]" and "wound[ing]" the sea. The Mediterranean seems suddenly to have turned into a quasi-human body, animated on its own account and animating too the lands which surround it, with Pompey presiding over what happens there as if he were a demigod or a *genius loci*.

Pompey himself contributes to the sense that he is a more-than-human figure when he declares,

> I shall do well.
> The people love me, and the sea is mine;
> My powers are crescent, and my auguring hope
> Says it will come to th' full.
> (2.1.8-11)

Not only can he grandly announce that "the sea is mine", he implicitly figures himself as the moon, the governor of tides, when he says that his "powers are crescent", an image developed in the unspecified and otherwise grammatically incongrous "it" which "will come to

th' full". There is also a distinct sense of him as larger than life in a three-way exchange amongst Lepidus, Antony and Caesar:

> Lepidus Time calls upon's.
> Of us must Pompey presently be sought
> Or else he seeks out us.
> Antony Where lies he?
> Caesar About the Mount Misena.
> Antony What is his strength by land?
> Caesar Great and increasing, but by sea
> He is an absolute master.
> (2.2.166-73)

Pompey is not only in a position to hunt down the three supposed masters of the civilised world; the description of him "l[ying]" "About the Mount Misena" suggests that he occupies a vast amount of space, enough in fact to encompass a mountain. Moreover, he is metaphorically growing, since his strength by land is increasing, while the sea is already completely under his control. At this stage of the play he does indeed cut a formidable figure.

On one level, Young Pompey is clearly there to evoke his father. When Antony first mentions him he explains specifically that

> Our slippery people,
> Whose love is never linked to the deserver
> Till his deserts are past, begin to throw
> Pompey the Great and all his dignities
> Upon his son, who, high in name and power,
> Higher than both in blood and life, stands up
> For the main soldier; whose quality going on,
> The sides o' th' world may danger.
> (1.2.192-9)

Domenico Lovascio observes that "the very presence on stage of his younger son Sextus further strengthens the onstage ghostly presence of Pompey" (2020, 12), and there is also a potential, if puzzling, extradiegetic connection, since Young Pompey's first words are "If the great gods be just, they shall assist / The deeds of justest men" (2.1.1-2) and the title page of Chapman's *The Wars of Pompey and Caesar* bears the epigram, "Out of whose euents is euicted this Proposition. /

Only a iust man is a freeman" (my emphasis).[5] Chapman's play would not see print until long after Shakespeare's death, but Shakespeare seems to show knowledge of Chapman's translation of Homer in *Troilus and Cressida* (Wolfe 2015, 299), and he could conceivably have been aware of his Pompey and Caesar play, for whose composition J. E. Ingledew has proposed "a certain date between 1599 and 1607, and a probable date of 1605" (1961, 144). Young Pompey's use of "justest" might simply be intended as ironic preparation for his deeply cynical response to Menas' later suggestion of committing political assassination, but it is not quite beyond the bounds of possibility that it nods extradiegetically at a play about his father. What it certainly does do, however, is to establish him as a character who claims a moral as well as a political perspective, and this instantiates him as part of the thematic structure as well as the plot, as a contributor to the play's sustained enquiry into what it means to live well.

It is apparent from the outset that Young Pompey is a charismatic character. A messenger rather daringly warns Caesar that not only is Pompey "strong at sea", but it also appears that he is "beloved of those / That only have feared Caesar" (1.4.36-7). Young Pompey also seems to be a potentially crucial catalyst in the turbulent political situation, as we see when he says, "But how the fear of us / May cement their divisions, and bind up / The petty difference, we yet not know" (2.1.48-50).

He understands himself as someone who creates fear, and he also seems to be using the royal 'we', as if he were not only kingmaker but king. But as well as this public, political persona he also has a private one, and the two are headily imbricated when he addresses the triumvirate:

> To you all three,
> The senators alone of this great world,
> Chief factors for the gods: I do not know
> Wherefore my father should revengers want,
> Having a son and friends, since Julius Caesar,
> Who at Philippi the good Brutus ghosted,
> There saw you labouring for him. What was't

5 All references to *The Wars of Pompey and Caesar* are from Chapman 1631 and will appear between brackets in the text.

> That moved pale Cassius to conspire? And what
> Made the all-honoured, honest Roman, Brutus,
> With the armed rest, courtiers of beauteous freedom,
> To drench the Capitol, but that they would
> Have one man but a man?
> (2.6.8-19)

This speech starts out by being about private revenge, but it turns into an embryonic political manifesto as Young Pompey praises Brutus and calls his co-conspirators "courtiers of beauteous freedom" (provocatively enough given that he is talking to both the nephew and the best friend of the man they murdered). He sounds like a classic supporter of the Roman republic and would therefore have appeared to many in the original audience as honourable, disinterested and virtuous, but his reference to "one man [being] but a man" has the ironic potential to undercut his own status just as much as Caesar's and does indeed herald a new phase of events in which he will no longer be like the waxing moon but rather like the waning one. Young Pompey could sustain the role of master of the sea while he did not attempt to be anything else, but he will prove no politician.

At the same time as Young Pompey's personal and political power begins to decline, however, his allegorical and symbolic force increases. His father's defining attribute in early modern drama was a ship. As we shall see, scenes on a (perhaps physically staged) ship play an important part in the anonymous 1607 *Caesar and Pompey*, which Leeds Barroll suggests is alluded to in *Antony and Cleopatra* (2005, 280), and John Taylor the Water Poet would later figure Pompey as metaphorically afloat when he wrote that

> Fellow-SHIP: this ship was once of that estimation, that *Iulius Caesar* would have beene content to hauv sayled in her, but that the great *Pompey* scorn'd any equality, and would be no meanes boord the Fellow-SHIP with any man (1630, Ii*v*).

In *Une Tragédie nouvelle appelée Pompée*, Cornelia plans a sacrifice in a boat and Pompey dies in one (2000, 1-60). Partly this reflects the strong association of the historical Pompey the Great with naval warfare and with the general control of the sea. In Chapman's *The Wars of Pompey and Caesar* Crassus warns Caesar that

> *Pompeys* navie,
> You know, lies houering all alongst those seas,
> In too much danger, for what ayde soeuer
> You can procure to passe your person safe.
> (D4*r*)

Caesar himself, by contrast, has only "poore vessels" (D4*r*) to which his aides advise him not to trust, and though a terrible storm is merely described we do see the master of a ship entering with sailors (E3*r*). At the beginning of Act 5 it is the sight of a lone ship that first warns Cornelia of Pompey's failure (H3*r*). In *Antony and Cleopatra*, this imagery is echoed when Cleopatra recalls how "great Pompey / Would stand and make his eyes grow in my brow; / There would he anchor his aspect" (1.5.32-4). Here Pompey is figured as an actual ship for whom emotional attachment can be troped as an anchor.

But ships meant much more than simply sea power. Bronwen Wilson observes that ships were

> potent images . . . for medieval and early modern Europeans. With diverse biblical, functional, philosophical, economic, mythological, and poetic associations, they appealed to the imaginations of pilgrims and travelers, artists and writers, merchants and rulers . . . Because ships stimulated thinking about the accumulation of wealth as well as risks of loss, ships were symbols for the vicissitudes of fortune. (2022, 2)

They could have other metaphorical uses too: they might for instance represent statecraft and survival in difficult seas, while Nicola Tallis notes that "As symbols of happiness, ships were a popular theme for jewels in this period" (2023, 92). Julia Fox and John Guy observe that in 1518 the inhabitants of Nantes gave Francis I

> a silver-gilt ship weighing 16 lbs 8 oz. Judging by its weight, this was a table jewel meaning that his subjects were safe in storms so long as he was at the tiller. It was a motif as ancient as Plato's use of the term 'pilot of the ship of state' to describe the leadership of the Athenian Republic (2023, Kindle loc. 1626)

Fox and Guy suggest that Anne Boleyn was remembering that ship when she gave Henry "'a fair diamond' set in a 'ship in which a

solitary damsel is tossed about'", and perhaps such imagery is also echoed in the Hunsdon Jewel, a ship pendant said to have been given by Elizabeth I to her cousin Lord Hunsdon, whose mother was Anne Boleyn's sister (2644; 2676). Elizabeth relied on Hundson to keep the Scottish Border safe (and also to control the activities of Shakespeare's theatre company); a ship would have been an appropriate sign of the extent of her trust in him.

In literature in particular a ship is rarely just a ship; Lindsay Ann Reid, discussing the title page of John Awdelay's *Fraternitye of Vacabondes* (1565), argues that it implicitly "aligns the Gravesend barge with the metaphorical ship of fools popularised in Sebastian Brant's late fifteenth-century *Das Narrenschiff*" which she calls a "seminal work of humanist *narrenliteratur*" which had familiarised readers with the expectation that ships should be read allegorically (2024, 113). Finally John Guy notes that at the banquet following the wedding of Mary Queen of Scots to the Dauphin François

> six mechanical ships had been constructed . . . The ships rocked from side to side and moved backwards and forwards. Painted canvas had been laid on the floor of the great hall to imitate the waves [and] As the clockwork ships navigated their way round the hall, a narrator explained how the scene depicted Jason . . . Henry II, he announced, was Jason. By capturing the Golden Fleece, he would conquer an empire and create a universal monarchy' (2018, 88-9)

Clare Hunter suggests that ships figured in Mary's marriage masque because the ship was "the Catholic symbol of safety in time of persecution" (2022, 42), and Alison Weir notes that in England too 1573 Henry Killigrew wrote to Lord Burghley about plans "to save the kingdom from shipwreck" (2016, 357). If shipwreck is something to be profoundly feared and ships are totems of security, to murder *in* a ship, as Menas suggests that Pompey should do, is terrible not only morally but allegorically.

