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## Women and Socio-Political Power: A Feminist Appraisal of William Shakespeare's Tamora and Cleopatra in Respectively *Titus Andronicus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*

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### Abstract:

Women's position has been a degrading one for very long. They have been regarded as physically and intellectually weak and fragile beings. For that reason, they are excluded from the socio-political progress of the society. However, William Shakespeare, though living in the 16<sup>th</sup> century portrays women who defy the accepted norms of the patriarchal society. This analysis aims at exploring the relationship between women and political and social power in Shakespeare's two tragedies *Titus Andronicus* and *Antony and Cleopatra* through their respective tragic heroine. Basing itself on a feminist ideology, the study has answered the question 'is women's power an effective and efficient one in the selected plays?' It comes out that in contrast to what the patriarchal men think of women, Shakespeare's main female character are strong, intelligent, manipulative and capable of yearning and handling conveniently the respective power that they possess.

**Key words:** Feminism, Power, Patriarchy, Shakespeare, Tragedy.

### Introduction

During the ancient time, women's image has been portrayed in a very negative way. It has been described with less desirable connotations such as "a foe to friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a gateway to the devil" (A Dobie, 1960, p105). Consequently, they were treated with less consideration as men or even as human beings. Instead of getting respect from the society because she is the guardian of humanity's progress through her womb, a woman is rather victimized and non-respected. Although she is the one who carries children and give birth in a painful way, her man sees her very weak and fragile. Even though she is the one who keeps the household and takes care of husband and children, she is seen as immoral. Although she is the one who supports her husband, the society sees her as an unintelligent being. They are less listened to because they are believed to be irrational as Tyson Lois (2006) explains it "*the traditional gender roles* cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive" (p87). This stereotypical situation consequently limits women's sphere in their houses.

As a result, women do not contribute to the socio-political development of their respective societies. Using liberal feminism, this study aims at pinpointing the relationship between women and power in Shakespeare's plays *Titus Andronicus* and *Antony and Cleopatra* through their respective main female characters. It answers the question is women's power an effective one in Shakespeare's selected plays?

### I. Women and Power in *Titus Andronicus*

#### 1. synopsis of the play

*Titus Andronicus* is believed to have been written around 1593. It a five acted tragic play. It forecasts the Machiavellic plans of a woman who wants to remain to power and to avenge her sons' murder. She

liberates a great amount of force and stratagem to have her plans succeeded. The play enlightens women's strength to lead and fight to achieve their dreams.

In fact, the plays revolves around Titus Andronicus and Tamora and their actions to avenge their respective sons.

Coming back from a war on the Goths lands, Titus takes the queen as a captive and executes one of her sons as sacrifice to his dead sons on the battlefield. Despite Tamora's supplications to Titus, he ends up executing the young man. In the course of actions, the war captive Tamora becomes the new roman queen. She then decides to take actions to avenge her son's murder in destroying Titus' family. As a result, she kills Titus' daughter's husband and have her sons rape Lavinia, Titus' daughter. Finally, she makes the king execute two of Titus' sons.

## **2. Women and power in *Titus Andronicus*.**

The main female character is Tamora, the captive Goth Queen. She enters into action where she is brought in front of the roman authorities by Titus. The first trait of her character that is brought out is her weakness due to her situation as a captive. She begs Titus for her son's life but her supplications fell into deaf ears. Despite her seemingly unfavorable situation, her power is nonetheless recognized by her surrounding and herself. In act one scene one, Saturninus calls her, "Tamora the Queen of Goths", this demonstrates her power and importance like Howells Allison explains it, "Saturninus' proclamation reveals the political power Tamora holds" (Howells 3). By referring to her as Queen, Saturninus also shows the importance she upholds in the political arena and in the society "lovely Tamora, Queen of Goths.... speak Queen of Goths" (I.2.251; 258). Tamora's political power alludes therefore to her importance, this is certainly why Howells speculates that "by addressing her as Queen of Goths twice within his speech, Saturninus emphasizes that he finds her title worth mentioning and indicates that her influence with the Goths is a politically attractive, advantageous asset" (Howells, 2021, p3). This opinion is also supported by Paul Innes who thinks that "Saturninus marries Tamora because he needs a new party in the state to support his throne" (Paul, 2012, p.19). So, even as a captive and before becoming the roman empress, she already possesses a political power from where she comes from. So, Saturninus does not hesitate to use this asset in her to strengthen his authority. Most importantly, Even Tamora herself is aware of the important power and position that she occupies. Therefore, she feels humiliated when her position is not respected by Titus. She deplores "make them know what 'tis to let a queen/ kneel in the streets and beg for grace in vain" (II.1.91-92) hence, highlights here her political position and power.

