FACT FROM FICTION: THE EVOLUTION OF THE CLEOPATRA LEGEND

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

"Fact" from Fiction: The Evolution of the Cleopatra Legend

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Literature Review

There have been many attempts to reconstruct Cleopatra over the past two millennia, in the form of cultural depictions and histories, each of these adding a little more nuance to her mythology. The earliest depictions as a villainess hell bent on the destruction of the Roman Empire have received varied treatments over the years, but the general trend has been to depict Cleopatra more favorably. However, Cleopatra presents apologists of her legend with a significant problem in the sources for her lifetime. The earliest relatively complete accounts of Cleopatra's lifetime come from biased Roman accounts. Adaptors then wanting to depict Cleopatra in a positive light must contend with the Roman bias in separating the fact from the fiction. However, the most iconic episodes of the Cleopatra Legend come from these very sources, suggesting that adaptors are not quite willing to part wholly with the Roman accounts. While there has been a general shift towards depicting Cleopatra more positively over the years, this is done while preserving much of the source material in cultural memory in how her legend is told. This desire to express Cleopatra differently, yet keep the terms through which she is portrayed, her iconic myths and episodes, the same is a peculiar case.

From the surviving contemporary and near contemporary accounts of Cleopatra, most maintain a severe bias against her character. This is, in part, due to the fact that these accounts rely heavily on compiling the products of a propaganda war Augustus Caesar issued on Cleopatra as their sources. As a result, adaptors of the Cleopatra Legend are tasked with dealing with the Roman narrative of Cleopatra's character, as there is little else material which meaningfully contributes to a full account of her lifetime. But why is it that if the earliest available accounts are known to be biased, fictitious, and embellished, that adaptors still seem to be burdened with maintaining the same narratives as closely as they do?

In recent scholarship, histories have been constructed which describe the myths that have persisted throughout the entire Legend of Cleopatra and the various other myths that have generated over time within the legend. The works of Sally-Ann Ashton has been of particular importance in terms of creating a spectrum of the various Cleopatra's that exist in many different cultural traditions. The research for this paper has been greatly supported by Ashton's book, *Cleopatra and Egypt*, which offers a somewhat comprehensive survey of the topics of discourse surrounding the Cleopatra mythology, and from which I derive the general themes discussed in the analysis of my thesis. While a great number of Cleopatra adaptations are used in the analysis of this project (including books, rhetoric, plays, film, and video games), the thesis focuses on the adaptations by Chaucer, Shakespeare, Mankiewicz, and their contemporaries, in order to better understand how Cleopatra Legend is handled differently in each culture.

Thesis Statement

By observing the evolution of Cleopatra VII's portrayals in literature, plays, art, and film, I chart the processes by which myths adapt and translate over time, across media and genres, and through cultural boundaries. This is accomplished through close readings of the works of

Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Mankiewicz, as well as their contemporaries. This study aims to answer why apologists of Cleopatra's character still use Roman accounts as sources for reconstructions of the Cleopatra legend, despite the typical Roman bias against Cleopatra within these accounts. In answering this question, we observe the reasons Cleopatra's narrative has remained relatively unchanged in cultural depictions for the better part of two millennia.

Theoretical Framework

This research is done by applying deriving from Jacques Derrida's theory of translation and theory of transadaptation and then expanding it to include second order signs through Roland Barthes' analysis of myth, and then applying it to a series of close readings of culturally significant transadaptations of the Cleopatra Legend.

Project Description

This project offers a case study on the progression of the Cleopatra Legend from the time of biased Augustan political works to modern day film. While the works of many different genres, media, time periods and regions are taken into consideration, the thesis is organized by the analysis of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Mankiewicz. The focus of this analysis answers why adaptors often chose not to depict Cleopatra as the early Romans did, while still maintaining the same narratives created in early Roman works. I believe the key to understanding this relationship involves the analysis of how mythologies are built and how they become cultural fact within society, which adaptations subsequently appeal to. This study explores through a derivation of Derrida's theory of translation and an expansion on Barthes' theory of myths, how the general shift toward more positive depictions of Cleopatra over time, combined with the continued use of biased Roman sources, is explained through Derrida's economic laws of property and quantity combined with a linguistic law of convenience.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

My first exposure to Cleopatra's treatment in literature came as an indictment of her character in Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*. The indictment comes from Thomasina, a thirteen-year-old intellectual prodigy living in England in 1809, who displays her own agency and wit as comparable to a queen. Cleopatra stands accused of everything being "turned to love with her… I never knew a heroine that makes such noodles of our sex. It only needs a Roman general to drop anchor outside the window and away goes the empire…" However, what should an audience of the 1993 play feel? Is Cleopatra an easy target or is the comparison effective in elevating Thomasina over Cleopatra?

Thomasina seems to become lost in the comparison when Thomasina adds, "If Queen Elizabeth had been a Ptolemy history would have been quite different -we would be admiring the pyramids of Rome and the great Sphinx of Verona". Either Stoppard believes Cleopatra to be a bad heroine or he laments the reduction of a powerful queen to the caricature of feminine wiles in tragic romances. In a sense, both critiques ring true depending on which Cleopatra we are talking about: the Cleopatra of the western canon or the "true" Cleopatra that apologists reconstruct. "Bad heroine" hardly compares to what the queen of Egypt has been subject to over the course of her legacy, as many others regard her as the vile temptress from Roman literature that brought forth the downfall of Mark Antony and Julius Caesar.

On the other hand, there have been many apologists of Cleopatra's character who believe Roman sympathizers to have given Cleopatra unfair treatment, and have subsequently aimed to amend her literary canon. The growing trend to depict Cleopatra favorably is most evident in recent scholarship and adaptations of the Cleopatra legend. However, from Augustan

propaganda to Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women* to featuring in Ubisoft Montreal's *Assassin's Creed Origins,* Cleopatra's is never depicted quite the same way and it seems that adaptors are still trying to get the recipe right.

This project examines the broad strokes of Cleopatra's adaptation history. By observing the evolution of Cleopatra VII's portrayals in literature, plays, art, and film, I hope to chart the processes by which myths adapt and translate over time, across media and genres, and through cultural boundaries. This study explores why apologists of Cleopatra's character still use biased Roman accounts as sources for reconstructions of the Cleopatra legend, as well as questions of fidelity criticism and methods of breaking works into first, second and third order sign systems that can then be studied in how they adapt and translate. In answering these question, we observe the reasons Cleopatra's narrative has remained relatively unchanged in cultural depictions for the better part of two millennia.

CHAPTER I

MYTH AND TRANSADAPTATION

Myth

In his *Myths Today*, Roland Barthes argues that myths exist in relationships of signifier and signified, making use of Ferdinand de Saussure's semiological system (124). At the structural level, a myth is the existence of a positive relationship between a signifier, the form of the myth, and its signified, the myth's meaning. Just as words have values that people use to communicate different ideas, the exact same can be said for myths. However, myths can be even more convenient, as many complex relationships can be communicated in few words or an image. Alternatively, a myth could be constructed by a complex formula of signs to convey a single message. Barthes describes myth relationship with signs as that of a "*metalanguage*," as myths are communicated in a language of a second order, a language about language (124). Then, the "form" of the myth, its signifier, is the combination of signs of the first order (126).

While the signification of both first order and second order signs are arbitrary and dictated largely by convention, myths do not begin that way. A story told through first order signs becomes surmised by just a portion of the signs that originally constructed it. This is true for any symbol, as the values and history associated with the American flag are felt differently than that of the confederate flag. As first order signs, their stripes represent what they are, but as second order signs these flags represent values, histories, and stories. However, to become myth, the relationship between signified and signifier need to be naturalized in cultural memory.

These messily bundled histories are often processed without the receiver even realizing it; Barthes notes that myths "transform history into nature" (141). Myths are symbols that distill

meaning into form, though not natural to begin with (142). Their histories are told so that the relationship between the meaning of the myth and the first order signs denoting it feel completely natural, the histories supplying their analogies to the form (137). The end stage of a myth is the existence as a cultural idiom within a culture, completely naturalized and an expression of or commentary on reality rather than used by language users to express themselves. The earlier example with the flags would not serve here as their meanings are too frequently debated and there are a number of perspectives, making it hard to call their meaning "naturalized." The construction of myth is aided by more controlled and unified use, allowing the signification between the myth's meaning and its symbol to be uninterrupted. Additionally, Barthes points out that "poor, incomplete images" such as caricatures, pastiches, and symbols serve the functions of myth better than fully fleshed out (137). The result is that myths serve to convey histories wrapped within a single signifier.

However, as is the case with any idiom, myths rarely make sense without a little digging into their past. The generation of myths likely has an instigator that casts the relationship between initial form and concept, but this reason, which could then serve as context and an inhibitor to the evolution of the myth, is lost as the myth is reproduced and reproduced again in cultural memory. Once the myth is adopted by a culture, the initial instigator of the myth no longer restricts the relationship; the signification becomes as arbitrary and subject to cultural convention, the use of the myth determining its form and meaning.

The mutability of myths needs to be considered to understand how and against what pressures they evolve. The greatest obstacle to changing the function of a myth is its apparent naturalization. The "*second-order semiological system*" through which myth is communicated, metalanguage, functions differently from a language of the first order, "language-object" (123-

4). For example, the lexical units "cowboy hat" denote a meaning in English of a certain type of hat. What is then connected to these lexical units are the myths surrounding them, e.g., the type of person, occupation, or history one might associate with a cowboy hat, based on their exposure both to its history and to the use of the myth. Furthermore, the sight of a person wearing a cowboy hat would cause an observer to connect the mythology of the hat with the wearer, consciously or otherwise. It can then serve as convenience for storytelling to get ideas across with a single image or word through metalanguage. However, simply functioning as a second-order sign is not enough to earn the title of "myth," as myth implies that the signification between sign and signified is regarded as "truth." To add further distinction to Barthes' theory, I would classify second-order signs as *symbols*, recurring symbols as *tropes*, and *myth* as tropes that signify cultural fact. The difference between the latter two types of second-order signs is in how they relate to cultural memory.

The meanings of myths can change with their use, just as with words, especially when frequently employed in storytelling (although, if too much variation is accepted into cultural memory, it may destroy the naturalization of the myth's signification). This is partly why Cleopatra is the focus of this study, as she has countless cultural depictions and reconstructions throughout history. There is something about her character that keeps artists coming back, whether only to change a minute detail about her legacy or to completely flip it on its head. The volume of works on Cleopatra across time, cultural boundaries, and genres make her the perfect subject for a case study on how and why myths change, and will hopefully shed some light on the usefulness of, and pitfalls of, relying on myths in telling a story.

