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Reflections of "Otherness" in William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*

Introduction

The notion of "otherness" has always been explored in art and literature. Writers in various epochs have employed this theme as a legitimisation of conquest, subjugation and alienation of certain minority groups and cultures. Creating "the other" is a process that engages emotions. The target "alien" is equipped with features that make him or her inferior. This motif was commonplace in ancient literature which vehemently criticised the invaded nations. It was also part of the Anglo-Norman and Elizabethan royal propaganda (see Jaworska-Biskup 2018, 2019; Faletra 2014).[1] Like other writers of his times, William Shakespeare employed this theme. The most well-known Shakespeare's "others" are Othello and Shylock, both stigmatised for their origin, morals and customs.

This study aims to demonstrate how William Shakespeare weaves the concept of "otherness" in one of his most famous Roman plays *Antony and*

[1] Cf. the depiction of Sir Hugh Evans, a Welsh character in William Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Cleopatra.[2] In the tragedy, the Queen of Egypt is portrayed as a "creature" alien to Roman (*ergo*: Elizabethan) culture. As presented below, Shakespeare depicts her as terrifying and fascinating (a destroyer and life-giver) at the same time. A woman of dark complexion, wearing a crown, openly flaunting her sexuality, and in a liaison with a married man was seen by the Shakespearean audiences as "other" and "alien". Her image contrasts with the social canons that the pale "virgin queen" Elizabeth I tried to impose on her subjects in England.

Ancient works inspired the Bard[3] (though indirectly).[4] Like many commentators before and after him (including many historians such as Theodor Mommsen[5]), the English playwright was "fooled" by Augustus' propaganda (Wyke 1994: 98–140). Sources relating to the civil war, in which Antony and Cleopatra suffer a humiliating defeat, are far from being objective. Therefore, Cleopatra possesses all the qualities considered unworthy of a woman of good manners in a patriarchal society. William Shakespeare infused Cleopatra's psychological profile (as depicted by ancient authors) with new traits. For Shakespeare, filling in source gaps, such as addictions, impulsiveness or promiscuity, was less of a challenge. Yet one remains the same. Cleopatra was a stranger to

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[2] The theme of this volume is emotions. The potential of the play in discussing human affect is vast (jealousy, toxicity, over-dependence, to list a few issues). Harold Bloom aptly writes: "Critics rightly tend to agree that if you want to find everything that Shakespeare was capable of doing, and in the compass of a single play, here it is. I can think of no other play, by anyone, that approaches the range and zest of Antony and Cleopatra. If the greatest of all Shakespeare's astonishing gifts was his ability to invent the human, and clearly I think it was, then this play, more than Hamlet or King Lear might be considered his masterwork, except that its kaleidoscopic shifting of perspectives bewilders us" (Bloom: 560).

[3] Plutarch's *Life of Antony* was a primary source that Shakespeare used when writing *Antony and Cleopatra*. The Bard was also inspired by such books as *The Tragedie of Antonie* by Robert Garnier from 1578 and *The Tragedy of Cleopatra* by Samuel Daniel from 1594. In building the plot, the English playwright parallelly used the episodes from the Plutarch's lives of Caesar and Timon of Athens. What is important here, Shakespeare did not know Greek. Therefore, he used Sir Thomas North's translation (*The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes, Compared*, London 1579). To make things more interesting, North's command of Greek was also not well enough to translate the ancient text into English. Thus when translating his version North referred to a French translation of Plutarch's text: see: Canby: 143. On Shakespeare's construction of characters based on the work of Plutarch see: Roe: 171–187.

[4] The image of Shakespeare as unfamiliar with classical culture was perpetuated by Shakespeare's peer Ben Johnson. Nuttall: 207–222.

[5] Cf. Mommsen: 84, 85–87.

the people of Rome in the first century A.D., she remained so even for the visitors to Elizabethan theatres in London.