Nonetheless, Saturninus' authority is not the only one to be strengthened by his decision to marry Tamora, Tamora also benefits from this decision because she becomes the empress of the romans and gains more power. Tamora is thus the most powerful woman in the play. But before then, Tamora has in fact been publicly humiliated and wronged by Titus by first making her beg for the life of her son and second by killing him. But her destiny plays in her favor and, from a miserable and unfortunate position, she becomes the roman empress.

As a matter of fact, Tamora's tragic flaw starts to emerge to the surface. In fact, taken by the anger of her son's lost, she decides and swears vengeance by all means. The murder of her son by torture ordered by Titus is what brings out Tamora's major sin, anger. Sorge (2017) explains that "Tamora's villainy unfolds from her reaction to the horror of her son's death by torture, dismembering and fire" (p23). From then she lets herself controlled by her flaw that is her anger, by vowing revenge. So, "all her actions throughout the rest of the play are a result of her need to get revenge on Titus" (Sorge, 2017, p23). Consequently, she uses her political position and her power as the Queen to exact revenge. Tamora, more than any other Shakespearean female character displays much cruelty, mercilessness and strength and willingness to fulfill her objectives. As a matter of fact, she uses her power to control everyone in her surroundings to achieve whatever goal she carries. Her main objective being to destroy Titus' family, she manipulates everyone and everything to be successful.

Tamora has not fought to get power but shows ability and cleverness to use it. She has been selected by fate to become once again Queen, as she has been before elsewhere. She stands in an unfavorable and miserable stand until destiny chooses her to be the roman empress. At the moment she is consecrated as empress, wife of the emperor, she starts handling state issues in her favor. Tamora, like Saturninus, uses her marital state

with the emperor to her favor. She knows that becoming the Empress will help her gain more power de facto ease her path to her objectives. In fact, she “needs [Saturninus] at least as much as he needs her in this new political configuration. From her starting point “as a captive of a successful roman commander, she can only gain her revenge against Titus by means of a relationship with the newly installed emperor” (K Sorge, 2017 20). In this sense, right at the starting point of this relationship, Tamora takes hold of the advantages by starting “cautioning subtlety to Saturninus” (K Sorge, 2017,p20). When the newly and fresh emperor Saturninus hesitates in forgiving the Andronicus for their hot-bloodedness and coldness, she says her husband to be “my lord be rul’d by me (Act I S2 379-39I). She first makes sure to manipulate the king at her will in order to execute whatever she desires.

Consequently, many a time in the story, she is capable of changing the king’s decisions and commands. Instances are, right at the beginning of her relationship with the Emperor, she makes the emperor coming back on his words and decisions. When the emperor is reluctant to pardon Titus’ family, Tamora intervenes and changes the situation through emotional blackmail. She says to Saturninus: “My worthy lord, if ever Tamora/were gracious in those princely eyes of thine/then hear me speak indifferently for all;/And at my suit, sweet, pardon what is past. (II.I 365-368). She demonstrates an understanding of human nature and ability to play on. She makes sure to win the trust of the king in order to use him at her convenience. Furthermore, she also shows an understanding of the public and teaches Saturninus how to behave publicly to win their trust and support. She explains to the king:

My lord, be rul’d by me, be won at last;  
Dissemble all your griefs and discontents:  
You are but newly planted in your throne;  
Lest then the people, and patricians too,  
Upon a just survey, take Titus’ part,  
And so supplant you for ingratitude,  
Which Rome reputes to be a heinous sin.  
Yield at entreats, and then let me alone.  
I’ll find a day to massacre them all, (II.1.379-87)

