

### **Egypt as Seen by Shakespeare in *Antony and Cleopatra***

This paper attempts to study Shakespeare's view of Egypt as manifested in his play *Antony and Cleopatra*. This play has a lot to say and has a lot to be said about it. The paper will be focusing on the role of Cleopatra: her description, her image, and how the Romans evaluated her in Fulvia's life and after Fulvia's death. Her death stands for a demarcation line between two different stages in the play. The incidents that take place during Fulvia's life stand for the first half of the play. The words used to describe Cleopatra are less fiery and less offensive than those used after the death of Fulvia. After her death, Antony is forced to marry Octavia, Caesar's sister, to cement the relationship between the Roman triumvirs and to keep Antony very close to the Emperor of Rome. Therefore, Antony will be talked of more seriously and Cleopatra will be talked of more offensively. Consequently, the second half of the play is more exciting than the first half. "Now, in this peculiarity *Othello* is quite unlike the other tragedies; and in the consequent effect, which is that the second half of the drama is immeasurably more exciting than the first, it is approached only by *Antony and Cleopatra*."<sup>1</sup> This paper will try to find an interpretation to the dichotomy between the two halves of the play as related to Cleopatra –the only non-Roman factor in shaping the response and reaction of the Romans to an alien interfering with the world of heart of one of their leaders sent to conquer Egypt.

We may be obliged to agree with Mr. Bradley that *Antony and Cleopatra* is "the most faultily constructed of all the tragedies; but there it is due to not so much to the absence or vagueness of the indications as to the necessity of taking frequent and fatiguing journeys over thousands of miles. Shakespeare could not help himself in the Roman play."<sup>2</sup> This statement by Mr. Bradley could enlighten us very much on the prejudice of Shakespeare against Cleopatra, Egypt, the Egyptians and the non-Roman elements in the play. Caesar had no option but to attack Cleopatra

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<sup>1</sup> A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1979), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

as she enchanted Antony and soured the relationship between him and Octavia, as much as she did to the relationship between Antony and Fulvia. But, we are surprised –towards the end of the play- to find Antony repeating the same Roman words as if he were inculcated by a Roman master. He saw Cleopatra as: triple-whore, a traitor to his army and heart, looking for a new master (Octavius Caesar after conquering Egypt), and a morally-ruined girl in general who brought about his end.

Antony, in *Julius Caesar*, is the same Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra*: a man who likes to go to plays, listens to music, likes arts, and a man all for love as seen by his lord Julius Caesar himself in comparison with Caius Cassius. So, why did Shakespeare feel that it was strange of him to behave the way he did in *Antony and Cleopatra*. We know that sexual relationships were open during the Lupercal, especially with a man like Antony, to bring fertility to the impotent couples. Why was it strange for Antony to be entrapped by a queen who did the same with two previous Roman leaders: Julius Caesar and Pompey?

Shakespeare introduced a very beautiful description of the 'barge' in which Cleopatra sat. Although that could be seen as the best description of a royal ship -ever seen or imagined- Shakespeare damaged that beautiful scene by bespeaking his characters an endless number of offenses against Cleopatra, Egypt, and the Egyptians.

*Ant.* Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch  
Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space,  
Kingdoms are clay; our dungy earth alike 35  
Feeds beast as man; the nobleness of life  
Is this to do thus [*embracing*] when such a mutual pair  
And such a twain can do't, in which I bind,  
[On] pain of punishment, the world to weet  
We stand up peerless.

*Cleo.* Excellent falsehood! 40  
Why did he marry Fulvia, and not love her?  
I'll seem the fool I am not. Antony  
Will be himself.

*Ant.* But stirr'd by Cleopatra.  
Now for the love of Love, and her the soft hours,  
Let's not confound the time with conference harsh; 45  
There's not a minute of our lives should stretch  
Without some pleasure now. What sport to-night? (I, i, ll.33-47)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Blakemore Evans, et. al., eds., *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974).

The love from Antony to Cleopatra is reciprocated by "Excellent falsehood!" on the side of Cleopatra. That note synchronizes with the falsity of love which Cleopatra has within her heart for Antony. But suddenly, there is a shift to talk about Fulvia discussing a major issue on love and marriage: which is first? "Why did he marry Fulvia and not love her?" Antony was keen to use every minute with his beloved Cleopatra, however and how long that time was, did not matter.