Rome *versus* Egypt

In his essay on *Antony and Cleopatra,* Michael Payne observes that the play reverberates around dualism and polarity. One of the central themes of the tragedy is contrasting Rome and Egypt. The Roman world, as depicted by Shakespeare, is viewed as a space where measure, authority and conquest dominate. Egypt, by contrast, is projected as a brutal and alien space to be subjugated by the civilised Empire.[6] To quote the scholar, "Measure, authority, conquest, the setting boundaries, and uniformity are the absolutes of the Roman world, as well as being the means for Roman success. Establishing boundaries, whether geographical or moral, necessitates a dualistic ethic. Within the boundaries of the Roman empire is civilisation, outside those boundaries is barbarism" (Payne: 266). Alongside polarity, Shakespeare develops a theme of conflict. The playwright juxtaposes conflicting Roman and Egyptian values and standards that cannot be reconciled. In Payne's words, the conflict is between "the Roman desire to measure, to judge, and to set boundaries, and the Egyptian cultivation of freedom, fluidity, and ecstasy" (Payne: 274).

One of the clearest epitomes of Egypt's freedom is a cult of self-pleasure and sexual frivolity. In Adrian Goldsworthy's words, "the exotic is almost always reinforced by the intensely erotic. Cleopatra has become one of the ultimate femmes fatales, the woman who seduced the two most powerful men of her day" (Goldsworthy: 6). In the Roman eyes, Antony relinquishes military prowess and discipline to pleasure. The general's indulgence in earthly delights dethrones him from the position of god Mars to a mere puppet in the hands of a woman. In Act 1, Scene 4, Octavian (called by Shakespeare Caesar), in his conversation with Lepidus, reports on Antony's visit to Egypt in the following way: "From Alexandria /This is the news: he fishes, drinks, and wastes /The lamps of night

[6] The Greeks and Romans did not understand (also refused to understand) Egyptian culture. "Egyptian" for them meant as much as "barbaric", "savage" and "uncivilized". On the interactions of cultures along the Nile, see: Łukaszewicz, 2006.

in revel (1.3.3–4).[7] As the passage informs, alongside such "wastes" as fishing and abusing alcohol[8], the Roman general spends nights on ongoing feasts.[9]

A reference to drinking as a symbol of Egypt is also mentioned in another part of the play. After her lover's departure to Rome, consumed by longing and sadness Cleopatra finds consolation in drinking mandragora[10]: "Give me to drink mandragora. /Why, madam? /That I might sleep out this great gap of time/ My Antony is away" (1.5.3). Mandragora caused a drug-inducing state. This drink was known for its anaesthetic as well as poisonous properties. It was also considered as a panacea for melancholy. Moreover, mandragora (more precisely, madrake, the plant used to produce this drink) has sexual associations. In Elizabethan times, it was believed to boost potency (Williams: 201). The link between sex and food is a recurring theme of the play and another token of Egypt's "otherness". It is true in the statement that "Egypt is associated with images of eating and drinking, while Rome is associated with images of temperance and abstinence" (Cantor: 24).[11] The allusions to sex and food are made by Cleopatra again when she calls herself a "morsel" and "dish" (read as a speciality served to men). Also, Antony refers to food when rebuking Cleopatra for her licentious past. At the lost battle at Actium, Antony shouts: "I found you as a morsel cold upon/ Dead Caesar's trencher; nay, you were

[7] All quotations are taken from *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. D. Bevington, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, and henceforth cited.

[8] Antony's abuse of alcohol can be attributed as much to his inclinations as to Egypt's devotion to pleasure and entertainment. While still in Rome, the general became known as the author of the work "On my drunkenness" (*De sua ebrietate*). This was later exploited by his enemies. See: Scott: 133–141. Shakespeare's presentation of Antony as indulging in earthly pleasures reflects Plutarch's depiction of this character: See Harold Bloom's commentary: "Plutarch's Antony, whatever real brutalities and malfeasances he commits, is always distinguished by his love of honour, and by his capacity to arouse affection in common soldiers. Yet Antony, in Plutarch's judgment, was the most self-indulgent of the Romans of his era, and succumbed to Cleopatra as the ultimate indulgence" (Bloom: 580).

