

CLEOPATRA REIMAGINED: GENDER, SEXUALITY,
RACE, AND EMPIRE AT THE FIN DE SIÈCLE

VOLUME I:

TEXT

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that the diverse portrayals of Cleopatra across late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theatre, oil paintings, novels, short stories, and poems not only mirrored evolving perceptions of gender, sexuality, race, and empire but also actively influenced contemporary debates on these issues. By exploring literature, art, and theatre, this study reveals how Cleopatra's evolving image both reflected and shaped traditional gender norms and the 'woman question'. This analysis examines her representation as a powerful pharaoh, sensual lover, and nurturing mother, highlighting the fluidity with which she navigates gender binaries, while exploring how these depictions mirrored shifting social dynamics. This study shows how fictional portrayals of Cleopatra offered female readers a means to explore their evolving societal roles, while simultaneously offering female writers and poets a platform to contribute to contemporary discussions on gender, sexuality, and power.

Additionally, it establishes the political implications of Cleopatra's transformation from a vilified figure of antiquity into an icon of popular culture. This shift highlights her pivotal role in shaping discussions on power, sexuality, and resistance. As Cleopatra is reimagined from a villain to an empress striving to save her nation, noticeable parallels emerge in the source material between her and Queen Victoria. Furthermore, as the final pharaoh of Egypt, Cleopatra lends herself to discussions of race and empire, with portrayals ranging from a Greek woman to an Egyptian figure. This thesis demonstrates how the complexity of Cleopatra's racial identity allowed *fin-de-siècle* dramatists, writers, painters, and poets, as well as their audiences, to engage with and reflect on ideas of race and empire. Ultimately, this thesis establishes that Cleopatra's multifaceted representations serve as a lens through which shifting societal attitudes toward gender, sexuality, race, and power can be understood, highlighting her enduring influence on cultural and political discourse.

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INTRODUCTION

Every account of Cleopatra, whether fictional or biographical, presents a contradictory version of the same woman that collectively opposes the other. In *The Life and Times of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt* (1914), the Egyptologist Arthur Weigall wrote that ‘in the case of Cleopatra, the biographer may approach his subject from one of several directions’; he may view her as a ‘moderately good woman in a difficult situation’, or as a ‘thoroughly bad woman’.¹ Weigall believed that Cleopatra was a ‘brilliant, charming, and beautiful woman’ who was ‘ready [...] to make use of her charms’ when ‘tenderly playing in the nursery with her babies’ or when ‘surrounded by her armies in the thick of battle’.² In 1867, the biographer A. H. Dick presented Cleopatra as a ‘moderately good woman in a difficult situation’ by describing her as a sovereign struggling to maintain ‘the throne of her fathers’.³ Dick argued that although Cleopatra’s actions ‘shock [...] modern notions of morality’, they cannot be used to condemn her because she was merely attempting to prevent ‘Roman conquest’ and ‘annexation’.⁴ Most nineteenth- and early twentieth-century biographers, however, presented Cleopatra as a ‘thoroughly bad woman’. In *Cleopatra: A Study* (1890), the French historian Henry Houssaye acknowledged that Cleopatra was ‘beautiful’, ‘skilful, intelligent, and very learned’, but stated that she was ‘weak, without genius and without mental force’ because she was ‘too essentially a woman’ to be heralded as one of the great historical women who exhibited ‘manly virtues’.⁵ Houssaye contended that Cleopatra only ‘preserved her throne and maintained the

¹ Arthur Weigall, *The Life and Times of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt: A Study in the Origin of the Roman Empire* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1914), p. xvii.

² Ibid., p. 16.

³ A. H. Dick, ‘Cleopatra: A Biographical Sketch’, *St. James’s Magazine* (May 1867), pp. 242-256 (p. 250).

⁴ Ibid., pp. 243, 250, 252.

⁵ Henry Houssaye, *Cleopatra: A Study*, trans. by A. F. D. (New York: Duprat, 1890), pp. 29, 17, 105.

independence of Egypt' through using 'womanly means' to 'become the mistress of Cæsar and the mistress of Mark Antony'.⁶

The contrast between Weigall's belief that Cleopatra could command armies while being a faithful mother, and Houssaye's conviction that Cleopatra 'was not a great queen' because she was feminine, was reflected in the enormous number of articles, short stories, novels, poems, plays, oil paintings, illustrations, and sculptures featuring Cleopatra across Britain, Europe, and North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, in the American author Nelly T. Sawyer's novella *The Egyptian Ring* (1901) and the German Egyptologist Georg Ebers's historical novel *Cleopatra* (1894), the final pharaoh of Egypt is an intellectual and loyal mother; in the French dramatist Victorien Sardou's play *Cléopâtre* (1890) and English author H. Rider Haggard's popular novel *Cleopatra* (1889), she is a passionate lover and a powerful empress; and in Irish playwright Bernard Shaw's drama *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1899), she is reliant on male leadership but prone to violent outbursts. In these narratives, Cleopatra not only oscillates between feminine and masculine, meek and powerful, Greek and Egyptian, white and Asiatic, sexual and maternal, but inhabits the spaces between these binaries. Cleopatra's occupation of the spaces between binary definitions of gender, sexuality and race reflects the dissolution of established contemporaneous values. By analysing *fin-de-siècle* archival material, verse by poets including Oscar Wilde and Arthur Symonds, short stories printed in periodicals, artwork by painters including John William Waterhouse, Lawrence Alma-Tadema and John Collier, theatrical productions like Herbert Beerbohm Tree's 1906-1907 production of William Shakespeare's (1564-1616) *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607), and fiction by Haggard and Ebers, this thesis demonstrates that artists, writers, and their audiences used Cleopatra to explore the changing climate of the *fin de siècle*.

⁶ Ibid., p. 105.

Instead of concentrating solely on Britain, I examine anglophone material from America, Britain, and Europe. This broader focus is necessary because the material discussed in this thesis transcends national borders. For example, the same plays that were performed in London were also staged in New York, Berlin, and Paris, often featuring the same actresses on tour. In her performance of Cleopatra in Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*, for example, Gertrude Elliott first performed in New York, then across Europe, before finally performing in London. Novels also had a transatlantic publication history, with publishers simultaneously releasing their works in London and New York. Ebers's *Cleopatra* (1894) exemplifies this trend, as it was translated from German into English soon after its initial publication and was released by publishers based in both cities. Short stories and poems published in periodicals similarly reached across the Atlantic. Mary Sheffey Peters's 'The Egyptian Amulet', for instance, was first published in America in February 1881 in *Peterson's Magazine* before appearing in Britain in the *London Reader* in June of the same year. The sole exception to the anglophone cultural exchange explored in this thesis is Sardou's *Cléopâtre*, as Sarah Bernhardt performed exclusively in French. Despite being staged in French, the play achieved considerable success in London, New York, and Paris, largely due to Bernhardt's celebrity, with reviews, illustrations, and photographs of the production featured in periodicals across the English-speaking world. In 1891, Arthur D. Hall even published an English novelisation of the play, titled *Sardou's Cleopatra*. Although Bernhardt performed *Cléopâtre* in French, the play's influence on western culture, the English novelisation, and the breadth of coverage in anglophone periodicals justify its inclusion in this thesis.⁷ The cross-border exchange of cultural materials

⁷ While this thesis focuses on Bernhardt's performance in Sardou's *Cléopâtre* due to its impact on *fin-de-siècle* representations of Cleopatra, the American production, featuring Fanny Davenport in the title role, was briefly performed in English in 1891 at New York's Fifth Avenue Theatre and Boston's Hollis Street Theatre. Despite the English performance in America, the play was not published in English until Frank J. Morlock translated the script in 2010. Though I analyse Bernhardt's performance, I use Morlock's English translation of the play when referring to the script. See., Victorien Sardou, *Cleopatra: A Play in Five Acts*, trans. by Frank J. Morlock (Maryland: Borgo Press: 2010).

illuminates the extensive reach and mutual influence of anglophone interests in shaping a transatlantic cultural dialogue.

This thesis delves into the radical reimagining and multifaceted deployment of Cleopatra, as depicted in Greek and Roman sources, by authors and cultural figures of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By analysing how Cleopatra was reinterpreted during this period, the research uncovers the ways in which her portrayal was transformed to resonate with the changing social and political dynamics of the time. This study pays particular attention to how autonomous, intelligent, and sexually liberated Cleopatra-esque characters began to appear in literature, art, and popular media. These reimagined figures not only captured the public's imagination but also played a crucial role in shaping contemporary debates around the 'woman question', a term referring to the ongoing discussions and controversies surrounding women's roles in society, their rights, and their status. Through these portrayals, Cleopatra became a powerful symbol of female agency, challenging traditional gender norms and offering new possibilities for the expression of female identity. Moreover, this thesis investigates the broader political implications of Cleopatra's evolution from a vilified anti-heroine of Classical antiquity to a ubiquitous icon in popular culture. It explores how this transformation reflected and influenced the era's social currents, contributing to the discourse on power, sexuality, and resistance. By examining the ways in which Cleopatra was recontextualised, the research reveals how her image was not only appropriated to serve various ideological agendas but also how it opened new avenues for political thought and action. Cleopatra, in her new cultural incarnations, became a vehicle for exploring the intersections of gender, sexuality, power, and politics, making her an enduring and versatile figure in the cultural imagination of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Cleopatra in Graeco-Roman Sources

As there are no known writings by Cleopatra herself, most of the knowledge surrounding her came from biographies and stories by Graeco-Roman historians and philosophers, including: Plutarch, Suetonius, Cicero, Cassius Dio, Strabo, Appian, Diodorus Siculus, Livy, Josephus, Velleius Paterculus, Dion Chrysostom, Tacitus, Florus, Lucian, Orosius, and Athenæus. Except for Cicero, these philosophers and biographers were born decades and even centuries after Cleopatra's death. In *Cleopatra: Last Queen of Egypt* (2011), the Egyptologist Joyce Tyldesley notes that Cleopatra's ancient memoirs are 'coloured by [...] propaganda, prejudices and assumptions' because Graeco-Roman men painted her as 'cunning, recklessly extravagant, and selfish' to make Egypt appear morally corrupt and inferior in comparison to Rome.⁸ Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historians, artists, poets, dramatists, and authors all borrowed from Graeco-Roman scholars and Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607), itself a retelling of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, to form different versions of the same woman. The contradictions in Cleopatra's biographies made her the perfect apparatus to discuss the changing atmosphere of the *fin de siècle*, as her multifaceted image provided a versatile symbol through which concerns surrounding gender, sexuality, race, and cultural identity could be explored and debated.

According to these varying narratives, Cleopatra VII (69-30 BCE) was the final pharaoh of Egypt. She ascended to the throne at the age of seventeen alongside her brother-husband Ptolemy XIII. The young pharaoh was extremely well educated as she had access to Alexandria's world-renowned library, research centres, and finest tutors who guided her in medicine, philosophy, pharmaceuticals, rhetoric, and oratory.⁹ Plutarch (c. 46-119 CE), a prominent Greek philosopher and biographer, notes that Cleopatra was the first of the Ptolemies to speak ancient Egyptian and fully embrace Egyptian customs and rituals. Cleopatra's 'intelligent and ambitious' nature made her a threat to her young brother's guardians who convinced him to exile her to 'further their own

⁸ Joyce Tyldesley, *Cleopatra: Last Queen of Egypt* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), p. 7.

⁹ Duane W. Roller, *Cleopatra: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 43-44.

political ambitions'.¹⁰ According to the Roman historian Cassius Dio (c. 165-c. 235 CE), Cleopatra 'adorned and beautified herself so as to appear before [Caesar] in the most majestic and at the same time pity-inspiring guise'.¹¹ 'Upon seeing her and hearing her speak a few words' Caesar was 'completely captivated' by Cleopatra's beauty and intelligence and ordered Ptolemy XIII to share the throne.¹² Plutarch offers a different account, stating that Cleopatra hid in bedding and had her friend Apollodorus help her meet Caesar. Although Plutarch claims that Cleopatra was not beautiful, he admits that Caesar was 'captivated by' her 'bold coquette' and the 'charm' of her society from their first meeting.¹³ These narratives contributed to Cleopatra's image as an intelligent and scheming seductress, who leveraged a relationship with Rome's most powerful man for political advancement. Cleopatra was in Rome when Caesar was assassinated in 44 BCE and had hoped he would name their son, Caesarion, as his heir. After Caesar's death, Cleopatra formed a dynastic liaison with Mark Antony in the ensuing Roman civil war. Their relationship strengthened the Egyptian Empire, as Antony gifted Cleopatra 'Phoenicia, Coele Syria, Cyprus, and a large part of Cilicia'.¹⁴ Plutarch and his contemporaries believed that Antony's 'love for Cleopatra' was 'a crowning evil' that 'dissipated and destroyed whatever good and saving qualities still offered resistance', yet the couple's passionate love affair lasted over a decade and resulted in the birth of three children.¹⁵

Following their defeat at the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE, Plutarch reports that Antony killed himself with his own dagger after he heard a rumour of Cleopatra's death, and Cleopatra performed suicide with her handmaidens to evade subjugation at the hands of Octavian. There is uncertainty surrounding the cause of Cleopatra's death. Cassius Dio reports that she most likely

¹⁰ Tyldesley, p. 46.

¹¹ Cassius Dio, *Dio's Roman History*, trans. by Earnest Cary, 9 vols (London: William Heinemann, 1916-1927), I (1916) p. 169.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives*, trans. by Bernadotte Perrin, 11 vols (London: William Heinemann, 1914-1926), VII (1919) p. 559.

¹⁴ Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives*, trans. by Bernadotte Perrin, 11 vols (London: William Heinemann, 1914-1926), IX (1920) p. 219.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 191.

used a poison hair pin, while Plutarch states that she either used poison that was ‘kept’ ‘hidden’ in a ‘hair’ ‘comb’ or an ‘asp’ which was delivered to her in a basket of ‘figs’.¹⁶ Many historians have observed that suicide by snakebite is not an ‘easy matter [...] particularly when one snake is expected to kill three people’.¹⁷ Despite the implausibility of the rumour, the myth that Cleopatra died by asp became acknowledged as historical fact in the nineteenth century because of the popularity of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*. Shakespeare’s impact on *fin-de-siècle* interpretations of Cleopatra, which continue to influence modern perceptions, underscore the significance of literary representation in shaping our understanding of history. Cleopatra’s suicide marked the end of the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt, which was then annexed by the Roman Empire.

The *Fin de Siècle*

With Britain’s territorial expansion into Africa, as well as the emergence of sexually ambiguous Aesthetes and politically active New Women, the *fin de siècle* was a period of instability where the categories of race, sexuality and gender became increasingly contested. In *Sexual Anarchy* (1990), Elaine Showalter describes the *fin de siècle* as a period of ‘cultural insecurity, when there are fears of regression and degeneration’ and a ‘longing for strict border controls around the definition of gender, as well as race, class, and nationality’.¹⁸ Showalter labels sexual difference, imperial decline, and the blurring of racial, gender and class boundaries as some of the ‘threatened borders of the *fin de siècle*’, and states that there was an overriding anxiety to maintain binaries to prevent an ‘apocalypse’.¹⁹ As Cleopatra existed between the binaries of race, gender, and sexuality, her identity threatened the ‘borders of the *fin de siècle*’. By producing works inspired by Cleopatra, poets, artists, authors and playwrights could explore the endless possibilities of ‘cultural insecurity’. Whilst many

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 329.

¹⁷ Tyldesley, p. 192.

¹⁸ Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 4.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 4, 5.

of these narratives warned of the ‘apocalypse’ that would ensue with the breakdown of established binaries, many narratives, especially those produced by marginal figures such as the New Woman writer George Egerton, the American feminist activist Mary Bayard Clark, and Decadent poets such as Oscar Wilde, explored the liberating possibilities of living without the confinement of rigid categories. Although these alternative narratives did not always achieve widespread popularity, they nonetheless contributed to the period's discourse on identity and cultural transformation.

Cleopatra's imperial ambitions and racial ambiguity made her the perfect figure to examine concerns regarding imperial decline and racial degeneration. The first ruler of the Ptolemaic dynasty was a Macedonian Greek general who served under Alexander the Great. In *Race: Antiquity and its Legacy* (2012), Denise McCoskey notes that ‘the rulers of Egypt moved between Greek and Egyptian identifications’, and were predominantly perceived as Macedonian by Graeco-Roman scholars until Cleopatra's liaisons with Caesar and Antony made her a ‘manifold threat’ that needed to be demonised and othered for ‘pro-Octavian’ propaganda.²⁰ While Graeco-Roman sources emphasised Cleopatra's ‘Egyptianness’ to vilify her, modern concepts of Cleopatra as either black or white did not exist in ‘ancient ideology’.²¹ Instead, confusion surrounding Cleopatra's race emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the development of racial hierarchies, which aimed to categorise historical figures into racial classifications. Though Cleopatra embraced Egyptian customs and worshipped Egyptian gods, aligning herself with the mother-goddess Isis, her Greek rather than Egyptian ethnic origins made her an emblem for white supremacists. For example, in 1892 the *Spectator* argued that the Ptolemies ‘ruled as chiefs of a dominant caste, superior to its subjects in race, [and] in intelligence’, to suggest that the white race have been leaders even within Eastern empires.²² Cleopatra's uncertain racial identity positioned her within a complex racial spectrum. In Haggard's *Cleopatra*, she is a Macedonian Greek coloniser. In Henry William

²⁰ Denise Eileen McCoskey, *Race: Antiquity and its Legacy* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), pp. 14, 15, 17.

²¹ Ibid., p. 16, 14.

²² ‘Cleopatra’, *Spectator*, 68.3337 (11 June 1892), pp. 808-809 (p. 808).

Herbert's posthumously published poem 'Cleopatra' (1888), she is ethnically Egyptian, while in Alma-Tadema's oil painting *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883, Fig. 0.1), she is racially ambiguous with her dark eyes, brows, and hair contrasting against her pale skin. Following Britain's imperial expansion into Africa and the ensuing occupation of Egypt in 1882, a climate of fear was exacerbated by the defeat of General Gordon at Khartoum in 1885, where he fell to the Mahdi, the leader of a Sudanese Islamic fundamentalist group. At the same time, growing anxieties regarding potential colonial rebellion and 'racial mingling' in the colonies fuelled fears of degeneration and imperial decline. Showalter notes that 'England was often compared to decadent Greece and Rome, and there were parallel fears of the rise of captive peoples'.²³ In *England's Mission* (1878), the prime minister William Gladstone articulated his vision of governing Britain as a modern Rome and in *Oceana* (1886), which was widely published across England, America, and India, the historian James Anthony Froude warned that 'the fate of Rome seemed to [him] likely to be the fate of England'.²⁴ Cleopatra's lasting image thus acts as a prism through which the anxieties and complexities surrounding empire, race, and identity are both mirrored and distorted. Focusing on the *fin de siècle* enables a detailed examination of evolving attitudes concerning gender, sexuality, race, and empire, revealing their enduring impact on contemporary perspectives.

Orientalism

According to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Orientalism is a 'mirror-image' that reflects the 'chosen weakness[es]' of the West onto the East.²⁵ Said argues that the Orient is frequently constructed as a 'feminine' space that can be easily dominated by the masculine West, where women are 'creatures of a male power-fantasy' who

²³ Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, p. 4.

²⁴ William Gladstone, *England's Mission* (London: John Hodges, 1878). See also., James Anthony Froude, *Oceana: or, England and her Colonies* (London: Longmans, Green, 1886), p. 10.

²⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 209.

‘express unlimited sensuality’ and ‘are more or less stupid’.²⁶ With *Orientalism* in mind, Western authors could project their own anxieties regarding the inferior aspects of their society onto Cleopatra and Egypt. As Lucy Hughes-Hallett observes, ‘Cleopatra’s attraction lies precisely in her unlikeness, in her embodiment of everything that Victorian England [...] denied’.²⁷ Representations of Cleopatra thus served as a means to explore fears, desires, and the allure of the taboo in *fin-de-siècle* culture. While Said’s framework is foundational in examining Cleopatra’s portrayal as an exotic, sensual figure within imperial discourse, this thesis argues that it does not fully account for her complex racial and sexual ambiguity, which disrupts fixed orientalist categories. Building on feminist scholars such as Reina Lewis and Lisa Lowe, this thesis recognises that Orientalist discourse is shaped by gender and race in complex and often contradictory ways. Lowe complicates Said’s theory by examining ‘junctions at which narratives of gendered, racial, national, and class difference complicate and interrupt the narrative of orientalism’, arguing that orientalism is not a singular hegemonic force but a site of negotiation and contradiction.²⁸ Similarly, Lewis challenges ‘masculinist assumptions about women and imperialism’ by highlighting women’s roles as both subjects and creators of orientalist representations.²⁹ In her analysis of Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853), Lewis argues that the protagonist’s reading of a painting of Cleopatra enables her to assert an authority typically denied to her, using the dynamics of empire to challenge gender and class hierarchies.³⁰ This demonstrates that Cleopatra’s image, while embedded in imperialist discourse, also opens up space for exploring gendered power dynamics, providing a more nuanced reading of female agency that Said’s framework overlooks. At the *fin de siècle*, Cleopatra’s racial and sexual ambiguity made her a figure of both fascination and contradiction, disrupting fixed orientalist categories and allowing her to be appropriated into multiple, often opposing, ideological frameworks. While some depictions align her with the exoticised *femme fatale*,

²⁶ Ibid., p. 207.

²⁷ Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *Cleopatra: Histories, Dreams and Distortions* (London: Vintage, 1991), p. 258.

²⁸ Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 5.

²⁹ Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London, Routledge, 1996), p. 236.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 37.

others integrate her into imperial narratives. In this way, Cleopatra serves as both a product of and a challenge to Orientalist projections, making her a dynamic figure through whom shifting ideas about gender, race, and empire are negotiated. Although Orientalist theory often assumes eastern women are inherently sensual, Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* presents her not as an eroticised figure but as politically immature, paralleling Britain with Caesar's Rome and Cleopatra with contemporary Islamic Egypt – an unstable land in need of Western intervention. Conversely, Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* (1888, Fig. 0.2) aligns her with Queen Victoria and Imperial Britain, reinforcing her status as an empress. By incorporating feminist critiques of Said's Orientalism, this thesis contends that Cleopatra's reception was not simply a projection of western fantasies about the orient, but a dynamic site where intersecting discourses of gender, race, and empire were contested and reimaged.

The New Woman

Cleopatra's dynastic liaisons with Rome's most powerful men, her role as a pharaoh with masculine authority, and her willingness to cross-dress (as invented by Shakespeare), ride into battle, and partake in incest and fratricide, all while being a devoted mother and wife, challenged traditional *fin-de-siècle* conventions of gender and sexuality. Egyptologist Joann Fletcher notes that there are only twelve known female pharaohs, many of whom were marginalised or overlooked in the historical records of their time.³¹ This rarity made Cleopatra's role as a female pharaoh especially prominent, even in the context of ancient Egypt. At the *fin de siècle*, 'New Women and Aesthetes redefined the meaning of femininity and masculinity', while the words 'feminism' and 'homosexuality' first came into use.³² In the hundreds of New Women fictions produced in the

³¹ John Boudreau, 'Egyptian Female Pharaohs Rule', *Hamilton College*, 30 March 2012, <<https://www.hamilton.edu/news/story/egyptian-female-pharaohs-rule>> [accessed 20 July 2024]. See also., Joann Fletcher, *Cleopatra the Great: The Woman Behind the Legend* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2009).

³² Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, p. 3.

late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the New Woman was a ‘feminist activist, a social reformer, a popular novelist, a suffragette playwright, [and] a woman poet’.³³ In Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), the New Woman protagonist refuses to consummate her marriage out of fear of contracting syphilis from her promiscuous husband, asserting that women are ‘free agents’, ‘not [...] property’.³⁴ In Mona Caird’s *Daughters of Danaus* (1894), she describes motherhood as a ‘veritable curse’ that hinders women’s ambitions and in Egerton’s ‘The Spell of the White Elf’ (1897), she yearns to ‘have a child [...] without a husband or the disgrace’.³⁵ Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s utopian novel *Herland* (1915) even imagines the ‘health and peace and happy industry’ that could exist in a matriarchal society.³⁶ In the countless novels depicting the New Woman, two archetypes emerged: the ‘sexual liberationist’ and the ‘social purist’.³⁷ Grand, a bestselling feminist author who popularised the term ‘New Woman’ in 1894, predominantly promoted social purity, while Kate Chopin and Egerton advocated for women’s sexual liberation. The heroine of Chopin’s short story ‘An Egyptian Cigarette’ (1900) dreams that she is having a passionate love affair with an Arab Sheikh in the desert, and even contemplates suicide when he abandons her.³⁸ Her longing for an Eastern man suggests that the New Woman’s sexual appetite can lead to interracial relationships that threaten racial boundaries. Similarly, the heroine of Egerton’s ‘A Cross Line’ (1893) imagines that she is ‘Cleopatra sailing down to meet Antony’, when she is a discontent housewife travelling to indulge in her lover’s body.³⁹ As Egerton’s heroine engages in a sensual love affair without punishment, her embodiment of Cleopatra’s sexuality threatens the

³³ Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 1.

³⁴ Sarah Grand, *The Heavenly Twins* (New York: Cassell Publishing, 1893), p. 116.

³⁵ Mona Caird, *The Daughters of Danaus*, ed. Margaret Morganroth Gullette (New York: City University of New York, 1989), p. 319. See also, George Egerton, ‘The Spell of the White Elf’, in *Keynotes* (London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1893), pp. 76-98 (p. 88).

³⁶ Charlotte Perkin Gilman, *Herland and Related Writings*, ed. by Seth Sutton-Ramspeck (Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2013), p. 154.

³⁷ Sharla Hutchinson, ‘Marie Corelli’s Ziska’, *Monsters and Monstrosity from the Fin de Siècle to the Millennium: New Essays*, ed. by Sharla Hutchinson and Rebecca A. Brown (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2015), pp. 29-18 (p. 31).

³⁸ Kate Chopin, ‘An Egyptian Cigarette’, in *Daughters of Decadence: Stories by Women Writers of the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 2016), pp. 1-5 (p. 1).

³⁹ George Egerton, ‘A Cross Line’, *Keynotes* (London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1893), pp. 9-44 (p. 26).

conventional structures of Victorian society. In response to what they interpreted as a challenge to patriarchal culture, academics, authors, and physicians labelled women advocating for access to professional employment, university education, and suffrage as ‘mentally disturbed’, while satirical magazines like *Punch* ridiculed them by presenting them as hideous bicycle-riding, trouser-wearing, book-reading, masculine women.⁴⁰ In this thesis, I demonstrate that the complexity of Cleopatra’s perceived sexuality allowed women poets and authors to explore the endless possibilities of female liberation, while at the same time allowing male authors, poets, and playwrights to explore their anxieties surrounding unhindered female sensuality.

Cleopatra’s Cultural Reception

Contemporary scholars have examined how Cleopatra’s image has been continuously reinterpreted across various cultural and historical contexts, reflecting changing attitudes toward race, gender, and power. Lucy Hughes-Hallett’s *Cleopatra: Histories, Dreams and Distortions* (1991) explores the diverse forms of ‘dream-Cleopstras’ which stem from Cleopatra’s legend.⁴¹ Hughes-Hallett creates an extensive narrative surrounding Cleopatra by using Graeco-Roman historical sources before exploring Cleopatra as a lover, woman, queen, foreigner, killer, and child. Her analysis focuses extensively on Shaw’s *Caesar and Cleopatra*, while also touching on other sources central to this study: Sarah Bernhardt’s and Constance Collier’s theatrical performances, Shakespeare’s and Sardou’s plays, Ebers’s (1894) and Haggard’s (1889) novels, Arthur Symonds’s dramatic verse *Cleopatra in Judaea* (1916), and Alma-Tadema’s oil painting *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra*. While Hughes-Hallett refers to these materials to demonstrate how Cleopatra’s diverse image was formed, I foreground them to demonstrate how they not only reflect on Cleopatra herself, but

⁴⁰ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Penguin, 1987), p. 145.

⁴¹ Hughes-Hallett, p. 11.

also on the society and era in which they were created. For instance, while Hughes-Hallett refers to Haggard's and Ebers's respective Cleopatra novels to illustrate Cleopatra being perceived as a foreigner, analysing these texts with female readers in mind, as I do in this thesis, shows that the authors reshaped their Cleopatras into modern women with an appeal to a particular section of the literary market. This transformation aimed to resonate with British, European, and American audiences, allowing them to fantasise about emancipation through fictional Cleopatra narratives. Examining these representations reveals not only the fluidity of Cleopatra's image but also the evolving aspirations and anxieties of the society that produced them.

Margaret Miles's *Cleopatra: A Sphinx Revisited* (2011) comprises essays that explore various aspects of Cleopatra's life, death, and legacy, while highlighting the interactions between popular culture and historical narratives.⁴² Among the essays are Margaret Mary DeMaria Smith's analysis of Alma-Tadema's *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra*, in which she intentionally refrains from employing the framework of Orientalism to explore his paintings, as well as Maria Wyke and Dominic Montserrat's investigation of how Cleopatra's representation in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century mass culture shaped her portrayal in twentieth-century film.⁴³ In this thesis, I argue that Cleopatra's image has not only been shaped by the evolving cultural and historical narratives of the *fin de siècle* but has also actively influenced them. I build upon Smith's work by examining the Egyptian elements in the paintings of Alma-Tadema, Collier, and Waterhouse without applying Said's theory of Orientalism. This approach allows for a nuanced exploration of empire, race, gender, and sexuality that transcends representations of Egypt as inferior. Additionally, I expand on Wyke and Montserrat's work by analysing Cleopatra's presence in mass culture through *fin de siècle* theatre, oil paintings, novels, short stories, and poems, emphasising how

⁴² Margaret Miles, *Cleopatra: A Sphinx Revisited* (London: University of California Press, 2011).

⁴³ Margaret Mary DeMaria Smith, 'HRH Cleopatra: The Last of the Ptolemies and the Egyptian Paintings of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema', in *Cleopatra: A Sphinx Revisited*, ed. by Margaret Miles (London: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 150-171. See also., Maria Wyke and Dominic Montserrat 'Glamour Girls: Cleomania in Mass Culture', in *Cleopatra: A Sphinx Revisited*, ed. by Margaret Miles (London: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 172-194.

these mediums contribute to her complex image beyond the realm of twentieth century film. By examining various mediums, I demonstrate how Cleopatra's contradictory biography serves as both an inspiration and catalyst for discussions of gender, sexuality, race, and empire, profoundly impacting perceptions of societal roles and individual identities. This contribution offers new insights into how Cleopatra's representation has dynamically influenced cultural discourse, offering a fresh perspective on her enduring influence.

Molly Youngkin has discussed how women writers in Victorian Britain used Cleopatra as a 'representative of Egyptian women'.⁴⁴ In *British Women Writers and the Reception of Ancient Egypt* (2016), Youngkin explores the fictional Cleopatra through Michael Field's drama *Queen Mariamne* (1908) and Elinor Glyn's erotic romance novel *Three Weeks* (1907). She contends that contemporary women could see themselves in the 'positive' aspects of Cleopatra. Furthermore, in her analysis of late nineteenth-century adaptations of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* in her essay 'The Culminating Flower of Cat-Worship in Egypt' (2020), Youngkin discusses how modern British women asserted their desire for 'emancipation from old laws about marriage and family' through their understanding of Cleopatra as a 'lover and a mother' who 'captured the duality of [...] Victorian womanhood'.⁴⁵ Youngkin's work highlights how Victorian women writers leveraged the figure of Cleopatra to reflect and challenge contemporary notions of womanhood, using her as a symbol of empowerment in their quest for emancipation and self-definition. Youngkin's research provides a crucial framework for understanding the gendered dimensions of my thesis. Her work highlights how prominent female figures, such as poets Michael Field, as well as actresses Sarah Bernhardt and Constance Collier, used Cleopatra to offer women insights into their societal roles and explore potential challenges to these functions. My analysis builds on Youngkin's insight

⁴⁴ Molly Youngkin, *British Women Writers and the Reception of Ancient Egypt, 1840-1910: Imperialist Representations of Egyptian Women* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 145.

⁴⁵ Molly Youngkin, "'The Culminating Flower of Cat-Worship in Egypt': Nineteenth-Century State Cleopatras and Victorian Views of Ancient Egypt", in *Victorian Literary Culture and Ancient Egypt*, ed. Eleanor Dobson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp. 114-138 (p. 115).

by examining not only these well-known figures but also lesser-known contributors such as poets Alice Dacre Mackay and Julia Clinton Jones, and writers Nelly Sawyer and Mary Sheffey Peters. By incorporating these additional sources, I expand upon Youngkin's claims about Cleopatra's role as a symbol through which women could imagine empowerment and freedom. My work demonstrates how Cleopatra serves as a versatile figure in both celebrated and obscure texts, reinforcing and complicating the narratives of female agency that Youngkin identifies. The fact that women actively engaged with Cleopatra narratives – both as consumers, by reading novels and watching plays, and as creators, by producing poems and short stories – demonstrates that Cleopatra served as a potent figure for women's fantasies. Through Cleopatra, women explored and expressed their desires for power, beauty, and independence in various forms. Cleopatra's enduring appeal highlights her role as a symbol through which women could imagine and articulate aspirations that were often constrained by the societal norms of their time. This analysis also addresses racial elements, emphasising how white women writers, through their portrayals of Cleopatra, engaged with and uplifted women of colour. In some instances, these writers even explored radical ideas of crossing racial boundaries by envisioning themselves as oriental women.

Cleopatra's impact on nineteenth-century culture has been discussed at length in an American context by Scott Trafton (2004) and Charmaine Nelson (2007).⁴⁶ American critics explore nineteenth-century representations of Cleopatra as a by-product of the race question. In nineteenth-century America, the Ptolemies' racial ambiguity meant that pro-slavery scholars could argue that Cleopatra and 'the upper classes of Egypt were [...] Caucasian', while African American civil rights activists could contend that Egypt was a 'African civilisation whose accomplishments had surpassed the white civilizations of Greece and Rome'.⁴⁷ In *Characteristically American* (2014), Joy Giguere argues that 'ancient Egypt infiltrated the everyday cultural environment and

⁴⁶ Charmaine Nelson, *The Color of Stone: Sculpting the Black Female Subject in Nineteenth-Century America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

⁴⁷ Ann Fabian, *The Skull Collectors: Race, Science, and America's Unburied Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 107.

contributed to the shaping of American understandings of both the ancient past as well as contemporary western society'.⁴⁸ Similarly, Trafton argues that nineteenth-century Egyptian-inspired narratives produced in America, such as Charles T. White's *The Virginny Mummy* (1830), stemmed from cultural anxieties about race.⁴⁹ In his analysis of Edmonia Lewis's sculpture *Cleopatra* (1876), Trafton states that her sculpture occupied the spaces between 'power, gender, sexuality, and race', and made her observers wonder whether she was 'masculine or feminine, queen or whore, civilized or savage, Greek or Egyptian, white or black'.⁵⁰ While Trafton and Nelson explore gender and sexuality through the lens of American racial politics, this thesis's exploration of forgotten nineteenth-century poems reveals that white American women, even those who had benefited from the slave trade, could see themselves in Cleopatra despite her racial ambiguity. However, the representation of Cleopatra in these poems is not monolithic. While poets like Clarke and Jones celebrate Cleopatra's allure and power, Martha Dickinson Bianchi's critique of her vanity introduces a contrasting perspective. This variety indicates that Cleopatra served as a complex figure through which white American women navigated their societal roles and the potential of female sensuality, while also engaging in critical reflections on her character. Thus, the narratives surrounding Cleopatra encapsulate both admiration and critique, reflecting the diverse responses of women to her multifaceted identity. By analysing *fin-de-siècle* depictions of Cleopatra, I build on existing historical, classical, Egyptological, and literary scholarship to explore evolving attitudes toward gender, sexuality, race, and empire in Britain, Europe, and North America.

Thesis Overview

⁴⁸ Joy Giguere, *Characteristically American: Memorial Architecture, National Identity, and the Egyptian Revival* (Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 2014), p. 47.

⁴⁹ Scott Trafton, *Egypt Land: Race and Nineteenth-Century American Egyptomania* (Durham: Duke University press, 2004), p. 123.

⁵⁰ Trafton, p. 168.

Through an exploration of Cleopatra's contradictory nature in diverse artistic mediums, this study argues that each form contributes in different ways to the exploration of shifting perceptions of gender, sexuality, and race. As each medium is produced by distinct creatives with varying audiences in mind, an exploration of theatrical productions, oil paintings, short stories, novels, and poems reveal how different social classes, genders, and sexual orientations engaged with Cleopatra. For example, short stories published in periodicals were aimed at a middle-class readership, primarily targeting young women, and Decadent prose was typically accessed by an elite few who believed in 'art for art's sake'. Exploring dramas, oil paintings, novels, short stories, and poems individually also resurfaces overlooked narratives, some of which were immensely popular in their time. Ebers's *Cleopatra*, for example, was extremely well received, immediately translated into English, and published in Europe, North America, and Britain, yet little contemporary academic engagement with the novel exists. Similarly, while Clarke's 'Cleopatra's Soliloquy' (1877) has been completely forgotten, the poem was extremely popular amongst American women and was republished numerous times. An exploration of forgotten narratives that were popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries allows for a more nuanced investigation of the period. By exploring the complexity of Cleopatra in *fin-de-siècle* culture, this thesis demonstrates that Cleopatra was a vehicle to explore new fluid understandings of gender, sexuality, and race, as she reflected broader societal debates surrounding racial difference, the state of empires, women's changing space in society, and the shifting definitions of femininity and masculinity.

