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## The Image of Egypt in a Selection of Elizabethan & Jacobean Plays

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### ABSTRACT

This study communicates the question of representational Egypt(ians) through textual analysis and close reading of Elizabethan and Jacobean selected plays, whose main concern is Egypt and Egyptians: Shakespeare's *Antony & Cleopatra*, *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, (*All Is True*) *Henry VIII*, and *Cymbeline*, Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, Jonson's *The Alchemist*, Beaumont and Fletcher's *The False One*, Daniel's *The Tragedie of Cleopatra*, Chapman's *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, and Webster's *The White Devil*. It examines the process of labelling, the concomitant negative stereotyping of land and human, and its effect upon characters' lives and future prospects as a result of the dramatists' response to contemporary colonialist discourse that exaggerated the signs of cultural and epistemological difference.

**Keywords:** Literature, Post-Colonialism, Orientalism, Xenophobia, Egypt, Identity, Stereotypes.

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### 1. Introduction

This study communicates the question of representational Egypt(ians) through textual analysis and close reading of Elizabethan and Jacobean selected plays, whose main concern is Egypt and Egyptians: Shakespeare's *Antony & Cleopatra*, *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, (*All Is True*) *Henry VIII*, and *Cymbeline*, Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, Jonson's *The Alchemist*, Beaumont and Fletcher's *The False One*, Daniel's *The Tragedie of Cleopatra*, Chapman's *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, and Webster's *The White Devil*. By engaging in this study, the researchers hope to highlight the patterned method of representing Egypt(ians) as a reflection of the binary of the West's Self versus the Oriental Other. During the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, Egypt was of special allure to the dramatists of the periods

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in a way which reflects a stereotypical image strong enough to be classified as racial, subjective, and repugnantly representational.

The idea of Orientalizing/Orientalist discourse as a means of representing the Orient was validated by many Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, who exercise a high degree of power in promoting an othering consciousness against such a territory and its people. Studdert-Kennedy refers to Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest* because of its concern "with the institutionalisation by the British of their conviction that their scriptures and their literature were at a deep and effectual level homologous". The British also believed that "what was essential, in relation to both conduct and belief, could be mediated by literary texts" (Studdert-Kennedy, 1998, p.61). Aware of the propagandist function of literature to promote an imperial ideology, most of those dramatists maintain the relationship between the Occident and the Orient as an attraction of opposites. Said explains that "texts are worldly, to some degree they are events". He adds, "even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (Said 1984, p.9). According to Said, "[o]rientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (Said 1979, p.2). The general tendency of constructing the Orient(al) in Western consciousness is the binary opposition thought, which largely bears little relation to reality, and is essentially complicit with stereotyping.

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, there is not a single study hitherto that covers the representation of Egypt in Elizabethan/Jacobean plays. This study is apart from the already established scholarship in outlook and end. The question of Egypt(ians) did not yet emerge as a topic in modern and contemporary scholarship on these plays. Due, however, to the large corpus of literature on the dramatic selection in question, it is not feasible to generate a comprehensive review of literature in this article – a matter that obliges us to settle with the following: Vanhoutte's essay communicates the question of suicide in *Antony & Cleopatra* in relation to the tradition of Shakespeare's and Roman periods, and contemporary thought (Vanhoutte, 2000). Kallendrof examines the theme of young women's right "to choose their sexual partners" from feminist, post-Bakhtinian, and new-historical perspectives in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Kallendrof, 2014). Willits' article on *The Jew of Malta* discusses the dramatist's view of the reasons of "the disunity of community," and highlights his "approach to dramatize" such a question (Willits, 2014). Similarly, the study undertaken by Moran on *The Alchemist* focuses on Jonson's means of theatricality to depict his characters "as an art to free man from God to the dominion of nature" (Moran, 2013). Hamamra's article, on the other hand, examines Webster's attitude towards challenging gender stereotypes and the hypocritical voice of patriarchy (Hamamra, 2016), and Minton examines the use of "dualism to represent the apocalypse" in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (Minton, 2013).

Such a study would yield interesting results and would shed light upon the injustices substantiated by some stereotypes associated with Egypt. In an age in which stereotyping, labeling, and enmity towards the East is being fueled by extremists and blood-thirsty war lords, this study gains special significance as it unmask hidden ideologies injected into the literary works in question to essentially maintain the wide gulf between people of different cultures/ideologies.

As for the methodology used in this study, the researchers mainly use postcolonial theory to investigate how and why stereotyping, labeling, and othering discourse is enacted throughout the selected literary works as a means of reconsidering the injustice and bias exerted on the Orient(al).

The analysis reveals that Egypt is associated with witchcraft, worldly pleasures, Bohemian way of life, necromancy, wild and barbarous activities, in short an Other's Dionysian world compared to the Self's Elizabethan Apollonian one. Due to the limited scope of this article which is by no means inclusive, it is hoped that it will trigger future studies that cover other selections of literary texts that reveal the significance of Egypt and its representation in Western fiction.

The article begins by discussing the image of Egypt(ians) in Shakespeare's *Antony & Cleopatra*, *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, (*All Is True*) *Henry VIII*, and *Cymbeline*, then moves to Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, Jonson's *The Alchemist*, Beaumont and Fletcher's *The False One*, Daniel's *The Tragedie of Cleopatra*, Chapman's *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, and ends with Webster's *The White Devil*.

