

■ “But stirr’d by Cleopatra”: The Ambivalent Role of Foreign Drugs in *Antony and Cleopatra*

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Abstract

This study looks at Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* primarily as a text expressing medical concerns about imported foreign drugs in early modern Europe, more specifically in 16th-17th century England. Through an investigation of the play’s dramatic atmosphere, juxtaposed with early modern beliefs about foreign drugs embodied by the images of Cleopatra, this article will demonstrate how *Antony and Cleopatra* is concerned with imported foreign medicines, and with how Shakespeare has placed various medicinal messages in a drama focusing on a romance and on political ambitions. *Antony and Cleopatra* is, then, a discourse on social pathology, on the desire for foreign drugs that could be both beneficial and fatal.

Keywords: *Antony and Cleopatra*, Early Modern medicine, foreign drugs, xenophobia

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“A drug infused, antidote to the pains
Of grief and anger, a most potent charm
For ills of ev’ry name.

. . .

Such drugs Jove’s daughter own’d, with skill prepar’d
And of prime virtue, by the wife of Thone,
Ægyptian Polydamma, giv’ n her,
For *Ægypt* teems with drugs, yielding no few
Which, mingled with the drink, are good, and many
Of baneful juice, and enemies to life.
There ev’ry man in skill medicinal
Excels, for they are sons of Paeon all.”

--- Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 4

“no man wolde lyghtly go unto a medicine, that came from so
strange a place . . .”

---Ulrich von Hutten, trans. Thomas Paynell, 1533

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, William Shakespeare depicts a dichotomy of two political entities, Rome and Egypt, and thus a vision of two worlds: the West and the East, the domestic and the exotic, the upright and the wanton, the orthodox and the unorthodox, a binary opposition that already suggests a certain ambivalence with regard to foreign lands in early modern European society. In fact ancient Egypt was venerated by “[n]early all writers of the ancient world, both historical and poetic,” who “acknowledged the supremacy of Egypt in medical knowledge” (Warren 1074-75), and yet the image of an indecent and inferior oriental Egypt immediately appears in *Antony and Cleopatra* when Octavius, in his opening lines, criticizes Antony for staying with Cleopatra and depreciates the queen’s court as a site of voluptuousness: “Let’s grant it is not / Amiss to tumble on the bed of Ptolemy, / To give a kingdom for a mirth, to sit / And keep the turn of tipping with a slave” (1.4.16-19). For Shakespeare’s Octavius, as well as for the majority of Shakespeare’s contemporary audience, Egypt is a place associated with decadence and degeneration, and Cleopatra is a woman born with nothing but passion and sensuality.

Martin Bernal, an influential modern historian, however, claims in his monumental and voluminous work *Black Athena* (1987) that Egyptian antiquity had remained revered by the Europeans in the Renaissance era and also in the following centuries (152-55). In fact, Queen Cleopatra was viewed sympathetically by medieval Arabic scholars, and her court during the reign of Ptolemy VII (69-30 B. C.) was also seen to have been one that supported various disciplines, particularly science and medicine (Tsoucalas et al. 116).

The gap between the conventional and the accurate historical conceptions of Cleopatra may likely result from a fear of foreignness, or xenophobia, that threatens to contaminate the national health of the early modern European people, especially after a series of outbreaks of terrible diseases, including the Plague or Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century and syphilis in the late-fourteenth and the early-fifteenth centuries. In the case of syphilis, ironically, while there was a fear of foreign drugs there was an even stronger desire to get the outside remedy which was sure to be more effective. Thus, one of the earliest-known imported foreign remedies was brought into Europe in 1514 for the purpose of curing this once-rampant venereal disease.¹ Exotic drugs are, therefore, for early modern European society ambivalent insofar as they suggest something both seductive and threatening, desired and denied, curative and poisonous—all of which suggests Shakespeare's Egyptian queen, Cleopatra.

In this study, taking Cleopatra as the *metaphor* for foreign drugs, I argue that there exists a drastic ambivalence towards any outside remedy in early European thinking, one which coincides with the two contrasting images of Cleopatra, and with the political duality of Antony and Octavius in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Through an investigation of the play's dramatic atmosphere, juxtaposed with early modern beliefs about foreign drugs embodied by the images of Cleopatra, this article will demonstrate how *Antony and Cleopatra* is concerned with imported foreign medicines, and with how Shakespeare has placed various medicinal messages in a drama focusing on a romance and on political ambitions.

Scholarship on *Antony and Cleopatra* has been mostly concerned with discussions of gender and sexuality,² as well as with the transcultural aspects of the role of Cleopatra.³ Thus the foreign and historical medicinal aspects of the play have remained largely unnoticed. The analysis of this play, with its "Egyptian foreignness"—itself tied to the origins of powerful foreign medicines and the conflicting attitudes toward imported drugs in the early modern English society—will help to disclose the nature of the Elizabethan popular imagination

¹ As R. S. Roberts indicates, the only exception for the long delay of introduction of new drugs was syphilis, which "struck such fear into sixteenth-century Europe generally that physicians were ready to experiment with exotic plants. The most popular of these was Guaiacum." He continues, the "earliest importations of guaiacum were from St. Domingo where Oviedo saw it in 1514" (168-69).

² Criticisms on the issues of gender and sexuality may include, to name a few, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993); Carol Thomas Neely's *Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare's Plays* (1985); and Jonathan Dollimore's "Shakespeare, Cultural Materialism, Feminism, and Marxist Humanism" (1990).

³ For example, Mary Hamer's *Signs of Cleopatra: History, Politics, Representation* (1993).

regarding the exotic sources of these medicines, and to further explain to what extent this may account for the cultural phenomenon of xenophobia in Shakespeare's era. *Antony and Cleopatra* is, then, a play about more than romance, politics, gender, and sexuality. It is a discourse on social pathology, on the desire for foreign drugs that could be both beneficial and fatal.

