

**Unit: 30: Postcolonial Shakespeare**

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**Introduction**

Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-59) who framed *The Minutes on Indian Education* (1835) justified English education by saying that it aimed to create a class of natives who will function as the tools of the empire. Even as the introduction of English and its literature, especially Shakespeare popularised Shakespeare among the colonised, it also helped them use English and also Shakespeare to speak back to the empire. English also liberated Indians from the empire as it helped them speak not only back to the empire, but also unite the diverse linguistic groups in India. Shakespeare's plays are widely used to challenge the colonialist assumptions of British and also as the mouthpiece of the colonised.

Shakespeare's plays use the early modern European codes defining non-European races and religions. Postcolonial discourses see how the reception of these plays in non-Western societies and former colonies in Africa, South Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America give new perspectives to Shakespeare. "Postcolonial theory examines the effect that colonialism has had on the development of literature and literature studies—on novels, poems, and 'English' departments—within the context of the history and politics of regions under the influence, but outside the geographical boundaries, of England and Britain". (Klages, 2017, p. 147). This unit looks at the word 'postcolonialism' and examines how it addressed in the readings of Shakespeare's *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Tempest* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

**Postcolonial**

Colonisation refers to 'coming from outside and controlling someone with or without force'. Even before the so-called western discovery of India in 1498, westerners used to come to India as travellers, and traders. They had their ideas of eastern people, societies and cultures. It was only much later when they became blinded by their uncontested ideas about their superiority that the west wanted to position the East concerning their self-assumed superiority. The missionary spirit of Christianity was also played a part in this. The West took it up as its responsibility to "civilize" the world with their Christian values. It is a task which Rudyard Kipling calls "the Whiteman's burden" of reforming the savages. This attitude ignored the fact that the colonised had their own culture and civilization. This civilising mission was a veneer of justification for the colonial economic exploitation.

British colonialism which lasted for three centuries from 17<sup>th</sup> Century to 20<sup>th</sup> Century. White British citizens colonised North America, Australia, New Zealand, India, Asia, the Middle East etc. by subduing the non-white and non-Western native population through military or/and economic power. They looked upon the colonised as "inferior," people in need of "civilization" offered by the West. Western capitalism, which looked for raw materials and markets a major impetus, created a superstructure through their legal, military, religious, and cultural institutions to form the natives into pliable subjects. To do this they introduced British literature and English language into the education system. English syllabus, designed to study and assert the mastery of English language and literature, participated in the British project to colonize India, China, the Arab world, Africa, and ensconced English authors like Shakespeare and Milton as the "greatest" authors.

There is a strong connection between postcolonial theories that examine how the colonising cultures dominated the cultures of the colonies and how these subjugated cultures reacted to and resisted the domination. They promoted scientific racism, a view argued that there exist superior and inferior races as marked by their genetic or biological features and that there is a relationship between physical characteristics and cultural conceptions.

Postcolonial literature is manifest in the simultaneity of the 'double-voiced' discourses of the colonized speaking in the language of both the dominating and dominated cultures. Empowered with heightened verbal mastery, the colonised silenced and undermined not only the systems of racial subordination but also achieved political independence.

Postcolonial theories which arose in the colonies around the 1960s created their discourses challenging the colonial discourses. These examined how the colonizers made the colonized to accept the colonising foreign culture as 'better' than their indigenous forms. The early challenges came from Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) which discussed racial discourses underlying benevolent civilising missions and Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) which argued that the Western discourse about the East come from the western myths and stereotypes about the East that see all Eastern people are alike and are different from Westerners. These created East/West binaries like exotic/familiar, mysterious/known, feminine/masculine, weak/strong, heathen/Christian, etc.

Postcolonial literary scholars examine how *The Empire Writes Back* (Gowri Viswanathan) by producing their knowledge about themselves. They also recognize the difficulty in doing so in the language and by using the tools of the coloniser and is conditioned by the colonial education. By straddling both the colony and the empire, the hybridity of postcolonial studies is difficult to negotiate depending on which model of identity is adopted. In the traditional Humanist model, identity is unique, consistent, and innate. In the Poststructuralist model identity is a socially constructed reality and as it is constructed by multiple discourses, people may believe in opposite or contradictory things, and it is impossible to predict how and what someone will believe, say, or react in a given situation. Both Humanist theory through the notion of free will and Poststructuralist theory through social determinism acknowledge human creative uniqueness.