To start, one cannot fully construe Shakespeare's oeuvre without engaging in a thorough analysis of the playwright's epistemological, theological, teleological, and political stances, the terrains he contested, and the cultural and social milieu in which he operated. He occupies an impregnable niche in demarcating and delineating the contentions, aesthetics, and ontologies of Western civilization. Egypt is a key motif in his *Antony and Cleopatra*. The central conflict in the play is between love and power; "[t]his tragedy is the supreme expression in Shakespeare of love as value" (Traversi, 1956, p.236). It also includes a conflict between the world of sensual pleasures and that of duty and responsibility.

Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* notes two main principles in the Greek culture: a mental Apollonian principle characterized by reason, wisdom, and light, and an instinctive Dionysian principle remarkable for pleasure, ecstasy, drunkenness, and madness (Nietzsche, 2012, p.3). The play presents Egypt as a Dionysian world of pleasures that is juxtaposed against Rome's Apollonian world. To Stephen and Franks, it depicts "a straightforward clash between two different and opposed philosophies and ways of looking at life. Egypt stands for luxuriousness, sensuality, indulgence, richness, warmth, pleasure, and a certain wiliness, or trickery; Rome stands for power, efficiency, ruthlessness, and cold practicality" (Stephen & Franks, 1987, p.101-02). The world of the play is divided into a polarity of us (Rome)/them (Egypt) in which the "us" gets the positive qualities and the "them" gets the negative ones. Hence, some critics read the play as a celebration of the superiority of West over East, an endorsement of colonial discourse and racial hierarchies.

To such critics, Shakespeare is the quintessence of Eurocentrism; he instills in the Elizabethan minds the sharp contrast between Western and Eastern cultures. Take, for example, Kabbani, who understands Elizabethan dramatists as leaning heavily toward a "stock of Eastern characters" to perpetuate the moral, epistemological, and sociopolitical ascendancy of the West over the East. In her comment on Shakespeare's dramatization of Egypt in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Kabbani proclaims: "If Rome connotes duty, respectability, social position . . . then Egypt (Cleopatra being Egypt, and Egypt possessing Cleopatra's powers of enchantment) is the indulgence of the senses, oblivion to the world's affairs, and overwhelming sexual desire" (Kabbani, 1986, p.20).

The play crystallizes the binary opposition between East and West: The West (Rome) connotes duty and reason whereas Egypt signifies pleasures and passions; Antony pines for Egypt: "I will to Egypt ... I'th' East my pleasure lies" (II.iii.36-8). Cleopatra, an epitome of Egypt, is depicted as a morally contaminating sensual sphere. Degabrielle highlights the "inexorable double logic" in which "Westerners" are depicted as "rational, men, free, equal, independent" while "others" are "irrational, possessing a 'woman-like' slave-mentality" (Degabrielle, 1997, p.252). Accordingly, the two Roman soldiers, Philo and Demetrius, debate their general's transformation from being a valiant dutiful warrior into a sensual fool and a slave to lustful Cleopatra. Philo critiques Antony's metamorphosis: "... this dotage of our General's\O'erflows the measure. Those his goodly eyes, ... Have glowed like plated Mars, now bend, now turn\... And is become the bellows and the fan\To cool a gipsy's lust" (I.i.1-10). Stephen and Franks state that "Rome condemns love, Egypt creates it. Rome is called, inhuman, a place of intrigue, tactical struggle, and power politics" and that "at times the audience see Antony the mere 'fan to cool a gipsy's lust'" (Stephen & Franks, 1987, p.103).

Caesar describes Antony as "not more manlike than Cleopatra, nor the queen of Ptolemy more womanly than he" and as "[a] man who is the abstract of all faults/That all men follow" (I.iv.7-9). From the Roman Caesar's Apollonian perspective, Antony is a slave to his desires as he leads a Bohemian life in Egypt and is, hence, a woman-like character. Romans, including Antony himself, believe that Cleopatra has bewitched him with her spell; Antony swears to Cleopatra, "By the fire/That quickens Nilus' slime, I go from hence/Thy soldier-servant, making peace or war/As thou affects" (I.iii.68-70). In

addition, Pompey hopes that his “stirring/Can from the lap of Egypt’s widow pluck/The ne’er lust-wearied Antony” (II.v.36-7). Egypt is viewed as a place of pleasure in which Antony is deeply snared and apparently beyond redemption. To Antony, the Dionysian world of Egypt is where his “pleasure lies” (II.iii.38).

Further, Egypt is depicted as a place of witchcraft and charms when Pompey declares that “all the charms of love,/Salt Cleopatra, soften thy waned lip./Let witchcraft join with beauty, lust with both/Tie up the libertine, in a field of feasts/Keep his [Antony’s] brain fuming” (II.i.20-24). The oriental character, in Pompey’s terms, is depicted as lustful, wanton woman only concerned with sex and amorous relations. The charm of Egyptian beauty has a negative effect upon Antony who, according to Tennenhouse, “cannot actually separate politics from sexuality” (144). To him, “[a]ll serious threats to Rome stem from Antony’s alliance with Cleopatra”, and their offspring would be a real cause for political disorder (Tennenhouse, 1986, p.145).

