

Did Cleopatra ever Love Antony?  
A Postcolonial Re-Reading of an Exhausted Text

هل أحببت كليوباترا انطوني قط؟  
إعادة قراءة نص مستنفد من وجهة نظر نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار

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### Abstract:

This paper examines several issues: first, Shakespeare's involvement in the Orientalist system through his degrading depictions of, Cleopatra, as voluptuous, while he describes the Western gods, Caesar, and Octavia, as chaste. Second, a defense of the Egyptian queen as patriotic and calculating who desires the protection of Egypt as her main goal. Third, Shakespeare's portrayal of Antony as a Roman leader who irredeemably slipped into the Orient and into Cleopatra's temptation. Fourth, an in-depth analysis of Cleopatra's real relationship with Antony. Did Cleopatra ever love Antony? Or did she use him as a shield to secure her country against the violent threats of Rome? The paper concludes with a reference to Cleopatra's honorable death compared to Antony's humiliating one, with a hint to Shakespeare's significant role in the Orientalist system of domination. The theoretical approach is mainly postcolonial with some reliance on selected feminist voices that relate to the topic.

**Key words:** Orient, patriotic, Rome, postcolonial, degrading

هل أحبت كليوباترا أنطوني قط؟  
إعادة قراءة نص مستنفذ من وجهة نظر نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار

### الملخص:

يسعى هذا البحث إلى فحص عدد من القضايا: أولاً، تورط شكسبير في نظام الفكر الاستشراقي من خلال تصويره المهين للملكة المصرية كليوباترا بوصفها شهوانية، في حين يصف الإلهين الغربيين، قيصر وأوكتافيا، بالعفة. ثانياً الدفاع عن الملكة المصرية بوصفها ملكة وطنية وحذرة ترغب في حماية وطنها ويمثل ذلك هدفها الأساسي. ثالثاً، تصوير شكسبير لأنطوني بوصفه قائداً رومانياً انزلق على نحو لا رجعة فيه إلى الشرق وإلى إغراء كليوباترا. رابعاً، تحليل متعمق لعلاقة كليوباترا الحقيقية مع أنطوني. هل أحببت كليوباترا أنطوني؟ أم أنها استخدمته كدرع لتأمين بلادها من التهديدات العنيفة لروما؟ وتختتم الورقة بالإشارة إلى وفاة كليوباترا المشرفة مقارنة بوفاة أنطوني المهينة. علاوة على ذلك، هناك تلميح حول دور شكسبير المهم في نظام التحكم والسيطرة الاستشراقي. أما النهج النظري لهذا البحث فهو نظرية "ما بعد الاستعمار" مع بعض الاعتماد على عدد من الأصوات النسوية المنتقاه التي تتعلق بالموضوع

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** المشرق، الوطني، روما، ما بعد الاستعمار، المهين

## **Did Cleopatra ever Love Antony? A Postcolonial Re-Reading of an Exhausted Text**

### **Introduction:**

Can we consider Shakespeare as one of the Orientalists who perpetuated the “inferior” image of the East in contrast to the “superior” West? Why not? Though Edward Said takes the late eighteenth century as a roughly defined starting point for Orientalism as a corporate institution dealing with the Orient, this process, did not start overnight. As Said himself says, “The absolute demarcation between East and West...had been years, even centuries, in the market” (Said 879). He further explains that “Orientalism plotted Oriental history, character, and destiny for hundreds of years” (878). This might invite us to move safely towards discussing Shakespeare as one of the faithful agents of the Orientalist institution. Again, as Said argues, “Every writer on the Orient (and this is true even of Homer) assumes some Oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the Orient, to which he refers and on which he relies” (874-875). In this sense, Shakespeare is a master because almost of all his plays were adaptations of ancient works. The Bard had relied heavily on Plutarch, Holinshed, and many others in recreating his masterpieces.

One more reason to see Shakespeare as an agent of the Orientalist institution is that he was a conformist English writer who lived within and witnessed the rise of the powerful British nation under Elizabeth I, with its immense geographical discoveries and expansion; not to mention the assertion of this British power after the Spanish Armada—the event which resulted in the shrinking of Spain as a colonial power and the emergence and spread of England as a new one.

To start with, Said, in describing the authority of a text over the readers, explains that “a book can always describe peoples, places, and experiences, so much so that the book (or text) acquires a greater authority and use than the actual reality it describes” (876). Taking Said’s statement as a principle that can be applied to the “authority” of Plutarch’s account of Antony’s life, “Life of Antonius,” included in his *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* (translated by Thomas North in 1579 from the French of Jacques Amyot), Shakespeare, first, as a reader

of this account, had fallen under the “authority” of Plutarch’s “text,” and second, as a writer, had perpetuated its Orientalist implications in his own text of *Antony and Cleopatra*, which spread textually to Dryden’s *All For Love* and theatrically to the Elizabethan audience.

Though Plutarch’s was not the only source available, in Shakespeare’s time, on the tale of Antony and Cleopatra, it seems that Shakespeare relied heavily on Plutarch through North’s translation. Except for some few omissions on Shakespeare’s part, I have noticed Shakespeare’s closeness to Plutarch during my reading of Plutarch’s account. Also, Richard Courtney in his *Outline History of British Drama* mentions that Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* is “adapted from North’s translation of Plutarch” ((courtney)83). That of C.A. Robinson sustains Courtney’s view. Jr. who, in his introduction to, *Plutarch, Eight Great Lives, The Dryden Translation*, says that “For Shakespeare, who used Sir Thomas North’s translation...Plutarch’s Lives sufficed history” ((Dryden)X).