In the play, Cleopatra displays herself as someone both treacherous and renewing, wanton and noble, alluring and admirable. That is, we may see her as being at the same time both the poison and the remedy, as characterized once again by the complexity, perhaps the self-contradictoriness of certain foreign drugs that were imported into England. That Cleopatra acts, in the medicinal arena of Shakespeare's contemporaries, as an impure and dangerous foreign drug for Octavius and his Romans, is a symbolic threat to the supporters of localism in the using of drugs, while she is also the cure or remedy for Antony in his search for a brave new world, one that seems to promise possibilities for those believers in internationalism who attempt to seek cures from the outside.

Ancient foreign cultures, such as that of Egypt, have generally remained stigmatized from the perspective of the popular Roman Christian world, as we clearly see in parts of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Bernal, however, explains in his *Black Athena* that "Renaissance thinkers believed that Egypt was the original and creative source, and Greece the later transmitter of some part of the Egyptian and Oriental wisdom" (160). Bernal, as a historian, is surely not a fan of Shakespeare when it comes to a concern with historicity: "Shakespeare's portrayal of the Greeks in *Troilus and Cressida* as being unreliable and scheming was firmly based in the late medieval tradition, and was not atypical in his own day" (160). Shakespeare is, however, by no means aiming at representing history itself, but at bringing his theater audiences into the imaginative world of his dramas. However, the discrepancy between the public's understanding and the historical theories is clear, as is that between the domestic and the foreign, which may to some extent explain the rise of xenophobia. Taking then Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* as an example, the present study will take this gap as a starting point to explore the contemporary Elizabethan controversy regarding contacts with foreign cultures.

Imported Foreign Drugs in Early Modern England

Though there remains the fear of foreignness, early modern England, like other European countries, was initially driven to import medicine from the outside as this was commercially profitable, and later due to the need to slow down

the rampant spread of syphilis, and if possible, to cure this disease after domestic treatments had proved futile. However, foreign cultures and commodities had become inevitably linked with contagious or exogenous diseases. Paradoxically, the outbreak of syphilis and other epidemics in England had an ambivalent outcome: it deepened people’s fear of the exotic and, at the same time, intensified the search for cures on the part of those sailing on exploratory voyages. Believed to have entered England from the outside, syphilis was a new and foreign disease with epidemic potential,⁴ unknown to Europeans, and yet the necessity of curing it led to a revolution in the English medicine of that period, in part as the best remedies had come, again, from the outside, from foreign lands.

England’s growing interest in international trade and in importing foreign products was also, to a degree, part of a larger foreign fantasy, which really meant an increasing awareness of the self/other or domestic/foreign dichotomy. This cultural ambivalence regarding the issue of imported drugs may be represented by the debate between localism and universalism. Though both standpoints show a greater concern with medicinal efficacy than with economic profits, the imported drugs gradually became, like gold, silver, and other rare commodities, indispensable as they made considerable profits for England at the time of British voyages of discovery and British colonization. “Remedies,” in the words of Andrew Wear, at this time were indeed “often associated with money, and the more novel and exotic the remedy, the more profitable it was likely to be” (Wear, *Knowledge* 69).

The new remedies of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, having both commercial and medical advantages, were brought into Europe from newly discovered lands, especially by the Spanish and the Portuguese. Other than recording the Aztec remedies,⁵ the Spanish physician Nicolas Monardes, who grew and studied many of the new American plants, introduced his knowledge of these plants into Europe. In his works on these exotic plants, published in the late sixteenth century, Monardes celebrates their curative efficacy (Wear, *Knowledge* 70). In his English translation of Monardes’s works, John Frampton, a one-time Spanish-English trader, also asserts the plants’ medicinal value in *Dos Libros: Joyfull Newes out of the New Founde Worlde* (1577). Another Eng-

⁴ In the early sixteenth-century, the diverse names of syphilis imply a national and political prejudice. Jonathan Gil Harris affirms that “syphilis was understood to reside in, and be transmitted by, foreign bodies” (26).

⁵ The Franciscan College in Santa Cruz, Mexico, published in 1552 a manuscript description written by an Aztec, Martin de la Cruz, of Aztec medicines of hundreds of medicinal plants (Wear, *Knowledge* 69n58).

lishman, Thomas Hariot, lists in his *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1589) several foreign plants that possess healing effects and equates them with precious commodities like silver and gold. Hariot records in his work the names of some curative plants, and in particular he recommends sassafras as a better drug than guaiacum to combat syphilis.⁶

Those exotic therapeutic plants, including guaiacum (the wood of guaiac), one of the first of the early imported herbs, were able to be assimilated into Galenic humoral medicine; hence, they did not challenge orthodox Galenism. Importantly, with the practitioners of Galenic medicine claiming the universality of the drugs, “the remedies from the East Indies and America were quickly integrated into the orthodox qualitative-humoral system of medicine” (Wear, “The Early Modern Debate” 149). That is, the imported drugs, endorsed by writers and physicians like Monardes, became “part of the allopathic medical system derived from Galen that formed the basis of the ‘learned’ medicine taught in the universities” (Wear, “The Early Modern Debate” 150). Patients and practitioners were in search of certain foreign plants due to their superior efficacy. As Jean de Renou puts it, these purgative remedies

are for the most part exotical and foreign, conveyed to us dry, from savage and barbarous Regions. Yet some we have growing with us, especially in hot Regions; yet they do not retain the same virtues and qualities that the other have, but come far short; and therefore it is that they are rejected, and the foreign ones (which are brought from *India* and *Arabia*) used. (qtd. in Wear, *Knowledge* 77-78)

The most obvious example of this was the use of guaiac,⁷ the resin of guaiacum, which had helped the Europeans to cure syphilis, as a replacement of mercury in the standard yet painful treatment.⁸

Though the fact remains that the “English were relative late-comers to the European voyages of discovery, colonization and trade, they were well aware that remedies from new-found lands could be valuable commodities” (Wear, *Knowledge* 70). In particular, after the commercial wars between England and Spain in the sixteenth century, one influential cause of the delay of the British import of American remedies, England won over much of its trading territory

⁶ According to Wear, “[b]y the time Monardes wrote in 1565, guaiac was going out of fashion” (“Medicine” 308).