On stage and in other kinds of dramatic entertainment, ships also allowed for spectacular visual effects. Joseph Ward notes that during the annual Lord Mayor shows the Thames served as "a ceremonial thoroughfare in . . . London, as its streets were far too narrow for the purpose" (2008, 58), and Maria Shmygol too observes its historically crucial role in elaborate civic festivities

(2022). The river offered 'both a means of passage and a watery stage during occasional royal processions and annual Lord Mayor's Day celebrations' which might include "a vibrant flotilla of vessels accompanied by trumpets, drums, and the thundering gunfire of the galley-foist, as well as symbolic and allegorical devices" (13-14). Such scenes and entertainments were drawing on a long tradition. Meg Twycross notes the dramatic power of scenes in mediaeval plays involving a ship caught in a storm, whether Noah's Ark or "Mary Magdalene's Mediterranean galley" (2008, 53), and Daisy Black observes that

> Records from plays staged in civic centres such as York and Chester suggest pageants of Noah's ark were highly popular with audiences and among the most spectacular and expensive pageants to produce, calling for the expert knowledge of the cites' craft guilds . . . That the device of the ship appears in other medieval performance genres attests to its success as a narrative and spectacular device. (2024, 73)

In particular, Black observes that "The late fifteenth-century Digby *Mary Magdalene* play has long been noted for its complex use of space and spectacle. Its use of a stage ship as a location for a tempest, as well as a space of birth, death, and rebirth, holds compelling similarities to that of *Pericles*" (ibid.) And there was a particular appropriateness in repurposing such stage effects for a play about Antony and Cleopatra: Joan Evans notes that Elizabeth I had a jewel showing Cleopatra standing in a ship (2003, 115). Elizabeth had been described by a Jesuit writer as "the English Cleopatra" (with Ralegh, on this occasion, envisioned as her Antony) (Lacey 1973, 54), and it has often been observed that there are some suggestive parallels between the two queens: Elizabeth cross-questioned the Scottish ambassador Melville over the appearance of Mary, Queen of Scots much as Cleopatra interrogates the messenger about Octavia (2.5.111-18) (Little 2000, 160-1), and both Cleopatra and Elizabeth express a self-identification with a milkmaid: "No more but e'en a woman, and commanded / By such poor passion as the maid that milks" (4.15.72-3) (Yachnin 1991, 7). The jewel's coupling of Cleopatra with a ship is however particularly suggestive: here one queen uses another to suggest balance, statecraft, and the wherewithal to survive in rough seas.

At least one play about Pompey may have drawn on the resonances of an on-stage ship. In the introduction to her edition of the 1607 *The Tragedie of Caesar and Pompey*, Julia Daly argues that there are 'a number of scenes that seem totally unnecessary but which may point to items of spectacle', and suggests that there is a specific clue to one such moment at 1.5.59 when Pompey says "But in this ship remain":

> Suddenly, it becomes possible to view the scene with Cato not as a pointless exercise, but as a stalling mechanism. Cato is perhaps standing in front of a curtain whilst behind it frantic efforts are made to wrestle appropriate props and scenery into place to denote the location as being on a ship, or possibly there is an actually ship prop being put together or manhandled into position (2009)[6]

Daly notes that "There are a number of uses of ship imagery in the play, always connected with loss or confusion" (ibid.), including Titinius terming Rome a "gallant ship" (1.1.7) about to be wrecked, Antony's reference to himself as a "crazèd bark . . . tossed in troubled seas, / Uncertain to arrive in wishèd port" (1.6.125-126) after his first meeting with Cleopatra, and Cassius figuring himself as one of those who "without stars do sail 'gainst stars and wind" (5.1.261), as well as Discord's reference to Charon's "old rotten boat" (5.1.379). Daly helps us see that a play which may look rather flat on the page could have come alive when staged.

Antony and Cleopatra is strongly interested in ships, as we see from the detailed description of Cleopatra's barge (2.2.201 ff), and memories and resonances of scenes and spectacles involving ships haunt the moment when Young Pompey grandly announces to the triumvirate "Aboard my galley I invite you all" (2.6.80), setting up a scene which will be pivotal to both his own personal fortunes and the thematic structure of the play. E. R. Adair declares that "To the English mind the term 'galley' has always had an unpleaant savour. It is redolent of criminals and forced labour, of the corsairs of the

6 See Julia Daly, "What's in a name?", introduction to her online edition of *The Tragedie of Caesar and Pompey*, available at: https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/iemls/renplays/Caesars_Revenge_Introduction.htm (Last Access, 13 May 2024).

Mediterranean" (1920, 497). Galleys were also associated with the Ottoman Empire: George Gascoigne's 1573 *A Devise of a Maske for the Right Honourable Viscount Montacute* speaks of

> The thundering fame which blew about the world so wide,
> How that the christian enmie, the Turke that prince of pride,
> Addressed had his power, to swarme vppon the seas,
> With gallies, foists, and such like ships, wel armde at all assays.
> (383)

However Adair goes on to note that "for a considerable time the English fleet had one or more galleys attached to it, and these were true galleys in the Mediterranean sense of the term", including Henry VIII's *Galley Subtile*; Henry also tried to borrow or buy ten more galleys from the Emperor Charles V, but the Emperor was unable to spare them because he needed them to fight the Ottoman Turks (1920, 497). Elizabeth I built or planned five further galleys in the last years of her reign, at least one of which was constructed at Deptford, a village within easy reach of London, and two of which were specifically intended for the defence of the Thames and would have been still new when *Antony and Cleopatra* was written (505). However galleys were high maintenance and demanded a lot of manpower, as we see when Caesar observes of Antony that "his best force / Is forth to man his galleys" (4.11.2-3), and by the reign of James I "The four galleys were a source of constant expense, one or the other being in continual need of repair, rebuilding, or shed protection from the weather. They were never used" (Oppenheim 1892, 489). The audience, then, could be expected to be familiar with galleys but also to be aware that they were not really suited to English waters; Pompey's possession of one marks him as a man who sails in other seas as well as being a vessel in which we might historically expect to find a Roman naval commander.

But galleys, like other ships, were not only literal vessels but also metaphorical ones. Andrew Hadfield observes that

> Shakespeare was undoubtedly alluding to the political issues raised by the story of the last days of the Roman republic in *Antony and Cleopatra*: but how, exactly? A clue is provided in 2.7, the galley scene, which may have been inspired by James's

> meeting with his brother-in-law, Christian of Denmark, aboard a ship in 1606. (2005, 224)

James Shapiro calls the Danish king's visit to London "as rich a source in its own way as Plutarch's *Life of Antony*", and it included a banquet described hilariously by John Harington as a scene of unmitigated debauchery (2015, 293). James was fond of ship images: a ship featured on the back of the gold ryal coins which he issued when he became king of England, and material celebrations of his wedding to Anna of Denmark appear to have included a church-ship model which may have originally hung in South Leith.[7] Both of these images were clearly intended to trope the king as safely steering the ship of state, but the onboard festivity of 1606 was unfortunately marred by a diplomatic contretemps in which the Danish king apparently (though perhaps inadvertently) implied that the Earl of Nottingham, Lord High Admiral and commander of the English fleet against the Armada, was a cuckold (Coates 2014), making the staging of an important meeting on board a ship look like a rather risky tactic in a play written shortly afterwards, and one which may well have prepared the audience for an edgy atmosphere.

The scene is indeed edgy, but it nearly becomes even more than that when Menas suggests to Young Pompey,

> These three world-sharers, these competitors,
> Are in thy vessel. Let me cut the cable,
> And when we are put off, fall to their throats.
> All then is thine.
> (2.7.71-4)

Pompey's reaction to this proposal is the play's pithiest and most cynical exploration of what is really involved in statecraft:

> Ah, this thou shouldst have done
> And not have spoke on't. In me 'tis villainy;

7 See the entry "James VI and I" on the website of the National Museums Scotland, available at: https://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/stories/scottish-history-and-archaeology/james-vi-and-i/ (Last Access, 13 May 2024)

> In thee't had been good service. Thou must know
> 'Tis not my profit that does lead mine honour;
> Mine honour, it. Repent that e'er thy tongue
> Hath so betrayed thine act. Being done unknown,
> I should have found it afterwards well done,
> But must condemn it now. Desist and drink.
> (2.7.74-81)

Hadfield notes that Menas' proposal to Pompey "has no obvious source", so appears to be solely Shakespeare's invention, and he also argues that Pompey's

> code of "honour", one that is rooted in a comprehension of public appearance not ethical behaviour . . . would have reminded the audience of the dying cult of honour of their own aristocracy rather than the culture of the republic, making Pompey more akin to Achilles and his macho posturing in *Troilus and Cressida* than Cicero or the first Brutus. (Hadfield 2005, 226)

This is, then, less a scene telling us a truth about the past than one which is dropping a distinctly dark hint about the present and about what is happening on the Jacobean ship of state rather than on the long-gone Roman one; as so often on the early modern stage, a history play proves to be a thrillingly effective vehicle for comment on contemporary politics. But it is also important to note that although Young Pompey is not very good, he is equally not very bad: he does not tell Menas to go ahead and does display residual, if not entirely convincing, regard for *some* form of honour, even if we might not find it the most desirable kind. The man who rules the middle sea is also in the middle between Antony (all ideals and rhetoric) and Octavius Caesar (all pragmatism and power).