[9] The noun *revel* means very noisy and lively enjoyment. All definitions of the English lexicon come from Crystal and Crystal, 2002.

[10] The ancient sources fail to mention this information. However, accounts have survived that the Queen took interest in poisons when she was planning her suicide. See: Goldsworthy: 374.

[11] Also, "The orientalism of Cleopatra's court – with its luxury, decadence, splendour, sensuality, appetite, effeminacy and eunuchs – seems a systematic inversion of the legendary Roman values of temperance, manliness, courage and pietas" (Gillies: 150).

a fragment/ Of Gnaeus Pompey's" (3.13.119–121). Shakespeare's portrayal of Egypt as a place of entertainment can also be exemplified by a mention of *billiards* in Act 2, Scene 5. The Egyptian Queen kills time by playing this game with her companions, Charmian and Mardian (2.5.4).

Another token of Egypt is music. In Act 2, Scene 5, Cleopatra demands music in the following words: "Give me some music – music, moody food/ Of us that trade in love" (2.4.1–2). As this passage accentuates, music connotes love. Music and sounds are also mentioned in side notes to the play as the introduction to the change of venue from Rome to Egypt. In line with that, the first thing that attracts Roman soldiers' attention when entering Egypt is music: "Peace. What noise? /List, list!/ Hark!/ Music i' th' air" (4.3.13–16).[12]

Egypt's "otherness" is also showcased by its affinities with water. Cleopatra is thus called "a serpent of Old Nile" (1.5.26). Associating Cleopatra with a serpent strengthens a negative image of the Queen as evil and poisonous. In ancient Rome, serpents symbolised deceit, betrayal, ingratitude and incalculable behaviour (Jońca, 2006: 265–266; Feuillet: 148–149). In Elizabethan times, a serpent denoted a "morally corrupting creature" (Williams: 273). There are also many mentions of water animals in the play. Rome, by contrast, is depicted as a land. Unlike land, which is seen as stagnation, water is associated with fertility and life. As Mary Crane puts it, "The Roman world is an orderly, impermeable, man-made 'arch'. The Egyptian 'earth' is 'dungy' clay elemental, life-giving, and allied with another element, water" (Crane: 5). Interestingly, Shakespeare includes images of the destruction of Rome by water in the following passages: "Let Rome in Tiber melt" (1.1.35) and "Sink Rome" (3.7.15).

The water versus land distinction parallels another contrast Mary Thomas Crane calls "water versus earth polarity". As the scholar observes, the Romans in the play speak of their Empire as a world in contrast to the Egyptians who perceive their environment as the earth. To quote Crane, the Roman world "is composed largely of hard, opaque, human-fashioned materials, and its surface is divided into almost obsessively named – and conquered – cities and nations".

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[12] This passage may refer also to Plutarch's famous description of the first meeting of Antony and Cleopatra on the Nile. As the ancient source informs, the musicians accompanied the Queen. Plut. Ant. 29.2. See also: Jońca, 2007: 116.

The Egyptian earth, by contrast, is "yielding, encompassing, generative, and resistant to human division and mastery" (Crane: 2).

Lost in dotage? Cleopatra and Antony

The turbulent and complex relationship of Antony and Cleopatra is the crux of the tragedy. As Paul Cantor rightly observes, Antony and Cleopatra's love is "a curious mixture of deep passion and profound insecurity, and seems all to ready to pass over into its opposite, a deeply felt hate, or at least a bitter mistrust of each other's fidelity" (Cantor: 156). Based on Shakespeare's descriptions, a modern psychologist would certainly consider the Queen of Egypt "toxic" and self-destructive.[13] Who knows, maybe he would diagnose her with bipolar disorder? Shakespeare's Cleopatra loves Antony immensely and at the same time enslaves and destroys her lover.

