

Translating *Orientalism*:
Modes of Producing the Oriental Other in
Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*

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i. _ Introduction

The publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* is this year celebrating its 30th anniversary.¹ Yet the work's continuing currency in academic scholarship points towards the fact that its theses and insights are far from being invalidated. Surely, Said's work has its very own limitations and constraints, but despite the varied criticism that has been formulated over the past decades, its impact can hardly be overestimated. Following the breakdown of European imperialism after World War II, a flood of criticism was launched by a number of intellectual movements originating in the former or soon-to-be independent colonies. Together with other works – Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Kwame Nkrumah's *Neocolonialism. The Last Stage of Imperialism* and Ashis Nandy's *Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, to name just three immensely influential publications² – Said's laying bare of the dominance of Orientalist thought in imperialist discourse amalgamated previous efforts to provincialise the Eurocentrism of an allegedly rational enlightenment thought. One of the successful results was the establishment of an academic field called "Postcolonial Studies", which owes much of its input to the critical reception of Said's work.³ His *Orientalism* has become, to sum up, a landmark not only of philological, but also of political scholarship.

Its status thus begs the question whether its insights cannot be "translated" and made available for neighbouring historical contexts. I assume that it can be, and in the following paper set out to prove the value and relevance of such a "translation" for the early modern period. Specifically, I intend to focus on theatrical modes of producing the Orient through a close reading of William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*⁴. In light of this aim, I will first widen *Orientalism's* chronological focus to include the early modern period, and consequently apply this extended theoretical framework in a close reading and analysis of Shakespeare's drama.

¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*. London: Routledge, 1978.

² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 1963; Kwame Nkrumah, *Neocolonialism. The Last Stage of Imperialism*. London: Nelson, 1965; Ashis Nandy, *Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*. Dehli and Oxford: University Press, 1983.

³ For an overview of the various traditions leading to the formation of postcolonial studies, see Robert C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001.

⁴ William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. by John Wilders. London: Thomson, 2002.

ii. _ Translating Orientalism

The attempt to adopt Said's frame of analysis for a study of early modern perceptions of "the Orient" may at first glance appear naïve. Very obviously, *Orientalism* traces discourses which gain influence only in the 18th and 19th centuries; Said's Orientalism is closely linked to the rise of European, and i.e. foremost: French and British, expansionism, colonialism and its subsequent transformation into imperialism.

Richmond Barbour justly intervenes that

[t]o project his [i.e. Said's] findings backward, to read precolonial ethnography as if its rhetoric bespoke European dominance of the world, or its defensive tropes necessarily foretold aggressive expansion, is anachronistic. [... P]re-Enlightenment "orientalisms" expressed material, political and discursive relations profoundly different from those Said finds typical of modernity.⁵

Yet Barbour's criticism only extends this far. Admittedly: Said does argue that "[t]he Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be 'Oriental' in all those ways considered commonplace by an average nineteenth-century European, but also because it *could be* – that is, submitted to being – *made* Oriental."⁶ The interconnection between cultural and colonial or imperial dominance clearly cannot be dismissed and needs no further amplification. And yet, despite the principally different constellations of power in the early modern period, I not only propose, but moreover insist on the necessity of making use of the core of Said's work and translating it into this earlier context.

Discourse theory, which *Orientalism* heavily relies on methodologically, at once allows for and forbids this translation. Foucault conceives of discourses as specifically embedded in local time and place, best identified through their so-called énoncés, the central statements around which every discourse revolves. These central statements are repeated in a process which Said terms the "restorative citation of antecedent authority"⁷; but yet they simultaneously and necessarily remain fluid and undergo a limited variation: The ambiguities of language as well as the individual background of

⁵ Richmond Barbour, *Before Orientalism: London's theatre of the East, 1576 – 1626*. Cambridge: University Press, 2003, p. 3. M. G. Aune adds: "The Ottoman and Mogul Empires, rather than European states, were economic and military centers of power in the early modern period. Encounters and exchanges between these cultures and Europe were often asymmetrical, and characterized by anxiety and fear on the part of the Europeans and indifference on the part of the Ottomans or Moguls. Imperial projects in the New World were clearly established in the sixteenth century, while such projects in Asia and Africa, comparatively, developed more slowly. European interest in these areas tended to focus on trade and commercial competition rather than colonization. This is not to say that the Europeans did not portray themselves as culturally or morally superior; the writing of travelers, diplomats, merchants, and others all deployed a range of rhetorical strategies to manage the instability and asymmetry of these encounters." M. G. Aune, "Early Modern European Travel Writing After Orientalism". Review article, in: *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, vol. 5 (2005), no. 2, pp. 120-138, here: p. 121.

⁶ Said, p. 5-6, emphasis original.