Homi K. Bhabha's notion of hybrid identities exposes the idea of a nation as "imagined community". Capitalism backed by politics and economics holds a nation together through the tools of oppression, even as the Homeless, refugees and different ethnicities who are excluded challenge the idea of the nation and borders. Here Shakespeare also crosses borders of the English nation and becomes a transnational, postcolonial, hybrid experience as he is taken across cultures.

Shakespeare's works are of major interest in postcolonial literary studies. They are significant because they were produced during the early phase of English colonialism, and seem to assert the superiority of the white race. Although this can be seen in many of his plays, some of them with some important non-white characters like *Othello* with its black Moor Othello, *Antony and Cleopatra* with Cleopatra the Egyptian queen, *The Tempest* with Caliban of an undefined savage race, *The Merchant of Venice* with non-Christian Shylock, and *Titus Andronicus* with another Moors Aaron are considered especially important. He also portrays other characters like Othello's mother (*Oth.*), Jessica, Tubal, the Prince of Morocco, and Lancelot's Moorish woman (*MV*); Tamora's black child (*Tit.*); Caliban's mother Sycorax from Algiers (*Tmp*), and the Indian Boy (*MND*). Of these three are Jews (Shylock, Jessica, and Tubal), nine North Africans and one are an Indian. They include four women (Othello's mother, Cleopatra,

Sycorax, and Launcelot's Moorish woman) and five men (Othello, Aaron, Caliban, the Prince of Morocco, and Aaron's baby); and an Indian boy kept by Titania (*MND*).

Othello is described as 'black'. People in Shakespeare's audience were familiar with blacks and moors in London. For the Elizabethans, Moor meant Muslim as they regarded the Turks, Arabs, Ethiopians and Africans as Muslims in general. Turks were treated as enemies of Christians: "she defies me, / Like Turk to Christian" (*AYLI* 4.3) were considered "infidels" (*2R* 4.1; *3R* 3.5), "black pagans, Turks, and Saracens" (*2R* 4.1), and they and wanted to "take the Turk by the beard" (*5H* 5.2). The Turks are spoken of in derisive terms: "malignant and a turban'd Turk" (*Oth* 5.2), turn Turk (*Oth* 2.3; *Ado* 3.4; *Ham* 3.2), "or else I am a Turk" (*Oth* 2.1) "stubborn Turks" (*MV* 4.1), "Base Phrygian Turk!" (*MWW* 1.3), "Turkish mute" (*5H* 1.2), and "Turk's tribute" (*4H2* 3.2). They highlighted the promiscuous life of the Turks: "in woman out-paramoured the Turk" (*KL* 3.4), "I would send them to the / Turk, to make eunuchs of" (*AWW* 2.3). The English were also wary of the Turks. *Othello* reflects the contemporary idea of the Turks as powerful as seen from their well-prepared, powerful and skilled Turkish fleet (*Oth* 1.3). The "Turkish tapestry" (*Err* 4.1) is an example of their dexterity.

The word black referred equally to the Arabs, Negroes as well as to all non-European races who were to be excluded from the civilized European identity. Othello is described as "old black ram" (1.1), "black" (2.3, 3.3), "far more fair than black" (1.3) "the blackest sins" (2.3), "begrimed and black" (3.3), "black vengeance" (3.3), "the blacker devil!" (5.2). Christian identity is foregrounded ("Christian and Hethen" (1.1), "Christian shame" (2.3), "I am a Christian" (4.2)) and the alien and non-Christian is associated with barbarians "Barbary horse" (1.1), "erring barbarian" (1.3), "barbarous brawl" (2.3), "malignant and a turban'd turk" (5.2), turn Turk (2.1, 2.3), "base Indian" (5.2).

The idea of European moral superiority stemmed from the colonial power. It is manifest in their attitude of moral and intellectual superiority and in their assumptions behind the educational policies they followed. Their idea of racial superiority was closely linked to their economic prosperity and this led to the belief stated by Rudyard Kipling (1865 – 1936): "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet".

