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# “Quick Comedians”: Mary Sidney, Samuel Daniel and the *Theatrum Mundi* in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*

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- 1 In the final scene of William Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606-1607), Cleopatra speculates upon the likely posthumous reputation of herself and her lover, Antony. In an extraordinary moment of metatheatre, she imagines this reputation in terms of its potential representation in the public theatres. She anticipates a situation in which

The quick comedians  
Extemporally will stage us, and present  
Our Alexandrian revels. Antony  
Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see  
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness  
I’th’ posture of a whore.

*Antony and Cleopatra*, V.ii.212-217<sup>1</sup>

The fact that this speech is delivered by a Jacobean boy actor in front of an audience in a public theatre provides a material affirmation of the prophetic nature of Cleopatra’s words and various “quick comedians” in England had indeed capitalised upon the dramatic potential of the Antony and Cleopatra story, particularly in the 1590s and early 1600s. However, by writing a play focusing upon Antony and Cleopatra, Shakespeare was engaging in a dramatic tradition in which “squeaking” boy actors, Alexandrian revels, and other trappings associated with the commercial theatres had largely been absent. Prior to Shakespeare’s play, the English dramatisations of the histories of Antony and Cleopatra, and the effects of their downfalls, had largely been the province of dramatists whose work was not intended for the public theatre, including Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, Samuel Daniel, Samuel Brandon, and, although his dramatic work on the subject is no longer extant, Fulke Greville. These dramatists were writing in what has come to be identified as the elite coterie form of closet drama, the outputs of which were intended for private reading, recitation, and,

in some cases, publication, rather than public performance. These works have frequently been regarded as antithetical to the endeavours of the commercial stage and, as a result, scholarly attention to dramatic representations of Antony and Cleopatra in the period has until recently been dominated by Shakespeare’s play.<sup>2</sup> This essay sets out to consider Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* in relation to his precedents and highlight the intertextual links between them. Rather than representing a distinct break from its predecessors, I argue that Shakespeare’s play exhibits a significant degree of continuity with the works of the closet dramatists, particularly when it comes to the plays’ representation of the politicisation of the *theatrum mundi* tradition and their resistance to the appropriation of theatricality in the construction and promulgation of sovereign power.

- 2 In her study of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, Janet Adelman argues that the play “consists of a few actions and almost endless discussion of them”,<sup>3</sup> a description that could be applied just as easily to the play’s dramatic precedents that appeared in England during the 1590s. Sir Philip Sidney’s sister, Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, established a new coterie tradition of dramatic writing in England with her translation of *Marc Antoine*, a work by the French dramatist, Robert Garnier. Sidney’s play, probably completed in 1590 but not printed until 1592, imported into England a Continental tradition of tragedy influenced by the Senecan precedent and drawing on neo-classical aesthetic principles.<sup>4</sup> Such dramas tended to follow the Aristotelian unities and to privilege rhetoric over action. Such premises had been underlined by Sir Philip Sidney in his *Apology for Poetry* (1581-1583) in which he complains that the offerings of the contemporary theatre observe “rules neither of honest civility nor of skilful Poetry” and highlights that the Aristotelian unities of time and place should be “the two necessary companions of all corporal actions”, an outlook that is founded on both “Aristotle’s precept and common reason”.<sup>5</sup> Sidney conceded that even *Gorboduc*, a tragedy he praised for its “stately speeches” and “notable morality”, could not be regarded as “an exact model of all tragedies” because it was “faulty both in place and time”.<sup>6</sup> Rather than representing the tragic events to the audience, incidents are related in speeches by the characters and, instead of dramatic action, the plays tend to open up space for rhetorical devices like apostrophe, stichomythia, and the inclusion of a chorus.
- 3 The tradition as it emerged in England was intended for reading and its outputs were disseminated in print or manuscript circulation, rather than being presented as public performances on the public stage. As a result, these plays tend to be classed as closet dramas and were, for much of the twentieth century, defined by their apparent antagonism towards the outputs of the commercial theatres. This can be seen in some of the critical commentaries upon the adoption of the form by Thomas Kyd – who Nancy Cotton characterises as the “chief exponent at the time of the blood-and-thunder action drama”<sup>7</sup> of the commercial theatre – in his *Cornelia* (1593), another translation from Garnier. Kyd’s adoption of this form has been characterised as a defection from one aesthetic campaign to another, with F. L. Lucas citing it as evidence of Mary Sidney’s success in “bringing under her wing, of all wild birds, Kyd whose melodramatic *Spanish Tragedy* of 1585-1587 had first really established tragedy on the popular stage.”<sup>8</sup> Rather than an abandonment of one dramatic form in favour of another, Kyd’s intervention in this genre actually suggests a considerable amount of common ground between closet and popular tragedy.

