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PRE-COLONIAL ANXIETIES: REASSESSING ORIENTALISM IN *OTHELLO* AND *ANTHONY AND CLEOPATRA*

ABSTRACT

This study critically re-evaluates Edward Said's *Orientalism* by analyzing Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra* within the context of England's pre-colonial encounters with the Ottoman Empire. While Said posits that early modern Western representations of the East uniformly depict the Orient as irrational and inferior, this analysis argues that such binaries oversimplify England's cultural position during a period marked by Ottoman ascendancy. Rather than reflecting imperial dominance, Shakespeare's plays convey anxiety, fascination, and ambivalence toward the East. In *Othello*, the protagonist's racial and religious ambiguity evokes fears of "turning Turk", the threat of Islamic conversion and identity loss, revealing not superiority, but a crisis of self. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Cleopatra functions as both an exotic Other and a politically powerful figure who destabilizes Roman masculinity and imperial order. Antony's symbolic "going native" and Cleopatra's manipulation of Orientalist imagery express anxieties about cultural and gender transgressions. By situating these texts within early modern Anglo-Ottoman dynamics, the study challenges the notion of a monolithic, hierarchical Orientalism. It offers a more nuanced understanding of Shakespeare's Eastern representations—defined less by colonial mastery than by ideological instability, vulnerability, and desire—thereby broadening the scope of postcolonial critique.

Keywords: Shakespeare, *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, Orient, Orientalism

SÖMÜRGECİLİK ÖNCESİ KAYGILAR: *OTHELLO* VE *ANTONY VE CLEOPATRA*'DA ORYANTALİZMİN YENİDEN DEĞERLENDİRİLMESİ

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Shakespeare'in *Othello* ve *Antony and Cleopatra* adlı eserlerini, İngiltere'nin Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ile kolonyal öncesi ilişkileri bağlamında ele alarak Edward Said'in *Oryantalizm* teorisini eleştirel biçimde yeniden değerlendirmektedir. Edward Said, erken modern Batı temsilinin Doğu'yu irrasyonel ve aşağı olarak sunduğunu savunsa da, bu analiz, söz konusu ikiliğin Osmanlı'nın yükselişe geçtiği bir dönemde İngiltere'nin kültürel konumunu aşırı basitleştirdiğini öne sürer. Shakespeare'in oyunları, emperyal üstünlükten ziyade Doğu'ya yönelik kaygı, hayranlık ve çelişkili duygular taşır. *Othello*'da başkahramanın ırksal ve dinsel belirsizliği, İslam'a geçiş korkusunu yansıtan "Türkleşme" endişesini ortaya koyar; bu durum, Batı'nın üstünlüğünden çok benliğin krizine işaret eder. *Antony and Cleopatra*'da ise Kleopatra hem egzotik bir öteki hem de Roma erkekliğini ve imparatorluk düzenini sarsan politik bir figürdür. Antonius'un sembolik "yerlileşmesi" ve Kleopatra'nın oryantalist imgeleri stratejik biçimde kullanması, kültürel ve cinsel sınırların bulanıklaştığına dair çağdaş kaygıları yansıtır. Bu eserleri erken modern İngiltere-Osmanlı ilişkileri bağlamına yerleştiren çalışma, hiyerarşik ve tekdüze bir Oryantalizm anlayışını sorgular; Shakespeare'in Doğu temsilini, sömürgeci egemenlikten çok kırılganlık, arzu ve ideolojik istikrarsızlıkla ilişkilendirerek postkolonyal eleştirinin ufkunu genişletir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Shakespeare, *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, Doğu, Şarkiyatçılık

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Introduction

This study explores William Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, two early seventeenth-century plays that reflect England's complex and ambivalent engagement with the Islamic East, particularly the Ottoman Empire. Challenging Edward Said's influential claim in *Orientalism* (1978) that Western portrayals of the East consistently served imperialist ideology by depicting the Orient as inferior and irrational, this research argues that such a framework fails to fully capture the nuanced representations found in Shakespeare's works produced before England emerged as a colonial power. During this pre-imperial period, England was neither globally dominant nor commercially central; instead, it stood in awe of the Ottoman Empire's military strength, wealth, and cultural sophistication.