This passage talks much about Tamora and how educated she is. Indeed, she remains the king, her “lord” and Rome’s lord that there is time for everything and that it is not convenient to act improperly even if it is a must because it is important to control the masses through trust. She also teaches him how to govern people if he wants to last on power. Even though not a roman, she teaches the roman king about the codes and believes of his own people. In fact, knowing that Titus has long fought for the roman army and the reputation that he wins acting so, Tamora understands that the king will lose people’s support and empathy if punishes the kneeled old man in front of people and overtly. Therefore, she manages to ‘win’ the king’s quick understanding in order to save his reputation and also have the opportunity to avenge herself. The king finally surrenders and declares “Rise, Titus, rise: my empress hath prevail’d” (II.1.396). It comes out from this passage that, Tamora is educated in politics and has knowledge in human psychology. Before situations come, she already knows how to prevent them and handle them. Tamora shows that she deserves her seat in men’s assembly because she is as knowledgeable as they are or even more. In the course of the story, no man is caught playing with people’s emotions and lives as Tamora does and she also is aware of her skills. She manipulates men around her with her political power and her intellectual power. This is why Sorge Kelly (2017) opines that “men are threatened by Tamora because she is not the object of power for anyone” (p29). Men are in fact object of her power.

Additionally, from the time Tamora is announced wife to be to the emperor, she issues her position to avenge her son’s death and the dishonor done to her by the Andronicus. In order to achieve her objectives, she elaborates a well-structured plan together with her collaborators. The end of their plan is to do away with the Andronicus family one by one by attacking first where it hurts the most. Because, only in destroying Titus’ family Tamora can have peace of mind like she says “nev’r let my heart know merry cheer indeed/ till all the Andronici be made away” (II.3.188-189).

Consequently, the first action that they undertake is to attack the children of Titus. Lavinia is in fact, among the first bullet that they shoot in Titus’ chest and it almost kills him. Indeed, they kill Bassianus, brother to the emperor and husband to Lavinia, and throw the body in the bush, this facilitates them access to Lavinia. They immediately accuse Lavinia’s brothers of killing Bassianus. After killing the husband, they

use the opportunity to rape Lavinia. Tamora cruelly accepts that her sons rape Lavinia and despite many supplications from Lavinia, the empress does not accept. The more Lavinia asks for mercy the more she remembers of the mercilessness of Titus, her father. She reminds her sons “remember, boys, I pour’d forth tears in vain, to save your brother from the sacrifice. But fierce Andronici would not relent. Therefore, away with her and use her as you will: the worse to her, the better lov’d of me” (I.3.163-167). There, “Lavinia’s pleading only encourages Tamora’s urge for revenge on Titus” (K Sorge, 2017, p26). She heartlessly supports and encourages her sons to rape another woman just to have revenge. This action goes beyond any humanity and feeling of compassion. Kelly Sorge rightly opines that “Tamora gets the most brutal form of revenge against Titus in her sons’ rape of Lavinia” (K Sorge, 2017, 25).

Tamora’s wishes are de facto executed by her sons who have raped Lavinia and cut off her tongue and her hands to avoid her from revealing the identity of her aggressors. In the ancient time, rape was among the most dishonorable and horrible things that a woman can go through. Beyond the raped, her family is dishonored, this is why Titus does not bear his daughter’s situation.

But Lavinia’s rape is only second in the process of Tamora’s revenge plan and Titus’ miseries. For, before Titus learns about his daughter’s situation, he first learns that his sons have been accused of murdering the emperor’s brother and that they are condemned for the crime. Whereas, Bassianus is killed by Demetrius and Chiron in presence of Tamora their mother. This is a plan set up by Tamora to hurt Titus and have his sons killed as her own. After the emperor has known about his brother’s death, Tamora shows a letter attesting a conspiracy against Bassianus by the two brothers.

With the letter, Tamora convinces the king of Titus’ sons’ guilt. This shows Tamora’s skills in lying and manipulating situations into her advantage in order to get what she wants. It also testifies her corruption of mind and heart and pitilessness. She betrays the patriarchal notion of femininity of her time because women were known to be fragile, docile and tender hearted.

Despite many pleas from Titus in his sons’ favor, no one listens to him but Tamora. She hypocritically reassures Titus that she will plead for the Andronici to the king. She says “Andronicus, I will entreat the king:/ Fear not thy sons, they shall do well enough” (II.3.303-304). Tamora shows herself limitless in deceiving her surroundings only to have her plans move forward. In fact, “in pleasing smiles” she destroys the Andronici and the royal family at the same time. She does not care of anyone but herself and her ambitions of revenge. For that matter, she undertakes all possible ways no matter what the consequences are provided that her sons and herself will be safe. She goes up to killing her husband’s brother thus her brother-in-law to assure the progress of her plan. Lavinia is right when she exclaims talking to Tamora: “Ay, come, Semiramis, -nay, barbarous Tamora/ For no name fits thy nature but thy own” (II.3.118-119). Her cunning nature is therefore used to destroy Titus’ family in an ambition to satisfy her egotistical desires.