Such a presentation of the Queen justifies Antony's conduct: his lack of prudence and haphazard behaviour. When describing the toxic relationship of the titular couple Shakespeare employs the technique of gender reversal. Under the influence of Cleopatra, Antony loses all his male properties. Cleopatra demonstrates male features rather than her partner (Syme: 260, 270). To repeat after the previously quoted Michael Payne, she is a "destroyer of men and their masculinity" (Payne: 271). The reversal of gender can be gathered from Cesar's words who observes that Antony is: "not more manlike/ Than Cleopatra nor the queen of Ptolemy/ More womanly than he" (1.3.5–7). According to Roman standards, Antony is "a man who is the abstract of all faults / That all men follow" (1.4.8–9). In other words, Antony betrayed all Roman values and principles. Gender reversal reverberates also in the act of changing clothes.[14] As we learn from Cleopatra's account, she once put her clothes on

[13] Cf. Goldsworthy: 124: "by 51 BC Cleopatra was about eighteen (…). Beyond her extensive education and clear intelligence, almost everything else about her character remains conjecture. Declared as goddess and the daughter of a self-declared god, her family had been royal and divine for centuries. The self-confidence of someone born to rule was mixed with the uncertainty and fear of her own family as potentially deadly rivals".

[14] Shakespeare emulates the accusations formulated by Octavian's propagandists. However, "Hellenistic" masculinity (Antony styled himself as a Hellenistic monarch) differed slightly

drunk Antony, wearing his sword simultaneously (2.5.22–23). The sword, a token of power and conquest, also symbolises Cleopatra's dominance over her lover. A mention of the sword is also made by betrayed and angry Antony: "O, thy vile lady!/ She has robbed me of my sword" (4.14.22–23).[15]

In the Roman eyes, Antony is under Cleopatra's spell. In the opening lines, Philo remarks: "Nay, but this dotage of our general's/ O'erflows the measure" (1.1.1–2). The word *measure* suggests proper proportions desired in healthy male-female bonds. As Philo informs, Antony's feelings towards Cleopatra are beyond measure, to quote the Roman soldier: they "o'rflow the measure".

In the next part of his entry, Philo describes Antony's transformation in Egypt, or to be more precise, his downfall triggered by the detrimental impact of the Queen he serves.[16] From an admired and respected general, he becomes the "bellows and a fan to cool a gipsy's lust" (1.1.9–10) – another allusion to the subservient position of the Roman general to his Egyptian female master.[17] Anti-Cleopatra propaganda can be gathered from the language that Philo uses to address the Queen. Antony is referred to as "our general" and compared to "plated Mars". His previous political status is reflected in the phrase "the triple pillar of the world".[18] Antony's Egyptian lover is not mentioned by her name or royal title by her Roman adversaries and propagandists. Rather, she is introduced by such derogatory words as "tawny front", "gipsy" and "strumpet".

In the play, even Antony is aware of the destructive consequences of his relationship. The problem is that he is not strong enough (ergo: not manly

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from the Roman ideas about who was a "real man" and "true Roman". Cf. Roy: 111–135. Interestingly, the traces of Antony's alleged effeminacy were shown in the HBO series "Rome". Cf. Toscano: 123–135. The creators of the series also followed the narrative of ancient sources (especially Plutarch).

[15] Plutarch also questions the masculinity of the Roman leader. See: Russell: 121–137.

[16] Ancient sources, especially Plutarch reproach Antony for his submissiveness to Cleopatra See: Burliga: 121–122.

[17] Similarly in ancient sources. Before the decisive battle of Actium, Augustus, in a speech to the soldiers, recalled that Antony "worships this woman" like some kind of deity (Dio Cass. 50.25.3–4).

[18] In 43 B.C.E. Antony, Octavian and Lepidus divided the Empire between them. Antony received the East along with Egypt.

enough[19]) to impose his dominance on the Queen.[20] Antony's relinquishment of his "alpha male" standing is the consequence of his choices (in Shakespeare's eyes: his weakness) (Braden: 188–206). It is a compromising situation for a man and a dangerous one for a politician. At the moment of despair, he admits: "These strong Egyptian fetters I must break, /Or lose myself in dotage"(1.2.113–114). The noun *fetters*, which means chains, represents the man's subservient standpoint. The word *dotage* is mentioned twice in the play by both Philo and Antony. *Dotage* denotes love. In another sense of the word, it signifies childishness induced by old age, lack of clear judgement and ill mind.