Chapter One examines theatrical portrayals of Cleopatra on the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century stage. By analysing the scripts of Sardou's *Cléopâtre*, Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*, and Tree's revision of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, along with contemporary critical reviews, photographs, illustrations, and publicity stills, I demonstrate how *fin-de-siècle* creatives employed Cleopatra to explore themes of empire via gender and sexuality. Sardou's *Cléopâtre*, commissioned for Sarah Bernhardt, was immensely popular, drawing crowds of women each evening despite the

language barrier. Tree's *Antony and Cleopatra*, featuring Constance Collier as the pharaoh, showcased magnificent set designs and costumes by Percy Macquoid, achieving great commercial success at His Majesty's Theatre in London in 1906 and 1907, and at the State Theatre in Berlin at the request of the German Emperor. Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*, starring Gertrude Elliott in Johnston Forbes-Robertson's 1906-1907 production, enjoyed success in New York, Europe, and London. Sardou's Cleopatra is a sensual, charming, and authoritative imperial leader embodying female power, Collier's Cleopatra is a fertile and sensual woman controlling the fate of empires, and Shaw's Cleopatra is a naive child. Each portrayal reflects contemporary anxieties and fascinations with female authority, as well as the shifting dynamics of imperial power. To gain a comprehensive understanding of how each dramatist depicts the complex character of Cleopatra, I analyse the costumes worn by Bernhardt, Collier, and Elliott in their portrayals of the pharaoh, and how these, combined with jewellery and cosmetics, contribute to the nuanced portrayal of Cleopatra's racial identity and, by extension, that of the actresses. This analysis draws on stage directions, periodical reviews, illustrations, paintings, and photographs to inform a well-rounded understanding of text and performance. In examining these diverse portrayals of Cleopatra, I illustrate how costume design serves as a crucial lens for understanding the intersection of female leadership, imperial ambitions, and oriental allure on the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century stage. These varied portrayals highlight Cleopatra's versatility and demonstrate how *fin-de-siècle* dramatists and actresses used her image to engage with and critique contemporary issues of gender, sexuality, and imperialism.

Chapter Two focuses on the oil paintings of Alma-Tadema, Waterhouse, and John Collier, revealing that *fin-de-siècle* artists portrayed Cleopatra as a pharaoh to explore female power in traditionally masculine roles. Alma-Tadema incorporated archaeological elements to create detailed portrayals of Cleopatra, including *Cleopatra* (1875, Fig. 0.3) and *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883). Collier and Waterhouse, influenced by Alma-Tadema and Pre-Raphaelitism,

produced works such as *The Death of Cleopatra* (1890, Fig. 0.4) and *Cleopatra* (1888), respectively. Their representations of Cleopatra as a powerful ruler were shaped by British imperialism and comparisons to Queen Victoria. Unlike French artists who depicted Cleopatra more erotically, British artists highlighted her dignity and power, using archaeologically informed settings and costumes to avoid sexualised portrayals. This nuanced representation aligns Cleopatra with contemporary monarchs and contrasts with orientalist depictions that highlight female sexuality and the exoticism of the Orient. Alma-Tadema's *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra*, Waterhouse's *Cleopatra*, and Collier's *The Death of Cleopatra* all drew on Shakespeare's depiction of Cleopatra, showcasing her dual nature as a powerful ruler and an alluring woman. These artworks presented Cleopatra with dignity and authority, reflecting the cultural reassessment of female power at the *fin de siècle*. My analysis examines the interplay of femininity, masculinity, authority, and empire through the lens of archaeology, gender ambiguity, and animal imagery in *fin-de-siecle* British oil paintings, while also considering earlier works and influential pieces by French, Italian, and Spanish artists in the anglophone world. Although I do not analyse Alma-Tadema, Waterhouse, and Collier as feminist painters, their portrayal of Cleopatra as a pharaoh evokes images of female power, reflecting the potential of modern women. This perspective reveals how art both mirrored and shaped contemporary views on gender and leadership at the turn of the century.

Chapter Three explores the novel form through Haggard's *Cleopatra: Being an Account of the Fall and Vengeance of Harmachis* (1889) and Ebers's *Cleopatra: A Romance* (1894) with a focus on female readers, to demonstrate that popular novelists employed Egypt's final pharaoh to investigate the woman question. As Haggard's imperial romances have been commonly interpreted as misogynistic books for boys, I turn to his two-volume autobiography *The Days of my Life* (1926), archives at Norfolk Record Office, and literary articles to demonstrate that women, including feminist activists, read and enjoyed his novels, and that he wrote with female readers in mind. Reading *Cleopatra* with Haggard's female readership in consideration suggests that the narrative

transcends beyond the depiction of Cleopatra as a *femme fatale*, instead serving as a satirical exploration of the anxieties faced by the New Woman's opponents. Harmachis, the novel's unreliable male narrator, is portrayed as a victim of his own sexual passions and weaknesses, which prevent him from achieving his goals. Haggard uses Harmachis's failure, I claim, to highlight the risks of viewing women through a lens of fear and misogyny. Ebers's historical novel, meanwhile, portrays Cleopatra as a deeply sympathetic figure, focusing on her intellectual prowess, maternal devotion, and struggles following the Battle of Actium. Ebers presents Cleopatra not just as a ruler but as a highly educated and loving mother, challenging contemporary views that education impairs a woman's maternal role. Both novels, therefore, serve as vehicles for reevaluating Cleopatra's positive qualities. In Ebers's work, this is achieved through a straightforward depiction of Cleopatra's virtues, whereas in Haggard's text, it is accomplished by exposing misogynistic perspectives through the lens of a deeply flawed male character. Together, Haggard's and Ebers's portrayals of Cleopatra provide rich, nuanced insights into the complexities of gender and power. Through Haggard's critical lens on female sensual autonomy and Ebers's sympathetic portrayal of Cleopatra's multifaceted identity, both authors engage with and challenge contemporary attitudes toward women. These novels, while reflecting their authors' varying perspectives, collectively offer a space for female readers to explore and question the limitations imposed by their own society, thereby contributing to a broader discourse on gender and empowerment.

While Haggard's and Ebers's works were aimed at the novel-reading woman, Chapter Four explores women's potential to write through short stories by female authors. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, contemporary short stories alluding to Cleopatra emerged, portraying her as a symbol of power and independence. Stories like M. K. D.'s 'Cleopatra', Peters's 'The Egyptian Amulet', Egerton's 'A Cross Line', and Sawyer's *The Egyptian Ring* depict modern women adopting Cleopatra's persona to explore themes of self-determination and defiance against societal norms. Unlike earlier portrayals of Cleopatra as a dangerous seductress, these modern

narratives emphasise female sovereignty and sexuality through the Cleopatra archetype, demonstrating how her myth was used to navigate and challenge the constraints imposed on women. In M. K. D.'s 'Cleopatra', a young woman emulates Cleopatra to defy her father's wishes and elope, challenging Victorian patriarchal ideals. This mirrors Cleopatra's assassination of family members to pursue her own romantic choices. Her rebellion underscores the potential for women to gain autonomy within the domestic space by rejecting societal expectations and patriarchal authority. Peters's 'The Egyptian Amulet' features Berenice Labordie, who imitates Cleopatra to assert her independence from marriage, immersing herself in Egyptian culture to seek freedom. Her obsession leads to possession by a vengeful demon who forces her into marriage. However, rather than serving as a warning against defying patriarchal authority, this outcome critiques the very restrictions on women's freedom. Published in a women's magazine by an educated writer, the narrative exposes marriage as a mechanism that stifles female autonomy, with the possession symbolising the oppressive forces of patriarchy. Egerton's 'A Cross Line' suggests that modern women, like Cleopatra, inherently possess sensual and untamed qualities. Sawyer's *The Egyptian Ring* features Cleo Patrick and Mark Anthony as reincarnations of Cleopatra and Antony. Cleo is portrayed as the ideal mother and wife – beautiful, intelligent and nurturing, but not overtly sensual or vain – challenging contemporary views on women's education, maternity, and purity, like Ebers's *Cleopatra*. Cleopatra's evolving representation via the modern heroines of short stories highlights the interplay between female identity and societal expectations, illustrating how the myth of Cleopatra was reinterpreted to empower women and critique contemporaneous constraints.

Chapter Five illustrates that Cleopatra was extensively explored in *fin-de-siècle* poetry, as her transgressive nature enabled poets to engage with female sensuality without facing societal backlash. Her widespread appeal among both male and female poets indicate a broad acceptance of Cleopatra as a symbol of sexual liberation. The Decadent movement, which prioritised beauty and pleasure over morality, provided an ideal backdrop for depicting Cleopatra as a transcendent

femme fatale. In Wilde's *The Sphinx* (1894), Michael Field's *Queen Mariamne*, and Symonds's *Cleopatra in Judaea*, Cleopatra is portrayed as a seductive, immoral, and destructive figure, embodying the Decadent ideals of sensuality and degeneration. Women also explored themes of sexuality and defiance through verse about Cleopatra. Clarke's 'Cleopatra's Soliloquy', Jones's 'Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra' (1889), and Bianchi's 'To Cleopatra's Mummy' (1898), address female power, cruelty, sensuality, and lust. These works are notable for their examination of female desire by bourgeois American women who, despite societal constraints, challenged conservative values. Although coming from privileged backgrounds, these poets pursued careers and financial independence, using their writing to critique societal norms and advocate for women's rights. Their Cleopatra-themed poetry enabled them to engage with transgressive ideas without directly affiliating with the Decadent movement. This section also examines MacKay's poem 'Antony to Cleopatra' (1896) alongside Arthur Buckland's accompanying illustrations which were published in *Pall Mall Magazine*, to explore the interconnectivity of poetry and art, as famously discussed by Walter Pater in *The Renaissance* (1873). These poems reveal that Cleopatra's association with female transgression made discussing female sexuality culturally acceptable, allowing poets beyond avant-garde circles to tackle provocative subjects. Cleopatra's role as a symbol of transgressive femininity in *fin-de-siecle* poetry reflects the era's fascination with the intersection of sensuality and immorality, highlighting how poets, regardless of their affiliations, utilised her mythic persona to challenge and reframe discussions of female sexuality and power.

Cleopatra's portrayal in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theatre, art, and literature reflect shifting attitudes toward gender, imperialism, and female power. Examining theatrical representations, oil paintings, novels, and poetry reveals multifaceted portrayals of Cleopatra's character, ranging from a sensual seductress to a powerful pharaoh. These diverse depictions, whether through elaborate stage productions or avant-garde poems, demonstrate how Cleopatra became a lens for upholding and critiquing Western culture. This comprehensive

analysis highlights the enduring complexity of Cleopatra as a symbol, revealing how her myth was harnessed to address pressing issues of the *fin de siècle*, including the increasingly distorted perception of gender and race, as well as the intersection of sexuality and power. All these narratives explore Cleopatra's racial identity and varying degrees of female power, with each genre presenting a distinct interpretation of the queen. To quote Shakespeare, Cleopatra at the *fin de siècle* is one of 'infinite variety'.⁵¹

⁵¹ William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Washington Square Press, 1999), II. 2. 275.

Chapter One

Performing Cleopatra: Gender, Sexuality, and Empire on the *Fin-de-Siècle* Stage

An examination of Victorien Sardou's (1831-1908) *Cléopâtre* (1890) starring Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923), Bernard Shaw's (1856-1950) *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1898) starring Gertrude Elliott (1874-1950), and Herbert Beerbohm Tree's (1853-1917) 1906-1907 adaptation of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607) starring Constance Collier (1878-1955), reveals that *fin-de-siècle* dramatists used Cleopatra to examine nineteenth-century concerns regarding empire through facets of gender and sexuality. Tree's *Antony and Cleopatra* explores the intense relationship between Mark Antony and the queen of Egypt, culminating in their suicides after their defeat at Actium. Sardou's *Cléopâtre* follows a similar plot but includes new scenes in Tarsus, Actium, and Alexandria, where Cleopatra strategically manipulates Antony to advance her political ambitions. The play was commissioned by Bernhardt who, along with the American actress Fanny Davenport, 'paid Sardou over \$40,000 to write a vehicle for the new Cleopatra, a play called not *Antony and Cleopatra*, but *Cleopatra*'.¹ Bernhardt performed *Cléopâtre* for 'eighty consecutive nights in Paris', before performing successfully in both London and New York.² In contrast, Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* presents a young Cleopatra learning to rule from the wise Caesar.³ The play received negative reviews when it was first performed in 1899 in Newcastle upon Tyne and was not revived until Johnston Forbes-Robertson staged a performance in New York in 1906, and at the Savoy Theatre in London in 1907.⁴ All three plays were performed in prominent theatres favoured by middle- and upper-class

¹ Doris Adler, 'The Unlacing of Cleopatra', *Theatre Journal*, 34.4 (1982), pp. 450-466, p. 464.

² Ibid.

³ Although Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* was written and performed in 1898, it was first published in *Three Plays for Puritans* (1901) alongside *The Devil's Disciple* (1897) and *Arms and the Man* (1894). See., George Bernard Shaw, *Three Plays for Puritans* (London: Grant Richards, 1901).

⁴ Mrs. Patrick Campbell played Cleopatra in the 1899 production at the Theatre Royal, Newcastle. Shaw's wife, Charlotte Payne-Townshend, blamed Campbell for the play's failure, arguing that 'she made [Cleopatra] into a vampire instead of the innocent child being moulded into a Queen by wise and patient guidance'. While Shaw was discontent with the 1899 production, he took pride in the 1906-1907 performance, which starred Johnston Forbes-

audiences, showcasing the tastes of the elite. Therefore, analysing theatre reviews is crucial, as the wider public primarily accessed these plays in periodicals containing reviews, illustrations, and photographs. In this chapter, I examine the scripts of Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* and Tree's abridged *Antony and Cleopatra*, along with the English translation of Sardou's *Cléopâtre* script, in conjunction with *fin-de-siècle* critical reviews, illustrations, photographs, and publicity stills to demonstrate that *fin-de-siècle* plays featuring Cleopatra served as a medium to explore contemporary concerns regarding empire and gender.⁵ As dramatists utilised Cleopatra's portrayal to convey their political beliefs, embedding their views on imperialism, gender politics, and national identity within their narratives, Cleopatra emerged as a symbolic figure through which playwrights could critique the political climate of their time and advocate for change. Additionally, the performances of Cleopatra by star actresses influenced the public's understanding of the connection between sensuality and power, offering new perspectives on female empowerment. This chapter ultimately reveals how Cleopatra became a powerful tool for addressing and challenging complex issues of empire, gender, and power during the *fin de siècle*.

Cleopatra became a prominent figure on the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century stage because of the resurgence of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607). In *Shakespeare's Heroines* (1832), the Anglo-Irish art historian Anna Brownell Jameson observed that Shakespeare's Cleopatra was considered 'the real historical Cleopatra – the "rare Egyptian" – individualised and placed before us'.⁶ *Shakespeare's Heroines* was republished several times during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, thereby shaping *fin-de-siècle* perceptions of Shakespeare's female

Robertson as Caesar and his wife, Gertrude Elliott, as Cleopatra. See., Gale K. Larson "Caesar and Cleopatra": The Making of a History Play, *Shaw Review*, 14.2 (1971), pp. 73-89 (p. 76).

⁵ Tree's abridged version of *Antony and Cleopatra* begins with Shakespeare's Act 1, Scene 4, and then Act 1 Scene 1. Act 2 includes Scenes 2, 5, 6, and 7. Act 3 includes Scenes 4, 6, 7, and 9. In the absence of a fifth act, Act 4 begins with Shakespeare's Scene 5, moves to Scene 3, and then merges Act 4, Scene 15 with Act 5, Scene 2. When referring to Tree's production, I will source his abridged version of *Antony and Cleopatra*. However, when I am talking about Shakespeare's play generally, I will use a scholarly edition. See., William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra: As Arranged for the Stage by Herbert Beerbohm Tree*, ed. by Herbert Beerbohm Tree (London: Warrington, 1907).

⁶ Anna Jameson, *Shakespeare's Heroines: Characteristics of Women, Moral Poetical, and Historical* (New York: A. L. Burt Company, 1906), p. 253.

characters.⁷ The *Play Pictorial* enhanced their promotion of Tree's adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra* with an excerpt from Jameson's essay, where she argues that the 'contradictory elements' of Cleopatra's character are what make Shakespeare's portrayal of her 'real', such as:

her mental accomplishments, her unequalled grace, her woman's wit and woman's wiles, her irresistible allurements, her starts of irregular grandeur, her bursts of ungovernable temper, her vivacity of imagination, her petulant caprice, her fickleness and her falsehood, her tenderness and her truth, her childish susceptibility to flattery, her magnificent spirit, her royal pride.⁸

Sardou and Tree each delve into the 'infinite variety' of Shakespeare's Cleopatra in their plays, showcasing her capacity for love, motherhood, sensuality, kindness, and malevolence. In contrast, Shaw intentionally depicted his Cleopatra as the opposite of Shakespeare's heroine, as he was 'disgusted' by Shakespeare's sexualised depiction of the queen. Shaw was critical of Shakespeare because he believed that 'no man [...] should become so sacred an institution that even the slightest adverse criticism would be considered slanderous and intolerable'.⁹ Although Sardou and Tree explored the contradictory nature of Shakespeare's Cleopatra, they were both criticised by the periodical press. As Shaw warned, Shakespeare's ubiquitous Cleopatra was so well accepted that any minor departure from the original script was worthy of condemnation. Although Tree uses Shakespeare's script, he 'omits some portions' to make room for scenic display.¹⁰ Performed at His Majesty's Theatre, Tree's production was so successful that for the 'fifteenth consecutive performance', he gifted the audience with a luxurious edition of his adaptation of Shakespeare's

⁷ Anne E. Russell, "'History and Real Life': Anna Jameson, *Shakespeare's Heroines* and Victorian Women', *Victorian Review*, 17.2 (1991), pp. 35-49 (p. 35).

⁸ 'Antony and Cleopatra', *Play Pictorial*, 9.54 (1 February 1907), pp. 225-252 (p. 250).

⁹ Gale K. Larson, p. 73.

¹⁰ Herbert Beerbohm Tree, 'Foreword', in *Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra: As Arranged for the Stage by Herbert Beerbohm Tree* (London: Warrington, 1907), pp. 5-6 (p. 5).

play. In the foreword, Tree stated that Cleopatra was ‘the greatest courtesan that ever [...] ruled and undid empires and emperors’.¹¹ By depicting Cleopatra’s death in a monument instead of her palace, Tree undermines her political strength, portraying her more as a destroyer of empires than as an empress. Similarly, Sardou diverges from Shakespeare by opening the play in Tarsus, where Cleopatra uses her sensuality to manipulate Antony into becoming her willing captive. After discovering Antony’s marriage to Octavia, she travels to him, initiating the Battle of Actium by forcing him to choose between her and Octavia. She then ensures his soldiers remain loyal by using her knowledge of meteorology to convince them she controls the storm gods. Ultimately, while Tree’s adaptation undermines Cleopatra’s political authority by emphasising her role as a seductress, Sardou’s portrayal heightens her power, highlighting her strategic prowess and capacity for command. While many *fin de siècle* adaptations of Shakespeare’s play emerged, including Cora Brown-Potter’s influential 1889 portrayal and Lillie Langtry’s popular 1890 performance, I focus on Sardou’s *Cléopâtre*, Tree’s adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra*, and Shaw’s *Caesar and Cleopatra* because they are distinct plays that reflect broader ideological concerns of the *fin de siècle* while engaging with Shakespeare’s legacy in ways that set them apart as unique dramatic works. Sardou and Tree’s plays exemplify how late nineteenth-century theatre both embraced and reshaped Shakespeare’s Cleopatra, with Sardou accentuating her political acumen and Tree prioritising spectacle over textual fidelity. Meanwhile, Shaw’s rejection of Shakespeare’s depiction provides a counterpoint, reimagining Cleopatra as a naive young woman. Collectively, these plays offer contrasting perspectives on Cleopatra’s agency while engaging with evolving discourses on gender, race, and historical representation.

Contemporary scholars have approached Sardou’s *Cléopâtre*, Shaw’s *Caesar and Cleopatra*, and Tree’s adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra* through various lenses. Shaw’s *Caesar and Cleopatra* is primarily interpreted as a ‘platform’ for articulating his views on puritanism and socialism.¹²

¹¹ Ibid., p. 5.

¹² Gordon W. Couchman, *This Our Caesar: A Study of Bernard Shaw’s Caesar and Cleopatra* (Hague: Mouton, 1973), p.

15. See also, Elsie B. Adams, ‘Shaw’s Caesar and Cleopatra: Decadent Barely Averted’, *Shaw Review*, 18.2 (1975), pp.

However, Lucy Hughes-Hallett presents a contrasting perspective, arguing that Shaw transforms Cleopatra from a ‘scholar, administrator and empire-builder’ into a ‘desexualised’ ‘bimbo/baby’, to encourage his male audience to ‘laugh’ at the ‘inferior’ oriental woman ‘without fear’.¹³ My argument intersects with Hughes-Hallett’s exploration of Shaw’s disempowerment of Cleopatra by analysing how Elliott’s costumes depict her as a ‘girl’ in need of male guidance.¹⁴ However, while Hughes-Hallett emphasises Shaw’s outspoken distain for manipulative female sexuality, I also explore how his socialist beliefs shaped his representation of Cleopatra. By focusing on both Shaw’s socialist ideology and his infantilisation of Cleopatra, I engage with two predominant interpretative approaches to his work, uniting them to analyse *fin-de-siècle* society. This chapter builds on existing scholarship to demonstrate that Shaw’s portrayal of Cleopatra as a youthful and vulnerable imperial figure complicates her image, intertwining gender and political agency in ways that reflect his ideologies and broader *fin-de-siècle* understandings of gender and imperialism. In contrast, Sardou’s *Cléopâtre* and Tree’s adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra* have primarily been analysed in relation to the celebrity status of their leading actresses, as well as the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fascination with the ancient world, reflected in historically informed Egyptian set designs and costumes.¹⁵ Building on Jean-Marcel Humbert’s exploration of how ‘ancient Egyptian themes found expression on stage’ by merging the ‘public’s idea of Egypt and the tastes of the day’, this thesis uses the term ‘archaeologically informed’ to describe scenery,

79-82. See also, Timothy G. Vesonder, ‘Shaw’s Caesar and the Mythic Hero’, *Shaw Review*, 21.2 (1978), pp. 72-79. See also, Charles A. Berst ‘The Anatomy of Greatness in “Caesar and Cleopatra”’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 68.1 (1969), pp. 74-91. See also, John A. Bertolini, ‘Shaw’s Ironic View of Caesar’, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 27.4 (1981), pp. 331-342. See also, Daniel J. Leary, ‘The Moral Dialectic in “Caesar and Cleopatra”’, *Shaw Review*, 5.2 (1962), pp. 42-53. See also, Maurice Jacques Valency, *The Cart and the Trumpet: The Plays of George Bernard Shaw* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

¹³ Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *Cleopatra: Histories, Dreams and Distortions* (London: Vintage, 1991), pp. 312, 328.

¹⁴ In her analysis of George Pascal’s 1946 film of Shaw’s *Caesar and Cleopatra*, Francesca Royster also explores Cleopatra as a ‘child’, arguing that Caesar’s quest to turn Cleopatra into a woman ‘enacts the adventure of imperialism: founding a nation, founding a people and making history in the body of a girl’. See, Francesca T. Royster, *Becoming Cleopatra: The Shifting Image of an Icon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 122.

¹⁵ See, Sharon Marcus, *The Drama of Celebrity* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019). See also, Gregory N. Daugherty, *The Reception of Cleopatra in the Age of Mass Media* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023). See also, Jeffrey Richards, *The Ancient World on the Victorian and Edwardian Stage* (New York: Macmillan, 2009). See also, Rosemary Barrow, ‘Toga Plays and Tableaux Vivants: Theatre and Painting on London’s Late-Victorian and Edwardian Popular Stage’, *Theatre Journal*, 62.2 (2010), pp. 209-226.

costumes, and adornments designed in consultation with Egyptologists and archaeological sources to reflect the perceived tastes of ancient Egyptians.¹⁶ These designs not only represent what *fin-de-siècle* creatives believed Cleopatra wore, but also reveal the intersection of archaeology and mass culture, embodying the tastes, desires, and anxieties of the era. Suzanne Osmond's 'Her Infinite Variety' (2011) is a crucial source for this chapter's exploration of costume. Osmond demonstrates that 'performance costume' is a 'rich site' for interrogating 'contemporary notions of identity', as 'costume and appearance' 'normalise the audiences' 'cultural assumptions about race, gender, and the "other"'.¹⁷ Building upon Osmond's work, I analyse how theatrical costumes serve as expressions of individual identity while simultaneously shaping and challenging contemporary societal norms regarding gender and power dynamics. Theatre offered opportunities for female empowerment, while enabling female audiences to engage with depictions of sensuality, power, and autonomy. This chapter explores fashion articles, photographs, and illustrations of Bernhardt, Collier, and Elliott in Cleopatra costumes to investigate how their attires reflect femininity, power, and empire, and how they captivated audiences, which, in Bernhardt's case, was predominantly female.

This chapter also builds upon Molly Youngkin's 'The Culminating Flower of Cat-Worship in Egypt' (2020) and Doris Adler's 'The Unlacing of Cleopatra' (1982). Adler notes that 'for over a hundred years Cleopatra swept the stage in the elegant fashions of the day' until Cora Potter 'created the first completely unlaced Cleopatra' in 1889 by wearing archaeologically inspired Egyptian costumes which reflected broader trends in Victorian staging.¹⁸ Although her primary focus is on the reception of Potter's exoticised performance of Cleopatra, Adler notes that Bernhardt, Langtry, and Davenport 'copied' 'her entrance, her makeup, and her hair'.¹⁹ Building

¹⁶ Jean-Marcel Humbert, 'Ancient Egypt on Stage from Bonaparte's Military Campaign up to the Present Time', *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections*, 8 (2016), pp. 26-48 (p. 26).

¹⁷ Suzanne Osmond, "'Her Infinite Variety': Representations of Shakespeare's Cleopatra in Fashion, Film and Theatre, *Film, Fashion & Consumption*, 1.1 (2012), pp. 55-79 (pp. 58, 75).

¹⁸ Adler, pp. 453, 457, 460.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 460.

on Adler's essay, I analyse the archaeological elements of Bernhardt's, Collier's, and Elliott's costumes to demonstrate that *fin-de-siècle* dramatists, costume designers, and actresses used Egyptian symbolism to portray the complexity of their Cleopatra – a complexity which she shared with contemporary women. Youngkin examines 'cultural influences on Victorian views concerning ancient Egypt, as reflected in reviews of Bernhardt's and Langtry's portrayals of Cleopatra in the periodical press'.²⁰ Langtry's performance directly competed with Bernhardt's, and like Cleopatra, Langtry had a scandalous affair with a future emperor, Edward VII. However, I focus solely on Bernhardt's portrayal because *Cléopâtre* was created specifically for her, making it an original *fin-de-siècle* play that was tailored to Bernhardt's predominantly female fanbase. Bernhardt's performance and Sardou's script more directly engaged female spectators, making her portrayal, stylisation, and reception central to this thesis's exploration of gender, sexuality, and empire. Youngkin also notes that *fin-de-siècle* Cleopatra plays responded to both "the Egyptian Question", which emerged after the 1882 British occupation of Egypt and involved debates over British imperialism and governance of Egypt, 'as well as "the Woman Question"'.²¹ My argument intersects with Molly Youngkin's work by building upon her analysis of Victorian views on Cleopatra, particularly regarding the intersection of empire and gender. While Youngkin examines how Bernhardt's and Langtry's portrayals of Cleopatra were shaped by contemporary discussions surrounding 'the Egyptian Question' and 'the Woman Question', with an emphasis on female sensuality and its connection to cat-worship, my analysis will delve further into representations of empire. I will achieve this by exploring the archaeologically informed elements of costumes worn by Bernhardt, Collier, and Elliott, along with their symbolic use of Egyptian motifs. By doing so, I demonstrate how these costume choices reflected and contributed to the complex portrayals of Cleopatra, which resonated with broader *fin-de-siècle* concerns about gender and imperialism. In essence, while

²⁰ Molly Youngkin, "The Culminating Flower of Cat-Worship in Egypt" Nineteenth-Century State Cleopatras and Victorian Views of Ancient Egypt', in *Victorian Literary Culture and Ancient Egypt*, ed. Eleanor Dobson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp. 114-138.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

Youngkin focuses on the cultural influences and the sensual aspects of Cleopatra's image, my work highlights how these portrayals visually and symbolically engage with the interconnected themes of empire and gender. This approach contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving attitudes towards both, during a period marked by increasing challenges to traditional gender roles and rising concerns about the stability and morality of imperialism.

'Empire of the Sun': Contrasting Visions of Female Leadership

Sardou's *Cléopâtre*, Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*, and Tree's *Antony and Cleopatra* each offer distinct interpretations of the final pharaoh of Egypt. Sardou portrays her as a seductive and cunning leader, Shaw presents her as a naive child devoid of sensuality, while Tree explores her 'infinite variety'. These diverse portrayals underscore the multifaceted nature of Cleopatra's character, reflecting each dramatist's perspectives on female leadership and empire. Sardou's play was produced for popular consumption following Britain's 1882 occupation of Egypt, Shaw's was penned near the end of Queen Victoria's reign, and Tree's was staged after her death. As Britain entered a new century with a new monarch, the stability of British imperial rule was in question, raising fears about the potential collapse of the Empire and its impact on the resilience of Western *status quo*.²² One prominent fear surrounding the Empire was the perceived danger of miscegenation. In *The Meaning of White* (2011), Satoshi Mizutani notes that miscegenation was feared to 'permanently leave an anomalous mixed-race population that must necessarily be weaker than the "pure European race", both mentally and physically'.²³ Fears surrounding miscegenation were highest in the colonies, where even 'cohabitation between white and non-white persons' was feared to cause racial degeneration.²⁴ In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theatre, the

²² Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago Press, 1992), p. 4.

²³ Satoshi Mizutani, *The Meaning of White: Race, Class, and the 'Domiciled Community' in British India 1858-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 33.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

portrayal of Cleopatra provoked fears of miscegenation. As an ethnically ambiguous Graeco-Egyptian queen, the Cleopatra of the *fin-de-siècle* stage threatened the white male body through her relationships with Caesar and Antony.

Sardou's play challenges the notion that ethnically diverse individuals were 'mentally and physically' weak by reimagining ancient Alexandria as a vibrant metropolis filled with schools and museums, governed by a powerful sovereign who is a radiant beauty, an exquisite musician, and a skilled dancer. Bernhardt was even reported to have used a 'concoction' of 'saffron', 'powdered coffee', and 'rose water' to darken her complexion, thereby appearing racially ambiguous.²⁵ This queen, who is also a poet, 'struggles wisely with philosophers' and 'debates science with savants', all while embodying both the 'gravity of a queen' and the 'mad gaiety of a child'.²⁶ Inspired by H. Rider Haggard's intellectual queen, this portrayal captures the 'infinite variety' of Shakespeare's Cleopatra while emphasising her intellectual capabilities. As one of the main criticisms of Sardou's play was that it was 'too modern', theatre critics evidently noticed that Sardou's Cleopatra embodied the New Woman.²⁷ By portraying his Cleopatra as an intellectual and ambitious woman, Sardou implies that women can become imperial leaders, while simultaneously being emotional, sensual, and hedonistic. This distinguishes Sardou's cunning queen from those of Tree and Shaw, who prioritised their relationships with men over their duties as imperial leaders. Sardou's favourable depiction of eastern and female power can be attributed to the fact that the play was written specifically for Bernhardt, necessitating a positive portrayal of Cleopatra. In *The Drama of Celebrity*, Sharon Marcus notes that Bernhardt's fan base was primarily 'female', as 'scores of women waited outside theatres morning and nights to hand her flowers and "steamy letters"'.²⁸ Although she performed exclusively in French, women who 'couldn't understand French' or 'only

²⁵ 'Sarah Bernhardt's Complexion: Paris is Wild About the African Hue of Cleopatra', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 51.17 (17 January 1891), p. 16.

²⁶ Victorien Sardou, *Cleopatra: A Play in Five Acts*, trans. by Frank J. Morlock (Maryland: Borgo Press: 2010), p. 17.

²⁷ W. Moy Thomas, 'Sarah Bernhardt as Cleopatra', *Graphic*, 45.1175 (4 June 1892), p. 666. See also, 'The Cleopatra of Sardou and Madame Sarah Bernhardt', *Art Journal* (July 1892), pp. 198-200.

²⁸ Marcus, p. 115.

knew a few words' would force their husbands to attend Bernhardt's performances 'against [their] will'.²⁹ Despite his criticism of Bernhardt's sensual performances, Shaw conceded that 'Sarah Bernhardt affects people who do not know a word of French'.³⁰ Not only did theatres primarily cater to middle- and upper-class women, but the 'Bernhardt Mania' among American, British, and European women meant that Sardou's *Cléopâtre* was written and produced with female audiences in mind.

While Sardou's play was written to appeal to women, Shaw wrote *Caesar and Cleopatra* to provide solutions for imperial decline. In 1884, he joined the Fabian Society, whose prime purpose was 'helping to regenerate society by defining the principles of socialism, [...] putting their socialist theories into practice in local and national government and in industry, and converting middle-class London and the industrial provinces to their own version of socialism'.³¹ In 1899, the same year that Shaw published *Caesar and Cleopatra*, the Boer Wars had begun in South Africa. Shaw argued that, 'for good or evil', the Fabians must embrace imperialism as it was their 'duty' to safeguard colonial states from being 'crushed out of existence'.³² He warned that if countries under British control were 'treated in the same way as Ireland and the United States', they would 'rebel' and the 'Empire would begin to fall apart'.³³ As an articulate critic of Shakespeare, Shaw was 'outraged' by his 'characterisation of Julius Caesar' and 'disgust[ed]' by his sensual Cleopatra.³⁴ Shaw aimed to rectify what he perceived to be Shakespeare's inaccuracies by dramatizing a 'real' history of Caesar, which presented him as the ideal model of an imperial leader. In 1898, Shaw wrote 'Ha! ha! Julius Caesar as the psychological woman tamer. Ho! ho!', in a 'letter kept in the form of a diary' for his wife, Charlotte Payne-Townshend.³⁵ By portraying his hero as a 'psychological woman tamer', Shaw suggests that for men to wield control over empires they must

²⁹ Ibid., p. 116.

³⁰ Bernhard Shaw, *Collected Letters 1898 – 1910*, ed. Dan H. Laurence (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1965), p. 529.

³¹ Patricia Pugh, 'Bernard Shaw, Imperialist', *Shaw*, 11 (1991), pp. 97-118 (p. 97).

³² Ibid., p. 103.

³³ Ibid., p. 105.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Quoted in Janet Dunbar, *Mrs. G. B. S.* (New York, 1963), p. 143.

first dominate women. Although Shaw ‘vehemently’ supported ‘the notion of equality for both men and women’, Maurice Valency has noticed that ‘women normally of a passionate nature seem to have inspired him mainly with fear’.³⁶ This fear is reflected in Shaw’s decision to transform Cleopatra from a powerful enchantress to a ‘manageable woman’, ‘amenable to the tutelage of a masterful male’.³⁷ *Caesar and Cleopatra* ultimately explores anxieties regarding gender and imperialism, while attempting to offer solutions for these contemporaneous problems.

Like Sardou’s *Cleopatra*, Tree’s adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra* was crafted for popular consumption. Tree was renowned for his productions of over-decorated Shakespeare plays, which emphasised scenic display, grandeur, and aesthetics.³⁸ Mizutani observes that in the ‘late colonial period’, fears of racial degeneration led to the othering of ‘poor whites’ and those from ‘working-class origins’.³⁹ Tree’s biographer, Madeleine Bingham, notes that his Lithuanian ‘background and schooling’ gave him a ‘exotic and foreign feeling’.⁴⁰ Tree’s connections to the Decadent movement, amoral lifestyle, and ethnic ambiguity posed a symbolic threat to the expansion of empire. A threat which was understood by his reviewers, who warned that only ‘trivial and immoral crowds’ would attend his productions.⁴¹ Although Tree’s adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra* explicitly explores the dangers of female rule, his choice to orientalise the play alarmed contemporary theatre reviewers, who feared it would corrupt audiences by symbolically transporting them to Egypt. These concerns were amplified by Constance Collier’s own ethnic ambiguity. Her Portuguese ancestry made her “‘racially” different than the British’, leading to perceptions of her as a product of degeneration.⁴² Tree’s production is complex; while it cautions against miscegenation by using archaeologically

³⁶ Sangeeta Jain, *Women in the Plays of George Bernard Shaw* (New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 2006), p. 20. See also, Valency, p. 112.

³⁷ Valency, p. 112.

³⁸ Madeleine Bingham, *The Great Lover: The Life and Art of Herbert Beerbohm Tree* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978).

³⁹ Mizutani, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Bingham, p. 7.

⁴¹ ‘Impressions of the Theatre. – XXV. “Antony and Cleopatra” at His Majesty’s’, *Review of Reviews*, 35.205 (January 1907), pp. 34-37 (p. 34). Despite this warning, Tree’s productions were extremely popular among the burgeoning middle and upper classes, with the opening night of *Antony and Cleopatra* featuring distinguished audience members including ‘Mr. Winston Churchill and the Lord Mayor of London’. See, “‘Antony and Cleopatra’: Magnificent Spectacle at His Majesty’s Theatre’, *Manchester Evening News*, 11788 (28 December 1906), p. 3.

⁴² Mizutani, pp. 10, 28.

informed Egyptian costumes to portray Cleopatra as a racially diverse woman who overthrows 'empires and emperors', it simultaneously challenges British imperial authority by highlighting the splendour of Egypt while casting a racially ambiguous actress. Ultimately, Sardou's play was crafted to appeal to Bernhardt and her female admirers, Shaw's play was devised as an alternative to Shakespeare, offering solutions for imperial growth, and Tree's play was produced as a profitable spectacle. Each production thus presented a unique Cleopatra, addressing different concerns about female power and imperial expansion.

Sardou's *Cléopâtre*

Sardou's Cleopatra is a powerful empress whose beauty, intellect, and resolve allow her to manipulate foes. The play opens in Tarsus, where Cleopatra faces Antony's charges of treachery after inciting a revolt in Asia Minor. The oppressed people see Antony as a colonial tyrant and hope Cleopatra will defend them, despite her royal pride. Antony, enraged, blames Cleopatra for Caesar's death. She neither denies it nor shows remorse, instead claiming she has never experienced 'furious love' with an equal.⁴³ Overcome by a 'sudden passion that maddens him', Antony declares:

Ah, sorceress! They weren't lying when they told me I could not brave with impunity the witchcraft of your lotus eyes and your caressing voice. I understand the infatuation of Caesar for the Egyptian, as they call you. And, I envy him for having loved you so much [...] what man would not forget for you, mother, wife, children? and would not accept exile even from his country to find a more beautiful home in your heart.⁴⁴

⁴³ Sardou, p. 36.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 37.

