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## Otherness and Gender Subjugation in *Antony and Cleopatra*

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### Abstract

Indeed, a significant disjunction is present between the Orient and the Occident; Orientalism by Said is a thorough example of this strong argument. Ethnic and gender hierarchies entangle the two great noble persons from East and West, turning into a fire that blindly follows footsteps, endagerously shaken or may threaten to undermine the whole Empire's foundation. The article is an in-depth and comprehensive research study that explores how the Empires of the East and West are perceived as morally corrupt due to their excessive emphasis on duty. It outlines the factors of trade, as well as the relationships between Eastern and Western powers, and cultural assimilation, in the context of Imperial Rome's expansion to the East. Additionally, it highlights Shakespearean themes of love and madness. Furthermore, it also asserts that Europe at the time of the play, *Antony and Cleopatra*, was anxiously concerned about the expansion of Islam, as well as the Turkification and conversion of colonizers to nativization. The conclusive argument is an assurance that masculinity and femininity are the two contradictory subversions that corrupt civilizations.

**Keywords:** Orientalism, Gender Hierarchies, Cultural Assimilation, Love and Madness

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### 1. Introduction

This paper argues that Shakespeare's descriptions of Cleopatra and Othello mirror more contemporary English themes of gendered and racial Otherness, specifically via the perspective of Orientalist rhetoric and colonial masculinity. It also sowed seeds of concerning matters, including race, gender, and otherness, which were cultivated in the past; however, disputes based on race and ethnicity have long plagued human civilization and continue to do so in the modern day (Nyoni, 2012). The guileful Cleopatra's dominance of power over Rome is discerned as a threat to the Empire's patriarchal mastery, aligning with Said's assertion on Orientalism, the East is less capable, bound to inferiority (uncivilized and irrational) in the eyes of the West, which thinks of subjugating and ruling over third world nations through colonial imperial hierarchy. Contemporary English anxieties about Shakespeare's world, particularly the erosion of Eastern countries' identity of masculine Englishness, are explored in this paper through Antony's crush on Cleopatra.

Furthermore, it will formally mark, Antony's loss of sense and 'going native,' as he loses interest in his motherland and becomes increasingly involved in the Egyptian way of life, ultimately relocating towards the exotic East, where he becomes feminized and forgets his loyalty to Rome, his mission, and its ideals. The paper also aims to demonstrate that it was not only literary graffiti that highlighted the East through English discourse; adventurers and explorers also showed a spectacular interest in Egyptology<sup>1</sup>. For example, one of the first British explorers to Egypt, George Sandy, as Cassidy Cash reveals in her article, Sandy's views on the pyramids of Egypt and the Sphinx embody various prevalent cultural and religious approaches (2019) characteristic of early 17th-century England, a Renaissance era. The extensive worries of conversion of the West into the East was a dreadful potent of the time when the Ottoman Empire had the adverse power and English people, who interestingly became Turks, left Christianity and the West. The fear had actual foundations before that, as well as in Chaucer's "The Man of Law's Tale" from *The Canterbury Tales*, where the opening lines correspond to the idea that the Arab/Middle East/East/Islamic World/Orients is rich:

In Syria once dwelt a company  
Of rich merchants, and moreover trustworthy and true,  
That wherever they sent their oriental goods,  
Cloth of gold, and satins rich in color (n.d., line 134-137).

In the literary canon of the territories ruled by the Jacobean and Elizabethan monarchs, the status of women was examined and frequently denounced. Simultaneously, women were portrayed as audiences to generate more attention (Dusinberre, 1996). The concluding works of Shakespeare represent a literary supersession of masculinity, characterized by resistance through "feminine sexual and socio-political power" (McAdam, 2012, p. 245), as exemplified by *Antony and Cleopatra*. Furthermore, it will be contended that Cleopatra fails to lead to Rome, a trait that amplifies the English apprehension regarding the fantasization of the feminization of Englishmen in the presence of sexual and lusty Eastern women. Cleopatra, together with her environment, is portrayed as epitomizing uncertainty, exoticism, allure, enigma, and cunning, particularly in contrast to other female heroines in Shakespeare's oeuvre.

Contrary to the conventional portrayal of women as mere bodies, subservient and submissive due to innate impulses, Cleopatra embodies deliberate agency, employing her intelligence to strategize throughout the play and ultimately orchestrating the hero's demise. Ultimately, Shakespearean tragedy subverts gender and power hierarchies, exposing the West's anxiety around the potential interchangeability of their identity and the fear of assimilating into the native culture, so losing their own identity in their interactions with the Turks. For instance, in another of Shakespeare's works, *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*, the anti-hero protagonist is intricately linked to themes of Moorish identity, Turkish associations, Islam, Asia, and untamed creatures through Shakespeare's nuanced characterization. Iago compares Othello in Act 1, Scene 1: "with a Barbary horse"... "your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs" (1998). On another occasion, Iago addresses Barbantio:

Zounds, sir, you're robb'd, for shame put on your gown,  
...  
Even now, now, very now, an old black ram  
Is tupping your white ewe? Arise, arise,  
Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you  
...  
Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago (1993, pp. 11-13).