*Antony and Cleopatra* remains a juxtaposing, multi-voiced body of writing: the Self and the Other are equally given a voice to articulate their identities and cultural values, and each main character is perceived from more than one perspective – a matter that makes the stereotypical notions circulated in the play less effective upon their readers. Shakespeare consciously contrasts the representation of the Orient/Oriental with reality. Cleopatra is held responsible for Antony’s moral degeneration – an accusation that sharply contrasts with her image as a dutiful queen, and with the degenerate nature of Antony.

Indeed, when Cleopatra urges Antony to conduct his duty towards Rome, it is Antony who appears to be dissolute and neglectful of his responsibilities: “Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch/Of the rang’d empire fall” (I.i.35-36). To Antony, there is “no messenger” to listen to except Cleopatra (I.i.52). As such, the discursive opposition between dutiful Rome and loose Egypt is disturbed: the discourse on the oriental character is not fixed, rather, it is subject to alteration. To Foucault, the rules and structures of any discourse change from time to time. He conceptualizes the process of such a change as “a field of memory,” where “statements are no longer accepted or discussed, and which consequently no longer define either a body of truth or a domain of validity, but in relation to which relations of filiation, genesis, transformation, continuity, and historical discontinuity can be established” (Foucault, 2002, p.64-5).

Shakespeare demolishes cultural prejudice from Renaissance thought due to its negative concomitant effect on the interaction between East and West. Robins claims that “[c]ultural *arrogance* can turn into cultural *hatred*, and this is the basis of racism” (Hall, 1997, p.66, emphasis added). Antony’s aforementioned speech debunks Philo and Demetrius’ false accusations of Cleopatra’s negative effect on Antony’s duty. Caesar’s reference to Antony’s abandonment of his duties (I.iv.1-6) is deconstructed by Lepidus who attributes Antony’s wasteful conduct of drinking, fishing and wasting to “hereditary” effect which “cannot change” (I.iv.13-14). Such a claim invokes *genetic determinism*. Antony suffers from genetic determinism that renders him genetically inferior – an inferiority that is usually thrust upon Oriental characters. In Shakespeare’s world, the “us” shares the attributes of “them”.

Shakespeare cleanses Cleopatra from the prejudices of Caesar, Philo and Demetrius on the one hand, and alleviates her to the status of an admirable influential woman. On the other hand, he provides a detailed description of Cleopatra’s charming qualities that highlight her beauty, strength and talents. To Enobarbus, Cleopatra’s beauty is matchless, “her own person,/... beggared all description . . .” (II.ii.202-04), and her charisma is so effective “that the holy priests\Bless her when she is riggish” (II.ii.244-45). Enobarbus’ remarks manifest Cleopatra’s powerful talents in controlling the religious institution, which at the time was quite influential in determining ancient Egypt’s state affairs.

Nevertheless, Shakespeare’s representation of Cleopatra is unique in contrast with that of other Shakespearean female characters. In spite of the dim Eurocentric views of Caesar, Pompey, and Philo who objectify Cleopatra, an “Egyptian dish”(II.vi.126), a “slave” (I.iv.19), and a lustful woman only

concerned with sex and amorous relations. Shakespeare frequently glorifies her as a powerful speaking subject in a seemingly patriarchal Roman world; Cleopatra asserts her identity: “I am Egypt’s queen” (I.i.31). She equally and effectively shares her authority with the most powerful imperialist political figures of her time being an “[a]bsolute queen” (III.vi.9-11) who totally controls Antony with her “beck” (III.xi.59).

Cleopatra suddenly decides to withdraw with her sixty-ship fleet from the battle Actium thus catastrophically throwing Antony’s fleet into confusion and causing him to lose the battle. Cleopatra’s decision affirms the impossibility of winning this battle against Caesar’s troops – a decision caused by “the cultural bomb” that “[a]nnihilate[s] a people’s belief in their names... in their heritage of struggle ... in their capacities and ultimately in themselves.” Hence, “[p]ossibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams” (Ngũgĩ, 1986, p.3).

Following his defeat in the final battle with Caesar, Antony sees Cleopatra/Egypt from a different perspective that caused him to “part” with “Fortune” and “beguiled” him “to the very heart of loss” (IV.xiii.28-29). Antony sees her as a “foul Egyptian” (IV.xiii.10), a “Triple-turned whore” (IV.xiii.13), a “gypsy” (IV.xiii.28), and a “false soul” (IV.xiii.25) who caused him to be defeated and “barked” (IV.xiii.23) though he was before he knew her a “pine ... /That overtopped them all” (IV.xiii.23-4). Egypt, embodied in Cleopatra, is considered from Antony’s perspective a fatal destructive mirage.

Cleopatra’s subjectification is also evident in her freedom of Roman patriarchal code that views women as “objects that satisfy men’s sexual appetites ... prizes of war ... [and] political pawns to be used as the means of cementing opportunistic alliances” (Gajowski, 1992, p.92). Unlike Octavia who accepts the role of being “a political pawn” between Caesar and Antony, Cleopatra refuses any role assigned to her by men; Cleopatra commits suicide for fear of being exhibited in Rome as an “Egyptian puppet” (V.ii.204), a “strumpet” (V.ii.11) to Caesar’s “saucy lictors,” (V.ii.210), or as a subject of “scald rhymers” (V.ii.211) and “quick comedians” (V.ii.212-15) who will negatively immortalize her by art.