Hadfield's observation that Pompey's version of honour might have reminded the audience of "the dying cult of honour of their own aristocracy" is particularly suggestive because any such reminder might also have brought with it recollection of a particular figure who had been strongly associated with the late Elizabethan version of the honour cult: Robert Devereux, earl of Essex, who along with his friend Philip Sidney subscribed to a "chivalric romanticism . . . that was intended to fortify Elizabethan men . . . against the

vicissitudes of fickle fortune" and was founded on a "synthesis of wisdom, honour and religion" (Wood 2013, 30-1). Freyja Cox Jensen notes that

> Perhaps the most famous instance of Pompey's history being recycled and harnessed to a new objective is Nicholas Hilliard's Elizabethan miniature, *Young Man Among Roses*, painted sometime between 1585 and 1595. Here, the idea of Pompey is utilised as a symbol of greatness and constancy. The motto at the top of the painting, "*Dat poenas laudata fides*", taken from Lucan's *Pharsalia*, refers to Pompey's fidelity, not only to his wives, but to the republic. Robert Devereux, the subject of the portrait, is thus identified with Pompey, assimilating to himself the Roman's military heroism and trueness of heart, as well as his professed love for his queen. (2012, 131)

Although Catharine Macleod notes that the identification as Essex is uncertain, she concurs with Cox Jensen's overall decoding of the image, translating the motto as "Praised loyalty is punished" (2019, 169), a sentiment to which the self-pitying Essex would indeed have been likely to subscribe. Shakespeare was clearly interested in Essex, to whom he seems to refer in *Henry V* and whom he may also have been remembering in *Coriolanus*, since Essex was directly compared to Coriolanus in a sermon preached by Bishop William Barlow in the aftermath of the Rebellion (Headlam Wells 2000, 403). If the Young Man Among Roses was indeed the earl Young Pompey looks even more like a contemporary political figure rather than a classical one, but whoever is represented in the painting it confirms the continuing currency of the story of Pompey the Great and by implication that of his son.

Young Pompey is not his father, however, and although he has previously traded on his father's name, he now begins to lose its power and protection as Menas says "Thy father, Pompey, would ne'er have made this treaty" (2.6.82-3). Menas has earlier warned that "Pompey doth this day laugh away his fortune" (2.2.106-7), casting Young Pompey as not only a political failure but as someone who does not even achieve tragic status: his father, Pompey the Great, may have had a great fall, but Young Pompey merely laughs his way into obscurity. Although we briefly hear that Caesar has made "New wars" against him (3.4.4) and that Lepidus has joined

in (3.5.4), he is simply no longer worth our attention, for he does not appear again and his offstage death, noted only in passing, both counterpoints and is diminished by the extraordinarily detailed attention given to the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra. The way in which the death of Young Pompey is reported also exculpates Antony, without any historical warrant for doing so: as Yasmin Arshad comments, Shakespeare "suppressed Antony's part in Pompey's assassination" (2019, 189), and indeed presents him as grieved by it when Eros declares that Antony is

> walking in the garden, thus, and spurns
> The rush that lies before him; cries, 'Fool Lepidus!',
> And threats the throat of that his officer
> That murdered Pompey.
> (3.5.16-19)

That is all we hear of the matter; not only do we learn merely in passing that Young Pompey has been murdered, the man who did it does not even warrant a name. From being master of the Mediterranean Young Pompey has been relegated to merely a footnote.

Although Young Pompey and his actions have ultimately proved to make no difference to the course of events, however, they may still affect how the audience feels about them. Survival is not the only thing that counts; the fact that Antony and Cleopatra also die does nothing to diminish their glamour (indeed it arguably enhances it) and Menas' question to Pompey "Wilt thou be lord of all the world?" (2.7.62) evokes not only the question of political power but also the temptation of Jesus, confirming the presence of an understated but suggestive eschatological element in the play. As I have argued at greater length elsewhere, Cleopatra is associated strongly with the Biblical, and so too is Antony when at his noblest and when closest to her values (Hopkins 2008, ch. 5). In particular, there is a host of suggestive allusions to the nativity story. Early in the play, Charmian beseeches the soothsayer, "Good now, some excellent fortune! Let me be married to three kings in a forenoon and widow them all. Let me have a child at fifty, to whom Herod of Jewry may do homage" (1.2.27-30). Antony recurs to motifs associated with the nativity when he excuses himself to Octavius Caesar by saying,

"Three kings I had newly feasted" (2.2.80); Cleopatra pretends the fish she catches are Antony as if she were one of the fishers of men (2.5.10-15); and it is suggested that Cleopatra, like the Pharaoh of the Bible, might be stricken by leprosy (3.10.9-11). Other things also point firmly in the same direction, such as the constant references to trinities and triples and Antony's caution that Cleopatra will have to "find out new heaven, new earth" (1.1.17). There is an obvious parallel between Enobarbus and Judas – both master-leavers who subsequently regret it and commit suicide – and a less strongly marked but equally suggestive one between the last feast on the night of Cleopatra's birthday and the Last Supper. Antony apparently recollects the Psalms when he speaks of the hill of Basan (3.13.126-8), and Caesar's assurance that "The time of universal peace is near" (4.6.5-7) also gestures in the same direction.[8] Moreover, Arthur Little considers Caesar to be represented as Christ-like and Cleopatra to be both like and unlike Mary – "nurturing her asp, she scripts herself as the *Madonna lactans*" (2000, 157-8). Moreover, Barbara C. Vincent points out that

> [i]n 4.4, Antony crosses the threshold into the serious comic realm of Christianity. This scene is repeatedly concerned with meaning . . . [Antony's] meaning is lost on his immediate, pre-Christian audience; only his off-stage audience can find meaning in these biblical *topoi*. (1994, 234)

Shakespeare's emphasis on the synchronicity of classical and Christian stories in this play is not found in the other contemporary or near-contemporary treatments of the Cleopatra story by Samuel Daniel, Samuel Brandon or Mary Sidney. It does, however, tap into a difference pointed out by Paul Yachnin between James and Elizabeth:

> The propagandistic contexts of the two monarchs were opposed: James's was largely classical, Elizabeth's mostly biblical. In its own strugle between classical and biblical modes of expression, *Antony and Cleopatra* registers and critiques this competition between the politicized allusive fields associated with Elizabeth and James. (1991, 14)

8 For comment on the Messianic resonances of this, see for instance Sohmer 1999, 122.

Moreover, the play itself suggests that the Biblical is its preferred explanatory mode, definitively superseding the classical. John F. Danby suggests that its Egypt is "the Egypt of the biblical glosses: exile from the spirit, thraldom to the flesh-pots, diminution of human kindness" (1994, 52). The suggestion, therefore, is that the Biblical – the mode associated with Elizabeth and by extension England – is superior to the classical, the mode associated with James and his preferred avatar Augustus, the Octavius Caesar of this play. If we thus view the events of the play *sub specie aerternatis* they take on a very different complexion. Although Enobarbus may resolve to leave Antony because "thou art so leaky / That we must leave thee to thy sinking" (3.13.67-8) he comes to repent it just as Judas repented forsaking Jesus; by contrast, "'tis paltry to be Caesar" (5.2.2).

Antony and Cleopatra, then, draws on a tradition of allegorical uses of ships both on and offstage to make Young Pompey a character with greater thematic heft than his ultimately unsuccessful political career might seem to warrant. When he invites the rulers of the empire on board his galley, he paves the way for a stage picture which might seem like an innocent reminder of the historical period in which the play is set, but which smuggles in not only a general discourse about ships of state but also hints at biblical as well as classical overtones and potentially reminds the audience about some uncomfortable recent episodes in the homelife of their own dear king. Ultimately the way Pompey sails his ship through the Mediterranean becomes a metaphor for the way we – and our rulers – all sail our own ships and try to keep them afloat in hazardous waters.

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Skenè Studies I • 6

Shakespeare and the Mediterranean • 3

Antony and Cleopatra

Edited by Cristiano Ragni

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Shakespeare and the Mediterranean

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The Actor's Point of View

8

Did Cleopatra Squeak?

Janet Suzman

Abstract

This essay will deal with the interiority of the character of Cleopatra, which is often ignored in my view. That of course is bound up with the notion that a boy could not possibly have managed to portray what Shakespeare asks of the part.

Keywords: *Antony and Cleopatra*; Cleopatra; interiority; boy actor; acting; sexuality

It's unusual to rely on the physical experience rather than the theoretical in matters of Shakespeare scholarship. Actors sometimes contribute to the discussion but seldom leave a visible mark. An inspired moment is gone before you can say 'That's it!' So I'm putting some thoughts into print and I hope it's helpful to somebody sometime. No best interpretation, merely what is consistent with the times and the text. It's as well to remind ourselves that first and foremost Shakespeare was an actor. Poet yes. Playwright yes. But actors and acting he understood in his bones; he writes like an actor feels. All the hints at unspoken motives lie there on the page winking at the actors.

You experience certain feelings of rightness, of emotional truth, by getting up on your feet and speaking out loud what you cannot deduce while sitting at a desk glossing text. Every now and then I have pondered the mystery at the centre of this play - the disjunct between what I read as Cleopatra's enticing contradictions and complexities, and the general acceptance of it having being a boy achieving all this. I believe this character was not written with a boy in mind because no boy, however talented, can get anywhere near that level of maturity; it's too nuanced and it's too difficult.

Besides which an immature young male creature as the queen of Egypt would insult the credibility of an increasingly perceptive audience, maturing as Shakespeare matured, and unused to being sold – literally – a pup. It might have been a man who played her I hear you say. Maybe. But I don't think so because Englishmen never take impersonations of women, a frequent activity in which they are comedically accomplished, into the tragic stratum. In Cleopatra I see a spiritual awakening into high seriousness as being an unavoidable element in the character's growth in this great play. Forgive me, though, if I fall short in this exercise. Instinctive creativity is hard to put into words.

