

Reconfiguring Transgressive Stage Space: Multiculturalism in *Antony and Cleopatra* (Directed by Barry Avrich, Stratford Shakespeare Festival, 2015)

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Abstract: *This essay applies geocritical and adaptation theories to the 2015 production of Shakespeare’s Antony and Cleopatra, represented at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, available on Digital Theatre Plus. The production directed for film by Barry Avrich (and for the theatre by Gary Griffin) represented a multicultural and multiracial Roman Empire, in which characters evolved almost chaotically. Yet this relative chaos was partially ordered by the figure of authority (Octavius Caesar), while Antony’s transgressive character and Cleopatra’s histrionic personality were the perplexing agents that provided excitement. Starting from the concept of “transgressivity” (Westphal 37), I argue that this production (as well as Shakespeare’s play) represented the expansive space of the Roman Empire (with the inland Mediterranean Sea) as disordered and troublesome settings, tragically marked by the characters’ psychological flaws and their inadequacies. Rather than showing an ordered universe marked by the overwhelming Roman military authority, the production repositioned multiculturalism in an ambivalent space of encounter and civil war, which challenged authoritarian figures representing stern concepts of Romanitas.*

Keywords: *Antony and Cleopatra, production, Roman Empire, Shakespeare, space, transgressivity*

The setting of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* is the whole Roman Empire, with the centrality of Rome and the Eastern Province of Egypt. Yet, apart from the dramatic settings shifting between Alexandria and Rome, some scenes are set in Sicily (2.1); by the mountain of Misenum (2.6), in the ancient port of Italy, located south of Baiae, at the west end of the Gulf Puteoli; on board of Pompey’s galley (2.7) in Misenum; in Syria, on the eastern border of the Roman Empire (3.1); in Athens (3.4), Greece, which was also part of the Roman Empire; in Actium, on the north-west coast of Greece (3.7; 3.8); in Taenarum, the central peninsula of southern Peloponesus (3.11); in Octavius Caesar’s camp outside Alexandria (3.12; 4.1; 4.6; 4.9; 5.1); or on the battlefield outside Alexandria (4.7; 4.10). [1] How could the bare Jacobean stage (or the modern one, for that matter) suggest such a variety of geographic spaces and dramatic perspectives? Is it possible to speak through space by using dramatic characters as embodied voices? The production of *Antony and Cleopatra* directed by Barry Avrich, [2] showed that this was possible. Developed on the relatively simple space of the stage, the shifting locations were suggested by costume, props, music or language. However, the atmosphere and the spatial dynamics were no less suggestive in conveying the idea of transgressive space, in which characters evolved according to their diversified dramatic destinies. Cleopatra’s palace in Alexandria was indicated by lavish and exotic costumes made of golden fibres, comfortable pillows, and golden jewellery and fans, manipulated by Cleopatra’s eunuchs and servants. Rome offered an austere setting, with columns and stern-looking soldiers guarding the structure. The Sicily of Sextus Pompeius’ rebellion was a dark place in the middle of nowhere; whereas other locations in Syria or Egypt were no different from Rome in suggesting betrayal, devastation, and loss.

Literary space is an unstable category and it depends on various factors and phenomena. In *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* (2011), Bertram Westphal observes that “[t]he first premise of geocritical theory states that time and space share a common plan, subject to an entirely oscillatory logic whereby the fragmentary ceases to be oriented to a coherent whole” (37). Westphal calls this systemic indeterminacy “isotropy” (37), which “marks the transition from a reading of the world still guided by the grand narratives to an erratic reading arising from a full-fledged postmodernity” (37). This kind of inconsistent reading is marked by “heterogeneity” (the contradictory nature of homogeneous space) (Westphal 37) and transgression, coming from the Latin *transgressio* (Westphal 42), which is connected with transgressing the borders, or *limes*, of the Roman Empire. As Westphal observes, “transgression means violating a moral, rather than a physical limit” (42). It is a “closed and striated space” (Westphal 42) which means more than crossing porous boundary lines; it refers to interpenetrating several spaces and temporalities (Westphal 42). This is exactly what this filmed adaptation of a theatrical production of *Antony and Cleopatra* did: it reimagined the shifting spaces of the play’s settings in such a way as to represent both

physically transgressing borders (of the Roman Empire, in the original sense of *transgressio*), and the indeterminacy of transgressing the moral and psychological borders of human possibility.