Antony and Cleopatra maintain their individual integrity, but the price of their self-assertion is both their lives. The world of Rome is a world of reason, which cannot condone Antony’s actions that would jeopardize the stability of the Roman hierarchy. Both Antony and Cleopatra fatally chase after their dreams, but they both lose everything because they tried to live both worlds (Apollonian and Dionysian) simultaneously. Shakespeare tests the formula of West/East by removing the slash between them to create a gray area in which readers can decide if such a relationship was possible and would have a happy end. He gives readers a chance to break free for a while from the bonds of stereotypes only to give them a sense of fatality caused by the catastrophic end of both Antony and Cleopatra that makes them afraid of removing that slash ever again.

Despite Shakespeare’s attempt to subvert the Occidental/Oriental binary in *Antony and Cleopatra*, he seems to confirm it in *As You Like It*. Jaques’s reference to Egypt seems to be a reflection of the Renaissance dominant bias and anxiety of the Orient(al), whose essential difference is to be overthrown. Jaques informs Amiens that he will “rail against all the firstborn of Egypt” (II.v.56-58) thus invoking the story of Prophet Moses and the Pharaoh, which highlights Egypt as a land of magic and violence. When the Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites leave Egypt, God cursed Egyptians with the death of the first child of each Egyptian family. Apparently, Jacques, who dreams of being the Duke’s fool, imagines himself having the power of Prophet Moses and the ability to cause the deaths of Egyptian children, a reflection of the repulsive position of Egyptians in the Renaissance people’s imagination, and an indication of a suppressed desire to overthrow them.

Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is concerned with love relationships not easily fulfilled which end happily in marriage. Shakespeare isolates his characters in a forest and subjects them to magic. Hence, the play involves supernatural creatures that cause change in the characters who undergo an archetypal journey into the realm of dream/unconscious where reality and illusion are interwoven causing them to correct their wrong choices of lovers. Consequently, characters are initiated from innocence into experience and gain self-knowledge. Theseus explains to Hippolyta the strange state of

the lovers that make them behold “Helen’s beauty in a brow of Egypt” (V.i.11). The Apollonian world of Athens sharply contrasts with the Dionysian world of the magical forest; the charms of the forest, associated with Egypt, bewitches the mind and creates illusions that seem real thus emphasizing Egypt’s mirage-like nature.

In *Henry VIII (All Is True)*, Shakespeare provides another allusion to Egypt. An old lady informs Anne of “an old story” of an Egyptian lady who refuses the responsibility of governing people and who “would not be a queen ... /For all the mud in Egypt” (II.iii.91-93) – a reference that sheds light upon the fertile mud of Egypt and highlights the stereotypical image of Egypt as a land of wealth. It also depicts Egypt as a Dionysian world in which people shrink away from their responsibilities for personal pleasures.

In *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare endorses the Renaissance dominant perception of the Orient. The Bard displays Egypt in a way that validates its danger. Posthumus writes Pisanio a letter announcing his wish to have Innogen killed. To Pisanio, the letter “[o]utvenoms all the worms of Nile” (III.iv.37). Egypt is well-known for powerful poisonous snakes like the ones Cleopatra used to avoid being displayed in Rome in Caesar’s victorious parade. In fact, Giacomo refers to a “tapestry” in Innogen’s bed chamber which depicts “[p]roud Cleopatra when she met her Roman” (II.iv.70). The tapestry foreshadows Innogen’s death by poisonous snakes of “slander”(III.iv.33) which are more poisonous than the snakes of Egypt.

In contrast, Marlowe’s attitude towards Egypt is much more economic, even though it does not efface its otherness. *The Jew of Malta* focuses on the commercial and the profitable nature of Egypt that appears as a place of enormous riches, pearls, commercial trades, and a land of divine aversion. Barabas, the Jew, refers to his ships “[l]oaden with spice and silks” which he “sent for Egypt” and “[a]re gotten up by Nilus’ winding banks” (I.i.42-45). When Barabas inquires about his ships, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Merchant informs him that his “argosy from Alexandria” is “[l]aden with riches, and exceeding store/Of Persian silks, of gold and orient pearl” (I.i.85-88). Egypt is a place of commercial trade, opportunity, and “[i]nfinite riches”(I.i.37). The winding Nile banks, another reminder of the snakes of the Nile, also an archetypal symbol of the snake, serve as a reference to the charming and tempting lure of Egypt. Barabas’ wish that “[t]he plagues of Egypt” be “[i]nfect[ed] upon”(I.ii.165-67) the Turks is an enactment of the religious discourse on the divinely cursed Egypt.

Jonson is similar to his Renaissance peers in reinforcing the discursive othering representations of Egypt. *The Alchemist* associates Egypt(ians) with the notions of foreignness, mystery, fear, divine curse, and inconceivable civilization. Surly compares Subtle’s claims of his ability to change base metals into gold to the myth of how “they do eggs, in Egypt”(II.iii.128). “Figuratively, the egg was regarded by Alchemists, as by the ancient civilizations, as a symbol of creation; the Greeks ...[regard it] as a container of the four elements” (Sylvester, 2012, p.120-21). Egypt’s association with the egg, the archetypal symbol of “the mystery of life” (Guerin, 1979, 159), invokes the mysterious unknown nature of Egypt. Subtle uses strange terms like “elixir,” “*lac virginis*”(II.iii.184), and affirms that “all the knowledge/Of the Egyptians [was] writ in mystic symbols” (II.iii.203). Coding knowledge makes it hard for outsiders and commoners to understand it. Egypt remains a place where there is knowledge though unattainable.