Adaptation and Translation

In his "What is a "Relevant" Translation," Jacques Derrida discusses what makes a good translation of a text, from one language to another (177). In consideration of only first-order signs, Derrida offers that the purpose of translation is to preserve the literal meaning of a text at the sacrifice of its original lexical form (186). He describes this relationship as transactions through the economic laws of "property" and "quantity" (178). The law of property concerns translating the meaning of the text, designating translation as an "an attempt at appropriation that aims to transport home… the most proper meaning of the original text" (179). The law of quantity, however, regards only a calculable quantity, which Derrida notes does not amount to the general, prosidic, or aesthetic construction of language, but the measurement of lexical units called words (179). However, he only applies his theory to first-order signs and only accounts for when the meaning of a sign is preserved rather than the form. In order to grow this theory, this paper considers the possibly of adaptation functioning as the inverse of Derrida's theory of translation. If translation is an aim to preserve the meaning of a text traveling from one linguistic system to another, adaptation then serves as the preservation of the form of a text at the possible sacrifice of its meaning in the transaction.

However, a few revisions to Derrida's theory are required to make this combined theory of transadaptation work. Not only are texts translated into other languages, but words travel between languages unchanged in aesthetic form to better serve a function in the subsequent language that had either not been filled or needed further distinction between concepts; a transaction between languages that Derrida calls "quasi-translation". However, these quasi-translations are underdeveloped in Derrida's theory, as quantifying lexical forms in this way would require the inclusion of the "general," "prosidic," and "aesthetic" construction of language

in the economic law of quantity (180). However, Derrida rejects these fields from his theory of translation as he primarily concerns himself with the preservation of meaning between linguistic systems, and cared little as to how the form may travel with it (180). However, these quasi-translated words can only be explored by looking to their form aesthetically. Therefore, in establishing the inverse of his theory of translation as the preservation of the *general*, *prosidic* and *aesthetic* form between languages, I establish the economy for "quasi-translated" words, and dub them instead *adapted* words. The reason for quantifying the aesthetic form can be seen in the many Latin borrowings English has, the signifieds of which changing associatively as they adapt to their new linguistic system. Furthermore, I suggest that if these theories of translation and adaptation can be applied to first-order signs to adequately describe the transactions between linguistic systems, they can also be applied to second-order signs.

An adaptation occurs when the form of something is preserved, but its original functions is allowed or forced to change. The signifier of myth, its structure and aesthetic, serving as combination of both signifier and signifieds of first order signs, is preserved, while its signified of the second order changes in its new environment. This can happen through changing the language the myth is told in, the sign system, while keeping the way it is told the same. Words may travel from one language to another without changing its lexical value, but the value of the word alters associatively as it finds its place in the new language. Similarly, a myth traveling from one culture to another may discard and accrue meaning as it finds its place. Take the myth of Cleopatra's death for example. Snakes may already have myths associated with them in a culture before the story of Cleopatra's death by an asp bite travels to that culture. Therefore, if the myth was told the exact same way, the meaning would undergo an associative change as it competes with the preexisting myths about snakes in this culture. The function of the myth is no

longer the same as it was in its parent culture, even though the form stays the same. The transitive process that results from adaptation may have larger, associative implications on the values of signs within the system, but the adaptation occurs at the level of the single sign that is transacted. Still, the study of translation and adaptation could be said to be both diachronic and synchronic, as one answers *what* changed and the other answers *why*.

Translation, as the inverse of adaptation, occurs if the meaning of the myth is the object preservation, saving the function of the myth while sacrificing its form. This, again, is a derivation of Derrida's theory of translation, which applies Derrida's theory of economic laws of translating first order signs to the translating of second order signs. A first order translated word, phrase, or sentence keeps its meaning intact from the original language and takes on a new form in the subsequent language. Translation, as it applies to myth, may be seen in if avoiding the connotations associated with snakes in a culture is worth it, an artist may translate the myth of Cleopatra's death to her dying by some other means, such as poison or dagger. The original meaning may remain intact, although the symbol of her death has changed in the process.

Neither of these methods is necessarily superior, they are merely different processes by which variance of expression is introduced to language. Artists make choices about which works that they prefer or that they believe an audience might appreciate, but which works will survive their cultural environment is never so obvious. Cleopatra has been given thousands of renditions, but which can be called the definitive version of her character and lifetime? There might be certain renditions that last in certain periods and regions longer than others, but as long as cultural values shift, the version of Cleopatra that stays on top will change as well. But how can we gauge an adapted work's success? And how can we learn to make better informed decisions when adapting works? Derrida offers a jumping off point in considering an answer.

Derrida posits, regarding first order signs when being translated from one language to another, that the success of translation lies in how well the original meaning of the text survives "during a process of conversion" (199). He suggests that translations aim to fulfill economic laws of property and quantity; that the meaning of the original word is preserved, while the word itself is replaced, hopefully on a one-to-one ratio, by one from the subsequent language (179). These same economic principles can be applied to second order sign systems and applying them inversely allows a useful working definition for adaptation.

A second order sign exists when a first order sign acts as the signifier for another signified. Translation of first and second order signs work principally the same way; the signifier is transacted with while the signified remains. If translation is as simple as the preservation of meaning at the potential loss of the form, I see no reason why adaptation should not fill the chasm by being designated as the preservation of the form at the potential loss of its meaning. Derrida notes, however, that the full retention of a word's meaning is not practically to be expected, but when the original meaning is lost, it is better for it to take on new or elevated meaning rather than it be reduced. I would say the same applies for adaptations in this theory, but it should also be noted that the success is ultimately determined in a survival of this fittest nature, successful adapted and translated works becoming canonized in cultural memory. The true test of whether a translated or adapted sign survives is its convenience to the users using it, but more on that later.

Transadaptation

Colloquially, and even as a standard practice in adaptation studies, adapted works are generally referred to by the same term used to describe their processes, adaptations (Frus 3, Hutcheon 6). If a work is to be considered as a whole, therefore assigning it a unified meaning in

its collection of first and second order signs, then it may be justifiable to refer to it simply as an adaptation, or translation, as the value of the whole changes if only a single part changes. However, it may also be said that works exist in self-contained linguistic systems called media, by which we can communicate through both first and second order signs based on that medium's specific rules of convention. The value of a language changes associatively with the adaptation of a single word, but one would not say English is an adaptation when the value of its words change associatively due to a single borrowed word. It is not the system that adapts or translates, but the individual element of that system, which then alters the system associatively. However, systems can also have unified meanings that sometimes come to be associated with a single concept, just as how a book or play (linguistic systems in themselves) may come to be associated with a specific theme. Yet, the distinction must be made each time between a work functioning as the linguistic system or as the signifier.

Of course, languages rarely change at the rate of one element at a time, but with constant variation and regulation by the speakers of a language (Bauer 8). Likewise, is it very unlikely for a subsequent work to only have one noticeable difference from its source, and the distinction between adaptation or translation can become muddied by the subsequent changes in associative values. When discrepancies between works are associative, how does one find the principal instigator of the change? This is the objective of close reading, and should not to be seen as a weakness to the theory of transadaptation, as the same requirement would be imposed on linguists trying to study a language diachronically. To the same extent is adaptation studies focused on the diachronic study of second order signs in linguistic systems in the forms of books, plays, film, etc. However, just as important is the study of synchronic changes that come to the linguistic system because of transadaptations.

A natural inhibitor to the survivability of stories is that their variations are infrequent in comparison with the variations of words in a language, and even words fall in and out of use within a language. However, artists carefully craft their works to best meet what they perceive to be their cultural environment. Depending on the size and scope of their work, and the strategies they employ in moving their works across different language systems, there might be many combinations of translated and adapted myths in any given work. Works that have been subjected to both translation and adaptation are then transadapted works or transadaptations.

Law of Convenience

Part of the immutability of myth, according to Barthes, lies in its naturalization within a culture. While myths can be constantly used within a conversation, their evocations are only unconsciously felt, and what they communicate is felt to be fact. While this may be true of myth, it is not necessarily true of all second order signs. The act of speaking through metalanguage can be accomplished even when the myth is known, as awareness of the sign does not strip it of its meaning. Barthes makes note of the same thing as he identifies the role of the mythologist to both deconstruct and consume the myth at the same time, being both aware that it is arbitrary and of what it signifies. The same can be seen in first order signs, as simply being aware that the concept of the color red is only arbitrarily signified by the word "red", does not mean it will no longer be signified that way.

Myths do not remain in use simply because they convey "truths." Rather, not only are the processes by which all orders of signs change the same (through adaptation and translation), but the reasons for their changes are the same as well. What determines whether a myth or any sign persists in cultural memory, falls out of use, or evolves is its relevance to a culture in terms of the truth it expresses. To explain this relationship between signs of all orders and their relevance, I

propose a "Law of Convenience." Languages like English are communicated constantly, by large populations and sub-populations, each user adding some variation to how the language conveys meaning and experiencing it differently from other parties. Likewise, myths change through the variation and reacceptance that determine their use. Myths signify cultural fact, but as they are separated from the basis of their origin, their signifiers change with usage as their signifieds become watered down or associated with some other cultural fact. The continued use of myth is wholly dependent on how convenient the myth is in expressing ideas relevant to that culture.

Artists have even more access to how a myth can change as artistry is in the industry of myth making. Myths begin as stories or histories that become symbolized by a signifier constructed out of first order signs that have something to do with its origin. Artists do not only have the power to construct these stories for consumption that then become something of cultural idiom, but they can also resignify them more effectively. While the use of myths within discourse may leave some impression, the law of convenience keeps the constant variation in check and causes people to store within their minds the conventional uses of a myth. This is true whether the myth is deconstructed to its users or not.

Artists, on the other hand, are able to reach larger audiences at once and resignify myths for groups of people at a time, giving viable alternative ways for understanding myths.

Trope

While naturalization is a key component of Barthes myth, it is not a requirement for all forms of metalanguage. As discussed previously, second order signs are simply first order signs that have meanings attributed to them, other than their literal or directly implied meanings, through their history or association with another signified. Myths, however, are second order signs that are naturalized. The signification serves as a fact, the relationship of the symbol being

one with reality. While diamonds might serve as symbols of wealth or capitalism, the naturalization of their association with love and marriage is what is most truly felt. Hardly could a western marriage be imagined without an expression of devotion through a diamond ring. The diamond ring may be expressions of love and devotion, as well as practical signifieds such as wealth and financial security, but the naturalization is seen in the fact the symbol itself is of utmost importance. However, the same values may be expressed through other customs to satisfy the conventional procedure of a marriage proposal. Yet, the myth remains that the proposal procedure is most adequately expressed through a diamond ring.

However, not all second order signs are myths, not all symbols reflect cultural fact. This is good as a myth might sometimes serve as the reason racism or xenophobia persist in a society. However, myth might also be the source of good things such as faith in humanity or doing good deeds (remember, the signifier for myth may be an act or gesture as well as a sound-image). Myth is more than recurring symbols of values or stories, tropes, they are persistent and are believed to relate fact. As not all second order signs are myth, trope serves to designate recurring symbols that may not be naturalized. That is not to say that a trope cannot be a myth. However, while the consequences of myth will be a topic throughout the remainder of this study, it is not its purpose to designate at any given point whether a recurring episode or theme in the Cleopatra Legend accurately reflects Barthes' myth at all stages of the legend's evolution. Instead, I will focus on how Roman myth has been transadapted across media and cultural boundaries, by analyzing tropes in depictions of Cleopatra.