⁷ Said, p. 176.

experience with which each participant invests individual meaning into the discourse's énoncés – both of these influences contribute to shifts in meaning and thus, essentially, reflect back on the status and currency of every discourse. In short, this process of variation despite (or through) citation, then, implies that a discourse does not have clearly defined borders, but is constantly overlapped, questioned and/or reinforced by related discourses. Thus, not only synchronic, but also diachronic origins of every discursive statement, of every énoncé, are difficult, if not impossible to locate.

Precision is needed: To argue, as Barbour does, against a “before” to Orientalism is in fact to argue against an early modern 18th and 19th century Orientalism. I, in turn, want to argue for a 17th century Orientalism without conceiving it as an only predecessor to later formats. The idea at present, consequently, is not to historicise 18th and 19th century Orientalism, and not to identify and trace the genesis of its academic discourse during the early modern period and consequently expand and enforce the book's argument. Rather, the underlying aim is to prove the perhaps obvious fact that Orientalism is much more persistent than the analysis of Orientalism in the context of the modern arts and the modern academy may suggest. Said vaguely states that “[...] the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West.”⁸ In the book's introduction in particular, he continues to raise awareness for the intricate complexities extending beyond the focus of his work, pointing out the roots from which modern branches of thought and writing have been able to spread out. In its profoundest sense,

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident” [... It acts as a] starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, “mind”, destiny and so on.⁹

It is this generalised conception of Orientalism that I wish to elaborate on and take as the basis for its translation into early modern contexts. It opens up a trajectory which allows us to isolate and abstract a number of aspects identifying Orientalist thought in 18th and 19th century discourses from their contextual relationships of power and knowledge: “Every writer on the Orient assumes some Oriental precedent”, writes Said, “some previous knowledge of the Orient, to which he refers and on which he relies. [... E]ach work on the Orient *affiliates* itself with other works, with audiences, with institutions, with the Orient itself.”¹⁰ Consequently, it becomes possible to read 17th century perceptions and representations of “the Orient” parallel to their later transformations as reflecting

⁸ Said, p. 5.

⁹ Said, p. 2-3.

¹⁰ Said, p. 20. Emphasis original.

[...] a *distribution* of geographical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; [... they are] an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction [...] but also of a whole series of “interests” which [...] they] not only create[...] but also maintain[...].¹¹

It is this “distribution of geopolitical awareness” into a network of texts that can act as a starting point for analysis. The subsequent task, then, is to dissect its inherent discursive “interests”. Here, Barbour emphasises, “[i]t is crucial [...] to distinguish early modern Europe’s strategic and economic relations with, from its domestic constructions of, Asia.”¹² There is little to add: Early 17th century visitors to the Orient, be they merchants, diplomats or travellers, will have been very well aware of the political, military and economic imbalance between any evolving European regional power and the Ottoman Empire, and thus are almost sure to have felt far from having the “relative upper hand”¹³ in many encounters. On the contrary: Much stood to be gained by establishing economic ties with the Ottoman Empire. The outlook on possible advantages reflected back on the intricate dynamics at work between the European powers themselves. As we straightforwardly learn from a “Memorandum on the Turkey trade”: Not only is it “[...] the Kinge of Spayne (who cane never be longe without warres with the Turke)”, but also “the frenche Kinge” as well as the Venetian traders who had to be considered adversaries to Anglo-Ottoman trade. The two latter powers, having “[...] their ambassadours at Constantinople will seeke by some indirect practise to discountenaunce suche of her Majestes subiectes as shall trade thither.”¹⁴

Despite the military and economic imbalance of Euro-Ottoman relations, early modern cultural constructions of Asia, however, tend to reveal a characteristic they share with modern modes of Orientalism: a “flexible positional superiority”¹⁵. Richard Knolles’ *Generall Historie of the Turkes* takes such flexibility to extremes. Reflecting, as the quoted Walsingham-Memorandum does, on the current power constellations, he acknowledges

[...] that at this present if you consider the beginning, progresse, and perpetuall felicitie of this the Ottoman Empire, there is in this world nothing more admirable or strange; if the greatnesse and lustre thereof, nothing more magnificent or glorious; if the power and the strength thereof, nothing more dreadfull or dangerous: which wondering at nothing but at the beautie of it selfe, and drunke with the pleasant wine of perpetuall felicitie, holdeth the rest of the world in scorne, thundering out nothing but still blood and warre, with a full persuasion in time to rule over all, presining [sic] unto it selfe no other limits that the uttermost bounds of the earth, from the rising Sunne unto the going downe of the same.¹⁶

¹¹ Said, p.12. Emphasis original.

¹² Barbour, p. 5.

¹³ Said, p. 7.