*Ant.* Speak to me home, mince not the general  
tongue; 105

Name Cleopatra as she is call'd in Rome.  
Rail thou in Fulvia's phrase, and taunt my faults  
With such full license as both truth and malice  
Have power to utter.

*Ant.* Let him appear.  
These strong Egyptian fetters I must break, 116  
Or lose myself in dotage.

...

*Enter another Messenger with a letter.*

What are you?

[2] *Mess.* Fulvia thy wife is dead.

*Ant.* Where died she?

...

I must from this enchanting queen break off;  
Ten thousands harms, more than the ills I know,  
My idleness doth hatch. How now, Enobarbus? 130

...

*Enter Enobarbus.*

*Eno.* What's your pleasure, sir?

*Ant.* I must with haste from hence.

*Eno.* Why then we kill all our women. We see how mortal  
an unkindness is to them; if they suffer our departure,  
death's the word.

135

(I, ii, ll. 106-135)

Antony realized that there was a lot of gossip back in Rome about him and Cleopatra. He showed a lot of sadness when he heard of the death of his wife Fulvia. His announcement to "break" these Egyptian fetters of love to Cleopatra is nothing but a frivolous warning in a fit of anger. Even if the more serious threat "I must from this enchanting queen break off" is taken into consideration we understand that a fit of anger will not free Antony at all. Enobarbus blamed Antony for the death of

Fulvia as she died because of his departure, "death is the word". Even so, Cleopatra is only an "Egyptian" for Antony to "dish" (II, vii, l.126), to serve or to enjoy.

*Cleo.* See where he is, who's with him, what he does.  
I did not send you. If you find him sad,  
Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report  
That I am sudden sick. Quick, and return. 5

[Exit Alexas.]

*Char.* Madam methinks if you did love him dearly,  
**You do not hold the method to enforce**  
**The like from him.**

(I, iii, ll. 3-9)

...  
*Cleo.* O most false love!  
Where be the sacred vials thou shouldst fill  
With sorrowful water? Now I see, I see,  
In Fulvia's death, how mine receiv'd shall be, 65

(I, iii, ll. 63-65)

Untrue love was even known to the assistants of Cleopatra. Her attendant Charnian felt that she was only acting and not at all true in her love for Antony. Cleopatra confined her false love for Antony.

*Case.* You may see, Lepidus, and henceforth know,  
It is not Caesar's natural vice to hate  
[Our] great competitor. From Alexandria  
This is the news: he fishes, drinks, and wastes  
The lamps of night and revel; is not more manlike  
Than Cleopatra; nor the queen of Ptolomy  
More womanly than he; hardly gave audience, or  
[Vouchsaf'd] to think he had partners. You shall find there  
A man who is th' [abstract] of all faults  
That all men follow.

(I, iv, ll. 1-9)

Antony was seen by Octavius and Caesar as behaving "more womanly" than Cleopatra herself. He was seen as the abstract of all faults "That all men follow". That means that Egypt was capable of changing the manly masculine nature of Antony into something quite feminine. He became even more feminine than Cleopatra herself.

*Pom.* He dreams; I know they are in Rome to-gether,  
Looking for Antony. But all the charms of love, 20  
Salt Cleopatra, soften thy wan'd lip!  
Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both,

Tie up the libertine in a field of feasts,  
Keep his brain fuming; epicurean cooks  
Sharpen with cloyless sauce his appetite,  
That sleep and feeding may prorogue his honor,  
Even till a Lethe'd dullness-

25

(I, v, ll. 16-27)

Pompey gives a very thorough description of the status in Rome: Caesar gets money and loses hearts, Mark Antony is in war in Egypt, Lepidus flatters both, and he loves neither of them. That's a very bad national situation in Rome. It is worsened by the love adventure of Antony for Cleopatra who is seen -by Pompey- as "salt" who has her "witchcraft" mixed with her "beauty" and both mixed with "lust". Antony's brain was kept "fuming" because of wine which was believed to bring drunkenness. That was believed to change Antony into a dull person, "That sleep and feeding may prorogue his honor,/Even till a Lethe'd dullness" that would be thrown into the world of forgetfulness by the course of time. It was believed that the over-sexuality of Antony and Cleopatra could have damaged all aspects of duty and the mission he was sent for in Egypt. Sexuality was believed to bring weakness and all moral diseases to Antony. That was why the Romans were worried about his stay in Egypt. But the course of events was against the expectations of Pompey. Romans could not easily forget Antony even with the death of Fulvia and himself being entangled to the body of Cleopatra and **enchanted by her love.**

*Eno.* Would we had all such wives, that the men  
might go to wars with the women!