Speaking of fluid borders and transgression, even the intersecting fields of spatial literary studies and literary geography are placed at boundaries marked by symbolic thresholds. In the article “Spatial Literary Studies versus Literary Geography?”, Robert T. Tally remarks on the interdisciplinarity of these fields: “the clearest difference between spatial literary studies and literary geography ... would be that the former maintains itself within the discipline of literature or, more broadly, the humanities, whereas literary geography ... would be more interdisciplinary—that is, operating *between* literature and geography—and more closely related to geography and the social sciences (Tally 394). The preposition *between* alludes to the interference with already established borders and the transgression into the unknown. Yet how about the theatre? In what sense was theatrical space, in a specific production, both transgressive and conventional? According to Goran Stanivukovic, in “Shakespeare and the New Aestheticism: Space, Style and Text” (2013), “[t]he spaces produced by Shakespeare’s work are shaped through an interaction of the play, the page, and the visual image that captures both a playtext and performance on a printed page” (Stanivukovic 142). Similarly, in mapping the “the historical meaning of visual reception” of Shakespeare’s plays on stage, Dennis Kennedy, in *Looking at Shakespeare: A Visual History of Twentieth-Century Performance* (2001), examines the “visual reception” (5) of Shakespeare across time in terms of how theatre audiences experienced and decoded scene designs and other visual aspects of production (for example, costumes) against the background of historical, political and aesthetic conditions that framed spaces.

Multiculturalism has often been defined, in sociological terms, as an ideology that suggests that society should consist of, or at least recognize and include with equal status, diverse cultural groups. Multiculturalism is generally deemed to be the counterpart of monoculturalism, which suggests a regularizing cultural unity and pre-existing consistency and homogeneity. In political theory, multiculturalism is associated with cosmopolitanism, as Charles Jones observes in the chapter entitled “Multiculturalism and Cosmopolitanism,” from *The Ashgate Research Companion to Multiculturalism* (2010). As Jones observes, “in many modern societies characterized by cultural pluralism and liberal democratic political institutions, one of the most striking developments of the last several decades has been the extent to which some liberal democracies have embraced multiculturalism as a requirement of their basic moral commitment to the freedom and equality of their citizens” (217). The theatre is a platform for promoting multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism, and the 2015 production of *Antony and Cleopatra* directed by Barry Avrich is no exception.

In addition, each filmed production is a form of adaptation, which recreates the conditions of theatrical performance. Adaptation theorists mention issues of “cultural capital” (Hutcheon and O’Flynn 91) when writing about the motives of adaptation. As Hutcheon and O’Flynn note, “one way to gain respectability or increase cultural capital is for an adaptation to be upwardly mobile” (91), and this explains “the many early cinematic adaptations of Dante and Shakespeare” (91). Yet this particular filmed adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* directed by Barry Avrich is both conforming to the play’s multiculturalism and also transgressive in relation to representing theatrical space.