Titus uses all possible words to plead for his sons’ lives in vain. He has been in this desperate situation when his brother brings in Lavinia who he has found mutilated and martyred in the bush. He discovers that more than the lives of his two sons, his only daughter also has been ravished. The loss of Titus’ two sons and the dishonor of the young Lavinia satisfies Tamora but not entirely. Since Titus’ own hand has been the very one that do away with Alarbus’ life, Tamora’s collaborators manage to have it off. They send him a false word from the emperor asking him to cut off one of his collaborators’ hands in retribution to his sons’ lives. Aaron, Tamora’s secret lover, is the one who brings the news.

In contact with this news, Titus relaxes a little bit knowing that there is a means to save his sons. But he will only be deceived when the two heads of his sons and his hand will be sent back to him. In an aside by Aaron, we learn that the plan is to fool Titus and hurt him more. After he cuts the hand off Aaron says: “I go, Andronicus; and, for thy hand,/Look by and by to have thy sons with thee./[Aside] Their heads, I mean” (III.1.199-201). Titus’ willingly and naively cuts off his hand but only receives back the two head cut off and the hand sent to them. They make fun of Titus’ sufferings as if it were a toy to children. The messenger who brings the two heads and the hand indignant “thy grief their sports, thy resolution mock’d” (III.1.239).

This situation brings Tamora’s vengeance plans and Titus’ resistance to their paroxysm, for “these miseries are more than may be borne” (III.1.243). Tamora is finally revenged from all the sides she desires it. But unfortunately for her and her collaborators, the andronici on their hand start taking up action to exact revenge for everything they undergo. Titus de facto decides to take up actions and avenge the atrocities done to his family. He tells his banished son to go to the Goths and rise up an army to attack the Roman emperor.



They have in fact much to do because each of them leaves with the intention and fire to get revenge. Lucius promises that “If Licius live, he will require your wrongs,/And make proud Saturnine and his empress/Beg on gates like Tarquin and his queen./Now will I to the Goths and raise a power,/To be reveng’d on Rome and Saturnine” (III.1.296-300). With this resolution for revenge, the Andronici leave one another. In the meantime, Titus feigns madness as a part of his plan to get revenged. The royal couple believes in his madness and tries to trick him back in order to do completely away with him.

In fact, informed about the Titus’ plans to attack the empire, the emperor decides to react and confront Titus the same way. But still, confident about her seducing skills and her power of manipulation, Tamora asks Saturninus to let her play off her cards and get completely rid of Titus. The following passage testifies of Tamora’s confidence in her powers: “I will enchant the old Andronicus /With words sweeter, and yet more dangerous,/Then baits to fish or honey stalks to sheep,/When as the one wounded with the bait,/The other rotted with delicious feed” (IV.4.89-93). Tamora intends to misguide Titus through her speaking skills and charm to turn the warlike situation in their favor. Saturninus on the other hand doubts about her ability to succeed with her plan but she replies: “If Tamora entreat him, then he will/For I can smooth and fill his aged ear/With golden promises, that, were his heart/Almost impregnable, his old ears deaf,/Yet should both ear and heart obey my tongue” (IV.95-99). The present passage attests of Tamora’s awareness of and undoubted confidence in her manipulative abilities. She therefore makes use of “all the art I have” as she says to achieve her goals. She is absolutely sure that her “art” works whenever she decides to apply it. Her affirmation “if Tamora entreats him, he will” demonstrates that she is totally convinced of her power and can convince anyone listening to her. However, this time, she is deceived by the very confidence in herself when Titus takes her in her own machiavellic game.

Indeed, Tamora disguises together with her two sons as Vengeance, Rape and Murder and promise Titus that they will help him heal his pains by getting revenge. She says “show me a thousand that have done thee wrong, /And I will be revenged on them all” (V.2.97-98). Titus still feigning madness shows them that he accepts their help whereas he is quite aware of their identity. He managed to get Tamora away and kill her two sons then bake them in a pie and later serve it to their mother as a feast meal.

