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CHAPTER 6

Hybrid Spaces in *Antony and Cleopatra*

Elisabeth Bronfen

It has become a critical commonplace to address the dramatic representation of queenship in *Anthony and Cleopatra* in relation to the spatial politics at issue in the conflicted love relationship between the eponymous heroine and hero of the play. Indeed, any discussion of the hybrid spatiality on which Shakespeare's imaginary refiguration of these historic personages is predicated, involves the way the play straddles the world of the flamboyant last pharaoh of Egypt with the post-civil war world of Rome at a the moment of transition, when the latter is about to assume complete political hegemony. As Ania Loomba notes, 'By taking as his central figure a foreign queen who was already a symbol of wanton sexuality and political seduction in European culture, Shakespeare comments on a long tradition of writing in which sexual passion expresses, but also ultimately sabotages, imperial ambition' (Loomba 2002, 112). It is, thus, important to note from the start that the two geopolitical spaces, Egypt and imperial Rome, are endowed with a temporal dimension as well. As in so many of Shakespeare's historical tragedies, at issue is the renewal of a world order at the cost of a spectacular destruction of its rival. As Mark Antony unequivocally shifts his allegiance from Rome to Egypt by the middle of the play, what comes to be negotiated is both a move from political honour to romantic passion as well as a transition from *realpolitik* to myth.

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Yet any attempt to map a neat opposition between Rome and Egypt is radically undercut by the contradictory semantic encoding with which the text endows each of these geopolitical spaces. While Cleopatra most prominently represents a sexually alluring warrior queen, Rome is not without erotic charm, even as, in the figure of Fulvia, it has its own feminine political warrior. Egypt, in turn, may ultimately transform into the site where a mythic resolution to the political antagonism sustaining the action can be found, yet throughout the play, it is itself very much the site of a political will determined by and against Rome. Furthermore, as Walter Cohen notes, by choosing suicide, Cleopatra not only 'dies a death that might be associated with a Roman man', nor does she 'in rejecting the inconstancy of the moon, of which Isis was goddess,' also die 'the death of a faithful Roman wife'. By 'taking the poisonous aspe to her breast', he adds, 'she may become a Roman matron as well' (Cohen 1997, 2625). The contradictions, which the two eponymous star-crossed lovers embody, thus reflect on this mutual implication, making both Rome and Egypt, as well as the play itself, sites of internal difference and of cultural hybridity.

Looking more closely at the spatial politics Shakespeare's play deploys, one notices a poignant shift in the critical literature on this late tragedy. While the Coleridgean tradition was content to align Cleopatra's seductive powers with an oriental Egypt, whose culture was allegedly markedly different from that of Rome, more recent criticism has taken the conflict between Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar as the articulation of a systemic political struggle that revolves around the person of the Egyptian queen. With Cleopatra as a sexually alluring embodiment of her country's political threat to the Roman empire, a feminized (and feminizing) Egypt emerges as the space against whose subversive strategies Rome defines and tests its own values; a test which, in turn, is embodied by Mark Antony. As John Drakakis points out, 'the dialectical opposition which the play sets up between Rome and Egypt embraces a struggle for power which is articulated through the difference between Rome and Egypt, male and female. Here politics are not incidental to the drama [...] but are in fact constitutive of it' (Drakakis 1994, 5).

One may well connect Rome to the world of imperturbable political strategy as well as a containment of libidinal desire in the interest of empire-building, while Egypt, by contrast, figures as a world of the flesh, carnivalesque in its excess and willing to default in grand, dramatic style. Yet if Mark Antony comes finally to be destroyed because he is caught between these two opposing forces, it is necessary to take note how the failure of his allegiance to the Roman rule also marks the radical instability

of the world in which he is acting. Similarly, his willingness to believe that his Egyptian queen had betrayed him after their defeat at Actium, reflects the very culture of conspiracy that has produced his power in the first place. Furthermore, the tragic outcome of this Roman war hero's compulsion to return to the Egyptian court may bring with it a movement from the contradiction and instability inherent to hybridity to a centralization of political power which undoes all hybridity. Yet what the play celebrates is the resilient fluidity of the old Nile, which the dramaturgic closure, with its installation of Octavian's victory, seeks to contain by staging the death of its two star-crossed lovers as their mythic apotheosis.