From the very beginning of the production, in Cleopatra’s palace in Alexandria (furnished with lush golden pillows and emanating sensuality, with eunuchs fanning the lovers with golden fans), the play set the multicultural spatiality. When Cleopatra claimed to set the boundaries of love: “I’ll set a bourn how far to be beloved” (1.1.16), Mark Antony replied, “Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth” (1.1.17). Apart from the biblical connotation suggested by “new heaven, and new earth” (Revelation 21:1), the expansive spatial metaphor implied transgression and dissolution of boundaries when emotions were involved. Cleopatra’s provocative invitation to set boundaries to love—as if this were possible—was counteracted by the image of Antony’s belief in a seemingly boundless universe. This alludes to the fact that the margins of the expansion of the Roman Empire were still being redrawn at that particular point in history. Then spatial metaphors shrunk to the confined space of the stage, when Antony claimed, “Let Rome and Tiber melt, and the wide arch / Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space!” (1.1.34-35). This was an allusion to Roman power being engulfed into the private space of emotion. As Mark Antony kissed Cleopatra’s belly button when stressing the word “space”, the production showed unequivocally how the larger expanse of the Roman Empire—and the power associated with it—contracted to comprise the woman’s body and the emotions provoked by love.

The extent of the Roman Empire at the time when the play was set covered a large space of the known world, with Numidia and Cyrenaica, the Kingdom of the Ptolemies in Northern Africa, Judaea, Syria, Cilicia, and Bithynia in Asia Minor, as well as Thrace, Greece, Macedonia, Illyricum and Cisalpine Gaul. The Messenger on stage drew an imaginary picture of the extending boundaries of the Roman Empire when he reported the “stiff news” (1.2.106) that Labienus [3] “hath with his Parthian force / Extended Asia” (1.2.106-107). The Messenger painted the wide and multicultural territory of the Roman Empire with the help of the painting brush of imagination, as both Mark Antony and the reporting Messenger were standing in Cleopatra’s golden palace in Alexandria. Another Messenger brought news “from Sicyon” (1.2.119), a Greek city in northern Peloponesus, north-west of Corinth, informing Antony that his wife, Fulvia, was dead. Not only did these messengers bring forth news of conquest, defeat and death, but this intelligence was meant to undermine Antony’s power in the East and destabilize the borders of the Roman Empire. Moved by this tragic and threatening news, Mark Antony concluded that he should “from this enchanting queen break off” (1.2.135). Not only were the borders of the Roman Empire drawn with the help of metaphoric language and through characters as messengers coming from afar, but also Antony’s personal emotions were associated with the disruptive force of conflicting states of mind.

Cleopatra’s emotions, on the other hand, were associated not only with histrionics and deceit, but also with the space of Egypt, her home country. In fact, Cleopatra’s moods were like the weather, but acquiring universal proportions. As Enobarbus told Antony, “We cannot call her winds and waters sighs and tears; they are greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report” (1.2.154-155). Almanacs were sold by pedlars and contained calendars, astrological forecasts and predictions about the weather, and they would represent an early modern form of globalization, combined with local news and events, because everybody was interested in the weather. However, Cleopatra’s moods were epitomised on a universal scale, as if her changing temperament would affect entire nations. This large-scale image of Cleopatra’s affections was contrasted with the news of Fulvia’s death, which was dismissed in three phrases by Antony: “Fulvia is dead” (1.2.163); “Fulvia is dead” (1.2.165); “Dead” (1.2.167); this also meant that Antony had lost a powerful and important ally in his wife. Mark Antony drew his power from the universally recognized passion of love for Cleopatra (associated with tempests), but also from the quiet homeliness of Fulvia’s support, associated with “old robes” (1.2.171) and “old smock” (1.2.175) by Enobarbus, in opposition to Cleopatra, the “new petticoat” (1.2.176). This combination of old love and new love also included the spaces in which the two women lived and died: Alexandria (for Cleopatra) and Sicyon, in Greece (for Fulvia).