The second chapter of this paper gives an introduction into the myths of Cleopatra, listing the many myths that come out of the Roman sources that persist in the western tradition of the Cleopatra Legend, as well as comparing with some key aspects of the Arabic tradition. The third,

fourth, and fifth chapters discuss Chaucer's, Shakespeare's, and Mankiewicz's transactions with

the Cleopatra legend, focusing on what their use of myth reflects about why they were attracted

to the myth as well as their roles in further myth making of Cleopatra.

CHAPTER II

CLEOPATRA'S "INFINITE VARIETY"

By the sheer volume of works on Cleopatra, she is clearly an attractive character to write about, but by looking at the individual changes made to her mythology, is it possible to decipher the intentions of an artist or garner insight into why a work receives its relative success? Before getting to why artists choose to create their own versions of Cleopatra, this chapter will be dedicated how the most prominent myths from her legend have changed over time and how her legend has evolved.

Due to the various reconstructions of her life over the years in the form of films, plays, books, etc., her legend very much resembles the braided stream associated with human evolution. While there is a general direction that the Cleopatra Legend has moved in since her death, it is not a straight or even a single path. Additionally, there is not a complete account of Cleopatra VII's character from her own lifetime, the earliest candidate coming a century after her death in Plutarch's *Life of Antony* in which Cleopatra is only a side character, leaving much of her lifetime up to imagination or speculation. While there are both Roman and Egyptian artifacts contemporary to her lifetime, that may offer something about how she was perceived during her reign, these sources are fragmentary in their depictions and are often not free from bias (Cicarma 36-7, Cicero XIV, 8, 20 and XV, 1,4, 15, 17, Shafei 30-1).

When it comes to each of these sources, however, modern historians of Cleopatra tend to lean on Roman accounts as little as possible. The general notion in modern reconstructions of her character is that the bias against Cleopatra in Roman sources causes their accounts to be thrown into doubt and skepticism. However, when it comes to filling out the events of her life, creative

artists seem to be more willing to rely on even biased sources rather than leave a page of her life blank.

Of Cleopatra's contemporary accounts, none survive that offer complete depictions of her lifetime. However, she was a significant topic for the Romans and some depictions survive in the works of Augustan poets such as Vergil, Horace, Propertius (Walker 64). As might be expected, these sources reveal a bias for Augustus, the emerging Roman emperor who patronized them. Augustus, wanting to secure his place with the Roman populace, realized the importance of campaigning (Walker 63). After the deaths of Cleopatra and Antony following the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C., Augustus continued to make use of the images of Cleopatra and Antony in ways that justified his right to rule. In Vergil's *Aeneid*, Augustus becomes the symbol of the Roman virtue of order, while Cleopatra and Antony became examples of a cautionary tale about the consequences of giving in to the influence of love and leisure, as depicted through the relationship between Dido and Aeneas. Horace devotes an ode to Augustus' victory in the Battle of Actium, which depicts a certain ease with which Augustus triumphed as well as casts Cleopatra into the role of a crazed villainess, aiming to destroy Rome (I.37). Propertius' account is similar, also alluding to the audacity of Cleopatra trying to oppose Roman order, yet, reducing her agency in comparing her power to that of a Roman citizen (III.39). In each account Augustus is the savior and preserver of the Roman state and values, while Cleopatra is the villain from the East who would destroy them.

Although no extensive account survives from Augustan propaganda, Plutarch notes other times when Augustus made use of her and Antony's image for his own political gains prior to the Battle of Actium. After falling in love with Cleopatra, Antony wrote in his will that his property would be distributed between his twins by Cleopatra upon his death and that his body would be

brought to Alexandria to be buried with Cleopatra's, all which Augustus published publicly for

the people to read (58). Augustus saw the usefulness in such a document and procured it from the

Vestal Virgins to read publicly, although, we do not know whether Augustus tampered with the

will before distributing it amongst the people (Schiff 238). Also relayed to the Roman populace

were the Donations of Alexandria, in which Antony gave to Cleopatra and her children many

Roman territories and named her son Caesarion his official heir (Plutarch 54). Not only was

Augustus able to portray Cleopatra's hold over Antony, he also convinced the people of the

danger Cleopatra presented in her ambitions for more power and territorial control (Schiff 239-

42). Antony lost favor in Rome so long as he continued to associate with the Eastern Queen, and

Augustus justified his conquest over foreign territories (LaPerle 227).

While full accounts of the life of Cleopatra are not available until sometime after her

death, it might be safe to assume that they would be pulling sources from a body of earlier

Augustan texts or what might have been passed down orally. Although they would not be under

the same direct influence of Augustus that he had over propaganda pieces circulating in his own

day, they are generally considered to be Rome-centric and affected by the skewed availability of

sources (Ashton 14). The lasting effects of Augustus' campaign might then be felt on both

Cleopatra's and Antony's legacy in literature throughout the period of the Roman Empire.

It is unclear whether Augustus saw Cleopatra or Mark Antony as the true threat to his

political position (Plutarch 60). Even still, Augustus' propaganda campaign against Cleopatra led

later accounts to continue revolve around the Roman sources that smear her character as the

"whore" and "crazy queen" who seduced Antony in her plot against Rome (Cicarma 41, Horace

I.37.7-10, Lucan 10.68). The story of Antony and Cleopatra would soon come to persist as a

cautionary tale symbolizing the fall of Roman order to Eastern passion. This narrative continued

even outside Rome for centuries, even into Shakespeare's time, often depicting Antony as a tragic hero for those that sympathized with the Roman values of replacing barbarism with order (LaPerle 227). However, there are artifacts of Cleopatra from her lifetime that do not come from the Augustan tradition.

While there is not a complete Egyptian account of her life contemporary to her, fragments of Cleopatra's reign and how her people would have perceived her survive in the form of coinage, temple reliefs, and royal decrees. What becomes apparent from these sources is that Cleopatra, like Augustus, put care into how her image was consumed (Bowen 9-10, Shafei 36-7). In coinage, she adopts masculine facial features and iconography associated with kings, possibly alluding to features that she shares with her father to establish her legitimacy as Queen (Ashton 12, 163, Shafei 37). In reliefs, she is depicted in the headdress and crowns of gods and goddesses, and sometimes even depicted in the garbs of male pharaohs (Shafei 31). Her royal and divine rights to rule were emphasized, while her femininity was downplayed. This narrative of the powerful queen contrasts heavily with the image of tragic lover that exists in Shakespeare's time. In fact, it even gives credence to the fear of Roman citizens of a powerful female ruler subverting patriarchal values, such to the extent that her eventual death came with ceremony and ridicule.

However, there is evidence that Cleopatra's image as a virtuous queen survived in the Arabic tradition of her story, as Queen Zenobia of Palmyra allegedly likens herself to Cleopatra when she found herself in a similar position of rebelling against the campaign of the Roman emperor Aurelian in 272 AD (Jones 227). Zenobia shared many of the mythical similarities with Cleopatra in that she was a scholar, favored by her people, and declared herself empress and her son emperor (Jones 222). However, it may be unclear whether this association was made by

Romans who aimed to disparage her or by Zenobia herself to elevate her status, as Cleopatra would have been viewed as a living goddess in her own time. Still, this reflects the use of Cleopatra's character as symbolizing rebellion as well as the protection of the rights of minorities and sovereign states against oppressors.

The same virtues displayed by Zenobia's alleged use of the Cleopatra legend are associated with Cleopatra in the Arabic tradition of her legend, which lauds her roles as scholar, architect, and queen (John LXIV, LXVII). The Western tradition, however, seems to be attracted to Cleopatra for entirely different reasons, when not depicting her as the villain of her story, fitting her into the role of the tragic lover or an extravagant spectacle. These tropes in depicting Cleopatra exists seemingly throughout the entirety of her Western canon, from Chaucer to Mankiewicz, as a result of her treatment in Roman literature. Cleopatra is rarely depicted as a character with agency other than seducing powerful men in Western canon, and her narrative is typically constrained to her relationships with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony. However, even within these constraints, artists still manage to find ways to say something new about Cleopatra in their portrayals by casting the same episodes and myths differently.

Conversely, Roman propaganda have limited the narratives of Cleopatra's character in Western depictions to stories about the dangers of love, by portraying either the need for men to stay virtuous against temptation or the equalizing nature of love to destroy its patrons. Still, within these narratives are countless transadaptions of Cleopatra's character and of her relationship with Mark Antony and Julius Caesar. Just as there have been Roman sympathizers disparaging Cleopatra over the years, there have also been apologists that felt that the Roman narrative was too biased against her or simply wanted to offer a fresher take on Cleopatra. Rarely do artists stray far from the canonical episodes of her life, but the variance in each depiction is

significant enough to track changing feelings across time and regions in how Cleopatra should be depicted. The Roman tradition of Cleopatra as the Eastern witch lives on, but today, Cleopatra's canon is made murky by alluding to her roles as queen, goddess, warrior, lover, scholar, architect, and mother.

When it comes to historians and Egyptologists, everything about Cleopatra seems to be up for debate, from her looks to how she died. However, this is not the impression one would get from the cultural depictions and retellings of her life, due to their general uniformity on most myths. It's important to remember that each of these individual myths signifies something to the audience about Cleopatra. When something is changed, omitted, or added to her mythology that differs from an audience's cultural memory, it rarely goes unfelt. These changes, whether they are adaptations or translations, may prove to be successful or unsuccessful by whether an audience deems them to adequately retain or elevate the myths according to their cultural value.

Despite the variation, most versions of the Cleopatra legend resign to telling her life in the same terms as the propaganda pieces. That is to say, the negative Roman accounts that are often wildly biased, fictitious and even contradictory, have created some of the most iconic scenes and myths in Cleopatra's canon. On one hand, this shows a severe reluctance or inability to diverge from the typical conventions associated with a Cleopatra narrative. On the other hand, the tendency to abide by the same myths allows us, the reader, an excellent opportunity to observe how the slightest variation in a myth might impact the reception of the artist's rendition of Cleopatra. Additionally, the omission of some myths typically included in retellings of Cleopatra's lifetime can be just as telling as to the kind of Cleopatra the artist is trying to convey. Finally, seemingly far less often, is the generation of new myths.

Cleopatra's Beauty

As soon as Cleopatra is shown on screen, on stage, or in any other manner, an audience is going to be instantly divided on how Cleopatra is depicted. For one, even the Roman sources could not reach a consensus on the beauty of Cleopatra. In some accounts she is credited as being entirely bewitching as it better served the narrative of Antony being beguiled by a foreign witch. In increasing her physical charm, they take away from what charm her queenliness or intelligence may have had over him. On the other hand, Plutarch gives a somewhat contradictory account, even to himself. At one point, he attributes Cleopatra's confidence in seducing Antony to her being at her "most brilliant beauty," before soon revisiting the subject, saying her looks were "not so far beyond compare or striking" (Plutarch XXV, XXVII). In fact, there are some historians that argue ancient coinage and busts may preserve an inkling of her likeness suggesting that she was not beautiful by today's Western standards of beauty (Ashton 12). Others argue that these depictions may not be entirely representative of her looks as they may only depict her as she wanted to be seen by her people, reminiscent of her father's more masculine features and thus able to rule (Ashton 105). Also suggested is that the standards of beauty were different in ancient times and that the features depicted on the coins and busts may have been more attractive than in modern society (Ashton 11-2). In any case, in most cultural depictions, Cleopatra is represented so that she satisfies the modern and cultural standards of beauty of an audience. This can be seen in baroque, romantic and renaissance art, as well as in the descriptions given in early modern plays, and especially in Western films of the twentieth century. The narrative of the beguiling witch is so prevalent in the West that it is hard to imagine a depiction of Cleopatra that isn't beautiful.

