

The Use of Intertextuality and Allusion: A Transgeneric Study of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra and Chawqi's Masraaou Cleopatra

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Abstract

A literary work embodies the traces of other works. It may preserve the characteristics of precedent works or bring forth new images. Many works may converge into the same subject but speak about it differently, each from its ideological, historical and cultural point of view. T.S. Eliot in Tradition and the Individual Talent affirms writers need not write in their ancestor's skin and be only influenced but also create and add. Shakespeare's play Antony and Cleopatra and Chawqi's Masraaou Cleopatra display a lot of convergences but also diverge mainly in the representation of Antony and the description of the Actium Battle. Shakespeare's depiction of Antony is more detailed while Chawqi's concern is directed toward Cleopatra. Also, Shakespeare describes the Actium Battle not as a political struggle but as a conflict between two cultures. Jacques Derrida in The Law of Genre defines genre as "a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy" (3). Derrida celebrates 'dissemination' which conveys the multiplicity of genre. The notion of 'impurity' reveals an intertextual play of texts, a 'permutation' of texts. In "The Bounded Text" Julia Kristeva views text "a permutation of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text" in which "several utterances taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another" (56). Gerard Genette beholds literary works as 'articulations.' "In Structuralism and Literary Criticism" he states that literary critic "creates a structure out of a previous structure by rearranging elements which are already arranged within the objects of his or her study"(83). Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra is definitely a tragedy from a generic point of view, but strokes of epic are embedded within tragedy. This is an evidence of Derrida's 'anomaly' or 'contamination' and a justification of genre instability and multiplicity. Intertextuality is not only depicted through Shakespeare's influence by Plutarch but also through Chawqi's attempt to fill the gaps of Shakespeare's representation. Chawqi rewrites the story of Antony and Cleopatra emphasizing the epic aspect more than the tragic. There is a crossing of boundaries in both plays. Through this presentation, I intend to show that the two plays combine multiple genres such as the tragic and the epic, and highlight the use of intertextuality and allusion.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Interpretation and Genre: the Role of Generic Reception in the Study of Narrative texts, Thomas Kent claims that "just as there is no escaping history, there is no escaping genre" (152). A literary work embodies the traces of other works. It may preserve the generic characteristics of precedent works or bring forth new ones. Many works may converge into the same subject but speak about it differently, each from its ideological, historical and cultural point of view. T.S Eliot, in Tradition and the Individual Talent, affirms that a writer need not write in his ancestor's skin and be only influenced but also create and add. Shakespeare's play

The Use of Intertextuality and Allusion: A Transgeneric Study of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra and Chawqi's Masraaou Cleopatra

Antony and Cleopatra and Chawqi's Masraaou Cleopatra display a lot of convergences but also diverge in the representation of Cleopatra and the description of the Actium Battle.

The interest in genre started with Aristotle who classified literature to: the lyric, the epic and drama. The structuralist approach to genre tends to group texts that share common characteristics and traits and exclude others that Jacques Derrida calls "eccentric traits", which would contaminate the generic essence. In *The Law of Genre*, Derrida views genre as "a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy" (3). These marginalised traits engender certain "anomalies" which Derrida lists as "impurity, corruption, contamination, decomposition, perversion, deformation, even cancerization, generous proliferation" (57). Derrida celebrates the concept of 'dissemination', which conveys the multiplicity of genres which "explodes and disperses" as Roland Barthes describes it (135). Poststructuralist study of genre not only attacks taxonomy but also promotes multi-generic texts due to the belief that classification deprives genre study of its power of comparison. Genre is conceived to be a network of components functioning in a process of repetition without sameness, a process of difference. The notion of impurity implies an intertextual play of texts, a 'permutation' of texts. In "The Bounded Text", Julia Kristeva views genre as "a permutation of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text", in which "several utterances taken from other texts intersect and neutralise one another" (56).