In a word, through Tamora’s route, it comes out that she has been very strong and cunning to achieve her aim. From the time she has vowed vengeance, she uses all the means she can afford to fulfil her ambition. She indeed does not fight to get power; the play presents her already with her power position and later on circumstances solidify this power position. Nevertheless, she does not behave as the submissive, weak and fragile woman that the early modern England knew. She subverts all the accepted and taken-to-granted attributes given to women. She does not however lose her femininity because up till the end of the play, she harms everyone but not her sons. She has been capable of nurturing and loving her sons and lover. In fact, her love for her son is even the straw that broke the camel’s back because his loss brings out her tragic flaw, that is anger and yearn for revenge. She employs all the means in her possession to make her aggressors pay properly the offense done to her.

In this respect, she spares no effort, she shows no weakness, no hesitation, and no fragility. Comparatively, only Lady Macbeth and the sisters Lear can compete with her in all the dramatic heroine portrayed by Shakespeare. Even lady Macbeth is only second to her because at the end her female weakness causes her mental demise. William Shakespeare depicts Tamora in a way that contradicts all the patriarchal beliefs about women. However, as any dramatic hero, Tamora pays all her crimes with her life because she lets herself corrupted by her tragic flaw. Like any Aristotelian tragic hero, she passes through purgatory at the end of the play.

To sum up, Shakespeare depicts a brave, intelligent and powerful female character in *Titus Andronicus*. Tamora is tactful and strong enough to face the perils of the patriarchal world in which she is depicted. She takes actions to control men and get her desires fulfilled. Instead of being manipulated and overruled as is accepted in a patriarchal environment, Tamora manipulates men’s lives and destiny. Tamora, most importantly has been capable of many atrocities in order to achieve her goal. Though dead at the end, she is only caught by her hamartia and purged it as any dramatic hero or heroine. This leads the study to analyze the relation between women and power in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

## II. Women and power in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

### 1. Synopsis of the play.

*Antony and Cleopatra* is written in 1607 approximately. It depicts a power struggles mingled with a love story. The story portrays a powerful queen, Cleopatra that is caught in a love affair with one of the roman triumvirate, Mark Antony. The play is thus set in two main locations, Egypt and Rome.

The play thus clashes the governance of two powerful countries through their leaders. Antony actually falls in love with the Egyptian queen, Cleopatra and leaves his country to live with the queen in her country. He therefore abandons his state affairs to live an exotic life with his love. However, shortly after, he learns that his wife passes away and he returns back to Rome. This makes Cleopatra in a bad temper. While in Rome, to consolidate, their relationship, Caesar decides to marry his sister to Antony. Cleopatra learns about this news and get angry about it that she weeps the messenger. But shortly after, Antony feels himself betrayed by Caesar and leaves Rome once again to join Cleopatra. He decides to go on war against the Rome to restore his authority. Cleopatra helps him in this war but states that they will fight as she wishes, and Antony and his army follow Cleopatra's directions.

During a second war, still, Cleopatra siding with Antony against Caesar, betrays Antony and runs away. Taken with anger and deception, Antony leaves Cleopatra. This makes her in an unfortunate position and decides to feign her death in order to have Antony rushing to see her dead body. Unfortunately, Antony does not do as she plans but he decides to suicide himself. With Antony dead, Caesar wants Cleopatra to abdicate but she resists and kills herself on her turn.

## 2. Women and power in *Antony and Cleopatra*

The title name, Cleopatra, is in fact the main female character. She is the queen of Egypt, the political leader. So, she is the tragic female character of the story. Her power is not patterned under any man unlike Tamora who is only wife to the king. Instead, Cleopatra is the one trying and plotting to hinder and control the power of men surrounding her. Cleopatra has complete and absolute control over the political affairs of her country. The play opens with Cleopatra already the Egyptian queen, so her way to get access to the throne is not mentioned, as her story is inspired from a historical figure. However, the way she takes control of and manipulates the men around her is impressive. She is physically beautiful and elegant beyond measure, orally, she of an eloquence without precedents. These two characteristics represent in fact, the two opposing boundaries. Being physically beautiful is a quality of the early modern woman in contrast to being expressive that was attributed to men. Shakespeare mirrors her to the image of Queen Elizabeth I. Elizabeth has been described as an eloquent and always well-dressed Queen. She used her oral skills and her sexuality to maintain her power position and control her realm. Cleopatra is thus a cunning and too manipulative character. This actually puts a light on her tragic flaw, she is of an overflowing pride and a manipulative nature. This pride and manipulative character bring her instantly to her downfall.