The discriminatory and disparaging comment that Rodrigo makes about "the thick-lips owe" (Shakespeare, 1998, 1.1) is another example. It is common practice to associate locals with animals, often labeling them with an inferiority complex and linking them to animals (Kabbani, 1994). Even in modern times, the East continues to encounter prejudice due to the racial terminology that emerged during that era (Patterson, 2019).

*Antony and Cleopatra*, a magnum opus and a well-known, universally acknowledged work by William Shakespeare, is a tragedy composed between 1606 and 1607 as part of the First Folio, which was released in 1623. Shakespeare drew inspiration from "The Life of Mark Antony," a part of Plutarch's *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, which Sir Thomas North translated in 1579, tells the Imperial Rome, where it depicts three Roman triumvirs, one of whom is Antony, who governs the East and is consumed by his fascination for Egypt. He leads a voluptuous and passionate lifestyle and engages in a fascinating relationship with the nation's exotic queen, Cleopatra. Augustus reproaches Roman triumvir Antony for dereliction of his responsibilities as both a politician and an army general.

Caesar perceives the Roman mission in Egypt as having been feminized due to his prolonged stay in Egypt. Antony's decline in rationality, a cognitive attribute often tied to masculinity, and his occasional blindness in making uncertain choices during the play are closely correlated with his time spent in Egypt. Consequently, he assembles a substantial military force opposite Antony and then transmits his swarms and fleet to Egypt. The Roman general, influenced by Cleopatra, preferred engaging in naval combat with Caesar. He permits Cleopatra to oversee Egypt's naval vessels despite significant opposition. Ultimately, Antony's armies are defeated, resulting in the nobleman's complete loss due to his profound affection for the Egyptian Queen. Upon receiving the erroneous report of Cleopatra's demise, Antony instructs one of his servants to terminate his life, seeking to reunite with his diva in immortality. However, the deputy commits suicide rather than. Subsequently, Antony plunges the blade into his own body, although the injury does not result in immediate death. The Roman nobleman is transported to Queen Cleopatra's headstone in Egypt, where the two lovers are reunited soon before his demise. Concurrently, Augustus is

strategizing, bringing the Egyptian Queen into the Roman Empire, acting diplomat for the kingdom. Queen of the East discovers Augustus' scheme, so she resolves to terminate herself a sting of venomous snakes. Caesar enters beside the tomb of the Queen, as well as that of beloved Antony.

## 2. Feminized East and Imperial Anxiety

The research paper argues that Shakespeare's portrayal of the East and West is a multifaceted puzzle, where allure, peril, and remiss are just a few of the pieces. These elements characterize the interactions with people, challenging the audience's intellect. It explores several moments that illustrate the connection between sex and ethnicity in *Antony and Cleopatra*. These two hierarchies are interconnected as well as ingrained through a romantic connection between the Queen of the East and the nobleman of the West. The study asserts that Antony embodies the superior Rome, whilst Cleopatra symbolizes the alien and delicate Orient. The literary phenomenon presents a counter argument to the traditional perspective that perceives a rigid dichotomy betwixt an alien, emotive East, as well as the logical, manly West. It contends that Cleopatra's persona subverts these orders, and Shakespearean, instead of endorsing or upholding rigid perceptions of the East and the West, appears to interrogate their immutable essence.

The Orient and the Occident are Eurocentric constructs articulated by Edward Said that establish an artificial binary dichotomy between the Western and Eastern worlds. In his memoir, *Out of Place*, Said contemplates his true identity, questioning whether he is the English-speaking 'Edward' or the Arab exile 'Said' (qtd. in Pannian, 2016, p.1). The east-west divide assigns distinct traits to each group and manifests in several forms. The Orient is perceived as illogical, barbaric, and uncivilized, with its women being portrayed in an eroticized manner. Chandra Taped Mohanty asserts that Western discourses generate a matching array of universal representations of 'third-world women,' including archetypes such as a swathed-chested woman, a formidable mama, a pure and untouched one, and the submissive missis, among others (1988). The duality subjugates multitudes of the Orient, positioning them as the Other and establishing the West as a dominant force.

