

Spring 5-2015

## **A Queen's Reputation: A Feminist Analysis of The Cultural Appropriations of Cleopatra**

Chamara Moore  
*University of Southern Mississippi*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://aquila.usm.edu/honors\\_theses](https://aquila.usm.edu/honors_theses)



Part of the [Literature in English, North America, Ethnic and Cultural Minority Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Moore, Chamara, "A Queen's Reputation: A Feminist Analysis of The Cultural Appropriations of Cleopatra" (2015). *Honors Theses*. 297.  
[https://aquila.usm.edu/honors\\_theses/297](https://aquila.usm.edu/honors_theses/297)

This Honors College Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College at The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact [Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu](mailto:Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu).

The University of Southern Mississippi

A Queen's Reputation:  
A Feminist Analysis of The Cultural Appropriations of Cleopatra

by

Chamara Moore

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Honors College of  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Bachelor of Arts  
in the Department of English

May 2015



Approved by

---

Martina Sciolino, Ph.D., Thesis Advisor  
Associate Professor of English

---

Eric Tribunella, Ph.D., Chair  
Department of English

---

Ellen Weinauer, Ph.D., Dean  
Honors College

## Abstract

While there is no doubt that Cleopatra is considered a notable historical figure and popularly regarded character throughout modern media, there is a distinct pattern in her portrayal throughout time as a woman whose power is defined by her sexual promiscuity. Even throughout periods of powerful female monarchs, political change, and social progress her prowess as a leader has been assumingly attributed to her affairs with Julius Caesar and Marc Antony. The purpose of this study is to examine how literature and media has contributed to this sexualized reputation of a queen who yielded authority over such a prosperous nation. This study additionally seeks to explain Cleopatra's ranging cultural representations in performance and multimedia by closely examining these appropriations in their relevant historical contexts.

Shakespeare's play *Antony and Cleopatra* portrays a culturally exotic queen plainly ruled by both her passions and the men in her life. Joseph L. Mankiewicz's immortalized film *Cleopatra* uses the scandalously renowned Elizabeth Taylor to display the queen as a fair sexual object capable solely of political manipulation. The bestselling videogame *Dante's Inferno* represents Cleopatra as a discolored beastly creature capable of seducing her victims for the gains of Lucifer himself. Each of these works present the figure of a foreign queen in divergent historical contexts. Considering these various forms of media, this study argues that each of these representations has in some way contributed to Cleopatra's iconicity in western culture as an image of uninhibited female sexuality.

**Key words:** Cleopatra, queen, Elizabeth Taylor, film, gender, culture

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
1.2 Background .....	2
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	6
2.1 Discussion of Terminology and Context .....	6
2.2 Variables to be Considered .....	10
2.3 Introduction to Theory .....	11
Chapter 3: Readings .....	14
3.1 Shakespeare's <i>Antony and Cleopatra</i> .....	14
3.2 Mankiewicz's film <i>Cleopatra</i> .....	25
3.3 Dante's <i>Inferno</i> : Hell's Circle of Lust .....	32
Chapter 4: Conclusion .....	35
Works Cited .....	37

## Chapter 1: Introduction

What do we think of when we think of the word “Queen?” Does an image of a 16<sup>th</sup> century ruler come to mind? Or are our minds automatically overrun with thoughts of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II of England, in all her propriety and grace? Perhaps we instead think of the famous queens of literature and media, like the evil Maleficent from fairy tales or the treacherous Queen Cersei from Game of Thrones. Similarly, what do we think of when we think of Cleopatra? Is the thought of Cleopatra tantamount with *Queen* or *Pharaoh*? Do we automatically think of Cleopatra VII, the historical figure who ruled the country of Egypt and the entire Eastern Mediterranean coast? Or are our minds automatically overrun with thoughts of the Cleopatra slot machine, the video game, the cliché of a “loose woman,” or Elizabeth Taylor? What about who Cleopatra is? Being an Egyptian ruler of Grecian descent, her ethnicity has often been questioned. Throughout time, through her various cultural appropriations she has changed from a fair European maiden to a symbol of empowerment for those of African descent.

## 1.2 Background

While her face is everywhere, not much is really known about Queen Cleopatra aside from the men she associated with. So how did a Queen Regnant, a woman in the highest seat of power up there with the likes of Mary Stuart, Catherine de Medici, and Elizabeth Tudor come to be associated only by the powerful men in her life? In order to find an explanation for the perception of Cleopatra, we must turn to the mediums most notably associated with her, the first being Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Due to her historical and cultural significance, most stories about Cleopatra are based in historical fact. By examining the overlaps between the text and the actual historical occurrences during the time of composition, we can better discern what Shakespeare's message was and why he portrayed Cleopatra's character as he did.

Shakespeare published *Antony and Cleopatra* in 1623, at the start of the Thirty Years War and end of the Elizabethan Era in England during a time in history when governments were drastically changing. Elizabeth I ruled during a time when Europe was adjusting to a female monarchy such as that of Mary I. Elizabeth's reign is often called the Golden Age of England because of its recreation of a national identity. This identity was characterized by classical ideals, international expansion, and a naval triumph over the Spanish foe in the Spanish Armada of 1588. England was also economically healthier, more expansive, and generally more optimistic under its powerful Queen. The question becomes: why would Shakespeare respond with a portrayal that reduces such a powerful ruler of Egypt to an envious character so desperate as to die by her own hand? A close reading of his play can help determine how much of this characterization of Cleopatra was commentary on the politics of the time, and how much was attributed to

historical understandings of this ancient Queen during the Elizabethan Era. Elizabeth I's sovereignty disturbed gender paradigms among her 15<sup>th</sup> century contemporaries.

Gender politics informs representations of Cleopatra across historical periods and media. A prime example is the 1934 film released by Paramount pictures, in which director Cecil B. DeMille fashioned a garish portrait of the female sovereign for American audiences. The 20s marked a decade of the "New Woman" defined by this new characterization of a woman as "the embodiment of cultural, social and technical progress" with a "newly gained right to political participation" and "more leisure time and liberty" (Reinsch 1). The 30s was distinctly different from this previous period of change. Feminist fervor had diminished and practically disappeared in wake of the Depression. With this change, women were perceived as belonging in the home and not the workplace. With the depressed economy, federal forces seemed to be focused on bringing American men back to work. Working women were seen as "un-American money grubbers, stealing jobs from men who needed them to support their families" (Moran 2). This background explains why DeMille brings us the picture of a helpless Cleopatra who is seen only lounging around when she's not screaming for help. While the movie was successful, it wasn't enough to make Claudette Colbert (the round faced French beauty) synonymous with Cleopatra herself.