- 4 Numerous critics also took their cue from Samuel Daniel’s dedication to the Countess of Pembroke that prefaces his *Cleopatra* (1594), a sequel to *Antonie*, in which he presents an image of Mary Sidney as a crusader who had mobilised a circle of wits whose “pens, like spears, are charged / To chase away this tyrant of the north, / Gross Barbarism”.<sup>9</sup> These lines have generally been interpreted as a call to arms against the popular theatre; Daniel’s reference to an aesthetic crusade is complemented by his inclusion of Mary Sidney’s “valiant brother” as one who “found, encountered, and provoked forth” the effects of the “Gross Barbarism” against which they were pitching themselves.<sup>10</sup> This led to some critics mistakenly regarding Mary Sidney and her coterie as a group of protestors attempting to reform the commercial theatre in line with Sir Philip Sidney’s comments in the *Apology*, a view that is promulgated most notably by T. S. Eliot’s account of the development of this form of drama:

It was after [Sir Philip] Sidney’s death that his sister, the Countess of Pembroke, tried to assemble a body of wits to compose drama in the proper Senecan style, to make head against the popular melodrama of the time. Great poetry should be both an art and a diversion; in a large and cultivated public like the Athenian it can be both; the shy recluses of Lady Pembroke’s circle were bound to fail.<sup>11</sup>

- 5 The view that Mary Sidney was spearheading an eccentric group of wits in an inept and ill-fated campaign to reform the popular theatre held sway for much of the twentieth century. In his study of the Senecan influence upon Renaissance tragedy, for example, Gordon Braden dismissed the outputs of the coterie dramatists by arguing that “Senecan imitation in the continental style remains a fairly elite and circumscribed affair.”<sup>12</sup> The commonplace views informed by Eliot and similar commentators were roundly dismissed in an influential article by Mary Ellen Lamb, according to whom:

There was no dramatic circle surrounding the Countess of Pembroke, and the idea of reforming the English stage probably never entered her head. She would be amazed to read all the descriptions of her misguided idealism, and amazed that, for all her real literary endeavours, it is this one for which she is best remembered.<sup>13</sup>

Here, Lamb dismantled the “myth” of the Pembroke circle and any motivations it might have had of reforming the public stage, thus helping to revive critical interest in the neo-Senecan drama.

- 6 The plights of Antony and Cleopatra became a recurring topic for the dramas written in this tradition which emerged prior to the first performances of Shakespeare’s play. Mary Sidney’s *Antonie* and its sequel, Samuel Daniel’s *Cleopatra*, were both written following the neo-classical precedent established in Robert Garnier’s brand of tragedy and focus upon the final hours of their protagonists. From this tradition there also emerged Samuel Brandon’s play, *The Tragi-comædi of the Vertuous Octavia* (1598), which shifted the focus of the action towards Rome and Antony’s spurned wife, as well as Fulke Greville’s lost play on the subject. In his *A Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney*, Greville provides a tantalising glimpse of the tragedy he felt compelled to destroy:

[The tragedies] were in their first creation three, whereof *Antony and Cleopatra*, according to their irregular passions in foresaking empire to follow sensuality, were sacrificed in the fire; the executioner, the author himself, not that he conceived it to be a contemptible younger brother to the rest, but lest, while he seemed to look over-much upward, he might stumble into the astronomer’s pit: many members in that creature (by the opinion of those eyes which saw it) having some childish wantonness in them apt enough to be construed or strained to a personating of vices in the present governors and government.<sup>14</sup>

Greville’s act of cautious self-censorship therefore shows the potentially loaded topicality of the tradition of Antony and Cleopatra plays and, particularly, their potential to interrogate issues relating to politics and sovereignty. By considering these plays as part of the same tradition as Shakespeare’s drama, this essay aims to highlight the intertextual links between the plays and to follow Lukas Erne’s argument that coterie and theatrical tragedies should be considered as “complementary rather than antagonistic in the influence they exerted”.<sup>15</sup>