⁷ Being imported into Spain by 1508, guaiac’s use had become widespread by 1517 (Wear, “Medicine” 308).

⁸ According to Herbert Silvette, regarding the treating of the patients of syphilis in the seventeenth-century, “[u]nder properly regulated mercury treatment the patient spat four pints in twenty-four hours. His gums ulcerated, his teeth fell out, and he shrank into a desiccated skeleton; but the pox was gone. All the patient had now to do was recover from his cure” (226).

from Spain, after the signing of their peace agreement in 1604. Thus, in early seventeenth-century England, with its expansion via commercial trade, the portion of imported drugs rose accordingly and conspicuously.

As R. S. Roberts indicates, "in 1588 only 14 per cent of all drugs had come directly from outside Europe, but by 1621 this had risen to 48 per cent" (170).⁹ Jonathan Gil Harris has a similar observation: "Official state documents recording imported goods testify to the substantial increase, during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, in the English consumption of foreign drugs and spices" (121). Thus, combined with the strong mercantile appeal of making large profits and the firm belief in that which is exotic, the importing of foreign drugs continued to increase, despite the arguments against it. Nevertheless, given the fact that there was an obvious increase both in the volume and the kinds of drugs, the issue of imported drugs remained controversial.

The protests against foreign drugs can be dated back to the twelfth century. From the medieval to the early modern era, the drugs that were imported into England had been delayed, according to Roberts, for several reasons,¹⁰ and "it was not until the seventeenth century that the modern history of the drug trade begins" (169). As early as the medieval period, there was a lack of imported drugs according to the commercial trade figures, and even "all these imported spices would have been used not in medicine but in cooking" (Roberts 167). The protests at this early stage, however, were due more to mercantilism than for medical purposes. Echoing this distaste for foreign drugs, William Harrison, a nationalistic historian, criticizes the bringing of the new plants into England in his *Description of England* (1587): "how many strange herbs, plants, and annual fruits are daily brought unto us from the Indies, Americans, Taprobane [Ceylon], Canary Isles, and all parts of the world" (265).¹¹ Taking a nationalistic perspective, Harrison declares that "the virtues of our simples [plants] here at home would have been far better known" if not for the popularity of "outlandish [foreign] drugs" (267).

This adherence to localism in medicine was particularly agreeable to the prominent revolutionary German-Swiss medical practitioner Paracelsus, who

⁹ Similar findings are also indicated by Patrick Wallis: "[s]igns of growth are visible in 1609, and from the 1620s to the 1660s drug imports increased substantially" (26).

¹⁰ Other than the initial domestic protest and the lack of adequate illustration and introduction of the new drugs, the most important reason that accounts for this delay is how, in Roberts's words, "Spain tried to prevent free trade to Spanish America and the Portuguese East." England, thus, is at war with Spain for this part in the sixteenth century (167-69).

¹¹ The modern text of the citation is based on Harrison's 1587 edition of his *An Historical Description of the Island of Britain*.

opposed the universality of medicinal plants asserted by the Galenic school, and claimed that

[e]ach land, to be sure, gives birth to its own special kind of sickness, its own medicine, and its own physicians. . . . I really have to laugh at those Germans who want to prepare medicines from across the seas while there are better remedies to be found in front of their noses in their own gardens. (Moran 104)

This fear of *adulteration*, even impurity of foreign drugs, would give rise to England's widespread xenophobia, and her awareness of this potential threat to the healthy unity of the European community. The mainstream thinking was that imported medicines were no better for curing diseases than the local plants, which were cultivated by people living in the same place with the same climate, and thus could be easily assimilated by them, by their bodies.

Other than the local, nationalistic, and medicinal standpoints against the outside remedy is the religious concern of Timothie Bright, a physician at St. Bartholomew's hospital in England. Bright wrote the *Treatise Wherein is Declared the Sufficiencie of English Medicines* (1580), which very openly opposes the exotic plants of foreign lands. He argues that God has given us our medicines in the same way that he has provided our food and clothing, the emphasis being on the crucial role played by the "localism" of these plants and medicines. Claiming the "orthodoxy" of these local remedies by directly associating them with Christianity, Bright thinks it to be absurd, that

the health of so many Christian nations should hang upon the courtesie of those Heathen and barbarous nations, to whome nothing is more odious than the very name of Christianity? And who of malice do withhold from us such medicines as they knowe most for our use . . . ? (11-12)

Bright's arguments clearly express his hostility to this outside, this unknown, this mysterious foreignness. The protest against exotic plants goes beyond the issue of medicine; it articulates an overwhelming cultural anxiety regarding those "foreign" contacts that suggest to most of the early modern Europeans impurity, disease, and death, and remind them of the outbreak of syphilis, a new disease at that time. This very fear of the foreign, of "foreign contact," is clearly presented in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, where we know Cleopatra comes from, to use Bright's phrase, the "Heathen and barbarous nations." However, if the image of Cleopatra foregrounds the impure origin of a disease that gives rise to xenophobia in the western world, she still remains, in the background, a permanent symbol of medicinal antiquity in the eyes of historians.

Cleopatra as the Dangerous Exotic Drug

The last scene of *Antony and Cleopatra* remains immortal, with Cleopatra trying to end her life via the bite of a venomous snake, a scene which reinforces our image of the Egyptian queen as being one who is associated with poison and drugs. Tanya Pollard, a recent critic of Shakespearean works, points out that *Antony and Cleopatra* is a play "permeated with poisons and narcotic potions" (71), and Cleopatra and her Egypt are closely tied to the image of poison.¹² Clearly, to most critics as well as to the Romans in the play, Cleopatra is a *femme fatale*, a seductress, a temptress who is the main cause of the fall of Marc Antony in spite of his famous military prowess.

