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Amany El-Sawy

Alexandria University, Amany-Elsawy@alexu.edu.eg

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Encountering Shakespeare's Cleopatra: The Subversion of The Occident's Threat of Objectification

Amany El-Sawy, Alexandria University (Egypt)

The Western discursive paradigm of projecting evil onto marginal and powerless groups within its cultural sphere has always been a convenient channel of constructing scapegoats. The feminine, for example, was associated with the Devil, black magic, sexual rapaciousness, willfulness and capriciousness (Kabbani 5). Most important is the construction of an external space into which such evils are projected. Edward Said argues that this imaginative space is the Orient which is “the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilization and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (Said 1). The East, thus, has a recurrent negative presence in the Western literary history; it is represented as a mimetic space with which the West can construct a dialectical relation. It reflects a grim depiction of univocality and homogeneity that leaves no margin for subversion and resistance. In attributing such epistemological consistency to the nature of Orient-Occident relations, Said relies on the same stereotypical constructs he tries to deconstruct. Thus, in this paper I attempt to investigate the possibility of the existence of a subversive opening that ruptures this consistently Western image of the East. This opening adulterates the Saidian epistemological consistency concerning the West’s perception of the East in one of the West’s iconic representatives, William Shakespeare whose treatment of the orient Cleopatra, I suggest, does not follow the discursive practices of Western representation of the East as a place of evil, degeneration, and the rest of the stereotypical Western repertoire.

The West proposes a Ptolemaic linearity of existence that presupposes an ontological, one-dimensional model for the relations between the West and the Other. In this paradigm the West assumes the position of the subject, Self, essence, and other ontological positioning to establish an epistemological supremacy. In this case, any attempt to exist

outside this Western linearity is considered a mimetic and deformed endeavor that aims to only emulate the Western origin. This perception is supported by the Platonic metaphysical philosophy, which has infiltrated to other fields of knowledge and still has an impact on Western ideologies. The Ptolemaic paradigm facilitates the separation between the Self and the Other, the subject and the object, and the Occident and the Orient and frames them in an ahistorical and teleological path. On the contrary, my reading of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* constructs an epistemological paradigm that fragments the Western monoglossic discourse and obliterates the dialectical tenets of its episteme as it deconstructs the West's ontological and teleological basis. According to the "sphericalization" of Western linearity, any attempt from the Other to assume an independent subjective locus has to be contained and assimilated. However, it is more dangerous to the West's positioning when this subversive attempt comes from inside the Western linearity as an effort to recognize the Oriental Other as a separate powerful entity.

The Subject's Identity vs. the Formative Power of Discourse

Michel Foucault's concept of power denies the subject any power to resist "the dominance of the social formation" (Pieters 228). The individual subject, in this respect, disappears and loses his or her identity in a totalitarian society, which is in full control of their lives along with any act of subversion that is likely to take place. New historicists, however, assert the identity of the subject over the formative power of discourse, when they state that it is very difficult for any discourse to completely represent the "complex cultural dynamics of social power. For there is no monolithic ... spirit of an age and there is no adequate totalizing explanation of history" (Tyson 281). Rather, there is a dialectic relation between individuals and society that creates "dynamic, unstable interplay among discourse." Hence, discourses are not only a source of power but also a stimulation of opposition, since human beings are no longer seen as victims of totalitarian societies, but rather are seen as powerful agents able to resist oppression in their lives. As texts are human made objects which make it subject to all social and historical forces, Stephen Greenblatt examines the relationship between text and context and literature and culture in one of his essays, "Towards a Poetics of Culture." In his article, Greenblatt tries to prove that literary and nonliterary texts are not only marked off from the discursive

institutions that constitute society and history at large, but are also embedded in the social practices that play a significant role in constructing self awareness and identity as well as informing the socio-historical situation itself. In this sense, texts diffuse social energy by circulating in society through acts of negotiation and exchange, which functions through a dialectics of sameness and otherness; totalization and differentiation (Payne 19-28).

Fredrick Jackson Turner highlights the importance of “interdisciplinary study” in which historians, despite being part of different discourse communities, can question each other’s values and assumptions with reference to various fields of study (Kloppenber 204). American historian James Harvey Robinson called historians to shift their focus from narrating past events to interpreting the history of the present and its meanings to trace the development of their own culture. The close examination of historical narratives proves how history is always written from a present perspective which renders our “knowledge ... contextual” (209). In this regard, pragmatism, in its attempt to break with the past, declines all traditional habits of reading and writing history, and rather focuses on the use of new methods that experiment with knowledge. This is clearly reflected in Stacy Schiff’s optimistic rereading and reevaluation of Cleopatra in her biography, *Cleopatra: A Life* (2010), which sheds light on certain aspects of Cleopatra’s character that have been overlooked in art and history. Hence, in his historical book, *The Life and Times of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt* (1914), English Egyptologist Arthur Weigall speaks of how it is necessary for students to clear their minds of any “polluted sources” that would condition their way of interpreting the life of Cleopatra VII of Hellenistic Egypt (Weigall 409). Weigall concludes that by going against “the stinging words of Propertius and the fierce lines of Horace,” readers will freely base their own judgments on Cleopatra’s character and actions and decide if history was “merciful” towards the woman who “fought all her life for the fulfillment of a patriotic and splendid ambition, and who died in a manner ‘befitting the descendant of so many kings’” (410).

The Portrayal of Queen Cleopatra in History

The history of Egypt, as documented by historical archives and discussed in books like *The History and Culture of Ancient and Modern Egypt* (2013) by M Clement Hall, is characterized by continuous heroic

struggles against foreign occupation. Certainly, the book tackles major issues in the history of Egypt related to culture, religion, and politics until our day. One of the most significant periods in the history of Hellenistic and Modern Egypt is the Roman province of Egypt, established in 30 BC, when Octavian, after defeating his greatest rival Mark Antony and overthrowing Cleopatra VII, whose death marks the end of the Hellenistic age in 31 BC, united the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt with the Roman Empire and established the Egypto-Roman Empire that Cleopatra VII died for. Breaking away from public opinion, when reading in history about queens in Hellenistic Egypt, one would understand how such queens were very different from their predecessors, as they were neither “passive” nor “protected” (Pomperov 10). Rather, being Macedonians and members of the ruling monarchy, like Cleopatra VII, their strong impact in the Hellenistic world marked the increase of power exercised by royal women and the development of their political as well as religious roles. This is clearly reflected in the Ptolemaic queens’ long heroic struggles to keep their Empires independent and to protect their dynasties by securing the throne for their children (10-11).