- 7 Fulke Greville also used his *Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney* to highlight the rationale behind the writing of his tragedies. He argued that these works were “no plays for the stage” and insisted that “it was no part of my purpose to write for them against whom so many good and great spirits have already written.”<sup>16</sup> Greville goes on to point out that “he that will behold these acts upon their true stage, let him look on that stage whereon himself is an actor, even the state he lives in, and for every part he may perchance find a player, and for every line (it may be) an instance of life beyond the author’s intention or application”.<sup>17</sup> Greville here is careful to defend his works against potential charges of subversion and argues that he has no control over the potential application of the contents of his tragedies, a premise he exercises to its extreme in his decision to burn his tragedy on Antony and Cleopatra. He does so by making use of the *theatrum mundi*, a long-established tradition predicated upon the idea of the world as a stage.
- 8 Although it is most famously promulgated in the “seven ages of man” speech delivered by Jaques in *As You Like It* (II.vii.139-166), the *theatrum mundi* idea had become a familiar conceit and one that had been appropriated in a variety of contexts throughout the seventeenth century.<sup>18</sup> It had, for example, been a recurring motif in the religious writings of Jean Calvin; in his sermons on the book of Job, Calvin appropriated the *theatrum mundi* for moral and didactic purposes by arguing that “this world is as a Stage, whervpon God setteth vs forth many examples, which we must turne to our own behoues, that wee maye walke in his feare, absteyning from all euill, and doing good to oure neyghbours, by walking soundly, and vprightly among them in all respectes”.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, in his sermons on the epistle of St Paul to the Ephesians, Calvin describes the world as “an open stage wheron God will haue his maiestie seene” and that viewing the beauty of the world will “leade vs too him that gaue them the vertewes which wee perceyue in them”.<sup>20</sup> In these cases, Calvin uses the tradition of the *theatrum mundi* as a way of highlighting the glory of God, as well as a means of discerning earthly moral exemplars, both good and bad. The tradition was also appropriated for similar didactic purposes in the sermons of the Protestant preacher Rudolf Gwalther who cautioned against viewing “the Theatre or stage of thys worlde, after the maner of ydle gazers”, advising instead that one should “vie[w] and conside[r] all things in the worlde, as juste Judge.”<sup>21</sup> In each of these cases, the idea of the world as stage is predicated upon the assumption that the individuals being addressed all have the ability and the agency to withdraw from the earthly stage and abstract themselves into a position as disengaged spectators who are able to draw religious or moral instruction from the spectacles.
- 9 Such outlooks, however, appear in contrast to the ways in which the theatrical frames of reference are appropriated in early modern political discourse, particularly when it comes to the representation and promulgation of sovereign power. In a speech delivered to Parliament, for example, Elizabeth declared that “we princes [...] are set on stages in the sight and view of all the world duly observed. The eyes of many behold

our actions; a spot is soon spied in our garments, a blemish quickly noted in our doings. It behooveth us therefore to be careful that our proceedings be just and honorable.”<sup>22</sup> James VI and I drew on similar rhetoric in his *Basilicon Doron* by opening the third book by repeating “a trew old saying, That a King is as one set on a stage, whose smallest actions and gestures, all the people gazingly behold” and going on to advise his son, Prince Henry, to “frame all your indifferent actions and outward behaviour, as they may serve for the furtherance and forth-setting of your inward vertuous disposition.”<sup>23</sup> In both cases, the monarchs highlight that they are not only the objects of the public gaze, but also that they are vulnerable to it and their merest actions are subject to intense scrutiny. Whereas Elizabeth reveals this to be a spur to virtuous actions, one that “behooveth us [...] to be careful that our proceedings be just and honourable”, James argues that it necessitates the “framing” of a monarch’s actions; in other words, one must at least convey an impression of virtue. The *theatrum mundi* tradition is thus appropriated by both sovereigns as means of highlighting their situation in a political system in which their authority is “staged” and depends upon the ways in which it is *represented*. Holger Schott Syme has argued that Elizabeth’s anxieties about monarchs being “set on stages” relates to “an awareness of her existence as a *character*, constantly subject to representation as an essential part of the political process.”<sup>24</sup> Syme sees this as symptomatic of early modern England as a culture that “relied thoroughly on deferral, mediation, or representation as engines of authority”, premises that are emblematised by the rise of the commercial theatres whose aesthetic practices were reflective of such tendencies.<sup>25</sup>

- 10 This essay shows that such anxieties about the mediation and representation of political authority are registered in the three Antony and Cleopatra plays upon which I focus. These anxieties culminate in the plays’ representations of Cleopatra’s last-ditch efforts to assert her individual agency in her retreat into the monument in order to resist the public gaze as an emblem of Octavius’ victory over the protagonists. Ronald Knowles argues that in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, “nothing escapes representation since we are reminded of actors dressing up as characters” and that the climactic victory of Octavius is itself “a representation within a play full of representations”.<sup>26</sup> With these points in mind, I argue that Shakespeare’s play engages in numerous metatheatrical moments in order to highlight the dependency of the sovereigns upon the mediation and representation of their political authority; in this sense, I conclude, Shakespeare’s play appears in dialogue with the coterie dramas, rather than antagonistic towards them.
- 11 There are numerous occasions in which the central protagonists of Shakespeare’s play emerge, effectively, as blank canvases onto which various characters project their own impressions. Antony, for example, emerges for Cleopatra as a figure whose “legs bestrid the ocean” and for whom “Realms and islands were / As plates dropped from his pocket” (*Antony and Cleopatra*, V.ii.81-91); Octavius, meanwhile, emphasises Antony’s Roman rugged martial endurance and the way in which he ate “strange flesh, / Which some did die to look on” (I.iv.67-8) before falling into effeminate Egyptian lust and degenerating into the “abstract of all faults” (I.iv.9). Such a narrative is being constructed for Antony at the very beginning of the play when Philo observes “The triple pillar of the world transformed / Into a strumpet’s fool” (I.i.12-13). The use of the word “fool” is notable and potentially suggestive of Antony’s reduction to the status of a mere performer for the benefit of Cleopatra’s whims, a fixture of her court rather than a victorious conqueror. This implication is further suggested when Cleopatra