This met with a fitting response from the colonies also. In EM Forster's *A Passage to India* when Dr. Aziz gets acquitted of rape charges, Fielding asked him, "Why can't we be friends now?". To this Aziz tersely replies "No. Not yet" and the sky said, "No, not here". Sudanese writer Syed Salihi's *Season of Migration to the North* (tr. Denys Johnson-Davies. London Heinemann, 1978) has Mustafa Saeed who goes to the Capital of the invading colonizers and says, "Indeed, my gentlemen, I have come to your locality as an invader. This is a drop of the poison you injected in the veins of history. I am not an Othello, Othello was a lie".

Postcolonial Shakespeare tries to understand how the colonized people use Shakespeare to speak back to the colonisers by relating it to their reality. This re-reading subverts Shakespeare who was brought into the colonies as part of European literature and language to execute the policy of cultural domination. By reversing the colonial "*vidi, vini, vici*" ('I came, I saw, I conquered') paradigm, the colonised nations began to speak back to the Empire. Such a postcolonial approach is more than mere interrogation of the canonised texts, rather an interrogation of the very process of canonisation itself, its discourses and frameworks. Postcolonialism reads Shakespeare within the narrative framework of subaltern alternative discourses of nation, race, gender and class.

## *Othello*

Ania Loomba thinks that “Othello moves from being a colonized subject existing on the terms of white Venetian society and trying to internalize its ideology, towards being marginalized, outcast and alienated from it in every way until he occupies his...position as it's other” (*Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama*. Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1989). Othello is socially conditioned to reiterate his identity although it is continuously being undermined by society's racist construction of ‘Moor’. He has to hold on to it to his tragic end.

*Othello* is constructed using the Renaissance view of the Moors, Africans, and Turks. It is re-read and re-interpreted in colonial as well as post-colonial spaces. It is especially reread in contexts of the independence of colonies, and the end of slavery and apartheid.

Othello reflects the Elizabethan Christian notion of the Great Chain of Being and was convinced about the divinely ordained monarchy as the inviolable order from God. They believed that if this divine order was disrupted, God would punish people until the order was restored. In this chain also they placed Europeans above non-Europeans. Low characters are accordingly kept below those of the higher class. So, even in the dramatis personae of a play, with king appearing on the top and with women appearing at the bottom. This is evident even in the order in which the dramatis personae is listed. With king and male characters appearing first and with female characters appearing at the bottom of the hierarchy.

The value system of this hierarchy can be seen in Brabantio's speech where he accuses Othello “Damn'd as thou art, thou hast enchanted her” (*Oth*.1.2). ‘Damned’ has the Christian connotations of hell and damnation. Here Brabantio connects Othello to the devil, and by extension, blackness to damnation. Brabantio defends the natural order accepted by Judeo-Christian version of the Great Chain of Being. Post-colonial explorations also look into the questions of racial and religious identity. In the 1500s, Venetians and the Europeans, in general, had a deep mistrust about the non-Europeans. They treated immigrants with disdain and marginalised the coloured people and associated blackness with the evil and devil. This strengthened the European prejudice towards the black.

For Iago, Othello's marriage with the native woman Desdemona was at best a “frail vow betwixt an erring barbarian and a supersubtle Venetian” (*Oth*. 1.3). It was a cultural taboo to assimilate with the white society. Iago's derogatorily compares Othello with a ‘Barbary horse’ (*Oth*. 1.1) an Arabian steed. But the term Barbary, which is phonetically close to ‘barbarian’ (1.3). Shakespeare refers to Barbary (*Ham*. 5.2; *4H1* 2.4; *MV* 3.2) as well as birds and animals from Barbary like cock-pigeon (*AYL* 4.1), horse (*Ham*. 5.2; *Oth*. 1.1; *2R* 5.5), hen (*4H1* 2.4). he uses the associated terms like barbarism (*LLL* 1.1; *2R* 5.2; *WT* 2.1; *Tro*. 5.4), barbarian (*Cor*. 3.1; *Oth*.1.3; *Tro*. 2.1), and Barbarous (*Cym*. 4.4; *5H* 1.2, 3.5; *6H2* 4.1, 4.4; *KJ* 4.2; *KL* 1.1, 4.2; *LLL* 4.2, 5.1; *MV* 2.9; *Oth*. 2.3; *Per*. 4.2; *Tit*. 1.1, 2.3, 5.1, 5.3; *TN* 4.1). Elizabethan courtiers described the Moroccan ambassador Abdel Ouahed who visited London as a barbarian.