There were, however, many different sources: *The Civil Wars of Appian of Alexandria* (translated in 1578), Samuel Daniel’s play *Cleopatra* (1594), and the *Tragedy of Antonius* (1595), a play translated by Mary Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, from the French of Robert Garnier. And as George Lyman Kittredge tells us, in his short introduction, as an editor, to the Kittredge edition of *Antony and Cleopatra*, “there were dozens of other accounts which he [Shakespeare] may or may not have known, but which generally shaped the manner in which his age could regard the love and deaths of Antony and Cleopatra” (X)

This paper will handle several points: first, Shakespeare’s involvement in the Orientalist system of thought mainly through his depictions of the sensual and inferior East with a “whore” on top, and the comparisons he implicitly and slyly leads between Cleopatra on the one hand and Caesar and Octavia, on the other. Second, my defense of Cleopatra as a patriotic and calculating queen who knows the interests of her country. Third, Shakespeare’s Orientalist treatment of the Orient in the character of Antony himself, as a Roman leader who irredeemably

slipped into the Orient and into Cleopatra's "lap;" fourth, an analysis of Cleopatra's real relation with Antony. In other words, did Cleopatra ever love Antony? I would also briefly touch on Cleopatra's honorable death, and Shakespeare's significant role in the Orientalist system of superiority and domination. My theoretical approach is mainly postcolonial with some reliance on several feminist voices that relate to my topic.

**Shakespeare's depiction of the "Orient" in *Antony and Cleopatra*:**

How does the "Orient" look like in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*? Said perceptively points out that "the essence of Orientalism is the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority" (881). The first scene of the play presents the two worlds. Rome and Egypt, as set in full "distinction," a governing paradigm that will remain till the last curtain. In this scene, the Roman world is that of strong and dutiful warriors (Philo and Demetrius) who speak of the "measure" in behavior, the "office," and "devotion." As representatives of the European moderation and restraint, they express their sorrow for their general, Antony, who once was like "plated Mars" (Shakespeare) (1, i, 2-5) and now has become "the fan/ To cool a gypsy's lust." On the other hand, the Egyptian world is one ruled by a "gypsy." A whore, with unquenchable "lust," a woman whose attendants are just "Ladies" and "Eunuchs." The reference to Cleopatra's "tawny front" sets her under people of color and so a mismatch for the superior white, Antony. This indicates that when these two worlds got mixed, "The triple pillar of the world [is] transformed/ Into a strumpet's fool" (I, i, 12-13). The court of the Egyptian queen is portrayed in act I, scene, ii, as a place of sexual joking and lustful allusions made by the attendants of Cleopatra, whereas the unsmiling Roman soldiers are looking and listening with uneasy detachment. The scene is filled with references to sexuality, fertility, cuckoldry, and desire—the qualities Shakespeare frequently uses to identify the Egyptians.

Later in act 1, scene iv, Shakespeare, through Caesar, portrays the East (Alexandria) as not a place for manliness but rather for waste and sensual pleasure. There, Antony "fishes, drinks, and wastes/ The lamps of night in revel; is not more manlike/ Than Cleopatra, nor the queen of

Ptolemy/More womanly than he” (I, iv, 4-7). Caesar sees Egypt (and the whole “Orient” by implication) as a large “bed” on which Antony “give[s] a kingdom for a mirth/...keeps the turn of tipping with a slave/...stand[s] the buffet/ with knaves that smell of sweat” (I, iv,17-20). Antony, in Caesar’s words, is doing shameful things that never “becomes him” as a man of “great weight”(18,22) and as a leader who “didst eat strange flesh/ Which some did die to look on” (67-8).

As Shakespeare means it, The Roman Emperor stands in complete contrast with and distinction from the sensual queen of Egypt. He is a stern man who rules the whole world with political prudence and cool calculation, whereas Cleopatra, in the following scene (I, v) surrounded by her women and eunuchs, complains of missing Antony. As an irresponsible woman of different moods, she is seen as making obscene jokes with Mardian about his sexual impotence, and then starts remembering her days with Julius Caesar. The effect is to assert that Cleopatra is erotic by nature and not merely a strategy to seduce Antony. The contrast made here is not only between a prudent Emperor from the West, and a loose queen from the East, but rather between a man with an “identity” and a woman with a “nature.” As Amy Koritz explains, in criticizing the politics of gender, “identity” which is “a historically specific set of characteristics” is assigned to men, whereas “nature” which is “an eternal contamination” is the share of women (Kortz)71).

Caesar’s discourse about the East (a discourse delivered by the then Emperor of the whole world) holds the East as “contained” in an unchangeable pattern of inferiority: it is the land of “slave[s],” “mirth” epicures, and “knaves that smell of sweat.” And because Antony, as a European superior, failed to insulate himself against the infectious Orientals, his and the whole Roman “equanimity” has become threatened. Even Bombey, who wishes longer stay for Antony in Egypt because this would increase his chances in the strife against Caesar, criticizes Antony because he , like a fool, has fallen into “the lap of Egypt’s widow” (II, I, 37), in the mysterious space, the “field of feasts” that “keep[s] his brain fuming”—the kingdom of “Epicurean cooks” headed by “Salt Cleopatra” in whose court “witchcraft joins with beauty, lust with both” (II,I, 37, 33,22).

