

Seminar

“Here is my space”: Geographies of the Self in *Antony and Cleopatra*

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In the opening scene of *Antony and Cleopatra*, questions of identity contrast Antony’s Roman “buckles on his breast”, symbolic of masculine, soldierly honour and power, with Egypt’s volatile and excessive feminine “lust”, identified with the inconstant, unreliable but fascinating gypsy queen’s “infinite variety”. But identities are continuously negotiated and (de)constructed performatively through Antony and Cleopatra’s fluctuating attitudes towards each other. Their speech acts deploy mutual, passionate, perlocutionary tensions involving contradictory emotional stances through which they experience dialectically the variable possibilities of their selves. Who are Antony and Cleopatra, and to what extent do they display and (de)construct themselves performatively in relation to the fluidity of “passionate utterances”? How does this dynamic involve geographies of the self interdiscursively, and what does ‘geography’ mean with regard to the broader ideological investment of the Rome/Egypt opposition? How is the mobile self of the interacting lovers situated in relation to their respective cultural positions and Western/Eastern perspectival mobility, and how is this issue conveyed performatively in terms of space imagery, stage business and acting? When Antony claims, “Here is my space” (where ‘here’ is the space of the ‘gypsy’), he conflates ideas of otherness and sameness, suggesting an ‘ontology’ of mobility that situates the self in a continuously mutable performative relation with the other. This makes the wider ‘world’, and its geography, an accessory to his own singularity, but not in a Romantic way.

The seminar explores ideas of belongingness and foreignness, and maps discursive and performative trajectories of the self by discussing how Eastern and Western binaries are questioned and reconfigured through experiences of ‘individual (and mutual) geographies’.

It also addresses a further binary: the divide between intellectual analysis and performance. It will therefore combine academic discussion with a practical workshop process in which the text will be tested through performance.

Keywords: Antony and Cleopatra, identity, performative, geography, speech acts