In contrast, the Occident is regarded as reasonable and cultured, with its women portrayed as submissive, where bigotry, as well as predisposition, manifest towards many literary expressions, positioning the West in a superior power dynamic relative to the Orient, so legitimizing imperialism and colonialism while institutionalizing racism. In his seminal work, *Orientalism* (1978), Said argues for the East as a construct of the West imagination, serving as one of Europe's most entrenched and persistent representations of the Other (Said). Furthermore, utilizing Derrida's notion of the extra, Said contends that the Orient played a part in defining the West (or Europe) in contrast to its reflection, idea, identity, and encounter (1978). He characterizes Western imperialism in the East with condescending depictions of Asia, encompassing the populations and cultures of North Africa, West Asia, commonly referred to as "the Middle East" in European-centered discourses, as well as Asian territories. Said's Orientalism posits that Western studies of the Eastern world are inextricably linked to the imperialist cultures that generated them, rendering most Oriental works fundamentally political and subservient to power (1978). Said's concept of New Humanism and the politics of subjectivity fortify the tenuous notion of the human subject. (Pannian, 2016). Furthermore, he endeavors to confront and address these conflicts through his politics of "worldliness" and his advocacy for a new humanism (Pannian, 2016, p. 3).

Initially, the love and madness tragedy of the Roman general and the Egyptian Queen emerges, confirming an Oriental perspective that merges notions of feminine authority betwixt colonial power, thereby laying the foundation for the play's conflict, joining manly Europe and the Eastern realm. The mannish Empire of Rome, perceived as rational and virtuous, contrasts with its female counterpart, Egypt, which is characterized as sensuous, opulent, unscrupulous, and feminine. Consequently, the fervent affection between Antony and Cleopatra intertwines the intricacies of colonial authority with those of gender and social scale. The lascivious conquest of Cleopatra by Antony represents Rome's dominion over Egypt. Nonetheless, the imbalance of authority cannot be as consistent as it seems, since Cleopatra is acknowledged as a cunning and manipulative individual who employed seduction to achieve her political aims—a notable cliché often attributed to females. The paper examines the consequences of the power structure orders on a recorded structure. It demonstrates how the play can be viewed as a narrative that challenges established discourse and disrupts the relations among East and the West.

Shakespeare employed Egyptology in his works, as evident in *Love's Labor's Lost*, where "Subtle as Sphynx" (n.d., p. 133), a giant monster, the lion's physique with a lady's visage, its statue is seen in Giza, Egypt, strengthens the status of ancient women. In the case of Antony's attraction towards Cleopatra, he is seen as completely surrendering his emotions, senses, and royal duties to his country. Antony exhibits a typically Roman unwillingness to receive Caesar's envoy coming from the Imperial Roman Empire, by declaring, "[H]ere is my space" (Shakespeare, 1606, 1.1.). The Roman aristocrat articulates his need to be in Egypt with his paramour, Cleopatra, an expression that underscores the perception of bodies as less sensual and signifies a deficiency in prudent gravitas. The particular standing of Antony in completing the assigned task, which is often neglected due to his extensive involvement in Egypt, its culture, and his in-depth connection with Cleopatra, is a legitimate answer to the empire's back, the Eastern queen whom ladies and eunuchs always accompany, is viewed as a sign of feminization nearly to Caesar and his companions. What does Antony's weakness suggest regarding colonial superiority?

The paper highlights, the Ottoman Empire of the 16th and 17th centuries arose as the preeminent power state, distinguished by its superior cultural, military, and economic advancements compared to any European state (McJannet, 2006). Their dominion extended across North Africa, the Mediterranean, and Eastern Europe, overseeing numerous commerce pathways of

the East (Mikhail, 2020). Europe struggled to formulate a cohesive answer to its Islamic adversary; instead, various Crusade states frequently entered into saleable and military partnerships alongside the Turks. During such dealings, Western sovereigns neither contemplate nor express any intentions to colonize these populations (Matar, 1999). Consequently, the gendered framework through which cross-cultural interactions with non-European societies are depicted in premature modern literature fails to carry colonial connotations within the Turkish context, and it must be understood in light of the chronological validity of the period, as no colonial practices demonstrated Ottoman dominance across the West (Öktem, 2013). The Queen of Egypt acts for the East cannot be asserted; nonetheless, Cleopatra's depiction shows that she is a decision-making lady who disrupts sex as well as colonial orders, interacting with the apprehensions of Western invaders over the rising influence of forces outside the Christian realm. In 1517, Egypt emerged as the most significant kingdom within the Ottoman Empire, a status it would maintain for the subsequent 350 years. The vanquished Mamluks were incentivized to integrate into the Eyalet<sup>2</sup> that the Ottoman Empire had established. Consequently, a multitude of traditions from the Mamluk period have persisted in central Istanbul (Hathaway, 1995). Meanwhile, Shakespeare wrote a tragedy about two noble persons from East and West, set in Egypt at that time, which was then under Turkish captive rule.