Antony's reference to Cleopatra as a 'sorceress' highlights his recognition of her captivating and manipulative influence. He acknowledges her allure as both powerful and irresistible, describing her eyes as possessing 'witchcraft' and her voice as 'caressing'. By calling Cleopatra 'the Egyptian', Antony highlights her exotic appeal, as her charms compel him to abandon western power and embrace 'exile' for her eastern love. Antony's speech reveals the power of Cleopatra's allure, as even the mere prospect of 'embrac[ing]' her 'flesh' transforms him into a traitor who willingly abandons his nation, pride, and honour. Instead of accepting Antony's devotion and servitude, Cleopatra challenges him to win her heart. Eager to please her, he 'pardon[s]' the 'rebels,' who 'prostrate [themselves] before Cleopatra'.⁴⁵ By manipulating Antony into forgiving the rebels, Cleopatra leverages her beauty, charm, and sensual allure to save her imperial subjects, ensuring they worship her as a god. Through a single conversation with Cleopatra, Antony willingly forfeits his power, allowing Cleopatra's influence to grow. Cleopatra's ability to transform Antony into her willing captive concerned some of Sardou's contemporaries, who criticised his portrayal of female power. A reviewer for the *Observer* noted that 'the scenes in which time after time [Cleopatra] bends Antony to her will by a few words of argument or entreaty' reduce him 'to the lowest pitch of weakness and indecision', while the commentator for *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* remarked that the 'constant scenes of Antony being angered, then persuaded by Cleopatra is [...] too repetitive'.⁴⁶ These reviewers appear upset that Cleopatra's empowerment comes at Antony's expense. In contrast to Tree's and Shaw's plays, Sardou's *Cléopâtre* elevates the sensual, oriental woman, while undermining the white, western man. Despite Egypt's eventual fall to Rome, Cleopatra's cunning political manoeuvring enables her to retain power for as long as possible. Ultimately, Sardou's portrayal of Cleopatra consolidating power suggests that representations of female rulers could legitimise the use of beauty, charm, and intelligence as political tools,

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 38, 39.

⁴⁶ 'At the Play: Royal English Opera House', *Observer*, 5217 (29 May 1892), p. 6. See also., 'Our Captious Critic: "Cleopatra"', *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 37.973 (18 June 1892), p. 520.

reinforcing the idea that influence could be secured through a combination of personal allure and strategic acumen.

Despite her changing moods, Sardou's Cleopatra prioritises the fate of Egypt. Sardou diverges from Shakespeare by having Cleopatra travel to Actium to confront Antony following his marriage to Octavia. Concealed behind a curtain, her emotions fluctuate as she hears Antony praise Octavia while his companions disparage her. Despite Antony's betrayal, reviewers highlighted moments indicating that Antony remained Cleopatra's captive. In the *Graphic's* illustration of the play performed at the Royal English Opera House, Cleopatra lounges on a bed with a surprised expression, while Antony angrily throws a man to the floor (Fig. 1.1).⁴⁷ The *Graphic* caption reads: 'Marc Antony [...] stung by the suggestion that Cleopatra is false to him, hurls the accuser Thyrsus', a Roman pledged to Octavian, 'to the ground, crying, "Misérable, tu as menti! – avoue que tu as menti!"'.⁴⁸ This scene illustrates that it is Antony, not Cleopatra, who is overcome with jealousy. This mirrors Shakespeare's depiction of Cleopatra attacking the Messenger. As Sardou portrays both Cleopatra and Antony attacking those who bring news of the other's infidelity, he highlights Antony's shared, if not greater, passion. The play, performed exclusively in French at a prestigious London venue, catered to middle- and upper-class audiences, with the wider public accessing it in theatre reviews. The *Graphic's* focus on Antony accusing a man of being a 'menti' '[m]isérable' [lying wretch], rather than depicting Antony slandering Cleopatra with his advisors, portrays him as a devoted figure under Cleopatra's control. When Cleopatra reveals herself, forcing Antony to choose between her and Octavia, knowing that choosing her means 'war', Antony declares: 'let the world burn! And let its furnace light our love'.⁴⁹ At this moment, Antony truly chooses 'exile' by abandoning Octavia for Cleopatra. Just as she manipulated Antony into forgiving

⁴⁷ The *Graphic* was an immensely popular London-based weekly periodical with a transnational readership because of its high-quality engravings and focus on western imperial interests and culture.

⁴⁸ 'Madame Sarah Bernhardt as "Cleopatra" at the Royal English Opera-House, *Graphic*, 45.1175 (4 June 1892), p. 653.

⁴⁹ Sardou. p. 141.

the rebels in the opening scene, she manipulates him into initiating war against Octavian. Triumphant, Cleopatra rejoices at preparing her fleet for combat, as fighting alongside Antony signifies her victory in securing him as both lover and political ally. A review of the Paris production by the *Graphic* praised Bernhardt, noting that ‘never has the actress displayed more grace and enthusiasm than in this act, as Cleopatra proudly prepares her fleet for battle’.⁵⁰ By praising Bernhardt’s ‘grace and enthusiasm’ as she prepares for ‘battle’, the *Graphic* implies that Cleopatra is most admirable when she embodies the qualities of an imperial leader, ready to expand her empire by defeating Rome. Sardou’s portrayal of Cleopatra’s active role in initiating the Battle of Actium emphasises her position as an imperial leader, determined to empower herself by uplifting her nation.

Victory is not enough for Sardou’s Cleopatra, as she wants Egypt to emerge as a dominant world power. Rather than allowing Antony to ‘triumph’ at Actium, Cleopatra leads the battle to Alexandria, where she would have emerged victorious if Thyrsus had not committed ‘treason’ by aiding Octavian.⁵¹ Using her knowledge of meteorology, Cleopatra promises Antony that a storm will defeat the Romans, and that Egypt will ‘open its doors to all races of the Orient’.⁵² She asserts:

Realize your dream of an Empire of the Sun, ruled by a couple of happy lovers. And make all the people of the earth forget the cursed name of Rome for that of my dear triumphant Alexandria.⁵³

⁵⁰ ‘Our Illustrations: “Cleopatra” in Paris’, *Graphic*, 42.1092 (1 November 1890), p. 487.

⁵¹ Sardou, p. 173.

⁵² Ibid. p. 161.

⁵³ Ibid.

The dream of an 'Empire of the Sun' is hers, not Antony's, but she convinces him otherwise to leverage his military strength. The possessive determiner 'my' highlights that Alexandria belongs solely to Cleopatra, therefore, winning in Alexandria instead of Actium only uplifts her. As Cleopatra's ambitions are intertwined with Egypt's fate, she aims to elevate her nation through the strategic manipulation of others. In 1891, transatlantic periodicals extensively covered a dispute between Bernhardt and Fanny Davenport, an American actress who performed the role of Cleopatra in English at New York's Fifth Avenue Theatre and Boston's Hollis Street Theatre.⁵⁴ During press conferences, Davenport emphasised her faithful adherence to Sardou's 'French manuscript', while criticising Bernhardt for portraying Cleopatra as 'a low creature with sensuality at the core of her character'.⁵⁵ In response to Davenport's public accusations, Bernhardt asserted that 'Cleopatra [...] has lived through the ages not because she was a great queen, but because she was an ideally womanly woman' who used her charms and sensuality to bewitch Antony.⁵⁶ Davenport disagreed, stating that while Bernhardt's Cleopatra may align with Plutarch's account, her own portrayal is faithful to Sardou's vision. Davenport claimed that Sardou agreed with her interpretation of Cleopatra's 'queenly defiance', using the 'storm scene' to support her argument.⁵⁷ She stated, 'the very power and cunning of the woman to appear to command the gods in the storm scene show what hereditary command as a queen he intended her to possess'.⁵⁸ In an interview with the *New York Times*, Davenport highlighted that during the 'incantation and storm scene', she is 'elevated' above the audience on the 'Grand Temple of Isis', with a 'raging storm' implied by the steady wind that blows throughout the scene.⁵⁹ Bernhardt, by contrast, remains

⁵⁴ Sarah Hatchuel, *Shakespeare and the Cleopatra/Caesar Intertext: Sequel, Conflation, and Remake* (Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011), p. 74. See also., Felicia Hardison Londré, *The Enchanted Years of the Stage: Kansas City at the Crossroads of American Theatre, 1870-1930* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), p. 147.

⁵⁵ 'Fanny Davenport and Sarah Bernhardt Quarrel Over Cleopatra Interpretation', *Clarion-Ledger*, 2.59 (25 February 1891), p. 1. See also., 'Still Warring About "Cleopatra": Fanny Davenport Fires Another Volley at the Great and Only Bernhardt', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 51.58 (27 February 1891), p. 7.

⁵⁶ 'Music and The Drama', *Guardian*, 13906 (9 March 1891), p. 6.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ "'Cleopatra' on her Art. Fanny Davenport Has Great Faith in Rehearsals', *New York Times*, 40.12352 (29 March 1891), p. 11.

seated on a 'portico' during this scene, as the 'resources of the French stage were inadequate to produce a tempest'.⁶⁰ Davenport's and Bernhardt's distinct portrayals of Sardou's Cleopatra highlight the complexity of her character. Although both actresses recognised Cleopatra's power, they differed in their interpretations of what aspects of her character made her powerful. Both Davenport's and Bernhardt's interpretations of Sardou's Cleopatra are plausible. She uses her sensuality to enhance her queenly power, embodying both a 'great queen' and a 'womanly woman'. Davenport's widely circulated opinions suggest that Cleopatra's power stems not only from her sensuality but also from her intelligence, assertiveness, and cunning. This implies that female sovereignty is not solely linked to sensuality but also to strategic intelligence and political acumen. Davenport's view of Cleopatra underscores how women identified with cultural representations of the pharaoh as a model of female sovereignty, a theme I explore in depth in the coming chapters on novels, short stories, and poems. The strategic intelligence, sensual allure, and queenly defiance of Sardou's Cleopatra illustrate the multifaceted nature of female power, demonstrating how representations of Cleopatra navigated the dual roles of lover and ruler.

Sardou's Cleopatra is a powerful empress who manipulates Antony using her beauty, intellect, and strength. Her blend of sensual allure and strategic intelligence showcases a multifaceted female power that combines love with imperial ambition. As Bernhardt's audiences were primarily female, *Cléopâtre*'s portrayal of strength serves to inspire and uplift contemporary women by showcasing the potential of female empowerment. Sardou's portrayal of Cleopatra contrasts sharply with Shaw's. While Sardou's queen is as a formidable imperial ruler, Shaw's queen is little more than a petulant child.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*

As Shaw believed that the British Empire owed its colonial subjects protection, he characterised his Caesar as a wise tutor who taught Cleopatra how to become a ruler. When Caesar sees Cleopatra hiding from the Romans on a sphinx, he declares that there is 'a child at its breast! A divine child!':

CAESAR (*amazed*). Who are you?

THE GIRL. Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt.

CAESAR. Queen of the Gypsies, you mean.

CLEOPATRA. You must not be disrespectful to me, or the Sphinx will let the Romans eat you. Come up. It is quite cosy here.

[...]

CLEOPATRA. Take care. That's right. Now sit down: you may have its other paw. (*She seats herself comfortably on its left paw.*) It is very powerful and will protect us; but [...] it would not take any notice of me or keep me company. I am glad you have come: I was very lonely.⁶¹

It is only through Caesar questioning 'who are you' that Shaw transforms the queen's character from 'THE GIRL' to 'CLEOPATRA'. This foreshadows that Caesar will play a pivotal role in helping Cleopatra construct her identity. While she answers that she is 'Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt', Caesar replies, mockingly, that she is 'Queen of the Gypsies'. Sitting atop the 'kitten of a sphinx' for protection, Cleopatra does not resemble a Queen but a lost child.⁶² Graeco-Roman scholars believed that Cleopatra devised a plan to meet Julius Caesar to form a political alliance that would

⁶¹ George Bernard Shaw, *Caesar and Cleopatra: A History* (London: Constable and Company, 1925), p. 104.

⁶² Ibid., p. 106.

allow her to regain the Egyptian throne. In Shaw's version of Caesar and Cleopatra's first encounter, the pair meet by accident. Instead of preying on Caesar by manipulating him with her sexuality, Cleopatra attempts to help him. She warns him of the cannibalistic Romans and urges him to 'take care' and share the protection of the Sphinx with her. Cleopatra's short sentences – 'take care. That's right. Now sit down: you may have its other paw' – show that she possesses a nurturing feminine character that is preoccupied with the welfare of others. The abundance of monosyllables in her rhetoric suggest that she is not an intellectual, while the clear, direct, and satirical tone of Caesar's oratory allude to his astuteness. Late nineteenth-century physicians such as T. S. Clouston, who was a lecturer on mental diseases and the medical superintendent at Morningside Asylum in Edinburgh, believed that women were constituted to be 'the helpmate and companion of man', his 'complement rather than his equal'.⁶³ Clouston believed that a woman's most important quality as a wife and mother was 'not only bearing her own share of ills but helping to bear those of others'.⁶⁴ By ensuring the safety and comfort of a stranger, Cleopatra shows her ability to become a man's extension.

As it was considered a man's job to physically protect women, Caesar declares that he will protect Cleopatra from the Romans by teaching her to be 'a brave woman and a great queen'.

CAESAR. Cleopatra: shall I teach you a way to prevent Caesar from eating you?

[...]

Whatever dread may be in your soul—however terrible Caesar may be to you—you must confront him as a brave woman and a great queen; and you must feel no fear. If your hand shakes: if your voice quavers; then—night and death! (She moans.) But if he thinks you

⁶³ T. S. Clouston, *Female Education from a Medical Point of View* (Edinburgh: MacNiven & Wallace, 1882), p. 41. See also, Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987), p. 123.

⁶⁴ Clouston., p. 41.

worthy to rule, he will set you on the throne by his side and make you the real ruler of Egypt.⁶⁵

Cleopatra is unaware that her companion is Julius Caesar, yet she promises to be his 'slave' if he protects her. By offering herself up as a slave, rather than enslaving great men as she is often portrayed in popular culture, Cleopatra reveals her susceptibility to manipulation. In her portrayal of Cleopatra, Bernhardt transformed herself into an Egyptian queen by using a concoction of edible oriental ingredients, including saffron, coffee, and rose water. Bernhardt applied these cosmetics, to attract and metaphorically consume men. Similarly, in Tree's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, the messenger feared that Cleopatra would 'bite him'.⁶⁶ In both these plays, edible commodities which include human flesh, were used to demonstrate Cleopatra's power. In Shaw's play, however, the act of biting demonstrates Cleopatra's meekness, as instead of threatening to bite, she is afraid to be bitten and eaten by the cannibalistic Romans. In 1906-1907, theatregoers that watched Elliott plead, beg, tremble and cling onto an older man for protection, interpreted Shaw's Cleopatra as an example of feminine weakness. A reviewer for *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* commented that 'there is no love-making, scarcely even flirtation' and 'the precocious mother of Caesarion is [...] as naively innocent as a convent-reared maid'.⁶⁷ By referring to her as the 'precocious mother of Caesarion', this reviewer reminds his London based readers that the young Cleopatra embarked on a love affair with Julius Caesar that resulted in the birth of a son. In 1913, Shaw publicly claimed that he 'could have' criticised *Caesar and Cleopatra* 'better' himself.⁶⁸ Commenting on the lack of 'love-making', Shaw stated that 'Antony was Cleopatra's slave: Julius was "every woman's husband"'.⁶⁹ By referring to Caesar as 'every

⁶⁵ Shaw, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, pp. 107, 108.

⁶⁶ Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra: As Arranged for the Stage by Herbert Beerbohm Tree*, p. 42.

⁶⁷ 'Our Captious Critic: "Caesar and Cleopatra," at The Savoy Theatre', *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 68.1786 (7 December 1907), p. 574.

⁶⁸ George Bernard Shaw, 'Caesar and Cleopatra: By the Author of the Play', *New Statesman*, 1 (3 May 1913), pp. 112-113 (p.112).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

woman's husband', Shaw implies that men who possess 'human strength of the Caesarean type' do not form attachments to women. By removing the 'love-making' of the play, Shaw also encourages his audience to view Cleopatra as a 'naively innocent', 'charmingly girlish', and 'real child of sixteen' that can easily be moulded into a 'woman'.⁷⁰ Shaw's hero states that the only way Cleopatra can 'prevent Caesar from eating her' is to make him 'believe' that she is a 'brave woman', as he is 'easily deceived'.⁷¹ The distinction between 'appearing' to be a 'brave woman' and 'being' a 'brave woman' is that the former is a pretence of confidence, while the latter is a great ruler. By only encouraging Cleopatra to fake an appearance of bravery, Caesar does not improve her character. If she can feign bravery, Caesar claims that he will 'set [her] up by his side and make [her] the real ruler of Egypt'.⁷² Caesar is coaching Cleopatra to command respect from her subjects, so that he can rule through her. Caesar's treatment of Cleopatra can be aligned with Shaw's personal belief that Britain should continue expanding the Empire, while treating the subjects under its control with dignity. By encouraging Cleopatra to 'appear' brave, Caesar gives Cleopatra the tools to rule Egypt, whilst maintaining superiority over her.

Caesar's colonisation of Cleopatra's kingdom is portrayed as beneficial to both the Roman Empire and Egypt. When Cleopatra discovers that her 'nice, kind, wise, good' companion is Julius Caesar, she becomes completely attached to him. She insists on always accompanying him and states that she will make him her 'king'.⁷³ When Caesar orders Cleopatra to remain within the Palace of Alexandria as he wages war against the Egyptian army for the murder of Pompey, Cleopatra declares 'but me! me!! me!! what is to become of *me*?'.⁷⁴ The repetition of 'me' and the use of double exclamation marks show that Cleopatra prioritises herself above all else. The increasing number of exclamation marks demonstrate that she is having a child-like tantrum, as she becomes more frantic the longer she is ignored. As she desires Caesar's company, she tells him

⁷⁰ 'Our Captious Critic: "Caesar and Cleopatra" at The Savoy Theatre', p. 574.

⁷¹ Shaw, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, p. 108.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 111.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 161.

to 'let them lose their lives: they are only soldiers'.⁷⁵ Her disregard for human life and capacity for violence led to Shaw's reviewers labelling her 'half, devil, and half child'.⁷⁶ Shaw's Cleopatra is a complex figure, as she is child-like, naive, and caring, while simultaneously being violent, impulsive, and selfish. Caesar responds 'gravely' that Cleopatra's 'life matters little [...] to anyone but [herself]', and that he will not place her above the 'soldiers who have trusted' him.⁷⁷ Caesar's refusal to disregard the soldier's lives, just because they are of a lower class, reflects Shaw's political views. As a prominent member of the socialist Fabian Society, Shaw advocated for securing 'equal rights'.⁷⁸ In his essay 'What Socialism Is' (1890), Shaw wrote that the House of Commons should be run by 'the wage-earning class', as they will 'govern in the interest of the people' instead of for the benefit of country gentlemen and capitalists.⁷⁹ While Cleopatra believes that her life matters more because she is a pharaoh, Caesar conforms to socialist ideals, refusing to equate class with significance. This exchange underscores Cleopatra's failings as a ruler while highlighting the essential role Caesar plays in enhancing Egypt's stability and governance.

Not only does Shaw's Caesar disregard class difference, but he believes in ruling 'without punishment. Without revenge. Without judgement'.⁸⁰ Reviewers who watched *Caesar and Cleopatra* at the Savoy were surprised by Caesar's 'leniency and clemency'.⁸¹ The *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* ironically stated that 'this Julius Caesar, [...] had he not preceded Christianity, would have been a Catacomb bishop'.⁸² Catacomb bishops were pacifists known to adopt modest lifestyles free of attachment to worldly possessions. Shaw's portrayal of Caesar as a 'Catacomb bishop' contradicts his position as a Roman Emperor, as imperial expansion cannot take place without violence. In his defence of the play, Shaw wrote that Caesar's disgust towards murder yet

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 159.

⁷⁶ "'Caesar and Cleopatra' at the Savoy", *Academy*, 73.1856 (30 November 1907), pp. 196-197 (p. 197).

⁷⁷ Shaw, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, p. 159.

⁷⁸ George Bernard Shaw, *Fabian Essays in Socialism* (London: Fabian Society, 1889), p. 149.

⁷⁹ George Bernard Shaw, *What Socialism Is* (London: Fabian Society, 1890), p. 3.

⁸⁰ Shaw, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, p. 198.

⁸¹ Eric Clement Scott, 'Savoy Theatre: Caesar and Cleopatra', *Bystander*, 16.209 (4 December 1907), p. 471.

⁸² 'Our Captious Critic: "Caesar and Cleopatra," at The Savoy Theatre', p. 574.

‘readiness to remove human obstacles by the sword if they will not step out of the way of the Gods is not a contradiction of his character, but a part of it’.⁸³ By referring to soldiers as ‘human obstacles’ in ‘the way of the Gods’, Shaw implies that Caesar did not commit murder, as he was acting as a vessel for divinity. The noun ‘obstacle’ objectifies the human subject, removing the tragedy of their death. As Shaw believed that it was the ‘duty’ of imperialist bodies to protect smaller states from being ‘crushed out of existence’, his Caesar is doing God’s work by removing individuals who prevent the Roman Empire from protecting these nations. Therefore, Caesar’s ability to end human life is not a contradiction of his character, as the killing is done to prevent further suffering. As established by Joy Pasini, war is a ‘man’s enterprise’ in Shaw’s play; therefore, Cleopatra has ‘no honourable way to protect her claims to the throne’ other than to rely on Caesar.⁸⁴ This reliance not only underscores Cleopatra’s lack of agency in Caesar’s patriarchal society but also reinforces Shaw’s belief in the necessity of imperialism. The reviewer’s sarcastic labelling of Caesar as a ‘catacomb bishop’ demonstrates that Shaw and Forbes-Robertson effectively portrayed Caesar as a morally superior figure, acting under the guidance of the Roman gods. While Shaw gives Caesar’s pagan religion the same morals as Christianity, he presents Cleopatra’s religion as false by having her speak to idols that do not respond. Cleopatra and Caesar are political opposites. Cleopatra prioritises her desires over her subjects, while Caesar only kills with divine guidance. By portraying Caesar as a great imperial ruler, Shaw encourages his audience, along with the transnational public who read about Caesar’s morality through theatre reviews, to consider socialist reforms to imperial matters.

In a final act of kindness towards his colonised subjects, Caesar pacifies Cleopatra by removing her weapon, Ftatateeta. A character of Shaw’s own creation, Ftatateeta is a fierce sorceress in Cleopatra’s court. When Caesar forbids Cleopatra from leaving the Alexandrian

⁸³ George Bernard Shaw, ‘Caesar and Cleopatra: By the Author of the Play’, p. 112.

⁸⁴ Joy A. Pasini, ‘Honorable and Dishonorable Killing: The Gender of War in “Caesar and Cleopatra”’, *Shaw*, 28 (2008), pp. 45-64 (p. 46).

palace, Ftateeta overpowers a Roman soldier with her bare hands to emancipate her, allowing Cleopatra to interrupt Caesar's war plans. When Ptolemy's regent Pothinus disrespects Cleopatra, Ftateeta assassinates him. As an intellectual who wants 'Egypt for the Egyptian', Pothinus's murder destabilises Cleopatra's rule by turning public opinion against her.⁸⁵ Theatregoers would have also noticed that Ftateeta always 'smile[s]' when Cleopatra stands up against Caesar.⁸⁶ All of Ftateeta's actions explicitly undermine Caesar's authority and threaten Cleopatra's rule. In Forbes-Robertson's production, the Anglo-Indian actress and suffragette Adeline Bourne, whose acting was praised as 'ferocious and powerful', played the part of Ftateeta.⁸⁷ By possessing black hair, dark eyebrows, and brown skin, Bourne embodied an eastern otherness that gave her the 'power and temperament' to play oriental characters.⁸⁸ As she was also a beautiful thirty-three-year-old woman, it can be argued that she resembled Shakespeare's seductive Cleopatra. Not only did Bourne's physical appearance align Ftateeta with the Shakespearean Cleopatra, but so did Shaw's characterisation of her. Rufio states that he 'shed the blood of [...] Ftateeta' because she was a 'tigress that killed men at [Cleopatra's] bidding'.⁸⁹ Caesar diminishes Cleopatra's authority by referring to her as a 'kitten', a term that implies both immaturity and a state of domestication.⁹⁰ This stands in stark contrast to Ftateeta, who is portrayed as an adult, wild, and formidable big cat, embodying strength and independence that resists control. As Cleopatra keeps Ftateeta by her side as a weapon, she embodies Cleopatra's 'ferocious' side which defies Caesar. By having Ftateeta murdered, Caesar kills the aging, powerful, Egyptian woman, and leaves behind a kittenish child who can be easily manipulated. By presenting Ftateeta as a savage killer who embodies all the qualities that made the mainstream *fin-de-siècle* Cleopatra a source of excitement and anxiety, Shaw ensures that her murder creates a peaceful resolution at the end of the play. In

⁸⁵ Shaw, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, p. 123.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 112.

⁸⁷ While Bourne also performed the part of Ftateeta in the 1906-1907 production, her performance was especially praised in the 1913 revival of *Caesar and Cleopatra* for 'Forbes-Robertson's Farewell Season'. See., "'Caesar and Cleopatra'" by George Bernard Shaw, Drury Lane Theatre', *Playgoer and Society Illustrated*, 8.44 (May 1913), p. 52.

⁸⁸ 'Miss Adeline Bourne: A New "Medea"', *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 76.2 (20 January 1912), p. 901.

⁸⁹ Shaw, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, p. 198.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 111.

the closing scene, a pacified Cleopatra rules Egypt alongside the Roman general Rufio. There is no longer unrest in Egypt, and the Roman Empire has expanded. Both the coloniser and the colonised have benefited. By neatly concluding the narrative with Cleopatra's pacification rather than her suicide – an act that underscores her decision to retain power – Shaw deviates from the portrayals found in Sardou's *Cléopâtre*, Tree's adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra*, and Ebers's *Cleopatra* novel. In these works, Cleopatra's defiance extends beyond death, making the deceased versions of her more powerful than Shaw's living queen.

In Shaw's portrayal, Caesar's influence over Cleopatra transitions her from a naive girl into a ruler who, while appearing powerful, is subservient to Roman authority. By juxtaposing Cleopatra's childlike vulnerability with Caesar's calculated guidance, Shaw presents colonisation not as an imposition of power but as a paternalistic endeavour designed to benefit both parties. Thus, the play reflects Shaw's ideological views of imperialism as a benevolent expansion meant to uplift and guide, rather than simply dominate. By integrating notions of female leadership with imperial expansion, Shaw's play suggests that women should remain under the guidance of male leaders. While Sardou's play celebrates sensual and intelligent women to appeal to female audiences, and Shaw's play diminishes female power to impart lessons on imperial leadership, Tree's play complicates the debate on imperialism by prioritising spectacle over a moral message.

Tree's *Antony and Cleopatra*

In the foreword to his edition of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Tree expressed that he 'compressed' Shakespeare's original script with the 'aim' of illustrating the world-famous 'story of Antony and Cleopatra', 'the austere grandeur of Rome', and 'the gorgeous splendour of the East' aided by the luxurious set designs produced by the 'graceful hand' of artist and theatrical designer Percy

Macquoid (1852-1925).⁹¹ Regardless of whether they enjoyed Tree's production, all his critics remarked on the 'splendid spectacle' of the play.⁹² In the *Academy*, H. De S. wrote that 'as the curtain rose in his *Landing Stage of Cleopatra's Palace* the illustration of Eastern splendour, helped by the fragrance of burning incense, was brought home to the audience'.⁹³ By creating a multisensory spectacle, Tree encouraged an immersive experience that brought ancient Egypt, Rome, and its greatest lovers to the *fin de siècle*. According to Said's *Orientalism*, western imperialist nations emphasised a 'systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, [and] inferior'.⁹⁴ Roger Luckhurst argues that negative depictions of the Orient served as an 'apparatus' for the British to vilify Arabs, thereby legitimising their imperial occupation of Egypt.⁹⁵ However, the wealth and grandeur of Cleopatra's Egypt in Tree's *Antony and Cleopatra* suggest that the East once possessed the power to rival the West in strength, culture, and art. A reviewer for the *Athenaeum* remarked that 'the full splendour of [...] Egypt' equalled 'Rome in wealth and luxury', while a critic for *The Times* stated that 'Egypt, not Rome nor Athens nor Misenum, becomes the "hub" of the play'.⁹⁶ *The Times's* reviewer even stated that there are 'weird nerve-trilling Oriental strains [...] in the air', as 'the strange figures from the tombs of the Ptolemies crowd and chat and salaam in the streets of Alexandria' while the 'faint sound of [...] Oriental music' even persists in the scenes set outside of Egypt.⁹⁷ As 'salaam' is an Arab greeting used in Muslim countries, *The Times's* article blurs Cleopatra's oriental empire with contemporary Islamic Egypt. The conflation of ancient and contemporary Egypt implies that modern-day Egyptians can achieve the same greatness as their predecessor, while the 'Oriental music' permeating the scenes set in the West evokes images of reverse colonisation. While *The Times's* reviewer describes Tree's *Antony and Cleopatra* as focused

⁹¹ Tree, 'Foreword', p. 5.

⁹² 'Impressions of the Theatre. – XXV, "Antony and Cleopatra" at His Majesty's', p. 34.

⁹³ H. De S., 'Drama: "Anthony and Cleopatra" at His Majesty's Theatre', *Academy*, 1809 (5 January 1907), p. 17.

⁹⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 300.

⁹⁵ Roger Luckhurst, 'The Mummy's Curse: A Study in Rumour' in *Critical Quarterly*, 52.3 (2010), pp. 6-22 (pp. 19, 17).

⁹⁶ 'Drama: The Week', *Athenaeum*, 4132 (5 January 1907), pp. 25-26 (p. 25). See also., 'His Majesty's Theatre: "Antony and Cleopatra"', *The Times*, 38215 (28 December 1906), p. 3.

⁹⁷ 'His Majesty's Theatre: "Antony and Cleopatra"', *The Times*, p. 3.

on 'imperial politics' and, quoting Shaw, 'sexuality infatuation', their characterisation of the play's oriental elements as 'weird' and 'nerve-thrilling' can be viewed as a byproduct of imperialism, revealing both discomfort and fascination with the 'scenic magnificence' of the Orient.⁹⁸ Given that negative representations of the Orient were vital for reinforcing the notion of the East as an inferior region requiring imperial oversight, Tree's exoticised portrayal of Cleopatra's Egypt challenges British imperial propaganda.

While the magnificent set designs indicate Egypt's strength, Tree's interpretation of Shakespeare's Cleopatra as a courtesan suggests that sensual women pose a threat to imperial expansion. The *Graphic* interpreted Tree's Antony and Cleopatra as 'two great human beings moving slowly but surely to destruction through selfish, unbridled, personal passion'.⁹⁹ Similarly, *The Times* stated that 'Cleopatra is the irresistible enchantress, Antony the colossal lover, and the whole play must burn to a white heat with their fire'.¹⁰⁰ Both publications interpret Tree's Antony and Cleopatra as tragic lovers overwhelmed by their own desires. In contrast, Tree's foreword to his edition of *Antony and Cleopatra* presents Cleopatra as the embodiment of feminine malice, while Antony is depicted as a tragic hero – loyal, loving, and masculine despite his hedonistic tendencies. By taking Shakespeare's interpretation of Cleopatra as a woman of 'infinite variety' and applying it to Antony by calling him 'a blend of many sided complexities', Tree uplifts Antony while reducing Cleopatra to a one-dimensional character.¹⁰¹ By calling Cleopatra 'the greatest courtesan that ever led man from the path of politics [...] and that ruled and undid empires and emperors', Tree reduces Cleopatra to a *femme fatale* who threatens the male imperial body.¹⁰² Instead of being a tragic Shakespearean heroine, Tree views Cleopatra as an antagonist. If Cleopatra is perceived as the villain, then her victims are Antony and the Roman Empire. Just as the set designs allude to the

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Dramaticus, "The Theatres: "Antony and Cleopatra", *Graphic*, 75.1936 (5 January 1907), p. 18.

¹⁰⁰ 'His Majesty's Theatre: "Antony and Cleopatra"', *The Times*, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Tree, 'Foreword', p. 5.

¹⁰² Ibid.

East's ability to rival the West in wealth, culture, and art, Tree's portrayal of Cleopatra as an imperial courtesan suggests that sensual women possess the power to ruin men and empires. These facets of the play allude to *fin-de-siècle* concerns about the British Empire weakening following Queen Victoria's death in 1901.

Tree's depiction of Cleopatra and Egypt as powerful and destructive forces was a cause of concern for his contemporaries. In January 1907, Edwyn Bevan wrote a public letter to *The Times* to chastise their critic for calling Tree's play a 'wonderful piece of work'.¹⁰³ Bevan, a British philosopher and historian specialising in the Hellenistic world, believed that the 'archaeological aspects' of Tree's play were 'false', as the 'Court of Cleopatra' was not 'Egyptian' but Greek 'in its language, culture, furniture, [and] garb'.¹⁰⁴ He claimed that the 'ruling race in Egypt were possessed of the same feeling of superiority to the natives that Europeans have now in Oriental countries'.¹⁰⁵ By comparing the ancient 'ruling race' of Egypt to modern European colonists, and confidently asserting that the Ptolemies did not practice interracial marriage, Bevan expresses *fin-de-siècle* anxieties regarding race. As the British Empire expanded, concerns of miscegenation increased, as it was feared that 'racial others' would 'pass for whites and [...] secretly [...] infect their blood'.¹⁰⁶ During this period, the evolutionary theory of degeneration flooded the arena of public debate, as scholars argued that humanity would evolve backwards and Britain would be 'swamped' by 'biologically inferior, rat-like specimens'.¹⁰⁷ These 'rat-like specimens' would have lacked the intellectual and physical power to maintain the empire, leading to Britain's decline. To promote the narrative that historically powerful figures were not products of 'racial degeneration', many of Cleopatra's *fin-de-siècle* biographers argued that she was Greek. Although *The Times* gave the

¹⁰³ 'His Majesty's Theatre: "Antony and Cleopatra"', *The Times*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ Edwyn Bevan, "'Antony and Cleopatra' at His Majesty's Theatre: To the Editor of the Times", *The Times*, 38227 (11 January 1907), p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Howard L. Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 148.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 129.

premiere of *Antony and Cleopatra* a brilliant review, spectators who held anti-miscegenation views were critical of Tree's representation of an Egyptian Empress. Bevan felt so strongly against Tree's representation of Cleopatra that he wrote to *The Times* on three occasions in January 1907 and even challenged Tree to produce a new play filled with 'dazzling military uniforms, crimson kausia, embroidered chlamys, and gold-studded buskins', that portrayed a Hellenistic queen.¹⁰⁸ As noted by Stephan Arata, 'Victorian race theory allowed for the idea that racial identities could be altered solely by contact with alien culture and physical environments'.¹⁰⁹ As the actress representing Cleopatra was European, her Egyptian 'garbs' were enough to deem her 'Oriental', and therefore 'false'. Furthermore, Bevan and his contemporaries may have feared that Tree's representation of an oriental ruler's love affair with a Roman man would have appealed to the audience, thus tempting them to pursue interracial love affairs. By replacing Cleopatra's Egyptian surroundings and costumes with Hellenistic ones, the 'alien culture' of the play would be eliminated, and the fear of oriental attraction would be suppressed.

In defence of his play, Tree argued that the portrayal of Cleopatra in an oriental setting was justified both artistically and historically, despite the controversy surrounding her ethnic and cultural identity. In a letter published by *The Times*, he wrote:

I assumed that the actual Cleopatra wore the garment with which Mr. Macquoid has clothed her representative. Your correspondent may exclaim, "Prove that she did." To this I would turn to retort, "Prove that she did not."¹¹⁰

The Times was a conservative newspaper representing 'the increasingly dominant middle-class strata in the United Kingdom', and as a leading nineteenth-century paper, it wielded the 'tyrannical'

¹⁰⁸ Edwyn Bevan, "'Antony and Cleopatra' at His Majesty's Theatre: To the Editor of the Times', *The Times*, 38234 (19 January 1907), p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ Stephan Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996), p. 160.

¹¹⁰ Herbert Beerbohm Tree, 'Antony and Cleopatra: to the Editor of the Times', *The Times*, 28230 (15 January 1907), p. 12.

power to ‘force political change on behalf of the elites it represented’.¹¹¹ As Bevan was a scholar, philosopher, and historian, his opinion would have mattered to *The Times*’s influential readers, thereby explaining why Tree and Macquoid felt compelled to publicly respond to his ‘assertive and misleading’ claims. By saying ‘prove that she did not’, Tree underscores the difficulty of proving Cleopatra’s ethnic identity. To discredit Bevan, Tree and Macquoid cited Professor John Pentland Mahaffy, who taught that Cleopatra was Egyptian, and their ‘friends’ at the British Museum’, who believed that ‘Mr Bevan [...] had much to learn of Ptolemaic Egypt, where all the kings, in their capacity as Pharaohs did beyond all doubt constantly appear in Egyptian costume’.¹¹² Mentions of Mahaffy and the British Museum aim to convince *The Times*’s readers that Cleopatra followed Egyptian customs, challenging the white supremacist claim that ancient Egypt’s ruling class was white. Although Tree argued that Cleopatra styled herself as Egyptian, he claimed that even if ‘Cleopatra’s immediate surroundings’ were ‘Greek rather than Egyptian’, he would ‘be justified, on artistic grounds, in placing Shakespeare’s Cleopatra in an Oriental atmosphere’.¹¹³ The notion that a play can exist ‘on artistic grounds’ mirrors ideals held by the Decadent movement, whose most prominent figure, Oscar Wilde, was a close friend of Tree. This connection highlights how Tree’s approach to theatre was heavily influenced by the emphasis on the aesthetics and sensory experiences that defined Decadence. The most common criticism of Tree’s production was that ‘it was a spectacle (at times a vulgar spectacle) and nothing more’.¹¹⁴ A reviewer for the *Academy* stated that ‘Mr Tree himself felt’ so strongly confident in the ‘scenic display’ of the production, that ‘when lines slipped from his memory, he waved his hand deprecatingly towards this splendid scenery, as though an alleviation or an excuse’.¹¹⁵ Similarly, the *Graphic* wrote that Tree ‘threatens seriously to retard [*Antony and Cleopatra*] by making people accept spectacle in the place of plays or

¹¹¹ Michael Dunning, *Britain and Terrorism: A Sociological Investigation* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), p. 69.

