

**Sir Charles Sedley's Adaptation of Shakespeare's
Antony and Cleopatra: Transformation from Anxiety into Admiration**

Eyad R. Al-Haddar¹

Hussein A. Alhawamdeh², Assistant professor

^{1,2}The University of Jordan

Abstract: This paper examines Sir Charles Sedley's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607), showing the Restoration tolerance to the East and anxiety of Charles II's transformation into absolutism. In Sedley's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1677), Cleopatra is depicted as a virtuous and faithful queen, defending simultaneously Egypt against Octavius Caesar's colonialism and preserving virtuous love of Antony. Sedley's adaptation lacks the Renaissance stereotypical delineation of the East and demystifies the Renaissance glorification of the Roman empire. Sedley's play offers stages of moral reformation of Octavius Caesar from tyranny and absolutism into wisdom and peace. Unlike Shakespeare, Sedley empowers the Oriental and Western women, represented by Cleopatra and Octavia, against the Roman patriarchal and colonial abuses. Moreover, Sedley's play reshapes the Shakespearean stereotypical delineation of Antony, showing him as a rational and moral Roman leader. This study aims at enriching modern scholarship on Sedley's adaptation of Shakespeare's play, providing a more detailed textual analysis of Sedley's play through Restoration lens.

Keywords: Sir Charles Sedley, William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, adaptation, Restoration drama

I. Introduction

This paper analyzes the different dramatization of the Roman character in Sir Charles Sedley's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1677), which adapts Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607). Unlike Shakespeare, Sedley demystifies the Renaissance glorification of the Roman emperor, represented by Octavius Caesar, showing him as a tyrant and despotic ruler. For Sedley, Restoration England was looking for peace and stability after many years of civil war. Therefore, his play shows the Restoration ambition of having a new Caesar, who is powerful but not a tyrant. According to Weinbrot (1978), there were "many parallels between Augustus and Rome and post-Restoration English monarchs and civilization, as in the restored Charles II and the London—'Augusta'—he ruled" (p. 5). However, Restoration England craved for having Charles II as a "better Augustus, bringing to England civilized order and enlightened patronage of the arts, a self-consciously Augustan age" (Monk & Lipking, 1979, p. 1726). Sedley's play, which adapts heroic drama in Restoration age (Mallery, 1990, p. 146), criticizes the tyranny of the Roman model and warns implicitly against Charles II's possible transformation to absolutism (Braverman, 1993; Webster, 2005, p. 143) or to "barbarism" (Nyquist, 1994, p. 104). Braverman

(1993) explains that Sedley's play criticizes the Restoration politics when Charles II, behaving like Antony, endangered the future of Restoration England by allying with the French Louis XIV, who represents the "modern Caesar," while Cleopatra represents the French "Louise de Kerouaille, the Duchess of Portsmouth," who distracted the English King from observing the suspicious imperial plans of Louis XIV (p. 139). According to Owen (2000), Sedley's *Antony and Cleopatra*, advocating "Whig tragedy," presents a critique to Charles II's infatuation with mistresses: "His Antony is a critical portrait of Charles II, blind to the way in which his foreign mistress manipulates him, and inappropriately merciful and severe at the wrong times" (p. 163). For Webster (2005), Sedley's play dramatizes the tragic consequences of "libertinism" of combining "eroticism and politics" (p. 155). Chernaik (2011), tracing the early modern English drama's interest in reviving the Roman history by rewriting the story of Antony and Cleopatra, explains briefly that Sedley's *Antony and Cleopatra* is the only play that demystifies the glories of the Roman leaders such as Octavius Caesar and Antony:

Except for Sedley's *roman à clef*, none of these Cleopatra plays is in any way critical of traditional Roman values, even where they invest Cleopatra with some degree of tragic dignity. All these plays assume that reason should rule over passion and that men should rule over women. All treat Octavius Caesar's victory as the triumph of Roman virtue over Eastern licentiousness. (p. 146)

Building on Chernaik's observation, this paper explains how Sedley's play discontinues the Renaissance idealization of Roman history. However, this paper reveals that the dramatization of Cleopatra, in Sedley's play, goes beyond the negative projection and allusions to suspicious historical figures or morally corrupted models of politics, reflecting a new spirit of tolerance to the East in Restoration England.