Shakespeare more subtly presents the “inferiority” of the Orient through the contrast he draws between the lustful Cleopatra and the saint-like Octavia. Cleopatra is a “Royal wench” who “makes hungry/where most she satisfies,” a woman whom “the holy priests/Bless her when she is riggish” (II, ii, 226-7, 236). She “made great Caesar lay his sword to bed,” a “gypsy” whose “infinite variety” “beggar’d all description” (II, ii, 226-7,236,198). Octavia, on the other hand, is a lady of “beauty, wisdom, and modesty,” a perfect woman who, unlike Cleopatra, “can settle/The heart of Antony,” a “blessed” and virtuous lady (II, ii, 241-2), who will remain on her “knees” making “prayers” “Before the gods” all the time when Antony is away (II, iii, 3). “The male imperial ethic” as Leela Gandhi explains, has always “distilled its mission through the figure of the angel in the colonial home” (98). Such mechanisms of “controlling women’s sexuality, exalting maternity and breeding a virile race of empire- builders,” as Anne Mc Clintock notes,” was widely perceived as the paramount means for controlling the health and wealth of the male imperial body” ((McClintock)47). Octavia is the antitoxin that Antony needs to be cured from the venom of the “serpent of old Nile” (I, v, 25). Octavia has the moral potential to keep Antony in his absence and to pray for him, whereas Cleopatra, in Antony’s absence, remembers her previous lover and her “salad days” (I, v, 73). By large, she is an erotic temptress whose life is just a series of sexual adventures, a “morsel cold upon/ Dead Caesar’s trencher... a fragment/ of Genius Pompey’s” (III, xiii, 116-18), a “Rare Egyptian” whose worth is nothing compared to Octavia, the “gem of women” (III, xiii, 108).

To maintain the image of the mysterious queen intact, Shakespeare dedicates one whole scene (II, v) in which Cleopatra appears as it is intended for her to be: a foolishly extravagant and unstable woman. When her messenger comes back from Rome, she impulsively promises him of a wealth if he bears good news and death if he bears bad ones. As soon as he tells her of Antony’s marriage, she “strikes him down,” “hales him up and down,” and threatens to “spurn” his eyes, “unhair” his head, and to have him “whipp’d with wire and stew’d in brine.” Then, she cools down and wishes that the messenger would change his words. As he sticks to his words, the queen clutches his throat



with a knife, but he runs away. Once more, she asks for the messenger again. As the messenger confirms the news, she burst into rage, curses him, and banishes him from her sight. Cleopatra immediately starts to set her counter plan information about Octavia. By such portrayal, Cleopatra appears as a mysterious woman, with sudden fits of anger and rashness, quick-changing mood, tendency of scheming, and limitless sexuality. Cleopatra turns out to be a ready material for the Roman leaders' sexual joking. She is mentioned to have been brought to Julius Caesar in Alexandria, tied up "in a mattress" on the back of Apollodorus, her servant, as a means of entering Caesar's palace without being seen by people. As Judie Newman arguably explains, "The East was thus either a foolish woman...or a sexual temptress who should be controlled and resisted at all costs" ((Newman)39). And Shakespeare generously sets Cleopatra in both categories.

Not only does Shakespeare ridicule Cleopatra, but he also trivializes the pyramids. When the pyramids are mentioned, they are mentioned through Lepidus, the most heavily drunk among the celebrants, and the least respected among the Triumvirs. Dead drunk as he is, Lepidus pronounces the word "Pyramids" as "pyramises" (II, vii, 31-32). And, while he mentions that "they are very goodly things," his awkward statement receives no regard and so looks out of context. Ironically, Shakespeare contextualizes the whole scene (II, vii) in an Egyptian cloak only because the scene is that of feasting and heavy drinking. As Pompey says, "This is not yet an Alexandrian feast," to which Enobarbus replies, "Shall we dance the Egyptian Bacchanals/ And celebrate our drink?" (92, 100). The wish of the Roman celebrants to change their feasting from the controlled Roman into the voluptuously limitless, Egyptian fashion reflects a collective projection of the celebrants' desire to be in Antony's position at Cleopatra's "lap." Or why does Pompey ask the feast to be Egyptianized while he has earlier criticized Antony for falling into "the lap of Egypt's widow." The "Salt Cleopatra."

By wrapping the Roman feast into an Egyptian atmosphere, Shakespeare means to say that the Egyptian excess has not only infected the Romans who are accustomed to moderation, but it has also become the measure, the standard of exaggeration. And by having Caesar show

disgust at the celebrants' heavy drinking, Shakespeare retains the image of the emperor, the head, as detached, shrewd, and habitually temperate in drinking—unlike the Egyptian queen in whom “vilest things become themselves,” and in whose palace the celebrants “did sleep day out of countenance and made the night with drinking” (II, ii, 178-79).