The paper contends that Shakespearean tragedy is rooted in Egypt and Rome, drawing on events from the first century BC, which had been recounted by Romans and other narrators from that era until his own time. This separation between the East and the West has persisted from the earliest periods of history. Since ancient times, the Occidents have consistently portrayed the Orient as inadequate and linked feeble characteristics to it. Juxtaposition of Shakespeare's and Plutarch's portrayals of the Queen of Egypt's arrival in Tarsus (modern-day Turkey) effectively illustrates the development and transmission of a specific European lexicon for depicting the Orient throughout the years (Loomba, 2002). Cleopatra's trance is shown exotically in Act 2, Scene 2, aligning with Said's concept of Orientalism, "The barge she sat in like a burnished throne Burned on the water / ... oars ... Silver / ... picturing that Venus where we see" (Shakespeare, 1606). The throne is similar to a barge; the fragrant atmosphere, the silver paddlers, and the cherubic youths surrounding the Egyptian queen are all emblematic of the alien Other. Via exaggeration, they all appear appealing, stunning, and vibrant, yet simultaneously unconventional to Enobarbus, which clearly illustrates the Western perception of Egypt. The Queen of Egypt's attractiveness seems ineffable, likened to representations similar to the deity Venus and is regarded as surpassing the idealized portrayals of the deity in terms of beauty and allure. She transforms into a fictional persona that facilitates illusions of amorousness and emanates romanticism, providing the delights of a decoy. Enobarbus reflected his fantasies of Orient onto Queen of Egypt and the surroundings. The account contrasts Enobarbus's portrayal with the one provided by Plutarch, "She came sailing up the river Cygnus, in a barge with gilded stern and outspread sails of purple" (1878, 5:178-179).

Cleopatra, in Rome, declines Antony's bidding of dinner, then extends her own, therefore defying his wishes and demonstrating her refusal to submit. Enobarbus articulates that "courteous Antony" (Shakespeare, 1606), who never did encounter rejection, since any lady who received 10 grooming sessions from the barber attends the feast, indicates the notion of hyperreality that surrendering to the East was a failure of the Roman orders. However, his eyes alone find fulfilment. The Egyptian Queen's astuteness, as well as her aim, are apparent. Cleopatra transforms herself into an attractive and alluring being; yet, by substituting Antony's offer to dinner, she endeavours to exert her authority and control over him (the West). In this manner, she presages her future supremacy over the Roman general (Belsey, 2003). Subsequently, upon a rise in drama, the influence of the Queen of Egypt on the Roman executive will pose a tangible challenge onto Western canonical system.

The Queen of Egypt exhibits a range of types, hues, and temperaments, giving a closer look at Medusa, a guardian, a ruler, rather than just a Queen of Egypt. She is shown as a skilled actor adept at manipulating others to fulfill Egyptian enterprising objectives. Cleopatra possesses a multifaceted, skilled character and deliberately manipulates the West through frequently altering her enchanted temper, employing this tactic to get him to comply with her desires. Upon learning that the Roman general is leaving, the aide comments on the Egyptian Queen's potential response under these circumstances, "I have seen her die twenty times upon far poorer moment" (Shakespeare, 1606, 1.2.). He concedes that if Cleopatra were to catch wind of this, she would perish instantly, noting that he has witnessed her demise twenty times over far less significant information. He presumes there must be something exhilarating about death, given her enthusiastic demise. She is implicitly compared to the legendary figure of the Phoenix, possessing a remarkable capacity for perpetual revival, which is indicative of her prolific reproductive capability. Antony responds, "She is a shrewd postman's contemplation" (Shakespeare, 1606, 1.2.). Subsequently, Enobarbus retorts with sarcasm, "Her sighs and tears are like great winds and floods" (Shakespeare, 1606, 1.2.). The aide, comparing the Queen of Egypt to Venus, skilled in assembling "storms and tempests," persists.

Cleopatra is analogized to a savory dish, termed a saltish Egyptian Queen as well as a dish (Shakespeare, 1606, 2.6), and described as a "morsel" remaining on Caesar's plate (Shakespeare, 1606, 3.13.), serving as a metaphor for her enticing allure to men. Nonetheless, she ceases to be a delectable indulgence for the Romans since she incites desire in men, as aide, "Never. He will no. / ... The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry where most she satisfies" (Shakespeare, 1606, 2.2.). Enobarbus is convinced that Antony will never abandon Cleopatra. He cannot refrain from expressing that her diverse allure remains perpetually captivating. He believes that increased familiarity with a lady diminishes her allure. The more one observes Cleopatra, the more the longing she evokes. Even her most egregious flaws possess such allure that holy priests bestow their blessings upon her, even in moments of wanton behavior. Her allure is so potent that she can subvert the patriarchal hierarchy. Cleopatra, the Eastern queen, subverts the patriarchal order by exerting her authority on the Roman administrator through rescinding the bid to eat together and substituting herself. She is highly ambitious and alluring; her fluctuating emotions and capricious disposition serve as practical strategies to entice Antony and manipulate him into fulfilling her desires. In other

words, she has a strategy and a plan to achieve her desire. Such an endeavour necessitates deliberate introspection, followed by review, serving as a workout for one's brain and reason rather than the corporeal attributes traditionally associated with women. For example, Cleopatra dispatches her attendant to inform her of the Roman general's activities (Shakespeare, 1606, 1.3.).