Sedley's *Antony and Cleopatra*, sympathizing with the Oriental queen of Egypt, reveals the Restoration tolerance to the East, which attracted Restoration England's trade with the Turks and Moors in the late seventeenth century. It is obvious that Restoration literature, particularly drama, was influenced by the change of politics in Restoration England. To establish a powerful empire, the policy of Charles II was to make a strong economy and trade by making peace agreements with the Muslim Turks (Goffman, 2002, p. 225). Smith (1967) refers to the toleration of Islam in Restoration literature: "the English literature of the Restoration period is free from that note of anxiety over Turkish aggressions which marked the literature of the Renaissance period" (p. 20). Similarly, Birchwood (2007) refers to the tolerant and complex dramatization of Islam and Muslim characters during the Restoration period, viewing Islam through different lens of admiration and fear: "Herein lies the contradiction. By mid-century, the idea of Islam was a volatile mixture of longstanding anxieties centred upon the Ottoman Empire as a spiritual and military threat, combined with esteem for its cultural and imperial achievements" (p. 184). Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* reflects the Renaissance anxiety of the Orient in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries when the Muslim Turks and Moors constituted a

political and cultural threat to England (Matar, 1998). However, the English fear of the Orient was no longer available in the Commonwealth and Restoration politics due to the change of power relations: “During the Commonwealth and the Restoration periods, the English navy became powerful enough to force peace treaties on the Barbary Corsairs” (Matar, 1998, p. 9). Shakespeare’s dramatization of the defeat of Egypt anticipates the Renaissance fear of Islam and the East and offers an imaginary Western victory over the Orient: “Egypt’s defeat in the play thus enacts a reassuring prophecy of Europeanization” (Barbour, 2003, p. 57). Sedley’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s play avoids the Renaissance fear of the Orient, showing the Oriental characters in a tolerant mode.

Sedley’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s play sheds light on the Restoration ambition of establishing a moderate and peaceful monarchy, granting freedom of worship and fostering trade. Sanders (2006) offers several reasons for adaptation: “Adaptation is frequently involved in offering commentary on a sourcetext. This is achieved most often by offering a revised point of view from the ‘original’, adding hypothetical motivation, or voicing the silenced and marginalized” (pp. 18-19). Hutcheon (2006) explains that adaptation “involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation,” forming a “process of creation” (p. 8). Holderness (2005) shows that Shakespeare’s works are of universal influence of appropriation and adaptation: “The secret of Shakespeare’s longevity and plurality lies in the ‘malleability’ of the works” (p. 5). Cartelli (1999) refers to Shakespeare’s function of “textual exchange” in new plots and settings: “Until then Shakespeare will continue to function as he always has: as an unusually charged medium of textual exchange” (p. 23). This paper, while using theories of adaptation, gives textual focus to Sedley’s revisit to Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* by remoulding Shakespeare’s play in a Restoration context. This paper aims at enriching modern scholarship about Sedley’s *Antony and Cleopatra* by providing a more detailed textual analysis of the play, showing the new trope of tolerance to the East in Restoration literature. Even though much ink has been shed on Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, little has been written on Sedley’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s play.

II. Reshaping of Octavius Caesar and Mark Antony

The age of Shakespeare showed a political and cultural identification with the Romans, who gave the British writers and politicians a model of virtue and power for imitation. Chernaik (2011) explains that “To Shakespeare, Jonson, and their contemporaries, Rome could never be wholly Other, but was seen as parent or precursor” (p. 4). Kahn (1997) refers to the significance of the Roman model to Renaissance England: “Rome was familiarized for the English by being represented in terms of its past kinship with Britain and as a model for England’s present and future” (p. 4). England was seen as a continuity of the Roman Empire of colonial expansion and masculinity: “Englishness appears in Roman settings, and Romanness is anglicized” (Kahn, 1997, p. 4). The English monarchy in the seventeenth century was fascinated with the Roman virtues of leadership: “In the court of James I, the Roman analogy is standard currency for praise of the monarch as ‘England’s Caesar’” (Chernaik, 2011, p. 4). Shakespeare’s admiration of

Octavius Caesar mirrored James I's Roman affiliations. However, Restoration writers expressed a different ambition of having a reformed version of Augustus Caesar, who is moderate and just. Sedley's criticism of Octavius Caesar articulates the Restoration ideology of having a new Octavius Caesar, who is not tyrant. Just as Octavius Caesar was able to bring political stability to the Roman Empire after many years of civil wars, the Restoration writers wished that Charles II would do the same mission through reformed and moderate power.