Against this historical backdrop, the plays' depictions of the East must be understood not through the lens of Western superiority, but rather through a mixture of anxiety, fascination, and respect. The Ottoman Empire was not a colonized subject but a powerful geopolitical force that commanded both fear and admiration from Christian Europe. In *Othello*, the titular character—a circumcised former Muslim and racial outsider—is portrayed as a loyal Venetian general who ultimately becomes a figure of anxiety. His murder of Desdemona symbolically enacts the fear of "turning Turk," a phrase used to describe English captives or renegades who converted to Islam. Othello's racial and religious ambiguity encapsulates English concerns about the fragility of identity and the seductive power of the East. Similarly, *Antony and Cleopatra* dramatize Western anxieties about the East through Cleopatra's portrayal. As a politically powerful, sexually autonomous ruler, she destabilizes both Roman authority and patriarchal norms. Antony's abandonment of Roman discipline for Egyptian sensuality renders him emasculated and culturally absorbed, mirroring English fears of losing moral and national identity to Eastern influence. Egypt, an Ottoman territory at the time, represents not a passive Orient but a domain of power capable of undermining Western values. Cleopatra thus becomes a symbolic embodiment of the Orient, whose strategic use of exoticism subverts both gender and imperial hierarchies.

This study employs a historicist and contrapuntal reading methodology, drawing on travel literature, diplomatic records, and early modern mercantile documents, alongside theoretical frameworks from Said (1978, 1993), Vitkus (2003), Matar (1999), Loomba (1998, 2002), and Burton (2005). Through close textual analysis, it demonstrates that Shakespeare's engagement with the East reveals not a confident colonial gaze, but rather England's cultural insecurity and ambivalence in the face of Ottoman supremacy. By re-situating *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra* within the context of Anglo-Ottoman relations and Mediterranean geopolitics, this research challenges the dominant tendency in postcolonial studies to treat all pre-modern texts as extensions of colonial ideology. It argues that these plays are shaped less by imperial mastery than by fears of cultural contamination, identity dissolution, and gender subversion. Ultimately, Shakespeare's representations of the Orient emerge not as Orientalist caricatures, but as complex responses to England's encounter with a powerful Other, reflections of a world in which the boundaries between East and West were fluid, contested, and politically charged.

Re-turning Turk in *Othello*: Islamic Anxiety, Conversion, and Cultural Reversion in Early Modern English Drama

Shakespeare's *Othello* is a powerful dramatization of early modern England's cultural and religious anxieties concerning the Islamic East, particularly the Ottoman Empire. Written during

a period when England was not yet a colonial power but was increasingly exposed to global commerce and geopolitical tensions, the play reflects the complexities of identity, religious conversion, and cross-cultural encounters. Rather than merely portraying Othello as a racialised outsider or a colonised subject in the traditional postcolonial sense, the play positions him as a symbolic inversion of the feared English renegade—a Muslim-born individual who converts to Christianity and serves the Venetian state, only to ultimately embody the very traits attributed to the Ottoman "Other."

The historical backdrop of *Othello* is crucial for understanding the ideological function of its protagonist. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the Ottoman Empire was perceived in England as a formidable Islamic superpower. English travellers, seamen, and merchants who ventured into the Mediterranean often returned with accounts of piracy, captivity, and religious conversion. The phenomenon of Englishmen "turning Turk"—a phrase used to describe Christians who converted to Islam—was widespread and deeply troubling to English authorities. Figures such as Dragut Reis, a Greek-born slave who rose to prominence in the Ottoman navy, and Jan Janszoon (Murad Reis), a Dutch privateer who embraced Islam and settled in North Africa, exemplified this trend (Konstam, 2016). These renegades became cautionary figures in English political and religious discourse, serving as embodiments of moral and national betrayal.