This particular trope is most disappointing both for its monotony and because it often serves to diminish the roles of other characteristics of Cleopatra that may have been appealing to Marc Antony, Julius Caesar, and of course the Egyptian populace. Of course, while it may be reductive to portray Cleopatra as alluring so much because of her appearance, Cleopatra would have been playing on the anxieties of a Roman audience, even for her beauty. Manly virtue was often considered to be control and domination over lusts of the flesh in Roman society, and the fear of a foreign queen spectacular and beautiful enough for even the greatest of Romans to forget their duty may have seemed rational to them. In fact, it can be argued that similar character types are depicted throughout Greek and Roman literature. However, the adoption of Cleopatra into this particular type of character should not be overlooked, as the desire to restrict her to even a common archetype is significant. Even more significant is the fact that these same values may be in place today. Why has the Western canon continued to display Cleopatra as beautiful? Of course, there is nothing wrong with a Cleopatra that is alluring for her queenliness, her intelligence, and her beauty altogether, but many transadapted works employ Cleopatra primarily for spectacle. Is there still a fear for beautiful women within society?

Also, hotly contested is Cleopatra's ethnic background (Ashton 2-8). While there are standard genealogies that suggest Cleopatra's heritage is near to entirely Greek-Macedonian, some historians argue that there is uncertainty as to who exactly Cleopatra's paternal grandmother is (Ashton 6). The rise in the past century in depictions of Cleopatra that represent Cleopatra as African is also done with it in mind to counteract a Eurocentric worldview from appropriating African culture (Ashton 3-4). Although we cannot say for certain yet as to Cleopatra's ethnic background, the desire to take credit for Cleopatra as part of a cultural

heritage is a big shift from earlier representations within the Western tradition, when Cleopatra was still being passed along in a game of hot potato.

How exactly Cleopatra became a character worthy of veneration is important to consider. It suggests either an unfamiliarity with the Western canon of Cleopatra, or a denial of its legitimacy. Conversely, these claims to cultural heritage may indicate a familiarity with the Arabic tradition of depicting Cleopatra, as these sources would have been more favorable toward her. Today, however, historians are more likely to admit the exact ethnicity of Cleopatra is unknown due to question marks on her family tree.

Cleopatra's Entrance

Just as the physical depiction of Cleopatra will inform an audience's opinion of her, so too do the iconic scenes of her mythology. Possibly one of the most commonly depicted and iconic myths is Cleopatra's rug scene. Cleopatra's servant Apollodorus is said, by Plutarch, to have delivered Cleopatra hidden in a bedroll into the Ptolemy's palace, being occupied at the time by her brother, whom she was in civil war with, in secret to Caesar. In Plutarch's account, this is Caesar's first introduction to Cleopatra and it is in this moment that he becomes transfixed on her audacity and spectacle. Over time, the myth adapted to be Cleopatra being carried into the palace via carpet instead, and often serves as the audience's introduction to Cleopatra as well (Plutarch 49, Cicarma 49).

This scene is performed in any number of ways, and given varying degrees of importance as the scene is overplayed or underplayed. A common function of this scene is to establish the hierarchal relationship between Caesar and Cleopatra, with Caesar standing over Cleopatra who lies disheveled on the floor (*Cleopatra* 1999). The frequency of this theme causes its subversion to be highly noticeable. Including the scene but allowing Cleopatra to walk out of the rug

standing upright, rather than be rolled onto the floor is sometimes seen in modern

transadaptations (*Assassin's Creed: Origins* 2017, *Cleopatra* 1963). This slight change suggests

or allows for more of a parity between the two to exist.

Even more frequent is the use of this scene to establish Cleopatra's allure, either rolling

out of the carpet pinked cheek and out of breath or completely regal despite the potential

embarrassment of the situation (*Rome* 2005). Inclusions of this scene are almost always met with

Caesar being smitten with Cleopatra. However, sometimes the scene is left out entirely, having

Cleopatra and Caesar meet in an entirely different manner (*Caesar and Cleopatra* 1945). Still,

the prevalence of this scene is shown in the fact that it is frequently alluded to, even if not

depicted directly within a scene.

Cleopatra's Spectacle

There are many scenes in Cleopatra's canon that refer to her use of spectacle for

diplomacy. She's said to have made frequent and elaborate showings of the wealth of Egypt

through parties, parades and celebrations, often at the critique of Romans who saw it as

excessive and wasteful (Plutarch, Dio). Some historians reinterpret these events and attribute

these shows of wealth to her ability to influence the masses and the aristocracy through spectacle

(Bower 11-12). One of the most iconic myths comes from Pliny as the Banquet of Cleopatra,

during which she makes a wager with Antony that she could easily throw a lavish and expensive

feast worth millions of sesterces (Pliny 9.58). However, Cleopatra outwits him by dropping a

valuable pearl into a cup of vinegar and drinking the solution.

The importance of image to Cleopatra is also revealed in the way she liked to be

portrayed as a goddess reincarnate. Often assuming the likeness of Isis in celebrations as well as

in art and reliefs, Cleopatra established the legitimacy of her rule through her divinity (Ashton

130-1, 138-9). Some also attribute to her the ability to make use of sensational gossip, exampled through the controlled rumors of whether Julius Caesar had actually fathered her son Caesarian. While the tendencies to make use of pomp and parade and gossip were criticized by Roman sympathizers, these aspects of her mythology seem to be readily accepted in most representations of the Cleopatra legend.

However, some depictions take a different approach to exactly how sensational they want to make Cleopatra. While most depictions are fine with Cleopatra using sex to influence men into giving her what she wants, they now tend to justify it by suggesting Cleopatra truly loves the men she sleeps with, which is a partial departure from the Roman accounts. Additionally, there are varying degrees to Cleopatra's brutality, some depictions embracing the myth of her testing her poisons on prisoners or variations in which the episode where she orders the deaths of her family members become much more personal (*Cleopatra* 1963, *Cleopatra* 1999). Each of these recall the Roman warnings of Cleopatra's power-hungry nature, but many cultural depictions now embrace this side of Cleopatra rather than subvert it. Removed from the Roman context, audiences may be in favor of a brutal and austere foreign queen, and seeing her as a heroine may not be mutually exclusive to these sentiments.

The Battle of Actium

One of the major decisions Cleopatra retellings have to deal with is the Battle of Actium. What is at issue is how much blame to put on Cleopatra for the loss of the battle versus how much to put on Antony. There does not seem to be a right answer, as this simply turns out to be an unsavory part of the story in most depictions. Tragedy often calls for the characters to seem sympathetic or else the loss is not felt by the audience. However, there are some depictions

that lean heavily on blaming one or the other for the naval blunder that ultimately led to their defeat at the hands of Augustus.

However, blaming Antony does not readily absolve Cleopatra as she is often directly blamed for the downfall of Antony. Even when an attempt is made to portray her sympathetically, Cleopatra is characterized as a force of nature which inevitably breaks Antony, the consequence of love and leisure. As the Battle of Actium comes just before the death of Cleopatra and Antony, much of the audience's unresolved feelings towards Cleopatra is intended to be handled in this episode. On the other hand, there are some depictions that have Antony failing on his own accord and depict Cleopatra as a martyr for his failures, directly commenting on the myth that depicts her as the cause of his failure.

Cleopatra's Death

Finally, there are the myths surrounding Cleopatra's death. There is actually a smattering of these that see recurring use, but by far the most common depiction is of Cleopatra's suicide by the bite of an asp, sometimes on the wrist, but more frequently on the bosom. However, the earliest source about her death, Strabo, offers a second account of her death, suggesting she may have applied poisonous ointment instead (Strabo XVII.10). Additional iconography sometimes includes a basket of figs that the asp is carried in, two servants dying with her (one of which has the iconic phrase upon their death when asked how Cleopatra's death was performed, answering, "'Most grand, indeed…and fitting for the descendant of so many kings'"), and there may be two snakes depicted instead of one (Dio LI. 14, Plutarch 85, 86, Shakespeare V.ii). Also, there are several variations surrounding the circumstances of her death. Some early myths involve Antony killing her, but more common is Antony's failed attempt at suicide after Cleopatra tricks him into believing she is already dead so she can see if he still loves her (Boccaccio LXXXVIII, Plutarch

30

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76-77). This is followed by Cleopatra pulling a half dead Antony into her mausoleum to give him a proper Egyptian funeral service. Finally, there are the rumored dealings with Augustus, as it is possible that Cleopatra had been negotiating with Augustus prior to her suicide for the lives of her children and her own freedom (Dio LI, ll-13). However, the veracity of these myths are still largely questioned, and some of them originated as Roman myths as their original intents were different from the symbolism they eventually took on. However, that this may be precisely the purpose behind transadaptors of the Cleopatra Legend, the act of resignifying her myths.

The fact that Antony and Cleopatra's defeat at the Battle of Actium marks the beginning of the Roman Empire is enough to make one wonder how history might have turned had the outcome of the battle been different. As Cleopatra presented the final stand of the Hellenistic period, how different would Cleopatra's legacy be if she had overcome the emerging Imperator Augustus. Would she be recorded in countless histories as a harlot, still, to Julius Caesar; as the siren that seduced and corrupted Marc Antony? Would the past two millennia still have seen as many adaptations and retellings of her lifetime?

After the battle, Augustus continued to patronize propaganda disparaging Cleopatra and solidifying his right of rule. His campaign against Cleopatra promoted the right of Roman conquest over foreign states by painting them as dangerous to Roman ideals (Wiedemann 524). Another potential interpretation is that Augustus considered Antony to be the real threat to his rule, but due to Antony's popularity with the Roman populace, he painted Cleopatra as the villain who corrupted Antony with her Eastern charms.

While few textual accounts survive from Augustus and Cleopatra's lifetimes, the tradition of villainizing Cleopatra continues throughout the period of Imperial Rome (Walker 64). It is roughly a century after Cleopatra's death that the fullest, near contemporary account of her

31

lifetime comes by the Greek historian, Plutarch, in his biographies over Julius Caesar and Marc Antony, Cleopatra playing a role in the narratives of each. Plutarch, however, lived too late to guarantee any certainty on the accounts of Cleopatra causing the accuracy of his sources to be in question. Despite this, Plutarch is often one of the primary sources for adaptations of the Cleopatra legend, contributing many of the iconic episodes and character traits to her mythology, as seen in the works of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Mankiewicz and many of their contemporaries.