Despite her position as the queen of Egypt, Cleopatra was seen as “not fit” to attend the battle of Actium in person: “if we should serve with horse and mares together/ The horse were merely lost,” as Enobarbus tries to dissuade her (III, vii, 31, 7-8). The metaphor here is that she, as a “mare” would distract the attention of Antony, the Roman stallion: “Your presence needs must puzzle Antony/ take from his heart, take from his brain, form's time/what should not then be spar'd” (III, vii, 10-12). Fulvia, Antony's dead wife, was reported to have declared war against Octavius Caesar himself, whereas Cleopatra is asked not to attend the war in person, because in her presence resides Antony's defeat. Cleopatra is also condemned for her poor advice when she agrees that Antony should fight Caesar by sea, not land. Furthermore, her escape from the battle is claimed to be the reason behind Antony's defeat.

#### **Cleopatra as a patriotic, calculating queen:**

To keep Cleopatra vulnerable to criticism and subject to more obscurity, Shakespeare, who, for example, has given Hamlet a score of reasons and justifications for delaying his revenge, has been reluctant to give Cleopatra just one convincing reason to flee the battle. Cleopatra might have realized, in the middle of the battle, that it would be wise to leave two Roman powers destroy each other, and wiser, as well, to save her life, her fleet, her colonized country, and her people. If Antony wins the battle, she, as a tactful queen, would not fail to offer him an excuse for her flight. If Caesar wins the battle and Antony gets killed or imprisoned, she will think of another tactic or, if not, she, at worst, will lose her life only.

Furthermore, why do we tend to reason Antony's hasty marriage to Octavia (political marriage) as an act of patriotism and to Rome, and to deny Cleopatra the same justification for Egypt's sake? Why do we not take her flight from the battle as a (military divorce), a payback for

Antony's disregard of her by marrying Octavia? To Cleopatra, the whole matter is a political game in which she tries mainly to maintain a secure position between the two biggest powers, Caesar, and Antony. When these two powers were reconciled earlier by the marriage, Cleopatra realized that Antony is no longer reliable, and that she miscalculated the situation: "In praising Antony I have dispraise'd Cesar" and "I am paid for 't now" (II, v, 107, 109). Some lines later, she declares her final decision about Antony, "Let him for ever go" (115). "Like a Gorgon" or like "a Mars," it does not matter any longer. Here the queen of Egypt had to reverse the equation: to "praise" and please Caesar (by her flight from the battle) and "despise" Antony by the same act. To her, this was the only option left on the political table. Her relationship with Antony (mainly political, partially physical) did not have to intersect with her position as a queen looking for stability to her throne. That Antony deserts Octavia and returns to Egypt and hastily endows her fragile full independence from Rome did not convince her of any forthcoming stability. She was fully aware that neither she nor Antony would ever be able to escape Caesar's wrath and revenge. "But let determin'd things/ Hold unbewail'd their way," as Caesar decides to fight.

Within the realm of the same political game, Caesar, after defeating Antony at Actium, not only denies Antony's request of surrender and asylum, but he also tries to persuade Cleopatra to drive Antony out of Egypt or to kill him. The political offer is now clear: Cleopatra's life and throne in return for Antony's head. Cautious and more calculating, knowing that Caesar is a mighty "god," Cleopatra pretends consent to Caesar's messenger. More concerned about her kingdom than anything else, she says to the messenger, "Tell him, from his all-obeying breath I hear/The doom of Egypt" (III, xiii, 77). To wrap her pretension of consent into an outer credibility, Cleopatra allows Caesar's messenger to kiss her hand, an act that enrages Antony and makes him feel cuckolded, so he decides to start another war against Caesar.

Antony's decision to fight Caesar again gives no hope to Cleopatra, nor even arouses her interests. She becomes so immersed in thinking of her throne and her country. While Antony earnestly tells her

about his preparations: “I will oppose his fate. Our force by land / Hath nobly held; our sever’d navy too/ Have knit again, and fleet, threat’ning most sea-like,” Cleopatra seems astray (thinking of something else) and so he tries to call her attention, “Where hast thou been, my heart? Dost, thou hear, lady?” (III, xiii, 169-172). For the self-deceived Antony, “There’s hope in’t yet.” For Cleopatra, there is none. In thick gloom, Cleopatra has already predicted the horrible fate awaiting her, her heirs, and the people of Egypt-Caesar’s rage will fall like hailstones of poison, the first will

Dissolve my life! The next Caesrion 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! (III, xiii, 160-167)

How can she still believe or count on Antony who, after being defeated at Actium, foolishly asks for personal combat with Caesar, a man who became indulged in a “dream [of] emptiness” and whom Caesar “hast subdue’d his judgment too” as Enobarbus comments (III, xiii, 34-36). It is not only Cleopatra who is looking for an outlet; Antony’s most loyal lieutenant, Enobarbus, is also reconsidering his own situation within the horrible storms coming: “we must leave thee to thy sinking” (II, xiii, 64). Weakened and perplexed by the defeat, Antony becomes very emotional even with his household servants, with strange behaviors to the realists, Cleopatra and Enobarbus: “what means this?” and Enobarbus [aside to Cleopatra] replies: “Tis one of those odd tricks which sorrow shoots/ Out of the mind” (IV, ii, 13-14).

