

## Lessons in History: Bernard Shaw's discomfiting Caesar

Bernard Shaw's play *Caesar and Cleopatra* offers some striking lessons in history. What constitutes history? Does it have a fictional dimension? What difference might there be between an historical play and historical scholarship? And how does history—in this case the career of Julius Caesar—speak to the present and the future? The dramatization in Shaw's play of the Roman general and his interactions with Queen Cleopatra also offers historical lessons in political governance. How might a ruler construct their authority? How should they best govern their subjects? In what circumstances might it be appropriate for them to authorize murder? However, *Caesar and Cleopatra* also has its own history. The play was composed in 1898, received its copyright performance in Newcastle in 1899 and was published with two other play scripts in the volume *Three Plays for Puritans* in 1901.<sup>1</sup> It was first staged professionally in Berlin in 1906, and then in New York, Leeds and London between 1906 and 1907. It was revived in 1913 and restaged across the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Through each of these performances and for each of their audiences, the play's lessons have shifted, sometimes in quite disturbing directions. In this chapter, therefore, I propose to explore Bernard Shaw's play from a diachronic perspective, exposing some of the various layers of significance his characterisation of Julius Caesar has accrued over time, and how one single reception of Caesar can contain within itself multiple sub-strands.

This chapter will explore the lessons that *Caesar and Cleopatra* provides in just two periods of its production history, although those periods are ones of particular importance: firstly, from the play's composition in 1898 through its first staging and its revivals leading up to the First World War, during which period Caesar was routinely performed by the British actor-manager Johnston Forbes Robertson for whom the part had been originally designed; and, secondly, from the end of the Second World War until 1952, during which time a film adaptation was widely distributed featuring Claude Rains as Caesar and a celebrated production was staged both in the UK and the USA in which Laurence Olivier played the role. Plenty of scholarship engages with the rich documentary material available for the first period (including Shaw's own notes, the play text, letters and articles by the playwright, stage designs and photographs, interviews and reviews). Less analysis has taken place of the materials available for the second period (such as shooting scripts, film production designs and reviews in the archives of the British Film Institute in London and the Margaret Herrick Library in Los Angeles; or the theatre scrapbooks in the Olivier Collection of the British Library) or of their relationship to those of the first period. Utilising such resources, this chapter considers the challenge Shaw's Caesar set to historical scholarship, the lessons his historical play offered to audiences at the beginning of the twentieth century, and the discomfort with his representations of political leadership, gender and race that grew with the passing years.

### *Lessons in the drama of history*

Shaw deliberately challenged the discipline of history and the work of nineteenth-century professional historians through the subtitle he gave to the published script of his play *Caesar and Cleopatra*—'A History'. Additionally, in interviews, in the preface to the script, and within the play itself (where Caesar is characterised as aware of his own representation as a

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<sup>1</sup> The text of the play to which I shall be referring is that in the Penguin Books edition of *Three Plays for Puritans* first published in 1946. Page numbers refer to that edition.

figure in history), Shaw articulated various provocative positions on the relative objectivity of historical scholarship and historical drama.<sup>2</sup> A few years before the composition of *Caesar and Cleopatra*, in an interview published in the magazine *To-Day* for 17 April 1894, Shaw argued that all modes of history are obliged to give imaginative shape to the facts of the past, if those facts are to be intelligible:

Historical facts are not a bit more sacred than any other class of facts. In making a play out of them you must adapt them to the stage; and that alters them at once, more or less. Why, you cannot even write a history without adapting the facts to the conditions of representation on the stage. Things do not happen in the form of stories or dramas; and since they must be told in some such form, all reports, even by eyewitnesses, all histories, all stories, all dramatic representations, are only attempts to arrange the facts in a thinkable, intelligible, interesting form.<sup>3</sup>

Accounts about Julius Caesar might be thought to fit neatly within this characterisation of history not as a science but as an art that brings people and events to dramatic life, given that the Roman general's historiography begins, in his third-person commentaries on the Gallic and civil wars, with his own manifest attempts 'to adapt the facts' to a project of self-aggrandisement.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, with specific regard to the history of Caesar, and when Shaw was in the throes of composing the first scenes of his play, he responded robustly in an interview published in *The Academy* for 30 April 1898 to the question whether he had consulted contemporary histories such as Theodor Mommsen's *History of Rome* (which had been published in English translation a few years earlier):

Not a bit of it. History is only a dramatization of events. And if I start telling lies about Caesar, it's a hundred to one that they will be just the same lies that other people have told about him. I never worry myself about historical details until the play is done; human nature is very much the same always and everywhere. And when I go over my play to put the details right I find there is surprisingly little to alter.<sup>5</sup>

Later, however, Shaw offered a less dismissive, more intimate take on the relationship of his play to historical scholarship.

On the occasion of the London revival of *Caesar and Cleopatra* by the actor-manager Forbes Robertson, in an article Shaw wrote for the *New Statesman* for 3 May 1913, the author defended his play as an arrangement of history for the stage based closely on both contemporary and ancient sources. Critics, he argued, should be satisfied to find it not an invention but rather 'a chapter of Mommsen and a page of Plutarch furnished with scenery and dialogue' and so accurate a reproduction of those sources that 'a boy brought to see the play could pass an examination next day on the Alexandrian expedition without losing a mark'.<sup>6</sup> Support for these claims survives in the form of, for example, notes written by Shaw in 1898 culled from Mommsen, passages from the French translation of Suetonius extracted by his wife, as well as consultations with the classicist Gilbert Murray.<sup>7</sup> Yet Shaw's claims to humble dependency on such resources are simultaneously a mischievous hoax. Some of the primary and secondary materials Shaw had listed in the playbill for his copyright performance in 1899 were clearly bogus as they have no direct connection with Caesar's career in general, let alone his Alexandrian campaign in particular. Shaw does not engage at all with Lucan, and in *Caesar and Cleopatra* at times strays far even from Mommsen. For Shaw, the category of historical fact always remained suspect. Intelligible only through narrative (whether written or performed), fact could readily be replaced by invention (such as

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<sup>2</sup> On Shaw's engagement with questions about the nature of history, see Henderson 1911, 332; Larson 1971, 81-89; Couchman 1973, 123; Wikander 1998, 213-14; Dimitrova 2018, 13 and 24.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Larson 1971: 86.

<sup>4</sup> See Dimitrova 2018 esp. for the dramatic qualities of Caesar's commentaries and their influence on later dramatisations of his life.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Henderson 1911, 331 and reprinted in Larson 1974, 163-66.

<sup>6</sup> As quoted in full in Larson 1974, 185-9 and discussed by, among others, Wikander 1998, 207-8.