The Roman Empire’s land possessions (inhabited by many cultures) were set in counterpart with Rome’s “empire of the sea” (1.2.192), represented by Sextus Pompeius. [4] Land dominions and the sea power of the Roman Empire were brought unto the stage during an apparently casual conversation between Mark Antony and Enobarbus. Romans were referred to as “our slippery people” (1.2.192), whom Antony feared that they would swear allegiance to the younger Pompey. The play did not only celebrate the more obvious opposition between Rome–Egypt, male–female, reason–passion, or truth–deceit, but also the multicultural relations among the nations subjected by the Roman Empire, with their spaces of encounter, as well as the seas representing the vast spaces of transition and travel, crisscrossing this Roman world. Not only was Egypt the physical centre of the Eastern Roman vassal states, but also Cleopatra was the iridescent centre of Antony’s emotions. Even when Antony decided to leave for Rome (for political reasons), he committed himself to a physical absence, which was not spiritual separation. Metaphors of movement abounded in this scene, when Antony told Cleopatra that, even if the lovers were separated physically, they remained united spiritually: “our separation so abides and flies / That thou, residing here, goes with me, / And I, hence fleeting, here remain with thee” (1.4.104-106). The opposition between “here” and “hence” and a vague “there” (supposedly Rome) laid the stress on the ubiquitous place of emotion, which was where home was. Even if Antony’s official allegiance was in Rome, Alexandria was the “here” of his emotion, the place which he might account as his.

Rome, on the other hand—the space of stern Romanness represented by Octavius Caesar and Lepidus as centres of power—was not only a dreary emptiness in this production, but straightforwardly blank (or dark). Suggested by two symmetrical columns flanked by two Roman centurions on guard and two red banners, the Rome was arid and unwelcoming, but it was also a space of power. The conversation between Caesar and Lepidus in Rome took place on an elevated platform, between these two columns, as if to suggest the risings and trappings of political power. Lepidus sided with Mark Antony after the murder of

Julius Caesar in 44 BC and he was made a triumvir with Antony and Octavius. Therefore, like Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar, Lepidus owned one third of the Roman world, but was relieved of his responsibilities by Octavius Caesar, who forced him to retire into private life. Yet Lepidus, as one of the triumvirs, was closely linked to the world of power in Italy and the Roman values, as he was closer in space to Caesar's world than to Mark Antony's Eastern possessions and affections.

The vast space of the sea power was represented in this production by the figures of two "famous pirates" (1.4.49), Menas and Menecrates, [5] who "make the sea serve them" (1.4.50), according to another messenger. The Second Messenger said that "borders maritime" (1.4.51-52) were a threat to the triumvirate's power. Menace to Rome's political power came both from the pirates' "hot inroads" (1.4.51) in Italy and from the seas. In counterpoint, Caesar mentioned Antony's past victories in Modena and the Alps (1.4.58-72), reshaping a geography of Roman resilience in Italy, peppered with allusions to famine, drinking horse urine, and cannibalism.

These images of Roman strength in European western lands (in Italy) were opposed to the lasciviousness of Cleopatra's palace in Alexandria, where the Egyptian queen smoked opium and asked for "mandragora" (1.5.4) to drink; this was a poisonous plant that induced death-like sleep, but in Cleopatra's case it was meant to pass away "this great gap of time" (1.5.5) while Mark Antony was away. Space and time were not understood as homogeneous and rectilinear, but as extensions of the deserted queen's state of mind. Cleopatra combined geographic metaphors to symbolize West and East; Antony was "the demi-Atlas of this earth" (1.5.24), while Cleopatra was called by her lover "my serpent of old Nile" (1.5.26). In classical mythology, Atlas is said to support the world (or the heavens) on his shoulders, but geographically it is a mountain located in North-western Africa, while the Nile is placed in the North-eastern part of the African continent. Not only did these geographic metaphors suggest two opposing ends of the Roman Empire, but they also reimagined a world of extensive power. However, Atlas was, for a time, relieved of his load by Hercules, in order to bring the golden apples to the hero. Like Atlas, Mark Antony was known to support half of the power of the Roman world on his shoulders, and this is why Cleopatra called him a "demi-Atlas" (1.5.24). However, this power was waning, and these spatial metaphors revealed not only the extent of the Roman military power but also its vulnerability and the moral transgressions of its generals.