¹¹² Percy Macquoid, “‘Antony and Cleopatra’: to the Editor of The Times”, *The Times*, 38236 (22 January 1907), p. 11.

¹¹³ Herbert Beerbohm Tree, ‘Antony and Cleopatra: To the Editor of the Times’, p. 12.

¹¹⁴ H. De. S., p. 17.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

acting', as he has 'mistaken his vocation as a producer of plays' instead of a 'producer of pictorial pageants'.¹¹⁶ These reviews highlight a broader concern that Tree's emphasis on spectacle compromised the integrity of the play, suggesting that the visual grandeur was prioritised at the expense of Shakespeare's dramatic and thematic depth. Tree's justification for 'placing Shakespeare's Cleopatra in an Oriental atmosphere' reveals his deliberate prioritisation of aesthetics, effectively reducing the play's moral and political complexities in favour of visual spectacle.

Tree's production, while criticised for historical inaccuracies, highlights the tensions between admiration and anxiety towards Egypt in *fin-de-siècle* Britain. Through this spectacle, Tree's work emerges as a provocative reflection on the era's complex interplay between cultural representation and imperial ideology. By producing varying versions of Cleopatra, Sardou, Shaw, and Tree explore the interplay between female power and imperial ideology. In the following section, I examine the celebrity status of Sarah Bernhardt, Constance Collier, and Gertrude Elliott, along with the costumes they donned in their portrayals of Cleopatra. This analysis investigates how archaeologically inspired costumes foreground the themes between female leadership and sensual autonomy.

Oriental Glamour: Costuming Female Power

By the *fin de siècle*, the advent of mass production and the rising popularity of fashion enabled individuals to express themselves and shape their identities through their clothing. Garments and accessories came to embody 'moral and political meanings' while also enhancing the cultural

¹¹⁶ Dramaticus, p. 18.

visibility of the body.¹¹⁷ The costumes worn by Bernhardt, Collier, and Elliott allowed audiences to explore the multifaceted nature of their Cleopatras, including their sensuality, potential for leadership, racial identity, and connections to femininity and maternity. Their elaborate Graeco-Egyptian outfits were instrumental in conveying the complexity of their Cleopatras' personas, determining their potential for leadership. Bernhardt's self-designed costumes emphasised her sensuality and cunning as a female leader while showcasing the potential for contemporary women to embody Cleopatra. Bernhardt even consulted French Egyptologist Gaston Maspero to 'reconstitute with historical accuracy and exactness the costumes worn by the famous Egyptian Queen'.¹¹⁸ Collier's costumes, crafted by Macquoid, incorporated archaeologically inspired Egyptian elements to emphasise her authority as pharaoh and her unwavering devotion to Antony. Collier even planned to wear Marie Corelli's '4000 years old' Egyptian necklace but was prevented from doing so after Corelli reported a 'clairvoyant encounter with the spirit of an ancient Egyptian', who warned against lending the necklace to the production.¹¹⁹ In an intense scene with Antony, Collier tore her necklace from her neck, causing it to fall 'in fragments on the stage'.¹²⁰ This led Corelli to believe that her prophetic dream had protected her relic from being destroyed by Collier.¹²¹ Elliott's costumes incorporated Egyptian elements to illustrate her journey as 'an innocent child being moulded into a queen by wise and patient counsel'.¹²² By incorporating costumes made in consultation with archaeological sources, these productions blended historical elements with contemporary fashions to convince audiences that they were witnessing the real Cleopatra.

¹¹⁷ Amy de la Haye and Elizabeth Wilson, *Defining Dress: Dress as Object, Meaning and Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 1.

¹¹⁸ 'As the Egyptian Queen: Sarah Bernhardt's First Appearance in "Cleopatra"', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 50.297 (24 October 1890), p. 1.

¹¹⁹ Eleanor Dobson, *Writing the Sphinx: Literature, Culture and Egyptology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2020), p. 80.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Larson, pp. 75-76.

In *Fashion and Orientalism* (2013), Adam Geczy notes that by the *fin de siècle*, fashion had become ‘a conversation piece, a rite of passage, (and) a social indicator’.¹²³ The detailed descriptions of Bernhardt’s and Collier’s costumes in periodicals reveal that their attire was indeed a ‘conversation piece’. As textiles from the East India Company and precious stones from Egypt and South Africa were imported at an ‘unstoppable’ rate, oriental adornments became ‘assimilated and absorbed’ by Western cultures.¹²⁴ Geczy observes that ‘costly jewels, expensive fabrics, and rare accruements created a social landscape of covetousness and desire’.¹²⁵ Lynn Parramore also notes that late-Victorian jewellers ‘capitalised on the association of Egypt with exquisite feminine adornment by fashioning the finest Egyptian-style pieces [...] including combs, brooches, hairpins, necklaces, and earrings’.¹²⁶ Indeed, the popularity of *Cléopâtre* ‘set the fashion’ for modern women to purchase ‘trinkets and jewels’ inspired by the accessories that Bernhardt reportedly spent over £1,200 on.¹²⁷ Similarly, the press reported on a ‘beautiful bracelet’ that Collier received from the Prussian Emperor as a gift for her portrayal of Cleopatra.¹²⁸ By wearing ancient Egyptian outfits, Bernhardt, Collier, and Elliott not only explored the complexities of their Eastern queens but also elicited jealousy and desire among their female audiences. The shift to Egyptian costumes and jewellery in theatrical productions reflects the desirability of oriental fashion. As the orient became integrated into western fashion, Bernhardt’s, Collier’s, and Elliott’s costumes mirrored the era’s fascination with the East. Their attire not only influenced women’s perceptions of female power and exotic allure but also highlighted the interplay between identity, agency, and femininity.

Bernhardt’s Costumes

¹²³ Adam Geczy, *Fashion and Orientalism: Dress, Textiles and Culture from the 17th to the 21st Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 42.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Lynn Parramore, *Reading the Sphinx: Ancient Egypt in Nineteenth-Century Literary Culture* (New York: Springer, 2008), p. 38.

¹²⁷ ‘Well-Known Women: Bernhardt’, *London Journal*, 35.914 (1901), p. 536. See also, ‘Notes’, *Observer*, 5179 (24 August 1890), p. 4.

¹²⁸ ‘Beerbohm Tree Home’, *Umpire*, 1208 (21 April 1907), p. 9.

In Sardou's play, Bernhardt's costumes allow her to wield power against her enemies. In the stage directions introducing Cleopatra's character in Tarsus, Sardou wrote:

She is dressed in a tunic of transparent linen held by an enamelled belt. She has a gold cassock and a veil. Bracelets jingle at her wrists. She has multiple necklaces. Rings sparkle on each of her fingers. She holds a sceptre in the form of a cross. Behind her, two huge Nubian slaves hold fans of ostrich feathers.¹²⁹

Cleopatra's luxurious tunic and jewellery create an image of Graeco-Egyptian opulence, while 'the sceptre in the form of a cross' refers to the 'ankh', one of the most 'powerful' symbols in ancient Egypt.¹³⁰ The ankh, symbolising life, was associated with fertile women and the mother goddess Isis, who was believed to have the power of resurrection. In their review of the 1890 Paris production, the *Graphic* emphasised that Bernhardt 'never looked better than in this scene, dressed in a loose tunic, her complexion slightly bronzed, and her auburn hair falling thickly round her face'.¹³¹ Mirroring Cleopatra, the contrast between Bernhardt's auburn hair and artificially bronzed skin portrays her as an ethnically ambiguous actress playing an Egyptian woman. In Hall's novelisation of Sardou's play, he describes Cleopatra's 'shimmering' gown as making her resemble 'Venus Anadyomene issuing from the waves', while its transparent nature highlights her 'superb, stately and graceful' form, likening her to 'of one of the Graces of Apelles'.¹³² Like in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Bernhardt's transparent tunic aligns Cleopatra with the goddess of love, Venus.¹³³ Since the meeting in Tarsus was intended to determine Egypt's loyalty to Rome following

¹²⁹ Sardou., p. 26.

¹³⁰ Patricia D. Netzley, *Ancient Egypt* (New York: Greenhaven Publishing, 2003), p. 41.

¹³¹ 'Our Illustrations: "Cleopatra" in Paris', p. 487.

¹³² Arthur D. Hall, *Sardou's Cleopatra: A Novelization of the Celebrated Play* (New York: Street and Smith Publishers, 1891), pp. 20, 21-22.

¹³³ William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Washington Square Press, 1999), II. 2.226.

Julius Caesar's death, Cleopatra's decision to present herself as Venus can be seen as a political manoeuvre to appear innocent. By wearing a tunic of 'transparent linen', Cleopatra allowed Antony to appreciate the beauty of her 'graceful' form. The 'enamelled belt' accentuated her waist, the 'bracelets' drew attention to her 'wrists', the necklaces emphasised her neck and chest, the rings highlighted her 'fingers', and the 'Nubian slaves' underscored her whiteness. Cleopatra's use of bodily adornments that accentuate her beauty encouraged Antony to perceive her as innocent, based on Plato's theory of aestheticism.¹³⁴ Ultimately, Cleopatra's use of clothing to accentuate her beauty enabled her to pacify, seduce, and control Antony.

By choosing to wear Grecian robes, Sardou's Cleopatra undermines Antony's perception of her as a 'sorceress of Egypt'.¹³⁵ The stage directions indicate that at the beginning of the interrogation, Antony is guarded ('brusquely', 'discomfited'), but he quickly softens towards Cleopatra.¹³⁶ As Cleopatra's attire presents her as an innocent Grecian woman rather than a 'barbarian', Antony views her as an ally.¹³⁷ After their meeting in Tarsus, Antony returns with Cleopatra to Memphis for a feast in his honour. When Roman legionaries arrive to summon him back to Rome, they mistakenly identify him as 'Ramses' because he is wearing an 'Egyptian Robe'.¹³⁸ Their failure to 'recognise' him suggests that Egyptians and Romans can visually pass as each other with a simple change of clothing. Just as Cleopatra's Grecian costume signifies her allegiance to Rome in Tarsus, Antony's Egyptian outfit shows his allegiance to Egypt in Memphis. As clothing signifies political alliances, Antony's Egyptian garments imply that he has become an extension of Cleopatra. Sardou's portrayal of Antony donning Egyptian clothes mirrors Shakespeare's description of Antony and Cleopatra swapping garments in Act 2, Scene 5. While Shakespeare uses clothing to illustrate the subversion of traditional gender binaries in their

¹³⁴ Plutarch states that Cleopatra did not 'not' distribute her flattery 'into the four forms of which Plato speaks, but into many'. However, in *Cléopâtre*, Sardou states that Cleopatra ascribed to Plato's theory according to Plutarch. See., Sardou, p. 33. See also., Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives*, trans. by Bernadotte Perrin, 11 vols (London: William Heinemann, 1914-1926), IX (1920), p. 201.

¹³⁵ Sardou, p. 23.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 28, 29, 31, 33.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 157.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 61.

relationship, Antony's Egyptian gown in Sardou's play suggests that he has renounced his nationality by forming an alliance with Cleopatra. Cleopatra's decision to meet Antony dressed as Venus allows her to exert power over him, transforming him from a Triumvir into her Egyptian subject.

As one of the most influential actresses of her time, Bernhardt's persona became intertwined with that of Cleopatra. The *Star*, a popular London-based daily periodical that appealed to the masses, reported:

for years [Bernhardt] has been collecting jewels, girdles, armlets, bracelets, and necklaces. Every dress consists of a diaphanous piece of material seven yards long, embellished with metallic or silk embroidery. This long strip of gauze is wound and draped about her lithesome form and held in place at the hips, belt, and shoulders with magnificent fasteners, brooches, and girdles, incrusting with stones of every conceivable shade. [...] In her hair, about her fingers, arms, and ankles, bandeaus, bangles, and bracelets blaze, and the sandals in which her feet are slipped are also finished with rainbow effect. Row after row and chain upon chain of jewels encircle her chest and breast and the unparalleled display of opals, turquoises, topaz, scrabs, corals, sapphires, amethysts, rubies, sardonyx, malachite, and pearls produce an almost overpowering sense of luxury. One dress, an Egyptian robe, is certainly a most wonderful creation. The material in itself is of gold-coloured gauze, appliqued with a design of laurel leaves. The belt of pearls and turquoises that holds the delicate fabric in at the waist also secures a barbaric drapery at the hips made of a tiger's skin. Fancy the contrast of embroidered gauze and tiger's fur!¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Quoted in 'Sarah Bernhardt's Complexion: Paris is Wild About the African Hue of Cleopatra', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 51.17 (17 January 1891), p. 16.

The constant repetition and listing create a sense of abundance, which is enhanced by the extensive space given to the description of clothing in a daily paper. Evidently, the *Star* and the *Chicago Daily Tribune* (which reprinted the narrative for American audiences) believed their readers would enjoy learning about every detail of Bernhardt's Cleopatra costume. As noticed by the correspondent, the materials that Bernhardt sourced for her performance of Cleopatra 'produce[d] an [...] overpowering sense of luxury'. In the *fin de siècle*, wealthy women favoured opals, moonstones, diamonds, and pearls, partly due to Queen Victoria's influence.¹⁴⁰ Opals, for example, were originally disliked as stones of 'ill omen'; however, they quickly gained popularity after Queen Victoria began wearing them following the discovery of opal mines in British-controlled Australia in 1849.¹⁴¹ Sapphires, corals, rubies, sardonyx, and malachite were also stones mined from countries under British imperial control, notably India, Sri Lanka, and Egypt. As Sardou produced *Cléopâtre* at the height of the British Empire, the items worn by Bernhardt represented the wealth of British-controlled territories. These gemstones, serving as a reminder of Britain's colonial power, align Cleopatra and the actress portraying her with Queen Victoria. This comparison is enhanced by the knowledge that Sardou's Cleopatra sought to create an 'Empire of the Sun', while Bernhardt was called 'divine' because she was considered theatre royalty.¹⁴² By adorning Cleopatra's character with luxurious jewels symbolising the Empress of India, Bernhardt portrayed her as a worldly figure who possessed the riches of the East. By stating that Bernhardt personally 'collected' the 'jewels' used for Cleopatra's character at a time when major productions increasingly relied on costume designers, the *Star* equates Cleopatra's luxurious eastern otherness with the actress who portrayed her.¹⁴³ In her autobiography, Bernhardt wrote: 'every time that I start to work on a role I see the character in my imagination in costume [...] the materialised vision from

¹⁴⁰ Rose Leiman Goldemberg, *Antique Jewelry: A Practical & Passionate Guide* (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2000), p. 68.

¹⁴¹ Cora Linn Daniels and C. M. Stevans, *Encyclopaedia of Superstitions: Folklore, and the Occult Sciences of the World*, 3 vols (Milwaukee: J. H. Yewdale & Sons, 1903), II p. 738.

¹⁴² Clement Scott, "The Divine Sarah": The Bernhardt Répertoire', *Sketch*, 6.73 (20 June 1894), pp. 416-417 (p. 416).

¹⁴³ In *Victorian Spectacular Theatre* (1891), Michael R. Booth establishes that major productions in the latter-half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries relied on archaeologists and painters, such as Edward Poynter and John Collier, to create elaborate stage designs and costumes which aimed to highlight the grandeur of the ancient world. See, Michael R. Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850-1910* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

which there suddenly emerges the soul, which must dominate the character'.¹⁴⁴ By understanding a character's 'soul' through costume, Bernhardt expresses her belief that items of bodily adornment have the power to convey an individual's identity. The most famous accessory in Bernhardt's performance in *Cléopâtre* was a living 'silver snake' which curled 'round one of her arms'.¹⁴⁵ By adorning her body with a real snake Bernhardt embodied the last pharaoh of Egypt in the eyes of her contemporaries. In 1907, the *Sketch* reported that Bernhardt had grown 'attached to the little serpents'.¹⁴⁶ As noted by numerous British and American papers, Bernhardt would 'slip jewelled rings and chains on the bodies of her little snakes, with a view to enhancing their beauty'.¹⁴⁷ Owing to Cleopatra's association with the serpent, 'non-experts [...] habitually identified [...] every classical-style statue of a woman holding a snake, or standing next to a snake, or wearing a snake bracelet, as "Cleopatra"'.¹⁴⁸ By appearing in the streets of London, Paris, and New York with 'little snakes' covered in jewels, Bernhardt continued to embody a luxurious, eastern siren decades after her performance of Cleopatra. In 1892, the American opera singer Blanche Roosevelt stated that 'like the Serpent of the Nile', 'age cannot wither nor custom stale her infinite variety', as 'she is Cleopatra [...] the greatest actress of her time; the most wonderful woman; the one, the fascinating, the unique – Sarah Bernhardt'.¹⁴⁹ Bernhardt's culturally accepted identity as a 'modern Cleopatra' suggests that contemporary women could achieve their aspirations, fulfil their sensual desires, and empower themselves by visually mirroring the final pharaoh of Egypt.

The *Star*'s article also highlights how costume exposes the contours of Bernhardt's body, with the jewellery accentuating her 'hair', 'fingers', 'arms,' 'ankles,' 'chest and breast', while the fabric showcases her 'lithesome form'. The word 'lithesome', which emphasises a flexible and graceful figure, was used in the nineteenth century to refer to sensual women due to its association

¹⁴⁴ Sarah Bernhardt, *My Double Life: The Memoirs of Sarah Bernhardt*, trans. by Victoria Tietze Larson (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), p. 59.

¹⁴⁵ 'Notes', *Observer*, 5179 (24 August 1890), p. 4.

¹⁴⁶ 'Heard in the Green Room', *Sketch*, 57.732 (6 February 1907), p. 116.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Joyce Tyldesley, *Cleopatra: The Last Queen of Egypt* (London: Profile, 2009), p. 59.

¹⁴⁹ Blanche Roosevelt, *Victorien Sardou: Poet, Author, and Member of the Academy of France* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1892), pp. 142, 143.

with the serpent. As noted by Bram Dijkstra, ‘woman was not only tempted by the snake [the phallus] but was the snake herself’ because of the slender curves of her body.¹⁵⁰ As one of London’s most popular periodicals, with over 125,000 copies circulated daily in February 1888, the *Star*’s readers would have associated Bernhardt’s slender figure with the sensual yet dangerous serpent.¹⁵¹ As Cleopatra was also aligned with the serpent, the article blurs the lines between the actress and her role. The *Star*’s reviewer commented that ‘the belt [...] that holds the delicate fabric in at the waist also secures a barbaric drapery made of a tiger’s skin. Fancy the contrast of embroidered gauze and tiger’s fur!’. The word ‘fancy’ and the exclamation mark emphasise the reviewer’s shock at Bernhardt’s stylisation. At the *fin de siècle*, predatory animals like tigers were used in visual culture to represent the dangers of female sexuality. As noted by Lou Charnon-Deutsch, European artists of the *fin de siècle* painted ‘women-on-the-fur-rug-scenes’ because they were fascinated by the *femme fatale*, who was a ‘dangerous temptress [...] put on earth to rob men of their riches or their masculinity’.¹⁵² By painting her ‘nude, outstretched, immobilised body’ on the skin of an animal that symbolised her ‘predatory’ sexuality, they gained control of her.¹⁵³ They transformed her from ‘hunter’ to ‘hunted’ and ensured that she existed for male pleasure.¹⁵⁴ While the women in these paintings were styled by male artists and posed nude for the male gaze, Bernhardt was a living woman who styled herself. By draping her body in silk, an expensive eastern fabric favoured by the wealthy, Bernhardt creates a contrast between the ‘barbaric’ fur’ (itself an expensive, coveted material) and ‘delicate’ silk, depicting an individual who is both savage and refined. Since silk and fur were popular amongst aristocratic women, who frequently ‘travelled from London to Paris’ ‘to see Bernhardt perform’, her costume was designed to appeal to the female gaze.¹⁵⁵ Bernhardt’s

¹⁵⁰ Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-De-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 305.

¹⁵¹ Richard Jones, ‘T P O’Connor: The Star’, *Jack the Ripper Tour*, 23 July 2015 <<https://www.jack-the-ripper-tour.com/generalnews/t-p-oconnor-the-star/>> [accessed 5 January 2020].

¹⁵² Lou Charnon-Deutsch, *Fiction of the Feminine in Nineteenth-Century Spanish Press* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), p. 48.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Marcus, p. 114. In her biography, Constance Collier recounts that during her performance of *The Eternal City* (1903), she wore ‘magnificent furs’ valued at ‘about a thousand pounds’, which were ‘lent to her for the sake of

largely female fanbase would have coveted her Egyptian garment which symbolised her autonomy over her sensuality. Bernhardt's influential costume not only bridged the gap between sensuality and sophistication but also empowered her as both an object of admiration and an independent creator of her own image, showcasing a complex balance between feminine allure and artistic self-determination.

In 1892, the *Illustrated London News* published a full-page illustration depicting this costume (Fig. 1.2). Wearing an embroidered gauzy fabric, with jewellery embellishing her arms, chest, waist and hips, Bernhardt rests her left arm on the tiger skin while her right hand is holding a single white flower, which appears to be a peony. According to the Victorian language of flowers, peonies symbolised shame and bashfulness.¹⁵⁶ The peony's association with shyness is reflected in the tilt of Bernhardt's head. Instead of looking towards the viewer, Bernhardt's face is turned away from the audience. To add to the contradictions in Cleopatra's character, Bernhardt's costume implies that she is simultaneously shy, delicate, sensual, and exotic. In 1893 Georges Clairin, a close friend of the actress, created an oil-painting of this photograph titled *Sarah Bernhardt in the Role of Cleopatra* (Fig. 1.3). The use of colour in the painting, which is absent in the black-and-white photograph, draws attention to Bernhardt's body. The jewellery highlights her private parts while effectively concealing them, prompting the viewer to contemplate her sexuality while also reminding them of her unattainability. In the painting, the tiger appears younger, and instead of resting on a chair beside her, is positioned at her feet, symbolising her control over it. Since the tiger embodies female sensuality, her dominance over it suggests that she is in control of her own sexuality. Clairin's painting also establishes a visual connection between the tiger and Bernhardt, emphasising their similar hair colour which is embellished with pink and white flowers. This parallel subtly suggests a deeper symbolic link between the two, highlighting their shared traits of wildness, beauty, and

advertising. The 'fame' of these furs spread across England, was reported on by transnational magazines, and nearly led to Collier's death when a 'religious homicidal maniac' tried to 'sacrifice [her] to the poor' with a butcher's knife. See., Constance Collier, *Harlequinade: The Story of My Life* (London: John Lane the Body Head, 1929), pp. 127-129.

¹⁵⁶ Kate Greenaway, *The Language of Flowers* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1884), p. 32.

power. Bernhardt was Clairin's most influential muse, inspiring women to 'commission similar works starring themselves'.¹⁵⁷ The suggestion that respectable women commissioned paintings of themselves alongside animals symbolising their sensuality implies that Bernhardt influenced women to reclaim their sexuality through art. Bernhardt's influence thus extended beyond the stage and into the very fabric of western culture, impacting female self-representation.

The widespread coverage of Bernhardt's Cleopatra costumes in periodicals underscored their profound impact on women's fashion and self-expression, revealing how Bernhardt's portrayal of the Egyptian queen not only influenced sartorial trends but also encouraged modern women to explore and express their own sensuality and power. An article from *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, a London-based magazine popular with men for its focus on equestrian sports and hunting, noted that since it was still fashionable to see Bernhardt, the audience was predominantly composed of women. Mockingly, this reviewer stated:

nine out of every ten woman whom [he] saw in the vestibule had evidently made up after the familiar portraits of the actress to the fore. This was especially noticeable in the arrangements of their hair[.]¹⁵⁸

To accompany the critic's claims, the review includes an illustration of 'the vestibule on a Bernhardt night' (Fig. 1.4). The illustration shows the side and back profiles of multiple women, all wearing similar garments and with their hair in a curly up-do. As Bernhardt wore her hair down to portray Cleopatra, they are evidently mimicking the actress rather than her role. Two of these women are overweight, and most have curved noses reminiscent of caricatures mocking Jewish people, reflecting a possible imitation of Bernhardt, who had Jewish ancestry. By suggesting that none of the audience for *Cléopâtre* met western beauty standards, the newspaper mocks Bernhardt's

¹⁵⁷ Elizabeth Silverthorne, *Sarah Bernhardt* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003), p. 53.

¹⁵⁸ 'Our Captious Critic: "Cleopatra"', *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 37.973 (18 June 1892), p. 520.

admirers. As observed by Marcus, publications with primarily male readerships ‘focused on ridiculing the women who imitated’ Bernhardt.¹⁵⁹ Commenting on the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*’ article, Marcus states: ‘for this commentator, Bernhardt’s glamour as the Queen of the Nile, famous for her powers of seduction, became tarnished when mirrored by her less appealing followers, who transformed the rare into the common’.¹⁶⁰ Regardless of their ridicule of Bernhardt’s admirers, her ‘fan base became’ increasingly female as she ‘aged’; crowds of women even stood ‘vigil outside [her] home in Paris as she lay dying in 1923’.¹⁶¹ By imitating Bernhardt, her admirers made their sexualities culturally visible. The *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* features three illustrations of Bernhardt as Cleopatra, all focusing on her hair. In the first, her thick curls cascade past her waist as she embraces Antony, showcasing her profile with a slender nose, large eyes, and painted lips (Fig. 1.5). In the second, her hair is dishevelled as she attacks a dark-skinned messenger (Fig. 1.6). In the third, her long curls frame her shoulders, her eyes are wide open, and her painted lips are pouted, as she hides from Antony on a bed behind a curtain. In a speech bubble, the illustrator writes ‘I’ll give him ta ra ra boom de ay’ (Fig. 1.7).¹⁶² The song, popularised in Edmond Audran’s opera *Miss Helyett* (1891), features a ‘shy’, ‘innocent’ ‘belle of good society,’ serving as an insult to the ‘pure’ Octavia.¹⁶³ Sitting on a bed, which Michel Foucault described as the nineteenth-century ‘locus of sexuality’, Bernhardt’s Cleopatra is the antithesis of the ‘girl’ depicted in the song.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, Bernhardt’s violent outburst towards the messenger, the axe in her hand in the bedroom illustration, along with her loose hair and dark lips (suggesting the use of lipstick), implies that she is seductive and powerful. By presenting Bernhardt’s Cleopatra as a loving, sexual, violent, and destructive queen in an article focused on how contemporary women imitate Bernhardt, *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* subtly suggests that modern women

¹⁵⁹ Marcus, p. 156.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 115.

¹⁶² ‘Our Captious Critic: “Cleopatra”’, *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 37.973 (18 June 1892), p. 520.

¹⁶³ Henry J. Sayers, ‘Ta-ra-ra Boom-de-ay!’, in *500 Best-Loved Song Lyrics*, ed. by Ronald Herder (New York: Dover Publications, 2013), p. 339.

¹⁶⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans., Robert Hurley, 4 vols (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978–2021), I (1978), p. 3.

could explore their sensuality and power by imitating actresses who performed the role of Cleopatra.

Sarah Bernhardt's elaborate costumes, rich in detail and symbolism, not only highlight her personal allure but also set a precedent for how contemporary bourgeois women could express their own sensuality and power. Through her self-styled representation, Bernhardt merged the exoticism of Cleopatra with a modern assertion of feminine agency, reinventing herself as a modern Cleopatra. While Bernhardt's costumes employed Graeco-Egyptian symbolism to delve into the possibilities of female sensuality and leadership, Collier's archaeologically inspired garments showcased women's capacity to embody both maternal and romantic roles.

Collier's Costumes

The costumes in Tree's *Antony and Cleopatra* transform the final pharaoh of Egypt into the embodiment of royal motherhood. In her memoir, Collier stated that there was 'only a mention in the play of Cleopatra appearing as the goddess Isis', but Tree 'elaborated' it 'into a great tableau'.¹⁶⁵

Describing the scene, Collier wrote:

Cleopatra, robed in silver, crowned in silver, carrying a golden sceptre and the symbol of the sacred golden calf in her hand, went in procession through the streets of Alexandria, the ragged, screaming populace acclaiming the Queen, half in hate, half in superstitious fear and joy as she made her sacrilegious ascent to her high throne in the market-place.

I looked very beautiful in this scene, the contrast of the silver and my dusky brown skin making a wonderful picture.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Collier, p. 186.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

In the Graeco-Roman period, Isis was not only the ‘queen of heaven and the fertile soil of earth’, but also a ‘healer, a wise woman and a powerful magician’ who was a ‘faithful wife and compassionate mother’.¹⁶⁷ By aligning herself with Isis, Cleopatra encouraged her followers to worship her as the mother of the future king of Egypt, as well as the symbolic mother of the god Horus and her subjects.¹⁶⁸ In a promotional photograph by F. W. Burford published in Tree’s limited-edition version of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, and mass-printed in periodicals including *Bystander* and *Play Pictorial*, the silhouette and pattern of Collier’s gown mirror the sheath dresses worn by Isis in ancient Egyptian bas-reliefs (Fig. 1.8). Collier’s vulture headdress also includes a double uraeus, which was an emblem of protection for the pharaoh, and the ankh, which was Isis’s symbol. By contrasting against her ‘dusky brown skin’, the dress transforms Collier’s Cleopatra into the mother-goddess, while simultaneously orientalising her. In ancient Memphis, the ‘sacred golden calf’ Apis was worshipped as the loyal and sacrificial son of Hathor, the ‘goddess of love, childbirth and other “female” pursuits like song and dance’, which made her Venus’s Egyptian counterpart.¹⁶⁹ Similarly, the vulture headdress was worn by female pharaohs, queens, and priestesses as a symbol of protection by the vulture goddess Nekhbet. Like Hathor and Isis, Nekhbet was associated with royal motherhood, as it was believed that she provided the pharaoh with ‘life, youth, protection, and abundance in the hereafter’.¹⁷⁰ Collier’s vulture headdress, gown, and sceptre present her as the embodiment of royal Egyptian motherhood.

Tree had originally intended on introducing Cleopatra ‘with a procession of children’, with two ‘robed in silver, looking like miniatures of the great Queen’.¹⁷¹ However, Collier threw a tantrum as she found the ‘domestic side of Cleopatra [...] utterly incongruous’, arguing that she could not embody the ‘Queen of Love’ while imagining her as a mother.¹⁷² When the children did

¹⁶⁷ Tyldesley, p. 115.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 5.

¹⁶⁹ Robyn A. Gillam, ‘Priestesses of Hathor: Their Function, Decline and Disappearance’, *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 32 (1995), pp. 211-237 (p. 211).

¹⁷⁰ Stephanie Lynn Budin, *Images of Woman and Child from the Bronze Age: Reconsidering Fertility, Maternity and Gender in the Ancient World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 46.

¹⁷¹ Bingham, p. 170.

¹⁷² Collier, p. 186.

appear during the opening performance, Collier ‘tried to look as they did not belong to [her], and prayed in [her] soul that the audience would think they were attendants’.¹⁷³ Collier’s dismissal of Cleopatra’s motherhood reflects the cultural belief that maternity and sexuality are irreconcilable. Nevertheless, her forced performance with the children required her to embody both seductive and maternal qualities. The ‘screaming populace’ in Tree and Macquoid’s tableaux implies that royal motherhood holds significant power in Cleopatra’s Egypt. Although the ‘ragged’ clothes worn by Cleopatra’s subjects suggest that she does not care for her symbolic children, they worship her in ‘superstitious fear and joy’ because her position as pharaoh and her link to the mother-goddesses demands respect. The contrast between the ragged clothes of the Egyptians and Collier’s exquisite silver gown demonstrates that Cleopatra’s self-association with maternal power allows her to enjoy the benefits of being worshipped as a mother deity without the responsibilities of motherhood. Collier’s performance of a seductive queen linked to motherhood through her garments creates an image of a woman who uses her maternal role as a tool to maintain power. In her memoir, Collier remembered that when she was ‘gorgeously robed and playing Cleopatra, [the public] would unconsciously make way for [her]’.¹⁷⁴ This illustrates that Collier experienced increased respect while dressed in archaeologically inspired Egyptian clothing, indicating that she shared some of the power associated with her role. The real-life impact of dressing as an oriental queen suggests that actresses could empower themselves by visually imitating Cleopatra.

In the messenger scene, when Cleopatra discovers Antony’s infidelity, the allusions to mother-goddesses in Macquoid’s costumes highlight the feminine power embodied by Collier’s queen. A photograph by Burford, published to advertise the play, depicts Alice Crawford as Charmian, stopping Collier as Cleopatra from stabbing the messenger, played by Charles Quatermaine (Fig. 1.9). In ancient Egyptian mythology, Isis was often depicted with ‘wings’ or represented as a ‘bird of prey’ to symbolise her ‘function as protectress’.¹⁷⁵ As the pattern on

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 187.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 169.

¹⁷⁵ Heike Owusu, *Egyptian Symbols* (London: Sterling, 2008), p. 79.

Collier's dress resembles Isis's wings, her costume explicitly aligns her with Isis the defender. However, Collier was heavily criticised for her performance, as theatre critics believed she 'lacked' Cleopatra's 'indescribable charm'.¹⁷⁶ Despite this, many reviewers praised her portrayal in the messenger scene. B. W. Findon, writing for *Play Pictorial*, stated that Collier 'stamped her mark on the play in' this scene because she 'gave a vivid picture of a woman mad with jealous rage, wounded and scorned by the man [who] represented to her more than Empire and worldly power'.¹⁷⁷ By striking the messenger down and threatening to have him 'whipp'd with wire, and stew'd in brine', Collier's Cleopatra demonstrates her passion for Antony and the violence she is prepared to inflict on anyone who challenges their symbolic marriage.¹⁷⁸ Findon's claim that Antony means 'more' to Cleopatra 'than Empire and worldly power' reflects Tree's desire to present his Cleopatra as 'the greatest courtesan that ever [...] ruled and undid empires and emperors'.¹⁷⁹ Dressed as the goddess Isis, renowned for her unwavering devotion to her brother-husband Osiris, Cleopatra's costume symbolises her loyalty and love for Antony. Cleopatra's embodiment of Isis foreshadows her willingness to use her power to maintain Antony's love, even at the expense of their empires. Collier's performance of a 'woman scorned' and the archaeological details of her dress align Cleopatra with Isis the protectress. This creates a Cleopatra whose power emanates from her ability to embody the roles of lover, pharaoh, mother, protector, and aggressor, ultimately portraying her between the binaries of femininity and masculinity.

Although Collier was naturally darker than Crawford and Quatermaine, her skin appears significantly lighter in Burford's photograph of the messenger scene. It can be presumed that like Bernhardt, Crawford's and Quatermaine's skin was artificially darkened with cosmetics. While Crawford's body is darkened in this photograph, other promotional images for Tree's *Antony and Cleopatra* show her with her natural skin colour (Fig. 1.10) or a slightly darkened face (Fig. 1.11).

¹⁷⁶ H. De. S., p. 17.

¹⁷⁷ B. W. Findon, 'The Production and the Players', *Play Pictorial*, 9.54 (1 February 1906), pp. 226- 227 (p. 227).

¹⁷⁸ Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra: As Arranged for the Stage by Herbert Beerbohm Tree*, p. 42.

¹⁷⁹ Tree, 'Foreword', p. 5.

Tree's choice to present Cleopatra as lighter than Charmian and the messenger in this scene reinforces the *fin-de-siècle* rhetoric that Cleopatra's bloodline represented 'a dominant caste, superior to its subjects in race'.¹⁸⁰ However, as Cleopatra's whiteness is exclusive to this scene, Collier's Cleopatra's racial identity changes throughout the play. Bernhardt's performance of *Cléopâtre* experienced the same racial complexity. While several news outlets reported that Bernhardt darkened her skin, with the *Star* and *Chicago Daily Tribune* even describing her complexion as 'African', an illustration in the *Graphic* depicted her as a white woman in the messenger scene (Fig. 1.12).¹⁸¹ The illustration shows Cleopatra stamping on the back of an almost-nude dark-skinned messenger who is pleading for mercy. While her clenched fists and crossed brows demonstrate her rage, Bernhardt's Cleopatra remains completely in control of the situation. In both Sardou's *Cléopâtre* and Tree's *Antony and Cleopatra*, race is portrayed as a spectrum, with Cleopatra's racial identity shifting according to her interactions. When she is with Antony, she is portrayed as a bronzed Egyptian woman, while with the messenger, she appears as a white oppressor. Cleopatra's portrayal in these productions reveals a deliberate manipulation of racial identity to convey expressions of power and dominance. Collier's temporary whiteness, combined with the archaeologically inspired details of her dress that align her with Isis, situate her between the binaries of race, sexuality, and gender, suggesting that women in positions of political or social influence can manipulate these categories to reinforce their authority.

Collier's depiction of Cleopatra, through her attire and racial representation, bridges the complex intersections of power, femininity, and racial identity. By embodying both a seductress and a mother, Collier's Cleopatra illustrates how elite or theatrical women could simultaneously navigate maternal, feminine, and sensual roles, using oriental items of bodily adornment to shape their cultural perception. While Collier's and Bernhardt's costumes demonstrate the potential for

¹⁸⁰ 'Cleopatra', *Spectator*, 68.3337 (11 June 1892), pp. 808-809 (p. 808).

¹⁸¹ 'Sarah Bernhardt's Complexion: Paris is Wild About the African Hue of Cleopatra', p. 16.

female power through spectacle and performance, Elliott's costumes function as political tools to convey masculine imperial authority.