The historical biography of Cleopatra as well as the interpretations of her life and her political role in the history of Egypt are varied and controversial. Sally-Ann Ashton states in the preface of her book, *The Last Queens of Egypt* (2003) that “Cleopatra and her ancestors often received bad press, usually at the hands of Roman authors,” and thus Ashton wrote her book to present the Ptolemaic royal queens in different lights and achieve a “rounded understanding” of them (vii). Ashton, however, furthers her analysis of Cleopatra VII in her book, *Cleopatra and Egypt* (2008), which is a collection of essays on the life of Cleopatra. By making use of the conflicting anecdotes about Cleopatra from different time periods, which depict her either as the enchantress who enslaved two of the most powerful men of her time (Julius Caesar and Mark Antony) or as the powerful political leader who succeeded in winning both men to her cause, Ashton highlights the various problems researchers nowadays face in their search of the truth about the Ptolemaic queen. Indeed, such problems result from the continuous social and cultural changes that have largely influenced the documentation and reception of Cleopatra over the years.

Weigall states that “no study of the life of Cleopatra can be of true value unless the position of the city of Alexandria, the capital, in relation to Egypt, on the one hand, and to Greece and Rome, on the other, is fully understood and appreciated” (Weigall 18). According to Weigall’s description of the “glamour” it cast on Mark Antony, who was stunned to find himself “surrounded by a group of cultured men and women highly practiced in the art of living sumptuously,” Alexandria was the emblem of civilization in Hellenistic Egypt, as it was called “the Paris of the ancient world” (242). Due to its remote distance from the Delta and the Nile and its close connection with Mediterranean kingdoms, Alexandria, as a Greek port for the distribution of goods throughout the area, was intentionally made by Alexander the Great an authentic Greek settlement. Alexander’s intention was to turn the city into an independent state, which is “free of, and in dominion over Egypt”. Accordingly, during the reign of Cleopatra VII, Alexandria was the leading trading center in the world, which made it a powerful threat to Rome (19). The interests of “merchants,” “scientists,” “scholars,” and “statesmen” in Alexandria at that time made it become not only the “rival” but also the “successor” of Rome in being the “capital of the world” (287). Further, according to Weigall’s narration of the Roman political interest in the city, “Julius Caesar had talked of removing the seat of government from Rome to Alexandria; and ... Antony had transferred the capital ... to the city, and was regarding it as his home.” Alexandria’s location did not only make it a better place than Rome for governing the world, as the “barbaric western countries” surrounding Rome were not as valuable as the “civilized eastern provinces,” but also made it a far more “magnificent,” “cultivated” and “wealthy” trade center than Rome itself (288).

Hence, Cleopatra’s dream of establishing the Egypto-Roman Empire -- which she had lost after the death of Caesar, by convincing Antony to secure the throne for her as Caesar’s wife, and for her son, Caesarion, who is also Caesar’s legitimate child -- turned Rome against her. Weigall, therefore, puts forward the argument that “the general accepted estimate of [Cleopatra’s] character was placed before the public by those who sided against her in the quarrel between Antony and Octavian” (3). Prior her death, Cleopatra was the sworn enemy of Octavian, “the first of the Roman Emperors” at the time and the founder of the Egypto-Roman Empire of Cleopatra’s dreams, whose kings are not descended from the line

of Cleopatra's Caesarion but from Octavian's. However, despite the influence of Alexandria on the life of Rome and the important role Egypt played in the creation of the "Roman monarchy," Weigall concludes that "the memory of Cleopatra ... was yearly more painfully vilified [as] ... her struggle with Octavian was remembered as the evil crisis through which the party of the Caesars had passed" (409). Such perception of Cleopatra has changed in Ashton's books of the last Ptolemaic queens of Egypt in which Cleopatra was deemed legendary. For instance, in the introduction of her book, *Cleopatra and Egypt*, Ashton highlights the strengths and weaknesses of her study of Cleopatra, revealing how after consulting ancient and modern sources on Cleopatra and despite recreating the lifetime of the queen from the different perspective of a twenty first century author, she fails to fully interpret the social, economic and political background of Egypt at the time because of the lack of previous close examination of any of these fields. Further, Schiff's depiction of Cleopatra in her biography, *Cleopatra: A Life* (2010) underlines the political role of the queen in achieving the Egypto-Roman Empire and saving Egypt from the Roman occupation as well as her stature as a goddess, all of which have been overlooked in historical books and archives for decades.

Ashton's twenty first century historical account of Cleopatra VII and Weigall's twentieth century historical reading of the life of the queen Egypt reveal how the life of Cleopatra has always been a subject of debate among historians of different periods of time. For instance, where Ashton believes that Cleopatra was a "single mother," who was twice forsaken in marriage, once by Julius Caesar when she was wedded to her younger brother and the other by Mark Antony when he chose to marry Octavia to reconcile with Octavius (49), Weigall presents a different anecdote. At a time when the legal terms of marriage were not respected and violated by all people, and when all Rome and Alexandria were immersed in "domestic intrigues," Cleopatra was loyal to the two men who acted towards her as her legitimate husbands (11). Weigall elaborates on how Cleopatra was the mother of four children, whom she treasured also at a time when her attitude was considered "a voluntary assumption of the duties of motherhood" (12). This is clearly reflected in her intense devotion towards her eldest son, Caesarion, for whom she struggled to secure the Egyptian throne by establishing the Egypto-Roman Empire.

Cleopatra's Debatable Literary Reception

Against earlier theatrical representations of Cleopatra, such as the English poet Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* (1594) and the French tragic poet Robert Garnier's *Marc Antoine* (1578), Weigall concludes that there is no trustworthy evidence that Cleopatra was besmeared by her love to Antony nor was she an immoral who was involved in relationships other than "the two recorded so dramatically by history" (12). Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* ends with the death of the queen, which marks the end of the Ptolemies. Daniel depicts Cleopatra as one, who accepts full responsibility for Antony's downfall and for the destruction of her kingdom (Chernaik 143). However, throughout Daniel's play, Cleopatra is portrayed as a "loving mother, concerned about what will happen to her children ... [by] the remorseless power of the Roman conqueror" (143). In this respect, Daniel's portrayal of Cleopatra subverts the dominant perspective of her. This is clearly reflected in her representation as a "ruler of a great kingdom, who has been remiss in her responsibilities toward her Egyptian subjects" and whose virtues are reflected in her vow to Antony whom she shall join in death (144).