In opposition to Cleopatra's lush palace in Alexandria, where music, golden pillows and the central bed were essential elements of décor, the Sicily of Pompey's rebellion was a dark and unspecified location, dominated by a climbing ladder, next to which Pompey, Menecrates and Menas conversed in warlike manner. This was the ladder of Pompey's ambition, but it was not sustained by military force, so it ended nowhere, in darkness. Shakespeare created dramatic tension by making these rebels initially unaware that Antony was on his way to Rome. Yet, when Varrius announced that Mark Antony was expected in Rome, he commented that, since Antony left Egypt, there was "A space for farther travel" (2.1.31). Time and space were merged in this scene; as space was used to signify time, both of them were two facets of the same coin, which represented Antony's gradual loss of power. As the play moved from crisis to crisis, the shifting spaces became increasingly unstable. The same ladders and columns dominated the conversation, in Rome, between Lepidus and Enobarbus, initially, and then including Mark Antony and Caesar.

Having made the difficult break with Cleopatra, Antony had to face Caesar's accusations. Having patched their differences, the triumvirs prepared to deal with Pompey. Antony appeared favourably in this scene (2.2), frankly admitting his faults, first (2.2.97-100), but also defending himself against unfounded criticism (2.2.50-76). Caesar was uncompromisingly in control and accepted no apologies. Lepidus, during his brief few interjections (2.2.104; 2.2.101) tried to look on the bright side of the situation. The marriage proposal between Mark Antony and Octavia was made by Caesar's friend, Agrippa, and it appeared to have been set up in advance. This political meeting developed in a dark and ominous atmosphere, where the Roman triumvirs' power was flanked by two red banners symbolizing bloodshed. The symmetrical positioning of the three Roman leaders sitting on chairs suggested a political truce, but it also announced military confrontation.

The famous narrative by Enobarbus (to Agrippa and Maecenas) of the first meeting between Cleopatra and Mark Antony introduced another imaginary space on stage, which was physically still dominated by the three empty chairs left by the triumvirs. As Enobarbus described Cleopatra's barge "upon the river Cydnus" (2.2.198), audiences were not expected to imagine the luxuriance of Cleopatra's palace in Alexandria, but a place in Cilicia, in the south-east of what is now Turkey. Even if critics noticed that

Shakespeare followed Plutarch closer in detail in this passage than anywhere else in the play, the sensual atmosphere created by the description of Cleopatra's barge was entrancing. As Enobarbus described Cleopatra's "burnished throne" (2.2.201), the poop made of "beaten gold" (2.2.202), the purple and perfumed sails (2.2.203) and the silver oars (2.2.204), all that the audience could see was the dark stage and Enobarbus creating this scene in the audience's imagination. The space of the Eastern Roman province of Cilicia became, in Enobarbus' description, a locale of lasciviousness and conquest, suited to Cleopatra's seductive power. This was not a setting for the play (one among many others), but a place of imagination, whose borders were traced with the power of words.

Space was also the distance that Mark Antony had to keep between himself and the rising star of Octavius Caesar. When the Egyptian Soothsayer confronted Mark Antony in Rome, issues of spatial and spiritual transgression were openly stated. As Antony chided the Soothsayer with the ironic question "You do wish yourself in Egypt?" (2.3.10), the seer responded melancholically, "Would I have never come from thence, nor you thither" (2.3.11). This was the same linguistic balance between "here" and "there" but, this time, the spatial "here" was Rome, while Alexandria was referred to as the distant elsewhere, designated by "thence." Such spaces were traced not only through the characters' conflicting emotions, but also by means of an oppositional duality that defined Alexandria and Rome as incompatible entities. The Soothsayer's advice to Mark Antony was to leave Octavius Caesar in Rome and "Make space enough between you" (2.3.22). As if Antony's personality might be contaminated by Octavius Caesar's ambition, the Soothsayer predicted the rise of Octavius' star and implied the subsequent waning of Antony's power. Influenced by the Soothsayer's words, Mark Antony decided to send one of his leading officers, Ventidius, "to Parthia" (2.3.40), in order to drive the Parthians out of Syria and win a brilliant victory for the Romans. The Parthian Empire had an important role in the play's spatial arrangement because it established the eastern borders of the Roman Empire and highlighted the undefined relationships of power established in the east or, as Antony said, "I'th'East my pleasure lies" (2.3.40). The East was the space of pleasure, lasciviousness, and femininity, while the West spelled politics, resolution, and masculinity.