Such kind of unbalanced conduct on Antony’s part makes Cleopatra more convinced that there is no redemption. Even when he tries again to reassure her about the coming battle, she gives no answer. His attempts to please her seem forced. However, to the best of her judgment she has, by far, resituated herself in the middle: she now helps Antony “buckle” his armor to fight the second battle against Caesar. But she has formerly pleased Caesar’s messenger by her lip consent to Caesar’s scheme. As soon as Antony leaves for the battle, Cleopatra openly reveals

her own affirmed fears, “That he and Caesar might/ Determine this great war in single fight/ Then Antony –but now-well, on! (IV, iv, 36-37). Cleopatra’s words reflect her innate belief that Antony “now” will be a loser because the battle is between two incompatible armies, and not a “single fight” Cleopatra’s interjectional phase “but now,” set in isolation from the rest of the sentence by the two dashes, marks her sure conviction that the present time is not for the desperate and distracted Antony, but for the young and self-assured Octavius, whose army is well-prepared with the “best heads,” who “Know that tomorrow [will be] the last of many battles” (IV, i, 10-11). Cleopatra’s certain faith in Antony’s fall never changed: when he claimed a kind of little victory over Caesar’s forces, on the first day of the battle near Alexandria, she answers his claim in doubt and sarcasm: “Com’st thou smiling from/ the world’s great snares uncaugh’t?” (IV, viii,18). Cleopatra was not alone in her firm belief in the fall of Antony. Hers is shared also by Caesar, who sees Antony as an “old ruffian ...hunted...to falling” (IV, I, 4, 7-8); it was, as well, confirmed by Enobarbus, who sarcastically says that Antony wants to “outstare the lightning” and is in a “mood” like that of “The dove [who] will peck the estridge” (III, xiii, 195, 197).

Based on this, I can argue that the queen of Egypt, as reasonable and thoughtful as the Roman (European) heads, should not be accused of treason or deception. Her logic, as clear as the Europeans’, proves her need to take sides or positions according to the situation around her: “Every time/ Serves for the matter that is born in’t,” (II, ii, 10). Like the Europeans, and like any tactful, nationalist leader, who knows the best interests of his or her people, Cleopatra has always realized that “When valour preys on reason/ it eats the swords it fights with” (III, xiii, 199-200). Like Enobarbus and like all “The Kings that have revolted,” (IV, v, 4), Cleopatra had to “seek/ some way.” Ironically, Shakespeare, who drew heavily on Plutarch, never, at all, mentioned the names of the kings who flew away, but his predecessor did. Though Plutarch had not given a full list of those kings who escaped, he, at least, had mentioned that “Among the Kings...Amyntas and Deiotarus went over to Caesar” (Dryden 347), Shakespeare, as it seems, deliberately disguises the names of the other kings but not the “whore” of Egypt. And, when Antony was

lamenting his ill fortune after his defeat in the second battle, he, like Shakespeare, disguises the names of all traitors except Cleopatra. More ironical is that Antony related Cleopatra, specifically at this moment of disgrace, to her whole country: “The hearts/ That spaniel’d me at heel, to whom I gave/ Their wishes, do discandy, melt their sweets/ On blossoming Caesar...Betray’d I am / Of this false soul of Egypt” (IV, xiii, 21-27). As Said explains, “Orientalism...As a system of thought about the Orient ...always rose from the specifically human detail to the general transhuman one; an observation about a tenth-century Arab poet multiplied itself into a policy towards (and about) the Oriental mentality in Egypt, Iraq, or Arabia.” And, by this, Shakespeare fixes all Egypt at the point of “ineradicable” treachery. Serving the supreme goals of the machine, Shakespeare, as such, had vigorously contributed to the Orientalist assumption of “an unchanging Orient absolutely ...from the West.” That Orientalism “could not revise itself,” (Said 884) and so the Bard successfully assisted in the “inevitable” appearance of people like Cromer and Balfour, and consequently, the two invasions of Egypt by England: a failed one in 1807 and a successful one in 1882.

### **Shakespeare’s Orientalist treatment of Antony:**

Antony, in Shakespeare’s hands, is handled through two distinct stages: in the first, he slips into the space of being Oriental and Occidental at a time: in the second, Antony is shifted from this in betweenness exclusively into the Oriental one of “vacancy,” (II, ii, 216), “emptiness,” (III, xiii, 36), and “diminution” (III, xiii, 198). The point of “demarcation” (Said 879) between Antony’s two stages is his absolute decision, after deserting Octavia, “I will to Egypt ... I’th’ East my pleasure lies” (II, iv, 39).