Other portrayals of Cleopatra are further imbued with political dimensions. For instance, during the seventeenth century, poet and dramatist Fulke Greville's tragedy *Antony and Cleopatra* was destroyed by him for fear of "personating ... vices in the present governors and government" insofar as successful governors were impersonated by Antony whose love for Cleopatra led him to his downfall. Further, English dramatist and politician Sir Charles Sedley's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1677) with its "unheroic Antony and multiple subplots of political intrigue" (145) was an allusion to Charles II, who was influenced by the corrupt politicians and mistresses of his court. The majority of the plays, which depict Cleopatra, promote "reason ... over passion and that men should rule over women" (146), which foreshadows patriarchal authority. This is represented in the victory of Octavius, which underlines "the triumph of Roman virtue over Eastern licentiousness." However, English poet and dramatist Thomas May's *The Tragedie of Cleopatra Queen of Egypt* (1639), in which Cleopatra's political role in exercising power over Rome is highlighted, is distinctive in its portrayal of Cleopatra. Unlike the rest of the plays, Cleopatra is portrayed as unfaithful to Antony whom she is ready to forsake for the triumphant Octavius, underlining, thus, how far she is

“motivated by the same ambition to rule as her Roman enemy” (147). The play, therefore, places emphasis on the queen’s political ambition and not on her love.

Cleopatra’s political schemes and policies in establishing the Egypto-Roman Empire have been thus overlooked in the majority of texts in art and history – the thing that made Ashton dig deeper in history in an attempt to fully understand the significant political role played by Cleopatra in the history of Hellenistic Egypt. Ashton in *The Last Queens of Egypt* states that “[a]s ruler of Egypt, Cleopatra and her ability to court the powerful influential Roman officials Julius Caesar and Mark Antony presented a threat to the Republic of Rome” (50). Unlike her predecessors, who surrendered to the power of Rome for the protection of their thrones, Cleopatra defied Rome with her dream of securing the Egyptian throne for her son by establishing the Egypto-Roman Empire. Such portrayal is clearly presented in Schiff’s twenty first century biography, *Cleopatra: A life*, and Ahmed Shawqi’s twentieth century poetic play, *The Death of Cleopatra* (1927), both of which retell the history of Cleopatra but from different perspectives that either correspond to or challenge the ideological needs of present power structures.

Ahmed Shawqi in his poetic representation, *The Death of Cleopatra*, redraws the line between historical and fictive narratives to “rewrite the history of Cleopatra through a consciously subjective medium: a fictional narrative in a dramatic form” (Al khatib 257). Shawqi’s technique defends the disfigured reputation of the queen against European representations of her. In defiance to other perceptions of Cleopatra, which reduce her to a mere projection of “Western male desire,” Shawqi’s depiction of the queen reveals how she has long been portrayed in Western literature as an “epitome of both cultural and sexual otherness” in opposition to the highly revered Roman quintessential masculine image (258). Indeed, such an image underlines the west’s “dichotomized world view” that contradicts the Orient, which must be “feminine and therefore stands for degeneration and passion” (259). Shawqi’s recreation of the love story between Antony and Cleopatra in *The Death of Cleopatra* is different from Shakespeare’s version of it, despite the similarities that take place between the two plays. Although Shawqi depicts Antony’s suicide scene which is similar to Shakespeare’s insofar as Eros does not kill Antony and rather kills himself instead (Shawqi III, 66), mourning the death of Antony,

Shawqi makes Cleopatra, like Shakespeare's, besieged by fate which apocalyptically took Antony's life. Making Cleopatra resolve to reunite with Antony by departing this world (78), Shawqi rewrites history dramatically from a different perspective. In so doing, Shawqi reconstructs Cleopatra's character in line with Plutarch's representation of her. This is clearly reflected in the way that, unlike Shakespeare's Roman commentators, Shawqi gives Cleopatra's court a more interactive role of "commenting on action and character" to offer new insights into her character which have been overlooked in Western drama (Al Khatib 261). Shawqi's representation of the battle of Actium does not emphasize boundaries between "order" and "passion," where Cleopatra exemplifies reckless passion against Roman law and order. Rather "a new set of equally rigid absolutes is posited where a political battle of control between the oppressed (Egypt) and the oppressor (Rome) permeates the action" (272).

Hence, both human history and culture play a crucial role as "dynamic forces" which always reconstruct our perception of the world in a way that foreshadows how "human subjectivity develops in a give-and-take relationship with its culture" (Tyson 292). The production of any cultural work, thus, shapes our experiences through the kind of ideologies it transfers, indicating how art can be used as an ideological tool to circulate power. This is clearly reflected in the changing perception of Queen Cleopatra as a Roman mistress and a gypsy witch to Ahmed Shawqi's 1927 eastern depiction of her as a powerful threat to Rome, until Schiff's newly released biography, *Cleopatra: A Life* (2010). Such changes of perception, over time, indicate how far the biased perception of Cleopatra no longer condition our ways of judging her, as they have come to be quite distanced from the actions and beliefs of our own time. Indeed, as stated in an article entitled, "Cleopatra - the eternal queen," published on the Ancient Warfare website, Schiff's book is considered the first biography of Cleopatra to be written by a female in which she sheds light on some aspects of Cleopatra's character that have not been highlighted before (Reinke 11). Cleopatra in Schiff's book is no longer Shakespeare's shameful seductress. Rather, she is a skilled politician and a powerful leader, who built an army. This is clearly illustrated in Schiff's introduction in which she presents Cleopatra as "[holding] the fate of the Western world in her hands ... [who] ... at the height of her power she controlled virtually the entire eastern Mediterranean coast" (1). For Schiff, Cleopatra was "[a]

capable, clear-eyed sovereign, [who] knew how to build a fleet, suppress an insurrection, control a currency, alleviate a famine” (2), all of which make her more elevated than any other woman of her age.

Greenblatt understands the historical background which contributes to the construction of these texts. Greenblatt achieves this in the field of energy that he creates between the text and its sociohistorical context “so that we come to see the event as a social text and the literary text as a social event” (Wilson 39). In the light of this view, it is difficult to determine the historicity of Shakespeare’s play without reading it “with and within series of contexts, “which, on the one hand, acts as the “precondition of the play’s historical and political signification” and, on the other hand, sometimes reflects how far Shakespeare challenges other seventeenth century discourses, speaking of the same subject matter (Henderson 195). Therefore, without the “historical contextualization” of Shakespeare’s play, determining the influence of “bourgeois hegemony” would be hard to accomplish. Thus, by examining the ideological representations of Cleopatra in both literary and non-literary texts, we understand the complex historical background of the texts under study in a “relationship of identity and difference,” which highlights how “[t]heir similarities ... fit into a common episteme [whereas] [t]heir differences preserve the sense of conflict that monological historical narratives repress” (Thomas 39). Hence, any boundaries between literary texts and other social practices have to be overcome in order to highlight how the relationship between literary and nonliterary texts is not fixed, as it is in a constant “negotiation and reconstruction.”