The location of 2.6 by the mount of Misenum, placed about five kilometres south of Baiae at the west end of the gulf of Puteoli, suggested another space of political intrigue, betrayal and loss. Cape Misenum was Rome's most famous military port and harboured the largest base of the Roman navy. In 38 BC, Misenum was the place where a short-lived pact was drawn between Octavian Caesar and his rival, Sextus Pompeius. The crisis created by Pompey, which was one of the major reasons for Mark Antony's decision to return to Rome, came to a head as he and the triumvirs met in a conference. However, with Pompey's unexpected agreement to the terms offered him (2.6.57-59), the crisis evaporated and turned into celebration. The production of *Antony and Cleopatra* directed by Barry Avrich started this scene with the harsh sounds and ominous appearance of military drills, with Pompey talking of "hostages" (2.6.1), and ended it in a drunken mode of revelry and dance. The production suggested the unpredictable nature of history, when stern politicians pretended to come to a truce but, in the end, they turned into besotted drunkards and dancers with no purpose in life, feasting on board of Pompey's galley.

Space could also be suggested by an object—or an imaginary one, for that matter. When Cleopatra recalled the moments of her seduction of Antony, she told how she "wore his sword Philippan" (2.5.23). This was the sword used by Mark Antony at the battle of Philippi, during which Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar defeated Brutus and Cassius. This was another allusion to civil war and Roman rising against Roman; only that, in this case, Mark Antony was the victor. There is no evidence that "Philippan" was the actual name given to Antony's sword, but this strengthens my argument that the spatial reference to the battle of Philippi—enclosed in an object, the sword—raised issues of Roman conquest and competition for power. However, in this particular production directed by Barry Avrich, Mark Antony's sword was an imaginary one (not a real prop), wielded by Cleopatra from the height of her luscious bed. Just as Cleopatra's seduction of Mark Antony was construed as an act of passion, diminishing the hero's masculinity, the famous sword which won him his victories was nothing more than an imaginary object that might yield sexual connotations.

Moreover, Philippi was the space where the ghost of Julius Caesar appeared to Brutus, as Pompey reminded his political adversaries at Misenum: Julius Caesar "ghosted" (2.6.13) Brutus before his defeat at the Battle of Philippi. The space of Philippi, in Greece, in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, therefore, was turned from the symbol of Roman conquest and victory into an imaginary place of seduction, fear, and

betrayal, foreshadowing Cleopatra's possible betrayal of Mark Antony at the battle of Actium, in north-western Greece, this time. The country of Greece is transformed into a space of disloyalty, civil war and loss, far distant from the idea of Roman conquest of Greece proliferated by Roman propaganda.

Rivers were spatial symbols of countries and nations, of East and West, of conquest and power. Yet they were also metaphors of powerful emotions, like torrents gushing forth with incredible power. When Antony declared his undying passion for Cleopatra, he vowed, "Let Rome in Tiber melt" (1.1.34), as an expression of his love and his space. In counterpart, when Cleopatra was informed of Mark Antony's marriage, she exclaimed with equal passion, "Melt Egypt into Nile, and kindly creatures / Turn all to serpents" (2.5.78-79). As rivers were symbols of nations (the Tiber indicated Rome while the Nile designated Egypt), the power of their flow could also be assimilated with powerful emotions. Antony associated his all-encompassing love for Cleopatra with the dissolving of the Roman power into the Tiber, while Cleopatra's passion (and jealousy) was expected to annihilate all Egypt into the Nile, while all living creatures would be turned into symbols of betrayal (as the serpent was). Yet these symbolic rivers were represented on stage only through the power of spatial metaphors.

