

The Portrayal of Cleopatra in Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* and William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*: A New Historicist Perspective

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Received on: 11-8-2021

Accepted on: 6-12-2021

Abstract

Cleopatra VII is a major contender for the title of Egypt's most famous woman in antiquity. There is a plethora of interdisciplinary studies to fathom the depths of her character and influence. Since literature is an amalgamation of human experience, this paper delves into two literary masterpieces exploring the variations on the portrayal of Cleopatra in British drama. The plays under scrutiny are Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* (1594) and William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606). The significance of this paper lies in bringing the plays together to compare and contrast, within the theoretical framework of new historicism so as to examine them with reference to their original milieu. The question the study poses is how and why Cleopatra's portrayal varies greatly from one decade to another and from one author to another; hypothesizing that the variations are due to the changes in certain institutions (the monarchy, for instance).

Keywords: Cleopatra, Antony, New historicism, William Shakespeare, Samuel Daniel, Greenblatt.

Scholars and critics around the globe have different views on the intriguing and enigmatic figure of Cleopatra VII. Still, one cannot deny the fact that Cleopatra, as seen in the West, is represented in a way that mixes fact with fiction, the imagined with the real, and the Orientalized with the realistic especially by Roman historians. This representation is mirrored in Western literature in general, and in British drama in particular. In her book *Cleopatra and Rome*, Diana E. Kleiner states that "In fact, the remarkable image of this spectacular woman lying on a couch expiring from a self-inflicted wound haunts all subsequent versions of her story; the death by suicide of this great queen remains one of history's most climactic moments" (2005, 1). In this respect, this statement recalls the significance of Cleopatra in history as well as in literature, as her life might be summarized through a series of such sensational moments. These glimpses seared themselves in the mind of her contemporaries, and into the memories of the later generations of historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, dramatists, politicians, novelists and film-makers.

This paper, hence, aims at presenting a critical view that shares with new historicists the need to revisit and scrutinize the representations of Cleopatra in drama written by two British dramatists in

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* Doi: <https://doi.org/10.47012/jjml.15.3.16>

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different decades. As it analyzes the variations on this representation from the late sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century, with nearly one decade difference between them. It also aims to show and explain how these representations suited the playwrights' contemporary cultural discourses. The plays under scrutiny are *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* (1594) by Samuel Daniel and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606) by William Shakespeare.

New historicism literary theory aims at understanding literature through its cultural context, and vice versa, thus helping to deconstruct its *truth* by digging deeply into its immediate and pragmatic intentions. Paul Hamilton defines new historicism as "A label that is usually applied to a body of critical work on the English Renaissance, most conveniently and persuasively by the writings of the much-acclaimed Stephen Greenblatt" (2003,131) Greenblatt is the acknowledged initiator of new historicism, he explicates his ideas in some of his works such as "Toward Poetics of Culture" (1986) "Invisible Bullets" (1988), "Resonance and Wonder," (1990), and *Will in the World* (2004). He was also influenced by Michel Foucault, especially the idea of power and knowledge and the notion that the formation of the disciplinary society is connected with a number of broad historical processes. Furthermore, Michel Foucault's works have probably the most pervasive influence on new historicist practices. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh accredit his writings with constantly showing "how so-called objective historical accounts are always products of a will to power enacted through formations of knowledge within specific institutions (2001 253). In addition, Foucault believes that "Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true" (1980, 109).

New historicism is an attempt to articulate the relationship between the text and its socio-historical context, or between art and society as well as the political and the poetic; so "We come to see the event as a social text and the literary texts as a social event" (Wilson 1992, 39). For some critics history is a mere text, and as texts are human made objects, this makes them subject to writers' filiations and affiliations, as well as the social, economic, political and historical forces which new historicism analyses and measures. Thus, Shakespeare might be affected by his political and cultural changes while writing his play *Antony and Cleopatra*.

As the acknowledged initiator of new historicism, Stephen Greenblatt adopts the notions that "The work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society" (1986, 12). Greenblatt's book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980) is considered by many as the origin of new historicism along with his essay "Toward a Poetics of Culture" as he encourages more thorough investigations regarding the time, place, moral interactions and political situations that produce the literary text. In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Greenblatt believes that "To study the culture of sixteenth-century England did not present itself as an escape from the turmoil of the present; it seemed rather an intervention, a mode of relation...to study Renaissance culture then stimulates to feel more rooted and more estranged in my own values" (1980, 174).