Such an unfixed relationship between literary and non-literary texts is clearly reflected in Shakespeare’s theatrical representations of Cleopatra with reference to Sir Thomas North’s English translation of the first century historian Plutarch’s *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* (1579). Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* depicts Cleopatra whose life-story had been narrated several times to reflect every period’s own discourse. In this regard, each “individual text ... lies at the intersection of different discourses which are related to each other in a complex but ultimately hierarchical way” (Henderson 197). This sheds light on how regardless of their “unity,” texts must be interpreted “on the discursive field,” since they are marked by the “interplay of discourses” which constitute them. In “Shakespeare’s Politics of Loyalty: Sovereignty and

Subjectivity in *Antony and Cleopatra*,” Paul Yachnin highlights the subversive power of Shakespeare’s Antony and Cleopatra in challenging the Elizabethan “politics of loyalty” through the play’s power of theatricality (Yachnin 344). Certainly, in his essay, Yachnin proposes how literary texts transcend “polemical” representations ... [insofar as they] ... allow the emergence of ideological contradiction and its unwillingness to attempt to police the production of meaning’ (345). Such act subjects the play to different interpretations, each projecting a new meaning unto it, hence, contributing to historical change. Reading Shakespeare, “instead of having meaning, statements should be seen as performative of meaning; not as possessing ... universal content,” since they are used as instruments for “the organization and legitimation of power-relations” (Henderson 196).

Shakespeare’s Depiction of Cleopatra

Shakespeare’s depiction of Cleopatra does not follow the Western conventional representation of the Egyptian queen. He endows Cleopatra with his original ingenuity as one of his most complex creations. A.C. Bradley in *Shakespearean Tragedy* has considered only four of Shakespeare’s characters to be “inexhaustible”: Falstaff, Hamlet, Iago, and Cleopatra. By almost a universal consent, Cleopatra’s portrayal is Shakespeare’s most profound and compelling representation of the feminine. This characterization, I suggest, reflects the play’s, and Cleopatra’s, untranslatability under the rubrics of Western literary and cultural conventions. The problematics of translation become a place where questions of representation and reality converge as we attempt to explain the practices of subjectification embedded in the imperialist enterprise. By subjectification I mean, to use Michel Foucault’s terminology, the “fabrication” of the subject by practices of subjectification or technologies of power, for, Foucault posits, power “produces knowledge” and both “directly imply one another” (Foucault 27).

Thus, we are what we know, and what we know defines who we are. In this play’s case what Rome knows is what Egypt becomes. “The representation of history becomes the history of representation,” Linda Hutcheon maintains in *The Politics of Postmodernism*. She points out that the “issue of representation in both fiction and history has usually been dealt with in epistemological terms, in terms of how we know the past”

(Hutcheon 58). Nonetheless, through his parallel text, Shakespeare exposes the epistemological fallacies behind Rome's representation of the Other. Cleopatra, I suggest, becomes a knower -- a subject, a fact that sets her as the most dangerous threat to Rome's own existence as a subject. Shakespeare offers through the play's parallel text a view of Cleopatra as an autonomous Self. The view from this Shakespearean parallel space subverts the discursive Western representation of the Other. Egypt represents more an epistemological opening in this play than a spatial and geographical entity. Egypt is not depicted as a mythical, fantastic place. Shakespeare, rather, presents an image that is infused with political and social contexts that establish Egypt as real a place as Rome is.

Cleopatra the Autonomous Knower

When *Antony and Cleopatra* opens Cleopatra appears in this space as a subject, which presents a counter-discursive image to the Western stereotype of the objective Other. This Shakespearean subversive portrayal of the Egyptian queen as an autonomous knower is reflected in the opening uncertainty that prevails in the first acts of the play. The first words of the play are "Nay, but" as Philo and Demetrius enter arguing (Shakespeare I.i.1). It is worth noting here that it is Romans who articulate those doubtful and uncertain words, indicating the unknowability of the Egyptian parallel sphere. The Egyptian space rejects any Roman attempt to reduce its complexity and independence to a mere Romish cultural satellite that can be known under or subsumed within the West's epistemological rubrics. The uncertain words that open the play mirrors Rome's lack of knowledge concerning the nature of this cultural sphere. "Nay, but" becomes Rome's battle cry against Egypt's subjectification.

Accordingly, any action in the Egyptian sphere becomes a source of ambiguity and mystification. The conflictive interpretation of those actions according to Roman and Egyptian perceptions reflects the contrariness of those parallel spheres. The mode of argumentation and opposition prevails throughout the play. Enobarbus and Antony, as the following argument clarifies, are unable to determine the nature of Cleopatra:

[*Eno.*] I have seen her [Cleopatra] die
 twenty times upon far poorer
 moment: I do think there is mettle in death
 which commits some loving act upon her, she

hath such a celerity in dying.

Ant. She is cunning past man's thought.

Eno. Alack, sir, no; her passions are made

Of nothing but the finest part of pure love: we

Cannot call her winds and waters sighs and tears;

... this cannot be cunning in her;

if it be, she makes a shower of rain as well as Jove.

Ant. Would I had never seen her! (1.3. 147-57)

This debate portrays the Romish inconclusiveness toward the classification of Cleopatra's nature. Antony and Enobarbus' inability to judge Cleopatra according to Rome's discourse show the independence that the Egyptian sphere enjoys. Egypt, like Cleopatra, functions as an autonomous epistemological body that is still unassailable to and resistant of Rome's objectification. I would like to suggest, moreover, that Antony's description of the Nile's crocodile reflects an inability to define the Egyptian sphere according to Roman classifications of the Other. Moreover this crocodile can be associated with Cleopatra who is continuously referred to as Egypt, the Nile, the serpent of the Nile, and further, the crocodile of the Nile. Antony's nebulous description of the crocodile mystifies rather than clarifies the nature of this creature:

It is shaped, sir, like itself; and it is as

broad as it hath breadth: it is just so high as

it is, and moves with it own organs: it lives by

that which nourisheth it; and the elements once

out of it, it transmigrates. (2.7.47-51)

This perplexing description manifests an Egyptian denial of objectification and a rejection of the epistemological scrutiny of the West.