praises Antony’s “excellent falsehood” after declaring his intention to remain with her in Egypt (I.i.42). Cleopatra further imagines Antony’s identity as a performance when, anticipating his departure, she hectors him to “play one scene / Of excellent dissembling, and let it look / Like perfect honour” (I.iii.78-80). However, Philo also asserts that “sometimes when he is not Antony / He comes too short of that great property / Which still should go with Antony” (I.i.59-61), implying that even Antony’s Roman identity is itself a performance.

- 12 In these cases, Antony’s identity and the nature of the roles he is performing is determined by others. Cleopatra, however, is revealed to be more proactive in terms of defining the frames of reference by which she will be viewed. In her wooing of Antony, she instructs Alexas that, “If you find him sad, / Say that I am dancing; if in mirth, report / That I am sudden sick” (I.iii.3-5), thereby dictating the terms by which she will be represented. Her proactive approach to her self-fashioning is also suggested in her recollections of her seduction of Antony:

I laughed him out of patience, and that night  
I laughed him into patience, and next morn,  
Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed,  
Then put my tires and mantles on him whilst  
I wore his sword Philippan.

*Antony and Cleopatra*, II.v.19-23

Here, Cleopatra highlights herself as the active party with Antony as the passive figure onto whom an identity is projected. Jyotsna Singh comments upon “the range and virtuosity of Cleopatra’s performances” and highlights how this scene exemplifies the play’s “pervasive connection between her histrionics and the blurring of gender boundaries.”<sup>27</sup> Similarly Sidney’s Antony sees himself as being “in her allurements caught” (*The Tragedy of Antonie*, I.11<sup>28</sup>). Sidney’s Cleopatra is also subject to having her image constructed by other characters in the play. She is fashioned by them, somewhat unusually, in Petrarchan terms, and in a way that aligns her physically and ethnically with Europe: Eras comments that Cleopatra’s skin is of “fair alabaster” (II.185), whilst her secretary, Diomede, refers to the “coral colour” (II.478) of her lips, her “beamy eyes” which are like “two suns of this our world” (II.479) and, most surprisingly of all, her “fine and flaming gold” hair (II.480).<sup>29</sup> Such descriptions serve to remove any sense of exoticism from Sidney’s Cleopatra. Diomede’s speech also highlights Cleopatra’s skills in diplomacy and, in particular, her multilingual talents. He emphasises

her training speech,  
Her grace, her majesty, and forcing voice,  
Whether she it with fingers’ speech consort,  
Or hearing sceptred kings’ ambassadors  
Answer to each in his own language make.

*Antonie*, II.484-488

The references to Cleopatra’s use of non-verbal gestures in order to communicate is particularly significant, especially as Abraham Fraunce, a member of the Sidney circle, had devoted a section of his *Arcadian Rhetorike* to a discussion of effective ways of using one’s arms, hands, and fingers for rhetorical effect.<sup>30</sup> Diomede’s speech is therefore notable for placing the emphasis squarely upon her rhetorical skill, her ability to perform in diplomatic manoeuvring, rather than her sexuality.

- 13 In her study of Renaissance anti-theatricality, *Men in Women’s Clothing*, Laura Levine highlights the complex engagement of Shakespeare’s play in the discourses of anti-theatricality. She compares Antony to the stock figure of the effeminated and

degenerate warrior which was commonplace in anti-theatrical literature. Some anti-theatrical tracts also highlighted the theatre as one of the symptoms of the decadence leading to the downfall of the Roman Empire. In *The Schoole of Abuse*, for example, Stephen Gosson cites the example of the emperor Caligula, who “made so much of Players and Dauncers, that hee suffered them openly to kysse his lippes, when the Senators might scarce haue a lick at his feete: He gaue Dauncers great stipends for selling their hopps: and placed *Apelles* the player by his own sweete side”. He also asserts that Boudica berated her Roman antagonists, emphasising their effeminacy and condemning them as men who were “daintely feasted, bathed in warme waters, rubbed with sweet oyntments, strewd with fine poulders, wine swillers, singers, Dauncers, and Players.”<sup>31</sup> According to Levine, Shakespeare’s Octavius embodies many of the internal contradictions of Roman critiques of theatricality – his attacks upon Antony’s excesses contain within them “a secret glorification of appetite” and “an intense longing for theatricality”.<sup>32</sup> Sidney’s Octavius criticises Antony for passing his time in “loves and plays” (*Antonie*, IV.40), whilst Shakespeare’s Octavius asserts that Antony “wastes / The lamps of night in revel” (*Antony and Cleopatra*, I.iv.4-5) and later condemns Antony and Cleopatra for making a public show of their pomp in the marketplace where “in chairs of gold” they “Were publicly enthroned” (III.vi.4-5). However, in both plays, Octavius will come to rely upon theatrical-style spectacles in order to sustain and promulgate his power. This is represented most notably by his desire to lead the captive Cleopatra in triumph through the streets of Rome. Sidney’s Octavius declares that “by her presence, beautified may be / The glorious triumph Rome prepares for me” (*Antonie*, IV. 366-367). Similarly, Shakespeare’s Octavius sees the public display of Cleopatra as integral to his triumph when he asserts that “her life in Rome / Would be eternal in my triumph” (*Antony and Cleopatra*, V.i.65-66), a fate that Cleopatra perceives as being reduced to “an Egyptian puppet” to be displayed before “Mechanic slaves” (V.ii. 204-205).