Given these inherent thematic and rhetorical contradictions, it is nevertheless useful, as Terence Hawkes has argued, to distinguish between Rome as the realm privileging voice while Egypt is the realm privileging the body: 'Rome is a place of words, Egypt a place of actions. Rome is where love is talked of, Egypt is where love is made', he notes, adding 'If Egypt emphasizes the body, one level of language, one sort of "love", and the concomitant womanly powers of Cleopatra, Rome is a place of words, another level of language, another kind of love, and of self-confident "manly" prowess' (Hawkes 1994, 112). At the same time, as the dramaturgic force of the play moves towards Roman hegemony, Cleopatra, emerging as the objective of Octavian's colonization project, finds herself torn between two political spaces and the values they represent. She can align herself with Mark Antony, and the play leaves open whether her passion for him isn't ultimately meant to screen out her passion for the political power he promises. Nevertheless, what the play also leaves open is whether she may not be following a *realpolitik* of her own, willing to shift her allegiances if this is in the interest of her nation.

One can, thus, fruitfully speak of hybridity regarding the way she embodies Egypt, because the festive excess she masterminds in Alexandria presents a real political challenge to the restraining rational voice of Rome. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the carnivalesque ascribed to Egypt emerges as a particularly vibrant dramatic form of politics, whose subversive force resides in the contradictory fluidity celebrated by Cleopatra's constant shifting of roles. Her shrewd adaptability shows up the rigidity of the victorious Roman political sphere and, as such, both *reflects* and *reflects on* the very political space it contests, even if, or especially because, in the final act, Rome ultimately proves triumphant.[1] In other words, with the

[1] For a discussion of the carnivalesque as both dramatic form and a form of political subversion, see Stallybrass and White (1986). For a conceptualization of Egypt as a site that both

gendering of geopolitical spaces in *Antony and Cleopatra* articulating a strategy of colonization, it is fruitful to rethink the opposition between the rational language of politics ascribed to Rome and the excessive embodiment ascribed to Egypt. This tension is not only located within the Roman warrior Antony, who is divided against himself and, to the end, unsure of the object of his desire. Cleopatra can also be understood as a figure who, given her idiosyncratic conception of queenship, puts contradiction itself on display, making it difficult to pin her down to any one identity designation.[2]

Her glamorous self-performance, thus the wager of this essay, explores the artistry and artefact of the successful, albeit tragic female politician. Cleopatra is, after all, both the alluring lover of two Roman leaders and a shrewd politician, willing to wage a vicious war on her adversaries. The hybridity she embodies is one that fuses the symbolic body of the queen with that of the woman even while the notion of woman is deconstructed. The cross-dressing at issue is explicitly invoked in the scene of nocturnal excess she describes to Charmian, once her fickle lover has abandoned her because of Fulvia's military actions in Rome. Initially, Cleopatra compares her seductive strategy to fishing: 'I will betray/ tawny-finned fishes. My bended hook shall pierce/ Their slimy jaws, and as I draw them up/ I'll think them every one an Antony,/ And say "Ah ha, you're caught!"' (II.5.11–14). She imagines catching him over and over again, in multiplication so to speak, only to up the ante by recalling a morning, 'ere the ninth hour' when, as she almost nostalgically remembers, 'I drunk him to his bed,/ Then put my tires and mantles on him whilst/ I wore his sword Philippan. O, from Italy' (II.5.21–3). By taking up the sword with which Mark Antony conquered Brutus and Cassius at Philippi, while he, sleeping off his inebriation, is wearing her women's clothes, she fashions herself as a doubled warrior queen—not only explicitly victorious in the bedchamber but also, by association, victorious in a foreign battlefield in Italy. By effeminizing Antony and usurping the accoutrement of his power she also

contests and reflects Rome, with its imperial politics, see also Foucault's discussion of heterotopia as a real emplacement which contests, reflects, refers to and reverses what is posited as the central, ordinary place in 'Different Spaces' (Foucault 1998, 175–86).

[2] Adelman ascribes the rhetorical function of paradox to Cleopatra, in contrast to the hyperbole performed by Mark Antony (Adelman 1994, 56–77). Belsey also foregrounds the way Cleopatra's erotic power allows her to escape definition, inhabiting a 'space outside moral and civil law' in that she moves beyond both regal and feminine propriety (Belsey 1996, 41–6).

deconstructs the opposition of victorious male warrior and seduced female lover, showing them to be mutually intertwined.

The alluring femme fatale that Mark Antony's fellow soldiers as well as Octavius Caesar choose to see in Cleopatra proves to be a clever masquerade donned by this female politician. By playing to the erotic fantasies of her colonizers, she uses the role of the seductive oriental woman to cover up a political agenda whose prime interest is the well-being of Egypt. In other words, the contradiction is not simply between the body natural of a woman and the body politics of a queen, but the way Cleopatra foregrounds the sexual allure of her feminine body to sustain the political body of her sovereignty. Emphasizing the issue of hybridity at work in this duplicitous performance means drawing attention to the following point: for her to be able to perform the witch/whore persona successfully implies that she has consciously internalized this pejorative Roman interpellation. She can captivate her colonizers by playing to the role they have ascribed to her, doing so by straddling this externally imposed image with her own self-conception as Egyptian sovereign. The cross-dressing scene her monologue recalls for her intimate attendant Charmian signals that she is both capable and willing to manipulate the role to which she gives body even as she performs the seductive oriental Queen for others. Indeed, we are given to understand that she is always cross-dressed, always masquerading, not because there is no authenticity to her person, but because, as a sovereign, she is always on public display.