Indeed, John Scarborough, a recent researcher on the ancient Mediterranean medicinal culture of the Middle Ages, notes that the historical Cleopatra

herself had a fairly well-founded expertise in the lore of drugs and poisons, poisonous snakes, and other presumably harmful creatures native to Egypt, even though she bequeathed in her often-quoted works . . . a respected proficiency in the arts of cosmetics, as contrasted to her more ominous reputation . . . of being a royal toxicologist. (8-9)

Though credited with a prominent Egyptian cultural legacy, the image of the historical Cleopatra has been inevitably subject to the impact of the shift of the leading role "from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic theater in early modern times," in that "slaves were drawn from Africa rather than the Balkans for work in America" (Wallerstein 89). The result has been, in the words of the historian John Michael Archer, to "'other' and demean all of African civilization, including Egypt" (42); that is, to enlist the antique Egyptian traditions in the *process of othering* (Archer 42). Accordingly, there appeared to be a mixture of colors ("othering") and cultures in re-determining the old Egyptian culture, once reputed for its learning.

Thus, the Puritan divine George Abbot, in Archer's observation, seems to be ambivalent when, in his voluminous 1605 work entitled *A Briefe Description of the whole WORLDE*, he speaks of Cleopatra's skin color and her notoriety, though overall he celebrates the Egyptian civilization and learning:

Although the Countrie of Egypt do stand in the selfe same Climate, that *Mauritania* doth, yet the inhabitants there, are not black, but rather dunne, or tawnie. Of which colour, *Cleopatra* was obserued to be: who by enticement, so wanne the loue of *Julius*

¹² While Pollard's article focuses on Cleopatra's link to poison, this paper has distanced from it by my centering on the analysis of the Egyptian queen's association with the characteristics of foreign medicine.

Cesar, and *Anthonie*: And of that colour do those runnagates (by deuces make themselves to be) who goe vp and downe the world vnder the name of *Egyptians*; being in deed, but counterfaites, and the refuse, or rascalitie of many nations. (K2 recto-verso; qtd. in Archer 43)

Cleopatra is thus seen as the *other* for her racial color, her oriental origin, and her feminine unpredictability in the eyes of George Abbot, the seventeenth-century archbishop of Canterbury. Earlier, the fourteenth-century Italian poet Giovanni Boccaccio, in his much acknowledged work, *De Claris Mulieribus*, a collection of 104 famous women from antiquity, emphasizes Cleopatra's pagan otherness, seeing her as a woman of transgression. Even much earlier is the Roman historian Maestrius Plutarchus, or Plutarch, whose *Parallel Lives* appeared in A. D. 100, though its story of Cleopatra only became known to later European artists and authors. For Plutarch, Cleopatra is an ambivalent character, or as the Plutarch scholar Joyce Tyldesley puts it: "Plutarch's Cleopatra is a confusing creature; he seems unable to make up his mind whether she is essentially good or essentially bad, although he is certain that she is manipulative, and that she has been the ruin of at least one good Roman" (210). Cleopatra can never be allowed to enter, for Plutarch, the orthodox Roman world, as she was too unnatural, too fatal, even too treacherous.

Cleopatra's supposed treacherous nature is, this article argues, analogous to those imported drugs that generally denote danger and impurity. In the Actium War scenes of Shakespeare's play, the Egyptian queen flees from her alliance with Antony after their fight with Octavius. Enobarbus's exclamation, upon seeing the Egyptian naval forces turning their back on their enemy, rings the knell of Antony.

ENOBARBUS Naught, naught, all naught, I can behold no longer:
The Antoniad, the Egyptian admiral,
With all their sixty fly, and turn the rudder:
To see't, mine eyes are blasted. (3.10.1-4)

Following Enobarbus is Scarus's cursing of Cleopatra's mad act of flight:

SCARUS —i' the midst o' the fight,
When vantage like a pair of twins appear'd
Both as the same, or rather ours the elder, —
The breeze upon her, like a cow in June,
Hoists sails, and flies. (3.10.11-15)

In the eyes of Scarus, as well as of the audience, Cleopatra's fleeing is the main cause of losing the war, which has led to the total collapse of Antony's heroic valor, dignity, and even life.

SCARUS She once being loof'd,
The noble ruin of her magic, Antony,
Claps on his sea-wing, and (like a doting mallard)

Leaving the fight in heighth, flies after her:
Experience, manhood, honour, ne'er before
Did violate so itself. (3.10.18-23)

While combating the Romans, Cleopatra's abrupt withdrawal from the battlefield appears to be an uncontrolled and unknown medicinal effect of those foreign drugs when used to defeat the local diseases. Though her seemingly treacherous act of fleeing has not destroyed her lover's belief in her, the now defeated and outraged Antony accuses her of adultery when she is seen with her hand being kissed by the messenger sent by the victorious Octavius.

ANTONY You were half blasted ere I knew you: ha?

 I found you as a morsel, cold upon
 Dead Cæsar's trencher: nay, you were a fragment
 Of Gnaeus Pompey's, besides what hotter hours,
 Unregister'd in vulgar fame, you have
 Luxuriously pick'd out. For I am sure,
 Though you can guess what temperance should be,
 You know not what it is. (3.13.105,116-22)

The Egyptian queen is thus seen here as being as impure and adulterous as those imported foreign remedies that "were prone to be counterfeited, adulterated, and substituted" (Wear, "The Early Modern Debate" 150). In accusing the Egyptian queen of being sexually corrupted, Antony has chosen to break his alliance with Cleopatra and thus has unintentionally tied himself to his Roman foe Octavius, given their shared patriarchal view of women. Here Antony is apparently voicing the standpoint of Roman culture. Hamer says that the "[e]pitaphs for Roman wives, composed, it must be assumed, by husbands who erected the memorials, pay tribute to their chastity, regularity in keeping the house, and skill in such tasks as weaving" (28). Octavia, Antony's new wife, is indeed the very model of the Roman woman who acts and speaks in accordance with her grace and virtue.