¹⁴ Sir Francis Walsingham (?), “Memorandum on the Turkey trade”, 1578 (?), in: Susan A. Skilliter, *William Harborne and the Trade with Turkey 1578-1582. A Documentary Study of the First Anglo-Ottoman Relations*. Oxford: University Press, 1977, pp. 28-33, here: p. 28-29.

¹⁵ Said, p. 7.

¹⁶ Richard Knolles, *The Generall Historie of the Turkes*. London: A. Islip, ⁵1638, unpagged preface (=“The Author’s Induction on to the Christian Reader unto the Historie of the Turks following”).

Having conceded to the Ottomans their supremacy with all its apparent ambiguities, Knolles at the same time feels called to relativise his stark dramatisation by openly claiming for the Christian world a superiority understood in terms of religion, morality and tradition – and which crystallises above all in the profoundness of its world knowledge: The Ottoman past, he writes, “[...] is not well knowne unto themselues, or agreed vpon euen among the best writers of their histories.” Without question, the credibility of their accounts is strictly limited and proves of

[n]o great reason in my deeming: [...] giue the authors thereof leaue therewith to please themselues, as well as some others, which [...] borrow, or rather force their beginning [...] without any probabilitie at al; and that with such an earnestnesse, as they could not elsewhere haue found any so honourable ancestors.¹⁷

The *Generall Historie*'s “lack” of congruency between the material and political imbalances on the one hand and the cultural perception underlying its perspective on the other is, however, not necessarily to be interpreted as the provoking distortion of a simplified representation. Rather, the opposite is the case – Said's conception of Orientalism very much allows for this “misrepresentation”. To refer back to M.G. Aune's words, Knolles' lack of truthful reflection marks one of a “[...] range of rhetorical strategies to manage the instability and asymmetry of these encounters [...]”¹⁸, and as such can be inserted “[...] above all, [into] a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange [...]” between powers political, intellectual, cultural and moral.¹⁹ Consequently, there cannot be any degree of “misrepresentation”: What any study of Orientalism lays bare is its “*internal consistency* [...] despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a ‘real’ Orient.”²⁰ In very much the same way as later writings on colonial subjects, Shakespeare's Cleopatra and Marlowe's Tamburlaine too are inflected representations, filtered through specific lenses of perception, and cannot be taken as neutral mirror images of a supposedly transcendental reality.²¹

How obviously these Orientalist inflections apply already to early modern English thought needs to be stressed all the more since “[e]arly Stuart England possessed [...] no] working knowledge of [...] Asia.”²² Again, the *Generall Historie* provides ample proof of this: Knolles derives his authority on the Ottoman Empire not from personal experience, but solely from his study of Greek, Latin, French, German and Italian sources. Nonetheless, this lack of “working knowledge” proved no constraint to the

¹⁷ Knolles, op. cit., p. 2.

¹⁸ M. G. Aune, op. cit., p. 121.

¹⁹ Said, p. 12.

²⁰ Said, p. 5, emphasis added.

²¹ Said, p. 21.

²² This seems to have remained so even despite the availability of contemporary accounts by merchants and explorers such as Richard Hakluyt. Barbour, p. 6.

book's success²³: For the very reason that, by relying on its European sources, it was integrated into a process which Said calls the "restorative citation of antecedent authority"²⁴, it conformed with and strengthened the then predominant discourse on the Orient.

The public theatres and their performances likewise amplified this Manichean discourse. If their stages allowed audiences to "[...] ponder the possibilities of alternate cultural orders [...]"²⁵, these alternate orders were certainly also "[...] entertainments [which] thrive[d] on polar opposition [...]"²⁶:

Ethnocentrism galvanized polarities congenial to the theatre [...]. Elizabethan drama plots – with opposing parties set off by two stage doors – gather into dualistic patterns. Economies of time [...] likewise simplify obscure or overdetermined processes. On the London stage, Turks were represented as the demonic antagonists of Christians, and converts to Islam were ridiculed and punished [...].²⁷

Public reception of such performances was, of course, by no means passive, and proved on the contrary to be a process of productive consumption. As the "[...] experience of drama is rarely confined to the moments and the places of performance [...]", "[...] audience members become agents in the shaping and realizing of meaning [...]" and ultimately "[...] of public discourse."²⁸ The theatre's polarising Orientalism, in other words, did not remain an on stage, artistic containment: far from this, it effectively disseminated across early modern English culture, where it took on varying forms and degrees.