In his article "The New Historicism of Stephen Greenblatt: On Poetics of Culture and The Interpretation of Shakespeare", Jan Veenstra argues that "cultural poetics assumes that texts not only document the social forces that inform and constitute history and society but also feature prominently in

The Portrayal of Cleopatra in Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* and William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*: A New Historicist Perspective

the social processes themselves which fashion both individual identity and the sociohistorical situation” (1995, 174). Greenblatt himself confirms that the circulation and distribution of social energy is an indispensable source for the construction of self-awareness and identity. This circulation is identified as a dialect of totalization and differentiation as there is a confrontation between a total artist and a totalizing society. This phenomenon is used in Greenblatt's interpretation of texts as he scrutinizes the areas concerned with the relationship between culture and author, for instance, he believes that Shakespeare's plays are masterpieces because they reflect the cultural and historical consequences and capture the energy of the culture of the society and the author. Thus, new historicism purports to provide an entirely new way of interpreting and understanding literary texts which presents a new reading that contradicts older historical theories and previous critical schools, especially New Criticism, that have a tendency to understand literary texts as autonomous entities deprived of their sociopolitical and cultural contexts. “If literature is seen only as a detached reflection upon the prevailing behavioral codes, a view from a sage distance, we drastically diminish our grasp of its concrete function in relation to individuals and institutions, both of which shrink into an obligatory ‘historical background’ that adds little to our understanding” (1980, 4). Depriving the text of its cultural context will ultimately make us “drift back to a conception of art as addressed to a timeless, cultureless, universal human essence or alternatively as a self-regarding, autonomous, closed system – in either case art as opposed to social life” (ibid). This closed system entrenches the literary work in its own original milieu.

Samuel Daniel wrote his play *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* in 1594 when Elizabeth I was the Queen of England, while Shakespeare wrote his play *Antony and Cleopatra* in 1606 after the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603 and the proclamation of James I as the King of England. The history of Elizabethan and Jacobean eras marks interesting times for the study of the two reigns, as these periods are populated with memorable figures and historical events that shaped the political, social, literary and cultural scenes at that time.

Several political changes might have influenced the playwrights such as the death of Queen Elizabeth, the coronation of her successor King James I, the anxieties the latter endured before coming to the English throne. In addition, these two decades witnessed the Anglo-Spanish war which lasted for 18 years from 1585 to 1603, the Nine Years' War which took place in Ireland between England and the Irish alliance from 1593 to 1603. Another important factor was London plague from 1592 to 1593 which changed the social and cultural aspects as a pandemic at that time.

The publication of many literary works might have influenced the literary scene in general, and the two playwrights under study in particular, such as Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590), Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (1591), as well as Shakespeare's *Henry VI* (1591), *Richard III* (1592) and *Julius Caesar* (1599).

Queen Elizabeth's reign which began in 1558 and ended in 1603 is often marked by historians as the golden age of English culture, as it represents the apogee of the English Renaissance because it witnessed the prosperity of art, music, literature, poetry and drama. It became most famous for its theatres and the plays that broke free from England's previous style of theatre. In addition, it was the age of expansion

abroad as well as economic growth because of seeking new markets and the trading success that England achieved overseas.

King James's reign began in 1603 and ended with his death in 1625; a period that witnessed the union of the crowns of Scotland and England. In addition, this Jacobean era witnessed the frequent political conflicts between the English government and the parliament, as well as the British colonization of the Americas. Thus, there is a need to examine these two plays from a new historicist perspective, emphasizing their depiction of the character of Cleopatra. The questions that this paper addresses are: how and why does Cleopatra's portrayal vary greatly from one decade to another and from one author to another? It is hypothesized that the variations are due to the change in the particular scene, as the policies of James I markedly differ from those of Elizabeth I.

Several Roman historians wrote about Cleopatra such as Cassius Dio (c. 155-235 CE), Strabo (63/64 BCE - 24 CE) and Titus Livius (59/64 BCE – 17 CE) as well as the Greek Plutarch (46 -119 CE). However, Shakespeare chose Plutarch to be the main historical source for his play. Plutarch highlights Cleopatra's relationship with Caesar and Antony depending on Roman sources as he was writing about 150 years after the death of Cleopatra and Antony. Naturally, this long period of time between the actual event and writing about it reflects the inaccuracy in narrating the events precisely. Therefore, Christopher Pelling in his book *Life of Antony* asserts that Plutarch's narrative reflects the Roman side of the story, their expectations and understanding of gender and race at that time. "Plutarch's Roman connexions must have influenced his perspectives; he is not hostile to Rome" (1988, 25).

The first thing to be taken into consideration is the mentality of the Romans and how, in their collective consciousness, they refused the role of women in power as practiced in Egypt, such as Nefertiti, Cleopatra and others. In addition, the problem is aggravated because they are women from oriental origin, which makes them, to the Romans, inferior. Stacy Schiff defends Cleopatra in her book *Cleopatra: A Life* highlighting this factor by mentioning that "Here you have an incredibly ambitious, accomplished woman who comes up against some of the same problems that women in power come up against today. Cleopatra plays an oddly pivotal role in world history as well; in her lifetime, Alexandria is the center of the universe, Rome is still a backwater" (2010, 2).

Another factor that probably contributed negatively to the way English people imagined the East in general and Cleopatra in particular is economic; companies like the English East India Company (founded in 1600), flourished in trade with other countries and became a weapon for the newly emerging colonial and Imperial system. As these companies needed a justification for their exploitative activities, they portrayed oriental figures, including Cleopatra, to the English audience in a negative way, bearing in mind that the people benefiting from these companies are also the owners of, or at least have control over, theatres at that time.