Audiences in Puritan England were deprived of female performance because showing yourself off to the public gaze was the work of the devil. That was the law, but the assumption that only documented truth is the whole truth is a naïve one; singular individuals throughout the ages have dared to take steps to improve their lot and inject interest into their circumscribed lives. Mary Sidney was such a one in Shakespeare's time, aristocratic, cultured, and a brilliant person to know. There were other individuals feeling the pressures.

Agnotology (from *agnosis*, i.e. 'not knowing') is culturally induced ignorance, so that women have become 'missing matter' as it were. Not that a boy growing up in London's mean streets and earning a penny in one of the boy's companies would ever be aware of such a lop-sided state of affairs. Presuming his sister hadn't learned to read as he had, he'd probably just give a well-that's-life shrug. Even with a great queen on the throne, and a mother ruling the kitchen at home he wouldn't be fooled into thinking women were running his little world.

At last though, buried female history is slowly being unearthed. In literature, in the sciences, maths, physics, medicine, space engineering, palaeontology, portrait painting, you name it, and even often secretive contributions to a prominent husband's work, figures hitherto obscured in the long shadow of male power are being revealed. I have a feeling there was a maverick soul knocking around for Shakespeare inspiring him into writing up such a marvellous creature.

Is it a pervasive disinterest, or a gut fear of women that gets them blanketed under Time's dust? It's difficult to grasp just how threatened men must feel by their contesting presence. So women remain depressingly peripheral, even expendable, while the West tries its best to unenforce the dozens of levelling-up laws that are passed and then inevitably ignored or rescinded so that abortion becomes a victim of ignorant debate instead of an absolute right. Far too little practise at being in command come the way of ambitious women. For the rest most of the world's women have a miserable time of it.

At the court of James I, led by his wife, Anne of Denmark, certain aristocratic friends of hers loved dressing up in masques and having a hilarious time as goddesses of this or that. Meantime those ordinary women who came to hear plays at The Globe – Rosalind's Epilogue tells us they were there – would have enjoyed watching, not tipsy goddesses, but warm-blooded heroines offering up charmed possibilities to their restricted lives. Why go to the theatre unless you crave a glimpse of other lives, other worlds?

Shakespeare's awareness of the social straitjacket worn by women was very sharp. Viola, Rosalind, Portia - forced to dress as a boy for self-protection - conveyed on the stage the heady freedoms enjoyed by men. Their adventures in the plays, powered by love, must have spoken loud and clear to those women in the audience who harboured forbidden ideas of liberty, and of marriages forged more by love than expedience.

Tom Stoppard – a man of the theatre as Shakespeare was – dramatised these little dreams quite marvellously in his film, *Shakespeare in Love*. Remember that? He writes about a young aristocrat who somehow sneaks herself onto the stage of the Globe Theatre to play Viola in *Twelfth Night,* and the young Shakespeare finds himself falling in love with this new boy actor who enchants him by playing a boy playing a girl playing a boy unnervingly like a girl playing a boy.

Such playfulness is a far cry from our present hectic debates. We live in more literal times which demand clear definitions for unclear physical states of being. Shakespeare and Co didn't seem to be bothered with restrictive binary and non-binary definitions but seemed to take life's anomalies as they came.

There's no reason to revive a 450-year-old play other than to bring out what still resonates in our world. The subject of women – especially post-Me Too – continues to warrant the close attention of modern actresses. Where there are hints that Shakespeare is also paying attention to those matters is seductive; frustration at the limitations women put up with so often burst forth in Shakespeare's female characters at a peak point, an angry Beatrice, an enraged Cleopatra. But I tell you, when she confronts Antony with: "I would I had thy inches, thou shoulds't know / There were a heart in Egypt!" (1.3.41-2).[1] I know for sure she is my soul-sister.

How on earth a mere boy could have felt any similar frustration beats me. I find that grown men to this day display only a limited awareness of the drawbacks hindering free choice in a woman's life, either fictional or for real. And that presents a reason why The Serpent of old Nile remains not much more than an enticing sex-pot in most minds. On the whole male directors don't look closely at her motives, but I have found that Shakespeare's version of her examined through the prism of his curiously original mind, displays a fascinatingly different sensibility.

Let's assume that the youth who allegedly played Cleopatra was not yet a full-grown man, whereas an adult woman would lack those inches as a matter of course. The casting then as now would need to offer up a 'peerless' pair. Richard Burbage, the company's leading heroic actor and probably the Antony of the day, would hardly be happy playing opposite a giant gangly boy overtopping him in stature. "We stand up peerless" boasts Antony (1.1.41). I just can't see a boy as Burbage's peer, try as I might. I'll try to explain as I go.

Queen Elizabeth I herself spoke about her impatience with the disparity between the sexes: "I may have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the mind and stomach of a man" (Marcus, Mueller, and Rose 2000, 326). There are other quotes for the taking. In spite of Shakespeare's inspired empathy for women, and his great leap forward in humanizing characters, yet there is no intellectual or metaphysical equivalent in his female roles (a mere 16% of the full canon) to the great male roles. Women didn't run the world then and they don't now, so no surprise there. He is

1 All references to *Antony and Cleopatra* are from Shakespeare 2012.

simply holding the mirror up to nature. He is emulating the world in his plays as it presents itself to him in life. Shakespeare tuned in to foreigners and strangers however and wrote with profoundly empathetic feelings for them; in that sense Cleopatra joins Shylock and Othello as a mega-outsider. His all-embracing sympathy for the other, the exotic, the outsider, is a hall-mark of Shakespeare's non-judgemental position on the subjects which today are often so toxic. He is not a racist nor an anti-Semite nor a misogynist. As in the real world his women depend for their life and its ending on a male character's whims. With the exception of Cleopatra who chooses to remain in charge of her own fate right to the triumphant end.

Not till Ibsen's ground-breaking duo of *The Doll's House* and Hedda Gabler at the end of the 19th century, was woman's chattelage to a husband and her pathetically narrow parameters in life fleshed out. In all of European drama, Hedda is the sole female character who is onstage throughout, presenting the actress with the unique chance of a thrillingly immersive acting experience, (which is why, I suppose, it's been called the female Hamlet). Both characters, one fictional, one historical, are powered by an unquenchable urge for personal freedom. That is how I, a contemporary actress, see them, and that is precisely the point, because if I could not find in either of those texts supportive evidence for my views, I would have to stand down and go quietly.

Shakespeare never wrote at length about his queen, it being far too perilous an undertaking, but he found the two had much in common: manipulative genius, a fluency in Greek and Latin amongst other tongues – apparently Cleopatra could speak demotic Egyptian too, unusual for Pharaohs. Both queens were popular in the street, were well educated courtesy of their fathers, both came to a throne while young, and both developed an astute flair for statecraft. Both had a distinct flair for good PR, cleverly adopting an iconic self-image to inspire awe: Elizabeth as the Virgin Queen, and Cleopatra as the goddess Isis. Both possessed personal charm, honed to an art to get what they wanted in a male world, and both learned to juggle the twin dangers of having a brain while seeming not to.

North's translation of Plutarch's *The Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* was Shakespeare's source material, and his *Marcus Antonius* led Shakespeare to that famous barge, copied almost word

for word from Plutarch's journalese and transmuted by the poet into glorious technicolour poetry as he describes Cleopatra's grand plan to acquire for herself a useful consort. Shakespeare would have been in his element playing with a cinecamera, I feel. However, the play that emerged as the sequel to Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, is not called Marcus Antonius, but rather two names of equal weight, both complex, wily, duplicitous grown-ups. Cleopatra was in her prime at 38 years old, Antony a good 14 years older. Not another female character in the whole canon is at the mature height of her wits, her reign and her powers as she is. Who, then, was in Shakespeare's mind as Cleopatra? The silence surrounding all this doesn't help, does it? Whereas I think it's productive, allowing room for doubt.

Certain reasons for the enveloping silence come to my mind, but more of that later. The late great scholar Harold Bloom's seminal book on Hamlet *The Invention of the Human* sums up the huge Shakespearean achievement as regards complexity of character. In 2017 Bloom published four neat volumes, being his final thoughts on the four vividly alive characters that for him were so original they almost seem to have an independent life: Lear, Falstaff, Hamlet, and Cleopatra. He calls them his "Personalities". Bloom observes in his book, *Cleopatra. I am Fire and Air*: "Shakespeare would have known that women performed on the Roman stage. Ruefully he must have chafed at the legal restrictions that boys impersonated women characters. *I've always wondered how even a skilled Jacobean boy actor could have successfully performed the role of Cleopatra*" (2017, 117, my emphasis). Just so. I have wondered too. By 'boy' I mean a male youth up to the age of – what, 18,19? Anyway, before his voice has broken, I suppose.

In thanking Harold Bloom for sending me a copy of *Cleopatra. I am Fire and Air*, (he wanted my picture on the cover of it and a girl can't help being flattered by that), I wrote: "I can see at a glance that you are deeply under her spell as a man should be, though as an actress I could hardly be seduced in the same way. She and I had to be comrades in arms and I was entirely intent on taking her side in all things, hyperbole, bare truth, mendacity, magnificence and all. But I confess, it is gobsmacking", I wrote, "that Shakespeare could have known so much about how this tricky creature operated". Harold

Bloom replied to me by return – humbly, sweetly - thus: "Only Shakespeare can rise above the limitations of being a male". I may have thought it but so relieved he wrote it because my hunch that Shakespeare wrote his Cleopatra for a woman to play becomes less dismissible with him on my side.