William Shakespeare puts a parallel in his portrayal Cleopatra with Queen Elizabeth I. Cleopatra carries almost all the leadership characters of the English queen. She is daring, too expressive and tactful, all these behaviors were rejected by the patriarchal system from a woman. Contrarily, a woman should be weak, unvoiced, and under men authority. It is not surprising then that Cleopatra is denigrated by people around her. Actually, all the other characters describe her with negative qualifications such “a whore” “serpent” “trull” (*Antony and Cleopatra*). All these demeaning expressions testify of Shakespeare awareness of the patriarchal expectations of a woman and how the society rejected any woman who does not conform to its rules. In addition, these descriptions inevitably lead us to Gertrude in *Hamlet* who is perpetually denigrated by his son because of marrying her husband's brother just after her husband's death.

However, in parallel, Shakespeare struggles to portray his own ideal character who defies the norms of the society. In doing so, he gives chances to the audience to mirror up another form of women even though they were not used to. He breaks up the stereotypes of his contemporaries and tells them that women are capable of going beyond what is expected from them as illustrated by the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Thus, Cleopatra takes some of Elizabeth's behaviors and attributes and manners. In this line Randazzo Gelsey (2012) opines that “when Shakespeare's production was put on in front of an audience and Cleopatra was shown in her royal garments, spectators could have easily related this to their queen” (p10). Actually, she dresses up like Elizabeth used to do as Bassnett Susan Reports “Elizabeth appeared dressed in white silk, with long train and a crown on her head” (11). This shows the extravagance in Elizabeth's outfit just as Cleopatra's is described by Enobarbus “The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne/Burn'd on the water. / The poop was beaten gold;/ Purple sails, and so perfum'd that/The winds were lovesick with them; the oars

were silver” (II.2.196-198). Moreover, in her way of governing, she acts in certain ways like Elizabeth. For instance, during the war of roses, Elizabeth goes on the battlefield to support and encourage her army. Just like her, Cleopatra wants to go on the battlefield in the war that opposes her to the romans. Both keep explaining to the men surrounding them they are women yet they are the leaders of their countries.

These two elements combine femininity to courage and ability to govern. The first illustrates Cleopatra’s track of femininity in the way that she exhibits extravagant beauty and charm. She knows that she should make herself desired by men hence her track of sexuality as “women are forced to use manipulative methods to get what they want” (A Dobie, 1960, p106). On the other hand, she goes beyond the patriarchal expectations of a female in exhibiting courage and command over men.

The most important element of her character lies in the she governs her country and the way she sees herself. She sees herself no less than men and asserts her place on the throne with no reluctance and feeling of inferiority. She makes her way through men’s world and expects herself to be respected as so, as she reminds Antony “I am Egypt’s queen” (I.1.29). And as the Egyptian queen, she rules her country as a real political leader no less than men. This can be testified through the connotation she calls herself with. Many a time she refers to herself and is referred to by many as “Egypt”, so the representative of political power of the country and the people.

She teaches her realm to respect her as the sovereign of Egypt not as the woman she is. As quoted earlier, in act 3 scene 7 when she sends her soldiers in the battlefield, she wants on the battlefield as well with her soldiers. She says “as the president of my/kingdom, will appear/Appear there for a man. Speak not against it:/ I will not stay behind” (III.7.16). Hence, as the political leader of her country, she does not allow her subjects to downgrade her because she is a woman. This reminds us of Elizabeth’s claim that though she is a woman, she is the leader of the country. Cleopatra considers everyone under her control even Antony who is not an Egyptian but a stranger. In fact, even though Antony is not an Egyptian, the only fact that he stays in her land makes Cleopatra not be on his orders. During their first meeting for instance, when Antony proposes her to come to supper with him, she rejects it and says Antony should be the one coming over, as Enobarbus tells: “upon her landing, Antony sent to her, / invited to supper. She replied, / it should be better he becomes her guest” (II.2.224-26). In refusing to accept Antony’s invitation but rather sending him one, Cleopatra shows an understanding of how the societal rules work and she would be put in a second scale if she accepts going to the invitation. Also, it sends a message to Antony and anyone willing to know that, she is the commander of the land therefore everyone is at her orders. Cleopatra reverses the patriarchal gender norms right at their first meeting with Antony. Heidari F. Nastaran (2020) supports that “the fact that Cleopatra exercises her power over Antony by cancelling his invitation to supper and replacing by her own is an example of overturning the patriarchal order” (p126).