Since history is just another story told by historians, Cleopatra is part of a story told by her enemies the Romans years after her death. Consequently, the practices in Western politics and historiography have taken advantage of Cleopatra's story to achieve certain political and national objectives. Thus, Cleopatra is often intentionally represented negatively in Western drama as part of a Western hegemonic discourse that promotes certain misconceptions and stereotypes in literature, depicting her as a witch or a femme

The Portrayal of Cleopatra in Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* and William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*: A New Historicist Perspective

fatale from the inferior and exotic East. This pretext or stigmatization, as a witch or femme fatale, can be understood as a defense mechanism by Westerners to defend and justify the inexplicable deeds of their heroes, such as Caesar and Antony, portrayed in drama and history in a process described by Edward Said as "a rigid division which maintained a strict social and cultural hierarchy between members of the dominant and members of the subject race" (2002, 19).

This reflection of historical figures and events in literature makes literature a double-edged weapon to immortalize certain characters and moments while shaming others. As a consequence, the reliability of literature as a source of knowledge should be questioned starting with who writes it (Daniel or Shakespeare), and for whom it is written (Elizabeth I or James I), and its context as well as the purposes, whether consciously or unconsciously, taking into consideration that history is written by vanquisher, in this case the Romans. But, what about the vanquished? Or *the dead*? Do they have a voice or a different perspective? and who has the authority to assume their voice? These issues will be discussed with regard to Cleopatra's portrayal in Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* (1594) and William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606).

The Portrayal of Cleopatra in Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedie of Cleopatra*

Cleopatra is an inexhaustible astonishing story as Michael Grant, who debunks the image of a wayward woman and replaces it with a brilliant linguist and strategist, highlights her importance. In his book *Cleopatra*, he states that "Boccaccio launched the long line of Renaissance writing about Cleopatra in 1473. The years between 1540 and 1905 witnessed no less than 127 dramatic productions concerned with Cleopatra: 77 plays, 45 operas and 5 ballets" (1972, 350). Shakespeare's portrayal of Cleopatra seems to have dominated the collective consciousness and the literary scene ever since it was performed. Nevertheless, prior to Shakespeare, Samuel Daniel's play *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* (1594) is one of the earliest attempts. Samuel Daniel (1562 –1619) wrote the play as he was encouraged by Mary Sidney to compose a companion piece to her translation of Garnier's *Marc Antoine*, and this is clear from his dedication: "To the most noble Lady, the Lady Mary Countess of Pembroke" (Daniel 1594, 2); he then adds, "Thy well graced Antony... [is] to expect his Cleopatra's company" (Daniel 1594, 2).

The play is a closet drama as it has long monologues and reported actions, which made it almost unperformable and a less energetic work in comparison with Shakespeare's play, written for public performance. As a closet play, it consists of a series of soliloquies, each character comes onto the stage either alone or with the least number of other characters and delivers lengthy speeches which makes the play once again different from Shakespeare's play which consists of interactions and conversations between the different actors. T.S. Eliot describes Daniel's play as "The whole thing is in excellent taste. Yet we may ponder the fact that it would not have made the slightest difference to the formation of our Augustan poetry" (1932, 79).

Daniel's psychological portrait of Cleopatra is that of a woman with dignity and nobility, which can be clearly seen in Charmian's insistence on putting the crown on Cleopatra's head even if she is dead as an act of respect and dignity for Cleopatra, ruminating:

Yet will I have this honor to be last
Which shall adorn this head, which must be seen
To wear that crown in death, her life held fast,
That all the world may see she died a Queen (V, ii, 127-130).

Another obvious example is Charmian's last words before she drinks the poison as she reminds the audience that Cleopatra is from a glorified royal lineage: "Yea very well, and she that from the race / Of so great kings descends doth best become" (V, ii, 142-143). In Daniel's portrait, Cleopatra has a divided role as a queen and most importantly as a mother trying to protect her children. He focuses on her maternal love for her son as well as the loyalty to her husband, qualities originally found in Isis as Sharon Heyob explains: "while Isis is known for a myriad of roles, her dominant trait was her devotion to Osiris and her motherly love for Horus" (1975, 44). It appears that her loving care for her son Caesarion has turned him into a promising ruler. He is portrayed as a young man of no less patriotism than his mother, planning to lead an army to fight the "greedy Rome":

The winds may change, and all these states oppressed,
Colleagued in one, may turn again to sink
Their greatness, who now holds them all distressed.
And I may lead their troops, and at the walls
Of greedy Rome, revenge the wrongèd blood (I, ii, 138-142).

Certainly, this explains why Octavius kills Caesarion following philosopher Arirs' advice. "Plurality of Caesars are not good" (III, i, 108). It was the latter's justification when doubts about the decision were raised by another Philostratus, another consultant. The unwanted extra Caesars are of course the sons of Cleopatra and Antony Caesarion, and Antillus, Antony's son from his first wife Fulvia, who might, if left alive, eventually claim their legitimate throne if the opportunity came to them. It is worth noticing that the playwrights' use of the philosophers' ideas was a common device in the "closet drama" to offer their own explanations and commentaries on the events; just like the Greek chorus.