Sedley's play deconstructs Shakespeare's celebration of the virtue and nobility of Octavius Caesar. In Shakespeare's play, Octavius Caesar, appearing for the first time on the stage, looks as a noble leader, who is not motivated by hatred: "It is not Caesar's natural vice to hate / Our great competitor." (1.4.2-3). Caesar, who is considered as the "universal landlord" (3.13.72) and the maker of "universal peace" (4.6.4), intends to attack Egypt not for colonial purposes but to rescue Antony from the Egyptian amoral corruption: "To give a kingdom for a mirth, to sit / And keep the turn of tipping with a slave, / To reel the streets at noon" (1.4.18-20). For Caesar, Antony loses masculinity (Grams, 2016), which is a Roman virtue, and behaves as a woman: "This is the news: he fishes, drinks, and wastes / The lamps of night in revel; is not more manlike" (1.4.4-5). As an immature boy, Antony is no longer perceived as an ideal Roman leader because he sacrifices his Romanness for the sake of pleasures: "As we rate boys who, being mature in knowledge, / Pawn their experience to their present pleasure, / And so rebel to judgment" (1.4.31-33).

In Sedley's play, Caesar brags the colonial success of the Romans over his "Foe," Antony: "Our Arms an easie Victory have found / Over a Foe, in love and pleasure drown'd" (1.1.1-2). Sedley deconstructs the ideal and virtuous image of Caesar, transforming him from a man of "universal peace," as in Shakespeare's play, to a colonial villain. Octavia, Caesar's sister and Antony's wife, attacks the villainy and hypocrisy of her brother, showing his colonial "Thirst":

Your Love! your Pride and endless Thirst of sway.

To gain my friends, my Quarrel you pretend,

But universal Empire is your end.

Rome's once great *Senate* now is but a name;

While some with fear, and some with Bribes you tame. (4.1.96-100)

For Octavia, Caesar has a tyrannical cause, which is to have a "universal Empire" by intimidating the Senators with "fear" and "bribe." In Sedley's play, Caesar is an opportunist villain, who confesses that his colonialism of Egypt is not to serve the success of the marriage between his sister and Antony but to expand his empire: "Empire's our real quarrel, but I must / Her virtuous Mind with no such secret trust" (2.2.72-73). For Octavia, Caesar is a colonial opportunist, who hides colonizing ambitions of "Lust" to rule: "The cover of your Pride and Lust to reign" (2.2.77). Octavia threatens to expose Caesar's falsehood to all Roman: "To *Rome* I'll go, and all thy acts disown; / Make thy Ambition, and thy Falshood known / To every *Roman* of the Sword and Gown" (4.1.86-88). Caesar considers absolutism as a means of political stability and imperial success: "To set all right I must be absolute; / My least commands None daring to

dispute: / *Rome's* desp'rate state can never find redress" (3.1.68-70). Moreover, Caesar justifies his cruelty and colonialism of Egypt by Providence since his actions are guided by God: "Heaven chooses me the fittest instrument, / And on that glorious *Task* I'm wholly bent" (4.1.118-119). For Caesar, colonialism is a holy mission or "Task," supported by Providence and waged against enemies of Heaven.

Unlike Shakespeare, Sedley's play dramatizes Antony as a rational hero, who is heroic and brave. While Antony in Shakespeare's play is drowned in lust with Cleopatra, he shows heroic aspects of courage and chivalry in Sedley's play. Sedley starts his play at the end of the battle of Actium when Cleopatra flees from the battlefield, leaving Antony alone. Antony loses the battle because the Egyptian queen and Egyptian army retreat. In Shakespeare's play, Antony blames Cleopatra as a traitor :

This foul Egyptian hath betrayed me.