66

*Ant.* So much uncurable, her garboils, Caesar,  
Made out of her impatience-which not wanted  
Shrowdness of policy too-I grieving grant  
Did you too much disquiet. For that you must  
But say I could not help it.

70

*Caes.* I wrote to you,  
When rioting in Alexandria you  
Did pocket up my letters; and with taunts  
Did gibe my missive out of audience.

...  
Truth is, that Fulvia,  
To have me out of Egypt, made wars here;  
For which myself, the ignorant motive, do  
So far ask pardon as befits mine honor  
To stoop in such a case.  
...

Caes. There is my hand.

A sister I bequeath you, whom no brother

Did ever love so dearly. Let her live

To join our kingdoms and our hearts, and never

Fly off our loves again!

Lep.

Happily, amen!

150

(II, ii, ll. 67-153)

Antony was never happy with Fulvia. It was a good opportunity for both Caesar and Antony to send the latter to Alexandria (Egypt). Caesar would get rid of a partner (one of the Roman triumvirs). Antony, in turn would get rid -though for a short time- of the disturbances of Fulvia. Fortunately, Fulvia died. Consequently, Antony's mission to Egypt was seen as all beneficial for Antony. He thought he was relieved from the disturbances of Fulvia. The Romans were talking -in a sense- decently of the adventures of Antony with Cleopatra. The death of Fulvia stands for the demarcation line between two types of speech: A) before the death of Fulvia, the Romans talked indecently, but not very proudly of Antony. They saw him as a victim at the hands of Cleopatra. B) After the death of Fulvia, the discourse is radically changed. Antony was married to Octavia, Caesar's sister, after a very strong speech given by Agrippa to command her marriage to Antony. We might conclude that love of Cleopatra was seen as illegal in both cases. Antony was married to Fulvia then to Octavia. With the first, his love to Cleopatra was seen as treason to Caesar and his duty as a Roman soldier. With the second, his love was seen as treason to Caesar, his duty as a Roman soldier, and treason to his Roman wife who was Caesar's sister.

Discussing the role of women in Shakespeare, Liz Lewis said, "In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare again explores the idea of the victim within a patriarchal society. However, in this play the gender roles are inverted and it is Antony who is the true victim. Stifled by the rules of the patriarchal society of Rome which expects him to retain a masculine side only, and not to adopt the feminine qualities of passion, emotion, and love, Antony's control over his life diminishes. Within such patriarchal confines the role of lover must be subordinate to the male's political role. After finding an extraordinary and powerful love with Cleopatra - which Shakespeare establishes to perfection - Antony is unable to accept the 'business first' principle of the patriarchal laws. Like the typical female heroine of a tragedy, Antony's plight escalates when he is rushed into an arranged marriage of convenience. He cannot remain away from Cleopatra and faithful to Octavia who symbolizes Caesar and the power of Patriarchal Rome. He says 'though I make this marriage for my peace, / I'th'

East my pleasure lies'. Inevitably he returns to Egypt and Cleopatra, and causes a rift which can never again be cemented between himself and Caesar, which ultimately results in war."<sup>4</sup>

*Agr.* O, rare for Antony!

...  
From the barge  
A strange invisible perfume hits the sense  
Of the adjacent wharfs. The city cast  
Her people out upon her; and Antony  
Enthron'd i' th' market-place, did sit alone, 215  
Whistling to th' air, which, but for vacancy,  
Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,  
And made a gap in nature.

*Agr.* Rare Egyptian!  
*Eno.* Upon her landing, Antony sent to her,  
Invited her to supper. She replied, 220

It should be better he became her guest;  
Which she entreated. Our courteous Antony,  
Whom ne'er the word of "No" woman heard speak,  
Being barber'd ten times o'er, goes to the feast;  
And for his ordinary pays his heart 225  
For what his eyes eat only.

*Agr.* Royal wench!  
She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed;  
He ploughed her, and she cropp'd.