It was in Joseph L. Mankiewicz's 1963 film that a reigning Hollywood celebrity became conflated with the ancient queen herself. The film that began defining our culturally ambiguous queen starred a de-ethnicized Elizabeth Taylor, whose Jewish heritage was never part of her branding. This was made during yet another period of change, this time the Civil Rights movement. The film was in fact released 77 days

before the March on Washington. This was at the peak of the African-American civil rights movement, whose goal was to end racial segregation and discrimination against Black Americans. This period is most known for its campaigns of civil resistance such as sit-ins and boycotts. In fact, just one year after the movie released, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed, which banned discrimination based on color, religion, or national origin. While all of these things were happening during the time, the movie itself actually gained popularity partially because of the affair between Elizabeth Taylor and costar Richard Burton. So here we have yet another “Cleopatra figure” gaining popularity for her indiscretions. Could this be why Elizabeth Taylor and Cleopatra are so closely related from a modern cultural standpoint? Or is it also perhaps because Taylor was considered “queen” of the actresses at this time because she was the first actor (male or female) to ever be paid \$1 million for a film?

While Taylor’s ethnic identity was not associated with being “Jewish,” the racial identities of other actors were exploited in their later portrayals of Cleopatra. Such was the case for Tamara Dobson in the 1973 Warner Brothers film, *Cleopatra Jones*. This was one of many films categorized as “Blaxploitation” in the 70s. The Blaxploitation genre was meant to appeal specifically to an urban black audience. They often featured soundtracks of funk and soul music while having primarily black casts. *Cleopatra Jones* was released following the popular film *Shaft* released two years earlier in 1971. So what does it say that we have a black female special agent posing as a model that bears the name of an Egyptian queen? Called “Cleo” for short, Jones brings to mind the likes of James Bond with her fancy car (’73 Corvette stingray) armed with automatic guns and her martial arts ability. The most likely explanation for a character such as Jones bearing

Cleopatra's name is the movement during the 70s to develop "black identity." During this movement, people began changing their names to be more "ethnic sounding" thus adopting those of old African rulers such as Queen Cleopatra VII. An example of this is in the character Dee Johnson in Alice Walker's 1973 short story *Everyday Use* in which Dee returns home and requests that her mother begin calling her "Wangero."

Aside from film and Literature, the picture of Cleopatra continued to alter, forming the other cultural appropriations we are most familiar with. In addition to the Cleopatra Casino game where you can "get lucky with Cleopatra's gold slots," there's the new perverted view of the queen demonized into a videogame villain. An example of this can be seen in the popular videogame *Dante's Inferno*, in which the "Cleopatra level of lust" became best known for its difficulty and vulgar content. By examining these numerous cultural appropriations of Cleopatra, we can gauge how perception of her has changed in the context of the sentiments of their perspective eras. The game will be the last appropriation analyzed since its modern cultural relevance makes it arguably the most critical. In order to get a full picture over time, the analysis will start by looking at the early modern English play, *Antony and Cleopatra* as aforementioned.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Discussion of Terminology and Context

The first and most important term to define is *monarch*. Merriam Webster's dictionary defines a monarch as a hereditary sovereign or an absolute ruler of a nation. England alone has had 41 monarchs in 9.5 centuries (since 1066 A.D.), 5 of which have been female. That means 12% of England's rulers have been women, most of which received their crown by birthright rather than through marriage. This is a large percentage compared to Russia's 6% of female rulers, having had had 7 females out of 113 monarchs in over a thousand years (since 849 A.D.). These small percentages are just snapshots of the rarity of female monarchs throughout history. The glaring positive and negative implications of such an oddity must not be overlooked. The positive is the empowerment of a woman with political authority in the seat of royalty, but in the same regard she stands as a symbol against all patriarchy. By no means are all responses negative, however when considering the societal attitudes in place preceding an era of powerful female monarchs in Europe such as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it must be acknowledged that with change comes unrest and opposition.

The main voice for this opposition was John Knox, a popular political writer of the 16<sup>th</sup> century who was notorious for his traditionalist views. In his tract *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, Knox asserts that the accession of a woman to the throne is against the natural order of things. Using the Old Testament and patriarchal cultural traditions as evidence, Knox directly undermines the female rulers of his time, claiming them unfit and ineligible to bear rule over kingdoms. In fact, Queen Elizabeth found his writings to be "an offence to the legitimacy of her

title” and “an incitement to subversion of the public order,” (De Abreu 167). Because of this he was exiled to Geneva, Switzerland during her reign, though the distance didn’t stop him from writing.

Knox discusses another term central to this discussion, which is *gynecocracy*. Gynecocracy is just another word for gynarchy, though both words refer to a government led by women or by a single woman. It is essentially a word with the same meaning a monarchy that has been tailored to be specific to ruling women. A term such as this during Knox’s time was revolutionary, however he wasn’t the only radical voice of his time. When he published that Queens gain their titles through treason against God, it was an agreement with the earlier work of Thomas Becon. Reverend Becon was a British Protestant reformer from Norfolk, England who was also the Chaplain to Archbishop Cranmer of Canterbury. In *An humble supplication vnto God for the restoring of his holye woorde unto the churche of England*, published just four years before Knox’s work, Becon asserted “the accession of a Catholic Princess to the throne of England was part of a broader scheme to establish godless government in that nation,” (De Abreu 171). He goes on to compare the English Queen to Queen Jezebel of the bible, thus creating “the paradigm of idolatrous, wicked and tyrant female ruler,” (De Abreu 171). The purpose in explaining the opposing attitudes (often misogynistic rhetoric) is to better understand how rulers like Mary Stewart, Catherine de Medici, and Elizabeth Tudor were redefining the role of monarch and introducing gynarchy to Europe in a successful way. This was occurring particularly during the period when Shakespeare wrote *Antony and Cleopatra*, making it directly relevant to the discussion of the text.

The next important term is a synonym of the word monarch, which is the word *Queen*. It is important to discuss the word *queen* because of its notable homonym. The words queen and quean were once used interchangeably despite their very different meanings. *Queen* comes from the Old English *cwēn* meaning ‘princess’ whereas *quean* comes from the Old English *cwene* meaning ‘harlot’ or ‘low woman,” (Menner 231). *Quean* did not go out of fashion until around 1700, therefore the various stories of Cleopatra were conceived with the euphemism still standing in high regard. In fact, *quean* is used in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, which brings to the forefront the reason for the explanation of these words. It would be optimistic to assume that *quean* was done away with because of its offensive meaning, when “a survey of the distribution of *quean* in English dialects clearly corroborates the view that confusion with *queen* is the cause of its disappearance,” meaning the two different phonemes became too tedious to differentiate in pronunciation (Menner 232). It would be naïve to discuss the meaning of being a woman in the highest seat of power, without discussing the implications of being perceived as a quean as well.

A woman who is a *quean* may also be called a seductress. Seductress is another common term, referring to a woman who entices a man into sexual activity, usually with ulterior motive. It is a word that is most commonly used to refer to Queen Cleopatra, since she is considered one of the most famous seductresses of all time, sometimes called the first “femme-fatale.” She is known more for her “seduction” of Julius Caesar and Mark Antony than for guiding her country through plague and famine. Not to mention maintaining it as the most fertile country in the Mediterranean for over 18 years (Schiff 2). It was after Cleopatra’s death that Octavian soiled her reputation and dubbed her the

“whore queen.” So instead she has been reduced to the “sum of her seductions” and is known today for becoming “an asteroid, a video game, a cigarette, a slot machine, a strip club, a synonym for Elizabeth Taylor,” and many other things (Schiff 1).