Octavia maintains her celebrated femininity in the eyes of her male Roman observers in the play, who include Agrippa, ("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," 2.2.128-31), Mecaenas, ("If beauty, wisdom, modesty, can settle / The heart of Antony, Octavia is / A blessed lottery to him," 2.3.76), Enobarbus, ("Octavia is of a holy, cold, and still conversation," 2.6.106), and her own brother, Octavius, ("the piece of virtue," 3.2.28). In contrast to the Roman ideal image of Octavia, a domestic woman implying modesty and chastity, Cleopatra is undoubtedly lustful and capricious and, even more significantly, a threat to the hard masculine world of Rome which subdues the role of

woman.¹³ “This version of Cleopatra is,” Tyldesley observes, “the precise opposite of the chaste and loyal Roman wife, typified by the wronged Octavia and the virtuous Livia” (206).

In Antony’s second military battle with his Roman rival, after his disaster in the Actium War, he again is betrayed by his Egyptian queen, but this time he realizes that he is coming to his end, and he exclaims: “All is lost!” (4.12.9).

ANTONY This foul Egyptian hath betrayed me:

 Triple-turn’d whore, ‘tis thou
 Hast sold me to this novice, and my heart
 Makes only wars on thee. Bid them all fly:

 Betray’d I am.
 O this false soul of Egypt! This grave charm,
 Whose eye beck’d forth my wars, and call’d them
 home;
 Whose bosom was my crownet, my chief end,
 Like a right gipsy, that as fast and loose
 Beguil’d me, to the very heart of loss. (4.12.10, 13-15, 24-29)

The degree of Cleopatra’s commitment to Antony continues to change—as we see with her flight during the Actium War and, after this war is lost, with her secret agreement to surrender to Octavius via his messenger. She continues to change so quickly that her charming complexity may seem to become a not-so-charming unpredictability in the eyes of her comrade and lover, which weakens both her and Antony’s belief that they have a mutual understanding. With what may seem the uncontrolled efficacy of an exotic drug, Cleopatra now seems able to simultaneously exalt and weaken Antony’s spirit. The fact that it is hard for her to be accepted due to her complexity and even incomprehensibility may remind us of Europe’s resistance to those all-too-mysterious foreign drugs in early modern times. As Roberts puts it, before the descriptions of the new exotic drugs were known to the public, “it was difficult for a new drug to be widely accepted” (168).

This seemingly bewitching oriental beauty is, in her own words before her suicide, “No more but e’en a woman, and commanded / By such poor

¹³ Hamer has pointed out how Cleopatra is a threat to the Roman cultural patterns. As she elaborates, “the law of Egypt did not subject women as the law of Greece and Rome did; they enjoyed one freedom that made them a scandal to the men of Rome: they were free to choose their own husbands” (28). Hamer continues, “[h]er very origin in the East, . . . boldly demarcated as the ‘other’ by the time of Homer. . . . It is as a threat to the Law of the Father rather than as an erotic symbol that Cleopatra impinged on Rome” (29).

passion as the maid that milks, / And does the meanest chares" (4.15.73-75). As the queen, famous or infamous, of a mighty kingdom Cleopatra sees herself, at the end of her life, as just an ordinary woman commanded by her passion and obliged to work for a living like other women. Her lowering of herself to the level of a common woman is, indeed, a gesture that has demystified her, making her a down-to-earth, simple woman. Here again we may think of the gradual acceptance of those "unknown" and perhaps "fantastic" imported foreign drugs by Europeans, and more specifically Englishmen, in Shakespeare's time.

Like those unknown and mysterious foreign drugs, the historical and dramatic images of Cleopatra in the West have long been controversial, and have perhaps won the recognition of several later scholars and critics who speak about her from the other side of the story.¹⁴

Cleopatra as the Desired Foreign Drug

Recent critical readings of the play present a rather different assessment of the Egyptian queen. Linda T. Fitz, for instance, argues that "critical attitudes toward Cleopatra seem to reveal deep personal fears of aggressive or manipulative women" (183).¹⁵ Fitz sees this sort of interpretation as "sexist" criticism which has "distorted the meaning of what Shakespeare wrote" (183). The present study also seeks to critique this one-dimensional or biased assessment of Cleopatra by taking the image of this queen as being that of an exotic medicine, which reminds us of the bias against foreign drugs in Renaissance England, in spite of the latter's perhaps paradoxical yearning for an "outside" remedy for its own unrelenting domestic plague.

Significantly, though Plutarch's descriptions of Cleopatra, as mentioned above, in his popular work *Parallel Lives*, are thought to be the primary inspiration for Shakespeare's writing of *Antony and Cleopatra*,¹⁶ several medieval Arabic

¹⁴ The recent scholarly contributions on the historical investigations of Cleopatra's life include, to name a few, Hamer's *Signs of Cleopatra: History, Politics, Representation* in 1993; Joyce Tyldesley's *Cleopatra: Last Queen of Egypt* in 2008; and Duane W. Roller's *Cleopatra: A Biography* in 2010. On the other hand, the current literary critics like Robert Ornstein and Linda T. Fitz attempt to defend the much distorted position of the dramatic role of Cleopatra.

¹⁵ Fitz points out that there exists a "sexism" reading of Cleopatra in both the two major approaches of the play. In her words, "[b]oth the reduction of the play's action to 'the fall of a great general' and the definition of the play's major interest as 'transcendental love' make impossible a reasonable assessment of the character of Cleopatra. There is a word for the kind of critical bias informing both approaches: it is 'sexism'" (183).

¹⁶ In the words of Tyldesley, "Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, . . . served as the inspiration behind William Shakespeare's . . . *Antony and Cleopatra* (c. 1606). . . . The parallels between Plutarch and *Antony and*

scholars in Egypt, who had first-hand access to the ancient monuments and to the scholars and storytellers who preserved Egypt's oral heritage, wrote about the Egyptian queen from a very different perspective from that of the western Romans.¹⁷ Al-Masudi (who died c. 956 A. D.), the traveler and historian, was "the first Arab writer to give any details of the Queen's interest in science and scientists" (Daly 133), and introduced to us the eastern Cleopatra, who also appears as Quilopatra, Kilapatra or Aklaupatr:

She was a sage, a philosopher, who elevated the ranks of scholars and enjoyed their company. She also wrote books on medicine, charms and cosmetics in addition to many other books ascribed to her which are known to those who practice medicine. (qtd. in Daly 133)

Due to the illustrations of those Arabic scholars, Cleopatra seems to have been seen primarily as a dignified and erudite expert in science and medicine. The later Roman version of Cleopatra, perhaps influenced by the Arabic historians, had already started to undergo a transformation in the western world. In particular this can be seen in the work of the medieval English poet Geoffrey Chaucer, who describes the legend of Cleopatra in his work *Legends of Good Women* (1380), where the queen appears as a virtuous and a martyr-like figure who sacrifices herself for her love.