(II, ii, ll.205-229)

Starting this point on, Cleopatra will be described by the Romans using the worst and most obscene words ever used in Shakespeare's works: "Rare Egyptian" (rarity in evil), "woman" (in its derogatory and vulgar sense for a Queen) and a "Royal wench" who was "ploughed" in a sexual intercourse which resulted in the pregnancy and birth of Caesarion "cropp'd", as a fruit of this seemingly illegal relationship. Although Agrippa and Enobarbus know for sure that Antony is a man all for any woman, "our courteous Antony", "Whom ne'er the word of 'No' woman heard speak". All blame is laid to Cleopatra as a hostess and a guest to the passionate Antony. Cleopatra, though seen as rare by Enobarbus, was an ordinary thing in the case of Antony, "And for the ordinary pays his heart./For what his eyes eat only." Cleopatra – accordingly- was nothing but a bed-made. She was the same to Caesar

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<sup>4</sup> Liz Lewis November 2001, Shakespeare's women: Shakespeare's treatment of women in the tragedies Hamlet, Othello and Antony and Cleopatra . Liz Lewis @ hotmail.com

nothing but a land that was cropped "by him" and gave them "fruit" – Caesarion. It is worthwhile mentioning to say that Egypt, at that time, was a fertile land and rich with wheat as a major crop. That could be one of the reasons why these military missions were sent. Hence, the words 'plough' and 'crop' were used in harmony with the agricultural activities in Egypt.

*Enter Cleopatra, Charmian, Iras, and Alexas.*

*Cleo.* Give me some music; music, moody food  
Of us that trade in love.

*Omnes.* The music, ho!

*Enter Mardian the Eunuch.*

*Cleo.* Let it alone, let's to billards. Come, Charmian.

*Char.* My arm is sore, best play with Mardian.

*Cleo.* As well a woman with an eunuch play'd  
As with a woman. Come, you'll play with me, sir?

5

*Mar.* As well as I can, madam.

(II, v, ll. 1-7)

This very sheer racism in the world of sexuality is not confined to Cleopatra as a representative of Egypt's females; it is extended widely to include even the men of her palace whose language is oriented by sex and sexuality. Cleopatra in this situation is introduced as a very rude, vulgar, "ordinary" woman who talks very freely of sex and sex-practice. "As well a woman with an eunuch play'd./As with a woman. Come, you'll play with me, sir?" Cleopatra in this way could be rendered as the source of all evil in the play. The dilemma of the Romans –as largely as the dilemma of the Egyptians- could be laid to her vicious, lusty and capricious behavior of an ordinary woman. This could be seen as an attitude to demean and defame the other in the eyes of the Romans, a technique followed by Shakespeare who bespoke his characters to talk this way. It was the nature of the colonizer to "penetrate" and work over the geographical space of the Orient as a premise for colonizing it."<sup>5</sup> If we consider Egypt a part of the Orient of the Roman times, Said's statement will be very significant to understand the Romans' attack on Cleopatra and Egypt. "In the classical and often temporarily remote form in which it was constructed by the Orientlist, in the precisely actual form in which the modern orient was lived in, studied, or imagined, the geographical space of that Orient was penetrated, worked over, taken hold of. The

<sup>5</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p.211.



cumulative effect of decades of so sovereign a Western handling turned the Orient from alien into colonial space." This colonial space had to be derogated, defamed and even dehumanized. The nations targeted by the super-powers, to be attacked by them, are introduced as the most savage, the most ignorant, and in the case of Cleopatra the most treacherous. This would deprive Cleopatra of any qualifications of self "Preservation" or national "Preservation". Consequently, that would justify for the Roman occupation of her land. "He that will impartially. Survey the Nation of the world, will find so much of their governments, religions, and manners brought in and continued amongst them by these means, that he will have but little Reverence for the Practices which are in use and credit amongst Men, and will have Reason to think, that the woods and forests, where irrational untaught inhabitants keep right by following Nature, are fitter to give us Rules, than cities and palaces, where those that, call themselves Civil and Rational, go out of their way by the Authority of the example."<sup>6</sup> These means are shaped by the image composed by who think they are "the fittest to lead"; the colonizer in our case. They see the other as an 'extravagant object'. Therefore, this prejudiced attitude is reached very easily as related to their leaders, their practices, and customs. That is the same situation of the Romans on the Egyptians and their Queen Cleopatra.

*Cleo.* Some innocents scape not the thunderbolt.