Cleopatra – epitomes of "otherness"

The mental instability is not only Antony's characteristics. Cleopatra is also a woman of changing moods. In his conversation with the Queen Antony shouts: "Fie, wrangling queen, /Whom everything becomes, to chide, to laugh, /To weep itself, in thee, fair and admired!" (1.1.49–52). The word *wrangling* marks Cleopatra's propensity to argue fiercely with her adversaries. *To chide* vividly accentuates her mental state. On the one hand, it means reprimanding and disciplining others through vulgar and bitter language. It also denotes an argument and conflict. Cleopatra's outbursts of anger and violence intermingle with fits of laughing and weeping.

This emotional instability is not, however, seen as a vice but a charm which attracts men. Enobarbus paints an analogous portrayal of the Queen: "We cannot call her winds and waters sighs and tears; they are greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report" (1.2.142–144). The woman is compared to such destructive powers as storms and almanacs. The Roman soldier also alludes to Jupiter, the god of the sky: "she makes a shower of rain as well as Jove" (1.2.146). The most blatant example of Cleopatra's personality is her response

[19] According to Plutarch of Cheronea, it was Cleopatra's sexual obsession that led to Antony's downfall as a Roman and a leader. This is not better illustrated than at Actium, where he unexpectedly fled the battlefield following his mistress. Cf. Plut. Ant. 66.7–8.

[20] This picture tallies with the ancient sources. Cassius Dion (50.5.2) emphasises that the triumvir ceased caring about his honour and became a slave to the Egyptian woman. See also: Mommsen: 78.

to the news of Antony's marriage to Octavia in Rome. She cannot constrain her anger. The Queen attacks the messenger and even attempts to kill the man.

Yet another dimension of the otherness of Egypt is marked by witchcraft and magic. It is a place of fortune-telling and prophesying the future rather than a hub of logic and reason.[21] By way of illustration, in Act 1, Scene 2, Charmian and Iras who assist Cleopatra at the Egyptian court ask for a prediction of the future by palm reading. Also, Roman protagonists associate Cleopatra with magic. Antony admits: "I must from this enchanting queen break off" (1.2.125). Shakespeare again uses the word with a double meaning. *Enchanting* denotes a charming woman. In this way, he emphasises Cleopatra's beauty.[22] Secondly, it signifies magic and witchcraft.[23]

Even the Roman general refers to his lover as a witch: "The witch shall die./ To the young Roman boy she hath sold me, and I fall /Under this plot" (4.12.47–49). The *witch* connotes a woman who performs magic.[24] It is also

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[21] Shakespeare thus repeats the stereotypes of the Romans. They also loved magic, and their thinking could be shockingly superstitious. On the subject of magic in ancient Rome. Cf. Jońca, 2009: 266–268.

[22] A heated discussion of Cleopatra's beauty was sparked by Blaise Pascal. Interestingly, the debate concerned her nose. The profiles of the Queen on coins and surviving sculptures do not dispel all doubts. Instead, they confirm the opinion of ancient authors that the Queen was not beautiful, but well-groomed, passionate, bold in conversation and intelligent. Especially the latter trait drew the attention of Roman men accustomed to dividing women according to very simplistic criteria (woman of good manners vs. whore). See: Plut. Ant. 27.3–5; Dio Cass. (42.34.4–5). See also: Goldsworthy: 4: "Cleopatra was clever and well educated, but unlike Caesar and Augustus the nature of her intelligence remains elusive, and it is very hard to see how her mind worked or fairly asses her intellect". Some further remarks: Goldsworthy: 125. Sir Ronald Syme's remark is more sharp here: "Cleopatra was neither young nor beautiful. But there are more insistent and more dangerous forms of domination – he may have succumbed to the power of her imagination and her understanding" (Syme: 274).