Elliott's Cleopatra

In contrast to Tree's and Sardou's Cleopatras, whose costumes emphasise their sensuality and power, Shaw's Cleopatra is depicted in clothing that presents her as an innocent young girl. Shaw's script introduces Cleopatra as a 'girl' with 'braided hair'.¹⁸² In ancient Egypt, it was customary for women to keep their natural hair long or wear long wigs with 'carefully arranged strands, curls and braids' to symbolise their 'sexuality and fertility'.¹⁸³ Collier's long braided hair in her performance of Cleopatra conforms to ancient Egyptian beauty standards. The shortness of Elliott's hair, however, aligns her with young female servants who often wore 'round wigs that end[ed] above the shoulder'.¹⁸⁴ Instead of emphasising her sexuality, Cleopatra's braided hair in *Caesar and Cleopatra* transforms her into a servant girl. Shaw's contemporaries were aware of ancient Egyptian hairstyles through numerous articles published in *Pictorial Bible*, *Appletons' Journal*, *American Illustrated Magazine*, and *Literary Gazette*. Throughout the nineteenth century, 'respectable women' had to abide by unwritten 'hair rules', which dictated that ladies and married women wore their hair up while in public.¹⁸⁵ Braided hair was often considered an appropriate way to manage hair within these constraints. The *London Journal* even published an article in 1892 stating that 'the best method of dressing the hair' for 'sleep', was to have it 'loosely braided'.¹⁸⁶ As Cleopatra's character is sleeping in this scene, her braided hair conforms to the 'hair rules' which respectable *fin-de-siècle* women were expected to abide by. However, it is important to note that simply having braids did

¹⁸² Shaw, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, p. 102.

¹⁸³ Gay Robins, 'Hair and the Construction of Identity in Ancient Egypt, c. 1480-1350 B.C.', *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 36 (1999), pp. 55-69 (p. 63).

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹⁸⁵ Galia Ofek, *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 84.

¹⁸⁶ 'The Best Methods of Dressing the Hair', *London Journal*, 18.164 (1 August 1892), p. 13.

not automatically make the hairstyle ‘up’ in the sense required for public respectability. In the Victorian era, it was only socially acceptable for women to wear their hair loose in their marital bedroom, as dishevelled hair was associated with the ‘sinister potential’ of women’s sexuality.¹⁸⁷ Most *fin-de-siècle* actresses who performed the part of Cleopatra wore a few loose braids and styled their hair in loose, dishevelled curls. By portraying Cleopatra with short, unpinned braids, Shaw avoided giving her the long, voluminous hair that symbolised overt sexuality. However, leaving her hair unpinned also distanced her from the respectable, public-facing hairstyles of the time, simultaneously adding an oriental element to her portrayal. Shaw’s Cleopatra thus occupies a space between innocence, respectability, and otherness, emphasising her youth while avoiding overt sexualisation.

In the 1906-1907 production of the play featuring Elliott as Cleopatra, promotional photographs of this scene reveal that she not only wore her hair in braids but also partially concealed it with a veil (Fig. 1.13). The oriental veiled woman was a figure of secrecy and inaccessibility to men because veiling was associated with ‘female sexuality [...] and the veil of the hymen’.¹⁸⁸ By wearing all her hair in braids and concealing it with a white veil, Shaw’s Cleopatra is presented as an innocent and chaste ‘girl’ whose sexuality is guarded from the audience. However, the ability to gaze upon a veiled woman – whose veil symbolised her desire to ‘create a barrier between her and others’ – empowered Shaw’s male contemporaries, as they denied her the right to remain concealed.¹⁸⁹ Extending on Hugh-Hallett’s argument that Shaw turned his Cleopatra into an object of pleasure for his male theatregoers, the veil allows the audience to admire her beauty against her wishes without feeling threatened by her sexuality. Promotional images of Elliott in this costume, featured in *Cosmopolitan*, a women’s fashion and entertainment magazine, reveal

¹⁸⁷ Elisabeth Gitter, ‘The Power of Women’s Hair in the Victorian Imagination’, *PMLA*, 99.5 (1984), pp. 936-954 (p. 938).

¹⁸⁸ Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, p. 145.

¹⁸⁹ Susan Casteras, ‘Seeing the Unseen: Pictorial Problematics and Victorian Images of Class, Poverty, and Urban Life’, in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*, ed. by Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan (California: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 264-88 (p. 267).

that, aside from the silhouette of Cleopatra's dress and her beaded necklace, her costume lacks any references to divine power (Fig. 1.14). Instead of appearing like a powerful pharaoh, Shaw's Cleopatra resembles an ordinary Egyptian woman. As Queen Victoria popularised the custom of brides wearing white in 1840, the white fabric of Elliott's gown, alongside the high bateau neckline, basque waistline, and white veil, makes her costume evoke a contemporary wedding dress. While Elliott's Cleopatra attire makes her resemble both an ancient Egyptian servant girl and a *fin-de-siècle* bride, Forbes-Robertson's Caesar wears a laurel wreath that symbolises his godly status as the emperor of Rome (Fig. 1.13). The contrast between Caesar's regal garb and Cleopatra's simple gown suggests that Caesar is Cleopatra's superior. Sitting on the sphinx for protection from the Romans, Shaw's Cleopatra promises Caesar that she will become his 'slave' if he ensures her safety. As Shaw's Cleopatra is already dressed like a servant, her costume demonstrates her subservience. As this scene is the beginning of Caesar and Cleopatra's platonic relationship, her white dress symbolises her innocence and willingness to give herself to Caesar, in the same way that a servant or wife was expected to give herself to her husband or master. Shaw and Forbes-Robertson clearly intended for Cleopatra to be perceived in this manner, as promotional illustrations of this scene reveal that Cleopatra ultimately ends up on her knees, arms raised in worship towards Caesar, who looms over her like a god (Fig. 1.15). In contrast to Bernhardt's and Collier's costumes, which emphasise their feminine power, Elliott's costume emphasises her subservience.

Shaw's Cleopatra dresses like a divine queen only after Caesar crowns her at the end of the play. Photographs taken by Lizzie Caswall Smith to promote Forbes-Robertson's production present Cleopatra with downcast eyes, a solemn expression, and hands in a praying position, obediently waiting to be crowned (Fig. 1.16). The position of Cleopatra's hands suggest that she worships Caesar like a god. Towering above her, Caesar possesses all the power in their relationship. The little authority Cleopatra gains by becoming queen is undermined by the fact that Caesar leaves his governor, Rufio, to 'rule in [his] name, in [his] way, according to [his] boasted

laws of life'.¹⁹⁰ Although Cleopatra detests Rufio, the thought of Caesar abandoning her fills her with terror, making her fall 'on her knees'.¹⁹¹ Cleopatra's attachment to Caesar gives him power over her, as she accepts her nation falling under Roman control to maintain his friendship. By having Caesar place the vulture headdress on Cleopatra, Shaw demonstrates that even after becoming pharaoh, she remains subservient to him. The archaeologically informed details of Cleopatra's costume further highlight her meekness (Fig. 1.17). Cleopatra's heavily draped gown is embellished with Isis's wings, symbolising her role as protectress, while her vulture headdress symbolises her position as queen. By the Ptolemaic period, the vulture headdress without the uraeus was commonly worn by the 'king's mothers and principal wife' to transfer the 'divine aspect of queenship' from Nekhbet to the women closest to the ruling pharaoh.¹⁹² Instead of symbolising her position as pharaoh, Cleopatra's vulture headdress suggests that she is a female queen ruling alongside a divine king. This subtle archaeological detail in Elliott's costume suggests that, despite being crowned queen, Shaw's Cleopatra does not possess the same boundless power as Bernhardt's or Collier's Cleopatras. Although Elliott's costume shares the same symbolism as those worn by Collier, its layers of thick dark fabric do not accentuate her sexuality. Instead, Elliott's modest gown transforms her into a conservative version of Egypt's final queen, while also aligning her with Queen Victoria, who perpetually wore black mourning clothes after Prince Albert's death in 1861. Like her first costume, Shaw's Cleopatra wears a long veil to her coronation. While the darker colours and Isis's symbolism suggest that Cleopatra has matured from the beginning of the narrative, the veil and conservative gown emphasise that Shaw's Cleopatra remains as sexually oblivious and naive as she was at the start.

Shaw's portrayal of Cleopatra starkly contrasts with other representations by focusing on her innocence rather than her power. Through her modest costume and veiled, braided hairstyle, Shaw's Cleopatra is depicted as a subservient figure rather than a formidable queen. Despite her

¹⁹⁰ Shaw, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, p. 197.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 187.

¹⁹² Gay Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 23.

eventual elevation to pharaoh, Cleopatra remains under Caesar's influence, constrained by contemporary ideals of female respectability. By imposing *fin-de-siècle* morals on an ancient pagan woman, Shaw refuses to cast his Cleopatra as an emblem of female resistance. Although images of Elliott as Cleopatra appeared in *Cosmopolitan*, the lack of enthusiastic articles about her costumes suggests that female audiences were less captivated by her style than by Bernhardt's and Collier's. In Sardou's *Cléopâtre*, Tree's rendition of *Antony and Cleopatra*, and Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*, costume functions as a cultural identifier that signifies the wearer's political and moral allegiances. By styling their Cleopatras differently, each play presents a distinct version of the last pharaoh of Egypt. Bernhardt's costumes underscore Cleopatra's imperial power and sensuality while transforming Bernhardt into a 'modern Cleopatra' who inspires contemporary women to elevate themselves. Similarly, Collier's costumes highlight how wealthy western women could harness their power to challenge traditional binaries by manipulating their gender and racial identities through costume, jewellery, and cosmetics. In contrast, Elliott's costume undermines the concept of eastern female power by suggesting that even a pharaoh can be subject to masculine control. Together, these interpretations reveal that costume can reflect and critique contemporary issues of power, race, gender, and sexuality.

Conclusion

Theatrical representations of Cleopatra in Sardou's *Cléopâtre*, Tree's *Antony and Cleopatra*, and Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* reveal how late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century productions used spectacle to navigate anxieties about race, gender, and empire. Sardou and Tree emphasise Cleopatra's Eastern identity through lavish costumes and cosmetics, portraying her as a queen who exerts both political and sexual influence over Western men. Their productions foreground how theatrical design reinforced fears of female rule in an era of imperial uncertainty. While Sardou and

Tree depict Cleopatra's ability to manipulate imperial authority through performance and desire, Shaw's restrained staging and critique of female influence align with his socialist views on governance. These productions demonstrate how visual spectacle and theatrical interpretation shaped contemporary attitudes toward sexuality, female sovereignty, and colonial rule. Research into biographies of playwrights and actresses, as well as contemporary periodical reviews, further reveals how these plays were received by *fin-de-siècle* audiences, not only highlighting the tensions and fascinations they provoked but also situating them as both products of their era and commentaries on it.

Rather than presenting a singular vision of Cleopatra's power, these productions illustrate the interplay between female sensuality, performative femininity, and political authority. Bernhardt's Cleopatra manipulates Antony through her seductive charm, using his armies to strengthen her own imperial position. Similarly, Collier's Cleopatra embodies a sensual and fertile ruler whose visual allure reinforces her legitimacy. In contrast, Shaw's Cleopatra lacks sensuality, which limits her authority as a ruler. These plays suggest that monarchical power and sexual influence could intersect, but they also reveal competing perspectives on the relationship between femininity and governance. The enduring impact of these portrayals, particularly Bernhardt's celebrated performance, shaped contemporary discussions of female agency in both artistic and political spheres.

The following chapter reveals the significant intersection between theatre and oil paintings. Lawrence Alma-Tadema, John William Waterhouse, and John Collier not only drew inspiration from Shakespeare's play in their depictions of Cleopatra, but Alma-Tadema's and Waterhouse's paintings subsequently influenced the costume designs in Tree's production. Constance Collier even posed as Waterhouse's Cleopatra for 'Haviland's Series of Shakespearean Characters' (1909, Fig. 1.18). The interplay between oil paintings and performance highlights how distinct artistic mediums interacted to create diverse interpretations of Cleopatra.

Chapter Two

Pharaoh, Queen, Empress: Configuring Female Power in Oil Paintings

An analysis of Lawrence Alma-Tadema's *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883, Fig. 0.1), John William Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* (1888, Fig. 0.2), and John Collier's *The Death of Cleopatra* (1890, Fig. 0.4) reveal that *fin-de-siècle* artists presented the final ruler of ancient Egypt as a pharaoh, instead of a queen, to explore *fin-de-siècle* representations of female power in typically masculine positions of leadership. Alma-Tadema (1836-1912) was a Dutch London-based painter known for his depictions of decadent scenes of imperial Rome, ancient Egypt, and classical antiquity.¹ The 168 portfolios of Alma-Tadema's drawings, photographs, tracings, and prints held in the Cadbury Research Library are integral to my analysis of the artist's engagement with archaeology for the production of his numerous Cleopatra paintings, which include: the destroyed *The Death of Cleopatra* (c. 1857-1859, Fig. 2.1), *Cleopatra* (1875, Fig. 0.3), *Cleopatra* (1877, Fig. 2.2), *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883), and the unfinished *Cleopatra at Philae* (1912, Fig. 2.3). Collier (1850-1934) and Waterhouse (1849-1917) were both prominent English painters who drew from Pre-Raphaelitism, classical mythology, and literary sources to produce ethereal paintings depicting tragic and beautiful women.² Collier's *Lady Godiva* (1898) and Waterhouse's *The Lady of Shalott* (1888), for example, were both inspired by Tennyson's poems of the same names. Collier was also deeply influenced by his close friend and mentor, Alma-Tadema, whose guidance he described as 'an incalculable benefit', and whose focus on archaeology is reflected in *The Death of Cleopatra* (1890) and *Pharaoh's Handmaidens* (1883).³

¹ Rosemary Barrow, *Lawrence Alma Tadema* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2001). See also., Russell Ash, *Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema* (London: Pavilion, 1989). See also., Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Lawrence Alma-Tadema: At Home in Antiquity* (Munich: Prestel Publishing, 2016).

² 'Photographic Interviews: The Hon. John Collier', *Sketch*, 44.569 (23 December 1903), pp. 350-351. See also., Nicola Gauld, 'Victorian Bodies: The Wilde Animal as Adornments', *British Art Journal*, 6.1 (2005), pp. 37-42. See also., See also., Aubrey Noakes, *Waterhouse* (London: Chaucer Press, 2004). See also., Anthony Hobson, *The Art and Life of J. W. Waterhouse, RA 1849-1917* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1989).

³ 'Beautiful Women I Have Painted: An Interview with the Hon. John Collier', *Tatler and Bystander*, 28.353 (1 April 1908), pp. 14-15 (p. 14).

Alma-Tadema's, Waterhouse's, and Collier's oil paintings of Cleopatra were all produced at the height of the British Empire. From 1858 'the whole of India and its armies [were] controlled directly by the British Government'.⁴ In 1877, the conservative prime minister Benjamin Disraeli proclaimed Queen Victoria 'Empress of India'.⁵ In 1882, Britain further expanded its imperial control by extending into Africa and occupying Egypt. By the end of the nineteenth century, the British Empire 'comprised nearly one-quarter of the world's land surface'.⁶ Before Egypt became a province of the Roman Empire in 31 BCE, the Egyptian Empire was also expanding. Plutarch notes that Antony extended the Egyptian Empire by gifting Cleopatra 'Phoenicia, Coele Syria, Cyprus, [...] a large part of Cilicia; [...] the balsam-producing part of Judaea, and [the] part of Arabia Nabataea which slopes toward the outer sea'.⁷ As Britain's Egyptomania grew with the occupation of Egypt, the similarities between Cleopatra and Queen Victoria became increasingly apparent. As a result, oil paintings of Cleopatra produced in *fin-de-siècle* Britain presented a domineering version of the pharaoh that commanded one of the greatest Empires of the East.

Critics who discuss oil paintings featuring Cleopatra tend to analyse representations of ancient Egypt through Said's theory of Orientalism, which asserted that 'the Orient exists for the West, and is constructed by and in relation to the West', making it a 'recurring' mirror image of what is 'inferior'.⁸ While Said refers to the popularity of Cleopatra, Salomé, and Isis' in the literary works of Gautier, Swinburne, Baudelaire, and Huysmans as a fascination with 'Fatal Woman', Linda Nochlin's 'The Imaginary Orient' (1982) applies Said's theory to nineteenth-century oil paintings.⁹ Nochlin asserts that Orientalist painters like Jean-Léon Gérôme have historically portrayed Eastern societies as exotic, static, and inferior, reinforcing Western superiority while fulfilling fantasies of possessing 'women's naked bodies' through 'Orientalist erotica' such as

⁴ Walter Reid, *Keeping the Jewel in the Crown: The British Betrayal of India* (Edinburgh: Berliinn Limited, 2016), p. 28.

⁵ Marc Jason Gilbert, *South Asia in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 106.

⁶ Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 1.

⁷ Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives*, trans. by Bernadotte Perrin, 11 vols (London: William Heinemann, 1914-1926), IX (1920) p. 219.

⁸ Sunita Sinha, *Post-Colonial Women Writers: New Perspectives* (Delhi: Atlantic, 2008), p. 5. See also Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 203.

⁹ Said, pp. 180, 187.

Gérôme's *The Slave Market* (1866).¹⁰ In explorations of Orientalism in French oil paintings, Francine Prose refers to Alexandre Cabanel's *Cleopatra Testing Poisons on Condemned Prisoners* (1887, Fig. 2.4) as an 'orientalist' depiction of the 'visceral horror of ambitious women', while Gerald Needham refers to it as an 'absurd painting' which indulges in the 'colonialist depreciation of the Islamic world'.¹¹ Sitting on a divan draped with tiger skin as she watches her servants carry slaves writhing in agony from her poisons, Cabanel's Cleopatra is an orientalised *femme fatale*, a 'treacherous woman' who 'uses her sexual prowess to torment and destroy her male victims'.¹² By only analysing French paintings of Cleopatra through Said's theory, critics reduce her to an 'inferior' entity. To extend on Elizabeth Prettejohn's argument that Alma-Tadema's paintings of ancient Rome represent 'both the exceptional character of the city of modernity and the paradigmatic role traditionally ascribed to Rome', Cleopatra is both 'self' and 'other'.¹³ On one hand, she is an oriental other who symbolises sexually devious western women, such as sex workers and feminists campaigning for liberation; on the other, she symbolises female power much like Queen Victoria.

Instead of undertaking a purely orientalist reading of Alma-Tadema's, Waterhouse's, and Collier's art, I explore Cleopatra's authority as the ruler of a great empire by analysing the archaeological details in their oil paintings. The most comprehensive study on nineteenth-century artistic representations of ancient Egypt is Stephanie Moser's *Painting Antiquity* (2019). Moser's main argument is that Alma-Tadema, Edward Poynter, and Edwin Long not only played a 'pioneering role in uniting art with archaeology', but also 'expressed and generated a wider appreciation of the role and value of ancient domestic material culture'.¹⁴ *Painting Antiquity* features

¹⁰ Linda Nochlin, 'The Imaginary Orient', in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1991), pp. 33-59 (pp. 43, 44).

¹¹ Francine Prose, *Cleopatra: Her History, Her Myth* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2022), p. 9. See also., Gerald Needham, 'Orientalism in France', *Art Journal*, 42.4 (1982), pp. 338-341 (p. 340).

¹² Jennifer Hedgecock, *The Femme Fatale in Victorian Literature: The Danger and the Sexual Threat* (New York: Cambria Press, 2008), p. 2.

¹³ Elizabeth Prettejohn, 'Lawrence Alma-Tadema and the Modern City of Ancient Rome', *Art Bulletin*, 84.1 (2002), pp. 115-129 (p. 115).

¹⁴ Stephanie Moser, *Painting Antiquity: Ancient Egypt in the Art of Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Edward Poynter and Edwin Long* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 3.

extensive analysis of artefacts held in the British Museum, such as an eighteenth-dynasty ‘necklace of gold, lapis lazuli, and cornelian with lizard amulet’, archival material including Alma-Tadema’s ‘drawings of Egyptian antiquities’, along with the reception of Alma-Tadema’s numerous Cleopatra paintings.¹⁵ In her analysis of *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883), Moser argues that the archaeological details elevate ‘the status of Egyptian antiquities’.¹⁶ Moser’s analysis of artefacts, archives, and art reveals that academic artists were devoted to the depiction of the mundane, thus demonstrating the ‘role and value of ancient domestic material culture’.¹⁷ Moser’s extensive bibliography and knowledge on Egyptian artefacts provide an invaluable foundation upon which I build in unpacking representations of female power in Alma-Tadema’s, Waterhouse’s and Collier’s paintings.

In his 1898 presidential address to the students of the Royal Academy of Arts, Sir Edward Poynter (1836-1919) criticised aspiring artists’ ‘undignified’ portrayal of ‘The Great Queen of Egypt’.¹⁸ He stated:

following the example of a distinguished French painter [...] some of you have made Cleopatra present herself entirely unclothed before Caesar; but there is no hint of this in the story, and you should not have forgotten that you are dealing in this subject with the person who not only played the highest part in the history of the time, but were fully conscious of doing so [...] Cleopatra was born a queen, and brought up as a queen. That she would have presented herself before Caesar attired to the best advantage is probable; and though she was audacious enough, it is more natural to suppose that she relied on this and on her wit and eloquence as powers of fascination in the first instance.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 102, 84.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 290.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁸ Edward Poynter, ‘Sir. E. J. Poynter’s Presidential Address to the students of the Royal Academy of Arts’, *Artist*, 21 (January 1898), pp. 57-61 (p. 57).

¹⁹ Ibid.

As President of the Royal Academy from 1896 to 1918, Poynter's views on visual depictions of Cleopatra were highly regarded by aspiring British artists. His objection to nude representations of Cleopatra stemmed from his belief that the historical Cleopatra was a 'queen', fully 'conscious' of her importance. By claiming that Cleopatra used her status, 'wit', and 'eloquence' to fascinate Caesar, Poynter challenges the popular *fin-de-siècle* assumption that Cleopatra was a *femme fatale*. Instead, Poynter urges Royal Academy students and the educated middle-class readership of the *Artist* to view Cleopatra as a 'person' who 'played the highest part in the history of the time'. The gender-neutral noun 'person' presents Cleopatra as a significant historical figure, without placing importance on her gender and sexuality. Margaret Smith observes that the Elizabethan and Victorian eras explored queenship by drawing parallels with Cleopatra.²⁰ Like Cleopatra, these 'modern queens' were portrayed as 'intelligent and talented monarchs' who bolstered the prosperity of the British Empire.²¹ However, Smith argues that Cleopatra's 'weaknesses', such as her 'complicated personal life', raised Elizabeth and Victoria above her. Poynter aligns Cleopatra with Queen Victoria by recognising her as a historical ruler. Despite acknowledging her audacity, he dismisses the notion that Cleopatra's 'weaknesses' diminished her queenship, instead elevating her to the stature of contemporary monarchs. There are also notable similarities between Victoria's devotion to Prince Albert and Cleopatra's loyalty to Antony. By the *fin de siècle*, Victoria began to face criticism for her 'strict, excessive observance of mourning' following Albert's death.²² The extremity of her mourning can be compared to Cleopatra's suicide, which was interpreted as a show of resistance against Octavian and a symbol of her love for Antony. Cleopatra's devotion to Antony was so profound that Chaucer included her as one of the exemplars in *The Legend of Good*

²⁰ Margaret Mary DeMaria Smith, 'HRH Cleopatra: The Last of the Ptolemies and the Egyptian Paintings of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema', in *Cleopatra: A Sphinx Revisited*, ed. by Margaret Miles (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 150-171 (p. 165).

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Dagni Bredesen, 'The "Widdy's" Empire: Queen Victoria as Widow in Kipling's Soldier Stories and in the *Barrack-Room Ballads*', in *Remaking Queen Victoria*, ed. Margaret Homans and Adrienne Munich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 219-234 (p. 220).

Women (1387).²³ An examination of *fin-de-siècle* oil paintings of Cleopatra reveals that British artists predominantly drew on archaeology to depict her as an Egyptian Empress, while French painters were more inclined to portray her as a nude, eroticised figure. As France abolished the monarchy in 1792, while Britain was ruled by a female monarch, the similarities between Queen Victoria and Cleopatra may explain the portrayal of Cleopatra as an Empress rather than a *femme fatale* in British oil paintings.

The ‘distinguished French painter’ to whom Poynter refers to is Gérôme, who depicted Plutarch’s account of how Cleopatra concealed herself in a carpet to gain an audience with Caesar in *Cleopatra and Caesar* (1866, Fig. 2.5). Earlier artistic interpretations of this moment portrayed Cleopatra as a ‘vulnerable’ girl.²⁴ However, in Gérôme’s version, Cleopatra’s revealing costume implies that she intended to use her sensuality to manipulate Caesar into gaining control over the Roman Empire. Poynter’s painting, in contrast, depicts an older Cleopatra awaiting the bite of the asp after her defeat at Actium (Fig. 2.6). Her slight slouch and pouted lips suggest she is overwhelmed, while her downward glance, still posture, and regal adornments convey dignity. Instead of succumbing to Roman conquest, she asserts control over the narrative, patiently waiting for the asp to take her life. In Gérôme’s painting, Cleopatra’s lowered brows and the downward angle of her head also makes her appear in control, as she dares Caesar to resist her. In Gérôme’s version, the young queen seeks dynastic liaisons to secure her empire, and in Poynter’s version, the mature queen takes her own life to maintain her dignity. The primary distinction is that Poynter depicts Cleopatra draped in a loosely fitted, luminous gold fabric, whereas Gérôme depicts her as almost entirely nude. In *The Female Nude* (1992), Lynda Nead demonstrates that ‘one of the principal goals of the female nude [in art history] has been the containment and regulation of the

²³ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Legend of Good Women*, ed. by Walter W. Skeat (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), pp. 42-46.

²⁴ Scott Trafton, *Egypt Land: Race and Nineteenth-Century American Egyptomania* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 198.

female sexual body'.²⁵ By dressing their Cleopatras in historically inspired costumes rather than depicting her nude, Alma-Tadema, Waterhouse, and Collier refrain from containing their pharaoh.

In this chapter, I examine the archaeological details in oil paintings by Alma-Tadema, Waterhouse, and Collier to explore representations of female power in traditionally masculine roles of leadership. Focusing on Cleopatra as a pharaoh who commanded a vast empire, I argue that *fin de siècle* artists used the static nature of oil paintings to redefine her status. By leveraging the inherent stillness of the medium, these artists reshaped Cleopatra's image, offering new insights into her regal authority and historical significance, while highlighting the potential of female power and leadership. Additionally, I illustrate how these artists reimagined Cleopatra by drawing on Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* to emphasise her complex persona. This reinterpretation enabled Alma-Tadema, Waterhouse, and Collier to intertwine female and eastern power, exploring the possibilities that can be unleashed if women are allowed into traditionally male scenarios of leadership.

Stage to Canvas: Cleopatra's Duality in Art and Theatre

By the *fin de siècle*, Shakespeare's Cleopatra was analogous to the historical queen, as contemporary critics claimed that 'Shakespeare's Cleopatra is the real Cleopatra'.²⁶ The immense popularity of the play, from Samuel Phelps's 1849 production at Sadler's Wells Theatre in London to Arthur Symonds's verse drama *Cleopatra in Judaea* (1916), allowed Shakespeare's Cleopatra to become entrenched in the public's mind from the mid-nineteenth century to the end of the Edwardian era. As a result, paintings featuring Egypt's last pharaoh were heavily influenced by Shakespeare's play. Alma-Tadema's *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883) is based on Act 2, Scene 2, in which Enobarbus recalls how Antony became besotted with Cleopatra from the moment he saw her.

²⁵ Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 6.

²⁶ Anna Jameson, *Shakespeare's Heroines: Characteristics of Women, Moral Poetical, and Historical* (New York: A. L. Burt Company, 1906), p. 253.

The painting encapsulates Cleopatra's power as an Egyptian ruler while demonstrating her appeal as a beautiful woman. Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* (1888) was commissioned by William Thomas, the founder of the *Graphic*, for an exhibition of paintings of Shakespeare's heroines in honour of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887. Engravings of the paintings were published in 1888, with a further edition in 1896.²⁷ These engravings had a 'very wide circulation' and were popular amongst the 'middle-class market', who displayed them on tables, kept them in portfolios, or framed them to use as wall decorations.²⁸ Considering the influence of the *Graphic Gallery of Shakespeare's Heroines*, Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* (1888) played a crucial role in familiarising the *fin-de-siècle* public with Shakespeare's queen. The painting even influenced Constance Collier's costumes in Tree's production of *Antony and Cleopatra*, further bridging visual and theatrical representations.²⁹ John Collier's *The Death of Cleopatra* (1890) depicts Act 5, Scene 2, in which Cleopatra takes her own life with Iras and Charmian by her side. In 1925, an illustration of Collier's painting was used to depict Cleopatra's death scene in Thomas Keighley's *The Works of William Shakespeare*, demonstrating a cultural currency for this image well into the twentieth century.³⁰

Shakespeare's Cleopatra is a complex woman. She simultaneously embodies the roles of a 'royal harlot', a tragic heroine, and a powerful leader.³¹ While the Roman characters refer to her as a 'strumpet' who made a 'fool' of Antony, she possesses a 'powerful love' for him.³² Her anger and fits of jealousy reflect her devotion to Antony. In contrast to Roman propaganda that depicts her as a *femme fatale*, Shakespeare's Cleopatra is a powerful pharaoh who commands Egypt and ultimately dies while striving to expand her imperial control. Her various moods, which reveal

²⁷ *The Graphic Gallery of Shakespeare's Heroines* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1888).

²⁸ Alan R. Young, *Punch and Shakespeare in the Victorian Era* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 38. See also, Maria Wyke and Dominic Montserrat, 'Glamour Girls: Cleomania in Mass Culture', in *Cleopatra: A Sphinx Revisited*, ed. by Margaret Miles (London: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 172-194 (pp. 173-174).

²⁹ Suzanne Osmond, "'Her Infinite Variety': Representations of Shakespeare's Cleopatra in Fashion, Film and Theatre, *Film, Fashion & Consumption*, 1.1 (2012), pp. 55-79 (p. 65).

³⁰ William Shakespeare, *The Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. by Thomas Keightley (London: Virtue & Co, 1925).

³¹ John Gillies, *The History of Ancient Greece*, 4 vols (London: Cadell and Davies, 1786-1820), IV (1820), p. 486.

³² William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Washington Square Press, 1999), I. 1. 1. See also, Michael Steppat, *The Critical Reception of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra from 1607-1905* (Amsterdam: Verlag B. R. Grüner, 1980), p. 272.

themselves over five acts, demonstrate that she is a sexual, devoted, passionate, childish, and fiercely tragic heroine. As oil paintings are static artforms that capture a single moment, the archaeological details emphasising the greatness of Egypt in all three paintings contribute to portraying Cleopatra as a powerful leader of a great empire. To highlight her authoritative control, these paintings portray Cleopatra in a quiet, contemplative state, rather than in extreme emotions. As Britain was re-evaluating the meaning of female power and women's relationship with the orient following its occupation of Egypt, Cleopatra's existence as a powerful eastern woman enabled late-Victorian artists to explore *fin-de-siècle* concerns.

Alma-Tadema's *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883) revises Shakespeare's description of Antony and Cleopatra's first meeting to increase Cleopatra's significance as a ruler. The painting depicts Antony and Cleopatra in separate barges in the 'early morning' under the 'tropical brilliancy' of the 'harbour of the neo-Greek city of Alexandria'.³³ Shakespeare stated that Cleopatra travelled to Antony in Tarsus in a 'barge with gilded poop [...] reclined beneath a canopy spangled with gold'.³⁴ Dressed as Venus, the 'rare Egyptian' surrounded herself with 'pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids', perfumes that made the 'winds [...] lovesick', beautiful handmaidens, and luxuries that 'beggared all description'.³⁵ By dressing as Venus, the goddess of love and beauty in Roman mythology, Shakespeare's Cleopatra presented herself as a Western goddess while surrounding herself with Eastern luxury. The aesthetic stylisation of Shakespeare's barge, the strong perfumes, and the music collectively created a spectacle that aimed to appeal to multiple senses. Similarly, the three men burning incense, the beautiful women playing the flute, and the garlands of pink flowers that decorate Cleopatra's barge contribute to her decadent allure in Alma-Tadema's painting. In Shakespeare's narrative, Cleopatra's seduction captivates everyone except Antony, who remains 'enthroned I' th' marketplace' 'alone'.³⁶ By refusing to leave his throne to

³³ 'Alma-Tadema's Last Work, "Cleopatra"', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 42 (4 February 1883), p. 9.

³⁴ Shakespeare, II. 2. 226.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., III. 6. 1.

gaze at Cleopatra, Shakespeare's Antony demonstrates his determination not to be seduced by her. This interaction defines Antony as a Roman ruler while reducing Cleopatra to a seducer. As a result, Rome is established as a powerful nation at the expense of Egypt. In Alma-Tadema's retelling, Antony meets Cleopatra on a barge in Alexandria instead of waiting for her on his throne in Roman-controlled Tarsus. William Cosmo Monkhouse, writing for the *Academy*, stated:

One of the most gifted female artists of the day, Miss Clara Montalba, informed me that she had seen four or five different backgrounds to this very picture. Now it is all sea and shipping, once there was land and a town in the distance.³⁷

Monkhouse's article, written before Alma-Tadema completed *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883), captures the excitement surrounding the artwork while revealing that his indecisiveness delayed its completion by over ten months.³⁸ Alma-Tadema's consultation with Clara Bell, a prominent painter and feminist, during the creation of his 1883 painting highlights the collaboration between male creatives and feminist perspectives, which I explore in depth in Chapter Three. As an artist who was inspired by archaeology, Alma-Tadema chose a background that would best represent both ancient Egypt and ancient Rome. By making the background 'all sea' instead of portraying 'land and a town in the distance', Alma-Tadema presented Antony and Cleopatra as equally resilient leaders who controlled two of the strongest empires of the ancient world. Moser notes that 'the mighty Roman fleet, Roman centurions with oars raised, and lavishly decorated vessel of Marc Antony are all impressive, but the material characterisation of Egypt', is 'equally so'.³⁹ She concludes that the vivid 'clash of cultures' elevates 'the status of Egyptian antiquities'.⁴⁰ By enhancing the 'status of Egyptian antiquities', both Egypt and its ruler are

³⁷ William Cosmo Monkhouse, 'Some English Artists and Their Studios', *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, 24 (August 1882), pp. 553-568 (p. 567).

³⁸ Marion Harry Spielmann, 'Art Notes', *Magazine of Art*, 5 (January 1882), pp. 25-28 (p. 25).

³⁹ Moser, p. 290.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

elevated, allowing the couple to meet as equals. The change of location from Tarsus to Alexandria further empowers Cleopatra, showing that she met Antony within her own territory rather than travelling at his request. Just as Antony's fleet can be seen from a distance, the guards standing on the harbour and Alexandria's proximity to Egyptian land demonstrate that Cleopatra was equally armed. Alma-Tadema's positioning of Cleopatra's barge in the foreground further elevates her significance, as she commands the viewers' attention. Alma-Tadema's deviation from Shakespeare's play enhances Cleopatra's importance as a ruler, portraying her as an empress rather than merely a seductress.

Antony's gaze at Cleopatra reveals her power over him. In Shakespeare's play, Antony avoids looking at Cleopatra on her barge and only becomes infatuated after attending her feast. In Alma-Tadema's painting, however, Antony rises from his seat and impatiently cranes his neck to gaze upon Cleopatra. Alma-Tadema's contemporary critics interpreted Antony's expression as variously conveying 'eagerness', 'surprise', and 'anger'.⁴¹ Although Cleopatra's finely decorated barge, handmaidens, and incense burners create a spectacle, she conceals herself behind a half-open curtain, forcing Antony to rise to behold her. Cleopatra invites Antony to be enchanted with her, without giving him the satisfaction of being acknowledged. The downward angle of her head, haughty expression, and sidelong glance enables her to defiantly avoid Antony's gaze. Alma-Tadema directly based Cleopatra's face on an earlier painting he made of the queen: *Cleopatra* (1875).⁴² Describing Cleopatra's expression in the 1875 portrait, the *Academy* wrote:

With the intense fire of her eye, constraining herself to be calm, she follows, she is supposed to have just fascinated, the eye of Mark Anthony. She is balancing in her mind the power of her charms; the whole posture and expression reveal a sensuous woman of

⁴¹ Philip Gilbert Hamerton, 'Art Chronicle', *Portfolio*, 14 (January 1883), pp. 41-45 (p. 42). See also, 'Alma-Tadema's Last Work', p. 9.

⁴² When *Cleopatra* (1875) was first released, it was called *Cleopatra Meeting Mark Antony*. See, 'Notes and News', *Academy*, 7.145 (6 February 1875), pp. 150-152 (p. 150).

reckless and fascinating loveliness at the very moment of conquest; the hero is not yet at her feet, but the peculiar satisfaction of the lips, the peculiar flitter of the eye, show that she is certain of her triumph.⁴³

Cleopatra's downcast head, sideways glance, and satisfied expression prompted the reviewer to view her as a 'reckless' and 'sensuous woman' who was fully aware of her charms and skilled in using them. In Alma-Tadema's 1883 painting, Cleopatra displays the same expression and likeness. Even in Antony's full view, she defiantly challenges him to resist her and exudes a sense of victory. Her commanding gaze, coupled with her disinterest in the Triumvir, signifies her triumph while also hinting at her irritation at being summoned. Despite meeting him at his request, she deliberately evades his gaze, refusing to satisfy his curiosity. Alma-Tadema's contemporary audience viewed his Cleopatra's aloofness as Shakespearean, referring to her as 'Serpent of Old Nile'.⁴⁴ Although Alma-Tadema diverts from Shakespeare's narrative by setting the painting at sea to portray Egypt and Rome as two vast Empires, he maintains Cleopatra's image as a seductress who captured Antony. This is achieved by contrasting Cleopatra's confident defiance with Antony's eagerness. While Shakespeare's Cleopatra engages in a decade-long relationship with Antony, Enobarbus's account of their first encounter portrays her as a seductress. Enobarbus reflects the Graeco-Roman scholars who sought to discredit Cleopatra to reinforce Western propaganda. Like Shakespeare's queen, Alma-Tadema's Cleopatra is simultaneously a great ruler and a dangerous *femme fatale*, making her a threat to patriarchal western empires.