Roland Barthes explains that "any text is an intertext" and "the works of previous and surrounding cultures were always present in literature." The historical character of Cleopatra has been adapted and reintroduced by the famous Arab poet Ahmed Chawqi in his verse drama Masra'a Cleopatra (The Death of Cleopatra). Chawqi is one of the major pioneer playwrights in modern Arabic literature who writes under a Shakespearean burden with a slight difference about the Egyptian queen. In Shakespeare's play, the queen is black in skin and erotic, which threatens the Roman purity. However, Chawqi changes her character into an attractive and dangerous woman of infinite variety.

Intertextuality is not only depicted through Shakespeare's influence by Plutarch but also through Chawqi's attempt to fill the gaps of Shakespeare's representation. Chawqi rewrites the story of Antony and Cleopatra, emphasizing the epic aspect more than the tragic. There is a crossing of boundaries in both plays. The Egyptian poet imitates Shakespeare's play in many ways and this is apparent through the reference to Charmion, the maid who is a fictional character mentioned only in Shakespeare's tragedy. Also, some textual examples are approximately translated. For instance, Caesar's statements in Shakespeare's play are pronounced by Octavio in Chawqi's tragedy:

CAESAR: The manner of their death? I do not see them bleed. (V,ii,337)

OCTAVIO: Perplexing, doctor! I see a dead person/but no sign of a wound. (IV, 108)

Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra is definitely a tragedy, but, strokes of epic are embedded within. This is an evidence of Derrida's 'anomaly' or 'contamination' and a justification of the instability and multiplicity of genre.

2. THE BLENDING OF GENRE IN SHAKESPEARE'S ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

2.1. The Tragic Genre:

For Aristotle, the hero needs to be virtuous since "tragedy is imitating fine doings of fine men," but he has got 'alloys' of frailty, a flaw (hamartia) which can be a sin, an error or an imperfection. Antony's flaw is his surrender to his feelings. Among the hero's characteristics is belonging to a noble blood. When Antony passed away, Caesar gives credit to his noble

status. In his elegy, he says: "It wound thine honor that I speak it now/ was borne so like a soldier, that thy cheek/ So much as lank'd not" (Act 1, Scene 4). Also Cleopatra is a descendent of noble rank; she is audacious and has got a sense of dignity and honor that lifts her above other women. Her dignity is revealed through her decision to die rather than be exposed to Caesar's triumph.

In *All for Love*, John Dryden views Antony as the perfect hero since he mixes goodness and badness. This is reminiscent of Aristotle's depiction of the tragic hero as in the middle of two extremes-virtuosity and villainy-"a person who is neither perfect in virtue and justice, nor one who falls into misfortune through vice and depravity, but rather one who succumbs through some miscalculation." The dilemma Antony lives in is between love and duty, doubt and trust, reason and emotion. He is torn between his love and his honor as a soldier. His love and passion overwhelm his duty since he flees the battle of Actium and follows her.

2.2. The Epic Genre

Epic poetry agrees with tragedy in the fact that they are both representations of heroes of high position but epic poetry is written in prose narrative. Epic is defined as a narrative poem conveying the chivalry of hero and warriors. In Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony is praised by his Roman followers as "his captain's heart, which in the/ scuffles of great fights hath burst" (Act 1, Scene 1). The epic hero needs to be a national leader who embodies the aspirations of his or her people. Along with Antony, Cleopatra is also an epic hero because unlike the other heroes in Shakespeare's tragedies, her death is enacted by full choice and acceptance. She wants a magnificent death proper to a queen: "Give me my robe. Put on my crown. I have/ Immortal longings in me/ Yare, yare, good Iras, quick--methinks I hear/ Antony call. I see him rouse himself/ To praise my noble act." (Act 5, Scene 2)

Cleopatra is eroticized at the level of physical and character representation because it's not only her seductiveness that is mentioned but also her manipulation and power. She is the epitome of lust. Cleopatra's erotic side is obvious in Act II when she articulates: "I laughed him out of patience; and that night I laughed him into patience; and next morn, Ere the ninth hour, I drunk him to his bed, Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst I wore his sword Phillipian" (II,v,19-23). She admits playing a sexual game of power where she avows her absolute control of Antony. Cleopatra dethrones the Roman imperial power. Antony loses the Roman masculine power after his encounter with the queen of Egypt when he affirms his weakness due to love "You did know/ How much you were my conqueror, and that/ My sword, made weak by my affection, would Obey it on all cause." (III,xi,65)

Chawqi aims at subverting Shakespeare's accusation of Cleopatra and works to give justice to the Egyptian queen. His scribbling of *The Death of Cleopatra* springs from his desire to reclaim the lost land, demystify the exoticism of Egypt and dismantle the representation of marginalized other. By rewriting history, Chawqi de-eroticizes Cleopatra and de-exoticizes Egypt.