[23] As Caesar's general and then triumvir, Antony was adored and loved by the people. It was the relationship with Cleopatra that ruined his popularity. However, Antony was more than just a man who succumbed to the charms of an unsuitable woman. He was a Roman general and statesman. Somehow it had to be explained to the public why he suddenly became a public enemy, who should be annihilated. The story that an Egyptian witch cast a spell on him justified a civil war and the annihilation of a man of great merit to Rome. See: Goldsworthy: 345.

[24] The Romans attributed witchcraft and poisoning to women. Both of these activities were termed *veneficium*. See: Jońca, 209: 267; Jońca, 2022: 280–281.

a denominator of an evil person. Last but not least, the word connotes sex and prostitution. In Elizabethan jargon, it connoted a bawd and promiscuous woman (Williams: 341–342). To quote Vienne-Guerrin, the word finds such synonyms as "sorceress, a charmer, a hag, an enchantress" (Vienne-Guerin: 443). Witches also connote the trials against this group in England and Scotland.

Shakespeare seeks more derogatory labels to paint a negative picture of the Queen. Cleopatra is not only a witch but also a *gypsy*. The word gypsy in Shakespeare's times meant three things. It denoted a person of Egyptian nationality.[25] In the second sense, it described nomadic people. Thirdly, using the noun *gypsy* commentators referred to a whore (Elam: 35; Vienne-Guerrin: 208–209). All three meanings suit Cleopatra. Throughout the play, she is portrayed as a nomad Egyptian whose reputation as a seducer and prostitute is well-known among the Roman protagonists.[26] In Elizabethan England, gypsies were also referred to as Romanies.[27] As Nomads and aliens, they were ascribed such features as magic, treachery, adultery and evil (Bevington: 70).

In Shakespeare's epoch, gypsies had bad press. They were blamed for all disasters and calamities such as floods, earthquakes and plagues (Limon: 122–124). The negative status of gypsies was reflected in the law. The Egyptian Act of 1530 enacted by Henry VIII is an example of anti-gypsies legislation. Under this document, all 'Egyptians' were to be expelled from England and their properties confiscated. This was followed by the 1554 law enacted by Queen Mary. The new law allowed gypsies to live in England on condition that they abandon a nomadic and vagrant way of life (Elam: 39–41).

Thus Shakespeare employed the concept that carried negative emotions both in the context of the Roman world, as well as of his times. As Keir Elam explains, "Shakespeare exploits the misnomer to dramatize Egypt simultaneously

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[25] Shakespeare once again follows ancient and modern stereotypes. Cleopatra was not a native Egyptian; the Greek blood of the Ptolemaic dynasty flowed in her veins. See: Jońca, 2007: 115.

[26] The ancient sources do not treat Cleopatra as a gypsy. This is Shakespeare's projection. Virgil sarcastically calls her the "Egyptian wife" and writes that Antony's relationship with her was against divine law (Verg. Aen. 8.688).

[27] Similarly in Polish culture. See: Jaworska-Biskup, Jońca: 163. As John Gillies explains: "Cleopatra – who in Plutarch is represented as ethnically Greek – is represented with the «tawny front» of a moor consistent with Egypt's proximity to Libya, and consistent perhaps also with her sultry temperament" (Gillies: 127).

from a Roman and an English perspective: Cleopatra is an *Aegyptia* for Shakespeare's Romans and Shakespeare's London audience alike" (Elam: 37). It is Philo who introduces Cleopatra as a gypsy in the very first lines of the play with the phrase "gipsy's lust" (1.1.9). Also, Antony, having been defeated at the battle at Actium, calls his lover "a right gipsy" ("Like a right gipsy hath at fast and loose / Beguiled me to the very heart of loss'", 4.12.27), emphasising her cunning and treacherous nature. "The phrase 'right gypsy' therefore portrays a seductive, capricious and peripatetic *Aegyptia* from the viewpoint of an enamoured but humiliated Roman general" (Elam: 38). As Vienne-Guerrin also notes, the expression "at fast and loose refers to a cheating game that was supposed to be played by gipsies, and thus presents Cleopatra as cunning" (Vienne-Guerrin: 208–209).