Moreover, Cleopatra does not stop at inviting Antony to a feast but manages to win his affection and love. Antony, being one of the triumviri of the Roman Empire, it would benefit to her to win one of the leading figures of a neighboring land. Her plan of seduction and manipulative tactics successfully work and Antony “pays his heart/ for what his eyes eat only” (II.2.229-230). Cleopatra manipulates Antony and gets absolute control over him. This also clashes the social expectations of a woman for, normally, a lady should be the one living her home to join the man’s but in Antony’s case, he abandons his duties as a leader in Rome to stay with Cleopatra in her empire. At the death of his wife Fulvia, when it is proposed to Antony to marry Octavia and stay in Rome and therefore leave Cleopatra, one of his attendants says “Never; he will not” (II.2.239). So not only Antony and his friends are aware of the power and control that the queen has over him but also, they recognize her charming nature as one of them explains:

Age cannot wither her,  
Nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety. Other women cloy  
The opposite they feed, but she makes hungry  
Where most she satisfies; for vilest things  
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests  
Bless her when she is riggish (II.2.240-45).

This passage refers to Cleopatra’s “highly sexualized” (Randazzo, 2012, p5) nature and the way she uses it to manipulate the people close to her for “even her worst faults are so charming that holy priests bless her even when she acts wanton” (Heidari, 2020, p125).

However, even when her manipulative skills do not suffice to maintain Antony close to her, her pride does not allow her to feel defeated. In fact, when Antony is away for Rome, she tells her attendant Mardian that she should go fishing and that every fish that she takes, she will consider as Antony:

Cleopatra: give me my angle we'll to the river. There,  
My music playing far off, I will betray  
Tawny-finn'd fish, my bended hook shall pierce  
Their slimy jaws; and as I draw them up,  
I'll think them every one an Antony,  
And say, ah ha! You're caught (II.5.10-15).

For her, Antony is just a prize to be won by playing and she has the ability to win him thus, as Randazzo Gelsey (2012) explains it “the roles are again reversed as Cleopatra is playing the one in control and the aggressor” (19). Rather than being fished, she is fishing. These examples show how Cleopatra thinks of herself and behaves among and with her subjects. She rejects all the stereotypes linked to the image of women of her time. She shows that she is physically and intellectually as strong as men. In act 2 scene 5 Cleopatra tells her attendants and mocks on how she disarms Antony and takes his place as a man. She says “I drunk him to his bed/Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst/ I wore his sword Philippan” (II.5.21-23). Cleopatra, as the writer, laughs at the way the society sees man as powerful and degrades women's nature, because despite the fact that they are believed less than men, they are capable of controlling men. Cleopatra puts her outfit on the drunken Antony and wears what belongs to him. Normally, a sword is symbolic of man's strength and courage, and taking it from Antony and wearing it demonstrates Cleopatra's ability to stand in man's shoes. The writer purposefully pictures this scene of reversal of roles to tell his contemporaries that women's abilities and power can go beyond the socially constructed beliefs.

Nevertheless, she has not finished telling her story that, a messenger brings in bad news from Rome. He informs her that Antony marries Octavia, Cesar's sister. Taken by anger, Cleopatra “strikes him down and hales him up and down and draws a knife to him” (II.5.). In this scene, the queen demonstrates a good deal of physical strength by striking and haling a man up and down. Also, anger is an attribute of patriarchal men, but Cleopatra is caught being angry instead of meek and mild. The Egyptian queen is desperate about losing the man on whom she exercises her power and control. She feels insecure about her beauty and manners of seduction until she is reassured that Octavia is not as beautiful as she is.