In 1607, Daniel revised *The Tragedy of Cleopatra* in an attempt to make it performable on stage, and made some changes such as breaking long speeches such as Cleopatra's opening monologue. As a consequence, some critics considered that the editing of the play after Shakespeare's play, *Antony and Cleopatra*, is actually an indication that Daniel was influenced by Shakespeare's play. One of these critics is Arthur Norman who supposes that "Scholars have long suspected that the revisions in 1607-1611 editions of *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* by Samuel Daniel were made under the influence of Shakespeare" (1959, 1). Nevertheless, Daniel too reciprocally influenced dramatists such as Shakespeare and Dryden; as Hardin Graig notes that "the fifth act in *Antony and Cleopatra* corresponds roughly to Daniel's whole play and has the same dramatic theme" (1948, 207). Thus, it is believed that Daniel's play provided the source material for the last act, the fifth, in Shakespeare's play as there are some textual similarities between the two texts such as Daniel's "Cleare Cydnos shée did shew what earth could shew" (Daniel V, II, 94), which is compared to Shakespeare's "My best attires. I am again for Cydnus, // To meet Mark Antony" (Shakespeare, V, ii, 228-229).

The Portrayal of Cleopatra in Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* and William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*: A New Historicist Perspective

Worth mentioning too is the fact that despite the similarities between the two plays, there are several significant differences as well. These differences start from the number of the characters in each play, because Shakespeare's play has forty-two characters while Daniel's play has fourteen characters. This is because, unlike Shakespeare, Daniel's play begins after the death of Antony neglecting the love affair but laying emphasis on the final hours in Cleopatra's life.

It is quite interesting that Daniel lays little emphasis on Cleopatra's famed beauty, by aging his Egyptian queen, as she seems to be in the last few years of her life. Cleopatra herself expresses her awareness of her fading looks: in Act two, Scene one she says, "And yet thou camest but in my beauty's wane," mentioning "new appearing wrinkles of declining" (II, i, 173-174). Moreover, she is raised to a tragic status when she decides to die honourably instead of enduring humiliation in Rome if she surrenders: "So shall I act the last of life with glory/Die like a Queen, and rest without control" (IV, ii, 163-164).

Cleopatra represents her nation, as she is the Queen of Egypt, and her humiliation in Rome would be a humiliation for the nation she represents. Hence, she chooses to commit suicide in a painful way by the asp bite (V, ii, 102). Daniel's choice to end the play with a question about order by the chorus reflects the uncertainty about the future of Egypt under the Roman occupation: "Doth order order so /Disorder's overthrow?" (V, ii, 226-227). The gist is that order in Egypt is very much related to her rule and personality.

Daniel's portrayal of Cleopatra as a mother who cares about her children and her country, is different from the fact that the Egyptian queen has been remembered as a temptress who seduced Roman leaders. A well-known critic who supports this idea is Warren Chernaik who explains that "Cleopatra is portrayed as a "loving mother, concerned about what will happen to her children ... [by] the remorseless power of the Roman conqueror" (2011, 143). In this respect, Daniel's portrayal of Cleopatra subverts her dominant image. Another strong motive for presenting Cleopatra by Daniel in a more positive way is her analogy with Queen Elizabeth, since one of the political and social features at the time was the staging of Queen Elizabeth in public theatres, as she herself declared in a speech delivered to Parliament in 1586: "We princess are set on stages in the sight and view of all the world duly observed" (Williamson 1984, 257). This staging of Queen Elizabeth must have been taken into consideration by those dramatists. Thus, Holger Schott Syme proposes that Queen Elizabeth's anxieties about queens being "set on stages" relates to "an awareness of her existence as a character, constantly subject to representation as an essential part of the political process" (2012, 4).

Another piece of evidence about Queen Elizabeth's influence on the portrayal of Cleopatra can be found in Daniel's play as he praises Queen Elizabeth in the introduction to the play, celebrating the peace and stability England enjoyed during her reign. In a similar situation, Cleopatra brought stability and peace to her country during her reign. Furthermore, Queen Elizabeth had never married and the idea of the succession to the throne was a predominant theme throughout Renaissance drama. Thus, he uses Cleopatra as an example to show the catastrophic results after the end of her reign and to prove the necessity to support their queen to protect their country.

Daniel's first edition of the play was written during Queen Elizabeth's reign while the later editions were under King James I's reign. Thus, Daniel's sympathy with Cleopatra is actually a result of his sympathy and alliance with Elizabeth. Both rulers have control over the theatres at that time, and Daniel was close to the court in both reigns and he even dedicated some of his works to Queen Elizabeth and King James I. For example, he dedicated his poetic history entitled *The Civil Wars* to Queen Elizabeth; while for James I, he addressed his poem "Panegyrick Congratulatory to the King's Most Excellent Majesty" at the occasion of his accession to the throne. Daniel was also associated with King James's queen Anne of Denmark who commissioned him to write a masque.

Masques and plays were important means of communication at that time. In their book *The Politics of The Stuart Court Masque*, David Bevington and Peter Holbrook explain that "For a generation, the masque has been a favourite topic of new historicism, because it has been seen as part of the process by which artistic works interact with politics, both shaping and reflecting the political life of a nation" (1998,1). As a result of being close to the court in both reigns, Gillian Wright believes that Daniel's political priorities changed significantly, especially on the question of the role of and legitimacy of kingship. She explains that "Whereas in 1595 Daniel adopts a broadly conservative attitude to the rights of hereditary monarchs, in 1609 he consistently privileges the monarch's commitment to the "publique good" and the just execution of the law" (2008, 461).