My fleet hath yielded to the foe, and yonder

They cast their caps up, and carouse together

Like friends long lost. Triple-turned whore! 'Tis thou. (4.13.10-13)

However, in Sedley's play, Antony blames only himself for the defeat at Actium. He looks as a noble hero of forgiveness and toleration. He always justifies and defends Cleopatra's actions even in moments of defeat and loss:

But yet her love is stronger than her fears,

Her country she has made the Seat of War,

'Tis just her safety be our early'st care:

I will her Guard within these Walls remain. (1.2.92-95)

Sedley's Antony is a moderate leader and a true lover of Cleopatra. He does not ignore his duties and responsibilities to defend Egypt and its queen. For example, he defends Cleopatra when she is accused of treason and promises to stand as her guard: "And 'gainst the angry Gods her Cause maintain" (1.2.96). Also, when Agrippa captures Cleopatra at the wood, Antony shows chivalry by rescuing the queen: "By *Hercules* she's tane! So have I seen the / Dove, / Under the Pounce of eager Falcons move" (4.3.1-3). Antony, who represents the Roman ideals of chivalry, supports the weak nations against the monstrous oppression of Caesar.

While Octavius Caesar is ready to die for the sake of expanding empire: "Ile seize the Empire, which Ile die or hold" (3.1.111), Antony explains that great empire is founded by virtue : "A Pageant pow'r and Empire but in show- / True Empire only those great Souls enjoy" (3.2.11-12). In Sedley's play, Antony rejects Caesar's model of absolutism and despotism and seeks a model of governorship, based on heroic and virtuous deeds. Sedley's play changes the death scene of Antony from falling on the sword, as in Shakespeare's play, to stabbing himself. Unlike Shakespeare's play, which shows Antony as a coward, who fears death, Sedley's play delineates him as a brave hero, who is ready to sacrifice his life for the sake of the Romans'

stability. Antony plays the role of the saviour to the Romans when he decides to end his life, ending the political chaos and civil wars: “Never: let *Romans* now each other love, / Their tedious quarrel I will soon remove. / ’Twice has my Sword with *Roman* Blood been dy’d” (5.1.158-160). Antony anticipates that his death will bring love and unity to the Romans.

Antony’s association with the East is different in the two plays. In Shakespeare’s play, Antony is corrupted by drinking, dancing, and acting childishly because of his alignment with the East. He becomes an embodiment of the amorally corrupted and degenerate East, following pleasures like a slave to the wicked queen. Antony moves away from his Romanness, following the dark and uncivilized side of his soul. Chernaik (2011) explains that in Shakespeare’s play “the values of Rome and Egypt are sharply contrasted” (p. 139). Alhawamdeh (2011) comments on Samuel Clarke’s argument about Antony’s journey to Egypt and his loss of Roman virtues:

Samuel Clarke (1599-1682) maintained the racial and cultural dichotomy between East and West, as represented by the Roman Empire. For him, Antony defamed the Roman morals and values when converting to the immorality of the East. Antony’s disgrace occurred when he privileged Cleopatra over the chaste Octavia. (pp. 206-207)

On the contrary, Sedley’s play, which does not show negative or stereotypical connotations of Antony’s incorporation in the East, does not seek cultural values contrast between Rome and Egypt. Octavius Caesar describes Antony as an “*Asian Prince*” (4.1.52). Egypt is celebrated as an equal rival to Rome, showing resistance to Caesar’s colonialism. While Shakespeare’s play marginalizes the Egyptians, showing them as submissive slaves to the Roman masters, Sedley’s play empowers the Egyptians to resist the Roman colonial abuse of Egypt. Memnon and Chilax, two Egyptian lords, blame Cleopatra’s love of Antony since it causes the Roman colonialism of their country and distracts the queen from administering the state’s affairs. Memnon suggests that the death of Antony will end the queen’s distraction and will defeat the Romans: “Which nothing but *Antonius* death can heal” (1.2.18). Chilax, who is loyal to the Egyptian queen, seems at the beginning hesitant to “rebel” against her: “I love my Queen, and to rebel am loth” (1.2.34). Memnon, however, affirms his keenness to protect the queen and to save the Egyptians from the Roman colonizers: “I would but free her from *Antonius* pow’r” (1.2.35). Chilax then justifies the act of rebel against Antony because he is a foreigner: “Let us some plot against his life devise: / He’s not our Prince; for publick good he dies, / And for our Country falls a Sacrifice” (1.2.37-39). However, love, in Sedley’s play, triumphs over politics when both of Antony and Cleopatra stand bravely to defend their pure love, facing simultaneously many conspiracies from Romans and Egyptians.