3. THE BLENDING OF GENRE IN AHMAD CHAWQI'S MASRAOU CLEOPATRA

3.1. The Epic Genre

Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* claims that poets become 'strong' only when 'hooked' on past poetry. In *Shakespeare: the Invention of the Human*, Bloom argues that Shakespeare is 'the most factitious writer in history' and that we are still influenced by his images and figures. Ahmed Chawqi attempts to rewrite and fill the gaps in Shakespeare's representation of Cleopatra. His play can be considered as a defense of the Egyptian Queen

The Use of Intertextuality and Allusion: A Transgeneric Study of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra and Chawqi's Masraaou Cleopatra

since he portrays her as a proud queen who prefers suicide to being escorted as a prisoner. She is described as canny, calculating every action, wise and manipulative:

I was in my ship among my soldiers, contemplating the war

I saw Rome splitting into two parties, one the enemy of the other

And thought that if Rome destroyed itself, I would be the sole master of the sea. (I, pp. 19-20)

Chawqi has reproduced Shakespeare's style of writing, but he denounces Shakespeare's portrayal of Cleopatra. According to Nu'aymah Kur Durlu, in The Play of Cleopatra between Ahmed Chawqi and Shakespeare: A comparative Study, Chawqi portrays Cleopatra as "an intelligent queen, loyal to her country and prefers it to her love. For the sake of her country, she fights the mightiest army in the world" (70). His view of the queen contradicts to the Western view of Cleopatra as "a cunning woman who uses deceit and seduction to win. She has no goal except enjoying the luxurious life that she has and trapping everyone who sees her" (70). Chawqi's play can be considered writing back to the colonialist tendencies in Shakespeare.

Chawqi's play neglects the notion of duality between love and duty which almost structured Shakespeare's. He is more concerned with politics and with correcting the image of a national leader from her being a sorceress working to put a spell on Antony to a political leader caring for her nation and her people. He departs completely from Shakespeare as far as the nation and people are concerned. He voices his own obsession with patriotism in Habi's words:

HABI: We will not sit still/against Rome's cursed hegemony

We are not Caesar's party/nor that of Antony. (I, p. 12)

Cleopatra respects her people and this is best seen through her decision and choice of death rather than being humiliated and paraded in the streets of Rome. She chooses suicide as a solution to preserve Egypt's greatness:

I melt for their catastrophe knowing that

I lay the burden of a disaster on them.

I would love to live in humiliation for them

But glory prevents me, as does nobility.

Forgive me, little ones, if you suffer with my death

I do hope that you will forgive. (IV, p. 98)

The epic is deeply engrained in the celebration and praise of the nation. Although the battle of Actium is crowned with the defeat of Egypt, Chawqi opens his play by substituting the sense of loss with victory and triumph:

Wolves! Continue to howl. Thrive in your pride and oppression of this country ...

I promise you. You have not conquered Egypt, but in our land you have dug a grave for Rome. (IV, p. 111)

One cannot evoke the notion of nation and patriotism without referring to colonialism and the representation of the Orient as the other, inferior, irrational, feminine and many other pejorative attributes. Chawqi is aware of this angle of representation and attempts to adjust the depiction of Egypt by correcting the image of its queen Cleopatra and by refuting the attributes of 'lusty' and 'exotic.'

The Death of Cleopatra is new in subject matter. The author comments on the European historical representation of Cleopatra. He claims that:

This serious task was undertaken either by Roman ... or "Romanized" [historians]. These recorded the history of the shift [from Ptolemaic to Roman rule] in a fictive style, in which the Caesars of Rome got all the glory. The victorious amongst them is a hero, and the defeated a victim... while the poor Egyptian queen, Cleopatra-the last representative of the glory of the Ptolemies- ... got nothing but a heap of accusations, sins, and curses" (115).