<sup>7</sup> See esp. Larson 1971, 81-83 and 86. Shaw's notes were published in Crompton 1969.

Caesar's first meeting with Cleopatra at a Sphinx in Act 1, see Fig. 1) in order to reach a higher historical truth.<sup>8</sup>

By such means as these, Shaw articulated effectively a challenge to the current 'regime of historicity' – that is, according to the formulation of François Hartog, the way a society relates the past to the present and the future. According to Hartog, the classical model for our relationship to time, the Ciceronian conception of history as life's teacher (*historia magistra vitae*), dominated European thought until the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Based on the principles that human beings have always had the same nature and that events are always governed by the same laws, it was a regime of historicity that made the present intelligible through the past and allowed the past to connect with the future through the rhetorical strategy of exemplarity: 'in looking back at famous men, I could also find them in front or ahead of me'.<sup>10</sup> By the nineteenth century, Hartog argues, this regime of historicity had been superseded by one that conceived history not as a vehicle for moral improvement but as the scientific discipline of *die Geschichte*. In this modern regime, lasting approximately until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the present and future are understood as ruptures with an unrepeatable past, a past that cannot illuminate the future but is, instead, illuminated by it.<sup>11</sup> It is this modern regime of historicity that Shaw picks at, through his disclaimers and his claims, and through his historical play itself.

In *Caesar and Cleopatra*, Shaw also rejected the long history of Anglo-Saxon receptions of Julius Caesar as an instigator of civil war and usurping tyrant (inherited from Lucan),<sup>12</sup> a tyrant who was fixed at a point of frailty, conceit and assassination every time Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* was performed on the British stage. Shaw persistently argued that Shakespeare's Caesar and, through Shakespeare, Plutarch's constituted a reduction to absurdity of the real person.<sup>13</sup> At the opening of the year in which he composed his own dramatization, Shaw wrote a savage attack on Shakespeare's, after seeing the Beerbohm Tree production of the Elizabethan tragedy at Her Majesty's Theatre:

It is impossible for even the most judicially minded critic to look without a revulsion of indignant contempt at his travesty of a great man as a silly braggart, whilst the pitiful gang of mischief-makers who destroyed him are lauded as statesmen and patriots. (*Saturday Review*, 29 January 1898)<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, Shaw condemned Shakespeare's representation of the Roman general in the preface to his trilogy of *Plays for Puritans* in which the text of *Caesar and Cleopatra* was published in 1901: 'Shakespear [sic], who knew human weakness so well, never knew human strength of the Caesarian type. His Caesar is an admitted failure.' And Shaw's explicit attacks continued in the press before the London opening of his own play in 1907 and at the time of its revival in 1913. The Irish playwright was also provoked by what he took to be Shakespeare's unjustified glorification of love in *Antony and Cleopatra* and its long-standing attraction for audiences. A new prologue to Shaw's play, written in 1912 for delivery by the Egyptian god Ra in the pending revival, directly reproaches those spectators who come to the theatre with Shakespearean expectations: 'Are ye impatient with me? Do ye crave for a story of an unchaste woman? Hath the name of Cleopatra tempted ye hither? Ye foolish ones;

<sup>8</sup> On Shaw's attitude to both the historical facts concerning Julius Caesar and the available source materials, see Larson 1971, 81-83; Couchman 1973, 53-55; Wikander 1998, 195-96 and 207-8.

<sup>9</sup> Hartog 2015, 38 and 72-77.

<sup>10</sup> Hartog, 2015, 105.

<sup>11</sup> Hartog 2015, 104-7.

<sup>12</sup> For the hostile Anglo-Saxon tradition to which Shaw is responding, see Crompton 1969, 59-60. On the Anglo-Saxon plays about Caesar and the civil war, in particular, see Griffin 2009, 375-80 and Dimitrova 2018 *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> The literature on Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* as an assault on both Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and his *Antony and Cleopatra* is extensive. See, for example, Henderson 1911; Reinert 1960; Couchman 1960 and 1973; Larson 1971; Wisenthal 1988; Holroyd 1989; Loon Seong Yun 2002; Hatchuel 2011, 117-29.

<sup>14</sup> Shaw's review of the production is reprinted in its entirety in Larson 1974, 153-59.

Cleopatra is as yet but a child that is whipped by her nurse.’ (p. 133).<sup>15</sup> Working against the Shakespearian tradition, Shaw thus set out to present a comedy rather than a tragedy, a disciplined and realistic Roman protagonist rather than a romantic and self-indulgent one, and a young Cleopatra whose erotic desires are countered by the cynicism of Shaw’s mature Caesar.<sup>16</sup>

The selection by Shaw of the Alexandrian campaign between 48 and 47 BCE as the historical anchor for *Caesar and Cleopatra*, instead of the assassination in March 44 BCE, expediently bestowed on his play a temporal privilege over those of Shakespeare, creating the effect that Shakespeare’s tragedies are secondary because they are sequels in time.<sup>17</sup> Shaw also challenged Shakespeare by distributing throughout his historical comedy disruptive rewritings of *Antony and Cleopatra*, rewritings categorised helpfully by one scholar as ironic ‘intertextual interventions’.<sup>18</sup> Act 3 of Shaw’s play, for example, performs both a generic and a gender inversion of the end of Act 4 of Shakespeare’s, when the dying Antony is tragically hoisted up into the monument of his captivating ‘sweet Queen’. Here, instead, the ‘poor child’ is comically hauled up to Caesar besieged at the Pharos lighthouse, only for her to be informed by the impatient general (possessed of priorities in sharp contrast to those of Shakespeare’s Antony) that in battle her life matters little to anyone but herself.<sup>19</sup> Shaw relentlessly denies his spectators the pleasure of witnessing a tragedy of erotic passion unfold and in Act 5, most brazenly, presents a pragmatic Caesar who almost forgets to say goodbye to the Queen. Cleopatra is left disappointed at play’s end, constrained to wait for a more romantic Roman (namely Shakespeare’s Antony) to arrive.<sup>20</sup>

Shaw’s historical sources for his positive re-evaluation of the Roman dictator lay in the English biographies by James Antony Froude, *Caesar: A Sketch* (1879) and William Warde Fowler, *Julius Caesar and the Foundation of the Roman Imperial System* (1891), and—as we have already seen—especially in Theodor Mommsen’s *History of Rome* to which those biographies were much indebted. The eighth edition of Mommsen’s history had been published in a revised English translation by William P. Dickson in 1894, just four years before the composition of *Caesar and Cleopatra*. The German historian had rejected cold objectivity as a requirement for historiography, arguing that history is neither made nor written without emotion. He interpreted the end of the Roman Republic in the clearly accessible language of nineteenth-century political and social life, and wrote of Julius Caesar from a position of candid and impassioned partisanship—as dutifully striving to remodel an outmoded system of senatorial government on the grounds that it was based on corrupt aristocratic self-interest. In the fifth volume of his Roman history, on the establishment of a military monarchy, Mommsen had praised Caesar as

a monarch ... never seized with the giddiness of the tyrant. He is perhaps the only one among the might ones of the earth, who in great matters and little never acted according to inclination or caprice, but always without exception according to his duty as a ruler.’ (1894, vol. 5, p. 312)

And, the historian concluded, Caesar was ‘the entire and perfect man’ (1894, vol. 5, p. 313). Mommsen as a Prussian liberal and Shaw as a committed socialist both admired Caesar as an

<sup>15</sup> See esp. the comments on this passage in Wikander 1998, 206-7 and Hatchuel 2011, 133.