The success of Augustus' plan to make Antony and Cleopatra characters of a cautionary tale, justifying the right of imperial conquest, is evidenced in the nearly uniformly Rome-centric narrative of Cleopatra that existed in Western accounts for over a millennium. Of course, where Rome was in power, one might expect the political leanings of artists to be sympathetic to the government, but the Cleopatra legend seems to have been impacted by Augustan propaganda beyond this. Cleopatra had become part of a mythology spun by Roman authors, which could be passed on from generation to generation and transmitted between cultures.

In the Western canon, Cleopatra was often a harlot and sometimes only slightly deplorable for her tendencies toward extravagance and ambition, but is this inherently bad? There are many disturbing things about biased propaganda having success at defamation of character for political enemies that span millennia. There is also the question of whether reducing the role of one of the most significant woman rulers is indicative of other cultural trends, and whether Cleopatra could have been a powerful role model in cultures where there were otherwise few to be had. There are many social impacts one must consider that may stem from the manipulation of Cleopatra's character as sovereign ruler to siren, and Cleopatra's treatment may be equally representative of cultural values toward female sovereigns already in place as it is of what constructs them.

While Cleopatra could have remained in cultural memory as a villainess, instead, a significant shift takes place in the English canon through Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women*, written in England in the 1380s. Since then, there has been the growing trend to portray Cleopatra as a tragic character and even the hero of her own story. But the question is why transadaptors of the Cleopatra Legend choose to become apologists of Cleopatra's character.

While this will be discussed in more depth in the next few chapters to come, I hope at this point it may be seen that there is something attractive about Cleopatra's character, but also something unattractive to many about how the Roman narrative presents her. However, as we will soon discuss, the law of economy for translation and adaptation, while allowing for change, require some things to still stay the same from one representation of Cleopatra to the next. An adapted work owes a debt to its source's form, and a translated work owes a debt to its source's meaning. Cleopatra has been a constant subject for the humanities for more than two millennia, and as will be discussed, her countless adaptations may be understood both as attempts at social commentary as well as to reconstruct her place in cultural memory.

CHAPTER III

CHAUCER'S GOOD WOMAN

When we consider Chaucer's Cleopatra we are posed with the question of why myths change. Outside of the Arabic tradition, of which there are few surviving sources, literary depictions of Cleopatra were uniformly unsympathetic to her character. The myth Cleopatra serves, a symbol for lust and treachery, generally went unquestioned. However, what about when it is no longer useful to tell stories of treacherous foreign queens, or when a culture no longer places as high a value on order above all other virtues? One way for a story to survive in such an environment is to adapt its stories to serve a new purpose. In Chaucer's case, Cleopatra survives as the first tale of *The Legend of Good Women*, the legends of "maidenes and wyves, / That weren trewe in lovinge al hir lyves" (pp. 11).

There are a number of retellings of the Cleopatra Legend between the works of the Augustan poets Vergil, Horace, and Propertius, and the works of Chaucer. Many Greek and Roman historians such as Strabo, Pliny, Plutarch, Suetonius, Appian, and Dio, starting soon after her death to the third century AD, continue the Roman narrative and provide fuller accounts of the episodes that have become symbolic of Cleopatra's character. Additionally, there are later writers like Beauvais, Higden, and Boccaccio, who preserved these stories and incorporated them into their cultures. Chaucer, however, is the first adaptor of the Cleopatra Legend to make her the heroine of her own story.

Many of the historians between Chaucer and her lifetime simply tell Cleopatra in the same terms of the Romans without questioning their accounts. Antony's downfall at the hands of Cleopatra is an historical fact to be reported on; a caution to the pitfalls of lust and foreign

women. Dio describes Antony as a "slave to the passion and the witchery of Cleopatra," saying it was the time he spent with her and the Egyptians' "life of luxurious ease" that left him entirely demoralized (Dio IL.34, IIL.27). A similar sentiment of Cleopatra's treachery is given by Boccaccio, Chaucer's contemporary, who published his book *Concerning Famous Women* around the same time Chaucer was writing *The Legend of Good Women.* Chaucer, on the other hand, completely changes the function Cleopatra has served throughout the Western canon.

> Ye men, that falsly sweren many an ooth
>
> That ye wol dye, if that your love be wrooth,
>
> Heer may ye seen of women whiche a trouthe! (87-9)

Here, as Chaucer describes Cleopatra Cleopatra's committing suicide as proof of her commitment to Antony, he pulls the rug out from under the argument of the Western tradition. Instead of debating whether Cleopatra wanted to topple the Roman Empire or if she was the source of corruption of two of the most prominent Roman generals in history, he claims only that she is virtuous in her service to love. The values on either sides of the argument are completely different, not only in how they depict her legend, but also in terms of what parts they choose to depict.

In order to change the function of Cleopatra's Legend, an adaptor is forced to engage with the episodes and symbols an audience knows her by. An allusion to Cleopatra by name would only inspire the concepts already associated with her character. Therefore, alluding to her myth to serve a function, to signify a concept, not typically associated with her myth would simply be perceived as a misuse of the signifier. Without offering an alternative history

associated with the signifier of a myth, there is little contending with its signified. While arbitrary in signification, second order signs do have conventional uses in culture, and myths are second order signs whose signification serves as a reflection of reality. While an audience might accept Cleopatra as signifying something other than what she is known for within the confines of a work, the general acceptance of her resignification into her mythology must contend with established myth. In fact, as myth implies naturalization of the signification between signifier and signified, the argument given by an adaptor of myth must challenge the audience's perspective on reality. This, of course, deconstructs the myth, as competing ideas regarding the signification of the second order sign emerge.

The myth simply becomes trope, its purchase on reality lost, while its meaning remains in contention. What determines which signifier survives in competing uses of trope is not a continued naturalization, but the convenience the trope offers to a culture's desired interests and expressions. However, naturalization is always an option, as frequency and variation of tropes can determine what falls into myth again.

Chaucer's attempt to resignify the Cleopatra Legend comes again through her lines, "'that shal wel be sene; / Was never unto hir love a trewer quene'" (115-6). The prologue to *The Legend of Good Women* makes it clear that Chaucer is tasked to write of the legends of women who were true to love in their lives. However, Chaucer's adaptation of the Cleopatra Legend makes it seem as though the only question was whether the divorce is justified in their love. This Cleopatra Legend is almost entirely removed from its political context, and planted into the linguistic system of a poetic book of the lives of virtuous lovers. This leads Chaucer to make a number of interesting decisions in dealing with the works of his predecessors as sources in terms of what parts of Cleopatra's mythology he includes, what he omits, and what he changes.

Just as Chaucer leaves out the main complaints the Roman sources have against Cleopatra's character, he likewise omits many of the details that would make the Roman narrative sympathetic. Rather than grappling with the Roman narrative directly, Chaucer simply states the Cleopatra and Antony were fully in love and deserving of each other, "This noble quene eek lovede so this knight / … / Worthy to any wight that liven may" (29-33). Chaucer skips the marriage and by doing so, the Donations of Alexandria, in which Antony gave Roman properties to Cleopatra. This scene is typically depicted as part of the rising actions that led Augustus to enact war on Cleopatra and Antony. Instead, Augustus is depicted as wanting war simply for the dishonor done to his sister, Octavia, the wife Antony left "Al for the love of Cleopataras" (22). The result is a complete loss of the political context the Roman narrative suggests throughout its canon of the inhibited ambition of Cleopatra to conquer Rome. Instead, Augustus is depicted as the instigators:

> Octovian, that wood was of this dede,
>
> Shoop him an ost on Antony to lede
>
> Al-outerly for his destruccioun,
>
> With stoute Romains, cruel as leoun;
>
> To ship they wente, and thus I let hem saile. (45-9)

While Antony is softly chastised for the abandonment of his wife, the relationship between him and Cleopatra is justified through his complete devotion: "That al the world he sette at no value. / Him thoughte, nas to him no thing so due / As Cleopatras for to love and serve" (23-5). However, Augustus and his "cruel" Romans go to war with Antony on the basis of this love,

painting them as wrong in not understanding the circumstances of the lovers' plight. While Dio

mentions that a lot of finger pointing went on between the correspondence between Augustus

and Antony in determining who was to blame for their civil strife, Chaucer seemingly boils the

war down to Augustus not accepting the dishonor shown to his sister, and the tragic aftermath

that comes with true love.

The Battle of Actium itself is also given an intriguing treatment, specifically Antony's

defeat coming fairly and on his own terms, before his flight along with any of his soldiers who

were still living.

Til, at the laste, as every thing hath ende,

Antony is shent, and put him to the flighte,

And al his folk to-go, that best go mighte.

Only at that point is it mentioned that Cleopatra turns to flee as well.

Fleeth eek the queen, with al her purpre sail,

For strokes, which that wente as thikke as hail;

No wonder was, she mighte hit nat endure. (72-7)

This is another considerable departure from how the Cleopatra Legend is typically depicted. Not

only does Chaucer choose to omit certain scenes that lend themselves to well to the Roman

narrative, Chaucer also changes the order of events during the Battle of Actium in order to leave

Cleopatra blameless in Antony's defeat. Simply portraying Cleopatra as a virtuous lover is

seemingly not enough for Chaucer, who goes further to dispel the myth associated with the

Battle of Actium of Cleopatra's flight and Antony's pursuit leading to the loss of the battle and of Antony's honor.

Chaucer next describes Antony's death as a quick suicide, due to not being able to handle his defeat at the Battle of Actium, nor the fall of his reputation.

> And whan that Antony saw that aventure,
>
> 'Allas!' quod he, 'the day that I was born!
>
> My worshipe in this day thus have I lorn!'
>
> And for dispeyr out of his witte he sterte,
>
> And roof him-self anoon through-out the herte
>
> Er that he ferther wente out of the place. (78-83)

Antony's death is not depicted as particularly tragic, except for its implications for Cleopatra. While the honor of Antony is mentioned briefly, his death does not fit the genre of romance well as it he gives no consideration to the still living Cleopatra. Additionally, it comes immediately after the Battle of Actium and there is no meeting between he and Cleopatra, although, the episode in which Cleopatra pulls a half dead Antony into a mausoleum is not entirely skipped, only heavily revised. Lamenting the death of her husband, Cleopatra ordered a shrine be built to house Antony and to be filled with "rubies," "stones fyne," and "spycerye" (94, 96). However, Antony was put into this shrine alone, and the death of Cleopatra is a little more gruesome than typically depicted.