It is, thus, difficult to pin her down to one fixed, stable role, because we can never be certain whether the portraits other characters in the play draw of her are purely external projections or whether they also correspond to the way she wants herself to be viewed by others. And if the latter, do they merely reflect her shrewd manipulation of her public image or do they also indicate an intimate form of self-understanding? The scintillating unfathomability of her person is most prominently articulated in the manner in which Enobarbus recalls the first meeting between Mark Antony and Cleopatra at Tarsus. Gliding along the river of Cydnus, he remembers,

> the barge she sat in, like a burnished throne/ Burned on the water. The poop was beaten gold;/ Purple the sails, and so perfumèd that/ The winds were love-sick with them. The oars were silver,/ Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made/ The water which they beat to follow faster;/ As amorous of their strokes. (II.2.197–203)

By fusing with the space she inhabits, she renders it an extension of her alluring feminine body. She captivates by drawing everything into her charm, overpowering the scene itself as much as those who gaze at her. Enobarbus famously admits to the failure of his rational Roman mind to explain why, given his natural distrust of this woman and this queen, he is nevertheless bedazzled: 'For her own person,/ It beggared all description' (II.2.203–4).

In that this passage shows her to be fully in control of a spectacle in which she stages herself in the midst of her attendants explicitly in reference to Venus, the Roman Goddess of love, it also gives evidence of her knowledge of Roman culture. Playing to it, one might say, she is shown to use it to her own advantage. Cleopatra may beggar all description, in the sense that her extravagant self-presentation is too extraordinary to be believed. At the same time, what it does is produce an excessive description, on the part of this particularly sober eyewitness, which is predicated on a perfect fusion of the natural feminine body and its aesthetic refiguration. Enobarbus describes her performance as though it were a *tableau vivant*, which, as Catherine Belsey has shown, explicitly recalls early modern paintings of Venus, even while it is also conceived as a theatrical scene.[3] As the people of the city of Tarsus flock to the wharf, Antony remains alone in the vacant market place. Enobarbus' description thus positions him as the privileged viewer of a political spectacle in which the sovereign's power (appealing to her people) and that of the seductive women (appealing only to him, her conqueror) blend together. At the same time, she is also presented as more than life, endowing the natural space around her with her charisma, and with the air and water taking on her scent and her erotic charm. She actually overwhelms nature to such a degree that it, too, becomes her audience. The air, Enobarbus notes, 'had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too' (II.2.223), making a gap in nature.

Indeed, her charisma is so forceful that even her defects dazzle and bewitch those who gaze upon her. In another scene, Enobarbus recalls how Cleopatra, having hopped 40 paces through a public street, is reduced to panting, prompting Marjorie Garber to suggest that 'her shortcomings are part of the paradox that makes her irresistible' (Garber 2004, 734). Yet if Cleopatra's human frailty, as it is encapsulated in this scene, serves to foreground the natural body over her glamorous poses, the contradiction she

[3] See Belsey's 'Cleopatra's Seduction' (Belsey 1996) and also Bronfen's 'Cleopatra's Venus' (Bronfen 2003, 137–50).

resiliently puts on display consists precisely in making 'defect perfection' (II.2.237). Even when breathless, she breathes forth power. Ironically, Shakespeare gives to this loyal soldier, staunchly critical of the fact that his leader has fallen for the charms not just of a woman but of a foreigner, the most resilient line pertaining to this queen, drawing a portrait of her that installs her as a living myth: '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' (II.2.240–4).

Feminist critics have recast Cleopatra's unfathomability as an example of her supreme gift of self-performance. Rethinking her along the lines of a playmaker, indeed a diva, they read her histrionics not as intrinsic to her feminine nature, in support of the witch/whore label which Roman propaganda came to attach to the historic queen after her death, and which, transcribed by Plutarch, served as one of the sources for Shakespeare's own historical re-imagination (Spencer 1964). Rather, this proclivity to theatricality is re-encoded as evidence of her self-empowerment. As Jyotsna Singh notes, the infinite variety Enobarbus attests to, 'applies interchangeably to her sexual appeal and to her role-playing, and is clearly antithetical to the Roman myth of a stable and unified male subject' (Singh 1994, 317). By constantly reshaping her self-representations for private and public consumption, Singh concludes, Shakespeare's Cleopatra proves herself a master in asserting power through 'improvisational role-playing' (323).