In the same vein, the Egyptian sphere challenges the basis of Western principles of judgment. Roman ethos is inadequate in judging the moral values of this sphere. Enobarbus asserts that Cleopatra "did make defect perfection" (2.2.231) where "vilest things / become themselves in her" (2.2.238-39). Even Antony's description rejects Roman values of judgment, as he becomes part of the unknowability of the Egyptian space. Lepidus, in another perplexing metaphor, describes Antony's defects by asserting that:

I must think that there are

Evils enow to darken all his goodness:

His faults, in him, seem as the spots of heaven,
 More fiery by night's blackness. (1.4.10-13)

In this metaphor, Antony's relation to Cleopatra cannot be translated or interpreted within the West's ethical logos of simple vice and virtue. These complex metaphors manifest Rome's inability to translate Antony's attraction to the Egyptian sphere; such an attraction is untranslatable to the Western paradigm that governs the power relations between the masculine and the feminine.

Thus, despite attempts to consecrate the Western perception of the objectified Cleopatra, Shakespeare indeed has given us in his Cleopatra's characterization a woman who subverts most conventional attempts to understand her homogeneity and eliminate her "infinite variety" (2.2.240). Most of the analyses of Cleopatra's characterization have been concerned with her linear progression from the harlot and serpent of the Nile to spiritual salvation. This line of analysis reflects a metaphysical approach that validates the dialectical nature between Rome and Egypt, between moral values and moral laxity, and between harlot and queen. Such a diagnosis, I posit, attempts, in some cases consciously, to appropriate Shakespeare's subjectification of the Egyptian queen and to suggest a linear mental trajectory. This association, not to say conspiracy, between literary approaches and Western political hegemony aims to assimilate Cleopatra to the Western discursive dichotomy of subject and object, known and knower. In this respect, Shakespeare's depiction of Cleopatra, as an untranslatable subject, is a counter-discursive practice to Western hegemonic meta-narratives.

Cleopatra, Enobarbus explains, should be understood in terms of her 'Variety.' This can mean that Cleopatra is not a linear or flat character but rather a dialogical and multidimensional one. Linda Bamber in *Comic Women, Tragic Men* proposes that there are three Cleopatras. On one level, Bamber points out, we have Cleopatra as "the embodiment of Egypt." On the second, Cleopatra "represents the Other as against Antony's representation of the Self." And finally Cleopatra is a character "facing failure and defeat, motivated by the desire to contain or rise above her losses" (Bamber 45). Nonetheless, I would suggest that Cleopatra's hybrid characterization reflects an unknowability that subverts the West's claims to knowledge. Cleopatra-as-Egypt, thus, appears to reflect not an independent subjectivity but rather an experience. At this level, Cleopatra

is not so much a character by her own right but a metaphor for colonial experience (Bamber 46). For example, when Thyreus, thinking that Cleopatra is going to renounce Antony in favor of Caesar, says that Caesar “knows you embraced not Antony / As you did love, but as you feared him” (3.13.57-58). Cleopatra, sarcastically, responds, “He is a god, and knows / What is most right” (60-61). Enobarbus, hearing this conversation upon Cleopatra’s demand, concludes that Cleopatra is “quitting” Antony. Both Thyreus and Enobarbus are dealing with Cleopatra as a known object whose actions can be predicted. However, the evolution of the play proves that both were wrong. Cleopatra does not defect to Caesar and Enobarbus, not Cleopatra, seeks “Some way to leave” Antony (3.13.200-01). Thus, what critics have termed as Cleopatra-as-Egypt reflects what I term Cleopatra-as-unknown. In this portrayal Cleopatra appears as the unknowable alternative to the often portrayed knowable and simple Other.

In this reading I disagree with Bamber’s second Cleopatra-Cleopatra-as-Other (Bamber 48). Any reading that aims at representing Cleopatra as the Other I think originates from the Western representational locus. Thus, I posit that Shakespeare’s characterization of Cleopatra appears to originate from within the Egyptian sphere. Cleopatra is not the representation of Otherness. Rather, she is a representation of a parallel subject. The notion that Cleopatra is the Other bears within its superficial subversion an embedded epistemological tenet that validates the dialectical relation between subject and object. Cleopatra confronts Rome not as the stereotype, Egypt, or from the locus of a marginalized otherness. Instead Cleopatra’s confrontational nature stems from her subjectification. As an independent subject the confrontation arises between parallel independent spheres. Cleopatra cannot be assimilated to the hegemonic patriarchy of Rome; thus, she counteracts the subjectifying goal that results from the bipolar dichotomy of subject/object. Cleopatra threatens the base of the West’s self-identification mechanism by destroying the object and the known and replacing them with a subject and a knower.

Cleopatra: The Authoritative Author

Not only is Cleopatra a subject and a knower, but she is also a talented author who goes beyond the occident’s discourse. Mary Allen

Lamb argues in *Gender and Authorship* that patriarchal texts deprive women of “a primary source of the subjectivity necessary for them to construct themselves as authors” (Lamb 9). The confluence of subjectivity and literary authority is central to tropes of Otherness and objectification that are both literary and epistemological topoi. By this I mean that according to the Western epistemological paradigm, authorship and subjectivity are both associated with masculine and colonial practices. As an independent subject, accordingly, Cleopatra assumes the role of author/authority. Cleopatra, to some extent, authors Antony’s drastic departure from Rome’s discourse and his attempt to achieve an Egyptian state of existence. From the opening scenes, Cleopatra establishes herself as an author. The first scene manifests Cleopatra’s ability to author events and create situations. Her authorship of the domestic and political situation in Rome reflects an independent ability to explore Rome’s most intimate levels:

Fulvia perchance is angry; or, who knows
If the scarce-bearded Caesar have not sent
His powerful mandate to you, ‘Do this, or this;
Take in that kingdom, and enfranchise that;
Perform’t, or else we damn thee.’ (1.1.20-24)

These creative words summarize Antony’s tragic dilemma: he is torn between his private interests and those of Rome with all of its political tension between him and Caesar.

Cleopatra also authors Caesar’s most predominant description as “the scarce-bearded Caesar.” Cleopatra’s authorship is transformed into authority. Her proclivity to create situations proliferates far away from her epistemological realm. Cleopatra’s authorship can be felt in one of the play’s most poetic pieces: the authorship of the famous “barge scene” (2.2.190-249) should be attributed to Cleopatra not Enobarbus, for she is the one who has directed the scene that has “made a gap in nature” (223). Cleopatra, moreover, declares such association between authorship and authority when she describes her influence on Antony:

I laugh’d him out of patience; and that night
I laugh’d him into patience: and next mom,
Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed;
Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst
I wore his sword philippian. (2.5. 19-23)

In this declaration, Cleopatra manifests one of her most enduring threats to Rome's dominance: her ability to author Antony's gender and appropriate the symbols of his authority—the sword/phallus. By emasculating Antony, she has re-inscribed his authority him and, by extension, Rome as well. In this scene, Cleopatra does not whimsically and erotically switch orders with Antony. Rather, she displays an ability to consume the Western paradigm and appropriate its patriarchal and imperial signs. Here, I would like to propose, Cleopatra functions as an aporia or a space. This leads us back to Enobarbus' previous diagnosis of Cleopatra's ability to create gaps.