At the end of Sedley’s play, Caesar’s arrogance and tyranny witness a reform. He regrets the death of Cleopatra and her maids: “Am I so cruel and relentless held, / That Women dare not to my mercy yield?” (5.2.152-153). Also, he orders the soldiers to punish Photinus, the Egyptian villain character, who contrives the story of Cleopatra’s death to mislead Antony and to cause his death. He also regrets the death of Antony, with whom he wishes to share his empire: “Oh! what a God-like pleasure had it been / With thee t’ have shar’d the Empire once agen?” (5.2.180-181). He is not affected by Agrippa’s news that Cleopatra has burned all of her treasures: “And has her Treasure to vile Ashes burn’d. / Both ways defeating the proud hopes of *Rome*” (5.2.189-190). Caesar recognizes later that his despotic model of governorship fails in defeating enemies and in administering politics: “Great minds the Gods alone can overcome- / Let no man with his present

Fortune swell / The Fate of growing Empire who can tell?" (5.2.191-193). For Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra are "Great minds" his power fails to defeat. Changing his old model of absolutism, Caesar seems to be convinced of the importance of mercy and wisdom as the basis of great empire. The reform of Caesar, in Sedley's play, indicates the Restoration writers hope to have a reformed Caesar-like Charles II.

III. Sedley's Empowerment of Oriental and Western Female Characters

Unlike Shakespeare, Sedley's *Antony and Cleopatra* reshapes the image of the Oriental queen in a virtuous and heroic mode. The Eastern Oriental queen belongs to the East, where Restoration England had trade agreements with the Muslim Turks and Moors. Sedley's new positive dramatization of Cleopatra reflects the shift in Restoration politics and power relations. Sedley's play justifies Cleopatra's actions, describing her as a virtuous woman, faithful to her love. Sedley's play eliminates the stereotypical dichotomy between the virtuous Western woman (Octavia) and the sensual Oriental woman (Cleopatra). Deconstructing Shakespeare's portrayal of Cleopatra as a foil character to Octavia, Sedley's play empowers both of the Oriental and Western women to refuse the tyranny of Caesar's model of absolutism.¹

Sedley's play, describing Egypt and Rome as two rivals, avoids legitimizing the Roman colonialism of Egypt. On the contrary, Sedley empowers the Egyptians to resist the Roman domination over their country. Cleopatra, in Sedley's play, does not appear as a coward, but as a strict leader, who punishes soldiers for cowardice. For example, she punishes the Egyptian captain, who acts cowardly in the battle against the Romans: "Cleopatra. The Captain of my Gallies I have try'd, / And for his cowardice the Villain di'd. / With him die all remembrance of what's past" (1.2.170-172). Stevenson (2008) comments on the bravery of Cleopatra in Sedley's play: "From the first act onward, it is clear that Cleopatra is no household dove; in the aftermath of Actium, she announces that she has tried the captain of her gallies and had him executed for cowardice" (p. 296).

In Sedley's play, Cleopatra is depicted as a rational queen, managing simultaneously the state's affairs and her love of Antony. Unlike Shakespeare's play, Sedley's adaptation lacks confrontation between Octavia and Cleopatra. Both of the Oriental and Western women advocate against the tyranny of Caesar's model. In Shakespeare's play, Cleopatra is obsessed with Octavia's beauty, which may outrival hers: "Is she as tall as me?" (3.3.11); "Is she shrill-tongued or low?" (3.3.13); "Bear'st thou her face in mind? Is't long or round?" (3.3.29); and "Her hair—what colour?" (3.3.32). Sedley ignores Shakespeare's dramatization of the rivalry between Cleopatra and Octavia, recreating new spots of commonalities and shared interests among them.