- 14 In spite of what Eliot regarded as his appropriation of Senecan tragedy that served as part of an “attack upon the public stage” and its attendant “Gross Barbarism”,<sup>33</sup> Samuel Daniel also makes use of the *theatrum mundi* tradition and employs metatheatrical language as a means of representing the downfall of the protagonist in his *Cleopatra*. Picking up where Mary Sidney’s play concludes, Daniel’s Cleopatra, having retreated to the monument, is left to reflect upon the loss of her political power and to compare her current situation with her nostalgic reminiscences upon a time when “nought was but applause, but smiles, and grace” (*Cleopatra*, I.12<sup>34</sup>). It is significant that, at this point, Cleopatra imagines herself as a “staged” sovereign and the subject of the gaze of a theatrical audience, with applause as a traditional signifier of approval. It is therefore implied that the public recognition of her sovereign power was promulgated in theatrical terms. In this scene, Cleopatra also points towards the idea that sovereign power itself depends upon acts of performance. When reflecting upon taking a course of action in which she would seem to appease the demands of Octavius in order to secure the safety of her children, she reflects that “Calamitie herein hath made me craftie” (I.90), thus stressing the need to engage in role-playing or dissembling in order to achieve one’s political or diplomatic goals.
- 15 In this sense, Daniel’s Cleopatra contrasts with Sidney’s, who is inflexible in her devotion to Antonie, through her pragmatism and her recognition of the practices required in effective political manoeuvring. However, the most explicit connection

between theatricality and Cleopatra's sovereignty comes in the speech delivered by the chorus of Egyptians who conclude the play's first act. Here they reflect upon the causes and consequences of Cleopatra's compromised image as sovereign:

The scene is broken downe,  
 And all uncov' red lyes,  
 The purple actors knowne  
 Scarce men, whom men despise...  
 Thus much beguiled have  
 Poore unconsiderate wights,  
 These momentarie pleasures, fugitive delights.  
*Cleopatra*, I.Chorus.245-256

Here, the Chorus imply that the upholding of the sovereign's authority depends upon keeping their subjects enraptured, or "beguiled", in what is effectively an elaborate example of theatrical illusion. By compromising her political integrity, Cleopatra's actions have resulted in a situation in which such trickery is laid bare. As a result, this "scene is broken downe", meaning that the aura surrounding the "purple actors", or the sovereign and their court, has now been replaced by the recognition that they are in fact "Scarce men, whom men despise". In this way, Cleopatra's actions have, according to the chorus, caused a catastrophic bifurcation of the queen's two bodies by allowing the image of her "body politic" to be deflected by that of her "body natural" in a process that compromises her regal dignity.<sup>35</sup> In spite of failing in her own efforts at political theatricality, Cleopatra nevertheless refuses to appease Octavius and to reduce herself to the status of a "Trophy" (III.739) in order to signify his triumph. Whilst Cleopatra conveys a clear sense of awareness that she has been unable to perform successfully in emulating an exemplary image of sovereignty, she nevertheless expresses her unwillingness to perform as a public spectacle as a means of amplifying Octavius' aura of sovereignty.

- 16 The retreat of Cleopatra and her women into the monument has often been viewed as an act of resistance to theatricality and a repudiation of the public gaze. However, Adelman argues that Cleopatra's actions in the final act of Shakespeare's play serve to rob "Caesar of his 'triumph', his attempt to arrange how events will be remembered; in effect, she displaces his play with her own."<sup>36</sup> Whilst Cleopatra may imagine that she will be represented in the future by a "squeaking boy" in the midst of a burlesque representation of her and Antony's "Alexandrian revels", a process in which she loses all agency over her self-representation, her retreat to the tomb enables her to reconfigure the construction of her image. In this space, she is able to attire herself in her robe, crown, and jewels and to die as a free queen rather than an imperial trophy to commemorate Octavius' triumph. She is also able to repudiate the imperatives requiring the skills in diplomatic performance that were highlighted in relation to Sidney's Cleopatra – here, she can freely chide the serpent into calling "great Caesar ass / Unpolicied" (*Antony and Cleopatra*, V.ii.302-303). Whereas Shakespeare's Cleopatra strives to retain her status as a queen, an endeavour that still requires her to rely upon her regal apparel and physical appearance, the fate of Sidney's Cleopatra is consistent with the image she has been attempting to project throughout the play of herself as a loyal and constant wife to Antony. The attempts of her various advisors to persuade her to continue living in order to perform her domestic and political duties are negated by Cleopatra who asserts that her loyalty to Antony overcomes all other imperatives. Her suicide, she implies, would be a fulfilment of her domestic duties to Antony rather than a betrayal of her children. When Charmion reproaches her as a "Hardhearted mother",