Gender re-reading of the play conflates its racial readings and patriarchal assumptions. The Canadian playwright Djanet Sears's *Harlem Duet* (1997) reads *Othello* within gender struggle within the black community and with the whites. It is a response to Shakespeare's *Othello* in the background of the diachronic racial tensions in the US cotton plantation, Harlem and the present and tells the story of Othello's black first wife Billie who is abandoned for a white colleague named Mona. The theme of interracial marriage, names of characters like Othello and white mistress Dessy (in the 1860s) and Mona (at present)—a play on *Desde-Mona*—the use of African magic and the handkerchief show how the

tensions within the black society are as valid as the fears of the white society. It is the story of a black man and his first wife before he meets Desdemona. As a non-chronological prequel to *Othello*, it was written in response to the 'Othello syndrome' which became a keyword during OJ Simpson's murder trial in the 1980s. As most of these responses were constructed by white readers of Shakespeare, Sears tried to unravel Othello within the black culture and from a contemporary black woman's perspective, making the story more of Billie than that of Othello.

### *The Merchant of Venice*

The *Merchant of Venice* can be seen as a colonial discourse on colour. Shakespeare is seen as unjust to the marginalized characters in the play. Gramsci used the military term 'subaltern', to refer to a person or a group inferior in rank due to race, class, gender, ethnicity or religion, and exists outside the social, political and cultural hegemonic power structure. *The Merchant of Venice* becomes a subaltern discourse of the Jews who represent the mysterious and uncivilized 'other' and are treated inferior by the white and Christian west. Shylock's fate, and by extension that of the Jews, is a subject of postcolonial critique of Shakespearean anti-Semitism.

One may interrogate such postcolonial readings. These need not be Shakespeare's own or his society's racial prejudice, but a fictional account. If it is specific historical contexts which establish the veracity and meaning, the treatment of the subaltern in *The Merchant of Venice* can be understood only by placing the text in the socio-cultural context of its production. This can tell us how the play represents the racial bigotry which prevailed then. If these are read retrospectively, today it could lead to accusing Shakespeare of racial bigotry.

The Jews were stigmatized as a reviled outsider and were ousted from the Christian universe for their role in the execution of Jesus, around whom Christianity revolves. The fact that Jesus himself was a Jew is conveniently ignored here. Racial prejudice and parochialism pushed the Jews to subaltern status subjecting them to ethnic intolerance, persecution, social isolation, banishment and atrocities since the Norman Conquest (1066) when the Jews arrived in England first. Many Jews also fled to England from the intolerant Catholic states of Europe.

As the Jews prospered because of hard work, discipline and austerity and by the 13th century became very rich. The states began to politically and economically regulate them charging them with usury, taxation and threats of deportation. As creditors refused to return loans, they could not pay the taxes to the King on time and were further punished. Jewish massacres at London and York (1189–1190), Ordinance of the Jewry (1194), the Statute of Jewry (1253), and the Expulsion of Jews (1290) followed, conditioning the English attitude towards the Jews.

Postcolonial discourses are based on the economic and political hegemony of the colonialists. Wealth figures as a major factor in *The Merchant of Venice*. Both Bassanio-Portia plot and the pound-of-flesh plot revolve around capital brought in by trading. The first is based on wealth inherited by Portia of Venice, the trading port. Bassanio plans to marry Portia for her wealth first: "In Belmont is a lady richly left, And she is fair" (MV. 1.1). He gets 3000 ducats from Antonio to make him presentable. Later, when Portia offers her "dear bought" Bassanio "gold / To pay the petty debt twenty times over" to save Antonio, she puts forward one condition: "first to go with me to church, and call me wife" (3.2). The merchant Antonio has a business empire that is spread across the sea with stations like Tripoli, Mexico, England, Lisbon, Barbary, India etc.

Shylock is obsessed with wealth. He loves money even more than his daughter, and wants it to 'breed as fast'. When his daughter takes his money and elopes with Lorenzo, Shylock becomes so frustrated that he is overcome with "a passion so confused, / So strange, outrageous, and so variable" (2.8). He gives vent to his anguish to Tubal, saying: "I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear: would she were hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin" (3.1). He lends money to Antonio after ensuring that he will get it back. Although he knows that Antonio can take risks in mercantile trade and that it has fetched him a lot of wealth, Shylock prefers not to take a risk in losing his principal sum. He asks Antonio to go to a notary and seal the bond before he lends Antonio 3000 ducats.