Melt Egypt into Nile! and kindly creatures

Turn all to serpents! Call the slave again,

Though I am mad, I will not bite him. Call!

80

*Char.* He is afraid to come.

*Cleo.* I will not hurt him.

These hands do lack nobility that they strike

A meaner than myself, since I myself

Have given myself the cause. Come hither, sir.

(II, v, ll. 77-83)

If Antony said "Let Rome in Tiber melt" Cleopatra would, by analogy, say "Melt Egypt into Nile!" The geographical space which Edward Said just argued about was introduced in terms of analogy for comparing the feeling of the two royal lovers and how much they were ready to sacrifice for their love. Rome was sacrificed by Antony although he could and would not be able to rule Rome while Cleopatra would melt the whole of Egypt into the Nile and she had the throne of the whole of

<sup>6</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (London: Oxford Diversity Press, 1965), p. 219.

Egypt, people, land and sea. Therefore, Cleopatra was –in the conclusion- quite more generous than her Roman lover Antony; a message that was neither understood nor appreciated by the Romans.

*Cleo.* Is she as tall as me?  
*Mess.* She is not, madam.  
*Cleo.* Didst hear her speak? Is she shrill-tongu'd or low?  
*Mess.* Madam, I heard her speak; she is low- voic'd.  
*Cleo.* That's not so good. He cannot like her long.  
*Char.* Like her? O Isis! 'tis impossible. 15  
*Cleo.* I think so, Charmian: dull of tongue, and dwarfish.  
What majesty is in her gait? Remember,  
If e'er thou look'st on majesty.  
... 25  
*Char.* Excellent  
*Cleo.* Guess at her years, I prithee.  
*Mess.* Madam,  
She was a widow-  
*Cleo.* Widow? Charmian, hark.  
*Mess.* And I do think that she's thirty.  
*Cleo.* Bear'st thou her face in mind? Is't long or round?  
*Mess.* Round, even to faultiness. 30  
(III, iii, ll. 11-30)

Cleopatra made a very thorough investigation about the characteristics and personal qualities of Octavia, Antony's new Roman wife. She was worried about the ability of Octavia to speak highly or loudly, her body whether it was small or big, and the color of her hair. Fortunately, Cleopatra was relieved and satisfied with the answers of the messenger and promised to reassign him and apologized for him. Octavia was "dull of tongue, and dwarfish", "a widow" of "thirty" years old and her face was "Round, even to faultiness." The last item cheered her up very much. Octavia cannot be compared with the charming beauty of Cleopatra. Antony would remain charmed by his lady love.

*Caes.* Which soon he granted, 60  
Being an abstract 'tween his lust and him.  
*Oct.* Do not say so, my lord.  
*Case.* I have eyes upon him,  
And his affairs come to me on the wind.  
Where is he now?  
*Oct.* My lord, in Athens.  
*Case.* No, my most wronged sister, Cleopatra

Hath nodded him to her. He hath given his empire  
Up to a whore, who now are levying  
The kings o'th' earth for war.

(III, vi, ll. 60-68)

Caesar asked his sister Octavia, Antony's wife, to keep an eye on her husband. They both know that Antony was in deep love with Cleopatra. They realized that Octavia's marriage would never put an end to Antony's lust and love for Cleopatra. Caesar was very severe on describing Cleopatra as a "whore", "He hath given his empire Up to a whore..." This could be the culmination of the offensive discourse directed to Cleopatra.

*Cleo.* 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.

(III, vii, ll. 16-20)

Cleopatra was greatly offended by Caesar's, as profanely as the Romans', allegations. Her response was quite sharp and severe. She would justify her behavior as a means to protect her country against the Roman invader as if her love for Antony was, really, a false one as she said before and that she would behave as "a man" in the battlefield.

*Eno.* That I beheld. 15  
Mine eyes did sicken at the sight and could not  
Endure a further view.

*Scar.* She once being loof'd,  
The noble ruin of her magic, Antony,  
Claps on his sea-wing, and (like a dotting mallard),  
Leaving the fight in heighth, flies after her. 20  
I never saw an action of such shame;  
Experience, manhood, honor, ne'er before  
Did violate so itself.

*Eno.* Alack, alack!

(III, x, ll. 15-23)

Antony being enchanted by Cleopatra was not confined to his pacific world on land. Her enchanting powers had entangled his body and soul even in the battlefield. Therefore, Antony –in the height of the sea battle- gave up fighting and ran after Cleopatra in a very shameful way never seen before by Scarus, and Enobarbus, two friends of Antony.