Returning to Barbour's initial reservations concerning the possibility of translating Orientalism, then, the current argumentation appears to have reversed the question: With the parallels now laid bare, in what – if anything at all – does this projected early modern Orientalism differ from its later form as described by Said? In which ways are the "[...] discursive relations [so] profoundly different from those Said finds typical of modernity [...]"²⁹ Essentially, there is perhaps one characteristic that reveals these Orientalisms fundamental divergence: The very Orientalist modes of knowledge production which were in their modern forms to provoke the resistance of colonised people expressed in their early modern incarnations perhaps themselves an act of resistance (of "flexible positional superiority" in Said's terms) producing and reinforcing binary world images in order to compensate actual power relations in the face of an encompassing Ottoman threat.

²³ "With six editions in the seventeenth century and an abridgement in 1701, the book was widely read for many generations." Barbour, p. 16-17.

²⁴ Said, p. 176.

²⁵ Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*. Cambridge: University Press, 1987, p. 85.

²⁶ Barbour, p. 66.

²⁷ Barbour, p. 5.

²⁸ Gurr, op. cit., p. 5; p. 2.

²⁹ Barbour, p. 3.

It is this constructed, ontological and epistemological Orient, this discursive reflection of geopolitical awareness, that I propose to consider as an underlying analytical grid for the ensuing reading of William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606/07). Of course, the question arises as to how this treatment on early modern perceptions of the East might be conceptualised. A preliminary overview suggests the study requires not only a close rereading of the work in focus, but moreover also a reading against the grain of current studies on the topic: Early problems already arise with the attempt to deconstruct the predominant binary opposition between a monolithic East and a monolithic West. As, for instance, the title of Barbour's work suggests, it appears to ascribe to Shakespeare's constructions of the East a neutralist "proto-Oriental" character.³⁰ As the preceding pages have shown, such an approach denying these early modern Orientalisms any essential right of their own cannot prove fruitful. And indeed *Antony and Cleopatra* sets down bipolar oppositions repeated and paralleled in 18th and 19th century Orientalism. This realisation would, then, above all make necessary the contrasting of early modern "proto-Orientalism" with its later inheritor – a task which his criticism fails to include since Barbour clearly denies any relation between the two. Thus, the impression arises that Barbour's refusal to speak of Orientalism in early modern contexts is less the result of a straightforward conceptual delimitation than rather of his employment of an ill-defined terminological framework. The following chapters, highlighting the elements of this early modern ontological and epistemological Orientalism in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, will give consideration to representations of space, the characterisation of the plays' main protagonists, their language as well as the treatment of sources in order to estimate their degree of "restorative citation of antecedent authority".

³⁰ Barbour, p. 65.

iii. _ **Early Modern Orientalism in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra***

iii.i _ **Imagined worlds: Roman space and Alexandrian spheres**

Setting out to confirm the predominantly “polar oppositions” which, according to Barbour, are woven into the very concept of early modern theatre, it appears promising to investigate first into the treatment of space in *Antony and Cleopatra*. For here indeed Shakespeare confronts his readers and audiences with two radically, categorically opposed worlds.

“Egypt is associated with the Nile [...] visualized as the source both of fruitfulness and of carrion-eating insects, harvest and deadly serpents”, writes John Wilders.³¹ This description allowing a both “life enhancing and fatally poisonous”³² nature to characterise Egypt marks, however, a paradox which only serves to underline its exoticism. On the North African coast of the Mediterranean, everything “o’erflows the measure” (1.1.2). Excess is the rule and remains far from marking a modest exception, as Enobarbus confirms:

Enobarbus: [...] we did sleep the day out of countenance / And made the night light with drinking.

Maecenas: Eight wild boars roasted whole at a breakfast, / and but twelve persons there. Is this true?

Enobarbus: This was as but as a fly by an eagle. We had / Much more monstrous matter of feast, which worthily / Deserved noting. (2.2.187-193)

Egypt’s material opulence appeals to all senses at once, and thus extends beyond the reach of established categories of comparison: the consumption of food and beverages underlies no obvious constraints; the air itself is perfumed and love-sick (2.2.203-204) and thus draws even stronger attention to the overwhelming beauty and aesthetics which meet the Roman eye: Cleopatra’s Nereidian gentlewomen, her mermaids, gold and silver in abundance – Egypt seems a world of superlatives and quickly gains qualities parallel to the “strange” and “invisible” spheres of the magical and supernatural (2.2.222).

This perceived reality, however, does not reach Rome as a surprise. The report Enobarbus delivers fully confirms the conjured imaginations stirring Roman minds.³³ And yet, as Russell West-Pavlov shows, Egypt remains out of Roman reach: It is precisely its supernatural character, “[...] the strong sense of the elusiveness of the foreign land [...]

³¹ John Wilders, “Introduction”, in: Shakespeare, op. cit., pp. 1-84, here: p. 54.

³² Wilders, op. cit., p. 54.