<sup>16</sup> As Royster 2002, 122-23.

<sup>17</sup> On Shaw’s strategy for privileging his play through historical temporality, see esp. Loon Seong Yun 2002, 230 and Hatchuel 2011, 83.

<sup>18</sup> Loon Seong Yun 2002, 227.

<sup>19</sup> See Couchman 1960, 11-13 and Slater 2006, 237-38.

<sup>20</sup> As esp. Couchman 1973, 33-42 and 43-50; Hatchuel 2011, 118.

embodiment of the social reformer, a practical statesman who championed both the Roman people and the subject nations of the Roman empire.<sup>21</sup>

Here then is Shaw's heroic Caesar delivering his opening contemplative soliloquy at the beginning of Act 1 of *Caesar and Cleopatra*, staged at night before a Sphinx that sits high over the desert sands and between whose paws the girl Cleopatra lies asleep hidden from Caesar's view:

THE MAN: Hail, Sphinx: salutations from Julius Caesar! I have wandered in many lands, seeking the lost regions from which my birth in this world exiled me, and the company of creatures such as I myself. I have found flocks and pastures, men and cities, but no other Caesar, no air native to me, no man kindred to me, none who can do my day's deed, and think my night's thought. In the little world yonder, Sphinx, my place is as high as yours in this great desert; only I wander, and you sit still; I conquer, and you endure; I work and wonder, you watch and wait; I look up and am dazzled, look down and am darkened, look round and am puzzled, whilst your eyes never turn from looking out – out of the world – to the lost region – the home from which we have strayed. Sphinx, you and I, strangers to the race of men, are no strangers to one another: have I not been conscious of you and of this place since I was born? Rome is a madman's dream: this is my reality.... I am he of whose genius you are the symbol. Part brute, past woman, and part god – nothing of man in me at all. (pp. 146-7)

In quasi-mystical terms, Shaw's Caesar expresses his loneliness, his isolation from ordinary mankind, his otherworldliness. The dramatist emphasises Caesar's elevated status by scripting pointedly elevated language for the character at this early point in the play. Actors performing the role are invited to intone a kind of prose poem composed of delicate, musical rhythms.<sup>22</sup>

The theatre critic for the *Saturday Review* of 19 April 1913 was suitably impressed by the way Forbes Robertson (famed for his portrayal of Shakespeare's Hamlet) recited this soliloquy, but for him, as for other reviewers, this Caesar of the stage could not be equated with the Caesar of history:

There, as he stood before the Sphinx, was Mr. Shaw's extremely competent inventory of a great man. We waited upon his words – that we might somehow share the emotion of this great man on this great occasion. Soon we were attending coldly and carefully to a reasoned analysis in excellent prose of the feelings and ideas the Sphinx would probably suggest to a successful person at the height of his career. There was a certain pleasure in following this very efficient bit of exposition, apart from the way of Mr. Robertson's voice with an English sentence and the way of his person with a Roman habit. But there was just one thing conspicuously lacking. There was never one moment of illusion. Mr. Shaw had formed certain conclusions about Caesar. Mr. Robertson had learned them by heart, and was reciting them very beautifully. We never for a moment, after he began to speak, believed that here was Caesar before the Sphinx. (pp. 484-85)

In his adaptation of Mommsen's Caesar to the stage, Shaw had constructed a figure that was even more idealistic and poetic than the historian's and one that, despite his humorous qualities, was also 'part god'.<sup>23</sup> In a letter from 1918 to the actor-manager Hesketh Pearson, the playwright reflected that the scenic composition in Act 1 of Caesar's encounter with the Sphinx (Fig. 1) had been suggested to him by a French painting of the Flight into Egypt, in which the Madonna and Child are depicted asleep in the lap of a monumental Sphinx that stares out under the desert's night sky.<sup>24</sup> The painting Shaw had seen years earlier as an engraving in a shop window has since been identified as Luc-Olivier Merson's *Le repos pendant la fuite en Egypte* (1880).<sup>25</sup> Such a pictorial allusion bestows a disconcertingly Christ-like quality on Shaw's Caesar, when combined with the Roman general's paraphrasing

<sup>21</sup> This account of Mommsen's Caesar and Shaw's use of him is based on: Weintraub 1962, 257-72; Crompton 1969, 60-62; Larson 1971, 89; Couchman 1957 and 1973, 70-88; Wisenthal 1988, 41-2; Holroyd 1989, 15; Cole 2009, 428-29.

<sup>22</sup> On the elevated, poetic qualities of this speech designed to stress the elevated status of Caesar, see Crompton 1969, 63-4 and 68; Wisenthal 1981, 53-4.

<sup>23</sup> Couchman 1957 provides a detailed analysis of Shaw's various divergences from Mommsen.

<sup>24</sup> The letter is quoted in full in Larson 1974, 190-91.

<sup>25</sup> See Meisel 2015.

of the Sermon on the Mount in Act 4 and his reference there to the man who will be crucified by the world alongside a reference to himself as the man who has conquered the world (p. 230).<sup>26</sup> For some theatregoers, however, the Orientalist composition of the original painting and its replication on stage – the Pharaonic sculpture and the desert landscape as markers of an exotic land<sup>27</sup> – might suggest instead a Caesar who, like a nineteenth-century Western colonialist, has come to take possession of Egypt together with its Queen.

### *Lessons from Caesar in Shaw's history play*

Shaw claimed a didactic purpose for history, viewing the past not as a break from the present but as a perspective on it holding relevance for the future.<sup>28</sup> He was thus, as Hartog might put it, an advocate of the classical regime of historicity, or *historia magistra vitae*. He also asserted that drama should be created for the benefit of society.<sup>29</sup> It is understandable then that Shaw chose to give dramatic life to Julius Caesar, given that the Roman dictator had already functioned across many centuries of Western culture as model (as well as anti-model).<sup>30</sup> It is equally understandable that the playwright deployed multiple strategies to ensure that his Caesar of the Roman Republic spoke to the present of his late nineteenth-century audience.