*Eros.* Sir, the Queen. 5  
*Ant.* O, whither hast thou led me, Egypt? See  
How I convey my shame out of thine eyes  
By looking back what I have left behind  
'story'd in dishonor.  
*Cleo.* O my lord, my lord,  
Forgive my fearful sails! I little thought 55  
You would have followed.  
*Ant.* Egypt, thou knew'st too well  
My heart was to thy rudder tied by th' strings,  
And thou shouldst [tow] me after. O'er my spirit  
[Thy] full supremacy thou knew'st, and that  
Thy beck might from the bidding of the gods 60  
Command me.  
*Cleo.* O, my pardon!

(III, xi, ll. 50-62)

Even Antony himself confessed this defeat by the "fearful sails" of Cleopatra, of her magic more than of her ships. Egypt and Queen are the two names used –alternately– by Antony on addressing Cleopatra.

*Thid.* Shall I say to Caesar 65  
What you require of him? for he partly begs  
To be desir'd to give. It much would please him,  
That of his fortunes you should make a staff  
To lean upon; but it would warm his spirits  
To hear from me you had left Antony, 70  
And put yourself under his shroud,  
The universal landlord.  
*Cleo.* What's your name?  
*Thid.* My name is Thidias.  
*Cleo.* Most kind messenger,  
Say to great Caesar this in [deputation]: 74  
I kiss his conqu'ring hand. Tell him, I am prompt  
To lay my crown at 's feet, and there to kneel.  
Tell him, from his all-obeying breath I hear  
The doom of Egypt.

(III, xiii, ll. 65-78)

Shakespeare introduced Cleopatra as the most arrogant and most nationalistic citizen of the world on her refusal to the dictations of Caesar. He would subjugate her as not a woman but as the Queen of Egypt and the Egyptians. She could anticipate the defeat of her country, "I hear/The

doom of Egypt." But, we understand that she would never give up her love to Antony as well.

*Caes.* Go forth, Agrippa, and begin the fight.  
Our will is Antony be took alive;  
Make it so known.

*Agr.* Caesar, I shall. [Exit]  
(IV, vi, ll. 1-3)

...  
*Cleo.* Lord of lords!  
O infinite virtue, com'st thou smiling from  
The world's great snare uncaught?

*Ant.* Mine nightingale,  
We have beat them to their beds. What, girl, though grey  
Do something mingle with our younger brown, yet ha' we 20  
A brain that nourishes our nerves, and can  
Get goal for goal of youth. Behold this man,  
Commend unto his lips thy [favoring] hand.  
Kiss it, my warrior; he hath fought today  
As if a god, in hate of mankind, had 25  
Destroyed in such a shape.

*Cleo.* I'll give thee, friend,  
An armor all of gold; it was a king's.

(IV, viii, ll. 17-27)

The arrival of Caesar in Alexandria was a real challenge to both Antony and Cleopatra after the latter refused and rejected all his wishes and orders to give up her love for the first. Caesar found it an adequate reaction to come to Alexandria for two reasons:

- a) To separate Antony from Cleopatra.
- b) To capture the land of Egypt and her arrogant queen.

Antony realized that the arrival of Caesar was the beginning of the end to his love for Cleopatra and his life in general. But Caesar was more interested in having Antony captured "alive" to reunite him with his sister Octavia and the whole of the Roman body. Caesar felt that the body and soul of Antony were both polluted by this Ptolemaic Queen. The only catharsis and purgation could be done only when Antony was taken back to Rome. Octavia's body and bed stood for the same purgatorial as seen by Caesar. In the first round of war, Caesar was defeated. Antony and Cleopatra celebrated their triumph by kissing the "favoring" hands of Cleopatra. Antony -unconsciously- used the word "my warrior" on addressing Cleopatra on this occasion. The word "warrior" here could be read in two ways: a warrior for the cause of their love; or a warrior

against him if we consider the "falsehood" of their love which is talked of by both of them in more than one situation.

*Ant.* All is lost!  
This foul Egyptian hath betrayed me. 10  
My fleet hath yielded to the foe, and yonder  
Thy cast their caps up and carouse together  
Like friends long lost. Triple-turn'd whore! 'tis thou  
Hast sold me to this novice, and my heart  
Makes only wars on thee. Bid them all fly; 15  
For when I am reveng'd upon my charm,  
I have done all. Bid them all fly, be gone.