Temptation is more exhilarating than sexual intercourse, Belsey asserts (2003); she insists that female opponent alongside Antony continually capitalizes on the deficiency that incites desire (2003). One facet of Cleopatra's playfulness is her ability to evoke desire or imagination in others through her absence. Neither her appearance nor her presence incites hunger; instead, it is the anticipation of her arrival that evokes the greatest need. Cleopatra entices Antony using cunning manipulations. She does not readily yield to Antony; instead, she incites his yearning for her. Moreover, seduction is more imaginative and nuanced, necessitating both intellect and inventiveness. Consequently, she refrains from pursuing Antony directly; instead, she dispatches Alexas to monitor him, and by providing Antony with contradictory information, she compels him to seek Cleopatra. Cleopatra is aware of her own actions; she intentionally misleads Antony through her manipulations and fluctuates her demeanour. Charmin cautions her that she is not employing the most effective method to elicit his reciprocation. She implores Cleopatra to express her affection for Antony without pretence; nevertheless, the Queen of Egypt responds that you are instructing me to lose that (Shakespeare, 1606, 1.3.). She exercises her agency by employing her brains and ingenuity in a captivating and astute manner.

During the 16th and 17th centuries, with the preeminent power of the Ottoman Empire, British adventurers, seafarers, and cybergunks left the United Kingdom to explore Muslim territories, joining the Ottoman naval fleet, attracted by the advantageous career opportunities that the Turks offered them (Matar, 1999), significant number of them embraced Islam for attain freedom and prosperity under the Ottoman banner. Moreover, artisans and individuals pursuing improved living conditions established themselves throughout Turkish territories (Matar, 1999). The comparison is drawn between Britain and the Turkish Empire during the Shakespearean era, as well as between East and West in the play. Egypt symbolizes the East, as seen in *Antony and Cleopatra*, where Antony, the Western combatant, appears inclined towards abandoning his homeland to establish himself in Egypt, perceiving it as more appealing than his native nation. Cleopatra implores Antony to listen, an envoy from the Imperial Rome, but he responds by preferring to live in the East and does not take care of the Rome (Shakespeare, 1606, 1.3.), considers living in Egypt and devouring the juncture in the company of Cleopatra commendable pursuits, as the Roman warrior is content in Egypt. The fortune-teller cautions Antony in Act 2, Scene 3, that there is no possibility against Caesar, and he will inevitably fail in an contest against Caesar's navy. The fortune-teller states, "He beats thee 'gains the odds'" (Shakespeare, 1606). Following the departure of the soothsayer, Antony contemplates returning to Rome. Despite marrying Octavia, the sister of Caesar, to establish stability, Antony declares, "I' 'the East, my pleasure lies" (Shakespeare, 1606, 2.3.). The East, exemplified by Egypt, embodies the pursuit of desires and sensual gratification.

### 3. Racial Prejudice and Cultural Positioning

Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607) demonstrates a view of Egyptian female empowerment that is consistent with Brewer and Teeter's analysis of Herodotus, which portrayed Egyptian women as powerful in both the home and the marketplace (2007). In addition, Richard Knolles, a renowned chronicler, and his works, which cover the Ottoman Empire and other Oriental kingdoms, were widely read throughout Shakespeare's day; he asserts that Egyptian women consistently selected their spouses (qtd. in Loomba, 2002). Belsey observes that Cleopatra engages with Antony's advancements without shame or regard for their marriage (1996). Orientalism in catastrophic situations places East and West beyond the realm of regulation, portraying it as a haven of indulgence where all actions are permissible, and women freely discuss sexuality, as exemplified by Cleopatra and her eunuchs in Act 1, Scene 5, while awaiting Antony.

The article seeks to reinforce the assertion that discourse surrounding race and human identity was absent prior to the seventeenth century. Anthropologist Agnes Smedley asserts that race, as a means of social stratification and a kind of universal individuality, is a contemporary notion in the history of mankind. The concept and ideology related to race did not exist before to the 17th century (qtd. in Hendricks, 2005). Kabbani emphasizes the self-constructed concept of supremacy among Europeans, perceiving other races as inferior and positioned lower on the hierarchy of existence, with their status varying according to skin color (1994).