Daniel doesn't mention the scene of Cleopatra's barge in the Nile which was mentioned in Plutarch and later in Shakespeare because the play begins after the death of Antony and Daniel wanted to lay emphasis on Cleopatra's personality rather than her appearance. Thus, he connects her to Isis twice in his play as in Directus's speech "Into this passion "A stately vault to Isis" (I, ii, 24), as well as in Cleopatra's speech "Am I the woman whose inventive pride / Adorned like Isis scorned mortality" (I, ii, 29-30). The significance of this portrayal in Daniel's play is that Daniel focuses on the positive aspects, neglecting the Roman narrative that supports the idea that the magical spells and the dazzling beauty of Cleopatra are the reasons behind Antony's submission to her. However, Plutarch keeps the Roman interpretation in his book *Lives*, where he says, "The Romans felt pity for Antony, not for Octavia, and especially those who had seen Cleopatra and knew that neither in youthfulness nor beauty was she superior to Octavia" (Plutarch, *Lives*. trans. Perrin, 1916, 57).

Finally, in her book *Imagining Cleopatra: Performing Gender and Power in Early Modern England*, Yasmin Arshad stresses the idea that Samuel Daniel's positive portrayal of Cleopatra is something remarkable. She states that "Daniel's portrayal of Cleopatra is distinctive in English drama for the voice he gave to her suffering imagining her distress in her final days" (2019, 53).

William Shakespeare's Jacobian Cleopatra

William Shakespeare marginally mentions some Eastern female figures in his plays such as Othello's mother and Sycorax. Yet, one of his spectacular Eastern figures is Cleopatra in his five-act play *Antony and Cleopatra* written in 1606. Basically, set in the Roman Republic and the Ptolemaic Egypt, the play swiftly shifts between Alexandria and Rome. The play begins in 41 BCE and revolves around the Queen of Egypt's affair with the middle-aged Roman leader Mark Antony who is one of the three

The Portrayal of Cleopatra in Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* and William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*: A New Historicist Perspective

members of the second triumvirate of Rome. The play ends after the naval Battle of Actium in 31 BCE with their tragic death and with the victory of Octavius Caesar, later known as Caesar Augustus, who became the sole Emperor of Rome. Cleopatra, being the complex figure she is, is the heroine in the play, and the diversity of perspectives from which we see her, illustrates her either as a decadent lustful woman or a noble ruler. For these reasons, if history is a stage, Cleopatra is one of the most controversial and versatile characters.

Although Cleopatra is thirteen years younger than Mark Antony, Shakespeare shows her domination and control over Antony who has been led by his heart, jeopardizing his official status by neglecting his duties toward Rome. This negative portrayal of Cleopatra starts from the very beginning of the play, exactly in the first speech in the play delivered by Philo, one of Antony's followers, in Act one, Scene one, when he stigmatizes her as a lustful gypsy: "And is become the bellows and the fan / to cool a gypsy lust" (I, I 9-10). This is a pattern repeated throughout the play: The Romans believe that Cleopatra is the person who has distracted Antony from his duties toward Rome by charming him, as Antony is reported to have said: "Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch / Of the ranged empire fall" (I.i.35-36), which shows how little he cares about the government affairs because his world has come to be defined by Cleopatra's presence. Consequently, Antony worries about himself realizing that he is about to "lose [him]self in a dotage" (I, ii, 106), as he describes her as "Whom everything becomes to chide, to laugh / to weep" (I: i.1-55); which indicates how admirable and lovable Cleopatra is for Antony who is attracted to her in all her moods. Besides, this stigmatization frames the audience's understanding of and attitudes toward Cleopatra, from the first speech in the play by Philo to the end, as several negative descriptions of Cleopatra can be seen through the play, such as, "Wrangling queen" (I, I, 50), "slave" (I, iv,19), Rare Egyptian (II, ii,257), Royal wench (II, iii, 266) and also "a whore" (III, VI.67).

Thus, she is described as a witch who has made Antony "the noble ruin of her magic" (III, x.18). These negative descriptions are used by Romans as a defense mechanism toward the near-mythic Cleopatra, who is considered as an uncanny Eastern femme fatale and who has the reputation of being one of the most famous sirens in antiquity or a threat to the whole empire. To describe her as a witch attributes to her the sort of super power that makes her hard to resist even for men like Antony; it is like finding excuses for him, because for a Roman hero like him, it requires supernatural power to conquer him. Domitius Enobarbus's says, "Whistling to th' air, which but for vacancy/ Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too/ And made a gap in nature" (II, ii, 254-256). These lines, delivered by Enobarbus, show how Cleopatra's presence affects people and metaphorically affects nature as well. Furthermore, this impression also emphasizes the stereotyping of Eastern women as witches involved in sorcery in Shakespeare's plays such as *Sycorax* and *Othello's* mother. Thus, Enobarbus, in his famous speech, describes Cleopatra as a femme fatale with infinite renewal of beauty, while admiring her ability to be always young, as he says,

Never; he will not.
Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety. Other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies. For vilest things
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
Bless her when she is riggish” (*Antony and Cleopatra* II, iii 275-281).