At the same time, it is important to underscore that even while she is consistently playful, constantly performing for an audience—be it in the public arena or in the intimacy she shares with Mark Antony—the theatrical space she creates wherever she goes is part and parcel of her being. She is so bedazzling because her singular personality and her public role as seductive Egyptian Queen are inextricably intertwined. Her particular spin on diva-dom consists in the way she performs seductive femininity in a script of her own design, even if it also appropriates Roman concepts of femininity. Her existence as woman and ruler is predicated on this performance that she so skilfully commands and from which she cannot be extricated. If Egypt transforms into her stage whenever she appears, then the theatricality with which she is equated does not only serve to cover up her politics. Rather, the infinite variety of her performance of corporeal excess *is* her politics. In the first three acts, this primarily involves high melodrama, with comic notes regarding the breathless, hopping queen. The pathos of the final act, in turn, is predicated on the tragic sensibility it

infuses into her sustained playmaking. Cleopatra's final embrace of death is not only the logical consequence of her politics but also a politics predicated on performance.

Before looking in more depth at the way the final act, as Garber argues, 'will become the playing space for transformation, metamorphosis, and myth, a space in which the mortal becomes the immortal' (Garber 2004, 747), it is worth noting a further moment of hybridity that Shakespeare's text brings into play. Various scholars have made an argument for reading *Antony and Cleopatra* as an oblique comment on the political culture of Shakespeare's England, given the way Elizabeth I's theatricalization of her extravagant progresses, her audacious fashion style, as well as the abundance of portraits made of her during her lifetime allow the last Tudor Queen to be conceived as the first modern political diva. Cleopatra's performance of queenship offers many references to Elizabeth's histrionic embodiment of sovereignty, most notably the analogy between the Egyptian Pharaoh's infamous journey down the Nile in her barge and the Renaissance Queen's processions in her own barge up the Thames.

In the catalogue to the exhibition *Shakespeare: Staging the World*, Jonathan Bate and Dora Thornton argue that stage players 'had to be very careful in drawing implicit parallels between Roman history and contemporary affairs' (Bate and Thornton 2012, 140). Fulke Greville destroyed his dramatic version of Antony and Cleopatra, afraid that the story of a queen, who, having seduced a warrior-hero, is willing to forsake her empire in favour of love, would too readily have recalled the fatal love story between Elizabeth and Essex. Shakespeare's acting company waited some 5 years after the demise of Elizabeth I before bringing their Cleopatra to the public stage, and even though their Egyptian Queen is not conceived as a direct allegorical representation of Elizabeth, Bate and Thornton suggest, 'audiences would have been provoked into seeing the parallels: a woman ruler in an overwhelmingly male world, the identification between the queen and her country. Cleopatra is referred to as "Egypt", while Elizabeth in her famous oration at Tilbury compared her body to the body politic of England' (140).

It is useful to recall that Elizabeth chose to come amongst her troops just before the battle with the Spanish Armada, as she explains in the Tilbury speech, 'not for my recreation, and disport, but being resolved, in the midst, and heat of the battaile, to live, or die amongst you all... I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a King—and of a King of England too... I myself will be your General' (Morris 1969, 276).[4] Elizabeth thus explicitly addresses the double tension already discussed in relation to Shakespeare's Cleopatra between the natural body of a woman (weak and feeble) and the body politic of her nation (England) on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the cross-dressing of a woman as warrior queen, who, like Cleopatra with Antony's sword in hand, speaks of herself as a body (heart and stomach) and a man (king). Furthermore, in Shakespeare's play, Cleopatra also finds herself compelled to justify her presence amongst her troops. She explains to Enobarbus: 'A charge we bear i'th' war,/ And as the president of my kingdom will/Appear there for a man. Speak not against it./ I will not stay behind' (III.7.16–19).

Other details attest to Queen Elizabeth's spectral presence in Shakespeare's Cleopatra, straddling ancient Egypt with early modern England to produce yet a further moment of hybridity. Both, legend has it, were capable of spurts of rage, even while perfect in public flirtation. Legend also has it that both, while not remarkably beautiful themselves, charmed by virtue of their wit and their intelligence. As Keith Rinehart notes, like Queen Elizabeth asking Sir James Melville, the emissary from Mary, Queen of Scots, about the physical appearance and accomplishments of her dreaded rival, so, too, Cleopatra wants to hear from Antony's messenger about the beauty of his newly wed Octavia (Rinehart 1972, 81–2). Indeed, the most resilient line of association can be found in the way they both perform femininity to their political advantage, even while the context is different. Queen Elizabeth, inheriting a most unpromising throne with her own legitimacy in question, turned her weakness into her strength by insisting on her status as a glorious but unattainable Virgin Queen. Turning her advisors' desire to see her married to her own advantage, she became adept at playing diverse monarchs of European countries off against each other. Cleopatra, in turn, needed to wrest her claim to the throne from her siblings, using her sexual allure to engage Julius Caesar in her will to power. Having successfully destroyed her rivals, she then continued to engage the next generation of Roman conquerors in her favour, ultimately playing them off against each other as well.