In contrast to the virtuous Octavia, portrayed as a naive yet virtuous lady striving for reconciliation among her spouse and sibling, Cleopatra emerges as a multifaceted figure, resolute in her desires and determined to acquire them despite the challenges. Ultimately, she is an Egyptian woman, entitled to select her partner and engage in discussions about her preferences. The ethical dichotomy between Cleopatra and Octavia is evident in the representation of Roman principles through Octavia's character, juxtaposed with the alien queen Cleopatra, who stands in opposition to them. Agrippa asserts that Octavia possesses virtues and graces that distinguish her from all other women. Octavia does not suffocate her husband; instead, she is selected as a mediator between Antony and Caesar to facilitate their coexistence. Cleopatra intentionally distinguishes herself from Octavia and Rome by her governmental authority and feminine conduct. As a contentious and autonomous woman from the East, she embodies the 'other.' In this instance, Octavia exemplifies the traits of an ideal Roman wife, including intelligence, beauty, and, most significantly, loyalty to her husband, delineating a dichotomy between a realm governed by logic, vocation, and sensibleness and one characterized via devotion, delight, and attachment.

Scene 1 of Act 1 depicts Philo discussing Queen Cleopatra of Egypt, “[T]awny front” and “gypsy,” highlighting her ethnic and cultural status, which alludes to characteristics associated with the Orient (Shakespeare, 1606). Philo likens Cleopatra to a gypsy, specifically the Romani, a population that emanated from Indian North side that eventually migrated to the West of European lands, then to Scottish lands, and finally to England in the early 1600s. The erroneously identified common misconception in early modern England was that gypsies came from Egypt (Cressy, 2016). When Shakespeare wrote this play in the seventeenth century, the Egyptians were mistakenly thought to be gypsies (Loomba, 2002). Philo’s observation of Queen Cleopatra illustrates the tribal hierarchy, presenting as equivalent to a gypsy and subordinate to the Romans, who are perceived as racially superior due to their whiteness. During the period of composing, *Antony and Cleopatra*, authorities disfavored gypsies due to the challenges in governing them and their tendency to establish cohesive communities with hierarchical structures. Several of these gypsies were attired as Egyptian monarchs (Loomba, 2002). Similarly, Cleopatra, whom Philo likens to a Romani in the play, presents a challenge to the West, as she is not merely Antony’s Eastern consort but also a sovereign who resists the incorporation of Egypt into the Roman Empire. The Egyptian Queen advocates for her nobility as well as her nation’s autonomy while being under Roman rule. Consequently, Octavia represents Rome (the Occident), which enables the Queen of the East to exist, portrayed as the antithesis of the Western model of a lady, thereby emphasizing her Otherness. Philo is incensed by Antony’s infatuation with the deity of East, referring to her as a harlot. He highlights to Demetrio that Antony, one of the three global leaders, has become “trumpet’s fool” (Shakespeare, 1606, 1.1.). He perceives Cleopatra, a subordinate to the Roman Empire, and then contends that Antony has diminished in stature due to his association with his, the Queen of Egypt.

Evidence from the 1600s and 1700s indicates that a worldview in England operated according to a Great Chain of Being, a hierarchical framework wherein an individual who associates with inferior companions disrupts the established order and is consequently fated for a tragic end (Tillyard, 1942).

Gender inversion and imperial subversion are crucial key terms in Renaissance drama. Antony, who once regarded his men in a manner so dignified that his spirit almost tore the clasps from his armour, had devoted completely restraint as well as passion. At the beginning, Caesar remarks that the Roman commander’s indulgence in Egyptian pleasures encloses his masculinity as effeminate (Shakespeare, 1606, 1.4.). Antony’s decision to embrace the voluptuous life in Egypt and indulge in hedonism renders him effeminate in Caesar’s perception. Upon receiving the news that Antony engages in nightly revelries of fishing, drinking, and celebration, Caesar perceives Antony as being as frivolous and self-indulgent as Cleopatra, the queen of Ptolemy. Antony seemed to recognize his allies and responsibilities only scantily. In Caesar’s perspective, Antony has assumed a feminine role; she has journeyed to the East and substituted her responsibilities to Rome with hedonistic indulgences. A Roman triumvir is anticipated to concentrate on his duties with no distractions or impediments permitted. Antony’s lifestyle, which embraced local customs, was seen as a hindrance to his success in the eyesight of the Occident. Analogous to the Romans in the distant past, the English rulers throughout the Age of Enlightenment harboured apprehensions regarding their populace adopting indigenous customs, which is why the dire consequences of cultural assimilation became a theme in several literary works, including this play. It seeks to caution individuals about the perils of residing in Eastern territories and adopting local customs.