¹ Modern scholarship on Sedley's *Antony and Cleopatra* examines the character of Cleopatra from different perspectives. Nyquist (1994) illustrates that "where she [Cleopatra] fails as a queen[,] she's saved as a woman" (p. 107). For Nyquist, Cleopatra, who is condemned as a barbaric woman ruler, is tolerated as a woman, complying with "European bourgeois ideals of femininity" (p. 106) and never "challeng[ing] the set of bourgeois, patriarchal values" (p. 107). Analyzing the play from a structuralist point of view, Mallery (1990) argues that Sedley's play conforms to the rules of heroic drama of virtue and love, in which "both Antony and Cleopatra eschew their roles as rulers in favor of their great love" (p. 157). Braverman (1993) explains that Sedley's play shows Octavia as the "political antidote to Cleopatra," depicting her in a "sympathetic light because she embodies the civic values of republic" (p. 150). This paper claims that tolerance and empowerment are granted to both of Cleopatra and Octavia, showing a reconciliation between the former enemies and reflecting Restoration England's friendship with the East, as noted earlier.

In Sedley's play, Cleopatra trusts Antony's passions of love and loyalty to the East, standing as a strong-willed-woman against Caesar's threat.

Sedley's play avoids the negative and stereotypical accusations of Cleopatra in Shakespeare's play. For example, in Shakespeare's play, she is described as a "slave" (1.4.19), a "whore" (3.6.67), and a "witch" (4.13.47). Sedley's representation of Cleopatra is tolerant, showing her as an equal political rival to Caesar and as chaste and faithful as Octavia. Mallery (1990) argues that "Sedley's Antony and Cleopatra are completely faithful to one another" (p. 157). Cleopatra refuses to bargain with Caesar her love of Antony and determines to remain faithful: "We shall in Love sincerer pleasures find" (3.2.101). Cleopatra declines Caesar's offer of safety and continuous reign in case she surrenders to Caesar's army: "His offers I have all refus'd" (3.2.236). Thyreus, Caesar's messenger, negotiates Caesar's offer of peace with Cleopatra, assuring her of Caesar's lenience: "You may: but doubt not *Caesars* Clemency; / Your Crown and Person, tho provokt he'l spare" (3.2.194-195). However, Cleopatra prefers to die rather than to be enslaved by the Romans. Cleopatra appears as a self-confident royal queen with reputable dignity:

If I am Captive to the *Romans* made;
Surpriz'd in this weak place, or else betray'd;
Think not I'll live to be redeem'd again,
And like a Slave of my proud Lords complain.
At the first Dawn of my ill Fate I'll die. (1.2.231-235)

In Sedley's play, Cleopatra finds two functions of death: firstly, release from Caesar's enslavement and secondly, eternal reunion with Antony. She does not trust Caesar's real intentions of enslaving and humiliating her: "To be despis'd, reproach't, in triumph lead; / A Queen and Slave! who wou'd not life renounce, / Rather than bear those distant names at once" (5.2.31-33). As a royal queen, Cleopatra eschews to become a weak slave to Caesar, opposing subordination to Caesar's political will. Cleopatra fears captivity by the Romans and humiliation at the streets of Roman: "Till with our shame *Romes* Pride be surfeited: / Till every finger *Cleopatra* find / Pointing at her, who was their Queen design'd" (5.2.75-77). She is anxious of the Romans' mocking at her as a captive queen. Moreover, Cleopatra anticipates reunion with Antony in life after death. For her, death does not end our desires and feelings but moves them to another realm of immortality: "Men say that we to th' other World shall bear / The same Desires and Thoughts, imploy'd as here" (5.2.98-99). Death leads to eternity, where the "*Hero* shall in shining Arms delight" (5.2.100), "Poets shall sing, and in soft Dances move" (5.2.102), and "Lovers in Eternal Roses love" (5.2.103). She promises the soul of Antony of reunion and resuming their love in eternity: "If so, *Antonius*, we but change the Scene, / And there pursue what we did here begin" (5.2.104-105).