In 1664 Margaret Cavendish made this observation: "One would think he has been metamorphosed from a Man to a Woman for who could describe Cleopatra better than he hath done . . .?" (246). Virginia Woolf concurred, she thought he had an androgynous mind, a "man-woman mind" (1929, 99). Carol Symes, a historian at the University of Illinois writes: "The seemingly embodied understanding of women's positionality and plight just shines through those plays amazingly" (qtd in Winkler 2023, 267). There are others who see an ineffably female take on dramatic situations in Shakespeare's characterisations, not often picked up on. With all the many mysteries and secrets still undiscovered in Shakespeare's life I see enough space left for a performer's legitimate curiosity. After all, why should one assume that recorded truth is the whole and complete truth? Like Mary Sidney I doubt the assumption that documented history is the whole history.

There is only circumstantial evidence to flourish but what a relief to find written evidence that anomalies were abroad in the London of the time. Thomas Coryat a travel writer, said to be the first Briton to have made a grand tour of Europe apparently on foot, took a trip to Venice in 1608 and went one night to the theatre. It's thought *Antony and Cleopatra* was written in about 1606-8 or thereabouts. He wrote this in his journal: ". . . saw women act, a thing I never saw before, *though I have heard that it hath been sometimes used in London*, and they performed with as good a grace, action, gesture and whatsoever convenient for a player, as ever I saw in any masculine actor . . ." (1611, 247, my emphasis). "Sometimes used in London": hey? Where? When? By what company? In what play? "Sometimes" implies more than just the once. A few times? Many times? That mysterious sentence, a casual entry into a journal, clangs a bell which seems more sonorous for being written by a tourist not a playgoer.

In Puritan England the men's companies thrived without petticoats, while paradoxically actresses were accepted in the Catholic countries notably Italy and Spain, both producing rich dramatic literatures. The female roles weren't especially great, types

more than believable flesh and blood, but they were lively enough. Italian troupes of actors and actresses quite often crossed the channel and played both for the Court and for popular audiences. London was a seething place.

When Antony in 1.1 of the play tries to soothe a fired-up Cleopatra with: ". . . all alone / Tonight we'll wander through the streets and note / the qualities of people. Come, my queen!" (53-5), one just knows that's exactly what William Shakespeare used to do in his seething London and where he might have seen foreign actresses at work.

It is odd that all of Cleopatra's scenes are perfectly balanced while some of Antony's – including great swathes of sub-plot in this gigantic play – are eminently cuttable. This play was surely road-tested somewhere, perhaps in a private house with an invited audience? An audience invited and known so that an honourable silence could be entrusted to them, what nowadays we might call Chatham House rules, i.e. no blabbing about what you have heard outside the front door. It is always an honour to be entrusted to keep a secret. There's still an unspoken rule in England to this day that one does not reveal any part of a conversation with the monarch. So very English.

Only by living through every second of her stage life, speaking and listening, silent and watching, do you comprehend what Shakespeare has asked of his performer: a trajectory of anger through to high comedy energized by a jealous passion (I simplify) through to tragic self-realisation and on to an ardent spiritual epiphany. I doubt it's possible to encompass the creature's whole gamut in one go, and if it stretches a mature woman, as it did me, how in heaven's name can an unlived-in young man get there?

Show me a composer who writes his best arias for someone who can't sing them? Mozart composed his most sublime arias for those Weber girls. What's different for a playwright? Pinter and his muse Vivien Merchant; Athol Fugard and Yvonne Bryceland, Hitchcock and Tippi Hedren, Picasso and Dora Maar, Brahms and Joseph Joachim? What is the point in raising the bar high unless what is written can be fulfilled? For the greatest writer of all time how much more crushing to conjure up a creature whose vividness would be doomed to stay flat on the page for want of an actor up to its demands?

Why should this mature play with its demanding centrepiece be exempt from judgement? Shakespeare knew perfectly well the limitations of boy actors. Just remind yourself of Marilyn Munroe's radiant vulnerability and ask yourself how a boy, however gifted, could convey that? That Monroe gleam, caught by the click of a camera, belies the fragility of someone of singular beauty triumphing over a damaged life. Could a boy express that wounded vulnerability lurking behind the smile? (Mind you, I'm not proposing Cleopatra was a beauty, because there's no mention of that in the play). Boys can manage so much and no more, is all I'm suggesting. Boys are OK with straightforward things: adolescent sulks, innocence, mischief; they can do wicked sprites and frustrated heiresses, they can do candid honesty and the delicacy of extreme youth, but what they cannot do is the nuanced machinations of a mature woman who has spent her life learning to survive with dignity in a man's world.

To elaborate: boys can't do understated sexual power just by standing there, because they can't present being *unaware* of that power. Male power is different from female power. They would *have* to be aware of it to simulate it. They can't do the inner burn of sexual allure. Adult men with a camp flair for it can demonstrate *overstated* glamour, bosoms, eyelashes, wiggles, and all, but untried boys can't act outside of their own experience. They can offer a *postured* version, a simulacrum, a pretence of it. *Posture* is a word which Shakespeare very deliberately plants when he clarifies his attitude to boy actors in 5.2 of the play. William Shakespeare knows what proper acting requires and it's not posturing. Re-read Hamlet's advice to the Players.

John Barton in his famous text classes in Stratford would say 'Text *IS character'*. The jobbing actor in Shakespeare the writer drops acting tips into the text itself. Examine it closely for clues and the character begins to shape itself. (By the bye, Oxfordians never consider on-your-feet company work. Mark Twain, Sigmund Freud, Auberon Waugh, and other illustrious folk have never done a rehearsal that's for sure. Try to keep a company of actors quiet).

A brief history of my enmeshment with the play in case you're wondering. After playing Cleopatra for the RSC at Stratford and then London in 1973/4 forty years passed before Kim Cattrall – the delightful Samantha of *Sex in the City* – out of the blue asked me if I would care to direct her in the part. Would I just! I leapt at

the chance to re-examine the play through her with certain untried ideas in mind. Her liberated Samantha in *Sex in the City* signalled to entrapped womanhood worldwide that it was ok to enjoy sex and steer clear of marriage. Another soul-sister for Cleopatra, although unlike Samantha we know of only two reported lovers in Cleopatra's life, Julius Caesar and Mark Antony.

The great thing about working with Kim was that she wouldn't have to bother presenting the 'sexy' Cleopatra because she just is, plus she also has a lovely comic talent. Which left us free to explore Cleopatra's less obvious assets, the politic mind and her fierce dynastic ambitions.

In sum, by playing it, filming it (it's easily found on YouTube), and directing it, spanning both the 20th and the 21st centuries, I can say I know the play – much like the Biblical '*knowing*' it – from the inside out and from the outside in. I'd take a large bet no male scholar can intuit by glossing what I know by experience. Hence this paper. Like Rosalind, I can live no longer by thinking.

In the first 'Kim' production at The Liverpool Playhouse, I cut it to a more playable length and elided some characters because no-one can afford such a huge cast, and I deliberately cast a young man both as a most touching Eros and a wounded Octavia. It showed me how sensitively and movingly a young actor could achieve the wronged woman in himself. Octavia, though, is a far cry from Cleopatra. Our Antony was a splendidly heroic Jeffrey Kissoon. In the second 'Kim' production a year later at The Chichester Festival Theatre we had to cast a new Antony and Michael Pennington, who was much older and less manifestly heroic, was in my view closer to the Shakespearian view of the famous couple.

The celluloid images of Burton and Taylor cast a Hollywood glow over the story giving the impression of a mature mutual passion at full tilt, whereas the play itself is a huge cinematic poem that helicopters through the painful crumbling of a once titanic alliance, zooming in for intimate close-ups.

Some of you might have seen Marlon Brando in the film of *Julius Caesar* doing the "Friends Romans countrymen . . ." speech? That dangerously charismatic and clever Antony is softened by luxury when we see him again at Cleopatra's court. Men are as vain as women are said to be, so you won't find many an actor prepared to

show himself as a magnificent failure, for that's what Antony turns out to be. Casting this 'peerless' pair is nightmarish at the best of times. Casting Romeo and Juliet is mere doddle.

Many plays have expositionary beginnings, but this one starts off with a bang. Philo, a Roman officer stationed with the Alexandrian garrison, starts it off with a "Nay" sharp as a starting gun (1.1.1). His patience has snapped as he describes Cleopatra's court to a military messenger fresh from Rome. Here's Philo's speech:

> Nay, but this dotage of our general's
> O'erflows the measure. Those his goodly eyes
> That oe'r the files and musters of the war
> Have glowed like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
> The office and devotion of their view
> 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 . . . Behold and see.
> (1.1.1-13)

We are now primed to see a diminished Antony doting on his tawny-fronted lover; old soldiers don't lie. She is *tawny-fronted*, mixed-race, an exotic creature. Roman racism glares at us. In actual fact she was half-Greek, the daughter of the Macedonean Ptolemaus, one of Alexander's generals who was rewarded by him with Egypt. Cleopatra's mother was very likely an Egyptian, we don't know for sure. But Shakespeare follows Plutarch and makes her 'the other'. Not just foreign, but brown-skinned - always a threatening presence to white Europe, as it, unforgivably, still is. West versus East. The dilemma resides to this day. I chose to play the tawny version, Kim chose the Greek version.

Anyhow two opposing civilisations are thus established. Antony is to be torn between his passion for exotic Cleopatra and his Graeco-Roman loyalties. 1.1 lays out the parameters of the tumultuous relationship: the lovers joust with words, he declaring his love, she skipping sideways to keep him hungry. A messenger from Rome brings disturbing news. The queen, alert to disasters, urges a boozy Antony to get with the politics and attend to the crisis; hoping

to provoke him into action him by flagging up both the youthful Caesar and his wronged wife Fulvia as powerful threats to young Pompey's usurping force.