she responds by insisting that she is a “Wife, kindhearted” (*Antonie*, II.320). Similarly, when Charmion attempts to encourage her to “Live for your sons”, she replies “Nay, for their father die” (II.319). In this instance Cleopatra subverts Charmion’s emphases upon domesticity and asserts that she will be fulfilling her domestic duties to Antony through her suicide.

- 17 Unlike Shakespeare’s character, Sidney’s Cleopatra repudiates her role as a queen and instead uses the private space of the tomb in order to redefine herself as a widow and affirm her loyalty to Antony. Alison Findlay and Karen Raber have both argued that this aspect of Sidney’s play relates closely to the networks of domestic politics that its author was negotiating.<sup>37</sup> Towards the end of Sidney’s play, Cleopatra instructs her waiting women to join her in mourning for Antony:

Weep my companions, weep, and from your eyes  
Rain down on him of tears a brinish stream.  
Mine can no more, consumed by the coals  
Which from my breast, as from a furnace, rise.  
Martyr your breasts with multiplied blows,  
With violent hands tear off your hanging hair,  
Outrage your face. Alas, why should we seek  
(Since now we die) our beauties more to keep?

*Antonie*, V.191-198

Cleopatra here instructs her fellow mourners to repudiate any outward signs of feminine beauty and to adopt the identifying features of a mourner. Katherine O. Acheson sees in these lines an evasion of the gaze, and an affirmation of Cleopatra’s “modesty and faithfulness”, and a rare revelation of the “fullness of her body”.<sup>38</sup> She achieves this, however, in a curiously Roman manner with references to the “martyred” breasts and “hanging hair” which were associated strongly with Roman widows. Her reference to being consumed by coals is also a possible allusion to the suicide of Portia, who killed herself by swallowing hot coals. In a sense, this is in line with the decidedly European and Petrarchan realisation of Cleopatra conveyed by Diomedea earlier in the play. At the same time, however, Cleopatra re-appropriates this kind of rhetoric when she likens Antony’s eyes to “two suns” (V.149), thus applying the conventional Petrarchan trope to him and further negating the constraints associated with inflexible gender roles. Rather than evading the gaze, Cleopatra, in fact, retreats into the tomb in order to reconfigure the frames of reference that will dictate her posthumous reputation.

- 18 Although each of the plays places different emphases upon the retreat to the monument, the dramatists still represent it as a space in which Cleopatra can liberate herself from the constraints and contradictions inherent in the use of theatricality as a force that both sustains and undermines the myths associated with political power. As I pointed out earlier, Shakespeare’s play is one that relies upon the testimonies of various characters in order to convey various details – these include the sea battle that takes place off-stage and the triumphant entry of Cleopatra’s barge into Rome. In this way, it shares common dramaturgical ground with Mary Sidney’s play in which all the narrative details have to be related by various characters. At the same time, however, Shakespeare’s play also satirises these narrative methods through Antony’s description of the crocodile, which he says is “shaped... like itself, and it is as broad as it hath breadth. It is just so high as it is, and moves with its own organs. It lives by that which nourisheth it, and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates” (*Antony and Cleopatra*, II.vii.40-44). Antony’s sardonic speech highlights the flaws in the reliance on this

culture of representation and also implies his reluctance to engage in it for the benefits of his fellow Romans. Unlike Enobarbus, Antony seems to regard Egypt as beyond representation, at least within their Roman frame of reference.

- 19 In spite of emerging from different dramatic traditions, I have argued that there are clear intertextual links between the Antony and Cleopatra plays by Mary Sidney, Samuel Daniel, and William Shakespeare. Although Shakespearean drama had, for much of the twentieth century, been regarded as antithetical to endeavours of coterie dramatists like Sidney and Daniel, the plays all highlight the effects upon Cleopatra of the politicisation of the *theatrum mundi* tradition and the efforts to harness theatrical frames of reference as means of representing sovereign power. Each of these plays therefore engages in a tradition which features the portrayal of the monument as a space where Cleopatra is able to reassert her agency over how she is represented in a way that is untrammelled by the influence of Rome or the constricting values upheld by Octavius.