While the symbolism of the asp is sometimes debated, Chaucer elects to completely ignore the story associated with Cleopatra's death by asp and instead appeals only to its dramatic

imagery. Both Antony's and Cleopatra's deaths come after the continued pursuit of Alexandria by Augustus in Roman sources. These sources often suggest Cleopatra is given no other way to avoid being presented in Augustus' triumphal procession, and commits suicide as a last resort. Instead, Chaucer suggests her death comes completely as a show of her devotion, writing,

> And leet the cors embaume; and forth she fette
>
> This dede cors, and in the shryne hit shette.
>
> And next the shryne a pit than doth she grave;
>
> And alle the serpents that she mighte have,
>
> She putte hem in that grave. (97-101)

After enshrining Antony, Cleopatra digs a grave that she fills with serpents. What follows is a speech by Cleopatra where she proclaims her true love for Antony is shown in her death, a covenant that she made to feel just as Antony does, "lyf or deeth" (113). Chaucer then describes her burial, writing "And with that word, naked, with ful good herte, / Among the serpents in the pit she sterte, / And ther she chees to han hir burying" (117-9). Cleopatra's suicide is the proof of her proclamation that she is "'Unreprovable,'" and offers the secondary purpose of removing the audience further from the Roman sources (112). Chaucer ups the ante of Cleopatra's death by increasing its dramatic functions. However, does this mean Chaucer's Cleopatra functions as a translation or adaptation?

It should be noted that while Chaucer omits and changes several parts of the Cleopatra Legend, he continues the myth of Cleopatra's beauty, which most Roman accounts allude too. Not much time is devoted to establishing the very nature of her allure other than the claim "she

was fair as is the rose in May" (34). Many of the potential sources for Chaucer allude to Cleopatra's beauty, and there is little wonder as to why Chaucer would have left this part of her mythology the same. It does suggest, however, that the allure of Chaucer's Cleopatra had more to do with her looks than her charm or intelligence, as Plutarch claims (XXXVII.2-3).

While the forms of many of the myths are not preserved in their entirety, the resignification of these myths are definitely more heavily laid on their concepts. The function of Cleopatra as a caricature of herself in the Western canon is altered entirely to serve as an example of a virtuous lover. By making love the primary virtue of the story, Cleopatra exceeds both Antony and Augustus in terms of honor and Chaucer even challenges the reader to "finde a man thus trewe and stable" (124). In this work, the symbols and episodes Cleopatra is typically depicted by are gone. There is no mention of her power and authority, her ambitions for Egypt are gone, her foreignness is downplayed, there is no allusion to her lavish extravagance and leisure. Additionally, the symbols and episodes typically associated with Cleopatra are significantly changed. Antony's loss at Actium is his own, the symbol of Cleopatra's death is only vaguely reminiscent to the one in Roman sources. Is this even the same Cleopatra?

No adapted work will entirely maintain its form, or it would simply be the same work. In this sense, Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women* likely means something different to an audience in its cultural context than it does to an audience reading it today. However, I do not consider that to be adaptation, as the change in meaning is only associative and not from a process of transformation. The same goes for myths, as well as translations. While the intent behind Chaucer's *Legend of Cleopatra* is clearly to adapt her caricature and legend to fit the narrative of a virtuous lover, how well does it do so, or, in other words, how well is the form preserved?

The benefit of hindsight tells us that this was an unsuccessful transadaptation of the Cleopatra Legend, but the law of economy gives us clues as to why. The form of Cleopatra is changed considerably, and little is left for the audience to associate with the myths they know her by. The result is the creation of alternative symbols. While Chaucer does not successfully resignify the myths of the Cleopatra Legend that he includes in his *Legend,* he does create a new myth that comes to be associated with his virtuous version of Cleopatra. The death of Cleopatra in the *Confessio Amantis* by Gower borrows from Chaucer's myth:

> Among these othre upon the grene
>
> I syh also the wofull queene
>
> Cleopatras, which in a cave
>
> With serpentz hath hirself begrave
>
> Al quik, and so sche was totore,
>
> For sorwe of that sche hadde lore
>
> Antonye, which hir love hath be. (8.2571-7)

The allusion to Chaucer's Cleopatra is evident and clearly serves to inspire the concept of a virtuous lover, not a treacherous queen. The result of Chaucer's transadaptation then is not the resignification of the Cleopatra Legend, but the construction of a new symbol. However, aside from the allusion in Gower, there are no clear debts paid to Chaucer's Cleopatra. The unpopularity of Chaucer's Cleopatra suggests that the story was not convenient to cultural expression enough to see much recurring use.

Myth serves a specific purpose. It does not ask what its signifier could represent, but instead purports to be intrinsically related to one thing. When Chaucer adapted Cleopatra, he took her signifiers and claimed that these episodes of her life could stand for something different, that her character could be understood differently, and so deconstructed the myth. However, he did not do so wholly. His argument is incomplete, as he does not grapple with all of the myths that Cleopatra is known by, many of the same myths that would become popularized in paintings and retellings of her life. The political nature of the story is lost and converted entirely into a romantic tragedy. While Chaucer's adoption into the English canon carved out a place for Cleopatra that left her slightly better than her prior circumstances, her resignification was incomplete.

Rather than resignification, transadaptation results in the construction of new myth when it strays too far from its source in both form and concept at the same time. While the myths constructed in *The Legend of Good Women* have not become widely used in retellings of the Cleopatra Legend, they do reflect the early beginnings of changing the way Cleopatra's image is transacted with in cultural depictions. Regardless of his success in changing the understanding of Cleopatra in cultural memory, Chaucer's Cleopatra is one of the first attempts at deviating from the Rome-centric narrative within the Western tradition, starting a practice that has since been continually explored by artists and historians alike.

CHAPTER IV

SHAKESPEARE'S FOREIGN QUEEN

While Chaucer may have begun the English literary tradition of depicting Cleopatra as a sympathetic heroine, his take was not regarded as the rewrite her mythology needed. There are some surviving depictions of the Cleopatra Legend between Chaucer and Shakespeare in the English canon, but more iconography of her legend survives from after the Renaissance and during the Baroque period. Still, we can get a good idea of what kind of Cleopatra was being depicted by artists and consumed by cultures.

The first play to be written in English on Antony and Cleopatra, Mary Sidney's *The Tragedie of Antonie*, comes as a translation of Robert Garnier's 1578 play, *Marc-Antoine*. By the time of Sidney's translation, there were already six dramas on the topic written in other languages since 1550, all of which based on Plutarch (Hannay 41-2). Sidney's *Antonie* is a closet drama, published in 1592, and serves as a potential source for Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra.* Mary Sidney also patronized *The Tragedy of Cleopatra* by Samuel Daniel, another closet drama published in 1594, and another potential source for Shakespeare (Arshad 168). However, Shakespeare's staged rendition of the history borrows even more from the Roman narrative than both Daniel and Sidney. As a result, the transactions to be discussed are those of Shakespeare's work and Roman texts. It is possible for Shakespeare to be transadapting the more recent texts more directly, and this is not trivial as the purpose of this essay is to discuss how the many myths and episodes of the Cleopatra Legend are made use of, either as adaptations, translations, or transadaptations. However, discussing the debt to Plutarch seems more prudent, with points of comparisons between the two closet dramas.

Cleopatra would have been a well-known figure to a Shakespearean audience. She featured in art, advertisements and medical journals, credited as a medical authority for cosmetics, aphrodisiacs, and gynecology (Park 600-1). Jennifer Park suggests that the Cleopatra of the early modern period was not only a figure of the history surrounding her, but as a "figuration" constructed by all of the various traditions that constructed her figure (604-5). Cleopatra herself can be understood as a second order sign, but which Cleopatra is being presented in Shakespeare?

The opening dialogue in Antony and Cleopatra tells the audience a lot about which versions of Antony and Cleopatra are depicted within the play. The Antony depicted is a shadow of his stature when in military form:

> NAy, but this dotage of our Generals
>
> Ore-flowes the measure: those his goodly eyes
>
> That o're the Files and Musters of the Warre,
>
> Haue glow'd like plated Mars:
>
> Now bend, now turne
>
> The Office and Deuotion of their view
>
> Vpon a Tawny Front.
>
> His Captaines heart,
>
> Which in the scuffles of great Fights hath burst
>
> The Buckles on his brest, reneages all temper,
>
> And is become the Bellowes and the Fan
>
> To coole a Gypsies Lust. (1.1.4-14)

The general who once purveyed the ranks of war now devote themselves "Upon a tawny front."

While Cleopatra is not directly being blamed here, as it is only stated that the focus of Antony's

devotion has changed, the implication is far from innocent. The description of Cleopatra as

"Tawny," as well as the later description she gives herself as darkened by the sun reveal a

politically and ethnically charged argument within the play (1.5.555).

However, it is not the meaning of Cleopatra which Shakespeare wishes to change, but her

signifier. Cleopatra is not depicted as fair skinned, although this was the common trope in

paintings of Cleopatra in the early modern period. Instead the description of her as a "right

Gypsie" racially marks her, establishing the connection with gypsies in England and the blame

for her "unconventional existence" by conflating Egyptians with gypsies (LaPerle 232) .

Shakespeare alludes to Cleopatra's identity as a gypsies throughout the play, Antony at

one point lamenting that he "Forborne the getting of a lawfull Race," and later that Cleopatra

"Like a right Gypsie, hath at fast and loose / Beguil'd me, to the very heart of losse. (3.13.2282,

4.12.2784-5). Shakespeare then associates Cleopatra with the Egyptian race despite the fact that

the known Roman sources to Shakespeare would have led him to believe Cleopatra was Greek

Macedonian. Carol Mejia LaPerle points out that this argument is made in response to growing

anxieties about a gypsy population in England. Royal proclamations of sixteenth and seventeenth

century England reveal the nation's anxiety toward gypsies for "unlawfulness, degeneracy, and

intemperance" (LaPerle). Shakespeare politicizes the play by shifting the foreignness of

Cleopatra to that of a domestic political concern.

This is far from the norm at this time, however, as Cleopatra was often depicted in art as

fair skinned and blonde. While the reasons for this may be varied, Western artists depicting

Cleopatra as conventionally attractive to their audiences would have defaulted to their own

standards of beauty. Sidney and Daniel, on the other hand, both avoid dealing with the topic of

Cleopatra's race. In Mary Sidney's drama, there is no focus on Cleopatra's relationship to the

East at all, effectively Europeanizing her. Daniel's play gives the most attention to Cleopatra's

looks of the three plays, but gives no definite mention as to her race (LaPerle). Shakespeare,

however, makes less emphasis on the beauty of Cleopatra, who refers to her own looks as

"wrinkled deepe in time," (1.5.556). Instead, Shakespeare attributes her allure to her ability to

never satisfy and to keep Antony wanting when Enobarbus says,

> Age cannot wither her, nor custome stale
>
> Her infinite variety: other women cloy
>
> The appetites they feede, but she makes hungry,
>
> Where most she satisfies. (2.2.950-3)

Once Antony learns Fulvia is dead, Antony laments that what he cannot bring back that which he

once rejected, and directly tied to this is the "enchanting Queen" as the source of his idleness.

