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Abstract

*This paper, examining the legacy of the Roman Empire on Renaissance and Restoration thought, sets forth a different dramatic perception of the Roman heritage. Whereas the Renaissance idealized and mystified the cultural and imperial impact of the Roman Empire as a morally political institution, the Restoration—represented by the drama of John Dryden—demythologized and demonized the Roman heritage as corrupted by colonization and antagonism to the East. In his play *All for Love* (1678), which adapts William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607), John Dryden attacks the Roman imperial role in the East (Egypt), omits Octavius Caesar from the play, and elevates the virtue of Cleopatra. Also, in his play *Tyrannick Love* (1669), Dryden impugns the tyranny of the Roman Emperor, Maximin, to his family, to the Roman state, and to the conquered Alexandria.*

*For Dryden, the Roman model of Empire does not establish religious freedom nor foreground trade relations with the East. In other words, Dryden's drama reflects the anticipated role of Restoration England as a partner of commerce rather than colonizer to the East. For Dryden, commerce and tolerance rather than colonization achieve prosperity and development. In Dryden's two plays—namely, *All for Love* (1678) and *Tyrannick Love* (1669)—the Roman emperors Caesar in *All for Love* and Maximin in *Tyrannick Love* (1669) act as foil characters to King Charles II.*

Dryden's drama deconstructs the stereotypical representation of the morally corrupted eastern woman vs. the chaste western femininity. In Dryden's drama, Cleopatra is dramatized as a virtuous queen. Dryden's Cleopatra deconstructs the Shakespearean delineation of Cleopatra as a whore and morally corrupted and changes the Shakespearean fascination with the Roman Empire. Whereas the Shakespearean Caesar is a wise conqueror, Dryden's Caesar is a tyrant dictator.

Keywords: Orientalism, Postcolonialism, Renaissance and Restoration drama.