Against this backdrop, Othello emerges as a reverse Janissary—a circumcised Muslim-born soldier who embraces Christianity and rises through the ranks of a Christian state, only to revert to a form of violence and irrationality that English audiences would associate with the stereotypical Turk. His identity is inherently unstable: while he is celebrated for his military service and valued as an instrument of state power, his racial and religious origins remain sources of suspicion and fear. The Venetian state may accept him as a military commander, but he is never fully integrated into its civic or familial structures.

Shakespeare's use of Turkish references throughout the play reinforces its ideological undercurrents. Characters repeatedly invoke the term "Turk" as a marker of barbarity and otherness. Iago's sardonic remark, "It is true, or else I am a Turk" (2.1.114), and Brabantio's bitter lament, "So let the Turk of Cyprus us beguile" (1.3.210), situate the Ottoman as an internal and external threat. Even Othello's proclamation that "the Turks are drowned" (2.1.202) offers only temporary relief, as the symbolic force of the Ottoman menace lingers within his own persona. The figure of the Turk in early modern English imagination thus served not only as a geopolitical enemy but also as an emblem of uncontainable passion, cruelty, and religious apostasy.

Othello's own trajectory in the play dramatizes this anxiety of reversion. Despite his conversion and assimilation, he is repeatedly associated with uncontrollable emotion and savagery. His descent into jealousy and eventual murder of Desdemona represents not just a personal tragedy but a symbolic "turning Turk"—a regression into the religious and cultural identity that Venice sought to suppress. The phrase "Are we turned Turks, and to ourselves do that / Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?" (2.3.170–171) underscores this theme, equating disorder and violence with Islamic identity. In early modern Protestant discourse, to "turn Turk" was synonymous with treason and spiritual corruption, a betrayal of the Christian moral order (Vitkus, 2003).

Stephen Greenblatt (2005) interprets Iago as a figure of colonial manipulation, exploiting Othello's racial and cultural otherness to assert dominance. Similarly, Ben Zid and Al-Amri (2019)

argue that *Othello*'s dramaturgy mirrors Orientalist ideology, with Iago acting as an agent who manipulates Othello's racial and cultural positioning. While persuasive, such readings risk overlooking the historical specificity of Othello's religious background. Ania Loomba (1998) offers a more nuanced perspective, describing Othello as both "lascivious Moor" and "turbaned Turk"—a hybrid figure whose identity destabilizes racial and religious binaries. Loomba emphasizes that Othello is not merely a victim of prejudice but a site of ideological contestation. His position as a former Muslim and racial outsider renders him permanently suspect, and his eventual downfall confirms contemporary fears about the irredeemability of the Other.

Othello's narrative is thus structured around the fragility of conversion. His baptism and military service do not suffice to erase the latent threat of his origins. When he murders Desdemona and takes his own life, he reenacts a drama of moral collapse that English audiences would recognize as a warning against trusting the assimilated Other. His suicide is not just a personal atonement; it functions as a symbolic purging of the Islamic influence he embodies. This is made explicit in his final lines:" Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk / Beat a Venetian and traduced the state, / I took by the throat the circumcised dog, / And smote him, thus." (5.2.351–354). Here, Othello casts himself as both the Turk and the Christian executioner. By referring to himself in the third person, he enacts a final disavowal of his Muslim identity. The act of suicide becomes a ritual of purification, allowing the Christian order to reassert its moral authority.

Moreover, the ideological implications of color and conversion permeate the play's structure. Othello's blackness, though initially mitigated by his eloquence and valor, is ultimately recoded as a sign of moral and spiritual degeneracy. Emilia's exclamation, "O, the more angel she, and you the blacker devil!" (5.2.140), crystallizes the racialized moral dichotomy. Vitkus (2003) notes that in early modern England, dark skin was often viewed as a divine punishment and visible mark of infidelity. Panda and Samantaray (2022) argue that Othello's internalized inferiority and the tension between his public role and racialized identity forces Othello's reversion to violence and serves to validate the association of race with sin and savagery. The motif of reversion also intersects with early modern English anxieties about gender and sexual control. Iago's deployment of animalistic metaphors—referring to Othello as a "Barbary horse" and a "black ram" who corrupts Desdemona—aligns racial difference with sexual deviance. His manipulation of Othello's insecurities about Desdemona's fidelity reveals the extent to which patriarchal and racial hierarchies are interlinked. Othello's increasing misogyny and violent jealousy mirror contemporary fears of the Muslim male as dangerously libidinal and uncontrollable. His final assertion of authority over Desdemona's body, in strangling her, represents a desperate attempt to reassert patriarchal order.