Moreover, Cleopatra's controlling tactics over Antony do not stop there and as his Enobarbus says it he cannot stay from Cleopatra. As soon as he feels himself cheated by his fellow leaders, he flees back to Egypt and decides to fight alone with Cleopatra's aid. But Cleopatra does not give him help only but decides to lead the dance. She decides on what war techniques should be applied by the soldiers in the battlefield. She pushes Antony to fight the war against Caesar by sea instead of land where he is surer of his force. This war decision taken by Cleopatra instead of Antony shows that she has a hand even over the political affairs of Rome not only on Antony. Heidari Nastaran (2020) Opines that “Cleopatra persuades Antony to fight the romans at sea rather than on land, a decision that is seen unman not just Antony but all his roman soldiers” (p123). So, if Antony and his soldiers are ‘unmanning’ Cleopatra takes the role of man over Antony like described by Cleopatra in previous scene. This act of reversal of gender roles is felt by Antony's soldiers when they complain “our leader's led, /And we are women's men” (III.6.69-70). Antony no longer has power and control over his own political affairs but leaves everything in the Queen's commands. It is only normal that “Cleopatra's power over the roman triumvir will become a material threat to the roman patriarchal order” (Heidari, 2020, p123).

It is without any surprise this situation leads Cleopatra to expand her controlling hand farther than on Antony but also on Caesar. Her pride brings her to count on her manipulative skills to play with both men. During a second war led in majority by her troops and commands, Cleopatra accepts to deal between the two opposing forces –Antony and Cesar, but ends up failing and losing both. Antony is disappointed and does not want to hear from her but Cleopatra never accepts defeat. To win him back, she decides to feign her death and sends to Antony how she dies full of love for him expecting Antony to rush to her. She is only deceiving to learn that Antony wounds himself to death when he hears about the news of her death. With Antony dead, Cleopatra feels herself overwhelmed by Caesar troops and Caesar even proposes to her to surrender and follow him to Rome. Once again, she plays out her manners and has Caesar believe that she accepts his proposal but Cleopatra is too proud to accept being defeated and denigrated even after her death.



Because she knows that her family and she will work through Rome as captives though Caesar proposes friendship to her and that:

The quick comedians  
Extemporally will stage us, and present  
Our Alexandrian revels; Antony  
Shall be brought as drunken forth, and I shall see  
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness  
I' the posture of a whore (V.2.214-219).

Cleopatra has been very clever and she predicts the future so she can avoid it from happening. As a matter of fact, “to fool their preparation and to conquer/ Their most absurd intents” (V.2.225-226), she plays off Caesar’s plans and majestically kills herself. She puts on her royal cloths and the crown before giving herself out to death. In this action, she defeats Caesar and all the roman longing to see her marching as a captive queen through their land. Her death scene demonstrates that up to the end of the play, Cleopatra never lets the patriarchal men decide on her fate. As long as she lives, she keeps controlling men and when it comes for men to believe that they can take control over her and her court, she decides to die instead of lasting to witness it. This act is worth of appraisal even if her “choice of suicide is the last time she will exert control in a patriarchal society” (G Randazzo, 2012, p20). She successfully makes it out of a patriarchal set up.

Shakespeare depicts Cleopatra with very opposite characters. She holds the characters of a patriarchal woman-beautiful, sexual, and at the same time, holds characters that defy the patriarchal expectations of women – powerful, manipulative, voiced, etc. Shakespeare depicts Cleopatra as “an exceptional woman-a queen, a harlot, a lover, a mother, a warrior, a politician, a traitor, a hero” (G Niagolov, 2010, p12). Hence, the audience enjoys and experiences a clash between two opposed sexes in only one woman. Cleopatra shows successfully “the possibility that women can, when necessity arises, leave their feminine social roles and act in the world as men” (G Niagolov, 2010, p8). Unfortunately, her excessive pride and manipulative skills that allow her to maintain her power in a misogynist society are the same character flaw that threaten her to her end and Antony as well.

In sum, the women in *Antony and Cleopatra* come into clash in terms of social virtue. While the main female character is described as a rebel and as a result denigrated and feared by her surrounding, the other is the ideal patriarchal woman. Even as such, each of them performs from her stance and in her own way a political and/or social power in a male dominated society.

## Conclusion

At the end, having analyzed the leadership of women in two of Shakespeare’s tragedies with a feminist lens, it comes out that women’s weakness is but a myth. Actually, women are capable of leading institutions and countries at large just as men. Shakespeare therefore portrays strong, intelligent and manipulative female characters.

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