Cleopatra is also blamed for the change in leadership of the Roman Empire, and Egypt’s resulting political changes. This makes her seem like an Eve figure; a woman who causes ruin and becomes the very personification of the fall of man. In this way she is even comparable with Helen of Troy, the woman with the face that launched a thousand ships. Cleopatra is instead the face that had rulers and empires on their knees. This is how she is characterized in today’s world. How does this differ from the reputation of such a Queen during her time, the true Cleopatra of history?

## 2.2 Variables to be Considered

The first variables examined are consistent, in that this is an examination of Cleopatra's portrayal throughout text and various other medias. The other variables will be the specific texts examined such as *Antony and Cleopatra*, the film *Cleopatra*, *Cleopatra Jones*, and the video game *Dante's Inferno* (which features a Cleopatra level). The variables will be examined while asking a series of questions: What does it say that such a powerful female historical figure has come to be associated with porn sites, slot machines, video games, and the cliché of a "loose woman"? How did a Queen Regnant, a woman in the highest seat of power become associated only by the powerful men in her life? How has literature contributed to these associations? How did Mankiewicz's famous film starring Elizabeth Taylor change the views of Cleopatra through subtle commentary on the attitudes prevalent during Civil Rights Movement? What does Cleopatra's power in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* say about the influence of Queen Elizabeth during the time it was written (The Elizabethan Era)? Then after answering these questions, the implications across these texts must be examined and juxtaposed to determine a theory for why Cleopatra is portrayed as both immoral and culturally ambiguous.

### 2.3 Introduction to Theory

This study is fueled by a few critical literary theories, mainly *Feminist Literary Criticism*, *New Historicism*, and *Cultural Materialism*. The latter new historicism and cultural materialism are most often discussed together though they are indeed separate. New Historicism was not coined as a term until 1980, but is defined by placing a literary text within the frame of a non-literary text from the same historical period. Non-literary texts are newspapers, magazines, leaflets, historical data, statistics, etc. Separately, cultural materialism is defined as “the study of historical material (which includes literary texts) within a politicized framework, the framework including the present which those literary texts have in some way helped to shape,” (Barry 176). It is separate from new historicism in that it includes all forms of culture (television, popular music, fiction, etc.) and emphasizes the functioning of the institutions through which these texts are renowned. Most importantly, cultural materialism involves “using the past to ‘read’ the present,” (Barry 178).

New historicism is relevant to the study in its examination of actual historical facts and statistics regarding the prominent historical queens of antiquity and the current queens in today’s political world. Historical information regarding Queen Elizabeth I is significant when examining Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*. For instance, is there a parallel in how Cleopatra is treated in the play compared to responses to Elizabeth during her reign? Similarly, Cultural materialism is relevant in the cultural shift in the portrayal of Cleopatra, particularly how she changed from a prominent Egyptian leader to a name associated with the likes of a casino game.

Aside from those two critical theories, the central theory of the study is feminist criticism. It is essentially the analysis and interpretation of literature inspired by feminist theory. Its purpose is to examine women's social roles, experiences, interests, and how they are portrayed in literature. Feminist theory itself begins with the assumption that women are subjugated in society. It deals with gender inequality, objectification (usually sexual objectification), oppression, patriarchy, misogyny, and gender stereotyping. The theory tackles the association of women with their bodies and men with their minds, mainly by emphasizing how the association sprung from women's ability to produce progeny directly while men used this same time (the length of labor) for thought. This is often discussed simultaneously with the view of women a property and objects. Feminist inspired literary criticism is usually associated with the representation of women in literature and its implication. Pioneers of this criticism are women such as Virginia Woolf, Margaret Fuller, Helene Cixous, Sandra Gilbert, and many more. There were of course male feminist writers as well like John Stuart Mill who wrote *The Subjection of Women* and Friedrich Engels who wrote *The Origin of the Family*.

The 1960s women's movement is usually associated with this criticism, but Peter Barry describes it as "a renewal of an old tradition of thought and action already possessing its classic books which had diagnosed the problem of women's inequality in society, and (in some cases) proposed solutions," (116). The classic books Barry is referring to are those such as *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* written by Mary Wollstonecraft and published in 1792. The importance of this emphasis in the 60s women's movement is that it "realized the significance of the images of women promulgated by literature, and saw it as vital to combat them and question their authority

and their coherence,” (Barry 116). Later in the 1980s feminist criticism focused more on exploring the nature of the female outlook and reconstructing the female experience as opposed to attacking what was considered to be the male version of the world. Some feminist criticism also focused on creating a new standard of women’s writing in which women tried to define their distinct voice in the literary field.

After glancing at feminist criticism’s past, its present must be discussed, particularly since the study is discussing both the former and current view of women. According to Barry, the characterization of more current feminist criticism is centered on “1. the role of theory; 2. the nature of language, and 3. the value or otherwise of psychoanalysis,” (118). By this he means it is usually in three distinct areas, the first of which is usually the close reading and explanation of individual literary texts. The second concerns the question of whether or not language is distinctly feminine or masculine. The third discusses Sigmund Freud’s assertion that the feminine is not something “given and natural,” but that feminine sexuality is “formed by early experiences and adjustments,” (Barry 125). Freud also believed that gender roles must be malleable and changeable.

The application of the feminist critical theory brings relevance to the study by making the findings applicable to women today. There are many common archetypes for women in literature, three of which can be attributed to the Queen in question: the whore, the irritatingly outspoken woman, and the political seductress. These archetypes remain prevalent today, which may help shed light on why Cleopatra’s current reputation is as it stands. More than just her archetypes, what do these representations of femininity in both literature and culture imply?

## Chapter 3: Readings

### 3.1 Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*

While Shakespeare portrays Cleopatra in many different ways, her primary portrayal in the text is as a sexual object. In Cleopatra's soliloquy (Act V Scene II) she assesses her political future if she were to turn herself over to the Romans. In this 14-line monologue, Shakespeare inserts selective imagery to mirror the queen's possible transformation into a sexual object without agency. She addresses her attendant with "Thou, an Egyptian puppet, shalt be shown In Rome, as well as I mechanic slaves," (5.2. 208-209). By this she means that they will no longer have control over their own bodies, but instead they will be "puppets" of Rome and "mechanic slaves" to the Romans' desires. When she continues, "with greasy aprons" and "rules" she is referring to how she will be forced to assume the expected role of a woman, to cook and follow rules (5.2. 210). There is also the implication that this is the role of women in Roman society. There is physicality in the queen's words when she says she will be "forced to drink their vapour," (5.2. 213). By this she means that she will not only lose control over her body, but she will be forced (both figuratively and literally) to "drink" as in absorb the Roman ideology. The physical implication is of a sexual nature, implying that they may do as they wish with her physical form and she will no longer have the ability to make sexual decisions on her own. The bodily imagery supports her realization that surrendering her body to Rome will also mean the manipulation of her reputation to appear as Rome sees fit. That is why she ends the monologue by referring to herself in this possible future as "I th' posture of a whore," (5.2. 221). It is her admittance that once she is portrayed

however the masses of Rome wish her to be, she will have lost both her individuality and regal authority.