Here Antony seems to support their claims that he has fallen from the leader that he once was

and is now giving into his more base desires, however, he does not lament doing so. This will

change as the play goes on once Antony gives up the rationale of the lover which he sports in

this passage. Antony continues by refusing to "confound the time with conference harsh" and

when Cleopatra suggests they meet with the ambassadors Antony counters with passing the time

by roaming the streets and observing the "qualities of people" (1.1.46, 55). However, after

quickly taking an interest in the matters of Roman affairs at the behest of his messengers, Antony

chastises himself for becoming enraptured by Cleopatra, saying "These strong Egyptian Fetters I

must breake, / Or loose my selfe in dotage" (1.2.219-20). However, it does not seem that Cleopatra is meant to be understood by the audience as intentionally corrupting Antony, as Antony's claim of Cleopatra's cunning is denied by Enobarbus, saying "Alacke Sir no, her passions are made of nothing / but the finest part of pure Loue" (1.2.245-56).

The third scene of act one offers a sight into the mind of Cleopatra, whose main concern is how best to play Antony in order to keep him interested. Here, Charmian foreshadows that, for her antics, Cleopatra will lose Antony, saying "Tempt him not so too farre. I wish forbeare, / In time we hate that which we often feare" (1.3.312-13). Cleopatra is depicted as a character that, while she loves Antony, lords control over him through his unbridled love for her. She is also manipulative for his attention. As mentioned earlier, her foreignness is the source of her luxury as well as the source of Antony's interest in her. She is a spectacle that beckons Antony away from his duty.

Charmion foreshadows that people come to hate that which controls them, when Cleopatra tries to manipulate Antony into not leaving Egypt. However, this foreshadowing can also be applied to Antony's relationship with Augustus, which is depicted by the fortune teller that accompanies Antony. Antony's reasoning for returning to Egypt is first brought to the audience's attention by the fortune teller that says Antony will always live in Augustus' shadow while he is near him.

> If thou dost play with him at any game,
>
> Thou art sure to loose: And of that Naturall lucke,
>
> He beats thee 'gainst the oddes. Thy Luster thickens,
>
> When he shines by: I say againe, thy spirit

Is all affraid to gouerne thee neere him:

But he alway 'tis Noble.(2.3.991-96)

This might serve a similar supernatural purpose to the witches in *Hamlet*. It is not Antony's faults on his own accord, but some outside force that brings about Antony's downfall. He is a good man that was forced or convinced back into Egypt, at the downfall of his own pride, believing that his spirit shown more brightly away from Augustus. He shoos the fortune teller off, but admits that Caesar beats Antony far more often through luck despite the odds. He opens up about his plans, saying, "I will to Egypte: / And though I make this marriage for my peace, / I'th'East my pleasure lies" (2.3.1005-7). While Antony earlier said that he wanted to escape the control Cleopatra had over him, he finds himself caught between the two. Again, captured by Antony's line after learning of Fulvia's death that we only want something once it is gone. Antony finds himself constantly stuck between his desire for honor and for Cleopatra. However, the decision seems almost out of his hands, as the fortuneteller makes him aware of his fortune for him.

Caesar gives the counter argument to Antony's character. Even if it was acceptable for Antony to drink and fight drunkenly with strangers, sleep with Cleopatra and give away a kingdom, the problem is that he is wasting time to satisfy vice that calls to him as loudly as the matters of state. Antony is free to do as he pleases, as he will get what's coming to him. However, the problem lies in the fact that he is halting the progress of Rome.

You are too indulgent. Let's graunt it is not

Amisse to tumble on the bed of Ptolomy,

To giue a Kingdome for a Mirth, to sit

And keepe the turne of Tipling with a Slaue,

To reele the streets at noone, and stand the Buffet

With knaues that smels of sweate:

…

But to confound such time,

That drummes him from his sport, and speakes as lowd

As his owne State, and ours, 'tis to be chid:

As we rate Boyes, who being mature in knowledge,

Pawne their experience to their present pleasure,

And so rebell to iudgement. (1.4.446-463)

Antony may be so great that his faults are excusable, but the same cannot be said for the problems that he causes the state. This depiction of Caesar is very accepting and rational toward Antony. Because Cleopatra is depicted as love sick and immature, Antony's decision to grant her Roman lands seems incredibly irresponsible.

Cleopatra is without agency within this plot. Walking down the street she becomes out of breath. While Cleopatra is not mentioned to be directly plotting against Antony to bring him down, her involvement in his downfall is implied so heavily that the audience is left without any alternative in interpreting the play. The argument the play wants to make is clear. Rome is better for establishing order. Cleopatra is bad for Antony. Many of the Roman scenes are employed in the play with their original meaning mostly intact, although, the original form is directed to change slightly in order to attribute the original meaning to new signifiers. The introduction to

Antony reveals that he has fallen from his once great stature due to his infatuation with

Cleopatra. This is recognized by Demetrius to be apparent and even known in Rome when he

says, "I am full sorry, that hee approues the common / Lyar, who thus speakes of him at Rome"

(1.1.74-75). What is yet to be seen is exactly what type of Cleopatra Shakespeare is presenting.

While we have some allusions to Cleopatra being utterly in love with Antony, there is also a

mention of her conniving. Cleopatra still seems to be blamed for Antony's downfall, but only for

the effects that his love for her has on him.

Many of these values are mirrored in Roman accounts of Cleopatra and Antony. This

appears to be roughly the same version of Cleopatra from Plutarch, except for the fact that

Cleopatra does not seem hell bent on the destruction of Rome. Additionally, Cleopatra's

appearance is commented on as an additional indicator of her foreignness. While Roman sources

refer to her as an Eastern witch, Shakespeare goes further by challenging her Greek Macedonian

ethnicity. Finally, Shakespeare does not seem to be as concerned about painting Cleopatra as a

villainess. While Shakespeare benefits from this version of Cleopatra, his commentary is not on

Cleopatra herself. Rather, the Roman version of Cleopatra is taken for granted, and employed in

order for political commentary on the status of gypsies is England, as well as to comment on the

right of Western states to conquer foreign and barbarous cultures (LaPerle 227).

However, this play is very much about Antony's actions and very little about Cleopatra's.

Of course, as Cleopatra is almost always the subject of conversation in the play, we can still

glean from it a lot of how Cleopatra's character was perceived and exchanged in Shakespeare's

time. Additionally, many of the myths and episodes are at least alluded to when not shown on

screen, there are a few interesting takes on them. For example, the iconic scene of Cleopatra's

introduction "to Cæsar in a Matris" is briefly mentioned, even though it occurred many years

prior to the events in the play (2.6.1264). Additionally, there is a scene in Plutarch in which Cleopatra sends someone to manipulate Antony into returning to Egypt after marrying Octavia. This scene is not radically changed, but the function may be different as supernatural forces recur as a trope in Elizabethan tragedies. The fortuneteller, first depicted in Cleopatra's court, accurately gives the fortunes of three characters in the first scene, whose fortunes come to pass by the end of the play. While everyone in the play seems to be keen to Antony's lack of self-control, the inclusion of this myth shifts the blame further from Antony personally and attributes his fall more to the controlling forces of Augustus and Cleopatra.

The Battle of Actium and the deaths of both Antony and Cleopatra are depicted very closely to the accounts in Plutarch. Prior to the battle, Antony discusses with his plans for the battle in front of Cleopatra and his soldiers, intending to fight by sea despite not having a military force trained at sea battle. A soldier interrogates Antony about the decision, saying "Most worthy sir, you therein throw away / The absolute soldiership you have by land," but the only reasoning Antony gives as to his decision is "For that [Augustus] dares us to 't" (3.7.1909-10, 1895). The discussion that ensues after he departs makes it clear that the reason is Cleopatra's effect on his judgement, one of his generals saying concluding "we are Womens men" (3.7.1943).

After the Battle of Actium and the desertion of Antony's forces, Antony tries to convince Eros to kill him after receiving a message from Cleopatra's servant that she has died, but Eros, for loving Antony, takes his own life to avoid having to follow Antony's order. Antony, filled with courage by Eros' example, falls on his own sword, but survives the attempt, though mortally wounded. He is carried back to Cleopatra, where the two finally reconcile before their deaths. The Roman generals lament the death of Antony, including Augustus, with something of

the Roman ideas of suicide persisting in Shakespeare when Cleopatra says, "Wee'l bury him: And then, what's braue, what's Noble, / Let's doo't after the high Roman fashion, / And make death proud to take vs" (4.15.3101-3). The honor that Antony lost is recovered upon his death, while for Cleopatra it allows her the opportunity to prove herself: "Husband, I come: / Now to that name, my Courage proue my Title" (5.2.3539). Cleopatra's death is not only her act of reproof, however, but also functions as the object of her fame. Cleopatra tells her servants attending to her death, "Giue me my Robe, put on my Crowne, I haue / Immortall longings in me," immortal both at once referencing the immortal "byting" of the asp, as well as the immortality of her legend (5.2.3499, 3532). The self-awareness of the play comes again when the generals of Rome decide to bury Cleopatra and Antony together, Augustus remarking that the grave will be most famous, and matched in its pity only by the glory of his own conquest.

This play is not so much of a tragedy. Cleopatra is almost depicted as comically in love with Antony, while Antony is unable to control himself. On one hand he wants to be free from Cleopatra's control, but the same is true for Caesar's shadow over him. Would this then be a translation of her character, as the signified she serves is then attributed to another signifier?

As for the transadaptation of the many episodes of the Cleopatra Legend within this play, translation seems to be the primary focus. On one hand, this version of Cleopatra is not at all the powerful queen and only seems to care about keeping Antony in love with her. There is little mention of Cleopatra as smart, or leader, or goddess, and very little performed on her part that would align her with these versions of her. She is simply a spectacle to behold in her "infinite variety" (2.2.952). Her charm never withers because it is not necessarily her looks that attract, but her tendency towards pomp and parade. She is idleness and luxury and base desire. This is not the exact Cleopatra that comes out of Roman sources, as she was typically painted as the

conniving villain opposing the rise of the Roman Empire. However, this is the version of Cleopatra that started to be popularized during this period.

Just as Chaucer focused more on the domestic aspects of Cleopatra as a lover, Shakespeare does the same. Although there are scenes in Shakespeare, through which she is also viewed in her role as queen, she never adopts a demeanor that is queenly. On the other hand, many of the myths are used from the Roman tradition with only minor deviations. The combination of Roman sources with the early modern narrative of Cleopatra could best be described as translation.

While translation is the preservation of meaning, another way of thinking of the same process is *changing to what sign meaning is applied*. The exact same meaning evoked by episodes of the Cleopatra Legend can be preserved through new signifiers. This engagement in mythmaking simply adds to the pool of symbols by which the signified of a second order sign can be evoked. The translation of Cleopatra's character, however, to resemble that of gypsies does not preserve her original meaning wholly, as it is now elevated in meaning to include also the second order meaning that gypsies symbolized. However, it is possible for the translation of a second order sign to not include taking on new meaning, if the new form of the signifier did not already have meaning attributed to it. In this case, any loss or change of the original meaning of the translated sign is associative.