But Antony, slightly hung-over as he himself later admits, is full of braggadocio and insult: "Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch / Of the rangéd empire fall! Here is my space!" (1.1.34-5). Think an American five-star general in his cups yelling "F*ck the Constitution!" at a Buckingham Palace tea party. Imagine the messenger's eyes popping and the tea-cups rattling.

With the shaming news that his wife has died on a battlefield, Antony sobers up. Now ready to go fix his creaking Roman world, in 1.sc iii. he comes to take leave of his queen. A complicated scene to play. A simplistic view could call her behaviour 'manipulation', but she is focussed on delving beyond the usual miasma of white lies. It would be unnatural for a boy to comprehend female survival tactics, but Mr. Shakespeare does; to provoke laughter at the man's expense.

If I were to try to choose what most defines her modus operandi it is veering from speaking the plain truth to belying that truth with bathotic, sometimes ironic, twists of inventive imagery. How is poor beleaguered Antony meant to know if she means it or not? Shakespeare captures the eternal puzzlement of the male psyche confronted by the female. She astutely calls these accesses of vulnerable playfulness her 'becomings'. They are everyday currency to a woman, but to a boy?

And how unexpected that even the queen-goddess Cleopatra, supreme ruler of all Egypt, mother of his children, should feel herself a mere mistress, secondary to the wife. The strength of marriage as an institution has lessened only slightly since Tudor times, in that fewer young women in the West choose to get married, but now as then legitimacy holds the cards.

1.3 is the most packed scene between the lovers, due to the dangerous way she handles the shock of Fulvia's death. I hope you won't mind if I gloss this scene a little to show how very hard it must be for a boy to have followed the twists and turns with any cogency. She deliberately plays to her ever-present peanut-gallery, bright Charmian and the retinue, willing witnesses to the first of many humiliations that come Antony's way. She wrong-foots him

at the start of the scene pretending to be ill, and then turns the deliberate comedy to a blatant accusation of his disloyalty, turns that to defending Fulvia's adulterous fate, then to fury about herself being made a dupe too: cheat on one, cheat on another. Fulvia, a constant threat to Cleopatra, she unexpectedly adopts as her close ally, and so becomes a most unlikely advocate for all of wronged womankind: "Now I see, I see, / in Fulvia's death how mine received shall be" (1.3.64-5). Vows of love and loyalty – 'mouth-made' vows – vows without heart – lead Cleopatra to prod the open wound of his adultery. The path lies open to deride what Antony – all Romans – hold most dear, honour. (Oh, the disdain expressed in "A Roman thought has struck him", 1.2.88). She shows him up as feigning his true feelings like a bad actor. His vows of loyalty seem empty to her ears. While poor Antony means every word, she's going to tease him witless. "So Fulvia told me" (1.3.76) is an unkind cut close to the bone, so he gets very angry. It's working. The teasing ups a notch or two: ". . . Look, prithee, Charmian / How this Herculean Roman does become / The carriage of his chafe" (84-6). To retain any dignity in this onslaught of raillery, he barks: "I'll leave you, lady" (87) – all restraint dropped. Quick as a flash she stops his exit with: "Courteous lord, one word" (88). He must *want* to be stopped. Everyone knows that walking out in the middle of a row because you can't cope, is a bad move. He has heard the twang of sarcasm on the word "courteous". Though still wary, he is caught. He stops and waits.

She changes her tune: a chilling quietness gentles the air between them. With a Petrarchan formality she attempts once, twice, to speak a simple truth: "Sir, you and I must part, but that's not it; / Sir, you and I have loved, but there's not it. / That you know well" (89-91). The transparent simplicity of her tone makes you hope at least for peace between them, at most a declaration of love. However, the caesura affords her space for a wicked U-turn; that's what caesuras are for, to take you by surprise: "Something it is I would –" (91). Is the boy still with me? How can a young lad imbue that broken phrase with unexpressed memories of lust and longing? Or are we just to rely on the audience doing his job for him? I get the impression that the pro-boy brigade think that is what might have taken place. I can't think why.

Antony lingers, hopeful: *would* she go on to say that her heart is still as it once was – all his? Fat hope. She hasn't finished with him yet. His 'Roman thoughts' have expediently kicked aside their passion more like a squashed beer can than a legendary idyll. She turns the heat up a notch, kicking the can further along the road, as if 'I too shall forget what we once were, just as Antony has already forgotten me': "O, my oblivion is a very Antony, / And I am all forgotten!" (92-3). In case there are doubters about this reading, you have only to look at Antony's furious reply to her: "But that your royalty / Holds idleness your subject, I should take you / For idleness itself" (93-5). It is always useful to look at a character's riposte to a speech if there's any doubt about the intention preceding it. She pushes the envelope even further. Again, she speaks simply and truly, revealing her soul for an enticing two lines: ". . . But sir, forgive me; / Since my becomings kill me when they do not / Eye well to you" (97-9).To admit her "becomings" – 'histrionics' if you must – shame her if Antony can't see through them, is to invite Antony's forgiveness, but that would be too easy. "Your honour calls you hence . . ." (99). She grabs at the caesura again to inject a wry tone as in 'silly little me', and then dangerously invests his shiny Roman 'honour' with a faint tarnish: "Therefore be deaf to my unpitied folly / And all the gods go with you!" (100-1). Another twist of the knife, disguised as a formalised farewell speech in the high Roman manner: "Upon your sword / Sit laurel victory and smooth success / Be strewed before your feet!" (101-3). The repeated assonances sound a prolonged hiss of derision, and a sardonic obeisance to the laureate will nicely rub salt into the wound. She is not in the forgiving vein. Boys, are you with me?

For a further clue to the wounding edge of her speech, look at Antony's curt: "Let us go" (103). If she had been delivering a transparently sincere farewell, why would he offer so wounded a cut-off? But his warm heart intervenes, he can't bear to leave her so coldly: "Come" (103). Nor she, running into his arms for a last embrace, all quarrelling shelved under the stark stare of separation. Three lines of intense intimacy whispered in her ear makes up for all that has gone before. Razor's-edge stuff. This embrace is a last view of the lovers together for a long stretch. I defy any boy, however gifted, to accomplish her super- sophisticated twists and turns, true

feelings disguised as mockery. Mockery is easy, but feelings are not. The pain of prolonged separation dictates this scene. I would fear that a boy trying his best to mark the movements would reduce it to a worrying simplicity.

I would also fear a boy's control of the high comic scenes that intersperse Antony's Roman sojourn, where, for the amusement of her courtiers she wildly exaggerates both his glories ("The demi-Atlas of this earth, the arm and burgonet of men", 1.5.24) and her own ("wrinkled deep in time", 30) vulnerabilities. She melodramatises not only his frustrating absence, but as queen her underlying impatience at the loss of executive power which his absence exacerbates: "That Herod's head I'll have but how when / Antony's gone through whom I might command it?" (3.3.4-5). She displays a sobering nobleness of spirit, revealed in a regretful mini-soliloquy to the audience when the terrified messenger has fled: "These hands do lack nobility that they strike / A meaner than myself, since I myself / Have given myself the cause" (2.5.82-4).

Self-knowledge in two nutshells. It's a rare moment when Cleopatra gives us a glimpse into her very human heart. Both she and Antony lead public lives, and *are never alone*, a perpetual audience watches their every move. Charmian's daring repartee, and Enobarbus, as Antony's "considerate stone" (2.2.117), both shine a light into the inner natures of their charges. As to the comedy: a young man mourning his wrinkles? It's a stretch. Cleopatra was 38, exactly the age you start to worry about them if you're the real thing. I was 34 when I played it, and I confess four years later I would have been much more on top of it. It's said you're only old enough to play Juliet when you're too old to play her. That's clearly the experience of women who have felt the depth of emotions Shakespeare has written into that part. Treble that for a wilier, more opaque, and much more mature Cleopatra.

While Antony is absent, we learn how Julius Caesar still takes pride of place in her hidden Pantheon, thanks to Charmian's penchant for teasing it out. We should feel the danger in this queen able to "unpeople Egypt" (1.5.81) if she so chooses. Tempestuous when crossed, her people patrol nervously. Wounded to the quick by news of Antony's marriage to *dull* Octavia, she becomes violently enraged with the hapless messenger to a quite shocking degree.

Charmian's corrective to "keep herself within herself, the man is innocent" (2.5.75-6) is bang on point. She is beside herself with anger.

As to the physical demands, if a healthy stripling were playing Cleopatra, he would have to be ultra-careful not to hurt his fellow player when he/she attacks the hapless fellow and *hales him up and down*, cursing him to perdition. Lots of fight rehearsals here. Lots of control needed, and huge U-turns of emotion required throughout all three of those scenes.

Antony, the master-dumper of women (first Fulvia, then shock/horror Cleopatra herself, and finally, fatally, Octavia) is 'nodded' back to Egypt by a Cleopatra on the war-path. He can't help it, he is drawn to her, enthralled and helpless. He continues on his tumultuously wrong-headed path by misjudging Caesar's powers and throwing away the decisive sea battle. He stupidly ignores Enobarbus' and Scarus' soldierly pleas to fight by land by acceding to the airy braggadocio of a Cleopatra wilfully exerting a newly-restored power over him. Far worse, though, than his military misjudgement is the irrecoverable shame of following after her fleeing ship at the height of the sea-battle. I can't blame her. It must have been horrible out there on heaving seas with blood and death and screams all around you. I'm sure she is shocked that he followed her fleeing ship.