³³ Agrippa’s caution with which he leaves open the possibility that his “[...] reporter [may have] devised well for her [...]”, i.e. Cleopatra (2.2.198-199), is answered by Enobarbus’ reassurance: “I will tell you” (2.2.200).

and] its tendency to slip constantly out of the grasp of verbal representation” which focuses Roman attention on Egypt.³⁴ No other episode reflects this more openly than Antony’s description of North African wildlife:

Lepidus: What manner o’ thing is your crocodile?

Antony: 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. (2.7.40-46)

The country’s characteristics are presented here as entirely other, being only “like itself”. Egypt’s foreignness is unalterably autopoetic and self-referential, inaccessible to the Roman, read: European, “outsider”. Every attempt to relate with it remains beyond reference, without index: “[... A]ll that can be said about the foreign is, precisely, that it is foreign. The foreign land remains out of reach of expository discourse, at one remove from the language of the visitor, and thus constantly tantalizing, beckoning.”³⁵

Rome, in contrast, audience and reader seldom feel, hear, breathe or taste. The impressions conveyed are quite literally less sensual and dominated by visual descriptions of the Empire’s capital. These are, however, almost entirely limited to the display of masculine, military presence and disputes over republican power and stability.

Antony: Sextus Pompeius / Hath given the dare to Caesar and commands / The empire of the sea. Our slippery people, / Whose love is never linked to the deserver / Till his deserts are past, begin to throw / Pompey the Great and all his dignities / Upon his son, who, high in name and power, / Higher than both in blood and life, stands up / For the main soldier; whose quality going on, / The sides o’th’ world may danger. (1.2.190-199)

Caesar’s power politics imply a similar agenda: Not appeasement with the foreign, but its submission and assimilation is the programme he has subscribed to.³⁶ Cleopatra demonstrates conscious awareness of these influential tides of power and after Antony’s death reflects the likelihood of being exposed to political ridicule if she agrees to accompany Caesar back to Rome as the queen of a conquered kingdom. With Iras she shares her anxiety:

Cleopatra: [...] Thou an Egyptian puppet shall be shown / In Rome as well as I. Mechanic slaves / With greasy aprons, rules and hammers shall / Uplift us to the view. (5.2.207-210)

The quick comedians extemporally will stage us and present / Our Alexandrian revels; Antony / Shall be brought drunken forth; and I shall see / Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / l’th’ posture of a whore. (5.2.215-219)³⁷

³⁴ Russell West-Pavlov, *Spatial Representations and the Jacobean Stage. From Shakespeare to Webster*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002, p. 201-202.

³⁵ West-Pavlov, op. cit., p. 202.

³⁶ West-Pavlov, p. 206.

³⁷ Interestingly, in a moment of unrestrained anger, Antony designs the very same fate for Cleopatra. See 4.12.32-38.

Caesar's subsequent forecast summarises his imperial thirst: "[...H]er life in Rome would be eternal in our triumph" (5.2.65-66). The impression, then, is that political consolidation can only be regained through military expansionism.³⁸

III.II _ Space and Displacement

These, of course, are first, superficial descriptions which allow a clear binary positing of Rome against Egypt. Both Rome's depiction as the focal point of imperial power and Alexandria's exoticism are brought into question by the play's prominent protagonists. More than Cleopatra, though, it is Antony who is presented as the major character in conflict with his surrounding world: With "[...] half to half the world [being] opposed, he [... is]" in Enobarbus' words, "The mered question" (3.13.9-10). His conflicting interests present him as undecided between his military duty in Egypt on the one hand and his emotional involvement with its queen, Cleopatra, on the other. Caesar's disappointment in Antony's shift in allegiance makes this particularly clear. For him, Antony's career is that of a "knowing, pragmatic, [... and] experienced soldier"³⁹, determined, focused, disciplined and hard-bitten – the very epitome of Roman soldierhood.

Caesar: [... A]t thy heal / Did famine follow, whom thou fought'st against / Though daintily brought up, with patience more / Than savages could suffer. Thou didst drink / The stale of horses and the gilded puddle / Which beasts would cough at. Thy palate then did deign / The roughest berry on the rudest hedge. / Yea, like the stag when snow the pasture sheets, / The barks of trees thou browsed. On the Alps, / It is reported, thou didst eat strange flesh / Which some did die to look on. (1.4.59-69)

Shakespeare's treatment of literary sources thus markedly places Cleopatra's "demi-Atlas of this earth" (1.5.24) in one hereditary line with Mars, Aeneas and, in particular, Hercules.⁴⁰ Antony's later Roman adversaries, however, shift the perspective:

Maecenas: His taints and honours / Waged equal with him.
 Agrippa: A rarer spirit never / Did steer humanity; but you gods will give us / Some faults to make us men. (5.1.30-33)