Subtle fools other characters with alleged knowledge of his powers of transformation and refers to Egyptian “mystery, and hieroglyphic” (II.vi.23-24). Having an access to Egyptian culture, Subtle is othered as a “heathen” i.e. not a Christian, who speaks “the language of Canaan”, and demonized as a “profane person” with “the visible mark of the Beast [i.e. the devil], in his forehead” conducting the “work of darkness,” and holding a dangerous “philosophy,[that] blinds the eyes of man” (III.i.5-10). To Said, “culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with a nation or the state; this differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them’, almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity” (Said 1993, xiii). Subtle is identified as a catalyst for xenophobia and a threat to disturb the stability of Self’s society. Further, Egypt is depicted as land of monsters formed from Egyptian “clay”

and “dust” in “the fourth Beast./That was Gog-north and Egypt-south” (IV.v.4-5) and a land of divine aversion with reference to “the grasshoppers” and to “the lice of Egypt” (V.v.15).

Egypt, in Beaumont and Fletcher’s *The False One*, exists as a colonizable sphere. Despite some positive illuminations of Egypt(ians), the play represents it/them in relation to the colonialist discourse that perpetuates a binary of Western Self versus Oriental Other. It represents Egyptian characters imbued with noble qualities; Achoreus, the priest of Isis, comes into sight as “loyal,” a believer in “[t]he liberty of Man,” and a “friend to justice” (I.i.p.301). He contends that Ptolemy’s overthrow of his sister Cleopatra, the “Co-heir,” to assume a sole rule of Egypt contrasts with “the rites of Ægypt, or the lawes of Nature”(I.i.p.301). Egypt is marked for impartiality of its constitution: Egypt’s fundamental ruling laws stipulate that females “claim a priviledge, equall to the Male” (I.i.p.301).

Cleopatra appears as an emblem of tenderness, kindness, beauty, and ideality. She is frequently referred to as “Queen of beauty” (II.iii.p.328), “goddess” (II.iii.p.329), “a thing divine” (II.iii.p.326), a catalyst for “celestial sweetness . . . [and] [t]he treasure of soft love” (II.iii.p.327). Her attractiveness is not only limited to physical charms but exceeds them to include intellectual faculties together with appealing social compartments. Being accustomed to fishing and hunting deer, she admirably transgresses culturally assigned roles for females, gaining the well-deserved epithet “the Virgin Huntress” (I.ii.p.312). Genius and open-mindedness also become salient features of her representation. Apollodorus celebrates “the beauty” of her “mind” which has “[n]either check, nor chain”(I.ii.p.313). Unlike traditional Elizabethan representations of Cleopatra, she is here far above mere indulgence in worldly gains.

Cleopatra abnegates worldly gains over humanistic feelings. After having recognized Caesar’s allure to Egypt’s treasures, she sees in Caesar’s response an indication of his involvement in the world of avariciousness that contrasts with her romantic ideals. She renounces Caesar for preferring “some faint Jewels” to a “life of Love, and soul of Beauty” and labels him as a “base”, “covetous,” “Merchant” (IV.ii.p.346). Cleopatra is represented as a reliable Egyptian royal figure. She holds so high morale that Caesar himself considers a distrust of her as a blasphemous act: “’twere a kind/Of blasphemy to doubt her: ugly treason . . . Nor can so clear and great a spirit, as hers is, /Admit of falsehood” (V.ii.p.358). Cleopatra’s credibility is beyond question.

With the exemption of Achoreus and Cleopatra, Egypt and Egyptians are constructed in relation to colonialist discourse. The binary of Western Self versus Oriental Other ensures the superiority of the Roman imperialist Self over the Egyptian Other. The relationship between Caesar and Ptolomy, the King of Egypt, is one of master-servant; Photinus supplicates Caesar to “look upon ... [the] humble servant,/ ... Ptolomy”(II.i.p.318). Ptolomy’s identification with the servile role does not only manifest the epistemological Western imperialist discourse about what the Oriental authoritative figure should be, but also becomes the imperial ethos through which the Orientals are to be viewed. Césaire refers to “millions of men in whom fear has been cunningly instilled, who have been taught to have an inferiority complex, to tremble, kneel, despair and behave like flunkies” (Williams, 1994, p.178) before their colonizers, and Ptolomy, though a king, is not an exception.

Caesar’s assault on Egyptians, following the murder of Pompey, invokes Memmi’s assertion that, to the coloniser (i.e. Caesar), “strange and disturbing impulsiveness controls the colonized” who is “never characterized in an individual manner; he is entitled only to drown in an anonymous collectivity (‘They are this.’ ‘They are all the same’)” (Memmi, 1974, p.85-86). To Caesar, Egyptians are “false,” “base,” and “[t]raitors to the gods” (II.iii.p.324). He regrets that the life of his foe, Pompey, ends at the hand of an inferior “Egyptian” (II.i.p.319). An Egyptian is too base to take the sacred life of a valiant Roman general.