In the eyes of Shakespeare, of Caesar, and of the Orientalist institution at large, Antony, by being un-insulated against the waste of the East, he “prorogue[d] his honour” (II, ii, 26), and has become no more a typical Roman, no longer a successful “local agent” who can “ensure the harmonious working of the different parts of the machine” (Said 883). To Philo, Antony was “transforme’d,” “he is not Antony” (I, i, 12, 57). Caesar, who sits at the top of whole system, discredits Antony because he is risking the interests of the Empire, “You have broken/The article of

your oath” (II, ii, 82). Having “jeopardize[d] the Imperial interests” and turned a deaf ear to the “central authority” in Rome, Antony needs to be restored or pulled back immediately to Rome: the “central authority” needs to “obviate any danger arising” through re-instructing the diverted “agent” (Said 883). Back in Rome, after his wife’s death, Antony is planned to be held in a “perpetual...unslipping knot,” by marrying Octavia, Caesar’s sister, a plan which, as Agrippa acknowledges, is a “studied, not a present thought/ But duty ruminated” (II, ii, 125, 127, 138). To “ensure the harmonious working of the different parts of the machine.” So “the central authority” has the right to take any measures possible to fulfill its projects and to confirm, as Caesar says, “the power of Caesar” (II, ii, 144), “the universal landlord” (III, xiii, 72). And Antony’s rapid consent to the planned marriage puts him literally in the position of the “general, who, obeys the Viceroy, who is the servant of the [Emperor]” (Said 884). As Antony himself has said, “The strong necessity of time commands/ Our services” (I, iii, 43-44).

Antony’s rapid consent to marrying Octavia displays his non-balance or what Lois Tyson call, “double consciousness” ((Tyson)383) the disease of the colonized plagues the colonizer. The macrocosmic division between the “Orient” and the “Occident” is microcosmically embodied in Antony’s mind and heart. One moment he is in full “dotage,” the other he wants to “break/ Or lose myself in dotage” (I, ii, 109). To use Alexas’s words, Antony is “between the extremes/ Of hot and cold,” and as Cleopatra says of him, he has a “divided disposition” (I, v, 51, 52). At times, he wants to “Let Rome in Tiber melt and the wide arch/ Of the rang’d empire fall” (I, I, 33-4) for the sake of Cleopatra; at other times, he accepts to marry Octavia and to support Caesar for the sake of Rome. Antony, in Tyson’s words, “experience[s] double consciousness or double vision... [and is] speaking two languages” (383) he speaks and practices the sensuality (the language of the East) and speaks and, when necessary, behaves according to the authoritative discourse and the power of the West. As Cleopatra once best described him, “dispos’d to mirth; but on the sudden/ A Roman thought hath struck him” (I, ii, 75-6). He desires Cleopatra but marries Octavia. When Maecenas, after Antony’s consent to the marriage, thinks that Antony will “leave her [Cleopatra] utterly” he

receives one definite answer from Enobarbus: “Never! He will not” (II, ii, 233-4). A more affirmative answer comes from Antony himself, “I will to Egypt.../I’th’ East my pleasure lies” (II, iv, 37-9).

In this first stage, Shakespeare has seen Antony as, in the words of Leela Gandhi, an “ambivalent, transitory, culturally contaminated and borderline figure...caught in a historical limbo between home” and the Orient (132). But in the next stage, Antony is used both by Shakespeare and Caesar as a warning example on “the horrors of hybridity and ... miscegenation which must attend the unnatural mingling of disparate” worlds like the East and the West ((Gandi) 133). There is the fear “for the loss of the colonizer’s identity... [when the colonizer(s)] submit [s] to the civilizational depravity of their victims or, in other words “go [as] native” (133).

In order to prepare us smoothly for an easy acceptance of Antony’s new identity as an Oriental, Shakespeare, some few lines before Antony states his final intention of returning to the East, has given us Antony’s full submission to the bewitching prophecy of the soothsayer, who advises him to “stay not by [Caesar’s] side” and to “make space enough between you” (II, iii, 16, 22), because Antony will ever be “o’erpow’er’d” by Caesar. Shakespeare, besides telling us about Antony’s new “space,” makes the point that Antony, now like the Orientals, builds his forthcoming life not on the European model of reason and discretion, but on the Oriental one of witchcraft and superstitious prophecy of the soothsayer has eventually come true.

Shakespeare immediately follows this scene with a ten-line scene (II, iv), as an interval between Antony’s faith in witchcraft and Antony’s follies that began to pour in through Cleopatra and her women attendants. By the beginning of Act two, scene five, Charmian reminisces Antony being fooled by Cleopatra when the “diver/ Did hang a salt fish on [Antony’s] hook, which he/With fervency drew up” (II, v, 16-18). A bigger and more significant folly of Antony’s is narrated by the queen: “I drunk him to his bed/ Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst I wore his sword Philippan” (II, v, 21-23). With such little stories, especially the latter, Antony is hinted at as getting womanly at the hands



of Cleopatra who has stripped him of his manliness. In her attempt to effeminize Antony and masculinize herself, Cleopatra puts Antony to the lowly image that Shakespeare assigned to the Orient. This little tale is foreshadowing a part of what will happen later, by the end of the play. Immediately, before he commits suicide, Antony's sword will be taken off. He will also remember the event with Cleopatra: "O, thy vile lady/ She has robb'd me of my sword" as he says to Mardian (IV, xiv, 22). Antony also means that Cleopatra has deceived him.

Antony's image as womanly is frequently asserted in the play. When he decides to fight by sea, neglecting his power on land, Canidius mentions angrily that Antony's "action grows/ Not in the power on't. So, our leader's led/ And we are women's men" (III, vii, 68-69). Canidius's speech refers not only to Cleopatra's power over Antony, but also to Antony's loss of mindful judgment as a renowned leader. Antony, as womanly as the Orientalists, gives himself "merely to chance and hazard/ From firm security" (III, vii, 47), and so is inevitably defeated, also because of his "very ignorance" (III, x, 6).