In 3.11 when she painfully approaches him to beg forgiveness her guilt is palpable, she feels shame. Her heart goes out to her humiliated lover. She can find no other words than a naked "Pardon, pardon" (68), so vulnerable here. Shakespeare's instinct for heart-breaking simplicity is matchless. After the distant tumult of 1.3, this is only the second time that we see the lovers physically close: "Fall not a tear, I say; one of them rates / All that is won and lost. Give me a kiss!", says he, "even this repays me" (69-71). I don't know if boys were kissed on the lips. Shakespeare is always very clear about when he wants to see a stage kiss. This one, I would say, is unavoidable. Could it be possible for the Queen of Egypt to be so besotted with Antony that she is unaware of his misjudgements? That would be the legendary story. I took another path. The dynastic queen with heirs and a country to defend to my mind takes precedence over the lover queen in the second half of this play. When Thidias, Caesar's subtle messenger, attempts to persuade her to 'pack cards' with

him, diplomacy and political necessity bubble up to take precedent. Quite deliberately she charms Thidias "to kiss the tender inward of [her] hand" (Sonnet 28, Shakespeare 2005) where lie the *bluest veins*. Egypt is quite ready to play the game of *real politik* with Rome.

Antony is more than justified in raging against her. She vehemently denies her duplicity in a speech of monumental hyperbole. She's playing for her country's future. As queen of the most efficient theocracy in the ancient world, she needs to placate her Roman consort, she needs him, and of course she loves him, warts and all. But are her overlarded declarations of loyalty and devotion, her threats to discard her offspring, genuine? Quite a job for a boy to convey both sides of her problem.

When he is dying, he calls her by her true name: "Egypt" (4.15.43). He knows perfectly well he has despairingly loved a whole country in her. After that violent Thidias scene (3.13), she sees Antony make mistake after mistake as if watching a car-crash in slow-mo, mesmerised but unable to stop it. She reveals her terrible doubts about his judgement in those four huge words: "That head my lord" (19). To my mind this is central to an understanding of Cleopatra. I once had a conversation with the great actress Peggy Ashcroft, who felt it is one of the great inexpressible love poems of the whole canon, but I can't agree that this is the appropriate place to declare your love, quite the reverse. I wonder what a boy could possibly come up with if asked about it?

Here's how that line happens: Antony, defeated, bitter, snarls to the Soothsayer, his go-between: "To the boy Caesar send this grizzled head / And he will fill thy wishes to the brim / With principalities" (17-19). The queen watches that intemperate "head" (19) just asking for trouble, hence her cryptic admonition murmured more in sorrow than in anger. That "head" has lost its mojo, that "head" is making a big mistake.

When, after another victory and another defeat, Antony turns on her violently screaming he will tear her eyes out and worse, she flees in terror to her palace where a panicked Charmian tells her to hide herself away in her monument, "and send him word you are dead" (4.13.4), a terrible and fatal lie is perpetrated. Is she a stranger to lies? She, who so often seeks the truth? All acting decisions a boy must make. Do we blame watchful, devoted Charmian for stinging her

into this whopper? Note how quickly Cleopatra grabs at the lie and instantly embellishes it with a director's note to Mardian instructing him how to play the false message: "Say that the last I spoke was Antony / And word it, prithee, piteously. Hence Mardian / And bring me how he takes my death . . ." (8-10). I take my hat off to Mardian, slyly apeing his duplicitous mistress with a brilliantly executed description of 'How Cleopatra Died.' Acting medals all round.

So then, how much did she love him? We don't really know. She keeps us guessing till the end. She keeps him guessing too. He, on the other hand, is enthralled with her from start to finish, just as he's enthralled with himself and his own reputation. Is he the only great classical hero who dies for love? Is he the female Phaedra of Jacobean drama? When at the last he is carried, fatally wounded, into the arms of Cleopatra, his self-deception does not lessen as the blood drains from him: "A Roman by a Roman valiantly vanquished" (4.15.59). It was young Eros who was valiant. He never really knows himself. She by contrast is about to know herself better than ever he did. The reality of his death strikes gold in her: "Oh, see my women, the crown o'th'earth doth melt" (64-5). Love rushes in. Five lines of unmatchable poetry pour from her. Then, quite suddenly she falls utterly silent, still as an hieratic statue carved in stone. Most editors insert a stage direction: "She faints", or "She swoons" and shhh . . . most editors are male. It's what mere women are expected to do in extremis, isn't it? But, says I, she's not the fainting type. Her silence, her stillness scares her serving women badly and they panic. Young Iras weeps, Charmian calls for her to return from that unreachable place. It is during that silence that she profoundly comprehends the size of her loss. When she speaks it is like one who is transfigured by a startling revelation and not the least like one who wakes from the confused nothingness of a fainting mind. I wonder if a boy could truly understand what is happening here? Or is the boy brigade quite content to let him squeak his way through such remarkable poetry? For a moment she holds hands with King Lear, like him fully realising her own frailty –metaphorically, poetically. Like him, she becomes merely another poor forked animal: "No more but e'en a woman and commanded / By such poor passions as the maid that milks / And does the meanest chares . . ." (77-9). The authority of a crown is as nothing. She is no different to a simple milkmaid. Her

language achieves greatness, and the play becomes a tragedy. For a boy to reach towards those heights and insights is asking for too much. But Shakespeare wrote with intent, of that I have no doubt. He wished us to understand a profundity in his Cleopatra that we might think missing were those words not there.

From this point she continues her journey into a desolation made bearable by a growing realisation of what is left to her in life. With Antony gone, she starts to see death as an enticing resolution: "Then is it sin to rush into the secret house of death ere death dare come to us?" (84-5). One might say that her path is lonelier than Antony's. She has so entirely invaded his being that he cannot exist without her. Believing her to be dead he can do only one thing: seek his own so they can meet again in Elysium "where souls do couch on flowers" (4.14.52). His poetry becomes unbearably beautiful as if Shakespeare would wish to transmute his generous and blundering soul into something rich and strange.

Sheltering in her monument her new-found freedom from the proscriptions of a reigning queen, a sense of proportion, nay, of choice, seems to liberate her being. In 5.2 she explores more deeply an isolation both physical and spiritual which hones her courage by giving her agency. Her journey towards death is less the lover, more the cornered animal. Sheltering in her hidden place – her monument – she is badly frighted by a SWAT team of Roman soldiers who suddenly invade, surprising her and her women. Her courage detonates. She makes to stab herself. As an Egyptian expecting death round every corner, of course she secretes a dagger on her person.

Brutally disarmed, she confronts her enemies with a blazing obduracy and pride: "Sir, I will eat no meat, I'll not drink, sir . . ." (5.2.48), and builds to a desperate reach for her own death: ". . . rather make my country's high pyramides / My gibbet and hang me up in chains" (59-61). Tears and anger burn through this speech and a searing sense of self-worth; this is a proud Egyptian queen proclaiming defiance. Yet another huge stretch for a mere boy. Dolabella, a more senior officer arrives to take command. She instinctively trusts this soldier. [Just a note here: Even as he dies, Antony, as usual got it wrong: "None about Caesar trust but Proculeius" (4.15.50), he had warned her. He meant Dolabella, but it

is she with her finer instincts who noses that out.] The dense little scene with this officer becomes absolutely central to her destiny as she seeks for the unadorned truth. Desperate, exhausted, she seeks refuge in a romantic fantasy, aggrandising Antony's image into a mammoth presence striding the world. This is the Antony of legends. This, for the very first time in the whole play, is where the awesome size of their initial passion is re-discovered. We so often only realise the full value of someone when he is gone. Please tell me how an unlived-in young man can know this?

> CLEOPATRA I dreamed there was an Emperor Antony
> O such another sleep that I might see
> But such another man.
> . . .
> His face was as the heav'ns, and therein stuck
> A sun and moon which kept their course and lighted
> The little O, th' earth.
> . . .
> His legs bestrid the ocean: his reared arm
> Crested the world: his voice was propertied
> As all the tuned 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 t'was
> That grew the more by reaping. His delights
> Were dolphinlike, they showed his back above
> The element they lived in. In his livery
> Walked crown and crownets: realms and islands were
> As plates dropped from his pocket.
> (5.2.75-91)

That slip of a boy must transform into an exhausted and desolate woman reaching for a golden time with a dream lover in another life. That fabulous dream lover is at best only sporadic in this play.

At this stage in my argument, I find myself having to offer this observation: in England I have never beheld a male actor taking on a female part who is capable of achieving tragedy – comedy, yes, tragedy no. I have seen a most delicately played *As You Like It* with an all-male cast, full of careful charm and humour and puppy love.

I have seen lush evocations of glamour in outsize women (Danny La Rue) and admired the burlesque chutzpah of camp drag. I have seen comical old trouts from the snobby heights of Lady Bracknell (David Suchet) to the mundane depths of household comedians in hair-rollers. I've seen be-bosomed pantomime dames by actor chappies (Ian McKellen). I have seen Mark Rylance's famous wind-up dolly of an Olivia (who stole the play from Viola) and I've met the weird little- girly alter-ego of the artist Grayson Perry. Amongst stand-up comedians my favourites will always be Pieter Dirk Uys from South Africa, sharply political in content as big-haired Mrs. Evita Bezuidenhout playing Nelson Mandela's personal political adviser, while Barry Humphrey's grotesque Dame Edna Everidge stays tops for social comment, like a giant purple cuckoo chucking people to their deaths. Hilarious and cruel humour. Dressing up as sirens or harridans is clearly an Anglo-Saxon obsession.

As for tragical female figures the nearest I have ever seen was the mature Noh actor in Ninagawa's astonishing production of Medea in 1989. Tokusaburo Arashi did not seek to vulgarise his acquired femininity by wearing false breasts but wore a slim and elegant gown. Arrestingly sinuous, he conveyed that strange creature's chilling vengefuness with astonishing economy. I am told Noh actors start their training for specifically female roles at 6 or 7 and they continue for a lifetime, yet I have heard of no such training for Shakespeare's "little eyases" (Hamlet, 2.2.354). As I say, a young man capable of discovering mature self-knowledge in his female persona, with no frills, no pretences, no attitudes, no self-commentary – I have never ever seen. It would take an uncanny degree of psychological and physical immersion in the opposite sex to do that.