Beyond her sexual objectification, she is still objectified as something physical to be fought over and used for political gain. She is a literal sign of what the male powers desire, fight over, and attempt to control. There is a parallel drawn between her body and her nation, beyond the implication that as a female leader she has a maternal connection with her country. It is no mistake that Julius Caesar, Gneius Pompey, and Marc Antony colonize both her body and her nation sequentially. She herself affirms this parallel when she refers to herself as a “serpent of old Nile” (1.5. 26). Here she is describing herself as a direct projection of her country’s main source of water, nutrients, and overall health. The phrase seems a contradiction since the Nile is such a prolific water source, being the longest river in the world, yet a serpent is something so lowly and untrustworthy. She uses this contradiction as an assertion that she is aware of how she is objectified by the men in her life. She directly quotes Marc Antony and his pet name for her, before describing how even while “wrinkled deep in time” she has caught the eye of three different powerful men over the years much like how a sculpture of art engrosses the admirer (1.5. 30). She continues on to describe herself as such an enrapturing object in connection with each of the men. Instead of saying that she has a darker complexion, she alludes to the sun God Phoebus, claiming that the “black” of her skin gains its color from his “amorous pinches” thus implying that there is yet another man who has loved her (1.5. 29). She adds that while Caesar was still alive, she was “a morsel for a monarch” (1.5. 31). The use of the word “morsel” implies that she is both something small and consumable, though somehow elevated by Caesar’s monarchial status and not her own.

While Caesar would consume her, Gneius Pompey “would stand and make his eyes grow in” her face, thus admiring her intently like a piece of art until he would “anchor his aspect, and die” (1.5. 33-34). So once again, even while she is minimized to the likeness of an inanimate object, she is emphasizing her authority over men.

In addition to Cleopatra’s objectification as a representation of her country and a piece of artwork, she is also portrayed as a belittled keepsake. Antony and Caesar quarrel over her more so than their skirmish for political power. It is in this way that “Cleopatra serves as both an object of acquisition and as an instrument of revenge,” which Cristina León Alfar asserts in her work *Fantasies of Female Evil: The Dynamics of Gender and Power in Shakespearean Tragedy* (148). Caesar says cruel words about Antony only by comparing him to Cleopatra. After describing Antony’s frivolous activity, he describes Antony as “not more manlike / Than Cleopatra, nor the queen of Ptolemy / More womanly than he” (1.4. 5-7). Here the insult is infused with gender associations, claiming that Antony does not have qualities that distinguish him in “manliness” from Cleopatra. There is also the message that Antony has no true claim to Cleopatra or anything of hers since she is still Ptolemy’s widow. Yet he issues a similar insult to Cleopatra in the same breath, saying that she is no more “womanly” than Antony is manly.

These polarized and engendered insults seem to mirror an overarching theme in the play of defining what is masculine and feminine. Later in the play when Cleopatra plans to go into battle at Antony’s side, Enobarbus dissuades her by explaining why the battlefield is not a fit place for a woman. He says “if we should serve with horse and mares together / the horse were merely lost...The mares would be bare / a soldier and his

horse” (3.7. 8-11). Using this odd hypothetical, Enobarbus asserts that if male and female horses fought together, the horses would be distracted and useless, while the mares would be ‘ridden’ by the male horses and their riders alike. He is emphasizing the sexuality of the female and saying that it is so overpowering it prevents progress and combative success. He is subtly referring to Cleopatra and her “presence” which “puzzle[s] Antony” and distracts him from his political and military duties (3.7 10). Enobarbus even continues to tell her that the Romans say that a “eunuch, and your maids / manage this war” (3.7 14-15). Cleopatra replies to this by accepting her perceived crossing of gender roles when she says “as the president of my kingdom will / appear there for a man” (3.7 18-19). She’s not disagreeing with him, but instead embracing his polarized view. In the same scene Candidus remarks that Antony is weak because “so our leader’s led / and we are women’s men” meaning that Antony has a weak grasp of the proper thing to do because he is ruled by a woman, making him that much inadequate (3.7 70). So in this one scene we see femininity defined as a weakness and a hindrance in battle and tactics. Caesar further emphasizes this defining frailty of the female when he says “women are not / in their best fortunes strong” therefore implying an innate inferiority (3.12 29-30). He makes yet another association between sexuality and weakness when he continues to assert that “want will perjure / the ne’er touched vestal” (3.12 31). The Roman goddess Vesta is the personification of female purity, often associated with her Vestal virgins. When Caesar says that even the most chaste of virgins will still give in to sexual desire because of their femininity itself, he is rendering that purity impossible.

In addition to the feminine being defined by weakness, effeminization is also associated with emotion throughout the text. In Act 3 Scene 2 when Caesar and his sister Octavia have an emotional goodbye, Agrippa and Enobarbus fear that Caesar will “weep” because he “has a could in ‘s face” (3.2 51-52). Enobarbus says this show of emotion would make him “worse for that, were he a / horse” and indeed the same goes for men “so is he, being a man” (3.2 53-55). Caesar doesn’t cry, but the mere tearing up and showing of emotion instantly has numerous people asserting that he’ll decrease in value as a human being and be essentially less than a man. None of this negativity is remarked about Octavia when she begins to weep a mere 9 lines earlier. So it is acceptable to the men that “sweet Octavia” show emotion, but not their male leader for he would be instantly devalued (3.2 61). The same sentiment is shown later in the text when Antony addresses his troops, wanting to “make his followers weep” (4.2 26). Enobarbus remarks that Antony brings the people “discomfort” making them “weep” “for shame” like “an ass” (4.2 37-38). He begs Antony “transform us not to women” and to cease his tear-jerking address (4.2 39). So yet again femininity is associated with being shameful and uncomfortable in its expression of sentiment.

While the play defines femininity by weakness, it also associates the feminine with subservience, particularly in association with Cleopatra and her authority. In Act 3 Scene 11, Eros reports to Antony and remarks that “death will seize her but / Your comfort makes the rescue” (3.11 46-47). This implies not only that Cleopatra is indebted to Antony, but also that she is dependent upon him for her very life. Later in that same exchange, she asks Antony to “forgive my fearful sails” asking him for forgiveness for acting of her own volition and being implicitly emotional (3.11 54). She continues on to