"A medical writer herself," says the recent cultural historian Duane W. Roller, "she may have studied with the physicians and pharmacologists at her father's court" (45). It is also noted that the most influential role model for the historical Cleopatra would have been Mithradates VI the Great of Pontos, a powerful political figure in the world of the eastern Mediterranean for several decades, one who spoke over twenty languages, and an excellent scholar himself, especially of medicine, who possessed a remarkable library (Roller 49). The historical Cleopatra is also believed to have been the author of *Cosmetics*,¹⁸ a work that contains several groups of literary fragments that are scattered through several sources, and are found most significantly in Galen.¹⁹ The medical treatise

Cleopatra are obvious" (213).

¹⁷ For over a thousand years, western scholars, not until the sixteenth-century Ottoman conquest, as Tyldesley points out, "continued to study ancient Egypt second-hand via the only sources available to them: the classical authors and the Bible" (212).

¹⁸ As a significant work in the history of medicine, *Cosmetics*, indicated by Roller, was "cited by at least four later medical authors"; however, "[a]tribution to her cannot be proved but is exceedingly probable" (51).

¹⁹ Galen was the authoritative physician in the western world of medicine, who influenced the development of various scientific disciplines, particularly in the field of medical theories, from the second century to the sixteenth century, before he was challenged by the Swiss-German medical empiricist Paracelsus.

Cosmetics, attributed to Cleopatra, is "a medical and pharmacological work, with eight prescriptions for curing *alopecia* ('fox-mange'), a disease in which the hair falls off" (Roller 50).

The Cleopatra of Shakespeare's play does after all exhibit herself as a curative comforter for Antony in his later years, associating herself with the historical Cleopatra in her suggestive medicinal role. Though in the opening pages of the play Antony urges himself to return to Rome to attend to his political and domestic duties, still thinking with a Roman conscience, he later chooses to return to Egypt instead. Perhaps due to his damaged political status in Rome after wrestling with Octavius, Antony now wishes to limit his life to a more private sphere, personal desire and the inner chamber rather than political ambition and the battlefield. That is, the once undefeated and heroic Antony is now attempting to redefine his life, seeing himself as the exotic queen's engaging lover, and thus perhaps saving himself from his deteriorated political status.

After all, Antony's two domestic wives seem to have failed to represent, for him, the quality of true femininity, as the late Fulvia could have been a stout warrior, and Octavia seems to have been more like a lifeless creature. She is described like this in the messenger's reply to Cleopatra's inquiry:

She creeps:
Her motion and her station are one:
She shows a body, rather than a life,
A statue, than a breather. (3.3.18-21)

While the often-praised, modest and virtuous Octavia is marble-like, the military Fulvia is a masculine woman. Both define well the Roman values of reason, discipline, and stability, and yet both are strangers to the imaginative world hidden in Antony's mind, even if he mainly appears as a gallant soldier. It is, then, plausible that in Rome Antony has never really loved, and after all he can be "But stirr'd by Cleopatra" in this eastern land (1.1.43). Apparently, it is in the exotic Cleopatra that Antony discovers his "new heaven, new earth" (1.1.17), his land of love.

From the onset, once staying in Egypt, Antony has denied his native country, in which his worldly power and fame are to him but clay, and he boldly claims this foreign land as his new homeland.

ANTONY Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
 Of the rang'd empire fall! *Here is my space,*
 Kingdoms are clay. (1.1.33-35; my emphasis)

At one point, Antony is the very character who, being away from his newly-wedded Octavia and his native Rome, exemplifies Adriana's line in Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*: "some love that drew him oft from home" (5.1.56), for he is the one who seeks his desired mental cure outside of any domestic or national

home. Significantly, Antony's exotic love experience could be therapeutic for him in the sense that he is able to dive into an inner self that, before this, had known only earthly fame and power. For now he is able to undergo an elevation of himself, perhaps entering into a fuller or greater sense of humanity at the very time of his decline. Perhaps too he is now willing to compromise, reconcile, and fully embrace all that had once seemed to him unpardonable and irredeemable.

Far from being a passive lover intoxicated by the presumably poisonous Cleopatra, Antony is indeed now more active in his pursuit of love, as he himself is the initiator of the romance, one to be remembered for his devotion if not for his infatuation at the end of the play.²⁰ He is rather a poet who, at a time of total despair, sees the constantly changing shapes of clouds as those of the ways of human life.

ANTONY Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish,
 A vapour sometime, like a bear, or lion,
 A tower'd citadel, a pendent rock,
 A forked mountain, or blue promontory
 With trees upon 't, that nod unto the world,
 And mock our eyes with air. Thou hast seen these signs,
 They are black vesper's pageants. (4.14.2-8)

Here, Antony's poetic interpretation of the ever-changing nature of human encounters and experiences, with the heavy implication of elusiveness, reveals his melancholic vision of worldly events and objects. Antony seems to recognize, through his adventure with a foreign love, the evanescent nature of all earthly things, as his once glorious life is now but a cloud: "here I am Antony, / Yet cannot hold this visible shape" (4.14.13-14). The learned recognition here seems to be the necessary remedy needed to sustain a self, one that would live faithful to its commitments to an initially contingent foreign love experience, a recognition that later helps give him the desire to die with his love, to become a martyr of love. Antony seems to have undergone his rite of passage and become a forgiving and perhaps immortal lover, no longer a political loser.