While Elizabeth wins the decisive sea battle against the Spanish Armada, and, in so doing, establishes her political supremacy in Europe, Cleopatra

[4] This is one of the first critical essays to draw attention to the parallel. See also Weber's 'Intimations of Dido and Cleopatra in Some Contemporary Portrayals of Elizabeth I', who sees this relation as one of antithesis (Weber 1999, 127–43).

is defeated in the sea battle against Octavius Caesar at Actium. And yet, serving as her antithesis, the Egyptian pharaoh alludes to the English monarch in that both cast themselves as warrior queens accountable first and foremost to their subjects. Even if Elizabeth inaugurates a golden age of English empire while Cleopatra will prove to have been the last of the Ptolemies of Egypt, they share an awareness of the anxieties that accompanied their public performance of queenship. In the final act, Cleopatra explains to Caesar: 'Be it known that we, the greatest, are misthought/ For things that others do; and when we fall/ We answer others' merits in our name,/ Are therefore to be pitied' (V.2.172–5). In her answer to Parliament, urging for the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, Elizabeth, who was deeply conflicted about causing the death of another queen, in turn, justifies herself by casting herself in a similar light: 'For we Princes are set as it were upon stages, in the sight and view of all the world. The least spot is soon spied in our garments, a blemish quickly noted in our doings. It behoveth us therefore to be careful that our proceedings be just and honourable' (Rinehart 1972, 85). Given their shared propensity for a theatricalization of political power, Ania Loomba offers yet another point of association. The opposition between Caesar and Cleopatra 'can be seen as partially deriving from the contrasting *styles* of James and Elizabeth' (Loomba 1994, 294).[5] Theatrical practice with its penchant for carnivalesque transgression is aligned with the Egyptian queen, while King James is known to have favoured the ordered Augustan power.

Yet it is precisely this complicated proclivity to performance that makes both queens more than mere hybrid figures, straddling the public and the private, the feminine and the masculine, the exotic and the familiar. With Elizabeth hovering as a shadow over Shakespeare's Cleopatra, this double portrait of feminine sovereignty also produced a hybrid space on the stage that straddles the past and the future. Both the ancient and the early modern queen not only find their apotheosis by transforming into female deities, but also themselves orchestrate this divine self-elevation during their lifetime. While the historic Cleopatra came to declare herself to be a living embodiment of Isis, Elizabeth, in her speeches before

[5] See also Garber's *Shakespeare After All*, which further suggests that the Jacobean audience of the play would have 'been mindful both of James I's complicated relations with powerful and seductive regal women—his mother Mary, Queen of Scots, his predecessor, Queen Elizabeth—and also of the strongly held views among many political and religious thinkers of the time that women should not rule over men' (Garber 2004, 738).

Parliament, so emphatically insists on her direct lineage to her God that after her death she comes to be remembered as 'Diva Elizabeta'. Equally striking is the way this shared deification is tantamount to a transformation into an icon, when, in death, both become mythic signifiers of feminine sovereignty. Even if the end of their reign puts closure on the contradiction they embodied during their lifetime, it inaugurates our cultural commemoration of this contradiction. Both are remembered for a performance of queenship predicated on an enmeshment between a body natural and a self-consciously designed symbolic body, which draws on a masquerade of the feminine allure befitting their respective culture's needs and expectations. Finally, the death of both also marks a moment of political transition. With Elizabeth's death, the Tudor reign comes to an end, while over the dead body of Cleopatra, Augustan hegemony comes to be fully installed.

There is, however, one further image that, as Richardine Woodall astutely notes, 'draws the English queen and Shakespeare's into even greater symmetry', given that both anticipate the mythic status they will achieve in death. In her first speech to Parliament, in which Elizabeth defends her wariness about bringing forth an issue of her own, she ends by declaring: 'And in the end this shall be for me sufficient: that a *marble* stone shall declare that a queen, having reigned such a time, lived and died a virgin' (Woodall 2009, 197). At the beginning of her public self-fashioning, she thus invokes not only her own demise but also her legacy. In other words, the speech with which she inaugurates her own reign also dictates the marble inscription with which, after her death, she hopes to enter into the pantheon of public memory. In the final act of Shakespeare's play, Cleopatra uses a similar metaphor to justify her suicide: 'my resolution's placed, and I have nothing/ Of woman in me. Now from head to foot/ I am marble-constant. Now the fleeting moon/ No planet is of mine' (V.2.234–7). By claiming that she no longer has anything of woman in her, she, like the image of the Virgin Queen Elizabeth insists on from the start of her reign, casts herself in the image of one who has transcended gender. The marble stone, which will declare the birth and death of one queen, re-emerges in the language of Shakespeare as the description of another queen's condition, indicating that she, too, has transcended all mutability.