[Exit Scarus]

O sun, thy uprise shall I see no more,  
Fortune and Antony part here, even here 19  
Do we shake hands. All come to this? The hearts  
That [spannell'd] me at heels, to whom I gave  
Their wishes, do discandy, melt their sweets  
On blossoming Caesar; and this pine is bark'd,  
That overtopp'd them all. Betray'd I am.  
O this false soul of Egypt! this grave charm, 25  
Whose eye beck'd forth my wars and call'd them Home,  
Whose bosom was my crownet, my chief end,  
Like a right gipsy, hath at fast and loose  
Beguil'd me to the very heart of loss.  
What Eros, Eros!

(IV, xii, ll. 9-29)

Towards the very end of the play, Antony's fleet was defeated. He realized that Cleopatra did deceive him in the battlefield as wildly as in the world of love. It is quite surprising to see that the language of Antony –at the moment of revelation- is quite typical of and identical with the language of the Romans. Cleopatra is no more than

A) "Triple-turn'd whore" to Julius Caesar, Pompey, and Antony.

B) An Egyptian foul.

C) False soul of Egypt who betrayed him.

Although Mardian tried to convince Antony that Cleopatra was sincere in her love for him, Antony dismissed Mardian and offended him very severely.

*Ant.* Peace!  
Not Caesar's valor hath o'erthrown Antony,  
But Antony's hath triumph'd on itself. 15  
*Cleo.* So it should be, that none but Antony

Should conquer Antony, but woe 'tis so!  
*Ant.* I am dying, Egypt, dying; only  
I here importune death awhile, until  
Of many thousands kisses the poor last  
I lay upon thy lips.

20

*Cleo.* I dare not, dear-  
Dear my lord, pardon –I dare not,  
Lest I be taken.

...  
*Ant.* I am dying, Egypt, dying.

Give me some wine, and let me speak a little.

*Cleo.* No, let me speak, and let me rail so high,  
That the false huswife Fortune break her wheel,  
Provok'd by my offense.

(XV, xv, ll. 14-44)

As a Roman soldier, Antony put an end to his life by running onto his sword. This is typical of Cassius in *Julius Caesar* who put an end to his life with his dagger, "I know where I will wear this dagger then; I Cassius from bondage will deliver Cassius" (I, iii, ll. 89-90)

*Cleo.* Shall they hoist me up,  
And show me to the shouting varlotry  
Of censuring Rome?

55

...  
*All.* Make way there! Caesar!

*Caes.* Which is the Queen of Egypt?

*Dol.* It is the Emperor, madam.

*Cleopatra kneels.*

*Caes.* Arise, you shall not kneel.

I pray you rise, rise, Egypt.

*Cleo.* Sir, the gods

115

Will have it thus, my master and my lord  
I must obey.

*Caes.* Take to you no hard thoughts.

The record of what injuries you did us,

Though written in our flesh, we shall remember

As things but done by chance.

(V, ii, ll. 55-313)

If Antony preferred to die in the Roman way, Cleopatra had opted to die in the Nile and preferred its mud to any decent place in Rome as a prisoner of Octavius Caesar, "Rather a ditch in Egypt /Be gentle grave unto me! rather on Nilus' mud /Lay me stark-nak'd, and let the water-flies

/Blow me into abhorring! rather make /My country's high pyramids my gibbet."

And hang me up in chains! Caesar was very cautious not to use any titles that may give Cleopatra any air of pride or shame at this very critical moment when she surrendered and kneeled to her new master, "my master and my lord I must obey."

[To an asp, which she applies to her breast.]

With thy sharp teeth this knot intricate  
Of life at once unite. Poor venomous fool, 305  
Be angry, and dispatch. O, couldst thou speak,  
That I might hear thee call great Caesar ass  
Unpolicied!

*Char.* O eastern star!

*Cleo.* Peace, peace!

Dost thou not see my baby at my breast, 309  
That sucks the nurse asleep?

*Char.* O, break! O, break!