These faults have crystallised during Antony's time in Egypt, and estranged him not only from Rome, but moreover also from himself. Caesar rages how

[...] he fishes, drinks and wastes / The lamps of night in revel; [...] hardly gave audience, or / Vouchsafed to think he had partners. You shall find there / A man who is the abstract of all faults / That all men follow. (1.4.4-5; 1.4.7-9)

³⁸ The arranged marriage between Antony and Octavia might be interpreted as contradicting this thesis. In order to prevent the military empire's threatening division as a consequence of Pompey's grasp for power, Agrippa reflects on the possibilities of consolidating Caesar's and Antony's opposed authorities: "By this marriage / All little jealousies which now seem great, / And all great fears which now import their dangers / Would then be nothing. Truths would be tales, Where now half-tales be truths. Her love to both / Would each to other, and all loves to both / Draw after her" (2.2.138-144). However, their "union" does not mark an end of their imperialist projects, but rather allows two expansionist forces to (temporarily) join powers.

³⁹ Wilders, p. 56.

⁴⁰ See, for instance, Wilders, p. 64-67 and his subsequent annotations to 4.3.21.

And yet, though Antony is ostracised, he is ultimately not fully condemned for his conduct. He may, in Philo's explanation, "[...] sometimes, when he is not Antony, / [...] come[...] too short of that great property / Which still should go with Antony" (1.1.57-59) – still, Caesar's mood is reconciliatory when he learns of Antony's death:

[... L]et me lament / With tears as sovereign as the blood of hearts / That thou, my brother, my competitor / In top of all designs, my mate in empire, / Friend and companion in the front of war, / The arm of mine own body, and the heart / Where mine his thoughts did kindle, that our stars, / Unreconcilable, should divide / Our equalness to this. (5.1.40-48)

Antony, it must be taken into account, is very well aware of his middle position and often enough confronts it in soliloquies and dialogues. While he is initially convinced of his place by Cleopatra's side – "Here is my space" he confidently proclaims as the play opens (1.1.35) –, the increasingly negative news reaching him from Rome begins to pressure his lax commitment towards the imperial mission he is serving. "These strong Egyptian fetters I must break, / Or lose myself in dotage" (1.2.122-123), he warns himself: "Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know, / My idleness doth hatch" (1.2.135-137). Although his reaction certainly marks a shift of assessment, it is by no means final. What rather characterises Antony's emotional states is their constant oscillation between extremes. Instances abound: Early in the play, a "new heaven, new earth" (1.1.17) are necessary to redefine the encompassing depth of Antony's affection for Cleopatra, while only shortly afterwards he proclaims how much "Things that are past are done with me" (1.2.117): "I have not kept my square, but that to come / Shall be done by th' rule" (2.3.6-7), he vows to Octavia. However, as Antony's resolve is only momentary, his emotional sways persist and tellingly climax in what may be referred to as his double defeat: in military terms, he underlies against Caesar, and simultaneously finds himself facing the realisation of a fundamental insight: "Hark! The land bids me tread no more upon't; / It is ashamed to bear me. [...] I am so lated in the world that I / Have lost my way forever. [...] I have fled myself [...]" (3.11.1-4; 3.11.7). This flight, of course, has taken one, and only one direction:

Antony: Egypt, thou knewst too well / My heart was to thy rudder tied by the' strings / And thou shouldst tow me after. O'er my sprit / Thy full supremacy thou knewst [...] You did know / How much you were my conqueror, and that / My sword, made weak by my affection, would / Obey it on all cause. (3.11.56-59; 3.11.65-68)

Antony and Cleopatra's relationship thus develops a clear undercurrent which surfaces in the questioning of early modern configurations of identity through space. It becomes clear how strongly spatial dimensions are not merely a geographical given: Space is a cultural construct, the meaning of which is produced in social processes. Yet it is exactly this active, productive process which the play mimics. The focus on Antony's movements, interactions and exchanges challenges the rigorous oppositional

separation of the Roman (or: early modern European) self from the Egyptian (or: Oriental) other so easily established and posited in geographical referencing. Antony's displacement, then, mirrors the problematics which any movement through "physical reality" can entail: It acts as a negative ideal-type for the fundamental fear of a "loss of self" which simultaneously draws with it a "going native" of the civilised European.