This description can be discussed in light of Plutarch’s reports on Cleopatra in his book *The Lives*, he says,

For indeed her own beauty, as they say, was not, in and of itself, completely incomparable, nor was it the sort that would astound those who saw her; but interaction with her was captivating, and her appearance, along with her persuasiveness in discussion and her character that accompanied every interchange, was stimulating. Pleasure also came with the tone of her voice; and her tongue was like a many-stringed instrument: she could turn it easily to whichever language she wished And she gave her decision herself to most of them including Ethiopians, Troglodytes, Hebrews, Arabians, Syrians, Medes, and the Parthians (Plutarch, *Lives*. trans. Perrin, 1967, 33).

From this description we understand that Cleopatra’s magic is actually not sorcery, but her ability to look young and, more importantly, her powerful mind, vision and charismatic character. These merits and descriptions, as highlighted in Plutarch’s book, considered as a main source for Shakespeare’s play, distinguish her from other female characters in Shakespeare’s play; which actually raises a question about Shakespeare’s intention for *not showing* these merits in his heroine although he depended on Plutarch as a source for the play. In an attempt to answer this question Graham Parry states that “A reading of the general context for the play shows its relevance to the Stuart politics of union as well as the broader expectations of the audience” (1982, 42). Still, such realistic portrayal refutes the assumption used as a defense mechanism made by Romans that her magic is supernatural; on the contrary, it is completely natural.

Furthermore, the influence of Egypt and Cleopatra on Rome extends to religion as Roman religion absorbed several gods, goddesses and cults of the conquered nation Egypt, such as Serapis, who was a healing goddess in ancient Egyptian religion and whose worship spread in Greco-Roman world. Another important example is Isis, the protector goddess of sailors, the protector of the dead as well as the goddess of good fortune. Rivka Ulmer explains that “Rome enthusiastically adopted Egyptian gods, such as Isis and Serapis, which offered new religious perspectives and were viewed as a symbol of an ancient and exotic culture” (2009, 216). Dana F Michael adds that “The Roman soldiers, their families, and other settlers also began to have just as Egyptian practices and rituals as they did Roman” (2014, 24). The reference to Cleopatra as Isis occurs eight times in Shakespeare’s play. She appears dressed like Isis as Octavius describes her, “In th’ habiliments of the goddess Isis” (III, vi, 18); which illustrates Cleopatra’s identifying herself with Isis to the extent that Plutarch described her as the “new Isis” ((Plutarch, *Lives*.

The Portrayal of Cleopatra in Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* and William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*: A New Historicist Perspective

trans. Perrin, 1967, 54). One can imagine the impact this identification would have on the commoners. John Buchan, on the other hand, simply envisages her as surrounded by a “divine Aura as a reincarnation of Isis” (1937, 79); or even “the Avatar of Isis on earth” as seen by Foreman (1999, 41).

In Cleopatra's suicide at the end of the tragedy, Shakespeare gives her more centrality. Her death, according to Harold Bloom, is a victory as he states that “Her death is triumphant rather than tragic, and she forever is known best for being well known” (1998,74). The justification for Cleopatra's death is elucidated in her speech in the final scene in act five, as she, in a moment of metatheatre, speculates upon her possible future posthumous reputation. She would rather lose her life than be a captive paraded around the streets and theatres of Rome for the gratification of the audience that represents the racial and colonial other, as she says:

Nay, 'tis most certain, Iras Saucy lictors
Will catch at us like strumpets, and scald rhymers
Ballad us out o' tune. The quick comedies
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
I' th' posture of a whore. (V. ii. 210-217)

The pronoun “I” in these lines can be taken as an implication of her gender as a female from the East, who will be deemed a whore due to her gender and origin. Cleopatra's death immortalizes her and shows the great respect her enemy Caesar holds for her, as clearly indicated in the last words he said about her after her death:

She shall be buried by her Antony
No grave upon the earth shall clip in it
A pair of famous, High events as these
Strike those that make them; and their story is
No less in pity than his glory which
Brought them to be lamented. Our army shall
In solemn show attend the funeral,
And then to Rome. Come, Dolabella, see
High order in this great solemnity. (V, ii, 429-437)

Because of Cleopatra's reported ability to be the perfect embodiment of many contrasting qualities like virtue and vice, ugliness and beauty, Harold Bloom states that “A.C. Bradley considered only four of Shakespeare's characters as an “inexhaustible”: Hamlet, Cleopatra, Falstaff and Iago” (1998, 546). In addition, Bradley states that “The character of Cordelia is not a masterpiece of invention or subtlety like that of Cleopatra” (2019, 5).