Firstly, Shaw's characterisation of a quasi-mystical Caesar embraces elements of nineteenth-century thinking about great men. Shaw's Caesar has outgrown conventional political and ethical codes and embodies the capacity of man to evolve into a new, superhuman breed. A more restrained version of Nietzsche's Superman, he bears some similarities to the world-historical individual articulated in Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of history, the individual who alone among men grasps the Idea of Reason, makes it their purpose, and propels history's progress towards freedom. Shaw denied that he was promoting the authority of an autocratic Superman in the preface to his play *Major Barbara* published in 1905:

it is assumed, on the strength of the single word Superman (Übermensch) borrowed by me from Nietzsche, that I look for the salvation of society to the despotism of a single Napoleonic Superman, in spite of my careful demonstration of the folly of that outworn infatuation. (p. 8)

An indirect denial also issues from Caesar himself in *Caesar and Cleopatra*: 'believe me, Caesar is no Caesarian. Were Rome a true republic, then were Caesar the first of Republicans.' (p. 170) Yet the shadow of the heroic Superman can be discerned behind other Shavian characters such as Saint Joan or Napoleon and, as we shall see, later came to earn Shaw the label of fascist.<sup>31</sup>

Secondly, this present-day Caesar and his campaign in Alexandria also speak in a number of ways to the immediate British context of the play's production in the period prior to World War One. The English dialogue that Shaw ascribes to both Romans and Egyptians is littered with lively colloquial diction and relevant British anachronisms that bring ancient past and late nineteenth-century present into jarring alignment.<sup>32</sup> In the new prologue composed in 1912, the Egyptian god Ra breaks dramatic illusion to speak directly to the modern audience in the theatre whom he labels contemptuously 'quaint little islanders' (p. 129). Like a philosopher of history, Ra explains to them that, if the figures of the past they

<sup>26</sup> On the play's allusions to Christ, see Wisenthal 1988, 59; Holroyd 1989, 15; Dimitrova 2018, 113.

<sup>27</sup> For analysis of Merson's painting, esp. its insertion of a Sphinx into the Biblical story, see Grotenhuis 2014.

<sup>28</sup> See e.g. Dolgin 2015, 95.

<sup>29</sup> As Couchman 1973, 109-10 quoting from Shaw's essay of 1895 'The sanity of art'. Cf. Costello 1965, 1.

<sup>30</sup> For a survey of Caesar's many functions in Western culture, see Wyke 2007.

<sup>31</sup> On the Shavian Caesar as a Superman, see Weintraub 1962; Crompton 1969, 63-64; Larson 1971, 88-89; Couchman 1973, 143-64; Holroyd 1989, 14-18; Wikander 1998, 201-3; Dimitrova 2018, 109, 150 and 186-87.

<sup>32</sup> On the role of Shaw's verbal anachronisms, see Reinert 1960, 37-38; Wisenthal 1988, 101; Holroyd 1989, 19; Wikander 1998, 203; Loon Seong Yun 2002, 240; Dimitrova 2018, 157 and 185.

are about to see on stage speak and live like they do, it is because all remains the same (p. 133) – the forces of history have yet to change the human condition.

The use later, in Act 2, of British political slogans of the late nineteenth century constitutes a manifest expression of what the play as a whole dramatizes - namely a unity of past and present, a continuity of human experience, a failure of progress. When the emboldened courtiers of Ptolemy, seeking the departure of the Romans, clamour ‘Egypt for the Egyptians!’ (p. 165), they reiterate in the far distant past Liberal protests at the British occupation of Egypt that had begun in 1882.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Caesar’s secretary, the only British character in the play and pointedly named Britannus, mimics comically the stiff formality and resoundingly pompous behaviour of a British civil servant. With his ‘moral eye-to-business’ (as Shaw’s description of him has it, p. 171), Britannus satirizes the governance of the British Empire as sanctimonious and self-interested. Moreover, positioned in the historical timeframe of the play and from Caesar’s honourable and ironic perspective, his feeble secretary is open to ridicule as a servile islander coming from the savage periphery of a much more enlightened empire.<sup>34</sup> As an Irishman, Shaw might have felt entitled to critique British rule over her colonies, and he certainly condemned explicitly the brutal behaviour of the British armed forces as they completed their campaigning in Sudan in 1898, both in the press and in his contemporaneous scene setting for the original prologue to *Caesar and Cleopatra* (p. 135).<sup>35</sup> Yet, although Shaw’s Caesar pushes the country of Britannus to the savage edges of empire, the Roman general does not hesitate to tell the Egyptians that his own right to take control of their capital lies in a Roman scabbard (p. 168). At such moments, Caesar sounds himself like a Victorian imperialist.<sup>36</sup>

In *Caesar and Cleopatra*, Shaw merged Roman past with British present in order to ensure that the past would provide a perspective on the present, but he also structured the relationship of Julius Caesar to Queen Cleopatra as that of tutor to pupil in order to make his historical play provide its audiences with lessons for the future.<sup>37</sup> The drama is driven by Caesar’s desire to teach Cleopatra how to rule, in such a way that the teacher embodies humanity in its highest development and his recalcitrant pupil the base, untamed passions.<sup>38</sup> Across the first three acts, we are invited to watch Cleopatra slowly learn lessons in good leadership: namely disinterested virtue, rational judgement and courageous clemency all exercised for the well being of the people. But, in Act 4, she throws those lessons away when she secretly orders the murder of Pothinus, guardian of her brother Ptolemy.<sup>39</sup> At this climactic point in Shaw’s play, when Caesar discovers the murder, he is profoundly disillusioned with his pupil and pronounces to her the futility of such personal acts of vengeance:

If one man in all the world can be found, now or forever, to know that you did wrong, that man will have either to conquer the world as I have, or be crucified by it. .... And so, to the end of history, murder shall

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. when Britannus quotes just beforehand the Conservative Prime Minister Disraeli to describe Caesar’s proposed gift to Ptolemy of Cyprus as ‘peace with honor’ (p. 165). On these British political anachronisms, see Reinert 1960, 37-38; Crompton 1969, 62; Larson 1971, 76-77; Dukore 1973, 193-94; Couchman 1973, 99-100; Larson 1974, 167-68 and 182; Wisenthal 1988, 46 and 101; Hamer 1997, 270-73 and 283; Dimitrova 2018, 16 and 185.

<sup>34</sup> For Britannus as a vehicle used by Shaw to critique British imperialism, see Crompton 1969, 65-68; Wikander 1998, 203-5; Saunders 2001, 103-4; Loon Seong Yun 2002, 238-39; Ajtony 2007.