Naturally he will be lured by the exotic scenes of Egypt, which are somehow essentially feminine. Enobarbus recalls the magnificent sight of the appearing of the legendary Egyptian queen, Cleopatra. It is, indeed, a goddess herself and the earthly paradise coming to life:

²⁰ In discussing the relationship of Antony and Cleopatra, I am of the opposite opinion with the traditional views of critics like John W. Draper, whose description of their love as "truly an infatuation" has neglected the inner activism of Antony (112).

ENOBARBUS

The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne
Burn'd on the water: the poop was beaten gold;
Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
The winds were love-sick with them; the oars were silver,
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
The water which they beat to follow faster,
As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
It beggar'd all description: she did lie
In her pavilion—cloth of gold, of tissue—
O'er-picturing that Venus where we see
The fancy outwork nature. (2.2.191-94, 197-201)

The initial image of Cleopatra introduced here is of something glimmering, luxurious, and rare, something that seemingly ushers in a greater grandeur. The scene certainly reaches a poetic richness, with the weaving of musical sounds, images of floating water, colors of royalty, and the queen herself in a feminine pose. All of this contributes to the composing of a romantic tapestry, one brimming with exotic sensuality. The queen is the very incarnation of the mythical goddess of love, now being kept at a distance like an artwork of nature at an exhibition, a "piece of work" indeed (1.2.151-52).

Though the first sight of Cleopatra seems to have caught him, as Enobarbus describes—"As she first met Mark Antony, she purs'd up his / heart upon the river of Cydnus" (2.2.186-87)—Antony's initial response to Cleopatra is mainly sensual, taking her as that intoxicating drug that will let him escape his political weakness. Thus, instead of choosing the Roman idealism of imperial duty and Octavia, that "piece of virtue," the poet Antony would rather commit himself to this "piece of work," Cleopatra. Antony is surely sensitive, sensual, and responsive to the exotic queen's inner calling, in that she is like the desired drug that would release his inner Dionysian spirit, capable of bringing the vitality of life into this rigid and discouraging reality. Antony's hidden Dionysian spirit is already seen in his early feast with his Roman military companions.²¹ Enobarbus's words urging them to drink are, for Antony, clearly marked with an admiring gesture to the Egyptian deity Bacchus or Dionysus:²² "we dance now the Egyptian Bacchanals, / And celebrate our drink" (2.7.102-03).

Antony himself is easily drawn to the intoxication of liquor, as he seems

²¹ In history, Antony's Dionysian connection is also affirmed by the recent scholar, the Egyptologist Joann Fletcher, as she remarks, at the time for the pre-war ceremonials, "Antony, representing Dionysos, ensured that every god received lavish offerings to gain their support, amidst performances by musicians, actors and Anubis-worshipping gladiators" (362).

²² According to Lucy Hughes-Hallett, the celebration of Bacchus is specifically attributed to Egypt, for either Bacchus or Dionysus was often identified as an Egyptian deity (90-91).

to desire to be hurled into a state of forgetfulness: “the conquering wine hath steep’d our sense / In soft and delicate Lethe” (2.7.105-06). Antony’s utterance here mixes wantonness and melancholy, disclosing his conflicted mind; for he is eager to regain that political power which he once had, while also seeming to want to submit himself entirely to the world of oblivion. Cleopatra and her Egyptian court, at one point, appear to him as an exotic sleeping pill or drug, one that can cure his Roman insomnia. In a word, the Egyptian queen embodies, incarnates his dream world, one that would add an “infinite variety” (2.2.247) of foreignness to his Roman morality, his strong adherence to a masculine duty, to order and reason.

Antony’s longing to sleep is fulfilled at last, when he learns the message of Cleopatra’s death: “the long day’s task is done, / And we must sleep” (4.14.35-36). However, only one moment before saying this, Antony is still cursing the queen for her betrayal: “She hath betray’d me and shall die the death” (4.14.26). Antony’s sudden change from an enraged comrade in war to a sacrificial lover indicates his unrelenting lingering with his “serpent of old Nile” (1.5.25). For to die with his love is the sole solution to his total decline, as the melancholic poet would elevate his romance in the other world to become a legend:

I will o’ertake thee, Cleopatra, and
Weep for my pardon. So it must be, for now
All length is torture: since the torch is out,
Lie down and stray no farther.
. . . .
Where souls do couch on flowers, we’ll hand in hand,
And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze:
Dido, and her *Æneas*, shall want troops,
And all the haunt be ours. (4.14.44-54)

Sleep is for Antony, indeed, a painless death, and his early willing surrender to the Egyptian Bacchus intoxication can be, in a sense, seen as an act of suicide. Antony’s yearning for the poisonous self-annihilation is, after all, in disguise in his search for the curing love.²³

Cleopatra seems able to read Antony’s mind before his last breath:

The miserable change now at my end
Lament nor sorrow at: but please your thoughts

²³ The historical Cleopatra had learned of Antonius’ suicide attempt, and she then sent a message to him of her death to trigger his suicide idea again. It is “clear that she had manipulated in such a way as to make his death inevitable, provoking his known suicidal tendencies” (Roller 145-46). The strategy behind this could be Cleopatra’s obsessive thought of saving her kingdom, in that the disposing of Antonius becomes inevitable, though “this was a difficult choice that she probably kept postponing” (Roller 144). My reference here is to bolster my argument of the character Antony’s hidden suicidal impulses.

In feeding them with those my former fortunes
Wherein I liv'd: *the greatest prince o' the world,*
The noblest. (4.15.51-55; my emphasis)

The queen perhaps learns earlier about Antony's sole concern in life: his continuing to maintain his glory as a military hero. His suicide can, then, help preserve his heroic role from his further deterioration in becoming Octavius's captive. Thus, in preparing for her lover to achieve this end in his political declining status, Cleopatra decides to deceive Antony one last time: her death, which has meant to act as a fatal dose to him, to speed up the time of his death. Though the lie has helped lead to Antony's suicide and then his death, it is this same lie that keeps Antony's military glory untouched by Octavius. In his suicide, Antony, however, is able to be crowned as a sacrificial lover.