Cleopatra's transformation from fluid identity and cross-dressed playmaking to marble fixity also makes up the apotheosis of her self-performances in Shakespeare's text. In his study on the origin of the

German *Trauerspiel*, Walter Benjamin offers an unusual explanation for the dramaturgic death drive subtending baroque tragedy: 'Produktion der Leiche ist, vom Tode her betrachtet, das Leben', he argues that:

> Seen from the point of view of death, the product of the corpse is life [...] And if it is in death that the spirit becomes free, in the manner of spirits, it is not until then that the body too comes properly into its own. For this much is self-evident: the allegorization of the physis can only be carried through in all its vigour in respect of the corpse. And the characters of the *Trauerspiel* die, because it is only thus, as corpses, that they can enter into the homeland of allegory. It is not for the sake of immortality that they meet their end, but for the sake of the corpse. (Benjamin 1998, 217–18)[6]

If death is the prerequisite for the translation into an allegorical sign that will render a cultural survival certain, the elaborate staging of Cleopatra's suicide marks this to be a final self-performance in which she finds perfection.[7]

Ania Loomba usefully invokes the technique of cinematic montage regarding the spatial politics of the first three acts, given that these shift incessantly between patriarchal Rome and Cleopatra's Egypt, as well as the lovers' private world and the public arena of politics. Even though there are 15 changes of locale in the fourth act, it is limited to Egypt, and as such introduces the geographical focus, which, in the final act, leaves us confined to the area of Cleopatra's monument. Here, Loomba claims, her 'own body is the last 'space' to be wrested from Roman control' (Loomba 1994, 290). By abandoning the dialectic between inner and outer, political and personal, male and female space, which the montage of the first three acts plays through, closure is both installed and undermined. While it looks as if the rigidity of Roman law—and concomitant with it, masculinity and imperialism—allegedly regains control by taking over the volatile space of Egypt, whose most prominent attributes in the text are the fluid Nile and changing moon, 'Cleopatra's final performance,

[6] 'Wenn dann im Tode der Geist auf Geisterweise frei wird, so kommt auch nun der Körper erst zu seinem höchsten Recht. Denn von selbst versteht sich: die Allegorisierung der Physis kann nur an der Leiche sich energisch durchsetzen. Und die Personen des Trauerspiels sterben, weil sie nur so, als Leichen, in die allegorische Heimat eingehen. Nicht um der Unsterblichkeit willen, um der Leiche willen gehn sie zu Grunde' (Benjamin 1978, 193–4).

[7] See also *Over Her Dead Body* (Bronfen 1992).

which certainly exposes her own vulnerability, not only cheats Caesar but denies any final and authoritative textual closure' (291).

With Benjamin's discussion of the transition from *physis* to allegory in mind, the instability of the final scene in Shakespeare's historical reimagination of the last pharaoh of Egypt can be taken a step further. Cleopatra is perfected in death in that she now completes the process of aesthetic figuration, which she has been undertaking throughout, most notably by playing with Roman fantasies of Venus. Her corpse not only subverts Roman control, but also unfolds a further hybrid space, leaving her splendidly suspended between history and myth. The pathos of the action has shifted seamlessly from melodrama with comic notes to high tragedy. To appreciate the sublimity of this ultimate performance, it is, however, necessary to recall the two previous scenes that serve as its narrative points of reference. To celebrate his regained war fury, Mark Antony, at the end of Act III, calls out to her, 'let's have one other gaudy night' (III.13.185) and she responds, 'It is my birth-day,/ I had thought to've held it poor, but since my lord/ Is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra' (III.13.187–9). Even as the text draws attention to the fabrication of this persona—Cleopatra is a part she can be if, and only if, its counterpart is present—it leaves open what exactly this role entails: the faithful lover, the warrior queen, the shrewd politician. On the eve of a decisive battle, the volatility contained in her performance of 'Cleopatra' refers to the queen in whom Mark Antony needs to be able to trust if he is to fight valiantly. With her image in mind, he claims, he will be sure to 'make death love me' (III.13.195) the next time he does battle.