In addition, the river Euphrates was the longest and most historically important river of Western Asia, and one of the defining symbols of Mesopotamia. In the play's spatial arrangement, the Euphrates was a symbol of the extent of Roman dominance—a power which Mark Antony was all too ready to relinquish for Cleopatra's sake. When the messenger informed Antony that Labienus had conquered Asia Minor, the extended geographic space offered an image of Roman power: "From Euphrates / His conquering banner shook, from Syria / to Lydia and to Ionia" (1.2.107-109). Yet, initially, Quintus Labienus had been sent to Parthia by Cassius, in order to raise troops to help the conspirators against Antony and Octavius. Apart from a space of conquest and Roman power, the Euphrates symbolized betrayal and lost purposes. All these rivers adduced spatial metaphors related to power and betrayal on stage in this production of *Antony and Cleopatra*.

The setting of 3.1 in Syria, on the eastern border of the Roman empire, showed the vast geographic distance between this location and that of the previous episode (2.7), in Misenum, in Italy. This indicated the extent of the territory over which the triumvirs held power. However, this scene was in ironical contrast to the previous one. While the commanders were celebrating their false concord on Pompey's galley in Misenum, the subordinate (Ventidius) was loyally carrying out his orders of killing the Parthian king's son. Whereas the previous scene (2.7) led out to the carrying out of the drunken Lepidus, this one (3.1) started with the carrying in of Pacorus, and having the Parthian king's son murdered on stage by Ventidius. Thus, events that occurred at different ends of the Roman empire were connected dramatically through the idea of military defeat and death, as well as submerged political conspiracy. As for the actual décor in this production, this scene was no different from the previous ones suggesting the Roman empire, whether Rome, Sicily, Misenum or Syria: dark background marked by two red battle banners. The only difference when the setting was in Rome was that the characters evolved on an elevated platform, high above the ground level, signifying the domination of Rome over its vassal states.

Athens (as part of the Roman Empire) was the setting of 3.4, as Mark Antony and Octavia had a political conversation which showed the rift between Antony and Octavius Caesar starting to develop rapidly. The production's setting was just as minimalist as before, when other parts of the Roman empire were suggested, but the focus of the camera was on the two protagonists, suggesting that they were husband and wife and that their political influence—as well as their marriage—involved the destinies of many nations. Space was minimized physically here, but expanded mentally to comprise vast territories. When Antony complained that Octavius Caesar "hath waged / New wars 'gainst Pompey" (3.4.3-4), the fates of nations were enclosed in these words. This implied that, even if Pompey had accepted the offer of Sicily and Sardinia during the political pact, Caesar had gone back on his words to get Sicily into his hands. Even if this scene was taking place in Athens—the city of democracy and reasonable thought—the heated arguments between husband and wife belied the supposed atmosphere of concord expected between them. Although Octavia intended to play the conciliatory part between Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar, there was no reconciliation in sight and Antony announced "the preparation of a war" (3.4.26).

When the scene shifted to Alexandria, again, in 3.5, the focus was no longer on Cleopatra's love or jealousy, but on the Roman political manoeuvres. Several historical events were compressed in this scene, including Octavius Caesar's dismissal of Lepidus from the triumvirate (3.5.6-11) and the murder of Pompey

(3.5.18-19). The Roman world was, from this point, divided between Octavius Caesar and Mark Antony, who were gradually coming closer to outright conflict. The spaces of division in these scenes contradicted the expectation of multicultural understanding among diverse nations living in the Roman empire. Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar were transgressive figures, whose Roman power encompassed vast spaces, but whose moral behaviour was questionable, to say the least.