If Antonio represents the colonial enterprise, Shylock represents the capital that ignited the colonial engine. Antonio, the entrepreneur takes the risks of maritime trade while capitalists remained safe with their investment. This was a theme close to Shakespeare's society with London which was alive with London Stock Exchange and trading companies like the East India Company. Shakespeare was a successful investor who did not want to invest in maritime trade. He preferred to keep his money safe, like a money lender.

### *The Tempest*

*The Tempest* could be seen as Shakespeare's quintessential postcolonial play. Its postcolonial readings were spurred by the independence movements in the latter half of the twentieth century. Such readings challenged the European readings of the play which foregrounded the servitude of Caliban, the role of the collaborating native Ariel, and Prospero's/colonisers' right over the land they 'discovered' and colonised.

Until post-colonial readings of *The Tempest* appeared, it was read more of an allegorical discourse on creative art. As Shakespeare's final play, critics saw in *The Tempest* a symbol of Shakespeare himself in Prospero. As a master playwright, Shakespeare scripted the action of the play through magical art. He shaped everything in the play--starting right from the artificial tempest which opened the play to the final promised return. Like Shakespeare the dramatist, Prospero directs all actions in the play. He directs each character by executing his master plan. By using his magical powers, he regains the lost dukedom and hands over his daughter to the prince. Like Shakespeare who retires from the stage, Prospero breaks his staff, buries it, gives up his stage, retires to his village home, and hands over the stage to his successors at the Globe. Such view of Shakespeare's artistic fulfilment dominated the reading of the play until post-colonialists redefined *The Tempest*.

In postcolonial reading, Prospero is the coloniser who exploits the natives. He obstructs the development of the natives and denies them their rights. After dividing natives among themselves, he enslaves them and executes his purposes through them. Even as he exploits the natives, he projects himself as a benevolent and unrepachable master. If Prospero represented the idea of the white man's burden, postcolonialism foregrounds Caliban instead. As Prospero wanes, Caliban waxes. It is the growing stature of Caliban as a colonised figure during the decolonisation movements European colonies in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean islands that dented the 'benevolent master' image colonialism had crafted for Prospero. The binaries like the white Prospero's Eurocentric civilization / Sycorax's native 'natural' black magic got challenged in the anti-colonial revisions.

National liberation struggles made the colonised to re-read the play and defend Caliban's natural right over the island and emphasised Prospero's status as a coloniser. Caliban's assertion,

“This island’s mine, by Sycorax my mother,  
Which thou tak’st from me” (1.2.)

reverberated in African and Caribbean struggle for independence.

The Martinique writer Aimé Césaire, re-wrote *The Tempest* in French as *Une Tempête* (1969) (*A Tempest*, 1985) highlighting Caliban’s verbal attacks on Prospero. He focussed on Caliban’s opposition to Prospero’s control over language. He challenged the cultural stereotyping of the new world natives as cannibals and portrayed Caliban’s challenge as an allegory for black guerrilla independence movements. Ariel, labelled a ‘mulatto’, represented the mixed races who accepted their limited oppression and collaborated with the oppressors. Caliban became the symbol of the oppressed and defiant colonised subject.

Such re-readings of the play became sites for anti-colonial literary responses like the Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s novel *A Grain of Wheat* (1967). It deals with Prospero’s colonisation using a British character John Thompson who plans to write a book with the title, *Prospero in Africa* to explain the civilising mission of white men.

Like Miranda and Prospero who justify their enslavement of the ‘savage’ Caliban, the European colonisers also defended their natural superiority over the black ‘vile race’ (*Temp.* 1.2) which lacks natural goodness. Postcolonial criticism strongly challenges the assumptions of this moral superiority of western Christianity. Instead, it views Shakespeare’s portrayal of Prospero’s and Miranda’s relations with Caliban as one of the moral ambivalence which permeates the ‘civilising mission’ of European colonial masters. They presumed that natives lack culture or language until the Europeans gifted them with the language, culture and religion of the west. Those who resisted the European benevolent rule became ‘savages’ beyond redemption, and the natives who collaborated with them became reformed natives. When Shakespeare’s Caliban asserts that ‘You taught me language, and my profit on’t / Is I know how to curse’ (1.2.363–64), it forms a fissure within the text, and helps one to re-interpret the whole Shakespeare from a postcolonial perspective.