Ultimately, Othello's demise satisfies a Protestant ideological fantasy: the converted Muslim who relapses into barbarity is punished through death. This narrative allowed English audiences to confront the specter of Islamic power—militarily, culturally, and sexually—while simultaneously affirming their own moral and civilizational superiority. As England's political identity was still in formation, such theatrical representations functioned as compensatory discourses, allowing a marginal European power to imagine itself at the center of a moral world order. In this light, *Othello* should not be read solely as a tragedy of race or colonialism, but as a drama deeply embedded in the religious and geopolitical anxieties of early modern England. Shakespeare's portrayal of Othello reflects not imperial confidence but cultural insecurity. It is the story of a man caught between civilizations—used by one, shaped by another, and destroyed by

the impossibility of reconciling both. The play thus becomes a site where English fears of religious conversion, racial transgression, and imperial vulnerability are staged and temporarily resolved through the ritualized expulsion of the Other. By presenting Othello as both a noble general and a symbol of Islamic reversion, Shakespeare dramatizes the contradictions of a world in which identities are unstable, alliances are fragile, and cultural boundaries are always porous. The tragedy lies not simply in Othello's personal downfall, but in the ideological mechanisms that render his downfall inevitable. Through *Othello*, Shakespeare offers a profound meditation on the tensions between self and Other, faith and apostasy, West and East—a tension that would define English identity well into the colonial period.

Revisiting Orientalism in *Antony and Cleopatra*: Gender, Empire, and the Allure of the East

Antony and Cleopatra has often been interpreted as a dramatic site of Orientalist construction, in which Cleopatra embodies the exoticized East and is positioned in opposition to the rational West symbolized by Rome. Heidari (2019) asserts that Cleopatra's racial and gender identity is entangled with Orientalist fantasies that define her as irrational and sensual, yet Shakespeare complicates this depiction by portraying her as rhetorically and politically powerful. Turgut (2016) extends this analysis by showing how Cleopatra's cultural identity is unfavourably positioned within a Eurocentric narrative logic that marginalizes the East. These constructions extend into performance history, where Osmond (2020) observes that Australian stagings of Cleopatra in the colonial era reinforced Orientalist tropes by racializing and eroticizing the figure of Cleopatra. These readings collectively underscore how *Antony and Cleopatra* dramatizes the tension between imperial discourse and cultural alterity. According to Aldemir (2025) Said significantly shaped the postcolonialism field through his 1978 book, Orientalism. He showed how Western powers constructed narratives about the Orient and criticized Western scholars for endorsing imperialistic domination. While Said contends that the Orient has been consistently represented in Western discourse as inferior, irrational, and subjugated in order to justify imperial hegemony, Shakespeare's portrayal of Cleopatra disrupts this monolithic framework. Rather than constructing the Eastern woman as a passive, eroticized other, Cleopatra emerges as a politically astute, erotically powerful, and rhetorically adept figure whose sovereignty poses a direct challenge to Western patriarchal and imperial structures. The play stages not the confident supremacy of the West over the East, but rather its anxieties regarding cultural contamination, gender subversion, and the destabilizing potential of Eastern power.