beg for his “pardon” like she owes him reasoning for the political decisions she makes as queen (3.11 41). She even seems to slip into the role of a soldier apologizing to his superior or a servant apologizing to his master. The question then becomes why does Cleopatra deem it necessary to be pardoned for retreat in battle when she herself chose to do so while Antony merely blindly followed? This is the first acceptance of her implied subservience. This subservience is stretched to melodramatic proportions for obvious political gain later when Caesar’s ambassador relays him a message from Cleopatra in which she “confess[es]” his “greatness” and “submits” to his “might” (3.12 16-17). But by portraying herself as subservient, she is attempting to put Caesar at ease so that he doesn’t see her as a threat. She continues buttering him up saying, “He is a god and knows / what is the most right. / Mine honor was not yielded, / but conquered merely” (3.13 62-64). She is directly stating that she is inferior and has been conquered justly, though the tone of the statement is sarcastic, particularly since she agreed with Caesar’s statement that there were “scars upon [her] honor” (3.13 59). Her snarky comments continue when she says that she is no more than “a woman, and commanded / by such poor passion as the maid that milks and does the meanest chares” (4.15 76-78). Here she uses the social status of a humble servant to emphasize the insignificance of women in general. She again emphasizes this subjugation in reference to Caesar, when she tells Proculeius to relay that she is “his fortune’s vassal” and that she owes him “the greatness he has got” (5.2 29-30). Here not only is she justifying Caesar’s actions, saying he has properly earned his greatness and glory, but she is also portraying herself as a servant to his superior fortune. A vassal, by definition is someone who has entered into mutual obligation to a monarch to serve and support them in return for protection and land of

some sort. So the subservient role she rhetorically places herself in is hierarchically higher than a slave or handmaiden, but she is still submitting to the seemingly all-powerful male ruler. She even says in the same scene that Caesar allows her to “hourly learn” the “doctrine of obedience” (5.2 30-31). So while she openly admits that she’s not accustomed to being so subservient she still submits “gladly” (5.2 31).

Aside from being portrayed as submissive, Cleopatra is also portrayed negatively by comparison to Caesar’s beautiful half-sister, “admired Octavia” (2.2 127). Octavia is portrayed as the epitome of everything that is valued in a woman during Shakespeare’s time (the Elizabethan era). Queen Elizabeth herself was considered the Virgin Queen, so it is no mistake that even in the second act we are introduced to Octavia with testimonies of her “virtue” and “general graces” which “speak / that which none else can utter” (2.2 138). She is also discussed and bartered like a dog easily over powered. Caesar even attests that Agrippa has “power unto Octavia” (2.2 154). While he and Antony make the marriage arrangement, he says “a sister I bequeath you” implying that he’s offering her not as a person but as an object or animal of sorts one would give as a gift (2.2 159). Octavia herself has no say in the exchange of her person between the male leaders. Even though she says very little it is assumed that her sentiments are positive to both men, for Caesar says, “Let her live / to join our kingdoms and our hearts” (2.2 161). Though she is traded like a horse, she is still spoken highly of, like when Maecenas says “If beauty wisdom, modesty, can settle / the heart of Antony, Octavia is / a blessed lottery to him,” meaning that Octavia is a blessing that may tame Antony’s wild heart (2.2 251-253). This also implies that since Cleopatra holds Antony’s unsettled heart, she is something wild and exotic, not properly suited for the Roman leader like the virtuous and quiet

Octavia. Antony himself even describes the agreement he makes with Caesar concerning Octavia to be an “act of grace” (2.2 156). It is also evident that Octavia is not as outspoken and lively as Cleopatra because when the queen inquires about Octavia’s personality the messenger describes her as showing “a body rather than a life / a statue rather than a breather” (3.3 20-21). This perfectly characterizes Octavia’s role in Rome. She is something to look upon, but she does as she’s told and scarcely “breathe” voice to her own personal opinions, contrasting starkly with Cleopatra. Early in the play Cleopatra is described as having the ability to “pour breath forth” even while “breathless” (2.2 242). Antony even calls Octavia a “gem of a woman,” since she is lovely to look at but possesses no more functionality than an artifact (3.13 109). In this way she is polarized against the powerful and “wild” Queen Cleopatra.

While Cleopatra is degraded by her polarization with the lovely Octavia, she is also verbally associated with lust and lustful disposition. Early in the play Agrippa describes her as a “royal wench” who “made great Caesar lay his sword to her bed” and soon “cropped” after he “plowed her” (2.2 237-239). This makes it seem as if she has mystical powers of seduction and fertility with the ability to force a royal into her bed and bear a child to him soon after. The lust is not always so blatantly associated, for example when Enobarbus describes the first time Antony and Cleo met. Even the oars “beat” the waves with “amorous strokes” (2.2 206-207). She is described as having everything close to her in a sort of trance, even “th’ air, which, but for vacancy / had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too” (2.2 226-227). It is stated that her boat had “seeming mermaid steers” therefore seemed to be steered by a mythological creature also associated with seduction and sexuality (2.2 219). Enobarbus continues in his description with imagery of

Cleopatra “panting” in “defect perfection,” a blatant sexual parallel that still implies the queen is flawed even in her perfection (2.2 240-241). He then continues to allude to her sexual “appetites” that in others “she makes hungry” (2.2 247). Oddly, the only instance in the text that implies an acceptance of Cleopatra’s promiscuity is when Enobarbus says that “the holy priests / bless her when she is riggish” (2.2 249-250). This acceptance of her riggishness is only among her own people, which alludes back to the underlying inference of the play that the foreign Egyptians have lower moral standards.

Even beyond the lustful associations, there are numerous instances in the text when the queen is referred to as some variation of whore. Caesar angrily describes Antony as having abandoned his sister to “give his potent regiment to a trull,” *trull* being an archaic word referring to a prostitute (3.6 97). In Act 4 Scene 12 Antony goes on a furious tirade against Cleopatra and the Egyptians, blaming her for his evident loss to Caesar. He calls her a “foul Egyptian” and a “triple-turned whore” (4.12 10, 13). In Act 5 Scene 2 she verbally embraces the “frailties” of women that “shamed our sex” (3.13 125-127). In his fury he also tells her to follow Caesar’s chariot “like the greatest spot / of all thy sex” meaning that she’s a disgrace to her entire gender (4.12 35-36). He even adds yet another compliment to the vastly contrasted “patient Octavia” who he hopes scratches at the queen’s face with her “prepared nails” (4.12 39). So even the character that is the most madly in love with Cleopatra, calls her abominable names, blames her for her innate feminine inadequacy and refers to her as a “witch” when he is enraged (4.12 47).

It seems that Cleopatra maintains her resistance to such negative assertions against her until after Antony dies, further proving how much she defines herself in terms

of the men in her life. She continues to focus on the men rather than herself, when she says “but since my Lord / is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra” (3.13 188-189). She is defining herself in terms of only Antony, thus doing away with her own personal identity, much like her character is remembered and defined only by her interactions with powerful men. Right after Antony dies she asserts that she is “no more but e’en a woman” commanded by “such poor passion” as a “maid that milks” and completes “the meanest chares” (4.15 76-78). Once again, she verbally strips herself of her own monarchical status and demeans herself to the status of a maid, an average woman. She repeats this in her last stand before Caesar when she confesses to be “laden with like frailties which before / have often shamed [her] sex” (5.2 123-124). Based on this pattern, the use of snakes in her death is blaringly deliberate, more than the association between snakes and phalluses. She associates the snake with evil, calling it a “worm” without “goodness” (5.2 260). Then she asserts that “a woman is a dish / of the gods, if the devil dress her not” but for “every ten” women they make, “devils mar five” (5.2 270-273). In the very last scene two of these snakes bite her, seeming to represent the two powerful men that led to her demise.