<sup>35</sup> As e.g. Hamer 1997, 270-73.

<sup>36</sup> Malouf 2015, 207-11; Dimitrova 2018, 185-86.

<sup>37</sup> As noted by e.g. Dimitrova 2018, 105-6.

<sup>38</sup> For the pedagogic framework of the play and its drama of rationality in conflict with the passions, I am indebted esp. to Crompton 1969, 65-66; Dukore 1973, 196; Hatchuel 2011, 118; Dolgin 2015, 97.

<sup>39</sup> Here Shaw deliberately rewrites the sources to preserve a benevolent nature for his Caesar (as observed by Couchman 1957, 276-77 and Larson 1971, 87-88). While Mommsen is silent about the death of Pothinus, Julius Caesar himself takes responsibility for it in *de bello civile*.

breed murder, always in the name of right and honor and peace, until the gods are tired of blood and create a race that can understand. (p. 230)

The significance of Caesar's speech is marked, as was his soliloquy before the Sphinx, by a sudden shift from vernacular to elevated expression both in diction and rhythm. Shaw's Caesar (by now cleansed of any guilt for the murders he is known historically to have authorised) is again isolated from common humanity and delivers the drama's key moral: the perpetuation of violence can only be stopped by selfless compassion.<sup>40</sup>

The pedagogic work of *Caesar and Cleopatra* is achieved, however, only through activating the discursive labour of Orientalism, with disquieting consequences for the play's formulations of gender and race.<sup>41</sup> In order to play up Julius Caesar as a worldly-wise, mature statesman, Shaw plays down Queen Cleopatra as a foolish girl.<sup>42</sup> To that end also, those around her and her country are exemplified as feminine, childlike, cruel, irrational and in need of guidance.<sup>43</sup> The Orientalist polarity of West against East, figured hierarchically as the superiority of the male over the female and the developed over the unevolved, is thus reproduced when the play utilises the education of Cleopatra as the vehicle for its lessons from history.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the need for Egypt's education had frequently appeared in the rhetoric of its British administrators at the time when Shaw was writing *Caesar and Cleopatra*.<sup>45</sup> The play's implicit exploitation of colonial politics was made unusually visible in a modern-dress production directed by Christopher Newton for the Shaw Festival in Canada in 2002. Set around the time of World War One, Caesar wore a fedora and leather jacket, in the style of an imperialist adventurer, while the costume of his soldiers included the puttees and Sam Browne belts of British military uniform.<sup>46</sup>

A further significant feature of the didacticism structuring Shaw's drama is that his lessons from history are delivered in a comic key and that they fail.<sup>47</sup> In an article on acting written for the October 1907 edition of *Play Pictorial*, Shaw described the Caesar he had composed for Forbes Robertson to perform as a humane rather than a superhuman hero:

The demand now is for heroes in whom we recognise our own humanity, and who, instead of walking, talking, eating, drinking, sleeping, making love and fighting single combats in a monotonous ecstasy of continuous heroism, are heroic in the true human fashion: that is, touching the summits only at rare moments, and finding the proper level of all occasions, condescending with humour and good sense to the prosaic ones, as well as rising to the noble ones, instead of ridiculously persisting in rising to them all on the principle that a hero must always soar, in season and out of season.<sup>48</sup>

Within Shaw's play, Caesar expresses comic awareness of his own shortcomings. When he encounters Cleopatra at the Sphinx and has yet to identify himself to her, he says of himself in the third person: 'He is easily deceived by women. Their eyes dazzle him; and he sees

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<sup>40</sup> The speech is famous and its significance has been much discussed. See e.g. Crompton 1969, 69-71; Couchman 1973, 65-69; Adams 1975, 79-82; Slater 2006, 239; Switzky 2007, 64-65; Dolgin 2015, 97-98; Dimitrova 2018, 111-12.

<sup>41</sup> See most usefully Hamer 1997 who discusses Orientalist clichés as they figure in the film adaptation of *Caesar and Cleopatra*.

<sup>42</sup> Shaw sets Cleopatra's age on her encounter with Caesar at 16 rather than 21 (the scholarly consensus). This may be the result of a misreading of Mommsen or the adoption of other sources, either way it suits Shaw's purpose to strip the encounter of its sexual dimension and focus on politics and morality. See Holroyd 1989, 17; Hatchuel 2011, 118; Papreck King 2007, 165-73.

<sup>43</sup> As Pasini 2008, 50; Dimitrova 2018, 112.

<sup>44</sup> The play's use of Orientalist structures of thinking is discussed by Larson 1971, 86-87; Hamer 1997, 279-81; Saunders 2001, 101-2; Royster 2003, 122.

<sup>45</sup> Pointed out by Hamer 1997, 279-81.

<sup>46</sup> The modern-dress production is discussed in these terms by Slater 2006.

<sup>47</sup> See Couchman 1973, 123-43 for Shaw's transformation of history into comedy.

<sup>48</sup> The article entitled 'The heroic actors' is reprinted in full in Larson 1974, 180-84, and is discussed by Couchman 1960, 13.



them not as they are, but as he wishes them to appear to him.’ (p. 152).<sup>49</sup> Equally, Cleopatra exposes Caesar’s limitations as a hero as well as his failings as a teacher. Again in Act 1 at the Sphinx (Fig. 1), after Caesar has associated himself with the forces of eternity, Cleopatra swiftly deflates such pretension to greatness. She addresses him impudently as ‘old gentleman’ (p. 147) and identifies this Sphinx as the smallest among many, her plaything (p. 149). Audiences are invited to understand that Caesar is no more unique or grand than the Sphinx with which he had so eloquently identified himself.<sup>50</sup>

At the close of the play, in Act 5 (pp. 242–43), the now vulnerable Caesar abandons Cleopatra and her fallen world of Egypt to go to his death in Rome, while the queen – still vindictive and childish – remains unconcerned about her country or her subjects, aspiring only to conventional romance with the Roman whom Caesar promises to send in his place:

CAESAR. What! As much a child as ever, Cleopatra! Have I not made a woman of you after all?

CLEOPATRA. Oh, it is you who are a great baby: you make me seem silly because you will not behave seriously. But you have treated me badly; and I do not forgive you.

CAESAR. Bid me farewell.

CLEOPATRA. I will not.

CAESAR [*coaxing*] I will send you a beautiful present from Rome.

CLEOPATRA [*proudly*] Beauty from Rome to Egypt indeed! What can Rome give me that Egypt cannot give me?

APOLLODORUS. That is true, Caesar. If the present is to be really beautiful, I shall have to buy it for you in Alexandria.

CAESAR. You are forgetting the treasures for which Rome is most famous my friend. You cannot buy them in Alexandria.