This quote summarizes Chawqi's belief that the historical representation of Cleopatra is subjective and politically loaded. He wants to create justice through rewriting the portrait of the Egyptian queen and keeps asking "should not the Egyptian author do justice to this falsely accused Egyptian [Cleopatra]? ... I think that it is even his responsibility to be just, at least until modern research establishes the truth of this old history" (The Death of Cleopatra, 116).

The author's aim behind rewriting this story is to defend the reputation of Cleopatra who is an appealing character to Western writers because, according to Harold Bloom, "Cleopatra-whether in Shakespeare, Dryden, or Shaw-does seem the creation of a man's imagination, if only because the image of desire that activates and torments most men seems better represented by Cleopatra, as a literary character, than by anyone else" (1). The most depicted part of the queen is her sexuality, her being a recipient of Western male desire. According to Franklin Dickey in "The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra," Cleopatra is "the mad leader of an effeminate crew" (71). The queen's effeminized crew stands in contrast to the masculine Rome. She was described as the Eastern dangerous and seductive lady.

3.2.The Tragic Genre

Both the tragic hero and the epic hero intersect in their praise of the nation. In his rewriting of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra, Ahmed Chawqi preserves tragic mode through using tragic hero, the tragic flaw and catharsis. Turning back to Aristotle's definition of tragic hero, Cleopatra can be identified as a tragic hero since she not only belongs to a high rank but she also behaves nobly towards her people and towards Antony. Cleopatra's tragic flaw can be described as excessive pride and dignity. The miscalculation made by Antony regarding the course of the battle of Actium led to the reversal of his situation and to his downfall. The reversal of situation affects both Antony and Cleopatra because they have changed from a state of happiness and pleasure to a state of agony, defeat and misery.

Chawqi is not only following Shakespeare's tradition but also subverting it. This concept of rewriting bears with it the issue of 'supplementarity' as discussed by Derrida in Of Grammatology. Jacques Derrida conceives "the supplement" as harboring "within it two

significations whose cohabitation is as strange as it is necessary. The supplement adds to itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching plenitude, the fullest measure of presence... It adds only to replace" (144-45). Chawqi replaces the attribute of "gipsy's lust" and adds Cleopatra's devotion to her nation sacrificing even her love.

I forgot my love and support for Antunius whom I betrayed.

God knows I have let down my love, the father of my children, my supporter and my ally.

I took a stance that befits glory, I was the daughter and queen of Egypt. (I, pp. 19-20)

4. CONCLUSION

Chawqi aims at rewriting history by designing a new character of Cleopatra, because he wants to: "grant her the ultimate right to defend herself, her policies and her love, while not giving any other character more than a little space to defend himself" (117). Shakespeare's Cleopatra may sacrifice everything for the sake of her love for Antony to the point of depopulating Egypt: "He shall have every day a several greeting,/Or I'll unpeople Egypt" (I,v,77). However, in Chawqi's play, she praises her people, and she is represented as a leader.

Chawqi is more concerned with rectifying the accusations allocated to Cleopatra than representing the winners of the war. He questions the political Western narratives of history by redesigning a new portrait of the queen of Egypt. Arab writers believe it's their duty to interrogate historical truth and rewrite the suspected image of Cleopatra, whose character is sketched to rebuild a new reputation. Chawqi tries to correct the view of the queen as the embodiment of sexual otherness. Rather, sexuality is an epitome of political power used by Cleopatra to save her country. The new image of the witty and dangerous woman dethrones the classical phallocentric image. In Shakespeare's play, the lusty allure of the queen is a contamination of the Western stress on purity. In fact, women in Shakespeare's plays are sexually unattractive, which produces Cleopatra's exoticism and manipulative power.

Chawqi's rewriting of Cleopatra is framed by postcolonial discourse's challenge of dominant representation and stereotypical attributes. She is an assertion of the inversion of gender roles due to her powerful character and her absolute control over Antony. She is a leader who keeps praising her people, condemning Rome and asserting the greatness of Egypt.

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