### ***Antony and Cleopatra***

*Antony and Cleopatra* (1606-07) is more than a political romance of its titular lovers who cannot be separated either from their positions of power or from their passion for one another. Their relationship encapsulates the encounter between two great civilizations: Rome and Egypt; by extension, west and east. It seems to reiterate Rudyard Kipling’s “East is east, west is west, and the twain shall never meet”. When they met, they contaminated each other so much that it ended in the death of both.

By portraying an attempted but unsuccessful and incomplete colonization, *Antony and Cleopatra* discusses the process of the colonialist conquest and settlement. Like *The Tempest*, it was an important text in developing English colonial consciousness. The play evokes the abstract concept of an imagined empire through the image of the Roman conquest of Egypt. It concentrates on the character and role of the colonizing Romans and draws insights from the writings of Edmund Spenser. It expresses the colonial idea that men of high moral character are immune to the allures of the New World and they alone can succeed in the colonial enterprise. Cleopatra and Egypt symbolise the romantic and deadly allures of the new world. The play made sense in the context of the Virginia settlement which was chartered in 1606 and settled as England’s first colony in North America. It was established following Humphrey Gilbert’s failed attempt at Newfoundland (1583), and Walter Raleigh’s at Roanoke Island (1585).

By the time of the composition of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* the meaning of "Empire" and "colonization" had undergone radical changes from the time historical Antony and Cleopatra. How it is understood in the context of British colonisation of the world is important. Shakespeare did not understand these terms in the way these were used later by Rudyard Kipling's "Ballad of East and West" (1889), Joseph Conrad in his *Heart of Darkness* (1902), or EM Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924). The meaning of these words changed again in postcolonial discourses like Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), or Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête* (1969) when strong postcolonial criticism helped one reread Shakespeare's plays within a new framework.

The context of Jacobean England in which *Antony and Cleopatra* was staged is significant. England was trying to expand. After overcoming its internal security issue during the time of Queen Elizabeth, England made a few outposts across the Atlantic. Only a few of the exploratory missions sent out during this period were successful. They defined the Jacobean attitude towards colonialism the outsiders. Humphrey Gilbert's attempt to colonise Newfoundland in the 1580s, even "planted" a statue of Elizabeth there. It demonstrated the English attitudes about physical claims to colonised land.

In the opening scene of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony who feels ensnared in Egypt wants to return to Rome. It disappoints Cleopatra. He feels that unlike a Roman, he goes "soft" because of the pleasures of Egypt. News from Rome awakens the Roman in Antony and he wary of his life in Egypt with this "emasculating" mistress. In an attempt to lionize Rome, it describes Cleopatra as a "tawny friend" and "Gypsy's lust". What Shakespeare does not admit is that by the time of Antony Rome was licentiousness enough. Instead, he judged Rome by Jacobean norms. Romans of those days exchanged wives, sisters and daughters and regarded women necessary nuisance for the sake of reproduction. Shakespeare fails to capture the real difference between submissive Octavia and assertive Cleopatra who he portrays as seductive and lascivious.

Rome/West is portrayed as opposites and Egypt/East. The opposition can be seen in terms of Roman/Western virtue as opposed to Egyptian/Eastern vice. It is the Roman values that defeated the Egyptian civilization. The East is portrayed as corrupting the West. Roman resistance eases as Romans take interest in "Egyptian cookery" (2.6.63), "Alexandrian feast" (2.7.96 – 97), and "the Egyptian bacchanals" (2.7.104), making even a temperate Octavius "drunk" (2.7.125– 26).

Before it sank under the desert sands, the Egyptian civilization had influenced Rome significantly. More significantly, it accepted Roman values which defeated it and gave way to austere Christianity and then to even more austere Arabs and Islam. Meanwhile, the eastern values accelerated Rome's natural decadence to its death. That 'empire strikes back' is nothing new. it is as old as Cleopatra's time at least. The postcolonial readings of Shakespeare's play only reiterate this subaltern discourse.