During the period of exploration, settlers, privateers, and merchants traversed the world, journeying towards Western Hemisphere, Eastern India, as well as South Europe in pursuit of wealth and exotic goods. Despite their advantageous place in North America, their circumstances, particularly in the Mediterranean and the East, were unfavorable, while planters faced difficulties in the North American wilderness, their compatriots sought wealth ahead of the shores of North Africa (Barbary) and the Ottoman Levantine ports. However, European invaders were capable of asserting settlers’ domination in the New World but lacked colonial ambitions in Northern Africa, Turkiye, and the Levantine, which were under the dominion of the Turks (Vitkus, 2003). The English authorities were apprehensive that the formidable wealth and captivating power of the Ottoman Empire would entice an increasing number of Englishmen (Loomba, 2002). For instance, in another Renaissance tragedy by Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, Ferneze expresses his anxiety about the potential loss of Malta (Christianity) to the Turks (Islam) (1592, 5.1.). The term ‘go native’ refers to the act of abandoning a particular original manner of life via establishing residence in an unknown land and embracing a manner of life that diverges from that one’s homeland (Macmillan Dictionary, 2020). In her work on ‘natives,’ Linda Colley presents narratives of British captives who assimilated into native cultures, positing that they emerged as a focal point of uneasiness, embodying trepidations from the hazards of Islamization (2000).

From the European viewpoint, these individuals who embraced an Eastern lifestyle were perceived as emasculated due to their circumcision and/or their adoption of an exotic and sensuous mode of existence. Likewise, Antony’s desires create a conflict through his Roman military service identity as well as the emerging Orient Eastern persona. The Queen of Egypt, adherents comprise all sexes, as well as Antony, whose hedonistic lifestyle has rendered him effeminate, who also aligns himself with them. Consequently, the narrative of the love tragedy of the two noble people serves as a punitive tale, alerting Westerners to the perils associated with the East. The formidable marketplaces of the African and Asian continents were coveted after that apprehension, highlighting the imperative of this narrative to caution against the perils of cultural assimilation. Therefore, even if Antony abandons his belief, his chosen lifestyle reveals a tendency to assimilate. For instance, he dedicates a significant portion of his life’s journey to consuming alcohol, going fishing, and indulging in banquets in Egypt instead of attending to his obligations in Imperial Rome. Furthermore, Antony exhibits irrationality while submitting to Cleopatra, in opposition to Roman conventions that dictate males should be patrons and women should remain mute and subservient. By

portraying Antony as “going native,” Shakespeare resurrects the anxieties associated with conversion linked to Oriental empires and further non-Western societies with which the British interacted.

Furthermore, Cleopatra appears to be cognizant of her subversion of gender hierarchies. In Act 2, Scene 5, as she contemplates how to occupy herself until her lover, the Roman general, returns to his Queen of Egypt, Cleopatra envisions going fishing by the Nile, resembling the Roman general, and may capture Imperial Rome (Shakespeare, 1606). This serves throughout a reminder that the Queen of Egypt is not only the Roman general’s Eastern subjugation. Mighty Cleopatra deliberately subverts the sex mismatch between them. It seems that her allure ensnares every guy as if he were a hooked fish. Furthermore, she is cognizant that she influences Antony, which feminizes the Roman administrator; as remembering one morning when she intoxicated Antony to the extent that he donned her clothes as she adorned his sword (Shakespeare, 1606, 2.5.). A sword represents masculinity and holds significant importance for a warrior. Ania Loomba, a Shakespearean critic, asserts that this transvestite transcends mere chamber amusement, representing a broader inversion of gender norms (2002).

Moreover, when engaging the Romans at the seawater, Antony is convinced by Cleopatra to do so instead of ground, a choice perceived as unmanly not only by Antony but also by his army. He knew that his battalion undoubtedly had an advantage in land combat, as would his army; nonetheless, he ultimately chose to engage at sea due to Cleopatra’s persuasive influence. Antony’s preference for Cleopatra’s words above those of his men undermines both him and his army. The aide who is a trusted follower begs Antony, “Transform us not to women” (Shakespeare, 1606, 4.2.), as well as Canidius laments by the mentally deranged steps of Antony (Shakespeare, 1606, 3.7.). Consequently, the gender, patriarchal, and racial inversions shown in this study complicate the portrayal of the colonized territory, exemplified by Egypt, as a sexually accessible female. Cleopatra is a sovereign figure who relinquishes her authority with great reluctance.