Like Cleopatra, Octavia is a revolutionary feminine voice, exceeding the patriarchal limitations set by Shakespeare's play. Sedley's play authorizes Octavia to rebel against the tyranny of her brother, Octavius Caesar. According to Braverman (1993), Octavia is represented as a powerful advocate of the "republican Rome" (p. 147), an ideal form of governorship her brother opposes. Even though she is obedient to her husband, Antony, she rejects Caesar's exploitation of her marital challenges to colonize Egypt. She accuses Mecoenas, Caesar's Roman

councilor, of cruelty and colonial ambition by supporting war against Antony and Egyptians: “But thou art false, cruel, and bloody now” (2.2.42). Octavia, aware of Caesar’s colonial desire and hypocrisy, refuses her brother’s justifications of waging war against the Egyptian camp: “Caes. Sister, your Husband I would but reclaim, / And make him worthy of your virtuous flame” (2.2.46-47). Octavia, reminding Caesar of Antony’s past victories and achievements to Rome, forgives her husband’s mistakes: “If he has given much, he conquer’d more: / His valour, for his bounty, found the store” (2.2.56-57). She tries to stab herself to end Caesar’s false allegation of reforming Antony: “Tho I were dead you might your ends pursue, / But let me vanish from the painful review” (2.2.77-78). Meceenas hinders all possibilities of peace with Antony and Egyptians because he hides his love of Octavia and wishes the death of Antony to win her love and marriage. Octavia, as a virtuous and faithful wife, rebukes the villain plan of Meceenas and prefers death over cheating on her husband: “Let me then die for I have liv’d too long, / And heard of Love in my *Antonius* wrong” (2.2.128-129). Octavia no longer deals with Caesar as a brother but as an enemy and decides to support Antony’s “Cause”: “In the Foes Camp no longer I’ll remain. / The Arms I hate, my presence shall not grace; / *Antonius* Cause I’ll openly embrace” (4.1.83-85). She threatens to unite Caesar’s enemies, causing Caesar’s immediate defeat: “And against Thee both parties I’ll unite; / Amongst thy Foes I like a Spark will fall, / And to a sudden Flame convert ’em all” (4.1.92-94).

Meceenas, feeling pity for Octavia’s cause, fails to convince Caesar of sparing the life of Antony and of ending the war against Egyptians: “Ah Sir, your weeping Beautious Sister view; / Then if you can, her Husbands life pursue” (4.1.140-141). Meceenas, intending to prove his true love of Octavia, quits his previous counseling of the significance of colonialism and absolutism. Caesar, rebuking the sudden change of Meceenas, reiterates that he will continue his colonial project against Egypt: “Where is that Soul bids me be Absolute, / And the dissenting World with Swords confute. / Move forwards still, and spread my Conqu’ring Arms” (4.1.146-148). For Caesar, the power of “Swords” and absolutism are the basis of expansion and glory.

Even though Octavia fails to stop Caesar’s war against Egypt and her husband, she shakes the Roman soldiers’ loyalty to the tyrant model of Caesar. For example, Meceenas no longer trusts colonialism and absolutism as works of Heaven. Feeling disappointed by Antony’s death, Octavia decides to go back Rome, hiding her agonies and possible revenge against Caesar. Even though the play ends without mentioning what plans Octavia has against Caesar, it is clear that she may provoke a revolution against Caesar’s absolutism. One of the servants informs Caesar of Octavia’s condition: “Yes, in her way to *Rome*, / Of grief and discontent, as we presume” (5.1.295-296). Octavia does not witness the moral transformation of Caesar at the end of the play, but it is obvious that Octavia’s opposition to Caesar’s actions participates in reforming him. Caesar laments his sister’s afflictions: “I must on my *Octavia* drop a tear. / She was the best of Women, Gentlest Wife, / In every part how vertuous was her life!” (5.1.298-300). Caesar, recognizing the importance of wisdom, orders his soldiers to be prudent and merciful to enemies: “True Wisdom will no Enemy despise: / From small beginnings mighty Flames arise” (5.1.306-307). Agrippa announces Caesar’s new reign of peace: “The World does no more Enemies contain, / And *Caesar* over peaceful *Rome* may reign” (5.1.324-325). Octavia’s opposition of Caesar’s colonialism of Egypt corresponds with Restoration England’s interest in making peace and trade with the East.