Cleopatra-as-aporia refers to the inherent unknowability that is found in the West's representations of Cleopatra. This Western inability to frame Cleopatra within the limitations of the known object causes her to resist interpretation. I propose that Cleopatra “[makes] a gap,” to quote Enobarbus, in the “nature” of East-West power relations. Cleopatra-as-aporia, thus, describes the gap between Rome's homogeneous and hegemonic paradigm and Egypt's heterogeneous and subjectified space. Nevertheless, this reading underscores Cleopatra's ability to fragment Rome's univocal representations of the Other. Cleopatra emerges as a counter-discursive entity that imperils the West's monoglossic perception of the object. In this subversive practice, Cleopatra splits the philosophical tenets of subject and object. The Egyptian queen, through her Shakespearean characterization as a known author, disrupts the Western linear progression of the metaphysics of existence. The portrayal of Cleopatra as a separate subject, which denies any Western attempt of classification under the rubric of known/knower, Subject/object, author/text, and oppressor/oppressed, ruptures the Western epistemological sphere and constructs one of its major threats.

Language as a Subversive Technique

This Shakespearean technique validates Cleopatra's unparalleled nature. The depiction of Cleopatra as an “initiator of discursive practices,” to use Foucauldian parlance, accentuates the epistemological independence of the Egyptian parallel sphere. Emil Benveniste claims in *Problems in General Linguistics* that it is “through language that man constitutes himself as a subject” (Benveniste 224). In *Antony and Cleopatra*, it is in and through her use of language that Cleopatra

constitutes her identity and subjectivity in her subversion of Rome's representation. Benveniste identifies subjectivity as "the capacity of the speaker to posit himself as 'subject'" (224). This ability to identify herself as an "I," as a separate Self, constitutes part of what I have diagnosed as Cleopatra's ability to fragment Rome's logo-centric dominance over texts and contexts. Thus, Cleopatra-as-aporia disturbs the play's Roman space both textually and epistemologically. Cleopatra obliterates the linguistic and philosophical demarcation lines of the play's Roman space and possesses a proclivity to rupture the West's linear and monologic principles. Such subversions, textual and epistemological, serve not just to reverse interpretation but also to open the text to a free play of possibilities, making Cleopatra a fluid and unknowable subject. Aporetic characters, like Cleopatra, I suggest, are distinguished from characters who attempt to organize and institutionalize the play's text and context.

Linguistically, accordingly Cleopatra has often appeared associated with the subversive potential of language. Cleopatra often appears, in theoretical discussions bearing on the counter-discursive tendencies in language, as a symbol for what displaces authority and incapacitates hegemonic systems. Hélène Cixous associates Cleopatra with the counter-discursive practices of poetry in her essay "Sorties." The essay criticizes patriarchy that erases and portrays woman as a "dark continent" or appropriates her subjectivity to its own benefits. Cixous, then, vehemently asserts the need for a "feminine practice of writing" that consecrates "the unimpeded tongue that bursts partitions, classes, and rhetoric, orders and codes, must inundate, run through, go beyond the discourse [of patriarchy] with its last reserves" (Cixous 94-95). In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Cleopatra has the proclivity to create aporias which is clearly presented in her ability of infinite playful opening. Cleopatra's use of language disseminates to epistemological and philosophical spaces. Cleopatra as the creator/author of parallel worlds subverts Rome's threat of objectification. Thus, Cleopatra's first words, "If it be love indeed, tell me how much," reflect her creative ability to create (con)texts. They are subversive techniques that split Rome's discourse with her doubtful "If" (1.1.14). Her second sentence reflects an independent subjectivity that aims at controlling Egypt's, and her, existence: "I'll set a bourn how far to be beloved" (16). This bourn (limit) decides the play's dynamism between the parallel texts. Cleopatra, in her opening statements, positions herself as the locus of the play's

author/knower. This locus rejects Rome's previous representations of Cleopatra as a lascivious "gipsy" and a "strumpet" (1.2.9, 13).

Octavia: The Objectified Occident

Cleopatra's use of language to subjectify her existential position is, I think, clear in her interrogation with the messenger regarding Octavia's position:

Cleo. Didst thou behold Octavia?

Mess. Ay, dread queen.

Cleo. Where?

Mess. Madam, in Rome.

I look'd her in the face, and saw her led

Between her brother and Mark Antony.

Cleo. Is she as tall as me?

Mess. She is not, madam.

Cleo. Didst hear her speak? Is she shrill-tongued or low?

Mess. Madam, I heard her speak; she is low-voiced. (3.3.8-19)

Cleopatra's questions are not mere feminine inquisitions led by jealousy; her questions are aimed at constructing a mental image of Octavia. Cleopatra's immediate deduction, "That is not so good: he [Antony] cannot like her/long" (18), reflects disdain towards the objectified feminine position in Rome. An image of Octavia appears from this situation as a controlled object by the patriarchal authorities of family (Octavius) and the political one (Antony), and as a culturally repressed, voiceless object-hence Cleopatra's inquiries about Octavia's position, height, and voice. Accordingly, Cleopatra's depiction as an independent feminine subject debunks the Roman perception of women. Bamber argues that the ideal feminine position in Rome's perception is that of Octavia. Octavia, Bamber comments, "accepts her role as a leisure-time activity and offers no resistance to Antony's life in the world of men" (Bamber 116). When Antony, thus, tells Octavia that, "the world and my great office will sometimes / Divide me from your bosom" (2.2.1-2), she directly assumes the role designed to her by the Roman discourse: "All the which time / Before the gods my knee shall bow my prayers / To them for you." (2.3.2-4). To Caesar and Rome, relationships with women are limited to the confines of the private space of leisure-time activities. Any attempt to blur the separation between those two spaces jeopardizes the authoritative

position of men. A man who continues “to tumble on the bed,” as Caesar criticizes Antony, risks his position in patriarchal Rome.