Although Waterhouse was 'not as preoccupied with accuracy as Alma-Tadema', his Shakespearean Cleopatra is also a threatening yet powerful woman.⁴⁵ Analysing the *Graphic Gallery of Shakespeare's Heroines*, the actress, dramatist, novelist and poet, Emilia Aylmer Gowing wrote:

⁴³ 'Notes and News', p. 150.

⁴⁴ 'Alma-Tadema's Last Work', p. 9.

⁴⁵ Moser, p. 304.

Cleopatra [...] transports us into [...] Egypt, the old land of wonders, renewed and transformed by the life and vigour of a younger race, since Greece has planted a dynasty of kings and modern capital city on the banks of the Nile.⁴⁶

Gowing's reference to the Ptolemies' Greek origins is reflected in Cleopatra's white Hellenistic garments. Although Waterhouse's Cleopatra is robed in Grecian clothes, the painting's architectural backdrop codes her as Egyptian. Gowing acknowledges the significance of the painting's setting by stating: 'we are in the palace of the Ptolemies at Alexandria; [...] Cleopatra is queen, the last sovereign ruler of Egypt'.⁴⁷ Cleopatra, seated in the 'royal chamber' on a 'marble' throne with an 'imperial crown' adorning her hair, can be interpreted as the subject of Waterhouse's royal portrait.⁴⁸ Her gold crown, the golden fabric draping her waist, and the gilded details of the palace walls all symbolise the wealth of Egypt. The Egyptian winged sun disk carved on the wall behind Cleopatra was originally a symbol of Behdety, the god of the midday sun. By the Ptolemaic period it became known as a royal symbol of the falcon god Horus. The 'wings of the falcon represented the sky, the sun and the king' and the snake heads on the uraeus were worn by monarchs to 'ward off evil'.⁴⁹ The winged sun demonstrates that Cleopatra possesses the power and wealth of Egypt, along with the protection of the Egyptian gods. The lioness statue, evoking the goddess Sekhmet, further reinforces the idea that Cleopatra was safeguarded by Egyptian divinity. Youngkin notes that oil paintings which depict 'a wild cat, a tiger-skin rug, or both' near Cleopatra suggest that she 'embodied the duality of the Egyptian cat, who possessed the threatening qualities of the lion goddess Sekhmet but also the protective qualities of the domesticated cat goddess Bastet'.⁵⁰ Not only is Waterhouse's Cleopatra comfortably resting her

⁴⁶ Aylmer Gowing, 'The Graphic Gallery of Shakespeare's Heroines', *Theatre*, 12 (1 August 1888), pp. 80-84 (p. 82).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Broman, 'Egyptian Revival Funerary Art in Green-Wood Cemetery', *Markers*, 18 (2001), pp. 30-67 (p. 42).

⁵⁰ Molly Youngkin, "'The Culminating Flower of Cat-Worship in Egypt' Nineteenth-Century State Cleopatras and Victorian Views of Ancient Egypt', in *Victorian Literary Culture and Ancient Egypt*, ed. Eleanor Dobson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp. 114-138 (p. 117).

arm on Sekhmet's head, but her gaze and body language also mirror the statue. This mirroring reminds Waterhouse's contemporary audience that Cleopatra not only possesses Sekhmet's protection but also embodies the duality of Sekhmet's character. The archaeological details in Waterhouse's Cleopatra paint an image of a queen who is simultaneously fierce and gentle, while embodying the symbolic protection and physical strength of Egypt.

As Waterhouse's painting was commissioned for Queen Victoria's Jubilee, it portrayed Cleopatra as a symbol of Egypt's greatness to the *fin-de-siècle* public. Earlier oil paintings of Shakespeare's Cleopatra, such as Johann Heinrich Tischbein's numerous depictions from the eighteenth century, portrayed her as a wealthy woman by showcasing her in luxurious garments and accessories. However, they downplayed her Egyptian identity. Tischbein's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1773, Fig. 2.7), for example, depicts Cleopatra as a white woman with rosy cheeks and dark blonde hair, wearing a duck-egg-blue silk gown with a late eighteenth-century silhouette. Sitting in a neoclassical building, the only jewellery she wears is western in style: a blue pendant on her dress, pearl earrings, and a pearl headdress woven into her hair. Though Tischbein attempts to orientalise the painting by incorporating a sphinx-like statue in the background, an incense burner in the foreground, and a small figurine of a woman (possibly Isis) next to Cleopatra, along with a sistrum (an ancient Egyptian percussion instrument associated with Isis), these elements by no means dominate the scene. While Cleopatra wears clothing contemporary to the time of the painting's completion, Antony is dressed as a Roman general. In Shakespeare's original production, Cleopatra was dressed in Elizabethan attire, reflecting the practice of depicting historical figures in contemporary clothing. This approach was common, as it connected the production to its current era. By portraying Antony as a Roman general and Cleopatra as a modern woman, the depiction elevates Rome's status while diminishing the historical significance of ancient Egypt. In contrast to earlier depictions of Cleopatra as a European woman, Alma-Tadema's, Waterhouse's, and Collier's Cleopatras are queens who represent the greatness of Egypt. By integrating ancient Egyptian details into Cleopatra's garments and placing her in an archaeologically informed

Egyptian setting, these painters transform her from a seductive white woman into an ethnically ambiguous Asiatic ruler, whose strength as an Egyptian empress threatens to ruin Antony and his empire. This Cleopatra, who is the embodiment of imperial strength, possesses the destructive power of the oriental woman and the *femme fatale* without being a dehumanised sexual object.

Tischbein's painting captures the immediate aftermath of the Battle of Actium. Yet, despite knowing that their defeat has cost them their lives, Antony and Cleopatra appear deeply in love. Ignoring the scenes of turmoil in the background, the couple stare lovingly into each other's eyes. Antony's right-hand points towards the battle scenes, indicating his awareness of the impending danger they face, while his left hand tenderly holds Cleopatra's hand. The serene expression on the couple's faces and their intimate body language reveal that they are not only romantically and sexually attracted to each other, but also find comfort in one another. In the absence of overt visual signifiers that would suggest Cleopatra is an Egyptian empress, she is merely a woman in love in Tischbein's painting. In *Life of Antony*, Plutarch goes to great lengths to describe Cleopatra as a heartless *femme fatale*. Though Plutarch acknowledges that Antony and Cleopatra had a long relationship which resulted in the 'scandal[ous]' birth of three children, he maintained that Cleopatra was a 'dire evil' who 'pretended to be passionately in love with Antony' to expand her empirical control.⁵¹ Although Shakespeare's Roman characters mimic Plutarch by calling Cleopatra a 'strumpet', his Cleopatra proves to be entirely devoted to Antony. Just as Tischbein's *Antony and Cleopatra* shows the end of the couple's life, Alma-Tadema's *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883) and Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* (1888) show the beginning. Rather than depicting an aging couple hopelessly devoted to each other, Alma-Tadema and Waterhouse illustrate a young man and woman meeting for the first time as rulers of two great empires. By removing love from the equation, they focus on Cleopatra as an empress who ruled over a great empire. The main difference in form between theatrical productions and oil paintings is that the former tells a story

⁵¹ Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives*, pp. 217, 259.

over time, while the latter captures a fixed moment. Shakespeare's Cleopatra is a woman of 'infinite variety'; at one moment, she is deliberately seducing Antony, and in the next, she is enacting suicide to join him in the afterlife.⁵² Both Alma-Tadema's and Waterhouse's paintings capture the early stages of the couple's relationship, portraying Cleopatra as motivated by her concern for her nation. The distinction lies in their depictions: Alma-Tadema's Cleopatra avoids eye contact with Antony, while Waterhouse's Cleopatra gazes resolutely into the distance, reflecting on their impending encounter. This contrasts with Tischbein's Cleopatra, who gazes longingly into Antony's eyes. By choosing to depict the early stages of their relationship, both Alma-Tadema and Waterhouse portray Cleopatra as a powerful pharaoh driven by the interests of her empire.

The orientalisng of Shakespeare's Cleopatra by *fin-de-siècle* artists reflects increasing concerns about miscegenation that arose with the expansion of the British Empire. Neither Alma-Tadema's nor Waterhouse's Cleopatra can be described as a white woman. As noted by the *Athenaeum*, Alma-Tadema's Cleopatra is 'a royal Greek beauty tinged with the "blood of the sun"'.⁵³ This statement works on two levels: it asserts that Cleopatra's Greek skin has been physically tanned, while also implying that she is at least partially ethnically Egyptian. As the ancient Egyptians believed that the 'blood of the sun god had been transmitted by Horus into [...] royal veins', this transfusion of Egyptian blood either occurred supernaturally or through miscegenation.⁵⁴ By the late nineteenth century, Victorian polygenists and physicians claimed that racial mixing was akin to crossbreeding animal species, deeming it 'unnatural, degenerate, and unsustainable'.⁵⁵ As discussed in Chapter One, fears regarding miscegenation mainly concerned the colonies, where it was feared that 'blood-taint through intermarriage' would corrupt the male imperial body.⁵⁶ In *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883), the pharaoh's white skin is almost

⁵² Shakespeare, p. II. 2. 275.

⁵³ 'Fine-Art Gossip', *Athenaeum*, 2881 (13 January 1883), pp. 60-61 (p. 60).

⁵⁴ Jon Manchip White, *Ancient Egypt: Its Culture and History* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), p. 15.

⁵⁵ Damon Ieremia Salesa, *Racial Crossings: Race, Intermarriage, and the Victorian British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

luminous under the dark barge. However, as noted by Moser, the contrast between Cleopatra and her black female attendant highlights the exotic nature of the scene.⁵⁷ In visual representations of Cleopatra in the late nineteenth century, the problem of her ethnicity was often deferred onto her maids, who were depicted with much darker skin to confer an exotic otherness to the scene. Not only do her attendants orientalise her, but her 'black hair' reminded Alma-Tadema's contemporary audience that she possessed the 'blood of the sun'.⁵⁸ Alma-Tadema's paintings of Graeco-Roman women, such as *Silver Favourites* (c. 1903, Fig. 2.8) and *A Favourite Custom* (1909, Fig. 2.9), primarily depict them with blonde, ginger, or at most, dark brown hair. In contrast, his Egyptian paintings predominantly reimagine royal Egyptian women with white skin and black hair. In *The Finding of Moses* (1904, Fig. 2.10), while the pharaoh's daughter has fair skin, the blackness of her hair, along with the skin colour and clothing of her attendants, orientalise her by extension. Like Alma-Tadema's depiction of royal Egyptian women, Waterhouse's Cleopatra has dark black curly hair, dark brows, and a slight tan. As a result, both Alma-Tadema's and Waterhouse's Cleopatras can be viewed as products of miscegenation. These Cleopatras not only have tainted blood but also pose a threat to the male imperial body due to their attraction to Antony. As Antony represents whiteness and western greatness, his infatuation with Cleopatra threatens to corrupt his lineage which is directly connected to the future of the Roman Empire.

By making Antony the symbol of Rome and Cleopatra the symbol of Egypt, Alma-Tadema and Waterhouse foreshadow that Antony's love for Cleopatra will be his downfall. Describing Cleopatra's features in Waterhouse's painting, Gowing wrote:

she sits, this 'serpent of old Nile,' as the spider centred in her meshes weaving new wiles to ensnare to death the bodies and souls of men; cunning and self-centred, she beckons with her eyes from beneath her bold black brows; the dark down on her red lip seems to

⁵⁷ Moser, p. 290.

⁵⁸ 'Notes and News', p. 150. See also, 'Fine-Art Gossip', *Athenaeum*, 2881 p. 60).

quiver with whispered love spells. [...] she is not a woman to be desired, but there is some subtle witchery in the gipsy nature, some strange attraction, [...] in the powerful intellect and undaunted will, able to subdue all men to a charm that depends neither on youth nor the common mould of feminine beauty[.]⁵⁹

Gowing's description of Cleopatra as a 'spider' who instinctively enjoys 'to ensnare to death the bodies and souls of men' paints her as a *femme fatale*. The curtain half-concealing Cleopatra from Antony's gaze in Alma-Tadema's *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883) also features a spider motif. While the motif is discreet in the 1883 oil painting, it stands out in an 1882 watercolour rendition held at the Cadbury Research Library (Fig. 2.11). Since the motif is concealed from Antony but apparent to Alma-Tadema's contemporary audience, it implies that Cleopatra intends to entrap Antony without his awareness. Gowing's reading of Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* (1888) has been explored by modern critics, such as Quinn, who stated that she 'oozes sexuality', embodying Patrick Bade's 'exemplary definition' of a 'malignant, threatening, and fascinating' *femme fatale*.⁶⁰ Gowing's account of Cleopatra's dangerous qualities are intertwined with her description of Cleopatra's Asiatic features, as she comments on her 'bold black brows' and 'gipsy nature'. By interpreting the expression of her eyes 'beneath her bold black brows' as the plotting of male destruction, Gowing links Cleopatra's tainted blood with her bloodlust. Imitating Plutarch, Gowing suggests that it is not Cleopatra's beauty which 'subdue[s] all men', but her 'powerful intellect and undaunted will', which are qualities expected of leaders. Gowing's analysis shows that Waterhouse's contemporary critics saw his Cleopatra as a threat to the male body due to her embodiment of Egypt's power. It is not being beautiful but being a ruthless Egyptian woman who has the intellect and power to govern an empire that makes Waterhouse's Cleopatra dangerous. By depicting their Cleopatras as ethnically diverse Egyptian rulers, Alma-Tadema and Waterhouse

⁵⁹ Gowing, p. 82.

⁶⁰ Patrick J. Quinn, *Patriarchy in Eclipse: The Femme Fatale and the New Woman in American Literature and Culture 1870-1920* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), p. 4.

make Shakespeare's Cleopatra more threatening to their *fin-de-siècle* audience. Instead of being a threat to the male body, she also threatens to destroy and corrupt the empire and racial purity of the white race. In Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, the Romans accuse Cleopatra of destabilising Antony's power, claiming he neglected his responsibilities as a Triumvir to indulge in the opulence of Egypt. As Shakespeare's Cleopatra represents Egypt, her ability to disempower Antony through love and attachment suggests that she is a degenerative force. As classical Rome and Cleopatra's Hellenistic Egypt mirrored the uncertain relationship between Britain and contemporary Islamic Egypt, the racially ambiguous Cleopatras in the oil paintings of Alma-Tadema and Waterhouse demonstrate the threat modern Egypt posed to the expansion of the British Empire.

While Alma-Tadema's and Waterhouse's oil paintings depict the early stages of Antony and Cleopatra's relationship, Collier's *The Death of Cleopatra* (1890) captures the final moments of Cleopatra's life, reinforcing the Shakespearean vision of her as a powerful female pharaoh. The painting depicts Cleopatra's lifeless body on an altar, set against a backdrop inspired by the Great Temple of Philae, where Collier slept during his tour of Egypt.⁶¹ Iras lies dead on the floor below her, while Charmian, slowly dying, stands over Cleopatra like a guardian. Earlier artistic representations of Cleopatra's death predominantly portrayed her as writhing in pain, such as Achille Glisenti's *The Death of Cleopatra* (c. 1878, Fig. 2.12), in the process of performing suicide with an asp at her breast, like Guido Cagnacci's *The Death of Cleopatra* (c. 1645-1655, Fig. 2.13), or surrounded by Roman generals who want to impede her death, such as Pierre Mignard I, *The Death of Cleopatra* (c. 1635, Fig. 2.14). Even paintings that show the moments after Cleopatra's death, such as German von Bohn's *The Death of Cleopatra* (1841, Fig. 2.15), Jean André Rixens's *The Death of Cleopatra* (1874, Fig. 2.16) and Juan Luna's *The Death of Cleopatra* (1881, Fig. 2.17), depict Cleopatra in a dishevelled state. In Rixens's painting, for example, Cleopatra's lifeless body is on a bed in an Egyptian palace. Her upper body is completely nude. Charmian has placed her diadem

⁶¹ 'Photographic Interviews: The Hon. John Collier', p. 350.

on her head, but her arm has fallen to the side, depicting her loss of autonomy. The picture conjures an image of haste and despair. While Rixens's and Collier's paintings share similarities in depicting Plutarch's account of Cleopatra dying alongside her handmaidens, Collier diverges from previous depictions by highlighting Cleopatra's political strength. Positioned at the centre, Cleopatra's body is gracefully arranged on the altar. There are no signs of contortion to suggest a painful death, and her expression appears serene. She is adorned with golden jewellery including a vulture diadem elegantly resting on her head, as she wears a form-fitting Egyptian dress that exposes her breasts. Her calm expression and the deliberate positioning of her body at the entrance of an Egyptian temple suggest that she embraced death as a means of maintaining her autonomy. Imitating Shakespeare's reasoning for Cleopatra's death, her suicide is a final show of disrespect towards Octavian and can be read as a rejection of western male power.

To emphasise female power, Collier's Charmian uses her final moments to protect her queen. Despite her weakened state, she turns her gaze to the side of the painting, as if remaining alert to any looming threat. She stands like a protective guardian watching over the last pharaoh of Egypt. The lowered feathered fan in her left hand implies that she kept Cleopatra comfortable in her final moments by cooling her. The jewellery on both Charmian's and Iras's bodies also suggests that as Cleopatra's handmaidens, they were bestowed with the wealth of Egypt. Collier's decision to portray Charmian as Cleopatra's loyal protector is a sign of female power, friendship, and servitude, as even in death, Cleopatra is protected by the women with whom she surrounded herself in life. Collier modelled his depiction of Cleopatra after a 'well-known' bas-relief at the Temple of Dendera (Fig. 2.18).⁶² This bas-relief was identified as Cleopatra by multiple late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sources, including a photograph by the Zangaki Brothers entitled 'Bas Relief of Cleopatra' (c. 1880) and Egyptologist E. A. Wallis Budge in *The Dweller of the Nile* (1926).⁶³ The archaeological details aid in situating the painting in an archaeologically

⁶² Ibid., p. 351.

⁶³ Zangaki Brothers, 'Bas-Relief of Cleopatra, Denderah', c. 1880, *San Diego Museum of Man*, <<https://jstor.org/stable/community.13752324>> [accessed: 18 July 2023]. See also., E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Dweller of the Nile* (1926).

informed Egypt. Like Waterhouse's Cleopatra who is protected by the winged-sun symbol, Collier's Cleopatra is laid to rest in front of two statues. The nemes headdress, worn by the statue on the left, was worn by pharaohs to establish their link to the falcon god Horus and symbolise their transition to the afterlife. The nemes headdress serves as a subtle reminder that, as a pharaoh of Egypt, Cleopatra will be guided to the afterlife by the gods of Egypt. The existence of an Egyptian afterlife is also present in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, as Cleopatra 'kisses' Charmian and Iras a 'long farewell' until she meets them in the next world, where Antony is her personal 'heaven'.⁶⁴ Collier's painting simultaneously marks Cleopatra's physical death while hinting at the beginning of her life in the spiritual world. As the ancient Egyptians believed that pharaohs would enter the afterlife with the people and objects with which they were laid to rest, Iras and Charmian would also enter the spiritual realm with their queen.

The archaeological details of the painting are testament to the grandness of ancient Egypt. As the painting stands 'thirteen feet high by ten feet broad', it demands attention.⁶⁵ Though Collier's contemporary critics disliked the 'great' 'scale', it perfectly displayed the wealth and strength of Egypt when it was displayed in the Royal Academy, and then in Oldham Museum and Art Gallery in 1891.⁶⁶ Collier's painting intertwines female and Egyptian power, as Iras's, Charmian's, and Cleopatra's deaths allow them to reject the confines of the material world in favour of eternal power alongside the Egyptian gods. The fact that the background of the painting is plunged into darkness implies that, with Cleopatra's death, the power of Egypt in the material world has come to an end. By depicting the fall of Egypt alongside the death of Cleopatra, Collier's painting acknowledges her significance as an Egyptian monarch. Like Alma-Tadema and Waterhouse, Collier presents the eastern, oriental empire of Egypt as a powerful force that easily rivals Rome. By portraying Cleopatra as the powerful ruler of the Egyptian empire, these *fin-de-*

on the Nile: Chapter on the Life, History, Religion and Literature of the Ancient Egyptians (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1926).

⁶⁴ Shakespeare, V. 2. 335, V. 2. 336.

⁶⁵ 'Photographic Interviews: The Hon. John Collier', p. 351.

⁶⁶ Marion Harry Spielmann, 'Current Art', *Magazine of Art*, 13 (January 1890), pp. 253-260 (p. 255).

siècle artists reminded their contemporary audiences that oriental women, and their western sisters, could be powerful without being voluptuaries.

The splendour, luxury, and strength of Cleopatra's Egypt in *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883), *Cleopatra* (1888), and *The Death of Cleopatra* (1890) easily rival the vigour of Antony's Rome. As Cleopatra's Hellenistic Egypt was aligned with modern Islamic Egypt at the *fin de siècle*, its ability to challenge Rome implied that Britain's occupation of Egypt was unstable. To further illustrate Cleopatra's power in *fin-de-siècle* oil paintings, the next section explores how the portrayals of Cleopatra by Alma-Tadema, Waterhouse, and Collier showcase her empowerment through transcending gender binaries. These artists depict Cleopatra as a woman who commands authority and maintains her sovereignty by blending both masculine and feminine attributes.

Gender Blurring: Pharaoh, Woman, Mother

Shakespeare's Cleopatra defies the confines of traditional gender roles. When describing the pharaoh, Enobarbus states that she is a woman of 'infinite variety' who 'makes hungry' where most other women would satisfy.⁶⁷ Enobarbus's description of Cleopatra paints her as an incomparable seductive beauty. Although she is a feminine object of desire, she still holds the masculine position of pharaoh, is drawn to fits of violence, and proudly cross-dresses. Her gender ambiguity would have been a source of concern for Alma-Tadema, Waterhouse, and Collier's contemporary audience. In response to what they perceived as an 'attack' on patriarchal culture, academics, authors, and physicians began to label women 'campaigning for access to the universities, the professions, and the vote as mentally disturbed'.⁶⁸ Showalter notes that in literature, 'women who aspired to professional independence and sexual freedom were denounced as case studies in

⁶⁷ Shakespeare, II. 2. 275.

⁶⁸ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Penguin, 1987), p. 145.

hysteria and degeneration'.⁶⁹ As Shakespeare's Cleopatra was both financially independent and sexually liberated, she embodied the *fin-de-siècle* dissolution of gender binaries. However, instead of presenting her as a 'case study in hysteria and degeneration', Alma-Tadema, Waterhouse, and Collier depict their Cleopatras as powerful women who simultaneously occupy masculine and feminine spaces by being beautiful, maternal, and fertile, as well as controlling and powerful. By using archaeology to paint Shakespeare's Cleopatra, these artists demonstrate that influential and wealthy women could leverage their femininity and status to assert control in traditionally masculine spaces.

The items of bodily adornment worn by Cleopatra in Alma-Tadema's *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883) paint her as a sensual, powerful, fertile mother, thus undermining the contemporary belief that women could not simultaneously be maternal and sexual. Describing Cleopatra's appearance in Alma-Tadema's painting, the *Athenaeum* wrote:

Her white and semi-transparent robe, although bound by a lovely girdle, but half conceals so much of her contours as it covers, while it leaves bare a good deal of her sumptuous form [...] her hair is crowned by a sacred hawk headdress, [...] and she holds the two sceptres of her double dominion. The queen thus appears in her character as High-Priestess of Hathor, the Egyptian Venus, and the adornments of this attire suit her voluptuous physique.⁷⁰

The *Athenaeum*, a London-based journal of literature, science, and the arts, published this article in October 1881 to express excitement at Alma-Tadema possibly contributing 'numerous' paintings to upcoming Royal Academy Exhibitions.⁷¹ Since the final version of *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* was not exhibited until 1883, the *Athenaeum*'s writer is commenting on an earlier version.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 146.

⁷⁰ 'Fine-Art Gossip', *Athenaeum*, 2818 (29 October 1881), pp. 568-569 (p. 568).

⁷¹ Ibid.

However, given Alma-Tadema's commitment to archaeology, it is unlikely that his Cleopatra wore a 'sacred hawk headdress'. Instead, the reviewer may have mistaken a vulture for a hawk. Alma-Tadema's earliest known painting of Cleopatra, *The Dying Cleopatra* (c. 1857-1859) also featured the pharaoh wearing a vulture headdress. In ancient Egyptian mythology the vulture represented the goddess Nekhbet in Lower Egypt. Nekhbet was associated with motherhood as she was often depicted 'at royal birth-scenes' playing 'the role of protective nurse to the monarch'.⁷² As Nekhbet symbolised motherly protection, the vulture headdress in *The Dying Cleopatra* implies that Cleopatra wanted to be remembered as the literal mother of the future king of Egypt and the symbolic mother of her subjects. The bas-relief that Collier modelled his queen on in *The Death of Cleopatra* (1890) depicts her wearing a vulture headdress. The nine cobras above the headdress are symbols of Nekhbet's counterpart, Wadjet. Wadjet symbolised Lower Egypt and was believed to be the protector of women in childbirth and the 'protective' nurse of the god Horus.⁷³ By the Ptolemaic dynasty, she was 'identified as the sister of Isis', the mother deity.⁷⁴ When the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt took place around 3150 BCE, Nekhbet and Wadjet were both represented on the royal uraeus because they were believed 'to protect the king from harm and strengthen his rule'.⁷⁵ The vulture headdress in *The Dying Cleopatra* and the 1881 version of *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra*, as well as the serpent headdress in the 1883 version of *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* collectively conjure an image of a ruler who desires to be perceived as a royal mother. As the uraeus was worn on the headdress to protect the king of Egypt, its presence on Cleopatra's crown in the 1883 version of the oil painting demonstrates that she occupies the masculine position of a ruler. As a result, the headdress serves as a reminder of Cleopatra's power as a pharaoh and her maternity as a woman. By marrying these two qualities, Alma-Tadema presents a version of Cleopatra that is both powerful and fertile.

⁷² George Hart, *The Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 120.

⁷³ Anne E. Capel and Glenn E. Markoe, *Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1996), p. 139.

⁷⁴ Patricia D. Netzley, *Ancient Egypt* (New York: Greenhaven Publishing, 2003), p. 305.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

The *Athenaeum* further blurs Cleopatra's gender by stating that she held 'the two sceptres of her double dominion' while appearing 'in her character as High-Priestess of Hathor, the Egyptian Venus'. Like Venus, Hathor 'is the supreme goddess of sexual love' and 'physical desire' who elicits 'sensual joy' through encouraging 'music and dancing'.⁷⁶ The king of Egypt was originally called the 'son of Hathor' before the cult of Isis gained popularity during the Ptolemaic dynasty.⁷⁷ Since Hathor was a sensual mother figure, akin to Venus, the *Athenaeum* opted to emphasise Cleopatra's Egyptian religious identity rather than a classical one. In the nineteenth century, the patriarchal idea of the 'asexual Victorian angel-wife' meant that women who possessed the 'potential for motherhood' were 'sacred, pure, asexual, [and] nourishing' in the cultural imagination.⁷⁸ In contrast, the 'Victorian prostitute' symbolised the 'impure' and 'corrupt' state of the female body that was 'dangerous to masculinity, a source of moral and physical contamination'.⁷⁹ As the mother symbolised fertility and purity, while the prostitute symbolised contaminating sexuality, the two sides of the binary were viewed as mutually exclusive. Like Constance Collier's representation of Cleopatra in Tree's production, the Shakespearean Cleopatra in Alma-Tadema's painting completely undermines the 'angel'/'whore' binary by being a fertile mother who is in touch with her sensuality. Alma-Tadema's painting engages with *fin-de-siècle* anxieties about female sexuality by depicting Cleopatra as both maternal and sensual. Framing her within an Egyptian religious context, it presents her as a ruler who embodies both political and sexual authority, using the oriental woman to navigate contemporary perceptions of femininity.

In contrast to Cleopatra's feminine association with Hathor, the 'two sceptres of her double dominion' allude to her masculinity. The sceptres – a crook and flail – were 'Osiris's symbols of dominion'.⁸⁰ Pharaohs carried crooks and flails to align themselves with Osiris, the god

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 64, 65.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 62.

⁷⁸ Adrienne Rich, 'Anger and Tenderness', in *Mother Reader: Essential Writings on Motherhood*, ed. by Moyra Davey (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001), pp. 81-98 (p. 92).

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Hart, p. 23.

of the underworld. By portraying Cleopatra with a crook and flail rather than the feminine sistrum, Alma-Tadema presents his Cleopatra as a masculine pharaoh. While Cleopatra holds symbols of Osiris, her female attendants play sistrums. The juxtaposition between the feminine and the masculine creates an image of a powerful ruler who presents herself as a masculine-coded pharaoh while simultaneously being associated with feminine goddesses who symbolise sensuality, love, and motherhood. Alma-Tadema's decision to depict Cleopatra donning symbolic emblems almost exclusively worn by men aligns her with Shakespeare's Cleopatra. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Cleopatra recalls:

I drunk him to his bed,
Then put my tires and mantles on him, whilst
I wore his sword Philippan.⁸¹

By intoxicating him before swapping their clothes, Cleopatra emasculates Antony by taking the sword that represents his phallus while giving him her feminine garments. Dressed as a woman, with his lover holding a symbol of his manhood, Antony has been symbolically castrated. In Alma-Tadema's *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883) and the reminiscence of crossdressing in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony has come face to face with a more arcane power – that of a female autocrat who assumes all the privileges of masculinity by presenting herself first and foremost as a pharaoh rather than a queen. The duality in Cleopatra's gender representation reflects the complexity of female authority in *fin de siècle* oil paintings. Cleopatra's ties to Isis and Hathor evoke maternal and sensual power, while her alignment with Osiris asserts masculine monarchical authority. Alma-Tadema's Shakespearean Cleopatra thus navigates Victorian binaries of gender by

⁸¹ Shakespeare, II. 5. 22.

embodying both feminine and masculine-coded forms of power, reflecting broader anxieties about women's roles in *fin de siècle* society.

The transparent nature of Cleopatra's robe in *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883) demonstrates the power she possesses as a female ruler. Although Cleopatra is wearing a white Grecian-style robe, its transparency abides by Egyptian fashion. In the Ptolemaic period, 'Egyptian art stressed the fertility of women', by placing them in formfitting or transparent clothing that exposed their 'pretty, youthful faces, full breasts set off by a small waist and wide hips'.⁸² As white Grecian robes often concealed women's entire bodies, the transparency of Cleopatra's robes makes it a hybrid Graeco-Egyptian garment. Despite covering almost her entire body, apart from her lower arms and toes, the dress reveals the shade of Cleopatra's skin, the semi-outline of her breasts, and her wide hips, which all highlight her fertility and sensuality. In their description of Cleopatra's half conceal[ed] body in *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883), the *Athenaeum* describes her physique as 'voluptuous' and 'sumptuous'.⁸³ These adjectives evoke images of luxury, opulence, and pleasure, presenting Cleopatra's body as a sensual object that is too expensive to attain. Like the half-drawn curtain, Cleopatra's semi-transparent robe invites Antony to lust after her, while denying him access to her. The robe partially reveals the shape of Cleopatra's breasts, while the carefully draped leopard skin obscures Antony's view of their full shape or the colour of her nipples. Leopards, like lions, cats, tigers, and cheetahs, symbolised women's primal 'aggressive sexuality' and 'bestial needs' in nineteenth-century art.⁸⁴ In her analysis of Alma-Tadema's *The Tepidarium* (1881, Fig. 2.19), Ann Colley notes that animal fur is an extension of 'the [female] subject's languid sexuality'.⁸⁵ The difference between the bear skin in *The Tepidarium* and the leopard skin in *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883) is that the bear skin does not conceal the

⁸² Goelet, p. 26.

⁸³ 'Fine-Art Gossip', *Athenaeum*, 2818, p. 568.

⁸⁴ Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-De-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 289.

⁸⁵ Ann C. Colley, *Wild Animal Skins in Victorian Britain: Zoos, Collections, Portraits, and Maps* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), p. 139.

subject's nude body. Instead, it 'spills over and touches the floor' to 'seduce the viewer to vicariously [...] touch his [nude] model's body and visually run their fingers over its surfaces'.⁸⁶ Just as the animal skin worn by Bernhardt in her performance of Cleopatra alludes to her sexuality whilst concealing her body from the audience, the leopard skin in Alma-Tadema's oil painting prevents the viewer from gazing upon Cleopatra's chest. In contrast to *The Tepidarium*, the leopard skin warns the viewer of Cleopatra's ferocious sexuality, preventing them from taking pleasure in the display of her body. The leopard skin in Alma-Tadema's *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883) and Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* (1888) is also an archaeologically informed detail which alludes to Cleopatra's masculine nature. In ancient Egypt, leopard skins were worn by pharaohs and priests to symbolise power and regeneration. As most pharaohs and priests in ancient Egypt were men, the historical Cleopatra took on a masculine position when she appointed herself pharaoh. The leopard skins in Alma-Tadema's and Waterhouse's oil paintings serve a dual purpose by reminding archaeologically informed viewers of Cleopatra's masculine position of power while also highlighting her unattainable sexuality. As a result, Alma-Tadema's and Waterhouse's Cleopatras are simultaneously configured as powerful and sexual women who invite the viewer to desire them, while reminding them of the power they hold to destroy.

The leopard skin in Alma-Tadema's *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883) and Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* (1888), as well as the tiger skin in Collier's *The Death of Cleopatra* (1890) all link the final pharaoh of Egypt with the act of biting. In Shakespeare's play, Cleopatra assures the messenger who brought her news of Antony's marriage to Octavia that she 'will not bite' him, thereby demonstrating her potential to do so.⁸⁷ As the ruler of the Egyptian Empire, Cleopatra holds the power to express her 'bestial needs' by castrating men through acts of biting, beheading, disembowelling, and scratching.⁸⁸ In Waterhouse's *Cleopatra*, the statue of the 'bloodthirsty' Sekhmet whose 'name simply means the "powerful"' alludes to Cleopatra's ability to destroy her

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Shakespeare, II. 5. 96.

⁸⁸ Dijkstra, p. 289.

enemies.⁸⁹ Alma-Tadema was also aware of the association between feline goddesses and destruction. His personal collection of photographs of Egyptian artefacts included various statues of Pakhet, a lion-goddess known as ‘a nightery huntress with sharp claws’ (Fig. 2.20).⁹⁰ Like Sekhmet, Pakhet was the protector of motherhood and the pharaoh. Considering the association between feline goddesses and the act of biting, as well as Shakespeare’s Cleopatra’s potential to bite, the ferocious feline skins in Alma-Tadema’s *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883), Waterhouse’s *Cleopatra* (1888), and Collier’s *Death of Cleopatra* (1890) collectively conjure an image of a woman whose power as a pharaoh provides her with the spiritual protection of bloodthirsty deities, while instantaneously giving her the authority to physically bite any man who displeases her. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century adaptations of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* featured actresses robed in the skins of ferocious cats. In promotional pictures for Tree’s adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Constance Collier wore the skin of a leopard over her Egyptian costume, ‘evoking’ Alma-Tadema’s painting (Fig. 2.21).⁹¹ In this image, Collier’s vulture headdress symbolises feminine maternity, while the leopard skin draped across her body alludes to both her masculine position as pharaoh and her ferocious sexuality. Like Alma-Tadema’s and Waterhouse’s queens, Constance Collier is simultaneously a sexual and fertile woman who is capable of love and maternity, as well as a masculine pharaoh who holds the metaphorical and literal power of castration. The leopard skin in *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883) and *Cleopatra* (1888), as well as the tiger skin in *The Death of Cleopatra* (1890) warn of the dangers of women who hold masculine positions of power by configuring the Shakespearean Cleopatra as an emasculating, biting woman who literally wears a sword.

John Collier’s *The Death of Cleopatra* is the only painting that portrays Cleopatra’s semi-nude body, as her translucent fitted dress exposes her figure and displays her breasts, arms, shoulders,

⁸⁹ Hart, pp. 139, 138.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 125.

⁹¹ Rosemary Barrow, ‘Toga Plays and Tableaux Vivants: Theatre and Painting on London’s Late-Victorian and Edwardian Popular Stage,’ *Theatre Journal*, 62.2 (2010), pp. 209-226 (p. 214).

and ankles. Instead of being inherently sexual like Gérôme's depiction of Cleopatra, Collier's queen is portrayed in clothing inspired by archaeology. The historical elements of her outfit create an image of a strong Egyptian pharaoh who wholly embraces her eastern identity. Throughout most of Egyptian history, royal women wore 'transparent' and 'formfitting' dresses that left 'nothing to the imagination'.⁹² These fashionable dresses indicated their royal status and their link with divinity. Egyptian art created during the Ptolemaic dynasty, such as the bas-relief that Collier based his painting on (Fig. 2.18) and the 'Statue of a Ptolemaic Queen, perhaps Cleopatra VII' (Fig. 2.22), portrayed royal Egyptian women wearing tightfitting dresses that exposed their breasts. Recent studies conducted by the Metropolitan Museum of Art imply that this statue's braided hairstyle 'suggest identification with Cleopatra VII'.⁹³ Although it is believed to be a modern addition because it is 'incorrectly oriented', the cartouche on the statue's arm reads 'Cleopatra'.⁹⁴ The addition of the cartouche suggests that between the time it was found in Egypt and its donation to the Met in 1889 by the philanthropist Joseph William Drexel, it was believed to resemble Cleopatra. As Collier's Cleopatra has similar braided hair and is also wearing a diadem and a form-fitting dress that exposes her breasts, she mirrors the bas-reliefs and statues that were attributed to Cleopatra in the nineteenth century. Collier's decision to paint Cleopatra and her handmaidens as partially nude can be viewed as an attempt at archaeological accuracy, instead of an effort of sexualisation. 11In comparison to Collier's other paintings, his Cleopatra is far from sexualised. In *Lilith* (1886), for example, Collier depicts a smiling nude woman 'whose voluptuous round form' is surrounded by a large serpent (Fig. 2.23).⁹⁵ Lilith, Adam's first wife who was banished from the Garden of Eden for refusing to obey him, appears to take pleasure in the caresses of the serpent, which symbolises the devil in the Bible. Dijkstra notes that 'in the evil, bestial implications of her

⁹² Ogden Goelet, 'Nudity in Ancient Egypt', *Source*, 12.2 (1993), pp. 20-31 (p. 26).