This transadaptation affects the understanding of both Cleopatra and gypsies, denoting meaning to Cleopatra that might have once only been associated with gypsies and vice versa. Cleopatra is transformed into a domestic problem, one that an audience would already have strong feelings about. She is set up as the enemy to the audience simply by aligning her character with a class of people already disliked by the ruling majority of England. On the other hand,

every exploration into Cleopatra's character offers commentary on the nature of this class. The meaning of the early modern Cleopatra is then associated with the myths of Roman sources, resignifying their function in depicting Cleopatra from that of the villainous queen to the lover. This Cleopatra is also given new signifiers, in comparing her with gypsies, the myths associated with Cleopatra are now shared with their image; the meaning preserved, while the form changes.

CHAPTER V

MANKIEWICZ'S SPECTACLE OF SPECTACLES

Transadaptations of myth are relevant when they are adopted into the culture. Born out of an artist's desire to express something, either by conflating the meaning of two different signifiers, as in translation, or by assigning new meaning by preserving the form in a new linguistic system, an adaptation. However, their "relevance" is dependent on how convenient they are to the users and consumers of myths in explaining reality through cultural shifts in values.

Myth is built in one direction. It tells a story for which the context is left out and forgotten, only leaving the signifier and signified in an arbitrary relationship. While we have already discussed why myths change over time, the relative success of any transadaptation of myth is much harder to predict, just as it is hard to predict with certainty how language will evolve over time. There is a certain resistance to going too far with transadapting myth as it begins to no longer reflect reality.

The other limitation to transadapting myth is that even if a new "mythology" is accepted into cultural memory, it takes time for the newer signification to become naturalized, as the new second-order sign competes with the old. For example, it may be taken for granted that words, first order signs, "say" what they "mean," or that the relationship between signifier and signified is other than convention. In fact, prescriptive grammarians go so far as to say word usage should be rigidly defined and controlled, that words say what they mean going beyond implied fact to linguistic law. However, the meaning of words do change through their varied use over time, and each time it happens it disrupts the notion that words mean anything at all, other than what we

say they mean. The change from the word *awful* denoting "inspiring awe" to "very bad" can be likened to the more modern change in *sick,* once meaning "ill," but sometimes now meaning "impressive" (Bauer 2). This new meaning for *sick* was not accepted at once by all users of the English language, but was slowly adopted as subcultures used it in this way and the majority became more exposed to its new function. These types of changes in word usage are resisted because they disrupt language users' ability to communicate effectively. This disruption is much greater for myth.

If we were to say second-order signs are symbols and that tropes are recurring symbols, myth would be tropes that a culture accepts as reality. Not only in the sense that the concept portrays an intrinsic relationship to the sign, but vice versa as well. When asked to come up with a symbol of Cleopatra's leisure one might think of a pearl, as a representation of her extravagance and cunning as related by the Pliny's description of the Banquet of Cleopatra. The pearl would then serve as a symbol to extravagance and cunning even without Cleopatra's presence. In this scene, Cleopatra makes a wager with Antony that "on a single entertainment she would expend ten millions of sesterces" (Pliny 9.58). However, when it came to the banquet she threw, it was no greater than the ones they were both already accustomed to. Cleopatra then outwits Antony by dropping a pearl earring into a cup of vinegar and drinking the solution, winning the wager in one drink. For those in cultures where the depiction of the Banquet of Cleopatra became a trope in her representations, the connection between the pearl and their understanding of Cleopatra may have been thoroughly linked. As long as the transaction between the signifier, the pearl, and the signified, the values or history being portrayed by the symbol, remain in consistent usage, the myth is not disrupted and the connection may become fact. All depictions of Cleopatra's pearl would then signify her treachery, and her treachery would add to

the signification of the pearl. When that use changes, however, either through its adaptation or translation, it disrupts the language. A sign that once was once fact in its signification is now deconstructed to the sum of its parts.

Of course, "languages are self-regulating systems" (Bauer 8). The same goes for second-order languages. Whether the myth changed through adaptation, giving it a new signified, or through translation, changing the events or specificities in which it occurred, language users will continue to exchange and transact the myth. Perhaps the subsequent myth, now a symbol, falls out of use or continues to change through the continually varied use of the myth. Or else, this new version of the myth, a symbol at first, becomes accepted into the culture and recurs as a trope, until the relationship between its sign and signified once again become naturalized within cultural memory.

Even in the information age, myths continue to permeate perceptions of reality. "Heart shaped" cards given on Valentine's Day very rarely resemble actual hearts and are linked to expressions of love, which may cause people to believe that they love with their hearts. This connection can be seen in the expressions "I love you with all my heart" and "broken hearted," despite modern medical knowledge proving this to be untrue and that society is now far removed from the Greek sources that originally popularized the idea. In a considerable portion of the depictions of the Cleopatra Legend, Cleopatra dies by the bite of an asp. This death has been incredibly popularized in histories, plays, paintings, sculptures, and even film. However, there are no eye witness accounts of her death, and the earliest source about it offers two separate accounts, one by asp and another by poisonous ointment (Strabo XVII.10). Additionally, the original appeal to popularizing this death for Cleopatra may have come from Augustan propagandist's appeal to dramatic irony, as the asp is heavily associated with Ptolemaic regents.

Still, many artists choose to depict her death in this way and it may be considered a naturalized part of her mythology.

Many of the Cleopatra myths out of Roman sources have remained popular through film, both by allowing for increased exposure of the artists' rendition of Cleopatra to audiences, as well as due to its medium allowing for the inclusion of several of Cleopatra's iconic scenes, both in performance and imagery, in a way similar to plays. However, they often take different approaches to dealing with the Roman narrative. While Chaucer chooses to adapt the Cleopatra legend into a tragic romance and Cleopatra as the heroine, in not wanting to stick faithfully to the Roman sources for their bias he fosters the creation of new symbols for the Cleopatra Legend, but these symbols never become popularized in Cleopatra's Western tradition. Shakespeare, in sticking much closer to the intended concept and myths of the Roman narrative of Cleopatra, continues the growing early modern fascination with Cleopatra as a passionate lover, while using her other roles as extravagant and leisurely for social commentary, by applying these concepts to the adapted signifier of her race. How then has Cleopatra been presented on the silver screen?

The 1912 silent film *Cleopatra* by Helen Gardner comments on these myths directly in a slide during the opening credits:

> Certain stage traditions originally founded in ignorance and preserved after they became traditions, have not been considered; the object of the Director has been to insure naturalness in an atmosphere of romance, the object of the Author to intimate the nobilities and grandeur of the woman who was devotedly loved by Julius Caesar. Perfect freedom has been exercised in the adaptation. (1912 Gardner)

This recognition of the bias of the Roman sources and their hindrance on the ability to convey a Cleopatra that is natural "in an atmosphere of romance" might be cause to give Chaucer sympathy for his own reconstruction of the Roman myths. Ironically, this very disclaimer purports to intimate "the woman" and therefore claims Cleopatra herself as the source, rather than the "traditional" depictions of Cleopatra, and therefore engages in its own mythmaking. The claim that Cleopatra was "noble," "grand," and "devotedly loved by Julius Caesar" are then given credence only by the film's effectiveness in its portraying its argument.

However, today it is not Gardner's film, but Mankiewicz's that serves as the iconic modern-day depiction of the Cleopatra Legend. Four hours in length and with a massive budget, this 1963 epic depicts Cleopatra's legend from the time of Caesar's arrival in Alexandria to Cleopatra's death (Mankiewicz 1963). With the production largely considered to be a failure due to its poor performance at the box office and the mismanaged shoot that led to an out of control budget, how did Elizabeth Taylor become the iconic image of Cleopatra?

Above all else, the film serves as a faithful transadaptation of the Roman sources. Cleopatra is both conniving and a passionate lover of the two Roman generals (Mankiewicz 1963). It is never in question as to whether she seduces Marc Antony and Julius Caesar, and her political and territorial gains are always at the forefront of her reasoning. However, this film does not adopt the Rome-centric narrative by painting Cleopatra as the villain, but allows her character to fulfill the episodes of the Roman sources while portraying her as the heroine regardless. While many adaptations of the Cleopatra Legend seem to believe making Cleopatra the heroine of her story involved changing the myths surrounding her, Mankiewicz embraces them.

This might reveal some of the changing ideas about the cultural appeal to Cleopatra. Chaucer's depiction conforms Cleopatra to the feminine ideal, downplaying her roles as seductress and queen, while emphasizing her role as wife to Antony, Cleopatra as a virtuous lover. Other popularized depictions of Cleopatra showcase her faithfulness or bravery in the face of death through her suicide by asp, and her great extravagance through her banquet. Taylor's Cleopatra captures them all, along with her role as a politically and socially adept queen and seductress (Mankiewicz). Cleopatra is an appealing character in history not for any one role, although artists often try to caricaturize her, but for the many roles she plays.

So far removed from the Roman sources, the modern-day viewer may not feel the same affiliation with Roman ideals as cultures in the past, instead able to remain impartial or even identify more with Cleopatra. In the cases of both Mankiewicz and Gardner's film, Cleopatra is portrayed by a conventionally attractive woman of the ethnic majority of the culture it was released in (Gardner 1912, Mankiewicz 1963). While Rome is not depicted as particularly near to the audience, neither is Cleopatra, save for the attire. The result is a queen that is not quite so foreign, but ruling over foreign bodies. Additionally, in pitting her against Caesar Augustus and the Senate, Cleopatra becomes the symbol of rebellion in the face of occupying, patriarchal forces.

While Gardner's *Cleopatra* purports to take liberties in the portrayal of the Cleopatra Legend, Mankiewicz does more in resignifying her mythology by remaining more faithful. Rather than offering a depiction of Cleopatra that differs greatly from her Roman sources, trying to adapt or translate her into specific function or form, Mankiewicz portrays the legend nearly in full, at once deconstructing the myth by displaying all of its parts, but, in keeping close proximity to the conventional use of each myth, maintaining it. However, with the focus on

Cleopatra's agency rather than the Roman generals, Cleopatra becomes the film's protagonist, adapting the old myths into a new construction of the Legend.

CONCLUSION

Rather than resignification, transadaptation may result in creating new symbols when it strays too far from its source in both form and concept. Even if a new symbol is accepted into cultural memory, it takes time for the newer signification to become naturalized, as the new symbol has to compete with the old one. As a result, the new symbol may fall out of use or continues to change through its varied use.

However, as faithful transadaptations may subvert the form or concept of a myth without being too abrasive to an audience. The result is the gradual resignification of a myth, rather than a staunch attempt to resignify myth. Of course, neither of these methods is necessarily better than the other, and the ultimate determinant of the success of a transadaptation of myth is its adoption into and preservation in cultural memory, as a mark of its convenience to language users to express cultural values through the myth.

Derrida's linguistic theory of translation serves as a model for understanding the translation of first order signs. By expanding this linguistic theory, a concise economy is created that can comment on all transactions between languages in relations to the economic laws of property and quantity. The subsequent combined theory of transadaptation, however, functions for all linguistic systems, as proved in the close readings of three of the most significant cultural depictions of the Cleopatra Legend. While the Cleopatra Legend has a varied and complicated history, these three close reading provide several insights into how myths evolve over time, across media and genres, and through cultural boundaries.

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