APOLLODORUS. What are they, Caesar?

CAESAR. Her sons. Come, Cleopatra: forgive me and bid me farewell; and I will send you a man, Roman from head to heel and Roman of the noblest; not old and ripe for the knife; not lean in the arms and cold in the heart; not hiding a bald head under his conqueror’s laurels; not stooped with the weight of the world on his shoulders; but brisk and fresh, strong and young, hoping in the morning, fighting in the day, and revelling in the evening. Will you take such an one in exchange for Caesar?

CLEOPATRA [*palpitating*] His name, his name?

CAESAR. Shall it be Mark Antony?

RUFIO: You are a bad hand at a bargain, mistress, if you will swop Caesar for Antony.<sup>51</sup>

In her amorous preference for Mark Antony over Julius Caesar, Cleopatra is effectively choosing to be in Shakespeare’s play rather than Shaw’s.<sup>52</sup> Rufio and the play as a whole invite us to appreciate the poverty of Cleopatra’s judgement. The only hope then for the success of Caesar’s lessons lies not in the dramatic figure of the protagonist (who has failed as a teacher) but in his author Shaw and *this history play*. Whereas Caesar fails to educate Cleopatra, Shaw aspires to educate his audience. After attending the play and acknowledging Caesar’s flaws, Shaw implies, his audience might at last become ‘the race that can understand’ – yet what they are being asked to understand is the value of the strong man as leader.

### *Lessons from the history of Shaw’s history play*

<sup>49</sup> For the self-irony of Shaw’s Caesar, see Dimitrova 2018, 9 and 149.

<sup>50</sup> The Shavian Cleopatra’s role in deflating Caesar’s heroic pretensions is discussed by a number of scholars. See e.g. Couchman 1960, 12; Reinert 1960, 40; Bertolini 1981, 331–42; Wikander 1998, 205–6; Loon Seong Yun 2002, 232–37; Slater 2006, 232; Hatchuel 2011, 119–21; Dimitrova 2018, 181–82.

<sup>51</sup> For the significance of this scene in presenting the failures of Shaw’s Caesar, see Reinert 1960, 38–41; Crompton 1969, 73–74; Dukore 1973, 196–97; Couchman 1973, 96; Wisenthal 1981, 52–53; Wisenthal 1988, 175; Papreck King 2007, 172–73; Hatchuel 2011, 122.

<sup>52</sup> Wisenthal 1988, 58 sets out the meta-theatrical implications of Cleopatra’s amorous preference. Cf. Hatchuel 2011, 123–24.

The reiteration of works across time is a fundamental aspect of theatre.<sup>53</sup> Yet the history of restagings of *Caesar and Cleopatra* dresses its characters in an additional layer of temporal complexity that only adds further discomfort to the lessons the play proffers. Shaw's play, both in its performance and in his extra-dramatic discussions of it, demands that its audiences think historically: What is the relative value of truth and fiction in history? What perspective on the present can the past offer? What relevance does the past have for the future? Yet direct addresses to spectators in the theatre, such as those Shaw introduced for the play's revival in 1913, explicitly invite them to be aware of their own present encounter with the historical drama's performance.<sup>54</sup> If Shaw manifestly aligns Caesar with the present of turn-of-the-century imperial Britain, what alignments might be at stake when the play is revived in the twentieth or twenty-first centuries and what lessons can it offer in those later present moments for their futures, when ideas of leadership, empire, nationalism, gender and race have undergone radical change? It would seem that Shaw's great Caesar is always out of time – come too soon or stayed too late ever to be understood or admired.<sup>55</sup>

With the rise of European dictatorships and Soviet socialism in the 1920s, Shaw imagined a new world order was emerging that would match his utopian visions. He praised Mussolini in the British press in 1927, visited the Soviet Union in 1931, and backed Hitler until as late as 1941.<sup>56</sup> Such political allegiances inevitably attracted considerable public controversy and led to condemnation of the Caesar he had created back in 1898.<sup>57</sup> 'Time has shifted our point of view', wrote the liberal American journalist Edmund Wilson at the start of an essay written in judgement on Shaw on the occasion of his eightieth birthday (published in the edition of the *Atlantic Monthly* for February 1938). Decrying Shaw's entry into membership of the British bourgeoisie, his admiration for the British Empire, his support for war in 1914, and his enthusiasm for Mussolini sustained over more than a decade, Wilson declared Shaw's dramatic heroes to lack any socialist qualities:

His heroes are likely to be philosopher-statesmen or social prophets or saviours of society; but there is nothing to guarantee that they shall be, in the socialist sense, genuine popular leaders, deriving their power from, as well as guiding, the dispossessed; they may be simply despot-heroes – as Shaw's Julius Caesar actually is – acting in the right of their own superiority and giving people what they know to be good for them.<sup>58</sup>

Critics now understood Shaw's turn-of-the-century Caesar as dramatic anticipation of the playwright's later infatuation with the flesh-and-blood Caesars of the twentieth century.<sup>59</sup>

Shaw was also attacked from the right, when his Caesar was performed on screen by Claude Rains in 1945. Shooting of a British film adaptation of *Caesar and Cleopatra* (directed by Gabriel Pascal for the Rank studio) began six days after the Normandy landing of June 1944, and took eighteen months and £1.3 million to make while London was still experiencing rocket attacks and wartime austerity. The scenario editor, Marjorie Deans, published soon after much of the correspondence exchanged between Shaw and the director that revealed the playwright's awkward off-site micromanagement of the production, as well as details of the limited alterations to the film script conceded by a playwright attached rather

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<sup>53</sup> Carlson 2001.

<sup>54</sup> On how Shaw's play requires audiences to think historically, see Wikander 1998, 213-14.

<sup>55</sup> Slater (2006, 228 and 230-31) also argues that the production history of Shaw's play demonstrates the difficulties of making Caesar's greatness its central theme.

<sup>56</sup> Couchman 1973, 152-64 discusses the intersection of Shaw's political sympathies and his playwriting in this period.

<sup>57</sup> Malouf 2015, 207 and 213; Yde 2015.

<sup>58</sup> The essay is reprinted in Wilson 1952, and discussed by Bentley 1943, 118.

<sup>59</sup> Couchman, for example, states of Shaw: 'his admiration of Caesar's efficiency became an intoxication with all too efficient modern Caesars' (1973, 161). Cf. Bentley 1943 on *Caesar and Cleopatra* and Shaw's support for Stalin.

more to the word than the image.<sup>60</sup> After its glitzy premiere at the Marble Arch Odeon in London in the presence of Her Majesty Queen Mary, the film received many reviews that panned its expenditure on sets and costumes as profligate, its storyline as unromantic and its camerawork as dull. It achieved notoriety eventually as the biggest financial failure in British film history.<sup>61</sup> And, at a time of war when the ideologies projected onto cinema screens were a matter of particular sensitivity, the film was also denounced as a dangerously vivid expression of Shaw's political sympathies by the right-wing maverick sociologists E. W. and M. M. Robson.