The historical context of the play complicates traditional Orientalist binaries. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, England had not yet established itself as a colonial power. Rather, it remained on the periphery of global commerce and diplomacy, particularly in relation to the Ottoman Empire—a vast, cosmopolitan, and militarily dominant polity that elicited both admiration and apprehension from European observers (Matar, 1999). Egypt, annexed by the Ottomans in 1517, was an Ottoman province during Shakespeare's lifetime. While Cleopatra does not directly represent the Ottoman regime, her portrayal channels many of the attributes that the early modern English associated with the Islamic East: opulence, sensuality, cultural autonomy, and the power to seduce and destabilize the West. Antony's progressive immersion into Egyptian life and his abandonment of Roman discipline signal an early modern iteration of the anxiety encapsulated in the phrase "going native." His increasing emotional vulnerability, military imprudence, and political alienation manifest fears of emasculation and cultural betrayal. Cleopatra, conversely, is represented as the agent of this transformation—exercising influence not

only through erotic appeal but also through strategic manipulation and political foresight. In this respect, the gender dynamics in the play invert dominant Western hierarchies. Cleopatra is not subdued or silenced; she orchestrates her narrative, manipulates others, and resists incorporation into Roman imperial ideology.

Shakespeare's characterization of Cleopatra resists reduction to a mere Oriental stereotype. In Act 2, Scene 2, Enobarbus's elaborate description of her barge—"like a burnished throne, burned on the water"—invokes the aesthetic of excess and spectacle commonly associated with Orientalist fantasy. However, this fantasy is deconstructed through Cleopatra's subsequent actions. Her refusal to be paraded as a Roman trophy and her decision to take her own life on her own terms underscore her resistance to both gendered and imperial objectification. As Catherine Belsey (1985) argues, Cleopatra's seductiveness is not defined by passivity but by her control over the mechanisms of desire. She generates longing not by submission but through an active manipulation of absence, mystery, and theatricality.

The erotic and culinary metaphors that permeate the play reinforce Cleopatra's agency. She is repeatedly compared to exotic dishes—"salt Cleopatra," an "Egyptian dish," and a "morsel" on Caesar's plate—yet she inverts this objectification. As Enobarbus declares, "Other women cloy the appetites they feed, but she makes hungry where most she satisfies" (2.3.275–278). Her power lies in her refusal to be fully consumed, in her deferral of gratification, and in her capacity to incite desire even in fulfilment. Such erotic agency undermines the traditional patriarchal association of femininity with passivity and availability.

The political dimensions of Cleopatra's character are equally subversive. Her command over the Egyptian court, her role in military decisions, and her symbolic inversion of Roman authority position her as a sovereign subject rather than a colonial one. Her erotic power is inseparable from her political agency. This is exemplified in Act 2, Scene 5, when Cleopatra recalls dressing Antony in her garments and donning his sword. The gendered role reversal signals a broader upheaval in the structures that define masculinity and imperial authority. As Ania Loomba (2002) explains, Cleopatra enacts a potent threat to the ideological foundations of both patriarchy and empire. Antony's transformation under Cleopatra's influence reflects early modern fears regarding the loss of self through engagement with the East. Roman values—duty, rationality, discipline—are progressively eroded as Antony embraces Egyptian pleasures. His immersion in a feminized, sensual, and luxurious court mirrors English anxieties about the seductive dangers of the Islamic world. This cultural unease was particularly evident in English reactions to reports of captives who converted to Islam or assimilated into Ottoman society (Vitkus, 2003). Cleopatra, in this context, functions as the embodiment of a feared yet admired East—capable not only of erotic enchantment but also of ideological disruption.

Antony's downfall is not merely personal but symbolic. His failure to maintain Roman virtue is construed by his peers as a sign of feminization and political degeneration. Caesar's critiques emphasize Antony's deviation from Roman norms: "He fishes, drinks, and wastes / The lamps of night in revel... Is not more manlike / Than Cleopatra" (1.4.3–6). Enobarbus laments that their leader has become one of the "women's men" (3.7.87), and the phrase "Transform us not to women" (4.2.47) encapsulates the fear of collective emasculation. Antony's submission is cast as the surrender of Western rationality to Eastern excess. Yet Cleopatra's influence is not framed as simply destructive. Her performative intelligence, political savvy, and strategic agency reveal a