Antony’s marriage to Octavia is an epistemological choice. Octavia offers a two-dimension significance in this respect. First of all, Antony’s marriage can be seen as a “betrayal of Egypt and Cleopatra” (Bamber 51). However, this is not an ordinary act of romantic betrayal; it has political connotations. If Rome sees in Antony’s liaison with Cleopatra an excursion from Roman male principles, a marriage according to Roman perceptions, then, can make “[Antony’s] peace” with Rome (3.3.38). This technique is reflected in Antony’s declaration: “I will to Egypt, / And though I make this marriage for my peace, / I’ th’ East my pleasure lies” (3.3.37-39). Accordingly, this declaration of Antony’s separation between “peace” and “pleasure” leads to the second significance of Antony and Octavia’s marriage. This marriage, I propose, has epistemological connotations. Octavia, a personification of feminine idealism in Rome’s perception, reflects the patriarchal desire to make an alliance, or rather assimilation of, with an Other who accepts the objectified, nonthreatening role of a subordinate. Octavia offers no subversion to Rome’s discursive masculinity. Bamber sees Antony’s marriage to Octavia as an act of rejection to the Other’s attempts of subjectification in which the Other “is denied its dialectical relationship with the Self and valued only insofar as it brings pleasure.” In this moment of the drama the self, Bamber continues, “refuses the Other and puts his faith in the firmness of his own boundaries” (Bamber 50). Rejecting and silencing the Other is manifested as part of Rome’s integral epistemological characterization. Octavia is silenced, and her marriage is made possible by Caesar’s “power unto Octavia” (2.2.149). Octavia’s voicelessness and docility are juxtaposed against Cleopatra’s articulation and subversion.

Moreover, Each of Octavia’s brief appearances, or disappearances, is juxtaposed against a scene that reflects Cleopatra’s subjective, self-assertive existence. Octavia’s first appearance in the play is preceded by Enobarbus’ fantastic portrait of Cleopatra (2.2.195-223). Whereas Cleopatra is depicted in this scene as the author of parallel realities that make “a gap in [the] nature” of Western representations, Octavia’s appearance is brief, timorous, and confined within the limitations of Rome’s patriarchal discourse. Octavia’s second appearance is her tearful

farewell to Caesar whose language reflects the locus of the feminine Other in Rome:

Sister, prove such a wife
 As my thoughts make thee, and as my farthest band
 Shall pass on thy approval. Most noble Antony
 Let not the piece of virtue, which is set
 Betwixt us as the cement of our love,
 To keep it builded, be the ram to batter
 The fortress of it. (2.2.25-31)

Caesar uses specific diction that reflects his perception of Octavia's, and any woman's, role in the masculine sphere of politics. Octavia is referred to as a property devoid of any sense of human feelings. She is "the piece," "the cement," and "the ram" as Caesar's "thoughts make [her]" for the "use" of the political will of Rome. Directly after Octavia's objectification as property, Shakespeare contrasts this image with that of Cleopatra. Cleopatra's previous interrogation of the Messenger, as she extracts a subordinate image of her rival, reflects a dominant attitude usually associated with an independent Self. On the other hand, although Octavia's "beauty, wisdom, and modesty" (2.2.243) are applauded, they are dwarfed in comparison to Cleopatra's political savvy. Octavia's stereotypical domestic morality is reduced to a lifeless fixation in the messenger's sarcastic description: "She creeps: / Her motion and her station are as one. / She shows a body rather than a life, / A statue rather than a breather" (3.3.21-24). Octavia's lack of identity and her total submission to Rome's misogynistic discourse, thus, constitute the sources of her objectification.

Cleopatra: The Absolute Queen

Octavia's parting from Antony is succeeded by Caesar's description of Cleopatra and Antony's lavishly ruling Egypt:

Contemning Rome, he has done all this,
 And more ...
 In Alexandria: here's the manner oft:
 I' th' marketplace on a tribunal silvered,
 Cleopatra and himself on chains of gold
 Were publicly enthroned; at the feet sat
 Caesarion, whom they call my father's son,
 And all the unlawful issue that their lust

Since then hath made between them. Unto her
 He gave the establishment of Egypt; made her
 Of lower Syria, Cyprus, Lydia,
 Absolute queen. (3.4.1-12)

Caesar's unintended tribute manifests Cleopatra's counter-discursive locus as the representative of double Otherness (feminine and Egyptian) who becomes an "absolute queen." Cleopatra rejects Rome's gender designations by assuming the role of a political figure, which invades traditionally male dominated spaces. As a woman and as an Egyptian, Cleopatra fragments the Western monoglossic perception of the inability of the Other to occupy a subjective position. Cleopatra as the "absolute queen" presents a political, matrilineal space that counteracts Rome's exploitation of politics as an exclusively masculine domain. Cleopatra's counter-discursive position as a representative for the Other's adequacy to occupy epistemological designated space as the locus of the subject endangers Rome's claim of existential supremacy as a universal core. Rome's fear is illustrated in Caesar's horror that Antony:

hath given his empire
 Up to a whore, who now are levying
 The icings o' the earth for war. He hath assembled
 Bocchus, the king of Lybia, Archelaus
 Of Cappadocia, Philadelphos, king
 Of Paphlagonia; the Thracian king Adallas;
 King Manchus of Arabia, king of Pont,
 Herod of Jewry; Mithridates, king
 Of Comagene, Poleman and Amyntas,
 The kings of Mede and Lyaonia,
 With more larger list of scepters. (3.4. 1-11)

"The litany of eastern names," David Daiches comments, "suggests both exotic power and sinister threat to the familiar Roman world, but the chief force of the speech comes in the shocked association of the words 'empire' and 'whore'" (Daiches 150). This catalogue of the Other's positioning as a subject in a political locus horrifies Caesar. For Caesar, the object cannot occupy a subjective existence, and far more terrifying for him is the thought that the instigator of the revolt of the margin is a "whore." The assembly of the object in a subjective, counter-discursive locus threatens Rome's epistemological stability. Nonetheless, that this epistemological

positioning should be in the name of a strumpet is destructive to Caesar and Rome. Cleopatra, the whore, the strumpet, menaces the Roman space of the play by consumption. If Antony has “given his empire / Up to a whore,” what prevents Caesar from being consumed by the same whore and her followers? Shakespeare, in this imagery, blurs the Western core/margin dialectic in an act of submerging that intimidates Rome’s cultural fixation.