IV. Conclusion

Sedley's *Antony and Cleopatra*, which adapts Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, offers a "re-interpretation," in Hutcheon's terminology, of the Restoration perception of Charles II as a reformed Octavius Caesar and of the East-West relationship of tolerance. While Shakespeare's play glorifies the Roman empire and Octavius Caesar, Sedley's play demystifies Caesar's Roman model of absolutism and colonialism. Cleopatra, the Egyptian queen, is depicted as a virtuous and faithful woman, prioritizing her dignity over subordination to Caesar's colonial will. The East, represented by Egypt and Cleopatra, transcends the stereotypical and sensual connotations and never brings amorality to Antony. Shakespeare's play was examined through Restoration lens of adaptation to criticize local and foreign issues such as Restoration anxiety of Charles II's transformation to absolutism and Restoration "esteem," in Birchwood's term, of the East in the late seventeenth century.

References

- Alhawamdeh, H. A. (2011). *The archaeological and postcolonial transformation of the discourse of orientalism from renaissance to restoration drama* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <https://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd/819>
- Barbour, R. (2003). *Before orientalism: London's theatre of the East, 1576-1626*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Birchwood, M. (2007). *Staging Islam in England: Drama and culture, 1640-1685*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer.
- Braverman, R. (1993). *Plots and counterplots: Sexual politics and the body politic in English literature, 1660-1730*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cartelli, T. (1999). *Repositioning Shakespeare: National formations, postcolonial appropriations*. London: Routledge.
- Chernaik, W. (2011). *The myth of Rome in Shakespeare and his contemporaries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goffman, D. (2002). *The Ottoman empire and early modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grams, T. N. (2016). *Classical masculinity in Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra* (Master's Thesis). Retrieved from <https://commons.nmu.edu/theses/97>
- Holderness, G. (2005). "Dressing old words new": Shakespeare, science, and appropriation. *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation*, 1 (2), Retrieved from <http://www.borrowers.uga.edu/781442/show>
- Hutcheon, L. (2006). *A theory of adaptation*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kahn, C. (1997). *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, wounds and women*. London: Routledge.
- Mallery, M. A. (1990). *The Changing face of fortune in six English versions of the tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/2177
- Matar, N. (1998). *Islam in Britain 1558-1685*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Monk, S. H & Lipking, L. (1979). The restoration and the eighteenth century. In M. H. Abrams, E. T. Donaldson, H. Smith, R. M. Adams, S. H. Monk, L. Lipking, G. H. Ford & D. Daiches (Eds.), *The Norton*

anthology of English literature (4th ed., Vol. 1, pp. 1717-1743). New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

Nyquist, M. (1994). "Profuse, proud Cleopatra": "Barbarism" and female rule in early modern English Republicanism. *Women's Studies*, 24 (1-2), 85-130.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00497878.1994.9979044>

Owen, S. J. (2000). Drama and political crisis. In D. P. Fisk (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to English restoration theatre* (pp. 158-173). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sanders, J. (2006). *Adaptation and appropriation*. London: Routledge.

Sedley, S. C. (1928). *Antony and Cleopatra*. In V. D. Pinto (Ed.), *The poetical and dramatic works of Sir Charles Sedley*. (Vol.1, pp. 192-262). London: Constable & Company. (Original work published 1677).

Shakespeare, W. (2008). *Antony and Cleopatra*. In S. Greenblatt, W. Cohen, J. E. Howard, & K. E. Maus (Eds.), *The Norton Shakespeare* (2nd ed., pp. 2643-2721). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1607).

Smith, B. P. (1967). *Islam in English literature* (2nd ed.). Delmar, NY: Caravan Books.

Stevenson, K. G. (2008). The double strand of Cleopatra plays. In A. Lynch & A. M. Scott (Eds.), *Renaissance poetry and drama in context: Essays for Christopher Wortham* (pp. 285-302). Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Webster, J. W. (2005). *Performing libertinism in Charles II's court: Politics, drama, sexuality*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Weinbrot, H. D. (1978). *Augustus Caesar in Augustan England: The decline of a classical norm*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.