As aforementioned, much of the play objectifies Cleopatra, using her character to demean women on a general level, however the way Shakespeare sets up the ending implies that he is aware of the metamorphosis of Cleopatra’s reputation. In her last hours the queen speculates that she and Antony will have soiled reputations about which “strumpets” and “scald rhymers” will write songs, and plays will be “staged” (5.2 215, 217). She even predicts that “some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / I’th’ posture of a whore” (5.2 220-221). Here Shakespeare has her embracing her disgraced reputation

and empowering herself in her last hours. All of her predictions are of course spot on because in that era, her character would have actually been played by a high-pitched male. Shakespeare also seems to be admitting that his text portrays her as a whore. Even still, Cleopatra chooses to be dressed “like a queen” in death in her “best attires” (5.2 227-228). Her last words perfectly characterize Shakespeare’s assertion with her portrayal in the play. She describes herself as “a lass unparalleled” therefore a woman incomparable to anyone else, defined by femininity (5.2 312). She also asserts that she will lie in the “possession” of “death,” meaning that she will still submit to being possessed yet again, but this time finitely (5.2 311).

So while Shakespeare blatantly portrays the character of Cleopatra negatively, he uses the portrayal to emphasize the power of the reigning queen regent of the time (Elizabeth I). Cleopatra frequently submits to the powerful men in her life, and emphasizes her inadequacy as a woman, but he maintains her authority. Even in her very last hours, she seems to have a clairvoyant view of exactly how the world will perceive her and the events she’s witnessed. Shakespeare also uses the exploitation of her exotic cultural origins to explain her current reputation. Scholar Cristina León Alfar accurately asserts that Cleopatra “is objectified” in the text “on three levels: as woman, as racial ‘other’ and as monarch of an African dominion, a role itself complicated by her race and gender” (Alfar 142). She adds that, “these subject positions figure in Rome’s desire for control of Egypt, for all three positions intersect to form naturalized divisions between East and West based on the East’s inferiority to masculinist European power” (Alfar 142). So Cleopatra’s character represents her country (as a monarch) which was

“conquerable, then, in particular because of the feminized, racialized, and sexualized stereotypes of Oriental lands” (Alfar 142).

### 3.2 Mankiewicz's film *Cleopatra*

The 1963 film *Cleopatra* has a reputation equally as notable and scandalous as the queen it is named for. To date, it is one of the most expensive movies ever made. Its budget was said to have blown over its projected \$2 million to a grand \$44 million. Seeming to attempt to duplicate the lavish earlier film by Cecil B. DeMille, *Cleopatra* had over 26,000 costumes and 79 sets, the construction of which was rumored to have caused a shortage of building materials in Italy (Galindo). Many of its scenes, like Cleopatra's entry into Rome, required thousands of extras. The film was the highest grossing movie of 1963, but because of its inflated budget it still ended up a "box-office bomb" that contributed to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox nearly going bankrupt. The film was more famous for the amount of money it spent and the drama surrounding the actors, than the makeup of the film itself. The film has also become to be infamous for its leading lady Elizabeth Taylor. In 1963, Taylor was the first actor (male or female) to be paid over \$1 million for a film. While it is said that the film was popular due to Taylor's beauty alone, there is evidence that the film is actually best remembered for its coinciding with the affair between Taylor and Richard Burton (Antony) in real life. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox even admitted that the film was originally supposed to be two films: *Cesar and Cleopatra* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, but they chose to cut the film down into one to capitalize on the publicity of the "Taylor-Burton affair" (Galindo). This being said, it is no mistake that a movie popular for its scandalous affair both on and off screen, came to characterize Cleopatra as a lustful faithless woman, most known for her captivating beauty. The face of this beauty, Elizabeth Taylor, was widely popular in the 60s for her infamous beauty,

but is known more for her loose morals. This mirrors and possibly dictates Cleopatra's reputation for the past century.

Reputation of the film and its actors aside, its plot follows what it was intended which was to be "loosely based on stories by Plutarch, Suetonius, Apian, other ancient sources." Much like many of the other pre-millennial works featuring Cleopatra, the Egyptian queen is subjugated, hyper-sexualized, and overdramatized to be a fickle lecherous woman focused primarily on using men for political gain and that of her son Caesarian.

Even from the very beginning of the movie, Cleopatra is characterized negatively. Caesar only comes to Egypt to end the feud between her and her brother Ptolemy, since Rome was appointed guardian over their joint rule. The first Caesar and the audience hear of Cleopatra is that she was behind her brother's numerous assassination attempts and had recently fled to the desert with her army after being caught. So the audience's primary interpretation of Cleopatra is that she is untrustworthy and cowardly. We do not get a more positive depiction of her until the Roman generals congregate later to discuss her, saying that "were she not a woman she would be considered an intellectual." They are also sure to mention that "her sexual talents are said to be considerable...her lovers are listed by number and not by name" (Mankiewicz, *Cleopatra*). This sets the tone for Cleopatra's portrayal throughout the film. Her personage is centered on her beauty and sexuality and she functions with the knowledge that the Romans do not take women seriously in their culture, which may account for how often she asserts her authority and queen and goddess.

Aside from her negative characterization, she is objectified at every turn. The first scene in which she appears, the queen requires an audience with Caesar, so she is carried in through the servant door in the guise of a rolled up rug. Caesar unravels the rug remarking, “one can always tell the value of merchandise by examining the backside first.” It is after this cue that we are introduced to Cleopatra’s backside and thusly our female protagonist, a queen who is already mentally associated with her body as “merchandise.” Precisely 31 minutes into the movie, Cleopatra is naked. At this particular point she is being massaged facedown, and a servant pulls the towel off to reveal her butt to the audience yet again. This image is so fleeting and only takes up a literal 7 seconds of the film, implying that it was only necessary in the director’s desire to show the queen stripped naked. Similarly, when Caesar requests an audience with her, she purposely gets naked before he enters. In film’s 7<sup>th</sup> scene, called “An Audience” her messenger comes to tell her that Caesar and his men approach. While lounging in a blue dress she says, “we must not disappoint the mighty Caesar. The Romans tell fine tails of my bath and my handmaidens and my morals.” Appolladorus tells Caesar that she is in the bath, but Caesar forces his way in. Cleopatra is not actually in the bath, but instead lies stark naked under a thin towel. Though the audience only sees her from the shoulders up, the camera angle implies that Caesar can see more than this. Furthermore, even when Cleopatra is fully clothed her numerous dresses all have low V necklines that reveal her cleavage, accompanied by high slits to reveal her legs usually more than halfway up the thigh.

In addition to her objectification, Cleopatra frequently uses double entendre to suggest that she is both sexually experienced and accustomed to seduction. At the end of

her first conversation with Caesar, she asks, “I’ve rubbed you the wrong way, haven’t I?” To which Caesar replies, “I don’t think I wish to be rubbed by you at all, young lady.” The audience knows this to be false, since Caesar admits he “wasn’t listening” after Rufio began describing Cleopatra’s sexual exploits. Sure enough, later when Cleopatra furiously storms into Caesar’s chambers after the loss of the Alexandrian Library, she asks him, “swords, javelins, or are you going to set me on fire?” The words and javelins function as phallic symbols, while the fire is a direct sexual suggestion. Caesar continues to insult her and she accuses him of treating her “as if I were something you had conquered.” She then asks “Am I to understand that you feel free to do with me whatever you want whenever you want?” At this point Caesar has already wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close, perfectly suggesting what he wishes to do with her. He even tells her “you talk too much,” further emphasizing that his admiration of her has little to do with her opinion and personality and much to do with her physical allure. Caesar frequently comments that she is “a way of mixing politics and passion.”