Caesar recommends a ceremonious “noble burial” of Pompey. Egypt “shall now be bless’d” to have the honor of containing his “Roman” body (II.i.p.319). In fact, Beaumont and Fletcher voice their orientalizing prejudice against Egyptians by having Egyptians view Roman superiority as a natural

marvel. “In a quite constant way,” Said argues, “Orientalism depends for its strategy on . . . *positional* superiority, which puts the westerner in a whole series of possible relationship with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (Said, 1979, p.7, italics original). After Caesar’s long insulting rebuke to Ptolemy and Pothinus over their involvement in Pompey’s murder, Achoreus still holds an ideal image of Caesar and justifies his arrogantly aggressive reactions to the royal delegation: “told you, Sir .../He was a Roman, and the top of Honour; And howsoever this might please great Cæsar” (II.i.p.321). In spite of being charged of “slaughter[ing] thousands ... whip[ing] his country with the sword ... doing daily bloody murders” (IV.iii.p.356), Achoreus cannot perceive Caesar as a “Roman,” but as an ideal man sitting on the throne of honor. Likewise, Cleopatra internalizes the superiority of Romans and perceives Caesar as “godlike great humanity” (II.iii.p.328) and “honour[s]” him “[a]s a God” (II.iii.p.327).

On a different level, Egypt’s “matchless wealth” caused by “old Nilus”(III.iv.p.341) dazzles the eyes of its “conquering guest [i.e. Caesar]” (IV.i.p.343). Founding an imperial project in Egypt would be an ensured success as long as such enterprise would completely rely on the everlasting flow of the Nile. To Kabbani, the Elizabethan period “saw the foundations being laid for a later imperial entity” (Kabbani, 1986, p.19). Egypt’s lavishness asserts the worth of this country as a profitable imperial project fitting the aspirations of England for establishing a trade empire.

As a subject matter in *The Tragedie of Cleopatra*, Daniel’s Egypt is denigrated as a realm of sensuality on the one hand, and valorized as an object of inferiority and femininity on the other. It is grounded on stereotypical notions of the Orient that focuses on the sensual East in contrast with the rational West, the divergence between Self and Other, Western superiority over Eastern inferiority, and Western masculinity over Eastern femininity. Egypt stands as a location of excessive sensuality, where Cleopatra establishes a decadent hedonistic courtly life to satisfy her desires that have “no limits,” “no bound[s]”, and are “endlesse” (II.i.529- 39). Describing pleasure and lust as such emphasizes the stereotypical image of Orientals as people of extremes. Sturmer describes how many Aborigines, even today, “do not live according to ‘civilised’ notions of society, refinement, propriety, group welfare or personal well-being.” They also “fight too much, they drink too much, fuck too much, they are too demanding, they waste their money and destroy property” (Langton, 1993, p.39, my italics). Such a discourse that others Aborigines is applied to colonized races in general as Said proved in his *Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism*.

Cleopatra’s nostalgic speech of the past erotic life she has experienced with Antony articulates the difference between the “Self” Rome and the “Other” Egypt. The unconstrained hedonistic Egypt, incarnated in Cleopatra’s “vaine lasciuious court”(II.i.533) and her philosophy of the unconstrained life of sensuality, contrasts with the “strictnesse of the citie [Rome]”(II.i.539). In this manner, Daniel marks out the divergence between Egyptians and Romans as people of two different irreconcilable identities.

Daniel frequently demarcates the difference between Egyptians and Romans as two separate identities throughout the play. Early on, Cleopatra’s realization of the impossibility of reconciliation between Egyptians and Romans leads her to send her son, Caesario, to India for safety (I.i.108-11). The unfeasibility of concurrence between the Oriental Egyptians and the Occidental Romans is voiced by the Chorus. The Chorus’s voice reflects a racial view that interdicts a relationship between an Oriental woman and a Western man since such a relation would affect the integrity of the Roman Self. Although Cleopatra naturalizes her relation with Antony by referring to him as “my spouse” (I.i.174), the Chorus points to this relationship as a paragon of “sinne” and “shame” (I.i.358-59).

The play shows that the Self, Antony, becomes vulnerable to moral contamination, and then subject to inevitable downfall because of this relation. Caesar evidently lays the blame for the destruction of Antony and the ruins of all other characters on Cleopatra: “your selfe was cause of all,/And yet would all were but your owne alone,/That others ruine” (III.ii.919-21). Caesar’s confrontation with Cleopatra widens the gap between Romans and Egyptians as “naturally” opposed identities. He assaults her claim of love for Antony:



Loue? No, alas, it was th'innated hatred,  
That you and yours haue euer borne our people.  
That made you seeke all means to haue vs skattered,  
To disvnite our strength and make vs feeble. (III.ii.939-42)

The images that cluster around Egyptians here are Orientalist; Egyptians appear to be vindictive, cunning and opportunistic. Daniel emphasizes such characteristics in Cleopatra's defense of her cunning foreign affairs policy: "Ah what neede I vse art/To gaine by others but to keepe mine owne?/.. If we take either part we perish thus" (III.ii.955-62).