subjectivity that challenges the fixed binaries of East and West, male and female, colonizer and colonized. Her refusal to be conquered—culminating in her suicide—resists imperial closure. In her final moments, she asserts her identity, stages her death theatrically, and denies Caesar the spectacle of her humiliation. Caesar's admiring posthumous remark: "She looks like sleep, / As she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace" (5.2.415–417)—suggests that her power endures beyond death, her seductive force undiminished.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the East serves not as a static object of domination, but as a dynamic site of power, desire, and resistance. Shakespeare's Egypt is not a colonized landscape but a space that provokes awe and destabilizes imperial certainty. The play's symbolic geography maps Rome as a site of discipline and order, and Egypt as one of freedom, indulgence, and subversion. This polarity is not resolved in favour of one over the other but instead reveals the fragility of boundaries between them. Cleopatra's court, populated by eunuchs and women, inverts normative gender hierarchies and threatens the coherence of Roman masculinity.

Race, too, plays a significant role in the construction of Cleopatra's alterity. She is referred to as a "gypsy," "tawny front," and "dark lady," descriptors that mark her as both racially and culturally other. The term "gypsy," derived from the mistaken belief that the Romani people originated in Egypt, further exoticizes her figure. Loomba (2002) notes that such depictions align Cleopatra with early modern anxieties about racial and cultural hybridity. However, Shakespeare does not present this alterity as a deficit. Instead, Cleopatra's racialized body becomes the site of fascination, power, and contestation. Cleopatra's performative mastery and rhetorical skill make her an agent of disruption in both political and affective domains. Her interactions with Antony, Caesar, and her own courtiers reveal a keen understanding of diplomacy, manipulation, and the art of spectacle. Her refusal to be defined by others, and her constant reinvention of self, positions her as a subject of autonomy and resistance. Her agency challenges the epistemological assumptions that underpin Orientalist representations.

By foregrounding Cleopatra's sovereignty, Shakespeare complicates the logic of Said's Orientalism. Rather than reiterating the trope of the submissive Eastern woman or the triumphant Western male, *Antony and Cleopatra* stages a confrontation between competing imperial logics, gender roles, and cultural values. Cleopatra is not merely a foil to Roman greatness but a rival to it. Her death, though tragic, is an assertion of self-definition that denies the West the satisfaction of conquest. This reading contributes to postcolonial Shakespearean criticism by emphasizing the historical specificity of early modern England's engagement with the East. Prior to the full establishment of colonial dominance, English representations of the Islamic world were characterized not by confidence but by ambivalence, fascination, and unease. Cleopatra, in this context, serves as a site where these contradictions are imaginatively negotiated. Her characterization resists appropriation into a singular ideological framework and demands a reading that attends to the interplay of gender, race, power, and geopolitics.

Antony and Cleopatra does not simply reproduce Orientalist paradigms; it interrogates and destabilizes them. Through Cleopatra's complex subjectivity and Antony's symbolic collapse, Shakespeare exposes the vulnerabilities of imperial masculinity and the instability of cultural identities. The play invites its audience to reflect on the porous boundaries between East and West, and on the dangers of both seduction and resistance. It is a drama not of imperial conquest but of

cultural entanglement—a tragic meditation on desire, identity, and the fragile architecture of empire.