The exquisite character of Cleopatra is a summation of first her contradictions as the good, the bad and the charming along with her physical attributes, and her unique position as the queen from the

supposedly exotic East. Shakespeare did her justice when he embodied in her the experienced politician as well as the voluptuous female of “infinite variety” (II, iii, 77). Furthermore, Antony and Cleopatra are presented on separate spheres individually as a man and a woman, a leader and a queen or masculine virtue and feminine fluidity, and culturally as the West and the East or politically as the centre and the periphery. This representation goes on both the micro and macro levels, which helps to understand the different layers within the play, bearing in mind that “there are few actions in the play and their importance lies in the discussion around them”, as Janet Adelman illustrates in her study of the play (1973,30). Some questions need to be posed here from a new historicist point of view, such as: Was Shakespeare while writing this historical play about Cleopatra in 1606 making a statement about the political situation under the rule of King James I the successor of Queen Elizabeth I? Was he inspired by the shift of rule from a queen to a king? Did he feel obliged to write about the queen and her mistakes? Was Shakespeare taking part in a cultural process or a political propaganda? Further studies need to be undertaken in order to fathom the subject. Thomas Streissguth thinks that “Most people who wrote about Cleopatra’s life lived long after the queen’s death. Their information came down through many generations. Roman writers changed much of her history to suit their own goals” (2006, 98). Consequently, the assumption about the Roman writers’ credibility actually raises several questions, what is history? Is it just the historical event itself? Or is it a combination of a chain of cultural, social, geographical and political contexts that surrounded or even created the event? Historical events should not be divested out of its social, historical and political contexts, as these contexts pile up, they become their own edifice, and this is contrary to other literary theory schools, textualists approaches, in the past which deal with the text alone. Therefore, Hayden White suggests new historicism as a tool to understand literary texts as it provides “culturological and sociological model for orienting an approach to the study of history that carries with it implications of a decidedly ideological order” (1989, 296).

Since theatres were the social media and the think tanks at that period of time, some repeated negative descriptions of Cleopatra such as “witch, gipsy, whore” are intentionally used by writers like Shakespeare and other dramatists. These fabricated descriptions interfere with the collective consciousness of the masses and eventually become a stigmatization that strengthens the negative representation of Cleopatra. Finally, new historicism theory can be summarized by saying that ideologies and dogmas determine the literary works that must be scrutinized and re-evaluated by the lenses of the social, political and economic conditions of the period. In their introduction to their book *Practicing New Historicism*, Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt aver that new historicism signifies “an unsettling of established norms and procedures, a mingling of dissent and restless curiosity. ... [N]ew historicist readings are more often skeptical, wary, demystifying, critical, and even adversarial” (2000, 9).

A significant number of critics have been responding to these fabrications. In her article entitled “Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt,” Sally-Ann Ashton believes that “The legendary Cleopatra the public knows—the passionate, infinitely various woman of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* and the stylized beauty of the 1930s and 1960s films— has little to do with the historical Cleopatra” (2011, 21). Furthermore, Doris Adler, in “The Unlacing of Cleopatra” asserts that “The image of Cleopatra would be distorted if it is extracted from the cultural environment, the view point about Cleopatra, in a positive

The Portrayal of Cleopatra in Samuel Daniel's *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* and William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*: A New Historicist Perspective

way, is continuously changed over the time" (1982, 450). Moreover, Stacy Schiff warns against such intentional reimagining of this historical figure, "Shakespeare and Shaw put words in her mouth. Michelangelo, Tiepolo, and Elizabeth Taylor put a face to her name. Along the way the supple personality has been lost" (2010, 5).

The multiplicity of Cleopatra's portrayals is still occurring nowadays in theatres, literary studies, media, as well as in the divisive politics, ranging from a political female leader as in Daniel's play, or as a manipulative politician in Shakespeare's play. An obvious example for the multiplicity of Cleopatra's portrayal in the political level is the 2016 USA Presidential election as Cleopatra was portrayed in a magazine article as "an example of strong female leaders Hillary Clinton should emulate. Later, a *Washington Post* cartoonist depicted President Trump as Shakespeare's Cleopatra, so hyper-decadent, so gluttonous that even the asp slithers away repulsed" (2019, 11).

Comparison between Daniel and Shakespeare's Plays

The influence of Queen Elizabeth on Daniel's depiction of Cleopatra is obvious, and a similar influence is found in Shakespeare's play as well. However, despite the dissimilarities at the first glance between Elizabeth I and Cleopatra in Shakespeare's play, many scholars have connected the two queens. They even compared the Nile to the Thames. On the one hand, the differences are obvious as Elizabeth was never married and she was celebrated for chastity "fair vestal throned by the west" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* II, I,159); while Cleopatra is described as a serpent, a whore and a widow in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. In addition to the fact that Elizabeth I was fair while Shakespeare's Cleopatra was black "With Phoebus amorous pinches black" (I. v. 28). On the other hand, the general parallel outline between the two queens is there, despite the difference in their age, as both queens shared a lot of similarities to the extent that Keith Rinehart believes that Elizabeth may have been used as the living model for Shakespeare's splendid portrait of Cleopatra. He mentions the similarities between the two queens in his article "Shakespeare's Cleopatra and England's Elizabeth" by stating that: "The extent to which Shakespeare borrowed from Elizabeth for his Cleopatra is conjectural because so much of Cleopatra's character has specific warrant from Plutarch. But many of the supporting details were equally true Elizabeth" (1972, 81).

