

## SHAKESPEARE'S SEA CREATURES: MERMAIDS AS TEMPTATION IN *ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA*

Ana-Maria PAVEL

PhD student, “Ovidius” University of Constanta

**Abstract:** *The sea was seen as a space of imagination and endless possibilities in early modern culture. This essay discusses Enobarbus' description of Cleopatra's first encounter with Mark Antony on the river Cydnus (2.2.216-228) in Antony and Cleopatra, in relation to early modern depictions of mermaids as enticing and fascinating sea-creatures. First, I discuss the symbol of the mermaid in early modern England, based on the book by Tara Pedersen, Mermaids and the Production of Knowledge in Early Modern England (2015), and then I analyse the figures of mermaids and Nereids in the texts of Shakespeare's contemporaries, such as A dialogue between custom and veritie concerning the vse and abuse of dauncing and minstrelsie (1581) by Thomas Lovell, as well as the anonymous pamphlets A most strange and true report of a monstherous fish, who appeared in the forme of a woman, from her waste vpwards (1604) and The honorable entertainment giuen to the Queenes Maiestie in progresse (1591). I argue that Shakespeare's dramatic representation of the mermaids guiding Cleopatra's barge has a dynamic quality, which helps the audience visualize the luxurious images evoked by Enobarbus in the imagination of his audience (Roman generals attending a political meeting). As in many early modern representations, mermaids are a sign of temptation for mortals and they symbolize, in the play, Cleopatra's enticement of Mark Antony, suggested by lush golden oars and perfumed sails.*

**Keywords:** *Antony and Cleopatra*, early modern theatre, mermaids, Shakespeare, space