Cleopatra is seen as a whore.[28] The Roman characters use many words that depict her as a person of excessive sexual appetite and lust. Enobarbus remarks that due to the influence of Cleopatra Antony became a "strumpet's fool" (1.1.13). Another character, Agrippa, calls her "Royal wench" (2.2.237). Scarus invents another phrase with sexual connotations "Yon ribaudred nag of Egypt" (3.10.10), where *nag* means an old female riding horse and a whore. Cleopatra is thus presented as a woman who was "ridden" (read as overt analogies to sexual encounters) by several men. *Ribaudred* highlights the negative image of the Queen as obscene (Williams: 213; Vienne-Guerrin: 299). It means "decked out with ribbons like a horse at fair or wanton" (Vienne-Guerin: 240).

Another invective used by Antony when referring to the Queen is "triple turned whore" (4.12.13). It means traitorous towards Julius Cesar, Gneius Pompey and Antony. Cleopatra's licentiousness is criticised but also makes her attractive in the eyes of Roman men. Maecenas calls this asset "infinite variety": "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale /Her infinite variety. Other women cloy/ The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry/ Where most she satisfies" (2.2.244–247). In another part of the play, he compliments Cleopatra again: "She's a most triumphant lady, if report be square to her" (2.2.195). Enobarbus calls Cleopatra "a wonderful piece of work" (1.2.149). To quote Enobarbus

[28] Propertius calls Cleopatra "the shameless wife" (Propert. 3.11.31) and "whore queen" (Propert. 3.11.39). The latter term is also used by Pliny the Elder (Plin. nat. hist. 9.119). See: Wyke, 2009: 334–380.

again: "For vilest things/ Become themselves in her, that the holy priests/ Bless her when she is riggish" (2.2.249–250). The synonym of riggish is licentious (Williams: 260). Infinite variety is here contrasted with such phrases as vilest and riggish.

Cleopatra versus Octavia

Cleopatra's (and by analogy Egypt's) "otherness" is showcased by the Queen's female Roman opposite Octavia. The latter was married by Antony to settle a political conflict with her brother Octavian.[29] Octavia is portrayed as an obedient, calm and faithful woman. She embodies all the features desired in a woman in the Roman world. Agrippa in his conversation with Cesar refers to Octavia as "admired": "Thou hast a sister by the mother's side,/ Admired Octavia" (2.2.125–126). The man convinces Antony to marry Octavia by mentioning her beauty as well as virtues: "whose beauty claims/ No worse a husband than the best of men,/ Whose virtue and whose general graces speak/ That which none else can utter" (2.2.135–139). Maecenas adds more features of Octavia, such as wisdom and modesty[30]: "If beauty, wisdom, modesty can settle/ The heart of Antony, Octavia is /A blessed lottery to him" (2.2.251–253). From all these descriptions Octavia emerges as a paragon of Roman female virtues.[31] Calm, restrained and modest she is a candidate for a perfect wife (a lottery as Maecenas puts it) contrary to the noisy unpredictable Cleopatra. "Who would not have his wife so" (2.6.121), asks Mecanas.

For Antony, however, Octavia seems dull and unattractive. As Enobarbus remarks: "He will to his Egyptian dish again" (2.6.123).[32] In this passage, the

[29] The people of Rome received the news of the nuptials with enthusiasm. The poet Virgil composed a fourth eclogue to mark the occasion. A commemorative series of coins was also minted. Further remarks: Jońca, 2007: 120–121.

[30] Enobarbus refers to another asset: "Octavia is of a holy, cold, and still conversation" (2.6.120).

[31] The catalogue of female virtues that Roman men desired in their wives (silent, obedient, pious and industrious, to list just a few) can be easily reconstructed from tombstone inscriptions: Jońca, 2011: 88–97. Cf. Jońca, 2024: 9–18.