In a pamphlet the couple published in December 1945 to coincide with the film's release, and without even having seen it themselves, they urged the public against watching it on the grounds that Shaw's plays engaged with the philosophic concept of the Superman adopted by the Nazis and that the playwright himself supported dictators. His protagonist is a cold-blooded, war-weary philosopher, they claimed, while the real Caesar had been a great soldier and beneficial administrator. Rains is thus constrained to play 'an utterly negative and phantom Caesar' (p. 23), one who unpatriotically baits the British precisely when the British are at war.<sup>62</sup> The following year, when *Caesar and Cleopatra* was distributed in the United States, the avowedly anti-Communist critic John Charles Moffitt also damned the film as an untimely expression of Shaw's political views in a lengthy review he wrote for *Esquire*, the men's magazine published by the Hearst Corporation:

In 1898 it was dashing and provocative for the shocking intellectual to suggest in *Caesar and Cleopatra* that dictatorship was the ideal form of government. Hitler has shown us that two political fools in parliament or congress acting as checkmates on each other are a lot safer than one fool armed with absolute power. Yet, after the shambles dictators have made of the world, Shaw is right back where he was in 1898. In [the film] *Caesar and Cleopatra*, Shaw is still arguing for Caesarism and dictatorial power. He must have observed that dictatorships don't end well. (*Esquire*, 16 November 1946)

Moffitt disparages the cinematic representation of the Shavian Caesar as too virtuous and his uninterested pupil Cleopatra as too vicious to suit a traumatised, post-war world.

Originally Shaw had substantially diminished the stature of Cleopatra in his play in order to heroise his Caesar. The character of Cleopatra is supposed to remain an asexual, petulant child throughout and, in performance, the actor who plays her is supposed to take a backseat to the male star. Such a Cleopatra, however, did not fit the economic ambitions of the Rank film organisation in 1945 as it sought to increase the reputation of the British film industry and penetrate the American market with an adaptation to screen of a culturally prestigious dramatic work styled as a lavish Technicolor spectacle.<sup>63</sup> A significant part of the film's visual feast, in among the vast crowds, immense Egyptians sets, elaborate costumes and exotic props, was the film star Vivien Leigh (famous for her role as Scarlett O'Hara in the American epic *Gone with the Wind*, released six years earlier).

Although the playwright insisted in a letter to the director dated 15 March 1944 that Cleopatra's charm 'shall be that of a beautiful child, *not of sex*' [Shaw's emphasis], he did reluctantly agreed to provide for the film a new scene in Cleopatra's bedroom at the palace on the morning after Caesar's arrival at Alexandria. The shooting script calls for the camera to track in through a window and reveal the Queen fast asleep in her palace bed. Woken by

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<sup>60</sup> Deans 1946. Further evidence for the film's production, exhibition and consumption can be found in the archives of the British Film Institute (London) and the Margaret Herrick Library (Los Angeles). See esp. Costello 1965, 113-46; Dukore 1980, 125-47; Holroyd 1989, 473-78; McInerney 2015, 121-23.

<sup>61</sup> Such reviews can be found in the BFI and Margaret Herrick collections, and are discussed in Costello 1965, 142; Leonard 1981, 219-20 and 228-29; Holroyd 1989, 477-78.

<sup>62</sup> The pamphlet can be found in the British Library and its contents is discussed by Dukore 1980, 143-44.

<sup>63</sup> On the film *Caesar and Cleopatra* as a vehicle for the commercial ambitions of Rank, see Barker 1953, 221; Dukore 1980, 125-26; Hamer 1997: 272.

the sound of Roman military trumpets calling reveille, she is, to her surprise, brought bath towels by her nurse Ftatateeta.

FTATATEETA. Get up, child. You must be bathed this morning.

CLEOPATRA. [*dismayed*] No! I had my month's bath the day before yesterday.

FTATATEETA. In future you must have a bath every day.

CLEOPATRA. No, no: I should die of it.

FTATATEETA. You must. Your life is changed. You are still my child; but to all others you are now a grown woman and a queen.

Medium-Close Shot: Cleopatra. *Her face begins to assume its new look of childish arrogance and conceit as she looks round the magnificent bedchamber. She sits up and clasps her arms round her knees.*

....

CLEOPATRA. Yes, I am grown-up now. I am a Queen... *Asks*

CLEOPATRA. Tell me, Ftatateeta: what will Caesar do with me?

Medium-Close Shot: Ftatateeta. *Ftatateeta looks back at young mistress, expression half rueful half-smiling.*

FTATATEETA. Ask rather what you will do with him. My child, you have charmed him. You are safe; you are powerful.

....

*Close-Shot: Cleopatra in the Mirror. Cleopatra speaks to her reflection in the mirror.*

CLEOPATRA. Tell me what I must do to begin with now that I am really a Queen! <sup>64</sup>

The scene suggests that, already after her first encounter with Caesar, Cleopatra is changing from child to grown woman and commanding queen. The script as written by Shaw explicitly denies Caesar's interest in the female body beautiful - Ftatateeta expresses wonder at Caesar's sexual restraint. Yet visually the scene displays the sexual attractiveness of Vivien Leigh, who drops her robe as she enters the bathing pool for the delectation of the spectator watching in the cinema.<sup>65</sup>

In their national advertising campaign, American exhibitors of the British film also utilised Leigh's star power to draw in audiences, despite the film narrative's evident lack of romance. In one such advertising poster (Fig. 2), Leigh's bejewelled portrait is framed centrally. It stares brazenly out at the filmgoer underneath the tag: 'YOUR EYES HAVE NEVER SEEN SUCH LAVISH SPLENDOR ON THE SCREEN BEFORE.' She also appears reclining above the encircled title and credits as a mature, sexually charged woman whose ample breasts and luscious legs are scarcely concealed by a diaphanous, gold evening gown. As Caesar, Claude Rains is depicted only as a small figure, shunted to the poster's margins. Focus is thus shifted off screen from Caesar to Cleopatra, and control over others becomes a matter of sex not politics.<sup>66</sup> Despite the large amounts spent on such publicity, *Caesar and Cleopatra* still lost several million dollars and was described by one disappointed American reviewer as 'a Technicolor camel – exotic but unromantic' (*Time*, 31 December 1945).

Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* was revived by the actor-manager Laurence Olivier paired with Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* to represent the best of the nation's theatrical traditions during the post-war Festival of Britain. Together (staged on alternating nights) the plays experienced long successful runs under the direction of Michael Benthall, in 1951 at St James' Theatre in London and in 1952 at the Ziegfeld Theatre in New York (Fig. 3). Olivier alternated between the roles of Shaw's Caesar and Shakespeare's Antony, while Olivier's wife Vivien Leigh played Cleopatra as the Shavian child and the Shakespearean

<sup>64</sup> The final shooting script referencing each consecutive camera shot and dated 1 June 1944 can be found in the archives of the BFI, *Caesar and Cleopatra* S10310 pp. 64-67.

<sup>65</sup> On the film's new bedchamber scene, see Deans 1946, 50-51; Costello 1965, 126-29; Dukore 1980, 130; Holroyd 1989, 474-75.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. the similar emphasises on Leigh as Cleopatra in the oversized press books that survive in the BFI and the Margaret Herrick libraries. For discussion, see Costello 1965, 142-43; Dukore 1980, 145-46; Hatchuel 2011, 125.

woman (having already played a young Cleopatra in the film adaptation of Shaw some years earlier). Shaw had died by the time of the London rehearsals, and Olivier had complete freedom to express his irritation with Shaw's characterisation of Caesar and with Shaw's insistence – against the record of Caesarion's birth and Cleopatra's visit to Rome – that the Roman general had not had a sexual liaison with the Queen.<sup>67</sup> Newspaper coverage of the London production reveals how Olivier then performed the part counter to Shaw's lines. After the opening night, the theatre critic for *The Times* (11 May 1951) contended that the Shavian Caesar had been defective because he was not terrifying. Forbes Robertson, he recalled, had loyally played the character with easy dignity but Olivier in contrast gave a steely edge to all Caesar's magnanimities and philosophising. This Caesar reveals hints of a demonic power held in check only because there is no present occasion to exercise it. Similarly, the reviewer for *The Observer* (13 May 1951) commented that Olivier's Caesar preaches clemency as a political rather than an ethical gesture, for 'this gentle, grey witty philosopher has the "cosh" of dictatorship always up his sleeve'. Olivier's performance thus worked to mute any apparent advocacy of despotism and to conform more closely to the Festival of Britain's function as a post-war cultural expression of national reconstruction and reform.<sup>68</sup>

These productions of 1951 and 1952 also encouraged a shift of dramatic emphasis away from Shaw's Caesar. A Sphinx had been especially designed to figure in the sets of both *Caesar and Cleopatra* and *Antony and Cleopatra* to tie the works of Shaw and Shakespeare closer together across their performance on alternating nights (as Olivier noted in various letters). During the try out in Manchester, a journalist for the *Manchester Daily* commented on the importance of seeing the plays in historical order fully to appreciate 'the searingly tragic moment at the Sphinx where the doomed queen tries to revive dying love at the place where twenty-two years earlier Caesar had first inspired it' (2 May 1951). Cleopatra became the pivot of a dramatic diptych. A grateful theatre-goer wrote to Olivier that

For the first time, I saw a Caesar who made me believe in greatness – a great man who reduced all other men about him to pygmies – and on the second night you shed this quality in the most marvellous degree, and showed us a great heart – aware and capable of greatness, but preferring the sway of his love poured out to complete fulfillment. Your wife's beauty blinds the eye – satisfies all one's craving for magic, and her growth from the touching, uncertain child to a woman of fundamental passions completes for me the story of Cleopatra as I had never known it. (27 June 1951)<sup>69</sup>

The pairing of the plays and the dual performance by Leigh encouraged audiences to consider them together as the biography of Cleopatra grown from innocent youthfulness to artful maturity.<sup>70</sup> Audiences consequently came to see Shaw's historical drama and his male protagonist as deficient, the comic 'b' feature before the full-scale tragedy: 'the effect of the Antony is to burn up the Caesar into a small, dry cinder' (*The Times Educational Supplement*, June 1951). The souvenir programme for the performances at the Ziegfeld Theatre in New York also encouraged this shift of emphasis by giving top billing to Vivien Leigh in both plays, and by placing on its front cover a photograph of the actors together in *Caesar and Cleopatra* in which the brightly-lit profile of Leigh was positioned in front and slightly to the side of Olivier's. The Shavian Caesar had been thrust almost completely into Cleopatra's shadow.

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<sup>67</sup> On the paired production, see Baker 1953, 283-306 and Hatchuel 2011, 125-28.

<sup>68</sup> A number of scrapbooks containing a wealth of newspaper cuttings concerning the London and New York productions can be found in the Olivier Archive in the British Library, MS 80679. For the ambitions of the Festival of Britain to celebrate the nation, see Conekin 2003.

<sup>69</sup> The letter is signed by Kathryn Hamill Cohen and can be found among Olivier's correspondence in the British Library, Olivier Archive MS 80049.

<sup>70</sup> As Hatchuel 2011, 125-27.

It would seem that in the 1950s the Shavian Caesar could hardly operate as a *magister vitae*. The Roman past as dramatized by Shaw could not provide an acceptable perspective for audiences on the present of their post-war world nor help them imagine its future. Unease with the play and revivals of it has continued on into the latter part of the twentieth century and beyond. The scholar Mary Hamer talks of the discomfort felt by the cinema spectators around her as they watched a screening of Pascal's *Caesar and Cleopatra* restored for the London Film Festival of 1992.<sup>71</sup> She argues that, from our feminist and post-colonial perspective, we are inclined now to resist the film's opening orientalist invitation to enter Egypt in Julius Caesar's company as he brings the torch of Shavian enlightenment to the dark recesses of Cleopatra's feminine, archaic and inferior world. She suggests that, instead, we might choose to empathise with the Egyptian Queen who walks slowly and tragically down the steps of her palace at the end of the film unadorned, in a plain dark-grey costume, her hair shrouded. In terms of the plotline, Cleopatra mourns the murder of her nurse Ftateeta but, symbolically, she could be thought to grieve for what would be lost in the act of achieving Shaw's disturbingly envisioned, white, masculine world order.

So what lessons do we learn here and now about the reception of Julius Caesar from this exploration of Shaw's history play? This single reception of Caesar is both complex and malleable: complex because Shaw's Caesar raises questions about the nature of history and regimes of historicity; malleable because our understanding of Shaw's Caesar is subject to change in line with broad changes in political systems, conceptions of gender and race, and media technologies, and in response to the particular contexts and cross-currents of his consumption. The complexity and malleability of this single thread of reception displays in miniature the richness of the larger tapestry of Julius Caesar's reception across time, place and media.

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<sup>71</sup> Hamer 1997, 285-90. Cf. Slater 2006 on the modern-dress production in Canada in 2002.

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