After the defeat at Actium, Antony is portrayed more like a helpless woman lamenting her misfortune, a shameful figure who "lost command" and, by his flight, "instructed cowards/ To run and show their shoulders" (III, xi, 24, 8-10). No more Roman, Antony's "spirit" is under the "full supremacy" of Cleopatra who, in turn, is under the supremacy of Rome. When Antony decides to fight again, it is not out of military duty, but rather because he, like the Orientals, felt cuckolded when he saw Caesar's messenger kiss Cleopatra's hand. Before he decides to fight, he has submitted a shameful request to Caesar asking for asylum but is denied by Caesar since Antony, to him, is no longer Roman, and so unfit like a stupid savage to live among the enlightened. Dominated by "ignorance," Antony, who formerly used kings as messengers, is now foolishly using a schoolmaster as messenger to Caesar. Behaving like a savage, Antony, in full disregard of the rules of protocol, orders that Caesar's messenger be whipped brutally. And, like a defeated woman on her deathbed, Antony grows maudlin begging his servants to serve him well because it might be the last. The servants get discomforted and so

does Enobarbus—and as all start to weep, Enobarbus remarks, “for shame/ Transform us not to women” (IV, ii, 35-36).

In his portrayal of Antony as exclusively Oriental, Shakespeare employs another pattern of imagery, that of old age versus youth, the past glory of Antony versus the present power of Caesar. As idle and weak as the whole Orient, Antony, helplessly, lives on his past memories of glory. As he says of Caesar’s contempt of him, “Proud and disdainful, harping on what I am/ Not what he knew I was” (III, xiii, 141-143). Antony here is living on past memories. On the other hand, Caesar, the representative of European youth and reason, describes Antony as an “old ruffian,” a “poor Antony” (IV, 1, 4, 16). Like a crushed animal, Antony “must/ To the young man send humble treaties, dodge/ And palter in the shifts of lowness” (III, xi, 62-63).

Like the Orientals, Antony’s mind is now “full of lead” unlike the “blossoming Caesar” (IV, xii, 23), the “fullest man, and worthiest/ To have command obey’d” (III, xiii, 87-88). Being somewhat aware that the game now is only that of youth and age, Antony sends his messenger back to Caesar with the following message: “Tell him he wears the rose/ Of youth upon him; from which the world should note/ Something particular” (III, iii, 20-22). By this message Antony asks for a “sword to sword” combat, a request which Caesar trivializes and ignores. Even if Caesar agrees, Antony will fail to turn the wheel of age backward again. Overall, Antony’s slippery into the Orient has brought chaos and now it is time for Caesar to restore the Empire’s “universal peace” (IV, vi, 5).

Antony’s final moments are more of humbleness than of honor despite his death at his own hands. As he says of himself, “No more soldier” (IV, xiv, 42); soldiery is the art of the Romans and he is “No more” in; soldiery is the title of every Roman and he lost it- he is an Oriental because he moved from soldiery to “dishonour” (IV, xiv, 56). The uniform of the soldiery is taken off (either by himself or by Eros) immediately before he falls on his sword and so Antony is not allowed to die Roman-he was even denied a successful suicide like the typical Roman. And in his death moments, Antony is manipulated by Dercetas, the guard, who disobeys Antony and takes his bloody sword from his

wound to show it to Caesar, the “Mars” of the earth became an easy prey even for the human jackals.

Antony, a fully Oriental subject, is brought, while dying, in front of her majesty, the queen of Egypt and dies in her arms; he is even awarded what Rome denied him, citizenship, “Die when thou hast liv’d” (IV, xv, 38), officially and gloriously by the queen of Egypt. The last two words Shakespeare puts on Antony’s tongue are “no more”-no more chaos, no more contamination, and no more disruption to the high system. This Orientalist thesis of Shakespeare is briefly echoed in Cleopatra’s short statement, “The odds is gone,” i.e., the complexity of the situation around is gone by Antony’s death. With Caesar victorious and Antony dead, Cleopatra has “no friend/ But resolution and the briefest end” (IV, xv, 90-91).

Shakespeare’s Orientalist message is not without its Darwinian implications, despite the centuries-long span between him and Charles Darwin. The Bard’s focus on Antony’s old age and Caesar’s youth, vigor, and power largely signifies that survival is for the fittest, for the prudent not the womanly, nor the emotional; for the vigorous and powerful not for the idle and divided. As V.G. Kiernan perceptively explains, “no Oriental was ever allowed to see a Westerner as he aged and degenerated,” so Antony must go. Likewise, “no Westerner needed ever” to be seen by the natives “but vigorous, rational, ever-alert young Raj” so Caesar must win and prevail (quoted in Said 881).

### **Did Cleopatra ever love Antony?**

It is my own contention that Cleopatra did not love Antony. In terms of the compatibility, especially, in the Royal spheres, Antony, despite his military leadership, is not a match to Cleopatra as a queen; he is not a king, nor a Caesar. She herself has said to him once, “As I am Egypt’s Queen, Thou blushest, Antony” (I, i, 29-30). In terms of mentality, the two are wholly different. Cleopatra, for example, sees that “the nobleness of life” is to remain in sovereignty, but to Antony, it is “embracing” as he says to her. Cleopatra immediately rejects this flimsy logic by saying, “Excellent falsehood.” (I, I, 36-37).