The variety of multicultural encounters—represented by the multitude of spaces enclosed in the Roman Empire—were symbolically denoted in this production of *Antony and Cleopatra* directed by Barry Avrich. However, Rome's multiculturalism and cosmopolitan policies were marked by suspicion, enmity and civil war. The fragmented spaces represented in this play signified not only the political crumbling of the vast Roman Empire, but also the dissolution of consciousness when issues of absolute power were involved. Belying the expectations of multicultural understanding and cultural pluralism expected from the liberal democratic political institutions in the Roman state, the play dramatized the disintegration of cultural and political values (represented by *Romanitas*) in the face of ambition and greed for power. Characters marked by moral transgression (Mark Antony, Octavius Caesar and Cleopatra) evolved along fragmented spaces of subjectivity, whose borders were indistinct and blurred by negative emotions. Despite the expectation of multiculturalism deriving from the constitution of a great empire, the production dramatized diversified spaces marked by dissolution, betrayal and loss. The multiculturalism of the Roman Empire was only a vague concept in this production, as power spaces could not adequately contain the characters' transgressions.

Notes

[1] References to the text of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* are keyed to the Arden edition, edited by John Wilders (1995). Acts, scenes and lines will be given parenthetically in the text.

[2] Avrich, Barry, director. *Antony and Cleopatra* by William Shakespeare. A film based on the Stratford Shakespeare Festival Production, 2015. Directed for the Stage by Gary Griffin. Artistic Director Antony Cimolini. Melbar Entertainment Group in association with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. With Gerrant Wynn Davies (Mark Antony), Yanna McIntosh (Cleopatra), Ben Carlson (Octavius Caesar), Tom McCamus (Enobarbus), Sean Arbuckle (Maecenas), Daniel Briere (Eros), Ryan Field (Man from Sicyon), Ijeoma Emesowum (Cleopatra Attendant), Deirdre Gillard Rowlings (Octavia Attendant), Carmen Grant (Octavia), Randy Hughson (Lepidus), Peter Hutt (Agrippa), Andrew Lawrie (Diomedes), Jamie Mac (Towrus), Anthony Malarky (Dolabella, Thidias), Jennifer Mogbock (Iras), André Morin (Varius), Karack Osborn (Scarrus), Sarena Parmar (Cleopatra Attendant), Andrew Robinson (Ventidius), Brad Rudy (Menas, Camidius), Stephen Russell (Soothsayer), E. B. Smith (Alexa, Proculeius), Brian Tree (Pompey, Clown), Sophia Walker (Charmian), Antoyne Yared (Mardian).

[3] According to *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Quintus Labienus was sent to Parthia by Cassius to solicit help against Antony and Octavian, but with Cassius' defeat and suicide he was stranded there. In 41-40 BC (just before the opening of the play), Labienus invaded Syria with Parthian help and defeated Antony's governor. He then proceeded to invade Asia Minor (OED 476), as the Messenger reports.

[4] Sextus Pompeius was the younger son of Pompey the Great. According to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, following the defeat and murder of his father by Julius Caesar, Sextus was outlawed but occupied Sicily, from where he used his ships to rescue his father's former supporters and blockade the Italian coast (OED 714). Therefore, Antony may rightfully call him as ruling the empire of the sea.

[5] According to Plutarch, the source of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Menas and Menecrates were two pirates and supporters of Sextus Pompeius; Menas was a freedman of Pompey the Great and was killed while campaigning in Illyria, while Menecrates was a freedman and commander of Sextus Pompeius, who was sent against Octavius' fleet; seeing that the enemy was about to capture his vessel, he threw himself overboard and was drowned. These pirates operating at sea were used to suggest the threat to the Roman maritime power, as well as the political threat to the triumvirate's rule.

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