Along with her focus on sexuality, Cleopatra also emphasizes her own female prowess and fertility. She is frequently referred to as the “daughter of Isis” and even emphasizes to Caesar that she is the goddess Isis, since he mistakenly assumes she claimed to be a descendant of Venus. Isis is the Egyptian goddess considered the ideal mother and wife, who birthed Horus. Her name also means *throne*, so she is additionally the personification of an Egyptian ruler and power. It is no mistake that this is the association Cleopatra makes as well. She asserts herself as a comfort even to the Roman soldiers by saying, “the corridors are dark gentleman, but you mustn’t be afraid...I am with you.” Her personal emphasis on fertility is also evident in scene 13 entitled “A New

Lover” when she finally takes Caesar to bed. Caesar mentions that his wife is barren and Cleopatra instantly slips into a monologue:

“A woman that cannot bear children is like a river that is dry. A woman too must make the barren land fruitful. She must make life grow where there is no life, just as the mother Nile feeds and replenishes the Earth. I am the Nile. I will bear many sons. My breasts are filled with love and life. My hips are rounded and well apart. Such women, they say, have sons” (Mankiewicz, *Cleopatra*).

Here she reveals how much personal emphasis she places on fertility. There is also a glaring parallel between her body and her country. She calls herself the Nile, meaning she herself *is* the lifeline of Egypt. This outline of the fertile attributes of her body also functions to seduce Caesar to her bed.

There is also evidence that Cleopatra’s femininity is offended by the modest and subservient Octavia. Much like in the Shakespearean play, Octavia is shown to be everything opposite of Cleopatra. When Octavia and Antony finally dine together after they are promised in marriage, she constantly asks if he is pleased. She acts like a servant striving for approval. Even Antony even remarks, “you do nothing but please me in every way.” He begins discussing politics and she gets up from the table. Antony tells her there is no need to go. He replies with, “When I hear matters of state discussed by men, invariably I find myself wondering why the wine’s gone sour.” She is not only implying that she has no interest in complex discussion, but also that she is unfit to either participate or listen because she is not a man. This contrasts drastically with Cleopatra’s frequent and seemingly constant discussion of politics. Cleopatra is infuriated not only by the marriage, but what it means for her reputation. When she first hears of Antony’s

marriage she weeps and stabs at his clothes and bed where they've lain together. When she next sees him, she says, "By your marriage to her, he has made of me unmistakably your whore." The argument between them continues with more comments like, "Take his sister to wed and to bed as if to beg forgiveness for having stayed so long with your Egyptian Harlot?!" She adds that he is "chained to Octavian like a slave, with such an exquisite set of chains." The exquisiteness she describes comes from rumors she's heard about Octavia that she is "softly spoken," "virtuous," and sleeps "fully clothed." The irony is that her slave comparison makes it seem as if it is Antony that lacks the power, when it is indeed Octavia that had little to no say in the arrangement and is owned by her husband like a slave. Cleopatra is also imprisoned in association with him to be deemed a whore by reputation.

It is this polarization of Antony's affection, but unaffectionate words and decisions that are explained by his view of women and women in power. Before he and Cleopatra link romantically, he has an established reputation of womanizing. Cleopatra at first says that doesn't "intend to join that long list of queens who quiver happily at being summoned by Lord Antony," implying that she doesn't want to be yet another of his conquests. She emphasizes this by outwardly showing that after three years she is still Caesar's. When they meet for dinner she wears a necklace composed solely with Gold coins of Caesar. Antony is foolishly frustrated by this, as she expected. He asks her, "You don't permit yourself from forgetting him?" She scoffs at his use of the word "permit," thus aware of his mentality that women are to be ruled. Later after stumbling drunkenly into her bedchamber, he remarks that he was struck with her when she first visited Rome, "shining in the sun like a little gold toy." This accurately summarizes his

view that women are valued by their appearance, and little else. He thinks the same of queens, for example when he tells Rufio, “Queens strip almost as naked as any other woman.” Cleopatra accepts him fully, including acceptance of his biased view even after his death. For on her own deathbed she asks her maidens to dress her in the dress that made her appear to Antony as his “gold toy.” She seems relieved as her death approaches, remarking that “living has been someone else’s dream now finished at last.” As she dies, she says “now will begin a dream of my own which will never end.” This is as if to say that her reputation hereafter shall be hers and hers alone, though she may be spoken of in regards to the men she interacted with.

### **3.3 Dante's Inferno: Hell's Circle of Lust**

*Dante's Inferno* is an action-adventure videogame released in 2010 and made for the Xbox360, PlayStation 3, and PlayStation Portable. Loosely based on the first canticle of *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri, the game reimagines Dante's character as a Templar knight that must journey through the nine circles of hell to reclaim Beatrice's soul. In the game, Cleopatra is found in the 2<sup>nd</sup> circle of hell guarding the Carnal Tower with her lover Mark Antony. It is said that after death, Cleopatra and Antony were condemned to Hell's Circle of Lust for their actions in life. Characteristic of their corruption, they made a deal with Lucifer to rule the circle and serve him. Cleopatra serves Lucifer and captures Beatrice's soul and imprisons it in the Carnal Tower. The goal of the level is to get to the top of the Carnal Tower, kill her and Antony, and free Beatrice's soul.

Here, Cleopatra is a personification of lust, which is why she is depicted as a giant, huge enough to guard the tower with one arm (signifying that lust is a powerful sin). She has electric wind powers called the "Lust Storm" and even has the ability to wield magic. She also can release unbaptized babies from her bare breasts to oppose attackers, while she controls others through kisses. She summons Antony to fight for her, and when Antony is defeated she shrinks to normal size, kneeling and weeping next to her fallen lover. As the last feat of the level, she attempts to seduce Dante, but the character stabs her in the heart and ends her reign over lust.

Cleopatra's physical depiction in the videogame accurately reflects how she is viewed in modern day. She is a hulking purple mass with red blood shot eyes, a naked chest, and sharpened gold fingernails. She is of course associated with lust, though in the

game she literally rules over the entire realm of lust with Antony at her side. She is an image of fertility, thus why she can birth unholy babies from her breasts. Her most effective powers are her controlling kiss and her seduction. This game is a representation of how dramatically the great queen is associated with all things evil and sinful, so far as her character having a pact with Lucifer himself. She is also portrayed as a cultural other, therefore *not* Christian, and possessing ungodly powers of magic to affect the men that come to fight her. This grotesque beast is the very villain that the Egyptian queen's reputation has become.