III.III _ Language and Space

This feared rupture also leaves its marked traces in rhetoric. It quickly becomes clear how very much Antony and Cleopatra's language serves to further unfold Antony's loss of cultural and political orientation. According to Wilder, Shakespeare designed a distinct manner of speech for his protagonists, the background of which is readily understandable: Since antiquity, in- as well as outside the arts, "[...] eloquence [was perceived] not simply as a verbal style but as a moral quality, an expression of [...] personality and way of life [...] of character and conduct [...]"⁴¹. Indeed this rule makes an analysis of Antony and Cleopatra's language a further helpful stepping stone for interpretation: a brief reference to the previously quoted passages already reveals Antony's and Cleopatra's affinity to interpreting the world in "typically absolute"⁴² terms. Hyperbole is the figure of speech most frequently employed by both characters. Be it Antony's urge to define a "new heaven, new earth" (1.1.17) or Cleopatra's threat to "unpeople Egypt (1.5.71) – this "heightened" and "figurative"⁴³ speech is considered to have represented the general tendency towards extremes thought inherent in all Oriental culture. The contemporary distinction of this manner of speech is revealing: It was widely labelled the "Asiatic style"⁴⁴.

Noting Antony's problematic position between Rome and Alexandria, but emphasising the strength and depth of his bond to Cleopatra, Wilders draws the conclusion that through language both Antony and Cleopatra construct a world accessible exclusively for themselves which allows them to detach from the surrounding political circumstances.⁴⁵ It is my impression, however, that the question of language may be more convincingly resolved by extending the claim: The separate(d) world of language which Antony and Cleopatra resort to is certainly exclusive, but also, in the broadest of terms, essentially Egyptian / Oriental. Just as the Orient is constructed as a tempting space striving to make the Roman (or: European) subject succumb to its

⁴¹ Wilders, pp. 50, 56.

⁴² Wilders, p. 51.

⁴³ Wilders, p. 56.

⁴⁴ Wilders, pp. 49-50.

⁴⁵ Wilders, p. 52.

extremes of sensuality, so do Cleopatra and – gradually, too – Antony give voice to their thoughts and desires from within this space. Underneath their complex negotiations, both characters appear to posit the existence of a clearly distinguishable binary space – and this not only in order to simplify the processes they are involved in, but for the fundamental reason that, as Andrew Hiscock suggests, they “seek to reconfigure prevailing narratives of experience and / or history in order to generate new spaces for cultural meanings.” Their “political drive towards self-affirmation is [...] intimately linked to the continuing narrativization of the physical reality.”⁴⁶

As the previous sub-chapters have repeatedly addressed, this narrative develops a dynamic which is destabilising from a Roman perspective. Its growing momentum reveals the precariousness of Antony’s in-between position, which despite all efforts to the contrary retains the quality of the “mutable” – a quality which “[...] all too often became a dominant lens through which the age came to formulate ideas of cultural space *per se*.”⁴⁷ The question, then, has to be refocused around how this mutability is responded to. The “loss of self” so readily ascribed to Antony surely gives the answer a negative bias. Can this valuation, however, be overwritten? Does mutability inevitably signify the feared “loss of self”, or can this “loss” be in fact communicated as a psycho-cultural affirmation of identities otherwise repressed?

III.IV _ The depoliticised exotic

Cleopatra’s resistance to Roman absorption can beyond every doubt be read in this direction. “Know, sir”, she tells Proculeius, “that I / Will not wait pinioned at your master’s court, / Nor once be chastised with the sober eye / Of dull Octavia”(5.2.51-54). Yet Cleopatra’s defiance also points towards a more urgent question, a second dimension subtly encoded into (early modern) Orientalism. If the preceding sub-chapters have underlined the mindset’s tendency to exoticise the extra-European⁴⁸ Other, it also must not be ignored how this tendency is amplified by the related gesture to depoliticise the Oriental exotic.

If “Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale / Her infinite variety” (2.2.245-246); if she beggars “all description” (2.2.208) and overpictures “that Venus where we see /

⁴⁶ Andrew Hiscock, *The Uses of this World: Thinking Space in Shakespeare, Marlowe, Cary and Jonson*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004, p. 99, p. 83.

⁴⁷ Hiscock, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

⁴⁸ In contrast to more widely employed references to the *non-European*, the *extra-European* implicitly deduces cultural difference from a geographical outside. The *non-European* can, in theory, be mobile, shift location, be “outsided”, i.e. labelled as *non-European*, while being physically within Europe, whereas the *extra-European* remains physically, geographically, spatially and therefore, in its last consequence, culturally outside.