Yet the volatility of her performance of 'Cleopatra' is such that his desire can easily turn into its opposite. With astonishing ease Mark Antony assumes in the act that follows that, by having abruptly left the battlefield at Actium, Cleopatra in fact betrayed him. Suddenly she is no longer his queen, but a 'foul Egyptian,' and a 'triple-turn'd whore' whom he is sure has sold him out to the novice Caesar (IV.13.10; IV.13.13). If being 'Cleopatra' proves to be nothing other than a performance that calls forth radically different interpretations in the man to whose prowess it is directed, death emerges as the flip side of this hermeneutic challenge. Just before the Egyptian Queen returns to Mark Antony to explain why she surrendered her ships to Caesar, he warns his attendant 'my heart/ Makes only wars on thee' (IV.13.14–15). When, indignant at his paranoid mistrust, she rapidly leaves again, he adds, ''Tis well thou'rt gone,/ [...] but better 'twere/ Thou fell'st into my fury, for one death/ Might

have prevented many' (IV.13.39–42). Cleopatra gives her own lethal twist to the devious games the two lovers have been playing with each other, when she, in turn, has her messenger deliver a false description of her death so as to undo her lover's murderous desire. As Antony continues to rage, 'She hath betrayed me, and shall die the death,' Mardian responds, 'Death of one person can be paid but once,/ And that she has discharged' (IV.15.26–8).

This mock performance of death is, of course, both clever and dangerous. It is a final example for her strategic gift in that it pays Antony back in kind and he, with astonishing swiftness, falls into the pathos of the mourning lover: 'I will o'ertake thee, Cleopatra, and/ Weep for my pardon. So it must be, for now/ All length is torture' (IV.15.44–5). At the same time, it is calamitous because it engenders the very death it seeks to prevent. Recalling the fatal temporal disjunction in *Romeo and Juliet*, Mark Antony falls on his sword, hoping to follow his beloved into death's realm, only to discover that both have fallen prey to their blind mistrust. Too late does Diomedes appear to explain his mistress's game. The rage which Cleopatra feared 'would not be purged' (IV.15.121–2) has now turned back on Mark Antony himself.

The subsequent act of mutual pardoning is tantamount to an undoing of the mortal body and its metamorphosis into a mythic sign. By declaring that only Antony could conquer Antony, Cleopatra performs in speech the divine status she has been attributing to her lover throughout the play, even while she invokes Roman Gods—'Juno's power', 'strong-winged Mercury' and 'Jove's side' (IV.16.35–7)—to bespeak her own helplessness in the face of his dying. Her own ultimate entrance into the 'homeland of allegory' as Benjamin calls the transition afforded by the corpse on the baroque stage, is made all the more poignant by the fact that Mark Antony's death marks the end of the role-playing we have seen up to this point. It resolves the 'Cleopatra' she was willing to be, *again*, in response to Antony being Antony *again*. If his demise leaves her alone to abide in a 'dull world,' which, in his absence, is 'no better than a sty,' once he is dead, she declares, 'the odds is gone,/ And there is nothing left remarkable/ Beneath the visiting moon' (IV.16.63–4; IV.16.68–70). His death brings on an experience of catastrophe, the dissolution of her world, because it brings to an end the glamour that had sustained their conflicted game of love, in which both *played to* and *against* each other, mistrusted each other and themselves. Once there is nothing remarkable left of this volatile, unstable and incalculable love, however, a different 'Cleopatra' can take the stage, which, although this is still a performance, it is one endowed with tragic ethos. This transformation, though predicated on an abandonment of the ordinary symbolic world, involves a radical political act.

After all, one must not overlook that a further scene plays into and inflects this monumental suicide. From one of her attendants, Cleopatra has discovered that Caesar plans to include her in his triumph procession through Rome. The passage in which she anticipates this scene of humiliation, describing to Iras what she believes to know will happen to them if they get captured alive, brings into play once more an issue of political theatricality. 'The quick comedians/ Extemporally will stage us, and present/ Our Alexandrian revels,' she imagines, embellishing the scene of horror: 'Antony/ Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see/ Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness/ I'th' posture of a whore' (V.2.212–17). While this remark is often read as a reference to the practice of boy-actors on the Elizabethan stage, equally seminal is the way Cleopatra imagines in advance how this Roman spectacle will reflect and refigure in parodic exaggeration the cross-dressing she herself directed in her bedchamber, and which she recalled for Charmian when, in the second act, Antony had left her for Rome. It is against this fantasy, which she vividly imagines for herself and her attendants, that she pits her visceral performance of death, using the materiality of her mortal remains to author a different cultural survival. By perfectly calculating the staging of her corpse, she hopes to define the allegorical figuration by which she will be remembered.[8]

Her choice of suicide entails a radical political gesture in that it deprives Caesar of what he feels he most needs to cement his own power, namely a humiliating spectacle of the Egyptian Queen he has vanquished. At the same time, it occasions a form of symbolic re-investiture that renders her political power marble-constant. As Cleopatra asks her attendants to attire her in her full regal garments—'Give me my robe. Put on my crown. I have/ Immortal longings in me' (V.2.271–2)—she moves from cross-dressing to the dress of absolute sovereignty. The natural body is frozen into the icon of the queen, the scheming woman and the shrewd politician become one, while the seductive witch/whore transforms into the eternal wife. In and through death she can proclaim her marriage to Mark Antony, taking upon herself a gesture of self-authorization that was

[8] See also 'Auf der Suche nach Kleopatra' (Bronfen 2013, 9–23).

impossible while both were alive: 'Husband, I come. Now to that name my courage prove my title!' (V.2.278–9).