⁹³ 'Statue of a Ptolemaic Queen, perhaps Cleopatra VII', *Metropolitan Museum of Art* <<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/547702>> [accessed: 3 August 2023].

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ 'The Grosvenor Gallery', *British Architect*, 27 (6 May 1887), pp. 339-340 (p. 339).

beauty, woman was not only tempted by the snake but was the snake herself.⁹⁶ As the curves of the serpent mirror the curves of Lilith's body, she is not only the serpent's lover, but a mirror image of the venomous creature. The erotic encounter between Lilith and the serpent encourages the viewer to vicariously take pleasure in Lilith's exposed body. In contrast to Lilith, Collier's Cleopatra looks more like a statue than a living woman that can be vicariously enjoyed. Instead, the nudity in *The Death of Cleopatra* (1890) expresses Cleopatra's status as a royal Egyptian woman. The crook in Cleopatra's hand further indicates that, like Alma-Tadema's Cleopatra, she presents herself foremost as a pharaoh. As the crook and flail were symbols of the god of the underworld, they allude to Cleopatra's adoption of masculine objects to transition into an afterlife where she will be honoured by deities. The juxtaposition of the masculine crook and the feminine dress enables Collier's Cleopatra to navigate the binaries of gender. By departing from the specific bas-relief that inspired his work and depicting Cleopatra in a feminine vulture headdress rather than the uraeus traditionally worn by pharaohs, Collier adds another layer to the intricate interplay between femininity and masculinity. As clothing is a cultural signifier that visually displays an individual's moral and political allegiances, Collier suggests that Cleopatra wore Egyptian garments to emphasise her unwavering loyalty to Egypt. There is a clear juxtaposition between Cleopatra's white skin and Egyptian clothing. Her white skin demonstrates that she is, at least partially, ethnically Greek, while her clothing presents her as a wholly Egyptian woman. As her ethnicity allowed her to exist between the binaries of 'eastern' and 'western', her Egyptian portrayal undermines the orientalist belief that the West is inherently superior to the East. As a pharaoh promised power in the afterlife, Cleopatra's Egyptian clothing, which aligns her with royal Egyptian women and Osiris, underscores how her pharaonic authority enabled her to assert power beyond her mortal existence, reinforcing her position as both a sovereign and a divine figure.

⁹⁶ Dijkstra, p. 305.

Alma-Tadema's *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883), Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* (1888), and Collier's *The Death of Cleopatra* (1890) portray Cleopatra as a royal Egyptian woman whose beauty and fertility aid in her occupation of the masculine position of pharaoh. All three paintings configure Cleopatra as the divine mother of her people by creating allusions to the fierce goddesses Wadjet, Sekhmet, Pakhet, and Isis, while simultaneously aligning her with the deity of the pharaoh, Osiris. These divine associations are further evoked through the imagery of the serpent, which symbolises Cleopatra's royal and divine status while also foreshadowing her legendary demise – a theme central to the exploration of animal symbolism in Cleopatra oil paintings.

The Serpent's Embrace: Animal Imagery and the Myth of Suicide

Alma-Tadema, Waterhouse, and Collier all incorporate animal imagery in their oil paintings, particularly references to the serpent rumoured to have taken Cleopatra's life. In the nineteenth century, the belief that Cleopatra performed suicide by asp was widely accepted as historical fact, largely due to the influence of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. It remains unclear why Shakespeare selected suicide by asp over other methods suggested by Graeco-Roman scholars. The possibilities include the serpent's association with the uraeus of the pharaoh, which would have identified Cleopatra as a 'successor of many kings', the serpent's link with the cult of 'Hathor-Isis', or that death by serpent simply looked more dramatic in theatrical productions.⁹⁷ Suicide itself was a 'powerful tool of opposition' in the ancient world.⁹⁸ Rather than face humiliation and execution, the captured chose to take their own lives to defy their captors and reclaim their power. Just as Cleopatra's stern eye contact and firm clasp on the serpent's neck in Theodor Matthei's *Cleopatra with the Serpent* (1897, Fig. 2.24) demonstrates her control over the instrument of her death,

⁹⁷ John Gwyn Griffiths, 'The Death of Cleopatra VII', *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 47 (1961), pp. 113-118 (pp. 113, 114).

⁹⁸ Robert A. Gurval, 'Dying Like a Queen: *The Story of Cleopatra and the Asp(s) in Antiquity*', in *Cleopatra: A Sphinx Revisited*, ed. by Margaret Miles (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 54-77 (p. 65).

Cleopatra's suicide was deliberately performed to maintain her dignity. The combination of the ancient connotations of the serpent with the god of the underworld and the empowering nature of suicide in Collier's *The Death of Cleopatra* (1890) conjures a version of Cleopatra who cannot be stopped by death. While only Collier's painting portrays Cleopatra's death scene, all three artists establish Cleopatra's association with the serpent through archaeological elements. As the serpent was connected to royalty, divinity, and motherhood in ancient Egypt, the archaeological details demonstrate the symbolic and literal power Cleopatra possessed as pharaoh.

Alma-Tadema's use of the serpent in his completed Cleopatra paintings reveals varying representations of the same woman, with each one appearing more powerful than the last. His first painting, *The Dying Cleopatra* (c. 1857-1859), portrays the Egyptian queen lying naked with her eyes closed, her handmaidens grieving beside her, as an asp climbs her forearm. *The Dying Cleopatra* (c. 1857-1859) is far sexier than *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883). Not only is there full-frontal nudity, featuring a voluptuous Cleopatra with a tiny waist and broad hips, but she also appears to have pubic hair. As noted by Nead, 'the principal goal of the female nude' is 'the containment and regulation of the female sexual body'.⁹⁹ As the female body is defined 'as lacking containment and issuing filth and pollution from its faltering outlines and broken surface', classical artists could regulate it by 'momentarily repairing the orifices and tears'.¹⁰⁰ To 'regulate' women's bodies, most paintings featuring nude women either partially concealed their genitals or portrayed them completely hairless. Consequently, nearly all nineteenth-century nude oil paintings of women featured hairless models who resembled statues. Alma-Tadema's portrayal of Cleopatra's fully nude body and pubic hair breaks away from classical art and verges onto the pornographic. By portraying Cleopatra as a living woman whose 'orifices and tears' cannot be regulated, her naked body symbolises her ability to seduce and contaminate. Despite having a more threatening sexuality than the pharaoh of *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883), this Cleopatra is punished for her

⁹⁹ Lynda Nead, p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

sensuality. The downward angle of her head, the frown on her lips, and the languid position of her arm suggests that, like the pharaoh in Rixens's *The Death of Cleopatra* (1874), she has been devastated by death. However, it seems that Alma-Tadema destroyed *The Dying Cleopatra* (c. 1857-1859), as only a photograph of it exists. The destruction of the painting suggests that Alma-Tadema viewed it as practice during the beginning of his artistic career. The look of defeat on the queen's face in *The Dying Cleopatra* (c. 1857-1859) is the antithesis of her expression in *Cleopatra* (1875), *Cleopatra* (1877) and *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883), which were all officially exhibited. *Cleopatra* (1875) presents the queen as a 'seductive reclining figure adorned in a leopard skin garment', wearing a cobra headdress and golden snake armlet.¹⁰¹ In their description of the painting, the *Academy* wrote: 'out of the masses of her black hair, over her forehead, rises the sacred asp, the symbol of her Egyptian queenship. Round her arm a golden serpent is wound'.¹⁰² The way the 'sacred asp' headdress comes 'out of the masses of her black hair' makes it appear imbedded, as if the symbol of Wadjet exists within her. The natural placement of the uraeus demonstrates that, as the queen of Egypt, Cleopatra possesses supreme power. The golden serpent armlet – which was a replica of one Alma-Tadema made for his wife, Laura – mimics the living serpent in the c. 1857-1859 painting.¹⁰³ The use of a gold serpent armlet, instead of a living asp, allows Cleopatra to present herself as the 'serpent of old Nile', who is capable of biting, without being bitten back.¹⁰⁴ In the absence of a live serpent, Cleopatra's face is no longer plagued with worry, instead appearing mischievous. In *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883) and *Cleopatra* (1877), the queen's serpent armlet has been removed, while her headdress has become more defined. Alma-Tadema's choice to retain the serpent headdress, while removing the armlet, emphasises her status as pharaoh, while only subtly reminding the viewer that she will ultimately lose her life to a serpent's bite. In this way, Alma-Tadema's final completed paintings of Cleopatra are the most powerful, as they portray

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 213.

¹⁰² 'Notes and News', p. 150.

¹⁰³ Moser, p. 213.

¹⁰⁴ Shakespeare, I. 5. 22.

her at the height of her influence as a pharaoh and empress, without explicitly alluding to her eventual downfall.

The use of the uraeus to highlight Cleopatra's power as the empress of Egypt is even more prominent in Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* (1888). Like Alma-Tadema, Waterhouse depicted the golden cobra headdress emerging from Cleopatra's dark hair. The imbedding of the crown makes the headdress – with its associations of divine power – appear engraved into Cleopatra's being. Positioned between her brows, the gold cobra appears as if it is looking in the same direction as Cleopatra, creating the impression that it is an extension of her. As the uraeus was believed to stand 'upon the royal crown' to deal 'death and destruction to the king's enemies', its careful placement between Cleopatra's brows implies that her enemies cannot escape her gaze.¹⁰⁵ As a divinely chosen ruler, Waterhouse's Cleopatra not only possesses the wealth and power of Egypt, but also the power of the ancient Egyptian gods. The angle of the painting aids in establishing Cleopatra as an omnipotent, omniscient deity, as she seems to gaze down upon the viewer. Cleopatra's downward gaze implies that, as a pharaoh chosen to rule by ancient gods, she is a superior being. The uraeus crown, also worn by Alma-Tadema's 1875, 1878, and 1883 Cleopatra, serves as a reminder of her power. Not only is Cleopatra the only non-European woman in *The Graphic Gallery of Shakespeare's Heroines*, but most of the portraits depict women who have a look of innocence which is categorised by the glimmer in their eyes, their worried brows, and passive body language.¹⁰⁶ Philip Calderon's *Juliet* (1888, Fig. 2.25), for example, is depicted as a young woman slouching at her balcony, as she stares into the heavens, contemplating the state of her love affair. Even Laura Alma-Tadema's *Queen Katherine* (1888, Fig. 2.26) – the only other painting to depict a monarch – portrays a timid woman with rosy cheeks, as she shyly plays with the hem of her sleeve.

¹⁰⁵ John Whitehorne, *Cleopatras* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 193.

¹⁰⁶ The other female characters featured in the exhibition include: *Imogen* by Herbert Schmalz, *Olivia* by Edmund Blair Leighton, *Ophelia* by Marcus Stone, *Miranda* by Frederick Goodall, *Juliet* by Philip Hermogenes Calderon, *Cressida* by Edward John Poynter, *Desdemona* by Frederic Leighton Bart, *Anne Page* by George Dunlop Leslie, *Jessica* by Luke Fildes, *Portia*, *Wife of Brutus* by Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *Rosalind* by Robert Walker Macbeth, *Isabella* by Frank William Warwick Topham, *Queen Katherine* by Laura Alma-Tadema, *Beatrice* by Frank Dicksee, *Mariana* by Valentine Cameron Prinsep, *Portia* by Henry Woods, *Katherine* by Edwin Long, *Cordelia* by William Frederick Yeames, and *Aubrey* by Philip Richard Morris.

Cleopatra is the only painting which depicts a domineering woman bestowed with a powerful gaze. Looking down with a serpent between her brows, there is no glimmer of innocence in her eyes.

It is Cleopatra's domineering nature which aligns her the most closely with Queen Victoria. Like Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* (1888), Heinrich von Angeli's 1875 portrait of Queen Victoria depicts a stern queen, slightly inclining her head to meet the viewer's gaze (Fig. 2.27). Queen Victoria admired the portrait and had 'a number of copies [...] made, with one sent to India in 1876 to be placed over the Viceregal throne during the Imperial Assemblage at Delhi'.¹⁰⁷ Not only had Queen Victoria become Empress of India in 1872, but Britain also occupied Egypt in 1882. As a result, Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 celebrated her power as an Empress who had successfully extended the British Empire. The lion statue that Cleopatra rests her hand upon is a symbol of both Cleopatra's dominance over Egypt and Queen Victoria's dominance over the British Empire. As already noted, in ancient Egypt the lioness was the symbol of Sekhmet, who was a bloodthirsty destructive goddess that protected the pharaoh. In Victorian Britain, the symbolism of the lion was 'used to define the essential characteristics of Britishness' and was often associated with the crown.¹⁰⁸ In 1839 the government released a gold £5 coin to commemorate the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign in 1837. Designed by the official chief engraver of the royal family, William Wyon, the coin featured the queen's profile on one side, and her imagined as 'Una and the Lion' from Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590) on the reverse (Fig. 2.28). As Queen Victoria's guardian on the coin, the lion represents England. The lion was also symbolic of the continent of Africa, as shown by the original design of the Albert Memorial which featured statues representing the various continents.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, the Victoria Memorial Hall in Kolkata, India, which was built between 1906 and 1921 to commemorate the queen as 'Empress of India' had statues of lions at

¹⁰⁷ 'Queen Victoria', *The Royal Collection Trust*, [n.d.] <<https://www.rct.uk/collection/405021/queen-victoria-1819-1901>> [accessed 15 September 2023].

¹⁰⁸ Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen, *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 291.

¹⁰⁹ Katherine Hite, *Politics and the Art of Commemoration: Memorials to Struggle in Latin America and Spain* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 40.

the gate, before a statue of the aged Queen Victoria at the entrance.¹¹⁰ Owing to Queen Victoria's association with the lion, Waterhouse's representation of a lion statue simultaneously signifies Cleopatra's power as the empress of Egypt and Queen's Victoria's power as the Empress of India. The similarities between Queen Victoria and Cleopatra – as empresses at the height of their power due to the expansion of their empires – makes this painting an emblem of both women. In a promotional review of 'Shakespeare's Heroines', a writer for the *Graphic* described Waterhouse's Cleopatra as a 'stately figure' with a 'beauty of a noble kind', reinforcing her image as a powerful and majestic ruler, much like Queen Victoria.¹¹¹ The duality of Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* (1888) makes the painting not only a depiction of female power in the ancient world, but also a reference to modern female power.

While animal skins, lion statues, and serpent jewellery and headdresses in Alma-Tadema's and Waterhouse's paintings emphasise Cleopatra's power without directly referencing her suicide, the absence of a physical serpent in Collier's portrayal of her death empowers the queen by avoiding moral judgement on her demise. In a 1903 interview with the *Sketch*, Collier stated that he 'resisted the temptation to introduce the asp always associated with the "Serpent of Old Nile"' because 'it is extremely doubtful [...] she met her death in that way'.¹¹² By deliberately omitting the serpent, Collier challenges the traditional visual narrative associated with Cleopatra's death, offering a more ambiguous interpretation that shifts focus away from the sensationalism of her suicide and towards her sovereignty in her final moments. While Collier reimagines Cleopatra's death without the serpent, artistic interpretations often embraced this symbol, drawing on Shakespeare's depiction of Cleopatra's final moments to emphasise her sensuality and the complex interplay between motherhood, sexuality, and power. Observing '*an asp, which she applies to her breast*',

¹¹⁰ After Queen Victoria's death in 1901, numerous statues were built which emphasised Queen Victoria's connection with the lion. For example, the showman George Sanger commissioned the sculptor Arthur Ernest Pearce to construct a terracotta statue of Queen Victoria surrounded by four lying lions, in 1903, to commemorate her life.

¹¹¹ 'Shakespeare's Heroines', *Graphic*, 37.951 (18 February 1888), p. 167.

¹¹² Paraphrased in 'Photographic Interviews: The Hon. John Collier', p. 351.

Shakespeare's Cleopatra states: 'doest thou not see my baby at my breast, / that sucks the nurse asleep?'.¹¹³ It is a common motif in paintings depicting the death of Cleopatra to show the queen placing a serpent on her exposed breasts. For example, in Reginald Arthur's *The Death of Cleopatra* (1892, Fig. 2.29), Cleopatra grips the bed tightly with one hand while placing a small serpent on her breast with the other. The tense elevation of her shoulders and the contortion in her toes suggests that she is overcome with physical pain and pleasure. Despite playing the part of the mother by placing a serpent that grew from the Nile on her breast, her body is in an orgasmic contortion. Instead of embracing the serpent as a 'baby at [her] breast', she seems to derive sexual pleasure from it, all the while averting her gaze in apparent disgust towards the 'worm of Nilus'.¹¹⁴ Although Shakespeare's Cleopatra welcomed the 'poor venomous' serpent, earlier artistic representations of the scene, such as Guercino's *The Death of Cleopatra* (1648, Fig. 2.30), portrayed her death as a devastating punishment. In her reading of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Mercedes Broussard suggested that the 'baby' (serpent) 'may be regarded as the product of the love between Antony and Cleopatra', thus making 'it possible for Shakespeare to imply a moral along conventional lines by suggesting an appropriateness to Cleopatra's punishment'.¹¹⁵ As the 'serpent of old Nile', Cleopatra embodies both sexuality and fertility, while the Nile, seen as Egypt's heart flowing from heaven, reinforces her power as empress. Therefore, in Shakespeare's portrayal, her death by serpent symbolises punishment not only for her sexuality but also for her embrace of a traditionally masculine leadership role. In contrast to standard Shakespearean depictions of Cleopatra's death, Collier's painting presents a completely composed queen. The lack of defeat in her face – a feature prominent in other paintings portraying the moments after the queen's death, such as Jean-Baptiste Regnault's *Death of Cleopatra* (c. 1796-1797, Fig. 2.31) – shows that although she has ended her life, it has not deprived her of vitality. With no signs on her body indicating fear

¹¹³ Shakespeare, V. 2. 367.

¹¹⁴ Shakespeare, V. 2. 367.

¹¹⁵ Mercedes Broussard, 'Mother and Child: Cleopatra and the Asp', *CEA Critic*, 37.1 (November 1974), pp. 25-26 (p. 26).

of death, Collier's Cleopatra cannot be seen as punished. Instead, her death becomes a final assertion of control in the face of impending domination, allowing her to preserve her dignity as the last pharaoh, even in the face of Rome's conquest. By omitting the serpent and presenting a composed Cleopatra, Collier's painting challenges the traditional narrative of her death, reflecting a broader *fin-de-siècle* reimagining of Cleopatra as a figure whose power and sovereignty transcend conventional moral judgements and gender roles, further complicating her representation as both a sexualised icon and a formidable leader.

In Collier's painting, the peaceful expression on Cleopatra's face and the composed nature of her body suggest she welcomed death. If not for Iras lying dead on the ground and the title being *The Death of Cleopatra* (1890), Collier's contemporary audience might have mistaken Cleopatra as a sleeping woman. In her analysis of mummies and the fairy-tale genre at the *fin de siècle*, Eleanor Dobson compares Collier's *The Death of Cleopatra* (1888) with his later painting, *The Sleeping Beauty* (1921, Fig. 2.32). Dobson notes that 'like Sleeping Beauty, Cleopatra lies, luminous and desirable, seemingly awaiting a prince's kiss to revive her'.¹¹⁶ To extend on Dobson's argument, Shakespeare's Cleopatra makes haste to die so that she can kiss Antony – her 'heaven to have' – in the afterlife.¹¹⁷ As death holds the promise of reunification with Antony, Collier's Cleopatra can be viewed as a Sleeping Beauty who is awaiting her lover's kiss in the hereafter. By choosing not to depict the asp on Cleopatra's breast, Collier refrains from showing Cleopatra being punished by the creature which represented her control over Egypt. Instead of having a live serpent on her breast, Collier's Cleopatra wears a serpent armlet as in Alma-Tadema's 1875 painting *Cleopatra*. The armlet simultaneously emphasises Cleopatra's identity as the 'serpent of old Nile' and her power as a pharaoh, without presenting this identity as the cause of her death. Ultimately, Collier's painting suggests that despite occupying a traditionally masculine position of leadership, Cleopatra embodied both femininity and power.

¹¹⁶ Eleanor Dobson, 'Sleeping Beauties: Mummies and the Fairy-Tale Genre at the *Fin de Siècle*', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 18.3 (2017), pp. 19-34 (p. 20).

¹¹⁷ Shakespeare, p. V. 2. 356.

Alma-Tadema, Waterhouse, and Collier each use serpentine symbols to emphasise Cleopatra's power, control and authority as a pharaoh. Alma-Tadema's later works portray Cleopatra in a commanding state, using serpents inspired by archaeological discoveries to emphasise her status, without directly referencing her death. Waterhouse's painting underscores her divine authority, using serpents to emphasise her regal power and lions to draw parallels with Queen Victoria's imperial influence. In Collier's portrayal, Cleopatra transcends the conventional narratives of punishment, asserting her power in both the material and spiritual realms through her serene and dignified presence. Collectively, these artists immortalise Cleopatra's enduring legacy, highlighting her complex blend of sovereignty and femininity through animal imagery.

Conclusion

Alma-Tadema, Waterhouse, and Collier capture the multiplicity of Shakespeare's Cleopatra by portraying her as a racially ambiguous woman who is both feminine and maternal while occupying a masculine position of leadership. While theatrical productions, novels, poems, and short stories can explore the Shakespearean Cleopatra's varied emotions – oscillating between love, lust, joy, sadness, and anger – the static medium of oil paintings can only convey one emotional state. Alma-Tadema, Waterhouse, and Collier all depict Cleopatra in a contemplative mood, emphasising her political and monarchical authority. Rather than portraying her as equally a lover, mother, and ruler, they foreground her role as a pharaoh.

While literary and theatrical depictions of Cleopatra often align her with the Orient, British oil paintings complicate Said's theory by presenting her as an oriental other without reducing her to a mere sexual object. For example, Alma-Tadema's *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883) presents her as a sensual threat, but her command over Antony, the grandeur of her barge, and the archaeological elements linking her to divine power establish her as more than a *femme fatale*. Similarly, in Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* (1888) and Collier's *The Death of Cleopatra* (1890), she symbolises

Egypt's strength. These paintings align with Orientalist portrayals of Eastern women as 'fatal', yet they move beyond passive exoticism by framing Cleopatra's power through divine legitimacy rather than sexuality alone. Through their depictions of Egypt's magnificence, Alma-Tadema's numerous Cleopatra paintings, Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* (1888), and Collier's *The Death of Cleopatra* (1890) emphasise the strength of the Orient, while offering a safe space for western audiences to imagine alternative feminist futures. However, this vicarious empowerment remains limited, as it does not address the empowerment of women of colour in British-controlled territories, highlighting the gap between the fantasies of western artists and the realities of women of colour whose own agency is often overlooked in these representations.

The archaeological elements of these paintings reinforce Cleopatra's status as a ruler, presenting Egypt as a civilisation that rivals Rome. References to deities such as Sekhmet, Horus, and Isis, alongside symbols of rulership like the uraeus, the vulture headdress, and Osiris's hook and flail, highlight her duality as both a divine sovereign and a maternal figure. These visual markers position Cleopatra in direct relation to Queen Victoria, an association seen in theatre and short stories but most evident in oil paintings, where 'monarchical portraits functioned as royal propaganda, intentionally perpetuating an imperial agenda'.¹¹⁸ Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* (1888), for example, was not only produced for Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, but the stylisation of the painting as a royal portrait mirrors Victoria's position as 'Empress of India'. However, in contrast to Victoria's long reign, Cleopatra's death at the age of 39 underscores the precarious nature of female rule within a patriarchal society. Rather than suggesting an essential fragility of women's leadership, these paintings reflect *fin-de-siècle* anxieties about the decline of the British Empire, as explored in Chapter One, with Cleopatra's downfall serving as a cautionary tale about the instability of empires and the volatility of female leadership in a male-dominated political landscape.

¹¹⁸ Emily Engel, *Pictured Politics: Visualizing Colonial History in South American Portrait Collections* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020), p. 40.

Nonetheless, in their efforts to produce archaeologically informed paintings of ancient Egypt and its final ruler, Alma-Tadema, Waterhouse, and Collier engage with *fin-de-siècle* concepts of empire, race, gender, and sexuality. By depicting Cleopatra in contemplative moments of sovereignty rather than seduction, these paintings explore the tensions between femininity, sexuality, and rulership, presenting competing views on women's roles in imperial positions of power. While the archaeologically inspired paintings of Alma-Tadema, Waterhouse, and Collier reflect anxieties and aspirations regarding female authority in the late nineteenth century, the next chapter demonstrates how historical novels examined the evolving discourse surrounding women's roles, inviting female readers to fantasise about liberation.

Chapter Three

The New Cleopatra: Gender, Power, and the New Woman in Historical Novels

I say emphatically that free public libraries [...] are becoming a curse to the nation. They are making women lazy by novel-reading; by novel-reading women all become, in imagination, persecuted heroines - and the cooking goes wrong!¹

The increase in women's literacy rates after the 1870 Education Act, combined with advancement in the printing press, facilitated the mass production of single-volume novels. As a result, the novel emerged as the 'dominant literary form of the Victorian period'.² The novel's primary readers were young women who sought vicarious escape through 'sentimental' literature.³ Women's addiction to novels was a contemporaneous concern, as it was feared that they would become so invested in the fictional lives of heroines that they would abandon cooking, housekeeping, marriage, and even motherhood. Between 1880 and 1914, the periodical press repeatedly published fearmongering stories concerning women who became 'lazy by novel-reading'. There are reports of 'novel-reading' women committing crimes such as fraud, being sentenced to jail for neglecting their children, and even causing street accidents by crossing busy roads while reading.⁴ While the periodical press, driven by evangelical ministers and physicians, warned of the dangers of 'the novel-reading disease', popular authors such as H. Rider Haggard recognised that the success of their fiction depended on its appeal to female readers.⁵ Despite his fiction often being read as appealing primarily to 'big and little boys' – as he himself suggests in the dedication of his imperial

¹ 'Mr Carnegie to Blame', *Evening Telegraph*, 8678 (30 November 1904), p. 3.

² Kate Flint, 'The Victorian Novel and its Readers', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. Deirdre David (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 19.

³ 'Why They Don't Marry', *Daily Picayune*, 51.52 (17 March 1887), p. 4.

⁴ 'Woman Who Declines to Give Information Regarding Her Antecedents is Sentenced to Six Months for Fraud', *Dundee Courier*, 18360 (15 April 1912), p. 7. See also, 'News', *Dundee Courier*, 15099 (14 November 1901), p. 4. See also, 'Learn How to Cross the Road', *Daily Mail*, 3813 (1 July 1908), p. 6.

⁵ 'The Novel-Reading Disease', *Brisbane Courier* 26.4415 (25 November 1871), p. 7.

adventure novel *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) – Haggard's correspondence at Norfolk Record Office, two-volume autobiography, and essays reveal that he was not only friends with feminist activists, but also wrote his novels with female readers in mind.⁶ As Kate Flint and Margaret Beetham have shown that the 'literary importance of the novel was linked to the increasing importance of women as readers', this chapter explores Haggard's *Cleopatra: Being an Account of the Fall and Vengeance of Harmachis* (1889) and Georg Ebers's *Cleopatra: A Romance* (1894) with a focus on female readers, to demonstrate that popular novelists employed Egypt's final pharaoh to explore the woman question.⁷ Reading Haggard's and Ebers's novels with female readers in mind reveals that women were not only reading 'sentimental gush' to fantasise about love, but also consuming historical fiction featuring transgressive heroines who prioritised sensual pleasure, education, and power.

Haggard's (1856-1925) *Cleopatra* was first published in serial form in the *Illustrated London News* between January and June 1889, with illustrations by Richard Caton Woodville (1856-1927). In his memoir, Haggard recalls that although *Cleopatra* was 'attacked by the critics who were angry that, after Shakespeare's play, [he] should dare to write of Cleopatra', it 'found many friends' when it ran serially and became a bestseller when published in a single-volume novel format by Longmans, who bought the 'copyright of the book for a large sum of money'.⁸ In June 1889, Longmans published fifty-seven limited edition copies and 25,000 trade copies of the novel, accompanied by eleven illustrations by Woodville and eighteen new illustrations by Haggard's close friend, Maurice Greiffenhagen (1862-1931). The narrative, with its accompanying illustrations, inspired Sardou's play *Cleopatra* (1890) and the 1917 American silent historical drama starring Theda Bara, also titled *Cleopatra*. The commercial success of Haggard's *Cleopatra* demonstrates that novel-reading women were eager to immerse themselves in fiction regarding Egypt's final pharaoh.

⁶ H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines* (London: Cassell & Company, Limited: 1887).

⁷ Margaret Beetham, 'Women and the Consumption of Print', in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1800-1900*, ed. by Joanne Shattock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 55-77, p. 64.

⁸ H. Rider Haggard, *The Days of My Life: An Autobiography*, ed. by C. J. Longmans, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1926), II, pp. 272, 268.

While Haggard was a bestselling author, Ebers (1837-1898) was a German Egyptologist credited with discovering the Ebers Papyrus, an Egyptian medical paper containing herbal knowledge dating to 1550 BCE. As a professor of Egyptian languages and antiquities at the University of Leipzig, Ebers became the leading representative of the *professorenroman* genre. This genre of historical fiction was written by archaeologists, Egyptologists, and professional historians, who aimed to create as realistic an image of the ancient world as possible, given available historical evidence. Ebers's *professorenroman* was distinctly popular amongst young women because of his intricate love plots and focus on female heroines. His first German novel, *An Egyptian Princess* (1864), 'an historical romance satisfying to both his poetic and scholarly nature', was an immediate bestseller that was widely translated, reaching '18 editions by 1900'.⁹ Ebers's *Cleopatra* was published in German in 1894 and immediately translated into English by Mary J. Safford. The swift translation of Ebers's *Cleopatra*, which allowed English-speaking audiences to access it shortly after its original publication, demonstrates the demand for his historical fiction. Despite winning 'world-fame and popularity through his Egyptian lore' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Ebers's historical romances have since fallen into obscurity.¹⁰ An in-depth analysis of Ebers's *Cleopatra* provides an invaluable insight into changing opinions regarding women's place in society at the *fin de siècle*. In this chapter, I explore the ways Ebers and Haggard investigate the woman question in the removed ancient contexts of their novels, using the figure of Cleopatra to examine and critique contemporary gender dynamics. This demonstrates that the Cleopatra of historical romances serves as a platform to discuss broader issues surrounding women's rights, autonomy, and social expectations. Additionally, the portrayal of Cleopatra's roles as wife, mother, and ruler offers insights into debates about women's capacity for education, employment, and

⁹ Daniela Richter, 'Wilhelmine Culture in the Shadow of the Pyramids: The Historical Novels of George Ebers', in *The German Historical Novel Since the Eighteenth Century: More than a Bestseller*, ed. Daniela Richter (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), pp. 45-71 (p. 45).

¹⁰ 'What They Read: In the Fire of the Forge. A Romance of Old Nuremberg. By George Ebers', *Vogue*, 6.3 (18 July 1895), p. 7.

public life. By examining these aspects, this chapter illuminates how fictional depictions of Cleopatra were employed to challenge the limitations imposed on women.

The New Woman complicated the figure of the ‘novel-reading woman’ by transforming her from a ‘plain’ middle-class girl who lives vicariously through ‘persecuted heroines’ to an educated woman who is simultaneously writer and reader.¹¹ In ‘Women Writing Women’, Lyn Pykett notes that ‘frustrations of the woman sacrificed on the altar of family and prevented by [...] prevailing conceptions of the woman’s role, from becoming a writer or painter, [...] are a constant theme of women’s writing’ throughout the long nineteenth century, however ‘it reaches a crescendo in the New Woman writing of the 1880s and 1890s’.¹² Pykett mentions Mona Caird’s *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894), Isabella Ford’s *On the Threshold* (1895), and Mary Cholmondeley’s *Red Pottage* (1899), as a selection of novels which ‘deal specifically with the aspirations of female characters to become writers, painters or musicians’.¹³ Whilst New Woman novels intentionally addressed women’s issues to empower female readers, popular novels written by men, such as Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle* (1897) and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), portrayed the New Woman as an emasculating, mannish figure who needed to be controlled to preserve patriarchal values. Although both Haggard and Ebers were popular male authors, their Cleopatra novels occupy the liminal space between how New Women and popular male authors discussed the woman question. The historical Cleopatra also inhabited these liminal spaces. She was a female ruler in a patriarchal dictatorship without suffrage, and while her romantic relationships with Caesar and Antony showcased her bodily autonomy, her marriages to her brothers illustrated the societal pressures she faced. The historical Cleopatra embodied the New Woman’s struggle to possess power, self-fulfilment, and love in a predominantly patriarchal society. Through the character of Cleopatra, Ebers and Haggard could explore the dangers of women occupying masculine positions of

¹¹ ‘Women and Their Novelists’, *Portland Oregonian*, 13.37 (16 September 1894), p. 4.

¹² Lyn Pykett, ‘Women Writing Women: Nineteenth-Century Representations of Gender and Sexuality’, in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1800-1900*, ed. Joanne Shattock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 78-98 (pp. 88, 89).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

leadership, while simultaneously demonstrating women's potential to be conventionally beautiful, feminine, and powerful. Ultimately, the Cleopatra of Ebers's and Haggard's novels bridge the gap between traditional and progressive views of women's societal roles, to model the potential benefits and consequences of women advocating for greater socio-political rights.

While Suzanne Marchand and Daniela Richter have noted that Ebers's *Cleopatra* appealed to 'modern European ladies' because of the 'extraordinary, and historically unsupportable, scenes of Cleopatra lavishing love on her children', Haggard's imperial romances have been primarily read as 'racist' and 'porno-tropic' fiction, reflecting the *fin-de-siècle* fascination and fear of the gendered oriental body.¹⁴ In *Taming Cannibals* (2011), Patrick Brantlinger reads Haggard's imperial gothic romances as the embodiment of Haggard's own 'erotic fears and desires', while exploring the 'racist implications' of presenting ancient Egyptians as superior to their modern counterparts.¹⁵ Brantlinger also states that, owing to 'Haggard's misogyny', the 'figure of the *femme fatale* turns archaeological fascination with the past into necrophilia'.¹⁶ Similarly, Hager Ben Driss interprets Haggard's romances as shaped by 'colonial and masculine attitudes', while Norman A. Etherington's Freudian reading of Haggard's novels suggests that they were 'immensely popular' because they allowed the public to explore 'the awesome mysteries of their deepest inner selves'.¹⁷ While Brantlinger, Driss, and Etherington focus on Haggard's more popular novels, *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), *She* (1887), and *Allan Quatermain* (1887), they list his Cleopatra as a type of fatal woman. Although Haggard's *Cleopatra* can certainly be interpreted as a *femme fatale* narrative that encapsulates late nineteenth-century fears concerning eroticised eastern women, his autobiography, essays, and archived correspondences suggest that his contemporaries did not interpret his fiction as 'misogynistic', as his novels were enjoyed by outspoken feminists. Even

¹⁴ Suzanne Marchand, 'George Ebers, Sympathetic Egyptologist', in *For the Sake of Learning: Essays in Honor of Anthony Grafton*, ed. by Ann Blair and Anja-Silvia Goeing, 2 vols (Boston: Brill, 2016), p. 927. See also., Patrick Brantlinger, *Taming Cannibals: Race and the Victorians* (London: Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 161.

¹⁵ Brantlinger, p. 161.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Hager Ben Driss, 'Closed to Oriental Heroines: Ethos of the Colonial Text', *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, 36.2 (2003), pp. 164-188 (p. 165). See also., Norman A. Etherington, 'Rider Haggard, Imperialism, and the Layered Personality', *Victorian Studies*, 22.1 (1978), pp. 71-87 (p. 86).

without the knowledge that women were reading and enjoying Haggard's fiction, an in-depth analysis of his *Cleopatra* reveals that she is more than a two-dimensional *femme fatale*, as she is a cunning leader who shares traits with the modern New Woman. As Haggard's novels have been interpreted as fiction for an assumed male audience, analysing them with female readers in mind reveals new insights into his personal stance on women's issues, as well as the novel's potential to explore varying perspectives of the woman question through the contested figure of Cleopatra. Haggard's and Ebers's *Cleopatra* novels delve into the multifaceted nature of her character to examine both the potential dangers and benefits of female empowerment. Amidst the rising prominence of the woman question in public discourse, these novels address the evolving roles of women in society, serving as both a reflection on these changes and a guide on how they might be realised.

Gendered Narratives: Haggard, Ebers, and Women Readers

In an essay 'About Fiction' (1887), Haggard lamented that 'all fiction should be judged by the test as to whether or not it is suitable reading for a girl of sixteen', as men 'hardly ever read a novel'.¹⁸ Haggard's autobiography *The Days of My Life* (1926) and his personal correspondence held in Norfolk Record Office reveal that not only did he recognise his primary readership was female, but regularly engaged in conversations with female novelists, suffragettes, and readers who complimented and critiqued his novels. Analysing Haggard's *Cleopatra* with a female readership in mind raises the question of whether his feminist friends, readers, and reviewers would have enjoyed his imperial romances if they were simply misogynistic books for boys. The archival evidence that feminists were reading and enjoying Haggard's fiction suggests that female readers could take pleasure in narratives featuring powerful, sensual, and authoritative women.

¹⁸ H. Rider Haggard, 'About Fiction', *Contemporary Review*, 51 (February 1887), pp. 172-180 (p. 177).