During the Battle of Actium, when Cleopatra decides to achieve harmony herself ships with Antony’s navy, Enobarbus contests this decision. He contends that her presence will divert Antony as she incites strife within his heart and mind. As a result, this uncertainty leads to his defeat in combat. Notwithstanding Enobarbus’ remarks, she resolves to participate in the conflict, as the fight is directed at Egyptian waters and territory. The Roman general Antony, who had previously given orders to others, is now entirely influenced by the Egyptian Queen and calls his troops about wait for assault till the conclusion of that naval engagement. Immediately following the commencement of the conflict, Enobarbus recounts witnessing the Egyptian flagship, Antony, along with all other Egyptian vessels, alter the course of the conflict (Shakespeare, 1606, 3.10.). This maneuver disorients the fleet, resulting in triumph for Caesar. The spectacle repulses Antony’s troops. Petrifying panic indicates that on the turn of the Queen of Egypt, the Roman general, shattered with adoration, trails Cleopatra as ailing waterfowl. Consequently, Comidius abandoned Antony, and Enobarbus, against all obstacles, maintained his allegiance to his leader. Profoundly embarrassed by his conduct on the battlefield, the Roman triumvir implores personal maids to abandon their master, having hitherto forsaken his aristocratic principles. The Roman general (Antony) forfeited individual prestige, authority, and masculinity to the Queen of Egypt, succumbing to Egyptian influence. In retrospect, he perceives himself ravaged by disgrace. He enquires of Cleopatra the reason for his descent into ill repute; Cleopatra implores the absolution (Shakespeare, 1606, 3.11.). He next inquires how she could question his loyalty; Antony’s heart linkage irrevocably bound to Cleopatra, clearly indicating that the Roman mission’s surrender seems directed at Cleopatra, not vice versa. Subsequently, Cleopatra employs her manipulations to evoke Antony’s sympathy, weeping and pleading for absolution; Antony implores her to refrain from shedding tears, as even a single drop equates to everything that has been gained and forfeited. He requests a kiss, stating, “Even he repays me” (Shakespeare, 1606, 3.11.). Defeated Antony, a nearly equivalent confrontation, versus Octavian (Caesar) merely due to his decision to retire and pursue Cleopatra’s vessels, which had abandoned the combat. By patriarchal standards and Roman perspectives, a man who is overwhelmed by his affections for a woman subjugates her and relinquishes his authority, dominion, and honor in combat due to a little kiss from his beloved is considered emasculated.

Cleopatra is unmanageable, elusive, capricious, and arguably the most alluring of Shakespeare’s female characters, an astute as well as alluring concubine who fluctuates between emotional facades, then a connoisseur of enigmas. The Queen of Egypt refuses to surrender to either Antony or Caesar, which ultimately leads her to orchestrate her death as a final act of defiance rather than being carried to Rome as a witness to Caesar’s dominance, her real dying scenario evokes seduction in the reader’s mind. As Caesar observes Cleopatra’s physique, he then comes up with the idea that she will possibly trap another nobleman (Shakespeare, 1606, 5.2.). She does not appear deceased; it is as though she has only succumbed to slumber. Caesar’s portrayal of her implies that Cleopatra is attempting to mislead one more Roman general. It never seemed Cleopatra’s actuality, not the mere dearth, which was alluring, despite instead, she envisioned an anticipated presence.

#### 4. Conclusion

The play illustrates the subversion of sex and authority hierarchies through transvestism and exploitation, serving as evidence of the West’s apprehension about identity exchange, particularly the concern that Englishmen may assimilate or risk losing their identity in foreign interactions. Consequently, one might interpret Shakespeare’s portrayal of Cleopatra as a cautionary tale regarding the perils that loom over the English populace. She represents the essence of the East, characterized by a blend of sensuality and intellect, allure and assurance; her magnetic presence, formidable strength, and indomitable spirit render her one of the most remarkable figures in the Shakespearean drama. The theme of rule also seems remarkably prevalent in Shakespearean style, as Li notes that “in Shakespeare’s staging, taming is the spectacle that follows conquest” (2025).

Although the lingua franca language forays to the East, illustrated in numerous ages of the ‘rebirth of learning’ English discourses from the last tenure of the 16th and early 17th centuries, sought to vilify an Islamic universe as well as the East, these engagements failed to suggest a consistent narrative of Britain’s dominance and supremacy. Edward Said’s critics assert that it ascribes the settlers’ invading perspective of the Orient periods preceding Western rule. During the Renaissance, the Eastern side was scarcely perceived as a counterpart to Europe. Europeans endeavored to penetrate the formidable economic systems of Asia, the Mediterranean, the Levant, and North Africa, apprehensive of the Ottoman Empire’s martial prowess while being captivated by the opulence and refinement of many Orient domains. The West occupied a marginal position within the influential economic networks that were predominantly centered in the East, with its global dominance not commencing up to the 18th century (Loomba, 2002).

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Egyptology is an in-depth study and comprehensive analysis of Egyptian culture, flora, fauna, language, and all the antiquities.

<sup>2</sup> The Eyalet was the executive unit of the Ottoman Empire at the time.