Conclusion

The analysis has explored William Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra* through the lens of early modern English perceptions of the East, particularly in the context of England's encounter with the Ottoman Empire during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It contributed a more nuanced reading of Shakespeare's Eastern representations, which is inflected less by colonial mastery than by vulnerability, desire, and ideological instability, and thus expands the scope of postcolonial critique beyond the assumptions of hegemonic Western superiority. While Edward Said's foundational work, Orientalism (1978), asserts that the West systematically constructed the East as inferior to justify imperial domination, this study has demonstrated that such a binary framework does not fully apply to the plays in question, especially given England's non-colonial status at the time. Instead, I have argued that these works reflect England's anxieties over the East's military, economic, and cultural superiority—anxieties rooted in fear rather than a sense of Western dominance. Both *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra* reflect deep-seated English fears of "turning Turk" or "going native," a phrase used to describe the conversion or cultural assimilation of Englishmen within Islamic or Eastern contexts. These fears were not merely abstract but were grounded in real historical encounters—through trade, piracy, and captivity—with the Ottoman Empire, which was at the time a dominant geopolitical force. Englishmen who adopted Islamic customs, converted to Islam, or took on Eastern lifestyles were viewed as traitors and emasculated figures. Shakespeare's plays dramatize these anxieties by portraying protagonists whose proximity to the East results in the unravelling of their identity, rationality, and masculine authority. In *Othello*, the eponymous protagonist symbolizes a counter-Janissary figure: a circumcised former Muslim, converted to Christianity, and loyal to the Venetian state. However, his racial and religious background positions him as an unstable and threatening figure within the Christian world. His murder of Desdemona and subsequent suicide are interpreted in this study as manifestations of his symbolic re-conversion—his re-"turning Turk." Othello's racialization, frequent association with animalistic imagery, and descent into jealousy and violence reinforce contemporary English stereotypes of Muslims as irrational, savage, and untrustworthy. His final acknowledgement of becoming the "circumcised dog" he once fought against encapsulates the fear that one's conversion to Christianity cannot fully erase one's inherent connection to the Muslim Other. Similarly, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare dramatizes the fear of Eastern seduction and the effeminization of the Western male. Antony, once a celebrated Roman general, becomes the victim of Cleopatra's charm, eventually abandoning his military responsibilities to indulge in Eastern luxuries, ultimately losing both his reputation and his life. Cleopatra, on the other hand, emerges not as a submissive or eroticized Oriental stereotype but as an intelligent, cunning, and politically astute figure who consciously overturns imperial and gender hierarchies. Her dominance over Antony and her refusal to be paraded in Rome exemplify her agency. Even her suicide is portrayed as a calculated act of resistance, rather than a gesture of defeat. This study has shown that Cleopatra functions as the embodiment of the East—sensual, seductive, and dangerous. Through metaphors of food, cross-dressing, and mood manipulation, she emasculates Antony, leading to the symbolic subjugation of the Roman Empire. Shakespeare's depiction of Cleopatra reflects contemporary English fears of identity erosion through contact with the East, particularly the loss of masculinity and rationality—qualities traditionally associated with Western superiority.

The threat she poses is intensified by her unpredictable and exotic nature, as well as her ability to unman the West. Moreover, this study argues that Shakespeare's plays reflect the geopolitical dynamics of their time. The Ottoman Empire's dominance in the Mediterranean, North Africa, and parts of Europe, including Egypt's status as an Ottoman province, served as a powerful backdrop for the plays' themes of conquest, cultural exchange, and identity crisis. The fear that Englishmen might abandon their cultural and religious heritage in favour of the perceived freedom and wealth of the East is symbolized in both plays. Othello and Antony do not merely fall from grace—they become warnings against the seductive and transformative power of the Orient. While Said's theory of Orientalism emphasizes the construction of the East as a passive and inferior object, Shakespeare's representation of the East—through figures such as Othello and Cleopatra—reveals a more complex and ambivalent engagement. The East in these plays is not merely "othered" but feared for its strength, agency, and capacity to destabilize the West. Therefore, Shakespeare's portrayal of the Orient aligns less with colonial superiority and more with pre-colonial anxiety, a recognition of power dynamics in which the East was central and the West was still on the periphery. In conclusion, *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra* serve as rich literary case studies through which early modern English fears about Islam, the East, and identity can be examined. These plays depict not a dominant West constructing an inferior East, but a vulnerable and uncertain West encountering a superior and seductive Orient. The tragic ends of Othello and Antony reflect the perceived dangers of cultural assimilation, religious conversion, and the loss of masculine and imperial identity. Shakespeare, therefore, provides not a celebration of Western superiority but a cautionary tale of the existential risks posed by the East to the early modern English imagination.

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Ethical Statement/Etik Beyan: It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited. / Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.

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