Cleopatra's question in the very first scene of the play, "Why did he marry Fulvia, and not love her?" explains her doubts in Antony as indeterminate, that was later confirmed by his marriage to Octavia whom he does not love either. Antony, by nature, does not seek genuine love – he only seeks pleasure. As he reveals on his own nature, "There's not a minute of our lives should stretch/ Without some pleasure now" (I, I, 46-47). When he asks her immediately, "What sport to-night?" Cleopatra, who knows when time is ripe for pleasure and when it is not, replies, "Hear the ambassadors" from Rome (I, I, 45-48). As a stately and cautious queen, Cleopatra asks Alexas to put Antony under complete surveillance: "See where he is, who's with him, what he does" (I, iii, 2, 26), because she understands the division inside him, and because she feels that there are "treasons planted" in Rome and she will be the first victim.

If Antony is immersed in his "double consciousness" with his mind in Rome and his body in Egypt, Cleopatra, on the contrary, has one solid consciousness, but sometimes speaks a language with double meaning. For instance, as she says to Antony, "Sir, you and I have lov'd but there's not it" (I, iii, 88). Cleopatra means that this is not love, it is rather lovemaking, and the genuine love is not in the equation. And, more significantly, Antony is a vehicle for the queen's purposes of stability and somewhat equilibrium with Rome-and these two purposes are "not it" yet, i.e., are not fulfilled yet. All that Cleopatra needs is Antony's military power: the language she uses in her farewell to him is very rigid and void of any deep emotions: "Upon your sword/ Sit laurel victory and smooth success/ Be strew'd before your feet" (I, iv, 99-101). Her words are more of queenly precautions given to an envoy, than of anything else. Her political insight and life experience inform her of an imminent treason or dilemma, and her warnings to Antony are so focused because she knows about his "divided disposition." The queen's eyes are on his "sword," his "victory," and his "success" not his body. Thousands of men can perform this bodily job, but none can fulfill Antony's military career, specially before going to Rome. Even when she describes his body, while he is still in Rome, she again uses military and sheltering terms: "The demi-Atlas of

the earth, the arm/ And burgonet of men” (I, v, 23-24). To her, he is an “Atlas” who can support the sky of her kingdom on his shoulders.

Cleopatra defines Antony in two specific images: in one, surely the military, he is “a Mars,” in everything else he is “a Gorgon” (II, v, 116-117). After his marriage to Octavia and also after Actium, the “Mars” image vanishes in the queen’s eyes, and he remains in hers, as well as in Shakespeare’s discourse, “a Gorgon” whose twisting troubled sight and ailed insight have set the whole Empire into big chaos. Cleopatra’s assertive answer to those who claimed that she loved Antony is as follows: “Mine honour was not yielded/ But conquered merely” (III, xiii, 61-62). Her answer can also suffice against the claims about her loose sexuality with Julius Caesar and with Gneius Pompey.

As much as the European gods of the whole world, “the tailors of the earth” (I, ii, 156), have succeeded in changing and marring the patriotic and positive sides in the history of the Egyptian queen, they have failed to change the heroic reality behind her death. Cleopatra’s death is not as some might claim, “her only honorable course” ((Higgins)12), nor is it “Bravest at the last” as Shakespeare, through Caesar, mistakenly believes. My answer to these claims is that her true reality was distorted and concealed because history, as Walter Benjamin observes, is always written by the “Victors” ((Benjamin)448). Perhaps the European writers of the world’s history have found it likeable not to change the reality of Cleopatra’s death because the death was done in “high Roman fashion” (IV, xv, 87) as Cleopatra says.

### **Conclusion:**

Finally, Shakespeare remains one of the major Orientalist figures as he industriously used his literary genius in the service of the Empire. His works represent, as Alan Sinfield observes, “an influential medium through which certain ways of thinking about the world may be promoted and others impeded...generations of worshippers at the altar of high culture have bent themselves to the monumental task of constructing Shakespeare” (qtd. In (Bogdanov)60). Moreover, Jyotsna Singh argues, “Shakespeare’s plays were significant in promoting and privileging the culture of the colonizers...and colonial administrators found an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control over the natives” ((Singh)449). Shakespeare reinforces the logical supremacy of the colonizers over the essential inferiority of the colonized. In the same vein, Bill Ashcroft, and others in *The Empire Writes Back* farsightedly assert that: “Literature was made as central to the cultural enterprise of the Empire as the monarchy was to its political formation” ((Ashcroft)3). That is why Cleopatra stands in the defense arena and might remain for some more time because the pernicious effects of Shakespeare and his likes were and are still very far reaching and pervasive. So this paper re-reads Cleopatra’s character from a new perspective, with the postcolonial tools, attempting to change the stereotypical degrading portrayal of the Egyptian queen as a sensual, reckless queen. Moreover, to allow the Egyptian queen a chance to defend herself as both patriotic and calculating and to voice her mind in spite of Shakespeare’s ferocious biased depiction of her. Queen Cleopatra is still open for further research investigation through various theoretical angles to move into the arena of the victors that she deserves.

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