Unlike Shakespeare, Daniel reinforces the image of Cleopatra as a feminine object endowing her with domestic and feminine qualities as a wife/mother rather than Egypt's ruler. She appears as a mother concerned with the safety of her son and the unity of her family following her husband's murder. Instead of being involved in resistance against Caesar's forces, her concerns are more or less domestic. She feels inferior to Antony whom she only perceives in relation to gender and racial hierarchy; she identifies him as "her Lord, her spouse, her emperor" (I.i.267) to whom her wifely duty dictates her to forget "her owne distresse to comfort his" (I.i.268). Her internalization of domesticity and the man-made feminine conventionality causes her to enter the realm of political Roman patriarchy as an insufficient, weak object. Her feminine weakness is best articulated when she explains to Caesar her helpless position as a woman: "what, Cæsar, should a woman doe,/Opprest with greatnesse what was it for me/T'contradict my Lord, being bent thereto?/I was by loue, by feare, by weakenesse, made/An instrument to euery enterprise" (III.ii.925-32).

Chapman's *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* presents two principal features of Egypt: sensuality and witchcraft. Aegiale, Queen of Egypt, is sensually attracted to the Duke of Cleanthes, but his rejection causes her to accuse him of tempting her, "And offering stayne to Ægipts royall bed" (I.i.28) – a matter that leads her husband, Ptolemy, to banish him. Chapman conjures the Renaissance audience's imagination in which the Orient's image has been associated with the notion of epicurism. Bayouli avows that in Elizabethan drama, "the Orient was a domain where violent passions naturally unleashed" (Bayouli, 2016, p.115).

Aegiale seeks the help of Irus, the fortuneteller, to know the whereabouts of the exiled Duke of Cleanthes (I.i.26). Her fixation on Duke of Cleanthes is irrepressible – one that makes her hang his pictures on the all monuments of Egypt and propose "twise fiue thousand Crownes" for the person finding him (I.i.90-5). She makes an exceptional sacrifice to consummate her love with him: "But onely tell me where *Cleanthes* is,/That I may follow him in some disguise,/ ... Or I will Moore like learne to swimme and diue./Into the bottome of the Sea for him" (I.i.48-68). She is also ready to make him her god: "But my *Cleanthes* shall the object bee,/And I will kneel and pray to none but he" (I.i.107-08).

The notion of the capricious cruel Orient culminates as Aegiale embarks on killing her husband, King Ptolemy, and sacrificing her "onely sonne," Diones, in a bid to meet her lover. Employing the services of "Hella the sorceresse", she transforms them (I.vi.40) into "a Mandracker" branch. If the branch is cut or burnt, they will inevitably die. Following Count Hermes' advice, Irus in disguise, Aegiale chops and scorches the branch so that Cleanthes becomes free to return to her. Senseless, libidinous, and cruel she commits both the sins of matricide and filicide (I.vi.72-82). Chapman's image of Egypt does not deviate much from the Renaissance perception of the Orient. Kabbani argues: "Such scenarios summed up the East for the western reader: a sexual *lieu*, a despotic and a capricious one to boot. Orientals could do no better than indulge in such pastimes ... The cruelty of the Oriental in narrative constructions went hand in hand with his lasciviousness" (Kabbani, 1986, p.19). Further, Egypt is associated with the practice of witchcraft. Egyptians display a special reverence and subjugation to the magicians' prophecies that influence their personal as well as political decisions. Aspasia's marriage is influenced by Hella's prophecy which predicted:

That if the young *Archadian Doricles*,  
Should linke in marriage with his louely daughter.  
He then should conquere all our bordering landes,  
And make vs subiect to his tirrorannie. (I.viii.6-9)

Chapman's assumption concerning the Egyptians' practice of sorcery should be read in light of the Elizabethans' misrepresentation of Muslim Egyptians at that time.

During the Elizabethan era, the correlation between Islam and the practice of witchcraft was omnipresent. Hawamdeh argues that "[t]he Oriental ... Muslim alleged practice of magic and witchcraft is clearly a stock theme that was available for the Elizabethan playwrights" (109), thus promoting Islam as 'a false' religion. Vitkus argues that "[l]ate medieval . . . accounts of . . . the Prophet and the establishment of Islam . . . claim that he seduced the Arabian people by fraudulent 'miracles' and black magic, convincing them by means of 'imposture' that he was God's chosen prophet" (Vitkus, 1999, p.217). Chapman's heavy reliance on the Egyptian practice of witchcraft immortalizes this negative attribute of the Prophets' followers to undermine the premises of a flourishing and widely spreading religion in dire competition with Christianity at that time, given the conversion of many Christians to Islam in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. To Vitkus, Islam in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was a source of anxiety for England as many Christians "turn Turk, and by the early seventeenth century, many English subjects had become renegades in North Africa and the Middle East" (Vitkus, 2003, p.109).

The conception that the Orient is a natural domain where mystery, exoticism, sensuality, and betrayal are fostered illustrates Webster's othering attitude towards Egypt in *The White Devil*. The play captures Renaissance consciousness with imaginary qualities, which generate repugnant and dangerous impressions of the Orient and Egypt as embodied in the character of Vittoria. Brachiano asks Vittoria to read the letter which does not contain "hieroglyphics" and predicts she will be, like Shakespeare's Cleopatra, a "stately and advanced whore" (VI.ii.76). The reference to hieroglyphics suggests the complexity of reading this ancient Egyptian way of writing while simultaneously associating Vittoria's lust with Egypt/Cleopatra. Further, Flamineo narrates a story of a Nile crocodile which suffers from a "worm" that lives in its teeth, and "a little bird" removes it like a "barber-surgeon." However, the "ingrateful" crocodile tries to eat the bird with a "prick on the head," causing the crocodile to set it free (VI.ii.219-233). The crocodile functions as a miniature of the dangerous alluring aspect of Egypt.