## NOTES

1. All references to Shakespeare's plays are from William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, eds. John Jowett, William Montgomery, Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005.
2. A useful overview of the various Antony and Cleopatra plays in the Renaissance period is available in Marilyn L. Williamson, *Infinite Variety: Antony and Cleopatra in Renaissance Drama and Earlier Tradition*, Mystic, Lawrence Verry, 1974.
3. Janet Adelman, *The Common Liar: An Essay on 'Antony and Cleopatra'*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1973, p. 30.
4. For comment on the potential political implications behind Mary Sidney's translation of Garnier, see Victor Skretkowicz, "Mary Sidney Herbert's *Antonius*, English Philhellenism and the Protestant Cause", *Women's Writing*, 6.1 (1999), 7-25; Richard Hillman, "De-Centring the Countess's Circle: Mary Sidney Herbert and Cleopatra", *Renaissance and Reformation*, 28.1 (2004), 61-79; Anne Lake Prescott, "Mary Sidney's *Antonius* and the Ambiguities of French History", *Yearbook of English Studies* 38.1 & 2 (2009), 216-233; and Paulina Kewes, "'A Fit Memorial for the Times to Come...': Admonition and Topical Application in Mary Sidney's *Antonius* and Samuel Daniel's *Cleopatra*", *The Review of English Studies* 63.259 (2012), 243-264.
5. Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1973 (reprinted 1984), p. 133-134.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
7. Nancy Cotton, "Women Playwrights in England: Renaissance noblewomen", in S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (eds), *Readings in Renaissance Women's Drama: Criticism, History and Performance 1594-1998*, London, Routledge, 1998, p. 32-46 (p. 34).
8. F. L. Lucas, *Seneca and Elizabethan Tragedy*, New York, Haskell House, 1966, p. 110.
9. Samuel Daniel, "To the Right Honourable, the Lady Mary, Countess of Pembroke" in Cerasano and Wynne-Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
10. *Ibid.*

11. T. S. Eliot, *Elizabethan Dramatists*, London, Faber, 1963, p. 43.
12. Gordon Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition: Anger's Privilege*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985, p. 171. A similar line had been taken by Alexander Maclaren Witherspoon in *The Influence of Robert Garnier on Elizabethan Drama*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1924.
13. Mary Ellen Lamb, "The Myth of the Countess of Pembroke: The Dramatic Circle", *The Yearbook of English Studies* 11 (1981), 194-202 (p. 196). More recent studies aiming to re-evaluate the influence of coterie drama include Marta Straznicky, "'Profane Stoical Paradoxes': *The Tragedy of Mariam* and Sidneian Closet Drama", *English Literary Renaissance* 24 (1994), 104-134 and Karen Raber, *Dramatic Difference: Gender, Class, and Genre in the Early Modern Closet Drama*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 2001.
14. Fulke Greville, *A Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney*, in John Gouws ed., *The Prose Works of Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986, p. 3-136 (p. 93).
15. Lukas Erne, *Beyond "The Spanish Tragedy": A Study of the Works of Thomas Kyd*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2001, p. 212.
16. Greville, *op. cit.*, p. 134-135.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
18. The origins and resonances of the *theatrum mundi* trope are explored in Jean Jacquot, "Le théâtre du monde de Shakespeare à Calderon", *Revue de Littérature comparée* 31 (1957), 341-372.
19. Jean Calvin, *Sermons of Master John Calvin upon the Booke of Job*, translated by Arthur Golding, London, Lucas Harison and George Byshop, 1574, p. 76.
20. Jean Calvin, *The sermons of M. Iohn Caluin, vpon the Epistle of S. Paule too the Ephesians*, translated by Arthur Golding, London, Lucas Harison and George Byshop, 1577, p. 87.
21. Rudolf Gwalther, *An hundred, threescore and fiftene homelyes or sermons, vppon the Actes of the Apostles, written by Saint Luke*, London, Henrie Denham, 1572, p. 300.
22. Elizabeth I in *Queen Elizabeth I: Selected Works*, Steven W. May, ed., New York, Washington Square Press, 2004, p. 65.
23. James VI and I, *Basilicon Doron in King James VI and I: Selected Writings*, Neil Rhodes, Jennifer Richards, and Joseph Marshall eds., Aldershot, Ashgate, 2003, p. 199-258 (p. 246-247).
24. Holger Schott Syme, *Theatre and Testimony in Shakespeare's England: A Culture of Mediation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 4.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
26. Ronald Knowles, *Shakespeare's Arguments with History*, Houndmills, Palgrave, 2002, p. 123.
27. Jyotsna Singh, 'Renaissance Anti-theatricality, Anti-feminism, and Shakespeare's 'Antony and Cleopatra' in John Drakakis, ed., *Antony and Cleopatra: Contemporary Critical Essays*, Houndmills, Macmillan, 1994, p. 308-329 (p. 308).
28. All references to Mary Sidney's *The Tragedy of Antonie* are from the edition that appears in *Renaissance Drama by Women: Texts and Documents*, S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies eds., London, Routledge, 1996, p. 13-42.
29. Joyce Green MacDonald argues that Mary Sidney presents us with a Cleopatra who is "sensual, energetic", but also, "and emphatically, white-skinned"; see *Women and Race in Early Modern Texts*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 37. On the questions of race provoked by the various Antony and Cleopatra plays of the early modern period, see Pascale Aebischer, "The Properties of Whiteness: Renaissance Cleopatras from Jodelle to Shakespeare", *Shakespeare Survey* 65, 2011, 221-238.
30. See Abraham Fraunce, *The Arcadian Rhetorike: or The Praecepts of Rhetorike Made Plaine by Examples* London, Thomas Orwin, 1588, K2<sup>r</sup>-K4<sup>r</sup>.
31. Stephen Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse*, London, Thomas Woodcocke, 1579, 15<sup>r-v</sup>.
32. Laura Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-theatricality and Effeminization, 1579-1642*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 64.