*Cleo.* As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle-  
O Antony! –Nay, I will take thee too:

[Applying another asp to her arm]

What should I stay-

*Dies.*

Caesar believed in fate. He told Cleopatra that she met this tragic end because her fate doomed her to be so. But Cleopatra did not –as a warrior- give in at all. She died in the way the eastern star should approve and ratify. Therefore, she gave way to the asps to "Be angry, and dispatch", their poison into her breasts. She died "As sweet as balm, as soft as air..." with a last word to join Antony instantly and very quickly.



## **Conclusion**

After tracing the image of Egypt, Cleopatra and the Egyptians in Antony and Cleopatra, we could reach the following:

- Antony and Cleopatra managed to represent a comprehensive image of Egypt and Cleopatra as seen by the Romans in that play.
- The action in the play is divided into two sections:
  - a. The first section was during Fulvia's lifetime. Action, in this section, was much less than action in the second one. The language discourse, at this stage, was less offensive than the language in the second half of the play.
  - b. The second half was after the death of Fulvia. Her death was followed by the marriage of Antony to Octavia, Caesar's sister. More action was seen in the second section than in the first. Therefore, the language discourse used in castigating Egypt was much severer and much more offensive than the first.

\* Shakespeare could be seen as one of the earliest colonist writers. The image of Cleopatra as a 'royal wench' and 'a whore' paved the way for Octavius Caesar to occupy Egypt and put an end to its seemingly- powers of evil. In addition to that, Egypt –at that time- was the source of so many crops, especially wheat. That made the Romans more interested and more connected the riches of Egypt.

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**Abstract**  
**Egypt as Seen by Shakespeare**  
**in *Antony and Cleopatra***

This paper attempts to study William Shakespeare's (1564-1616) view of Egypt as introduced in *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607?) (1608?). Shakespeare applied the name of Egypt to the land which was ruled by Cleopatra and as an alternate given name for the Queen herself. Shakespeare introduced Antony as "enchanted" by the Queen of Egypt, Cleopatra saw her love for Antony as "false" and the Romans saw Egypt as the "waste" land. Antony is seen as "... the abstract of all faults/That all men follow" while Cleopatra was seen as "Royal wench" and "a whore". This paper will try to find out the reasons that led Shakespeare to prejudice against Egypt -the Queen as severely as the land. Was it the situation of the Romans of that time to hate Egypt and the Egyptians? Did this attitude have anything to do with the imperialistic attitude of defaming and miniaturizing the enemy (the future colonized) in order to justify for colonizing his land? The paper concludes that William Shakespeare was one of the earliest racists who prejudiced against the other ethnic groups. His attitude against Cleopatra could be incorporated with his anti-feminist attitude in general.

## ملخص

### مصر كما يراها شكسبير في " أنطونيو و كليوباترا "

يحاول هذا البحث دراسة وجهة نظر وليام شكسبير (١٥٦٤ - ١٦١٦) في مصر، أرضاً و ملكةً كما سماها في مسرحيته أنطونيو و كليوباترا (١٦٠٧)(١٦٠٨). ولقد قدم شكسبير أنطونيو على أنه "مسحور" بملكة مصر، و أن كليوباترا رأت خبها له على أنه حب "رائف". و الرومانيون رأوا مصر على أنها "أرض الضياع"، أما أنطونيو فقد صوره شكسبير على أنه "تلخيص لكل أخطاء الرجال" في حين أن كليوباترا صوّرت على أنها "فتاة ملكية لعوب" و أنها "عاهرة". و تحاول هذه الدراسة الوصول إلى الأسباب التي أدت إلى أن يتخذ شكسبير هذا الموقف المتحيز ضد مصر، أرضاً وملكة . وتطرح الدراسة أسئلة منها : هل كان موقف الرومانيين في ذلك العصر أن يكرهوا مصر والمصريين ؟ هل لهذا الموقف علاقة بالتوجهات الاستعمارية التي تقضى بالتشهير بالخصم الذي ينوى المستعمر احتلال أرضه مستقبلاً وكذا التقليل من حجمه ووضعته إلى أقل حد ممكن، حتى يكون ذلك مبرراً لاستعمارهم ؟ وتنتهي الدراسة إلى أن شكسبير كان واحداً من أوائل الكتاب العنصريين الذين انحازوا ضد المجموعات العرقية غير الأوربية. كما تسعى الدراسة لأن تثبت أن موقف شكسبير ضد كليوباترا يمكن أن يكون ضمن موقفه المبطن ضد المرأة وقضاياها .