In addition to the fact that both queens were left with no children to succeed them to the throne: Cleopatra's child Caesarion was killed by Octavius and Queen Elizabeth had no children. Male rulers will dominate the scene, which raises a question about an additional similarity between the two queens as both of them have manly features in their personality. For instance, Cleopatra in Daniel's play is described as having bravery befitting of a man as Antony exclaims after hearing the news about her fake suicide when Directus, Antony's follower, said that "Into this passion. 'What! And hast thou then /prevented me, brave Queen, by thy great worth/ Hath Cleopatra taught the work of men?" (I, ii, 28-30). A. McCabe supports this idea about the Egyptian queen as she states that "Cleopatra proves by her powerful intelligence, wit, and considerable political ability that she could govern equally to that of a man." In this light it seems

appropriate that coins are issued, by her, to the public with the inscription 'Queen of Kings' (or Cleopatra)" (2008, 23).

Daniel connects Cleopatra with Isis in his play to show the positive traits of the queen such as her love for her child Caesarion or her devotion to Antony. However, Shakespeare in his play connects Cleopatra to Isis "in the habiliments of the goddess Isis" (III, vi, 18) to strengthen the western defence mechanism of Cleopatra's magic and sorcery which lead Antony, the Roman leader, to follow her as she uses the Isis cult to control him. Antony, who is, according to Cassius Dio, is identified as Osiris: "painters and sculptors in their work portray him as Osiris (or Dionysus) with Cleopatra as Isis (or Selene)" (1987, 5). Thus, Shakespeare describes the relation between Cleopatra and Antony when Octavius told Octavia: "No, my most wronged sister. Cleopatra / hath nodded him to her. He hath given his empire / up to a whore" (III, vi, 74-76); a statement better understood in the light of Cassius Dio's analysis that "The Romans were offended that Antony seemed "enslaved" to Cleopatra" (Balch 71) and the belief was that Cleopatra "had laid him (Antony) under some spell and deprived him of his wits" (Dio 1987, 5).

Conclusion

This study is meant to project the depiction of Cleopatra on the English stage in two literary works from different epochs. Such a portrayal has always been a source of attraction for playwrights and their audience. The portrayal of Cleopatra has witnessed an increase in attention and analysis due to the acceleration of the emergence of modern critical theories that open doors for different interpretations and expand the work's horizons. Shedding light on this issue from a new historicist perspective is helpful in revealing the positive and the negative portrayals of Cleopatra as well as explaining what might be the possible reasons for that portrayal. The reasons that influenced the playwrights while portraying Cleopatra are, first, political such as writing in the final years of Queen Elizabeth as well as King James's succession to the throne. The second reason leading to the variations in Cleopatra's portrayal is historical, which is related to the accuracy of reporting historical events and the intentions of the historian who wrote about Cleopatra, something that allowed the huge variance of her portrayal in the two plays selected here. Shakespeare opted to adopt the Roman narrative showing Antony as a victim of the queen's seductive power and witchcraft, a form of mechanism the Romans improvised to defend their heroes and blame Cleopatra. At the same time they undermined and misrepresented the Egyptian queen's scientific advancement and extraordinary knowledge; bearing in mind that Egypt was a rich country in many ways: full of grain, goods and resources, and most importantly, scientific knowledge. This fact may explain the Romans' ambition of controlling it as part of what we call today a resource war.

Another aspect discussed here is how the dramatists' attitude towards the East has changed and how this change can be detected through the portrayal of its representative. Such changes follow international developments and relations, sometimes facilitating the means to broaden the yawning gap between the East and the West. Such possible differences in representation are encouraged by the scarcity of historical resources, if, in the worst scenario, history is not "eliminated unilaterally" (Said 19). However, Cleopatra

remains an inspiration for the creative writers and critics because of her unique attributes, particularly her passionate way of life and wilful death.

تصوير كليوباترا في مسرحية (مأساة كليوباترا) لصامويل دانيال، ومسرحية (أنطوني وكليوباترا) لوليام شكسبير: من منظور النظرية التاريخية الجديدة

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الملخص

تعد كليوباترا السابعة من أجدر الجديرات بلقب أشهر نساء مصر في غابر الأزمان. وثمة فيض من الدراسات بهدف سبر أغوار شخصيتها وتأثيرها. ولما كان الأدب مرآة لتجارب البشر، تتعمق هذه الدراسة في استكشاف التباين في تصوير كليوباترا في مسرحيتين من روائع المسرح البريطاني، المسرحيتان قيد الدراسة هما (مأساة كليوباترا) (1594) لصامويل دانيال، ومسرحية (أنطوني وكليوباترا) (1606) لوليام شكسبير، وتكمن أهمية هذا البحث في الجمع بين المسرحيتين من أجل المقارنة، باعتماد النظرية التاريخية الجديدة للبحث فيهما من خلال البيئة والوسط الاجتماعي. أما السؤال الذي يطرحه البحث فهو: كيف ولماذا اختلف تصوير شخصية كليوباترا من عقد لعقد ومن كاتب لآخر؟ تفترض الدراسة أن السبب وراء الاختلاف هو التغير في مؤسسات معينة (الملكية كمثال).

الكلمات المفتاحية: كليوباترا، أنطوني، النظرية التاريخية الجديدة، ويليام شكسبير، سامويل دانيال، جرينبلات.

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