The fancy outwork nature” (2.2.210-211), then Cleopatra may well and openly be mythologised – but despite her grandness she is fundamentally deprived of the religious authority ascribed to the goddess she is identified with, and in parallel effectively denied all political competence and credibility. Shakespeare at no point in the play allows Cleopatra to be witnessed in pursuit of a political agenda. Her space is strictly confined to constellations with her lover, and “deprived of Antony”, as in acts 1.5 and 2.5, Egypt’s queen “is idle and bored” and “has nothing to do”, as Wilders’ annotations pointedly summarise.⁴⁹ Undecided on whether to be entertained with music, play billiards or spend her time fishing (2.5.1-14), the only wish she determinedly voices is to “sleep out this great gap of time / [... her] Antony is away” (1.5.5-6). Thus, “[i]n Roman terms”, writes Barbour, “she is impractical [... in] her concern for governance [...]”⁵⁰. Given this, the rumour Enobarbus amplifies does not reach a surprised audience. His confrontation with Cleopatra is frank: “’tis said in Rome / That Photinus, an [sic] eunuch and your maids / Manage this war” (3.7.13-14). Thus, almost predictably, it is there that her ultimate debasement is formulated: Pompey knows she “Let[s] witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both” (2.1.22), and thus, according to Maecenas and Caesar, cannot be else in her soul’s core than a “trull” (3.6.97), “a whore” (3.6.68) who fails to represent an authority of power meriting political respect. Instead, she can be transfigured into a merely mythological character whose political body is elided, feminised and reformulated in dimensions which most openly qualify as Orientalist. From a wider perspective, the binary horizon thus separating an apolitical Orient from a rational, self-governing European polity reiterates a masculine cultural cosmology which allows early modern Europe to ground itself during its first tentative explorations of the globe.

iv. _ **The Orient in essence**

Antony’s in-between position is, therefore, not necessarily the involuntary consequence of his contact with the Orient. His moral tensions are rather, and this argument marks the core of Caesar’s criticism, the result of a perceived lack of self-determination and proper will on Antony’s behalf. His turning into “[...] A man who is the abstract of all faults / That all men follow [...]” (1.4.8-9) despite his proven soldierly qualities remains,

⁴⁹ Wilders, p. 119, 146.

⁵⁰ Barbour, p. 61.

after all, a gradual process. It reveals how Antony attempts to resist the Orient's (i.e. Cleopatra's) charm, but being principally susceptible to its (i.e. her) appeal, is finally overwhelmed.⁵¹ Contrary to the ambiguity permeating many of the protagonists' actions, then, the concluding impression of Shakespeare's early modern Orient is, in the last instance, an instrument of early modern European self-reassurance⁵²: The relatively clear configurations construct an Orient which is persuasive, seductive, and opulent to a degree which threatens to neutralise and consume all "productive", i.e. imperial, energies. Its binary opposition to Rome makes it more a sensual promise reflecting the suppressed and unfulfilled desires of the potential European conqueror than an actual, geographically locatable space. This elusiveness proves at once equally attractive and fatal: Egypt provides everything ever imaginable, and provides it in quantity and quality beyond imagination. There is nothing the Orient cannot be, and for this very reason, it is limited to being merely what the Romans can imagine it to be – a negative inversion of the European self guaranteeing, even if not always from the outset, Europe's superiority.

Thus, Shakespeare's Orient reveals itself to be structured by the very same "truth" which governs the works dealt with by Said: namely that "the Orient" is a discursive construct ultimately reflecting European rather than Oriental "essentials". *Antony and Cleopatra* sets up European rationality against Oriental sensuality; it juxtaposes the harshness of (self-)restraint and the overflows of material abundance – and creates a spatial object which is paradoxically just as concrete, knowable and incorporable as it is borderless and out of linguistic reference, only within military reach if it is conquered by a constrained, self-controlled European will immune to the temptations projected by its own "Orientalising" imagination. In all its dimensions – including those suppressed –, this object is forced into a geographical corset cleanly and efficiently compartmentalising early modern European experience. What every audience is thus essentially bound up into is a carnevalesque interaction of popular dichotomies which attempt to monolithise the complexity of early modern life worlds into Roman and European, Oriental and extra-European space; an interaction in which Antony functions as the element undermining this binary space and revealing its oscillating, antinomian realities.

The comparison is unlikely to be sustainable upon closer analysis, but as a closing thesis indicating a possible direction for future research on the current topic, one might surely ask whether early modern Orientalism as it has been distilled here might not

⁵¹ Charles Whitney, *Early responses to Renaissance Drama*, Cambridge: University Press, 2006, p. 24.

⁵² "Egypt's defeat in the play [...] enacts a reassuring prophecy of Europeanization." Barbour, p. 57.

mark an early *Clash of Civilizations*⁵³. Of course, the shortcomings of Huntington's work are well-known and have been widely discussed, but yet: it might prove helpful for understanding the currency of such perceptions if we take care not just to criticise, but also historicise them in a manner this paper has pursued: by treating them "[...] as idea[s] that [...] have] a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given [...] them] reality and presence in and for the West."⁵⁴

⁵³ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996.

⁵⁴ Said, p. 5.

v. _ **Bibliography**

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