Cleopatra, in sending the false message of her death, though apparently manipulating the event, has provided Antony a proper reason to carry out his desire of ending his life by his own hand, to save his dignity and himself from becoming a dishonored defeated loser. Cleopatra, at this point, has turned herself from a symbolic poison into a curing remedy in preserving Antony's more-than-life sense of honor.

Antony dies in Act IV and he dies as an extraordinary lover; however, it is not until Cleopatra's speech in Act V, the final act of the play, that he is reborn as an immortal being, one who is "past the size of dreaming" (5.2.97), one who is more than nature, for "to imagine / An Antony were nature's piece 'gainst fancy, / Condemning shadows quite" (5.2.98-100). In Cleopatra's speech, though she is being captivated, Antony is canonized as the mythic or legendary hero, surpassing all historical emperors and leaders to the point of becoming an omnipotent divine existence. Indeed, he is reincarnated as a universal god in Cleopatra's vision, bigger than the sun and the moon, a benevolent governor of the universe:

His face was as the heavens, and therein stuck
A sun and moon, which kept their course, and lighted
The little O, the earth.

. . . .

His legs bestrid the ocean, his rear'd arm
Crested the world: his voice was propertyed
As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends:
But when he meant to quail, and shake the orb,
He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,
There was no winter in 't: an autumn 'twas
That grew the more by reaping: his delights
Were dolphin-like, they show'd his back above
The element they lived in: in his livery

Walk'd crowns and crownets: realms and islands were
As plates dropp'd from his pocket. (5.2.77-80, 82-92)

Here Shakespeare presents us with some of his best poetry, and it is dedicated to Antony by the exotic queen, a foreign and oriental woman who has been condemned by the westernized Romans as a subordinated creature of wantonness. Still, to the Roman Antony, as well as to most of his fellow Europeans, the Egyptian queen encompasses the images of both the threatened poison and the desired remedy, as revealed in her engraved image of diversity, her “infinite variety.”

Conclusion

For historians, the various artistic representations of Cleopatra have, at a certain point, distorted the historical descriptions of this Egyptian queen. The cultural historian Hamer, for instance, casts doubt on the validity of Shakespeare's Cleopatra when she learns of a different version of the queen: “I learned to stop using Shakespeare as a norm and to ask what Cleopatra had meant before he wrote” (vx). Shakespeare might respond to his audience regarding his literary creation in the same manner as his predecessor Plutarch, who said:

it is not histories that I am writing, but lives; and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of virtue or vice; nay, a slight thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles when thousands fall, or the greatest armaments, or sieges of cities. (225)

However, unlike Plutarch, Shakespeare has changed his original source in his representation of Cleopatra, with her remarkable speeches in the last act, where she reserves her “marble-constant” dignity (5.2.239). Here, Cleopatra is dramatized by her act, just before her suicide, of putting on her royal robe and crown, an act seemingly immortalizing her as the one “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’” (Weigall 440).

Cleopatra, nevertheless, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, quits the world in a sudden yet quiet way, assisted by the bites of serpents, a living symbol that incarnates those opposite images of poison and medicine. She suggests poison in the sense that she is an outsider, an alien who threatens the health of that Western European community which had suffered from so many outside, foreign and exotic diseases. To Octavius, the embodiment of Rome, Cleopatra

remains the exotic, thus dangerous and contaminating "source" for the western world. To Antony and those adventurous searchers either for commercial advantages or therapeutic medicine from the outside, Cleopatra means the desired foreign medical drugs that seem able to offer multiple possibilities.

Though the battle between localism and the universalism with regard to the acceptance of imported foreign drugs persisted, it was the clear increase in their imports between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries that really explained the growing influence of the foreign drugs. As Wallis puts it:

foreign drugs were an important part of the therapeutic core of much commercial medicine, particularly in Galenic physic. They were also central to the retail trade in medical substances; they were the mainstay of the remedies sold in the shops of apothecaries, druggists and other retailers. (21)

Furthermore, even though the medicines and drugs that were being imported by the West had changed between c. 1550 and c. 1800, there was "an expansion in the pharmacopoeia, rather than a displacement of older medicines by new drugs" (Wallis 37). The irresistible flavor of imported foreign drugs, like the mysterious charm of Cleopatra, continues to grow so as to almost become another medicinal source, one quite different from that of the already-accepted domestic drugs, much like the suggestive final integrations of the play's polarities: Rome and Egypt, the domestic and the exotic, reason and passion, and above all Antony and Cleopatra.

The final burying of Cleopatra and Antony next to one another might of course suggest the symbolic unifying, the integration of East and West. Even so, the exotic Eastern queen, the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra, remains for the western European world an eternal symbol of ambivalence, a symbol perhaps of those still-desired, still-dangerous foreign drugs.

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《安東尼與克麗歐佩特拉》 與外來藥物

摘要

本文透過檢視莎翁劇作《安東尼與克麗歐佩特拉》，來探討西方早期時的歐洲社會中，特別是十六和十七世紀的英國，對於來自境外藥物所持的態度，其可視為一種文化現象。本文指出此時期的英國社會，對於外來的新進藥物的態度，乃是存著一種摻和期待和焦慮的矛盾感受。此一論點乃透過討論代表外來藥物意象的埃及皇后克麗歐佩特拉。本文對比分析她在莎翁劇中和歷史上的意象呈現。

在劇中，安東尼與克麗歐佩特拉的剪不斷、理還亂的情節，正相映於當時醫學立場上對於境外藥物的兩極紛擾態度，其激辯程度如同劇中的戰爭場景。亦即，本文嘗試說明此一觀點：莎劇《安東尼與克麗歐佩特拉》實乃一深深相關於醫學的劇作，特別著眼於既治病又致命的外來藥物。

關鍵字：《安東尼與克麗歐佩特拉》、西方早期醫學、帕拉塞爾塞思、外來藥物、外來恐懼症