While this grotesque character is a physical representation of Cleopatra's cultural transformation, her ethnic portrayal also represents her ethnic transformation. Her skin remains a dark purple while outside of the tower, taunting Dante as he fights Antony and her unholy children, but when she moves closer her skin appears lighter. In her darker form she is even more repulsive and uncivilized, shaking her breasts in taunt, scratching at the walls with her long golden nails, and roaring inhumanly. When she shrinks to normal size and approaches Dante with apparent sexual intent, her skin is noticeably lighter, making her physical attributes more apparent to the eye. As mentioned, her last line of defense is her power of seduction, which is unmistakably when her character is the lightest. Gone is her ominous dark purple skin, replaced by something implicitly more desirable and appealing enough to tempt Dante one last time. Since the last feat of the level of lust is to withstand the temptation of the queen's light complexioned nude form, it can be concluded that the game asserts an association of dark skin with repulsion and lighter skin with allure. While these associations may not be deliberate, since her

changes in complexion may be attributed to changes in lighting, the association is still present.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

After examining the various texts, it has become evident that Cleopatra's cultural transformation is minimal compared to that of her moral reputation. While Shakespeare's play was acted out entirely by men of the same race during his time, this eliminates both other cultures and other genders. Therefore, the ostracized entities are not isolated to minorities or cultural "others." This aside, the text still emphasizes that Cleopatra is different than the Romans and Europeans that she negotiates with. The same however cannot be said about Mankiewicz' *Cleopatra* film. It is apparent in the movie that all of the upper class Egyptians (including Cleopatra and her brother Ptolemy) are played by lighter skinned or white people. Dark-skinned people play all of the pallbearers, slaves, bell ringers, handmaidens, and other servile roles. Even in the scene when Cleopatra first enters Rome in a parade, the "beautiful" scantily clad dancing women are all white, while the marching people and the African chieftains that dance in their headdresses are all dark skinned. Even still Cleopatra has two notable minority handmaidens, one of which was Asian and tried to poison her, the other (the light skinned Egyptian) was her most loyal servant that gave her the asp that killed her. These minority characters are not enough to make the film appear anything other than "white-washed."

The accepted standard of beauty in the 60s film is also European focused. There is a single blonde handmaiden that attends to Cleopatra that happens to be the handmaiden Caesar chooses to kiss in order to make the queen jealous. None of the dark-skinned actors play characters that are thoroughly acknowledged or even pertinent to the story. With the time period of the film's release it can easily be concluded that the film contributed to a media that necessitated for a prevalent civil rights movement. Elizabeth

Taylor is so far from Egyptian, that they were unable to film scenes on location in Egypt because she wasn't allowed into the country as a Jew (Galindo). These factors considered, it can be concluded that Cleopatra's cultural transformation was not a complete one and that her character remains culturally ambiguous. Though it mustn't be denied that the majority of her modern depictions are those of the hyper-sexualized female, most often portrayed as the quintessential western desire with her scantily clad fair-skinned form adorned in various glittering African trinkets.

In regards to Cleopatra's reputation as a woman, her name seems to foreshadow her legacy of male associations, since the Greek *Cleopatra* literally translates to "glory of her father" or "her father's fame." Her name "speaks of the combination of public authority and responsibility with an active female sexuality" (Hamer xvii). The same applies to the use of her name in modern times, just as "current attempts to define women and limit their scope within the local social order inevitably shape the terms in which" modern representations of Cleopatra are conceived (Hamer xvii). The representations of Cleopatra that later generations are most familiar with (Elizabeth Taylor, Dante's *Inferno*, etc) uphold the stigma of her supposed hamartia; lust and impulsivity. *Antony and Cleopatra* portrays a woman wrought with "sexual jealousy" and "weakness" (Hamer 159). Elizabeth Taylor's Cleopatra flirtatiously "winked, sending up the grandeur and solemnity of her entrance into Rome and with it the cinematic spectacle" thus undermining her earnestness as a character (Hamer 159). *Dante's Inferno* creates a beastly image of a brazen villain whose power from Lucifer centralizes around seduction. These representations do not emphasize the power of Cleopatra as a female ruler, but instead objectify and demonize her character in association with femininity.

Stanford scholar Mary Hamer accurately characterizes the discussion of Cleopatra's gender and ethnicity when she says, "The dynamic of ethnicity as it interacts with gender in the representation of Cleopatra and its work in maintaining Eurocentrism deserves a book of its own" (xvii). With that being said, this study admittedly only brushes the surface of all that can be said of the infamous queen of Egypt and how she is portrayed.

## Works Cited

- Alfar, Cristina Leo. "'Evil' Women in Shakespearean Tragedy." *Fantasies of Female Evil: The Dynamics of Gender and Power in Shakespearean Tragedy*. Newark: U of Delaware ;, 2003. Print.
- Baird, Julia. "Queen Victoria, Another Maligned Mother." *New York Times* 23 Mar. 2013: N. pag. *nytimes.com*. Web. 25 Mar. 2014.
- Barry, Peter. *Beginning theory: an introduction to literary and cultural theory*. Manchester [England: Manchester University Press ;, 1995. Print.
- "Cleopatra." *Dante's Inferno Wiki*. EA Games. Web. 4 Mar. 2015.
- De Abreu, Maria Zina Gonçalves. "John Knox: Gynaecocracy,'The Monstrous Empire Of Women'." *Reformation & Renaissance Review: Journal Of The Society For Reformation Studies* 5.2 (2003): 166-187. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 28 Jan. 2014.
- Galindo, Brian. "15 Things You Might Not Know About The Movie "Cleopatra"." *The Buzz* 17 June 2013. Print.
- Hamer, Mary. *Signs of Cleopatra: Reading an Icon Historically*. Updated 2nd ed. Exeter, UK: U of Exeter, 2008. Print.
- Joseph L. Mankiewicz' Cleopatra*. Perf. Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton. 1963. DVD.
- Menner, Robert J. "The Conflict of Homonyms in English." JSTOR. Linguistic Society of America. Web. 4 Nov. 2014. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/409150>>.
- Moran, Mickey. "1930s, America - Feminist Void? The Status of the Equal Rights Movement during the Great Depression." *Loyno.edu* (1989). Print.
- Potter, Simeon, and Edna Rees Williams. "The Conflict of Homonyms in English." *The*

*Modern Language Review* 40.2 (1945): 132. Print.

Reinsch, Ole. "Flapper Girls – Feminism and Consumer Society in the 1920s." *Gender*

*Forum* 40 (2013). Print.

Rose, Richard, and Dennis Kavanagh. "The Monarchy in Contemporary Political

Culture." *Comparative Politics* 8.4 (1976): 548. Print.

Schiff, Stacy. "Rehabilitating Cleopatra." *Smithsonian Magazine* 10 Dec. 2010.

Smithsonian.com. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.

<<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/rehabilitating-cleopatra-70613486/?no-ist=&page=2>>.

Schiff, Stacy. *Cleopatra: A Life*. New York: Little, Brown, 2010. Print.

Shakespeare, William, and Tony Farrell. *Antony and Cleopatra*. Cheltenham: Nelson

Thornes, 2004. Print.