[32] In 37 BC, the romance between Antony and Cleopatra was renewed. Plutarch describes the reunion of the lovers and the eruption of former passion as "huge evil" (Plut. Ant. 39.1).

character draws an association of the Queen with food. Just like food that sustains life, Antony cannot exist without his lover. Cleopatra, not Octavia, gives Cesar life energy that propels him to action. Interestingly, a picture of Octavia as the complete opposite of Cleopatra is paid in Egypt. From Cleopatra's messenger, we learn that Octavia is short, low-voiced and has brown hair. Her face is "round, even to faultiness" (3.3.30). The man also reports that Octavia "creeps/ Her motion and her station are as one. /She shows a body rather than a life, /A statute than a breather" (3.3.19–22). Cleopatra describes her rival as "dull of tongue" and "dwarfish" (3.3.16). Such a depiction makes Octavia unattractive according to Egyptian standards. "That's not so good. /He cannot like her long"(3.3.13–14), says Cleopatra.

In line with that, the opposing two couples Antony-Cleopatra versus Antony-Octavia mark the Rome versus Egypt dichotomy. Whereas the former union is passionate and erotic, the latter is political and emotionless. In Paul Cantor's words: "The loveless marriage of Antony and Octavia is another token of the hollowness of traditional Roman institutions in the Empire, especially when contrasted with the marriageless love of Antony and Cleopatra (Cantor: 158). Antony adds another contrast. He juxtaposes peace and political allegiance with pleasure. He admits: "I will to Egypt; /And though I make this marriage for my peace, / I'th'East my pleasure lies" (2.3.37–39).

Conclusions

In the introduction to his book, Adrian Goldsworthy writes: "most often Antony and Cleopatra are remembered as a couple and as lovers – perhaps the most famous lovers from history. Shakespeare's play helped them to grow into fictional characters as well, and so their story can now be numbered alongside other tales of passionate, but doomed romance, as tragic as the finale of *Romeo and Juliet*" (Goldsworthy: 1). It is a tragic romance about two passionate lovers indeed. It is also a story of alienation, expulsion and otherness.

The relationship between the Roman triumvir and the Egyptian Queen – as told by Plutarch of Cheronea and other ancient writers – is great source material for historians and, as recent research has demonstrated, psychologists. William Shakespeare transformed an ancient story. Where ancient sources used

covert descriptions and allusions, Shakespeare put overt statements into the mouths of specific individuals. The old portrayal of Cleopatra as a stranger (on political, social, and gender levels)[33] was thus emphasised and sharpened. In doing so, the Bard strengthened the stereotype that a woman who wants to live life on her terms is a monstrosity[34] dangerous to herself, the man close to her, and her entire environment.

Shakespeare also used the story of the two lovers to reflect upon the prejudices and fears of aliens that circulated in Elizabethan society. In doing so, he used a diversified vocabulary that depicted the Queen as someone rebelling against social norms and conventions. The Egyptian Queen is thus portrayed in his play as a whore, gypsy, and treacherous. She is one allegory of many female "aliens" that should not be in the Elizabethan world.

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[33] Cf. Syme: 274: "Rome, it has been claimed, feared Cleopatra but did not fear Antonius". It was on the occasion of Cleopatra's death that the poet Horace wrote the famous lines: "it's time to drink" (*nunc est bibendum*). Hor. od. 1.37.29.

[34] Roman historian Florus also openly calls Cleopatra a "monster" (Flor. 2.21).

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Reflections of "Otherness" in William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*

Summary

The paper discusses the representation of "otherness" in William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra.* In this tragedy, Shakespeare weaved the ancient concept of otherness to elaborate on the social cleavage in Elizabethan society. Cleopatra, the main female character of the play, is depicted as the other, an alien blamed for the downfall of the Roman Empire. She is the epitome of all evil who destroys the power dynamics of the Roman world by seducing the Roman general. The analysis shows the dichotomies that Shakespeare builds, such as Rome versus Egypt, barbarity versus civilisation, and land versus water to list just a few. The study offers a new reading of the tragedy through the lens of alienation and otherness.

Keywords: Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, ancient Rome, otherness

Słowa kluczowe: Szekspir, *Antoniusz i Kleopatra*, starożytny Rzym, obcość

Cytowanie

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