Films are replete with marvellous child actors because the close-up does the work. The stage and its spaces need to be filled with a presence. Boys and youths might be talented, gifted, even moving, but yet with depths unplumbed. Boys don't have depths; everyone has to acquire depths by living a life. Grown men can play comical women, vulgar women, burlesque women, glamorous women, marvellously well, but tragic ones, no. My view is that women are for laughing at in the British psyche, fondly perhaps, but not to be taken too seriously.

With that in mind let us return to Cleopatra and Octavius Caesar, the man who precipitated her exquisite suicide in 43BC. Thereafter he continued to rule the known world for a further 45 years. Cleopatra's son by Julius Caesar, Caesarion, who would have stood in his way, he murdered and he ordered his spin-doctors to trash her reputation, propagate slanderous stories, vulgarise her history and deface her statues. A woman had humiliated Rome and Rome's heroic general, Antony. Her reward, a kind of oblivion. But we owe Cleopatra her place in history. Plutarch attests to a low voice, to "the persuasion of her discourse" and of her "irresistible charm" (qtd in Spenser 1991, 227). The spirit of the woman, not just the outer show is what's required. Boys can do outer but not inner.

Common sense tells me that men will have played those very grown-up women of Shakespeare's perfectly adequately: the Countess, Volumnia, Mad Margaret, Gertrude, the sad queens in the histories, the warm and vulgar Nurse, the whore Doll Tearsheet, feisty Paulina and so on. But why is there such a silence on performances? Perhaps there were things to hide?

Let us suppose, by some chance, there were furtive female players knocking about the place, most likely from the Continent. Remember Thomas Coriat's hearsay? Those performances would most probably remain unrecorded *as a matter of necessity*. In a police state you learn to be discreet lest you be hauled before the enforcers, the secret police, as I once was – the 'Greys' we called them in South Africa. In Elizabethan London it would have been courting disaster to make written reports or to keep diaries or logs. It was a virtual police state rotten with spies, hence the centuries of silence about the playing history of England's most active theatre.

Those of us who survived the idiocies of a real police state learned to stay silent. The campus of my University in Johannesburg (Wits) was well supplied with police-paid student spies, rather like Shakespeare's London teeming with Catholic hunters, so I guess that Londoners did what we did. Does human nature change that much?

There's an openness of heart in a young boy so how can they possibly possess the same vulnerability with seamless deceptions, convincing lies, conscious irony, faux humility, biting humour and a million other female ploys. They cannot, for the simple reason that since babyhood they have had no need for the daily survival

mechanisms of a woman. A young male in a man's world is blithely unconscious of the strictures that lie in wait in a woman's daily life, nor can he feel the ways in which a woman has to manage her world. Shakespeare knew what a boy actor could and could not manage.

There is a fascinating paper, "Boys Becoming Women in Shakespeare's Plays" by Juliet Dusinberre, who argues that she herself would have preferred the real thing, just as his audience might have, because Cleopatra's sexual allure is so fiercely written up in the play, so she could hardly be presented as 'a sexual fiction'. Dusinberre makes this further point on the subject of Cleopatra: "Her physical presence becomes central to the dramatic evocation of sensuality in a way that the boy actors could never have been" (1998, 13). The following observation is the most salient when considering what a boy actor might accomplish: "The relation of the boy actor to the expression of strong emotion" (18) is not, even in the most gifted of youths, a given – they simply don't have the experience of life, and certainly not the technical expertise to exercise restraint, which is the actors' chief tool in containing and expressing strong emotions: "[Shakespeare] must have been sometimes concerned that the boy actor would ruin everything with a burst of amateurish and immature passion" (ibid.). Quite so; actors need not cry real tears but must know how to make *you* cry, by holding back their full power so you feel their unexpressed pain. The performer must be in control.

Hamlet's speech which instructs no over-acting, no untruthful gesture, still stands as a benchmark for modern actors. Evidently modern actors have more in common with our Elizabethan colleagues than the centuries between us would imply. I'm bound to wonder if a 'then' audience and a 'now' audience is all that different? Setting aside the new secularity, human behaviour doesn't change that much does it? Why do we still do these plays? The characters and their dilemmas ring true, that's why.

So now I come to the one passage in the play on which all scholars hang their boy actor hat. An imprisoned Cleopatra pictures being mocked in Caesar's triumphal procession through the streets of Rome. As Caesar leaves her presence, he tries to soothe his captive queen: "Our care and pity is so much upon you / That we remain your friend; and so adieu" (5.2.187-8). He

leaves her, smug as a bug – what a prize! She is very angry: "He words me girls, he words me . . ." (190). She sends Charmian off to bring in the snake-man with her death writhing in a basket, all carefully planned. Egypt's fascination with "ways to die" (4.1.5) and the ceremonial of a Pharaonic death would be a far cry to a London boy surrounded by random street brutality, wouldn't you say? Cleopatra asks her young attendant (a boy): "Now Iras what think'st thou? / Thou, an Egyptian puppet, shall be shown / In Rome as well as I" (5.2.206-8). After describing the humiliations, they will suffer she comes to the point:

> Antony
> Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
> Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
> I'the posture of a whore.
> (217-20)

Here, say the scholars, is secure textual proof that a boy would be squeaking his way through the role of Cleopatra. Let's turn it on its head: "boy" is here used as a verb, to "boy" – to make little, diminish, a deliberate antithesis to "greatness". Shakespeare quite often uses nouns as verbs. Also "to boy" underlines the picture of a masculinised queen, hardly the one we have known hitherto.

Shakespeare could so easily have written "shew", which scans nicely. 'Shew' "my greatness / I'th' posture of a whore" . . . The choice of the word "posture" implies an inadequacy of expressiveness, as if just the crude outer shape will do. Shakespeare could have chosen "habits" or "image" or "movements" all of which scan. But "posture" is pointedly expressive of what 'drag' does, it postures the female body, it exaggerates the feminine gesture, parodies it. A boy actor would have to approximate his notion of how a whorish female might hold herself by, say, copying a prostitute loitering in a London street, and then superimposing his idea of how his very own Queen Elizabeth might insinuate herself into his gestures. Crude 'posturing' in effect. Queens and whores: the generalised idea of women all trussed up by an observant young lad.

Back to that line: "Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / In th'posture of a whore" (5.2.219-20). Iras swears she'd rather tear

out her eyes than see such a thing. Cleopatra applauds her spirit: "Why that's the way" (223) and mocks Caesar's intended triumph as a "most absurd intent" (225) – 'a posturing boy as ME? How absurd'. Well, quite.

Timing is everything. As an actor I ask myself why, with his unerring eye for the *moment critique* in a drama, why, I say, would Shakespeare choose to write an alienating interlude at this moment in the play where two boy actors rubbish boy actors? To take an audience out of the thrall of tension would be ill-judged. How is a Cleopatra to carry an audience along on her suicidal voyage if the audience is being encouraged to snigger?

The snake-man scene deliberately seeks comedy as the classic comic prelude to the tragedy of her death. But in-house laughter, self-referring commentary? I can't see it. The moment the snake man is dismissed Cleopatra will transmute her "immortal longings" into "fire and air", banish earthly fears and terrors by introducing unexpected notes of spirituality, of high seriousness, of poetic aspiration, of passion, while she is formally enrobed for death. An actor totally in charge of mood and pace and feeling must rule the stage.

I'm tempted to read this quote about a "squeaking" Cleopatra as a message in a bottle from Shakespeare to the world: 'If you want to see a great queen belittled before your very eyes, watch a boy play her'. The voice is an actor's chief instrument of expression. How is a youthful voice in danger of breaking, still unsettled, to be trusted with a long and arduous play? How can an unformed voice breathe forth power as Enobarbus attests, tell me that? Having written a part which requires an immersive strength of feeling right till the very end, Shakespeare would rightly fear the drawbacks of a fragile vocal instrument. Cleopatra's very grown-up attributes are a tall enough order for a mere actress. However talented in 'seeming', a youngster would be emotionally incapable of deeper deceptions. Nuance is not the stuff of youthful sensibilities. Even Beaumarchais insisted that a woman should play Cherubino in the Marriage of Figaro, because, he said, young men can't do 'nuance'. Adolescent Cherubino matched with our very evolved Queen of Egypt, I ask you! Last but by no means least: Shakespeare entrusted the final act of this enormous play to the female protagonist. That structure is unprecedented in dramatic literature. The player who took on

Cleopatra must have been someone who could hold the house's attention in the palm of her hand right to the end. A star, the peerless other half of the peerless pair.

A man of the theatre to his marrow, Shakespeare must have had one hell of an actor in mind for this part – Harold Bloom uses the word 'oceanic'. An oceanic boy? Do me a favour.

Cleopatra's part is arguably the most complicated, alluring presence in all of dramatic literature. She fights for life to the finish, and when there is no way out, she grasps death to her breast with all the sensuality of which she is the mistress. As the venom seeps into her, she becomes a mother suckling "her baby at her breast" (5.2.308). Shakespeare has drawn the most archetypically feminine of images as we watch her nursing her own death. She dies beautifully, triumphantly, fiercely in charge of her own fate. Hedda Gabler would applaud. For both, death is better than a life without freedom. Liberty or oblivion – done beautifully.

Whoever the Dark Lady of the Sonnets was, Shakespeare's fascination with yet another Dark Lady is here manifested. Too large by far for the fledgling soul of a boy. Like Beatrice, I too can see a church by daylight.

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