33. Eliot, *op. cit.* p. 41.

34. All references to Samuel Daniel's *Cleopatra* are from *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, Volume Five: The Roman Plays*, ed. Geoffrey Bullough, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966, p. 406-449. Daniel's play was subject to extensive revision following its first publication in 1594 until around 1607. Bullough's edition is based upon the early publications of the play; for an edition based primarily upon the revised version of 1607, see Dayton Dennett, *Samuel Daniel's 'Tragedy of Cleopatra': A Critical Edition*, doctoral thesis, Cornell University 1951. The textual history of the play is considered in Dennett's introduction; see also Ernest Schanzer, 'Daniel's Revision of his *Cleopatra*', *Review of English Studies*, 8.32, 1957, 375-381.

35. The concept of the sovereign's two bodies is explored in the landmark study by Ernst Kantorowicz; see *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.

36. Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, 'Hamlet' to 'The Tempest'*, New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 183.

37. See Raber, *op. cit.*, p. 52-110 and Alison Findlay, *Playing Spaces in Early Women's Drama*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 22-30.

38. Katherine O. Acheson, "'Outrage your face': Anti-theatricality and Gender in Early Modern Closet Drama by Women", *Early Modern Literary Studies* 6.3 (2001), <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/06-3/acheoutr.htm> [accessed 9 April 2015] (para 4 of 16).

## ABSTRACTS

Critical discussions of *Cleopatra's* resonance in Renaissance drama have long been dominated by Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, a trend that has often marginalised Mary Sidney's play, *The Tragedy of Antonie*, as well as its source, Robert Garnier's *Marc Antoine*, and its sequel, Samuel Daniel's *Cleopatra*. It has been a commonplace to regard Shakespeare's play, with its expansive time-frame and its representation of events like the Battle of Actium, as antithetical to the neo-classicism that characterises these other works. However, this essay argues that these plays should be considered as part of a shared tradition that emphasises *Cleopatra's* retreat into the private space of her tomb and her resistance to becoming a theatrical spectacle. I explore the ways in which each of these plays responds to the uses of the *theatrum mundi* as a means of constructing and mediating an image of sovereign authority and conclude that *Cleopatra* eventually comes to repudiate such processes by using the private space of the tomb as a means of reconfiguring and reasserting the ways in which her political image will be submitted for posterity.

C'est le plus souvent à *Antoine et Cléopâtre* de Shakespeare que les critiques font référence dans leurs analyses des représentations scéniques de Cléopâtre à la Renaissance ; par conséquent, *The Tragedie of Antonie*, pièce de Mary Sidney, est marginalisée, tout comme son texte source, le *Marc Antoine* de Robert Garnier, et la suite écrite par Samuel Daniel, *Cleopatra*. On considère habituellement la pièce de Shakespeare, en vertu de son cadre temporel large et de sa représentation d'événements tels que la Bataille d'Actium, comme l'antithèse du théâtre néo-classique qui s'incarnerait dans les trois autres œuvres. Ces dernières, ainsi que cet article essaiera de le démontrer, appartiennent toutefois à la même tradition que la pièce de Shakespeare, marquée par une insistance sur l'isolement de Cléopâtre dans son monument

funéraire et son refus de devenir un spectacle de théâtre. L'exploration du motif du *theatrum mundi* en tant que moyen de construire et de diffuser une image d'autorité souveraine permettra d'avancer la conclusion que, dans chacune des quatre pièces envisagées, Cléopâtre finit par rejeter de tels procédés pour se tourner vers l'espace privé du tombeau, d'où elle réaffirme son contrôle sur la transmission de son image politique à la postérité.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** Antoine et Cléopâtre, Daniel Samuel, Sidney Mary, métathéâtre, *theatrum mundi*

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