By saying of herself, 'I am marble-constant' (V.2.236) she performs a speech act that anticipates the transformation of her dying body into a monument. She declares what she hopes will be the result of an action which pits this carefully orchestrated *tableau mort* against her earlier performance of a *tableau vivant* of Venus. As she invokes a spectral Mark Antony, who she imagines to be praising her noble act and mocking the luck of Caesar, we are also reminded of the scene she called her birthday, in which his return prompted her to be 'Cleopatra' again. Yet this spectral lover is now entirely at the disposal of her artistic self-expression. He has changed into the perfect supporting actor in a theatrical scene, in which, by embracing her mortality, Cleopatra proves her sovereign power both over her adversary Caesar and over death. She controls the image of her demise, even while she controls the fact that she will have a mythic afterlife.

The dramatic irony of this self-designed apotheosis is that, over the dead body of Cleopatra, Caesar's political hegemony will come into sole power. He has survived and is left to comment on the tragic event. And yet, faced with Cleopatra's dead body, he is compelled to acknowledge the sovereignty of his adversary: 'Bravest at the last,/ She levelled at our purposes, and being royal/ Took her own way' (V.2.325–7). He will be remembered as a powerful political figure in Roman history, who was able to successfully defend the unity of Rome against both internal and external enemies. But if, in Shakespeare's historical re-imagination, he has the last words of the play, Cleopatra occupies this last scene as an eternal diva. It is, once more, her birthday, celebrating her entrance into the pantheon of allegorical characters. As though sustaining the contradiction so seminal to her appearance throughout the play, we find Caesar as entranced by this *tableau mort* as Enobarbus was while witnessing his master's first encounter with the Egyptian Venus.

The words Caesar utters, as he looks upon Cleopatra's corpse, attest to her legacy as an eternal political diva: 'but she looks like sleep,/ As she would catch another Antony/ In her strong toil of grace' (V.2.336–7). And through the words that follow, she is linked to the other allegorical star-crossed lovers in Shakespeare's oeuvre. The inscription on the golden statue to be erected at the end of *Romeo and Juliet* shadows Caesar's command: 'She shall be buried by her Antony./ No grave upon the earth shall clip in it/ A pair so famous' (V.2.348–50). Caesar concludes the play by offering the final stage directions: 'Our army shall/ In solemn show attend this funeral/ And then to Rome. Come, Dolabella, see/ High order in this great solemnity' (V.2.353–6). These words, in turn, fuse Fortinbras' command at the end of *Hamlet* ['for his passage,/ The soldiers' music and the rites of war/ Speak loudly for him./ Take up the body' (V.2.342–5)] with that of Malcolm at the end of *Macbeth* ['So thanks to all at once, and to each one,/ Whom we invite to see us crowned at Scone' (V.11.40–1)]. Caesar's response to Cleopatra's last performance recalls previous passages in Shakespeare's oeuvre, in which the entrance into the allegorical heaven of aesthetic forms is predicated on the production of corpses and as such open up to yet another moment of hybridity, namely that of textual regeneration.

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CHAPTER 7

The Sea in *Pericles*

Bernhard Klein

The geography of Shakespeare and Wilkins's *Pericles* (1608) ranges in its critical assessment from the figurative and emblematic to the factual and historic. For some, the play's locations are 'exotic' (Warren 2004, 5), extracted from a largely 'symbolic' (Cohen 1997, 2711) geography and animated by 'metaphorical' (Grainger 2008, 73) ships and voyages; for others, the play is set in a Mediterranean landscape well known to a Jacobean audience familiar with the scripture (Hanna 2002) and aware of the classics (McJannet 1998). The six Levantine cities in the play epitomize the divide, as they alternate in recent scholarship between thin placial signifiers used only to ground the characters momentarily in relation to the events of the plot (Gillies 2003), and sites with such cultural resonance in early modern England that to assume their mere instrumentality would be to miss the significance of the setting entirely (Relihan 1992). The critical disagreement attests to the enduring enigma of a play that has traditionally polarized both readers and critics (Skeele 2000). In this chapter, I focus attention on the maritime, arguing that the dramatic framing of the sea in *Pericles* is key to a spatial design that partakes in contemporary English endeavours in the Levant as much as it taps successfully into biblical learning and ancient geographical myth.

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