Like Shakespeare's Antony, Brachiano neglects his stately duties and responsibilities in his indulgence with Vittoria, thus he is punished by losing his political power, his love as well as his life. The characters of Zanche and Mulinassar (Francisco in disguise) emphasize the stereotype of deceit, and danger of the Oriental to socio-political order. Disguised as a moor, Mulinassar, "the sunburnt gentleman" (V.i.180), manages to gain the trust and admiration of Brachiano. Mulinassar initiates a murder crime against Brachiano that leads to his death. Brachiano, then, welcomed Mulinassar and was killed by him like the Nile crocodile tried to do to the bird – an association that makes Mulinassar the ungrateful dangerous crocodile.

Zanche, on the other hand, is a moor, who speaks a different language besides English (probably Arabic) (V.i.94). Flamineo confesses his love to "that Moor, the witch" whom he loves "as a man holds/a wolf by the ears" (V.i.154-55). Zanche is characterized as a "witch", a "wolf", a "gypsy" and a "black fury" (V.vi.223) because of her dark skin and fiery/wild nature. She encapsulates the Oriental mystique and is associated with witchcraft since she has visions of the crimes and seems to know exactly how each one was committed (V.iii.240).

## 2. Conclusion

Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists were preoccupied with Egypt(ians) to produce an image that asserts Said's view of the impossibility of Western pure knowledge about the Orient. "Orientalism" is

fundamentally “a cultural and political fact” that does not operate in “vacuum.” “What is thought, said, or even done about the Orient,” Said adds, “follows certain distinct ... super structural pressures ... [T]he pressures of conventions ... [a]nd rhetorical styles” (Said, 1979, p.13). Committed to these pressures and facts, these dramatists relatively constructed a large stereotypical body of ideas about such a territory and its people as a response to their contemporary colonialist discourse that exaggerated the signs of cultural and epistemological difference, where the image of the Other Egypt(ians) is mostly endowed with negativity, artificiality and prejudice. The image is evoked through performance of essential difference to make it culturally inferior, morally deviant, and religiously demonized, constructing a threat to the well-being of the Self.

The plays develop a racial discourse to express Self’s loathing, anxiety, bias, fear of Egypt and its people i.e. xenophobia. Shakespeare emphasizes the binary of Occidental/Oriental in *Antony & Cleopatra*, *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Henry VIII (All Is True)*, and *Cymbeline*. The fictional world he creates is basically divided into an Apollonian world (Rome) and a Dionysian one (Egypt) in which Egypt is represented as land of wealth and abundance, a dangerous place full of witchcraft, violence, poisonous snakes, etc. The binary of Us (Europe)/Them (Egypt) ensures that Europe stands for duty, reason, rationality, consciousness, whereas Egypt stands for hedonism, pleasures, witchcraft, irrationality, and unconsciousness.

Daniel’s image of Egypt does not differ much from that of Shakespeare. Egypt appears as a domain of sensuality, hedonism, inferiority, and femininity in contrast with the rational, superior, masculine West. In Daniel’s play, all Egyptians are vindictive, cunning, opportunistic, a source of moral contamination and ruin of Western characters. Likewise, Beaumont and Fletcher promote a colonialist discourse that perpetuates a binary of Western Self versus Oriental Other to maintain the superiority of Roman imperialist Self over its Egyptian Other who is depicted as false, low, and treacherous. In addition, Egypt is depicted as a land of wealth that would ensure the success of the imperial project. Marlowe similarly focuses on the commercial and profitable nature of Egypt and highlights it as the land of divine curse.

Jonson focuses on Egypt’s alluring aspects and represents Egypt(ians) as strange, mysterious, monstrous, scared, subject to divine curse, inconceivable, and a catalyst for xenophobia. Chapman does not deviate from the stereotypical image of the Orient(al). In his play, Egypt is depicted as a land of sensuality, cruelty, and witchcraft – a depiction that does not differ much from Webster’s in which Egypt appears as a land of mystery, exoticism, sensuality, violence, danger, deceit, and betrayal.

Religious discourse was similarly enacted to ostracize demonized and Othered Egypt(ians). The study of the image of Egypt(ians) reveals the power of stereotypes whose discourse stems from racism that legitimizes and justifies the enslavement of ‘inferior’ races. The world seems to be segregated into two camps: an Eastern and a Western. According to Stephen Batchelor the origin of this enmity is found in Herodotus’ *The Histories* and is due to “the epic conflict between Hellenes and Persians, giving rise to the mythical contrast between heroic, liberty, loving and dynamic West and the despotic, stagnant and passive East” (Clarke, 1997, p.4).

The negative stereotypical image of Egypt(ians) permeates the sample in question. According to Bhabha, “the stereotype ... depends on both what is known and in place (rigidity), and that which must be anxiously repeated” (Bhabha, 1983, p.18). He argues that it “produces that effect of probabilistic truth and prediction” and “must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically constructed.” Hence, it must exist, repeat itself, survive and overcome any logic or discourse that threatens its presence thus becoming *immortal* since it is “transmitted from one generation to another”(Bhabha, 1983, p.19). This pattern of negative representation of Egypt(ians) explains why these texts echo one another.

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