Cleopatra’s gathering of the margin in a subversive mobilization against Rome’s authority jeopardizes Rome’s epistemological absolutism as the center of the world. By folding down the margins of the Roman civilization, Cleopatra threatens Rome’s cultural core with her, “infinite variety” prowess to reduce this fixation into a fluid, heterogeneous entity. If this happens, the distinction between the subject/object, center/margin, we/them is shattered or de-centered perpetually. The threat to submerge Rome’s epistemological boundaries manifests, what I have diagnosed, as Shakespeare’s characterization of Cleopatra as an aporia. The submerging of Rome’s geopolitical and epistemological borders terrorizes Rome’s imperial subjectivity. Thus, the submerging of Rome’s identity means that it is going to be rewritten on the edge. Rome, then, will start to lose its imperial claims and lose any ability to draw a demarcation line between the Self and its exteriority. What has happened here, had Cleopatra’s plan succeeded, is, to quote Derrida, a “sort of overrun [debordement] that spoils all those boundaries and divisions.” The obliteration of the borderline between the subject and the object emphasizes the dominant notion of a Self to be located in different loci of subjectifications (Derrida 83). Caesar’s abhorrence, hence, is Rome’s reaction to the Other’s endeavors to overrun and transgress its epistemological boundaries. For, Derrida asserts, such submerging, “such debordement ... will have come as a shock, producing endless efforts to dam up, resist, rebuild the old partitions, to blame what could no longer be thought without confusion, to blame difference as wrongful confusion” (83), in short, to blame Cleopatra.

Cleopatra’s ability to displace epistemological fixations disturbs the play’s Roman text and creates a variance in the contextual space of the imperial Self. Egypt occupies the textual and contextual location of the subject. Rome’s opening attempts to conceptualize Cleopatra as the prostituted Other are distorted by Shakespeare’s creation of the Egyptian parallel space. The epistemological, geopolitical, and sexual gravity of this

parallel space creates an epistemological anomaly in Rome's imperial position as the center of cultural order. Cleopatra's capability to force her image on the play's textual techniques enhances her position as an unknowable subject that defies Western epistemological dichotomy. This proclivity to create a parallel universe, though weakened by Rome's constant aggression, represents a major threat that can fragment Rome's homogeneous paradigm. Rome's paradigm is a discursive, hegemonic activity that aims at homogenizing and appropriating the text's alternative and subversive practices to its own cultural domain. Cleopatra constitutes a parallel, independent subjectivity that counteracts Rome's objectification of the Other's existence. By defining herself through the Egyptian text, by creating new (con)texts in which she can evaluate her independent, antirepresentational identity, Cleopatra subverts Rome's cultural mold, and by doing so that is, by challenging Rome's hegemony-Cleopatra risks her life. Her death scene defies Rome's representational anticipations. According to Roman stereotype, Cleopatra does not love Antony; her relation to Antony is based on lust and utilitarian needs. Rome's perceptions are constructed upon a false understanding of the objectification of Cleopatra. As an object, Cleopatra cannot control her destiny or act upon her independent will. Yet Cleopatra's death scene falsifies Rome's representational depictions and displays Cleopatra as an autonomous agent.

Conclusion

To conclude, from the banks of the Nile Cleopatra is perceived as *differance*. In this Egyptian allegory, Western imperial metaphors such as race, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity are epistemologically resisted and disrupted. Cleopatra's appearance as *differance* connotes subversion and difference as her constitutive episteme by way of discursive political practices. In this sense, Cleopatra cannot be thought or known in Western logos because her differential consciousness is constructed from the locus of untranslatability and displacement. As the site of *differance*, Cleopatra subverts Rome's univocal reality by occupying a subjective position. However, Cleopatra's subjectivity does not attempt to emulate Rome's univocal discourse: as her subjectivity is characterized by *jouissance*. Cleopatra's space is like her sexuality; it is polyglossic instead of monoglossic, disseminated instead of constant, multidimensional instead

of teleological. Cleopatra's "infinite variety" celebrates hybridity and openness, thus severing the binary dialectic that organizes Rome's discourse. Cleopatra's *jouissance* fragments Rome's univocality. Cleopatra's fluidity opposes Rome's ideology that depends on the consistency of the imperial object as a stagnant stereotype. The Egyptian queen's "infinite variety" is seen as a source of epistemological insurrection. The Egyptian parallelism, thus, appears as a source of new knowledge that can debilitate the imperial ethos of objectification. It has to be invaded, explored, contained, appropriated, and assimilated.

Cleopatra, the dark queen, the "dark continent," is riveted "between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss," as Hélène Cixous diagnoses the situation of the feminine in her passionate treatise, "The Laugh of the Medusa" (315). Cixous' work accuses "phallogocentrism" of suppressing the feminine, transforming it into an enigma; in other words, the feminine has to be translated into phallogocentric discourse to be comprehended. Phallogocentrism discards the feminine either as the Medusa that no man can discover or as something to be represented in the abyss of phallogocentric order. Cleopatra manifests what Cixous terms "libidinal feminist" economy (311). This economy stands against the masculine discourse of Rome that exaggerates the signs of epistemological difference, where the Other has no turn to speak. Cleopatra's feminine libidinal economy marks the production of *Antony and Cleopatra* with its ability to endow the object with authorial powers. Rome does not acknowledge the subjective locus of the Egyptian sphere, does not identify it with any authorial production, and relies on its inability to represent its autonomous existence. Cleopatra's libido counteracts such claims and "materializes physically what she's thinking ... she inscribes what she is saying... she draws her story into history" (312). Thus, by producing the play's most important events, Cleopatra has the ability to literalize her eloquence, a power usually attributed in Western ideology to the subject.

Cleopatra's story is a history; it is a transformation from textuality to politics. By articulating and producing history, Cleopatra subverts the Occidental claim of homogeneous existence. This claim locates the core of existence in the West and any epistemological project is a mere mimetic representation of the ideal Western subject. Cleopatra uses her erotic proclivities as a political tool of resistance to Rome's patriarchal ideology.

“More body, hence more writing,” asserts Cixous (316). Cleopatra’s libidinal prowess, physical and authorial, means more subversion of Rome’s imperial ethos. It is a voleric practice that counteracts Rome’s static homogeneity; Cleopatra “is the erotogeneity of the heterogeneous” (317). What Rome has represented as moral laxity in Cleopatra’s character reflects Rome’s inability to control and translate Cleopatra’s subversive sphere. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare constructs an autonomous sphere that stands in parallel to that of the Occident. This parallelism is not a space of otherness but rather another sphere of subjectivity. Thus, in order to critique the Western dialectical ideologies, Shakespeare creates Cleopatra, not as a locus of the Other, but rather as an independent, epistemological, and subjective sphere. By this I mean that Shakespeare, in his construction of the Egyptian (con)textuality, creates another historical system that is not controlled, organized, or determined by Western discursive historiography. From the Roman perspective, this parallel historicity appears unknowable and untranslatable that has to be translated to the Occidental logos.

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