Haggard's autobiography and personal letters reveal that he believed he owed his literary ability to his mother, Ella. He devoted *Cleopatra* to her, posthumously published her poetry in *Life and it's Author* (1890), kept her handwritten dramatic monologue *Bianca* (c. 1850) among his archives, and stamped the words 'Rider Haggard, the son of Ella, Lady of the House', rendered in Egyptian hieroglyphs, on all documents sent from his wife's country estate in Norfolk.¹⁹ Haggard believed that if 'circumstances had permitted', Ella 'would have made a name in [the literary] branch of art'.²⁰ Just as Haggard viewed his mother as his greatest literary inspiration, he first realised he had made it as a successful writer when he saw 'an old lady engaged in a close, indeed an almost ferocious study' of *King Solomon's Mines* in a 'carriage of the Underground Railway'.²¹ Critics typically interpret imperial romances, which were first popularised by Haggard, as a misogynistic 'male-oriented genre' which uplift masculine men while presenting women as 'burdens or obstacles'.²² In *Taming Cannibals*, Brantlinger reads Haggard's portrayal of 'powerful women' such as 'Ayesha in *She*, [...] Cleopatra, Sheba, Helen of Troy, [and] Nefra in *Queen of the Dawn*' as evidence of 'Haggard's misogyny', while suggesting that Haggard explored 'his own baffled and unhappy sexual encounters' when he wrote romances featuring *femmes fatales*.²³ Although Haggard's *femmes fatales* can be interpreted as cruel, voluptuary nymphomaniacs, they are still powerful, domineering women who occupy masculine positions of leadership. As Haggard's autobiography, essays, and archives reveal that his readership was primarily female, women evidently enjoyed reading his imperial romances. As I discuss in depth in Chapter Four, reading about Cleopatra allowed women to empower themselves by providing vicarious escape through fantasies of female power.

¹⁹ Eleanor Dobson, *Writing the Sphinx: Literature, Culture and Egyptology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), p. 120.

²⁰ Haggard, *Days of My Life*, I, p. 26.

²¹ Ibid. p. 234.

²² Richard F. Patteson, 'Manhood and Misogyny in the Imperialist Romance', *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, 35.1 (1981), pp. 3-12 (p.5).

²³ Brantlinger, pp. 161, 176.

Not only were Haggard's novels primarily consumed by women, his friends and acquaintances included women novelists counting Marie Corelli and Marjorie Barber, as well as women's rights activists such as Florence Dixie and Isabella Banks. In 1889 he wrote a letter to the author and women's right activist Isabella Banks congratulating her on the success of her petition.²⁴ As Banks was a suffragette who regularly gave lectures on women's issues, it can be assumed that the petition in question was related to women's emancipation. He included a copy of *Cleopatra* alongside the letter, calling the novel his 'favourite child' and hoping that it would 'please [Banks] as much as *She*', which indicates that Banks had mentioned her admiration of *She* in a previous correspondence.²⁵ The fact that Haggard asked for Banks's autograph suggests that he esteemed her, while her appraisal of *She* suggests that feminists were engaging with his fiction. A year later, Haggard received a letter from the New Woman novelist Lady Florence Dixie concerning his novel *Beatrice* (1890), which recounted an extramarital love affair between a schoolteacher and a married solicitor. Dixie scolded Haggard for ending his heroine's life with her 'useless, aimless, curtailed, and wretched' suicide and urged him to 'use [his] pen to upraise women [and] to bid her to become a useful member of society'.²⁶ Despite Dixie's disapproval of *Beatrice*, she concludes her letter by asking if she might send Haggard a copy of her feminist utopian novel, *Gloriana* (1890). The request suggests that, whilst Dixie may not fully approve of *Beatrice*, she respects Haggard's literary opinion and views him as a friend. Instead of dismissing Dixie's criticism, Haggard published it in his autobiography and introduced her as a 'proto-suffragette' who 'strove manfully' for female liberation.²⁷ Although the adverb 'manfully' may seem insulting, it describes Dixie perfectly, as she was a trouser-wearing, short-haired suffragette who radically advocated for women's legal rights and engaged in 'male-oriented activities' such as hunting.²⁸ In

²⁴ Norfolk, Norfolk Record Office, Rider Haggard Papers, MC 32.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ H. Rider Haggard, *The Days of My Life*, II, p. 11.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 11, 12.

²⁸ Brenda Ayres, 'Introduction: or, *What You Will*', in *Biographical Misrepresentations of British Women Writers: A Hall of Mirrors and the Long Nineteenth Century* (Berlin: Springer, 2017), pp. 1-16 (p. 12).

fact, Haggard came to regret ever publishing *Beatrice* after he was 'horrified to receive two anonymous or semi-anonymous letters from ladies who alleged that their husbands [...] had made advances to young ladies of that name'.²⁹ Haggard's desire to 'suppress the book' because of these letters suggest a willingness to appease his female readership.³⁰ While Banks's and Dixie's letters reveal that New Women were engaging with Haggard's fiction, Haggard also aligned himself with educated women through his articles. In 'About Fiction', he acknowledged that a 'man or woman' can be a 'great' romance writer and named Lucy Clifford's *Mrs Keith's Crime* (1885) as one of the only novels 'published within the last five years' that accurately portrayed 'everyday contemporary life'.³¹ Furthermore, Haggard's most enthusiastic contemporary reviewers included female journalists such as Elizabeth A. Tompkins who called *Cleopatra* 'the most popular summer novel[]', and deservedly so'.³² Despite being interpreted as misogynistic books for boys by modern critics, Haggard's correspondence, essays, and contemporary reviewers reveal that his imperial romances appealed to intelligent, politically aware female readers.

Haggard also sought the advice of influential women when editing his fiction. His autobiography reveals that he developed a friendship with Queen Victoria's eldest daughter, Empress Victoria Frederick of Prussia, due to her and her late-husband's admiration of his novels. In their numerous correspondences, Empress Frederick stated that 'the Prince of Wales and his family read "Cleopatra" [...] and think it [Haggard's] best book' and debated whether *Cleopatra* or *Eric Brighteyes* (1891) was the superior novel.³³ Not only did Haggard send a copy of his Icelandic novel *Eric Brighteyes* to Empress Frederick before publication, but he also edited the novel based on her feedback and dedicated it to her. Haggard's willingness to change passages in *Eric Brighteyes* to appease Empress Frederick, who 'impressed [him] as a singularly charming and able lady',

²⁹ Haggard, *The Days of My Life*, II, p. 13.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

³¹ Haggard, 'About Fiction', pp. 173, 180.

³² Elizabeth A. Tompkins, 'The Talk of New York', *Washington Post*, 8443 (21 July 1889), p. 12.

³³ Haggard, *The Days of My Life*, II, p. 2.

suggests that his novels were not only aimed at women, but also modified by them.³⁴ The contradictions between the novel's negative portrayal of powerful and educated women and its popularity among female readers certainly complicates Haggard's *Cleopatra*. However, it is important to note that *Cleopatra* is told from the perspective of Harmachis, who is not only Cleopatra's enemy and spurned ex-lover but also a morally weak man, interpreted by some of Haggard's contemporaries as the 'leading villain' of the narrative.³⁵ As Harmachis is an unreliable narrator, his portrayal of Cleopatra as a mercenary nymphomaniac reflects his personal fears of sexually liberated women. This suggests a reading of Haggard's *Cleopatra* as an exploration of the fears that fragile *fin-de-siècle* men possessed regarding sexual liberationist feminists. When interpreted as shining a spotlight on misogynistic beliefs, the novel becomes a vehicle for discussing fears surrounding New Womanhood in Cleopatra's temporally and geographically distanced Egypt.

Ebers's historical romances were also primarily consumed by young women and translated into English by educated women. Ebers's translators included the polyglot Clara Bell, the educationist Eleanor Grove, and the distinguished translator Mary J. Safford. Bell, the sister of Edward Poynter, was a 'well-known' translator and writer who was partial to her 'scientific works', such as her translations for Professor Thistleton Dyer, the director of the Royal Botanic Gardens.³⁶ Grove founded College Hall in 1882, enabling female students to live in Bloomsbury to attend the University of London. Her partner, Rosa Morison, was the first Lady Superintendent of Women Students for the University of London. Grove and Morison were prominent New Woman figures who played a pivotal role in helping women gain a university education.³⁷ Safford was an educated American translator with an 'enviable reputation' and a close working relationship with Ebers.³⁸ In

³⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

³⁵ 'New Novels', *Graphic*, 40.1024 (13 July 1889), p. 48.

³⁶ 'Notes', *Book News*, 9.98 (October 1890), pp. 42-44 (p. 44).

³⁷ Elaine Kaye, 'Morison, Rosa', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 2004, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/48601>> [accessed: 7 September 2023].

³⁸ 'Our Book Table: Notes of Some Recent Works', *Sacramento Union*, 15.64 (6 May 1882), p. 6.

addition to her translation work, she wrote verse and short stories under a *nom de plume* for prominent periodicals including *Ladies' Home Journal*.³⁹ Willa Cather, a distinguished Darwinian feminist who utilised her novels and journalistic works to 'reject traditional sex roles, biological determinism, natural hierarchies, and heterosexualism', referred to Safford as a woman whose life seemed to have been 'passed among books' and 'men of larger stature'.⁴⁰ Cather used her article on Safford to demonstrate that women can break free from traditional binaries, thereby highlighting their potential.⁴¹ Safford's publications include the translation of Jean Finot's *Problems of the Sexes* (1913), which advocated for gender equality. Finot, who was a French journalist, socialist, and author, believed the acceptance of feminist demands for equality would 'restore [...] to the human race the harmony between the sexes so seriously compromised', as the enfranchised, educated New Woman 'with her loftier aspirations and more noble feelings' was 'better qualified to complete man'.⁴² The fact that Ebers worked with educated female translators suggests an intertwining of his work with feminist thought.

Like Haggard, Ebers had a close relationship with his mother, Fanny, who raised him alone while running a salon popular among Germany's intelligentsia, which included the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who courted her, and the German polymath, geographer, naturalist, and explorer Alexander von Humboldt who often escorted her to dinner. The way Ebers describes his mother in his autobiography, *The Story of my Life from Childhood to Manhood* (1893), mirrors the language he uses to describe Cleopatra. He states that his mother's 'rare beauty, her winning charm, and the receptivity of her mind quickly opened all hearts to her in circles even wider than her husband's large family connection', and that she remained steadfastly devoted to her children and the memory of her late husband despite becoming one of the 'fairest'

³⁹ Gilberta S. Whittle, 'Miss Safford's Quiet Life: The Literary Work of the Well-Known Translator', *Philadelphia Times*, 7029 (23 December 1894), p. 7. 'Gilberta S. Whittle' was one of the pennames of the distinguished American journalist and novelist Willa Cather.

⁴⁰ Whittle. See also, Angus Fletcher, 'Willa Cather and the Upside-Down Politics of Feminist Darwinism', *A Journal of Women Studies*, 34.2 (2013), pp. 114-133 (p. 115).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Jean Finot, *Problems of the Sexes*, trans. by Mary J. Safford (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), pp. 395, 394.

and ‘most courted women in society’.⁴³ Ebers’s depiction of Cleopatra as a woman of intelligence, maternal devotion, timeless beauty, and endless charm, is evidently inspired by his perception of his mother, who he credits for encouraging his interest in literature.⁴⁴ Ebers’s autobiography also reveals that he viewed his ‘beloved wife’ as a ‘part of’ himself, and was proud of the ‘highly educated’ wives and daughters of his intellectual friends.⁴⁵ His ‘lifelong’ friends included Lawrence Alma-Tadema, and his wife Laura.⁴⁶ In 1883, numerous English articles reported that a project was formed to hold ‘an Ebers Gallery in Dresden’ featuring ‘pictures inspired by’ the author’s works, and that both Mr. and Mrs. Alma-Tadema were invited to ‘contribute pictures’.⁴⁷ His invitation to Laura Alma-Tadema to contribute highlights his appreciation of women’s artistic contributions and his recognition of their role in shaping cultural and intellectual expression. Ebers’s work with female translators, admiration of his mother, closeness with his wife, and respect for the educated wives and daughters of his friends suggest that his novels were not only primarily read by women but also influenced by the women around him.

Ebers rendered his admiration of educated women into his fiction, as the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche aptly stated that his female characters were ‘daughters of Leipzig professors in Egyptian dress’.⁴⁸ In *Cleopatra*, for example, Ebers creates the character of Barine to explore Cleopatra’s admirable qualities in a bourgeois woman. Like Cleopatra and his mother, Barine ‘attract[s] all the prominent men in Alexandria’ because she is highly intelligent, musical, and beautiful.⁴⁹ Despite being educated by the ‘highly respected scholar’ who also taught Cleopatra and Octavianus, Barine also becomes a faithful wife and mother by the end of the novel, thus

⁴³ Georg Ebers, *The Story of my Life from Childhood to Manhood*, trans. by Mary J. Safford (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1893), pp. 9, 5.

⁴⁴ The German painter Friedrich Wilhelm Schadow even produced an oil painting of Ebers’s mother, entitled *Fanny Ebers* (1824). Possessing porcelain-white skin and black hair, like *fin-de-siècle* oil paintings of Cleopatra, Fanny Ebers can indeed be described as a ‘rare beauty’.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 47, 258.

⁴⁶ ‘Mr. and Mrs. Alma Tadema’, *Blackburn Standard*, 55.2833 (7 June 1890), p. 3.

⁴⁷ ‘London and Local News’, *Western Mail*, 4494 (6 October 1883), p. 2.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Marchand, p. 927.

⁴⁹ Georg Ebers, *Cleopatra*, trans. by Mary J. Safford, 2 vols (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1894), I, p. 11.

demonstrating women's potential to be both educated and maternal.⁵⁰ In her analysis of *Cleopatra*, Marchand asserts that 'Ebers (and perhaps his readers) found it plausible that modern European ladies might identify and learn love lessons from ancient Egyptians'.⁵¹ Ebers not only teaches 'love lessons', but also feminist lessons, as his Cleopatra believes in co-education of the sexes, gender equality, and female leadership. By portraying Cleopatra as an intelligent woman who is also a devoted mother and loyal wife, Ebers implies that it is possible for women to simultaneously seek education, marriage, and motherhood. His novel can be read as an instructional manual intended to teach young girls how to be free like Cleopatra while remaining true to their feminine, maternal nature.

While Ebers's *Cleopatra* transforms Alexandria into the intellectual centre of the world, where the sexes are equal, Haggard's *Cleopatra* portrays Alexandria as a matriarchy run by women who mirror sexual liberationist feminists. Although the historical Cleopatra was married to Antony, Haggard's Cleopatra believes in free love and sexual pleasure. She asserts:

Marriage! I Marry! I forget freedom and court the slavery of our sex [...] woman hath two ills to fear – Death and Marriage; and of these twain is marriage the more vile; for in death we may find rest, but in marriage, should it fail us, we must find hell.⁵²

Haggard's portrayal of Cleopatra as a powerful monarch who advocates for women's liberation from 'the slavery of' marriage goes against the Victorian perception of her as a 'concubine', 'fallen woman', or 'imperial bride', who was 'made to serve as part of an imperialistic celebration of its opposite – Caesar, Rome, and the masculine, imperial west'.⁵³ Instead, Cleopatra's speech aligns

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

⁵¹ Marchand, p. 927.

⁵² H. Rider Haggard, *Cleopatra: Being an Account of the Fall and Vengeance of Harmachis* (London: Longmans, Green, 1889), p. 206.

⁵³ Laura Eastlake, *Masculinity and Ancient Rome in the Victorian Cultural Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 152.

her with New Women activists who saw marriage as a restraint on their freedom. In 1888, the feminist novelist and essayist Mona Caird (1854-1932) published her belief that modern marriage is a 'failure' that 'draws its life-blood from the degradation of womanhood'.⁵⁴ Writing to the *Westminster Review's* liberal readership, Caird stated that the institution of marriage could only be redeemed through the 'co-education of the sexes', which would give women 'the development of individuality' that would make them equals in marriage.⁵⁵ In Ebers's *Cleopatra*, the Egyptologist portrays Caird's version of a successful marriage through Barine and Dion's marriage, as well as Cleopatra's former relationship with Caesar. In the same year as Caird's essay, the *Daily Telegraph* was flooded with 27,000 letters after Harry Quilter 'published a selection under the heading *Is Marriage a Failure?*'.⁵⁶ The letters revealed that even pro-marriage theorists such as Elizabeth Rachel Chapman believed that 'the once sacred and once theoretically indissoluble life-tie between husband and wife has become, in short, an open question'.⁵⁷ While Haggard was not vocally against marriage, his autobiography reveals that he understood marriage's burden on women. Haggard notes that after marrying at twenty-five, his mother had to tend to ten children and 'various duties, including that of housekeeping' which 'left her scarcely an hour to follow her own literary and artistic tastes'.⁵⁸ As Haggard believed in his mother's artistic talents, there is an unspoken sense of disappointment regarding her inability to establish herself as an author because of the gendered responsibilities of marriage. While Ebers uses his *Cleopatra* novel to illustrate women's potential to have careers and families, Haggard employs his *Cleopatra* narrative to explore potential fears regarding women seeking education and occupation instead of marriage. Therefore, Ebers's *Cleopatra* can be read as backwards-looking utopianism which functions as a moral guide on the

⁵⁴ Mona Alison Caird, 'Marriage', *Westminster Review* (London: Trübner, 1888), pp. 186-201, p. 197.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁵⁶ Valerie Sanders, 'Marriage and the Antifeminist Woman Novelist', in *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*, ed. Nicola Diane Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 24-41 (p. 25).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Haggard, *The Days of My Life*, I, p. 27.

woman question, while Haggard's *Cleopatra* can be interpreted as a social critique of contemporary concerns about female emancipation.

By transforming ancient Egypt into a matriarchy where women possess the powers advocated for by late nineteenth-century feminists, Ebers's and Haggard's romances allow their female readers to question their own positions within *fin-de-siècle* society while safely confronting antifeminist campaigners who warned of the dangers of transgressing gender binaries. The fact that educated female readers could admire Haggard's and Ebers's narratives suggests that historical novels allowed women to explore fantasies of female autocracy which challenged contemporaneous ideals of womanhood.

'Woman the Destroyer': Satire and the Sexual Liberationist Threat

Haggard's gothic romance reimagines Cleopatra as a satire of the transgressive New Woman who robs man of 'Empire, Friends, and Honour', to explore fears regarding sexual liberationist feminists.⁵⁹ The novel is narrated by Harmachis, an 'Egyptian patriot of royal blood', destined to 'deliver Egypt from the clutches of Macedonian colonisers'.⁶⁰ As Harmachis blames Cleopatra for his inability to reinstate the worship of the 'Gods of Egypt', he presents her as a cunning, mercenary nymphomaniac who uses her beauty, charm, and intelligence to overpower him.⁶¹ Harmachis's narration transforms Cleopatra into a castrating woman who defiles both men and empires. However, just as the narrator of Haggard's bestselling novel *She* is a self-proclaimed 'misogynist', Harmachis serves as an unreliable narrator who falls victim to 'sexual passion', which Haggard believed was 'the most powerful lever with which to stir the mind of man'.⁶² Despite blaming Cleopatra for his shortcomings, Harmachis fails to reclaim Egypt because of his

⁵⁹ Haggard, *Cleopatra*, p. 294.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. vii, 15.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 16.

⁶² Haggard, *She: A History of Adventure* (London: Longmans, Green, 1888), p. 79. See also, Haggard, *About Fiction*, p. 176.

mistreatment of his cousin Charmion, who betrays his plot to overthrow the Ptolemies due to his disregard for her emotions. By making it explicitly clear to his readers that Harmachis is a weak and prejudiced man, Haggard suggests that Harmachis's villainization of Cleopatra stems from his own fears surrounding sexual women. This alignment with *fin-de-siècle* men who sought to prevent female emancipation allows Haggard's novel to configure Cleopatra through the eyes of the New Woman's greatest critics. As a result, *Cleopatra* transforms the last queen of Egypt into a sexual liberationist feminist to explore the fears of conservative *fin-de-siècle* men.

Through Harmachis's narration, Haggard's novel foreshadows that Cleopatra is a threat to the sanctity and survival of ancient Egypt and its rightful ruler. Overcome with 'the Spirit of Prophecy', the infant Harmachis's dying mother foretells that the 'fruit of [her] womb' 'shalt rule and deliver Egypt', as long as he remains 'pure'.⁶³ Throughout the entirety of the novel's first 'book', 'The Preparation of Harmachis', and half of the second 'book', 'The Fall of Harmachis', the narrator is repeatedly warned to remain pure.⁶⁴ Atou, a wise old woman who raises him, advises, 'be but ware of Woman the Destroyer', as 'Khem shall [...] he free' if 'thou canst but endure the weight of the great temptation'.⁶⁵ His father, a priest, warns, 'there is danger in thy path, and it comes in the form of Woman' whose 'strength and beauty may lie a cause of stumbling'.⁶⁶ Sepa, the leader of the resistance, cautions, 'Woman, in her weakness, is yet the strongest force upon Earth'.⁶⁷ In all these warnings, 'Woman' is portrayed as a supernaturally strong force, seemingly weak, but possessing the 'strength and beauty' to destabilise even the strongest man. Although it is implied that Cleopatra is the woman who will cause Harmachis's downfall, the decision to warn against 'Woman the Destroyer' instead of '[Cleopatra] the destroyer' suggests that *all* women are a threat. The capitalisation of the noun 'Woman' reinforces this, as it makes the female gender

⁶³ Ibid., p. 16.

⁶⁴ The novel consists of an introduction narrated by an archaeologist who finds Harmachis's narrative on papyrus rolls and three books: 'The Preparation of Harmachis', 'The Fall of Harmachis', and 'The Vengeance of Harmachis', all narrated by Harmachis.

⁶⁵ Haggard, *Cleopatra*, p. 26.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 82.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 45.

appear like a unified entity akin to a god. As Harmachis is warned to resist ‘Woman’ to ‘free’ Egypt from imperial control, he is taught to believe that the empire’s fate relies on male sexual abstinence. In *Studies on the Psychology of Sex* (1900), the influential physician Havelock Ellis asserted that the majority of men who contracted venereal diseases were ‘youths’ who were ‘easily duped’ by a ‘clandestine prostitute’ that they mistook for a “nice” girl.⁶⁸ By stating that young men with syphilis were ‘innocent’, Ellis placed the blame of sexual contagion on promiscuous women.⁶⁹ Acknowledging that ‘the police cannot catch the prostitute at a sufficiently early stage’, the only solution for preventing syphilis becomes sexual abstinence.⁷⁰ Just as Harmachis’s tutors warn him to remain ‘pure’ to ‘deliver Egypt’, Ellis presents syphilitic prostitutes as a direct threat to the British Empire, stating that ‘venereal diseases in the army, navy, and government departments’ harm the nation by costing the government £7,000,000.⁷¹ Although Ellis’s work was published a decade after *Cleopatra*, the Contagious Disease Acts (1864, 1866, 1869), which permitted invasive gynaecological examinations to be carried out on suspected sex workers in garrison towns and ports, highlight that sexually transgressive women were viewed as a threat to the British Empire from the mid nineteenth century. As Harmachis is taught to view beautiful women as a threat to the empire, he is conditioned by his tutors to perceive Cleopatra as a ‘clandestine prostitute’. By mirroring nineteenth-century physicians and policy makers by teaching Harmachis to fear ‘Woman’, Harmachis’s tutors fail to educate him on woman’s true nature. As a result, he underestimates Cleopatra by viewing her as a sexually corrupt ‘Woman’ rather than as an intelligent human or a powerful pharaoh. As Harmachis’s downfall is his inability to understand Cleopatra’s true character, Haggard’s novel warns against underestimating women’s potential.

As a large part of Harmachis’s ‘preparation’ involves lessons on ‘Woman the Destroyer’, Haggard’s novel can be read as a parallel of the fallen woman narrative, with Harmachis playing

⁶⁸ Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 6 vols (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Company, 1918-1931), VI (1931), p. 339.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 339.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

the 'pure' and 'beautiful' girl who succumbs to the temptation and lies of a predatory man.⁷² In the Victorian era, young women were expected to guard their chastity to prevent becoming 'fallen women' whose 'fallenness justified' their 'social ostracism'.⁷³ In popular novels, such as Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), the fallen woman was an 'abased figurehead of a fallen culture', a 'pitiable monster', and a 'cautionary tale' against 'feared female sexuality and aggression'.⁷⁴ At the same time, nineteenth-century philanthropists, such as the poet Thomas Hood and artist George Fredric Watts, 'wanted to demythicize the fallen woman by making her victim rather than agent', a 'beaten down prostitute' instead of a monstrous seducer.⁷⁵ Failing to heed the warnings of his elders, Harmachis gives into temptation and kisses Cleopatra instead of assassinating her. Overcome with 'shame and terror', his only hope is that Cleopatra will restore his honour by marrying him. Throughout the nineteenth century, the 'marriage plot' in fiction, was used to 'present stories of women who [were] saved *after* being socially damaged'.⁷⁶ Like a heroine facing social ruin, Harmachis can only be saved by marriage. Ostracised and cursed by the gods for failing to free Egypt, Harmachis writes:

I had naught left to me but Cleopatra's love, and I twined my life about it, and brooded on it as a widow over her only babe. And thus the very author of my shame became my all, my dearest dear, and I loved her with a strong love that grew and grew, till it seemed to swallow up the past and make the present as a dream. For she had conquered me, she had robbed me of my honour, and steeped me to the lips in shame, and I, poor fallen, blinded wretch, I kissed the rod that smote me, and was her very slave.⁷⁷

⁷² Haggard, *Cleopatra*, pp. 40, 76.

⁷³ Deborah Anna Logan, *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die, or Worse* (London: University of Missouri Press, 1998), p. 3.

⁷⁴ Nina Auerbach, 'The Rise of the Fallen Woman', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 35.1 (1980), pp. 29-52 (p. 31).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Catherine England, 'Slipping into Marriage: How Heroines Create Desire by Risking Their Reputations', *Victorian Review*, 40.2 (2014), pp. 109-124 (p. 110).

⁷⁷ Haggard, *Cleopatra*, p. 162.

All the adjectives Haggard uses to describe Harmachis – ‘widow’, ‘shame’, ‘robbed’, ‘conquered’, ‘steeped’, ‘poor fallen’, ‘blinded wretch’ – are those conventionally ascribed to downcast woman. Waiting to be saved by the very person who transformed him into a ‘slave’, Harmachis simultaneously embodies an innocent young woman praying for the restoration of her honour and a ‘beaten down prostitute’. Harmachis’s ‘fallen’ state evokes both pity and anger, as the other characters chastise him for debasing himself and losing Egypt. This duality is reflected in contemporary reviews of *Cleopatra*, which acknowledge that Harmachis endured ‘lust and cruelty’, while still labelling him a ‘despicable scoundrel’ and ‘obvious’, ‘shameless liar’.⁷⁸ Haggard’s portrayal of a fallen man subverts *fin-de-siècle* social norms by shifting the shame of extramarital sex from women to men. The fact that Haggard’s female readers were consuming literature which policed the male body suggests that the temporal and geographical distance of historical novels allowed female readers to safely explore fantasies of male subjugation. Haggard’s decision to present his narrator’s downfall at the hands of a female coloniser reflects *fin-de-siècle* fears that powerful women could undermine empires and destroy men. In his reading of *Cleopatra* as a text linking ‘sexual desire and death’ through ‘exhumation and “resurrection” characteristic of late-Victorian archaeology’, Richard Pearson notes that ‘the inversion of Victorian gender ideology’, which makes Harmachis a ‘Fallen Man’, highlights the ‘potential for degeneration in both sexes’.⁷⁹ As Harmachis is emasculated, Cleopatra is transformed into a masculine figure. However, while emasculation disempowers Harmachis, masculinisation empowers Cleopatra without depreciating her feminine charms or beauty. Cleopatra’s masculinisation connects her to the New Woman, who was feared to lose her femininity due to her masculine attire, behaviour, and occupations.⁸⁰ The primary concern regarding the New Woman’s masculinisation was that she would encourage a

⁷⁸ ‘Mr. Rider Haggard’s “Cleopatra”’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 49.7575 (28 June 1889), p.3. See also, ‘New Novels’, p. 48.

⁷⁹ Richard Pearson, ‘Archaeology and Gothic Desire: Vitality Beyond the Grave in H. Rider Haggard’s Ancient Egypt’, in *Victorian Gothic: Literary and Cultural Manifestations in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys (London: Palgrave, 2000), p. 232.

⁸⁰ Susan C. Shapiro, ‘The Mannish New Woman Punish and its Precursors’, *Review of English Studies*, 42.168 (1991), pp. 510-522 (pp. 511, 512, 513).

corresponding feminisation of man; a feminisation that Harmachis embodies. By transforming Harmachis into a fallen figure, Cleopatra uplifts herself despite Victorian notions of propriety, suggesting that New Women could emasculate men by defying gender binaries.

Haggard's description of Cleopatra's duplicitous nature parodies the *fin-de-siècle* fear that even the strongest men are incapable of resisting the temptations of powerful women. Nineteenth-century physicians believed that the house was inextricably linked to the female body, and that 'the well-being of the domestic space would ensure the health of the inhabitants of that space'.⁸¹ With this in mind, Cleopatra's cluttered and disorganised bedroom (as portrayed in Fig. 3.1 and Fig. 3.2) symbolises her complex personality. The musical instruments regularly played by her maidens allude to her love of entertainment, while the glass vials used for scientific experiments suggest that she is an intelligent and curious woman, constantly seeking new knowledge. The leopard skin rug, visible in Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2, suggests that Cleopatra, by decorating her private space with the skins of apex predators, is an even more formidable adversary. Having already linked leopard skins to unrestrained female sexuality and power in the theatrical performances of Bernhardt and Constance Collier, as well as in the oil paintings of Alma-Tadema, Waterhouse, and John Collier, the animal skin transforms Haggard's Cleopatra into a huntress constantly in pursuit of victims. In Figure 3.2, Harmachis lies on the bed, completely vulnerable after being poisoned by Cleopatra's venom-laced lips. As Cleopatra's body is the vector for conveying poison, she symbolises the legendary asp popularised by Shakespeare. Harmachis's face is clouded with fear as Cleopatra stands over him in a domineering manner, threatening to stab him with his own dagger, a Freudian phallic symbol that further emphasises his emasculation. While it is clear that Cleopatra is holding a dagger, the object in her hand could be mistaken for a phallus in her shadow, suggesting that Harmachis is at risk of penetration. The irony of this emasculation is that it deprives Harmachis of his desire to sexually dominate Cleopatra. Harmachis's name means 'Sphinx', and

⁸¹ Annmarie Adams, *Architecture in the Family Way: Doctors, Houses, and Women, 1870-1900* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), p. 103.

the handle of the dagger he intended to use to murder Cleopatra is fashioned into the shape of a 'gold sphinx', serving as an extension of himself.⁸² By attempting to kill Cleopatra with a penetrating weapon representing his own phallus, Harmachis masked his sexual desire as a patriotic act, using symbolic rape under the guise of benefiting Egypt. Harmachis's desire to penetrate Cleopatra indicates his weakness, as his success relies on maintaining his virginity. Contrary to his claims of acting solely for the benefit of Egypt, his desire to symbolically rape Cleopatra reveals that he is driven by lust. Cleopatra appears significantly larger than Harmachis in this illustration, enhanced by the presence of her shadow looming threateningly over him. Greiffenhagen may have employed her shadow as a visual pun to emphasise her duplicitous nature, as Harmachis characterises her both as a beautiful empress representing the immorality of imperial expansion and as a malicious queen wielding corruptive powers. Harmachis's intention to violently penetrate Cleopatra with his dagger can be interpreted as directly leading to his own emasculation due to his planned betrayal of her. Therefore, as Harmachis faces punishment in the same manner he intended for Cleopatra, his fate suggests that the desire of conservative *fin-de-siècle* men to regulate and control women's bodies will ultimately lead to their downfall.

By viewing Cleopatra as the coloniser of Egypt, Haggard's narrator reconfigures her as a woman who possesses the power to defile and ruin ancient Egyptian customs. Promising Harmachis that she will marry him and reinstate the worship of Egyptian deities, Cleopatra tricks him into revealing the location of the treasures of the 'Divine' 'Pharaoh Menkau-ra'.⁸³ Guarded by a 'curse [...] *from which there is no escape*', and hidden within Menkau-ra's chest cavity, the treasure can only be justly taken by a pharaoh '*who hast need of riches to save Khem from the foes of Khem*'.⁸⁴ Disregarding the curse, Cleopatra 'unroll[s] the wrappings of the holy corpse'.⁸⁵ Haggard writes:

⁸² Pearson, p. 229.

⁸³ Haggard, *Cleopatra*, p. 182.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 185, 184.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 186.

‘It is too late to doubt,’ she answered, lifting her white beauteous face and fixing her blue eyes all big with terror upon my own. She took the dagger, and with set teeth the Queen of this day plunged it into the dead breast of Pharaoh of three thousand years ago. And even as she did so there came a groaning sound from the opening to the shaft where we had left the eunuch ! [...]

[...]

Then with much toil we hacked and rent the hard flesh open, and as we did so I heard the knife point grate upon the gems within.

Cleopatra plunged her hand into the dead breast and drew forth somewhat. She held it to the light, and gave a little cry, for from the darkness of Pharaoh’s heart there flashed into light and life the most beauteous emerald that ever man beheld. [...]

Again, again, and yet again, she plunged in her hand and drew great emeralds from Pharaoh’s breast bedded there in spices.⁸⁶

By repeatedly penetrating Menkau-ra’s ‘hard flesh’ with her phallic dagger, Cleopatra symbolically engages in sexual intercourse with him. Since Menkau-ra only permitted his corpse to be unwrapped by a selfless pharaoh, the symbolic penetration can be viewed as rape. The unexplained ‘groaning sound’ that echoes at the exact moment the first penetration takes place alludes to the feeling of pain and despair inflicted on the mummified pharaoh. Cleopatra’s penetration of Menkau-ra symbolises Harmachis’s complete loss of power, as it should have been him making the incision into the pharaoh’s body for the benefit of Egypt against the ‘white’ skinned and ‘blue’ eyed coloniser. In his analysis of Cleopatra’s ‘sexual and corrupt’ ‘power’, Pearson notes that ‘the male pharaoh’ being ‘symbolically raped by the female Queen as she thrusts her hand repeatedly into the body to grasp jewels’, alludes to Harmachis’s symbolic rape ‘by implication’.⁸⁷ However, I

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 188.

⁸⁷ Pearson., p. 232.

contend that Harmachis is not symbolically raped because his decision to tell Cleopatra about Menkau-ra's treasures can be interpreted as consent. Harmachis's actions in the tomb put his sexuality and gender under question. As Harmachis *chooses* to be involved in the mummy unwrapping, which Lynn Meskell calls a 'striptease' that reflects the desiring queer gaze of contemporary culture onto Egypt, he emasculates himself by engaging in the symbolic queer undressing of another man.⁸⁸ By watching the woman he intends to marry penetrate another pharaoh, he also allows himself to be cuckolded. Ultimately, Harmachis degrades and emasculates himself through cuckoldry and the blurring of his sexuality.

Greiffenhagen's illustration of this scene portrays Cleopatra kneeling over Menkau-ra's exposed body (Fig. 3.3). The linen that once covered him is scattered over the floor, his hair is wild, his body is tense, and a vulva-shaped wound extends from below his ribcage to his genitals. In her analysis of the tomb scene, Hughes-Hallett notes that 'the decoration at the head of the relevant chapter in the first edition of the novel shows a hand rummaging in a remarkably vulvaic wound' and that the pyramid itself is 'unmistakably womb-like' (Fig. 3.4).⁸⁹ As Menkau-ra is a paternal pharaoh protected by the Mother goddess Nout, Hughes-Hallett interprets Haggard's Cleopatra as a woman who 'defies the gods, stabs a father, violates a mother, robs a grave, dismembers a corpse, and contaminates sacred things by putting them to sexual use'.⁹⁰ To extend Hughes-Hallett's argument, the repeated imagery of sexual violence in both the written text and illustrations not only present Cleopatra as a woman whose 'very nature, denies God' by threatening the maternal female body, but also as a person who takes on a masculine role to sexually violate and emasculate men, thus becoming a threat to the patriarchy.⁹¹ Yet, she is only able to become a threat because of the knowledge given to her by Harmachis, who fails to see her as formidable in any way except sexually. In Figure 3.3, it is unclear where Cleopatra's hand ends and the handle of

⁸⁸ Lynn Meskell, 'Consuming Bodies: Cultural Fantasies of Ancient Egypt', *Body and Society*, 4.1 (1998), pp. 63-76 (p. 65).

⁸⁹ Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *Cleopatra: Histories, Dreams and Distortions* (London: Vintage, 1991), p. 305.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

the dagger begins. By merging the dagger with Cleopatra's hand, Greiffenhagen extends the phallic connotations of the dagger onto Cleopatra. The repetition – 'again, again, and yet again' – used to describe Cleopatra's hand moving in and out of the pharaoh's torso mimic the repetitive movements of sex. By forcing herself onto Menkau-ra in a sexually violent way, Cleopatra performs a masculine act that violates a 'pharaoh of three-thousand years'. As '*Menkau-ra, the Osirian*' represents the divine nation that Egypt once was, by violating him, Cleopatra also violates ancient Egyptian gods, royalty, religions, and customs.⁹² By stealing Menkau-ra's treasure, Cleopatra disrespects the land she has colonised and ensures that it cannot have a future. The devastating effects of her actions can be seen in Greiffenhagen's illustration, as the sphinx, which represents Egypt, is cast into the darkness of her shadow. American sociologist Josiah Flynt asserted that, socially, 'nothing is more severely judged than rape', and Ellis emphasised that, according to eugenicist physicians, 'castration' should be the 'punishment'.⁹³ By sexually violating Menkau-ra in the same way she violated Harmachis, Cleopatra not only subverts gender norms by committing a masculine crime but also transforms into a sexual deviant whose lust makes her a societal threat that can only be subdued through permanent castration. By portraying Cleopatra as a woman capable of degrading men and empires, Haggard's novel presents his sexual liberationist feminist as a threat that can only be subdued through death. This makes Cleopatra a symbol of *fin-de-siècle* men's fears regarding sexually liberated women. However, it is crucial to remember that this portrayal is filtered through Harmachis, who not only harbours violent desires towards Cleopatra but would symbolically rape and murder her if given the opportunity.

The original readership of Haggard's *Cleopatra* was presented with an even more threatening version of the queen. Greiffenhagen's illustrations of Cleopatra in Haggard's novel portray her with pale skin, a slim build, and a nose and chin associated with ancient Greece in the nineteenth century. She resembles the Cleopatra typically depicted by white male artists such as

⁹² Haggard, *Cleopatra*, p. 183.

⁹³ Josiah Flynt, 'Homosexuality Among Tramps', in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, ed. by Havelock Ellis, 6 vols (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Company, 1918-1931), II (1918), pp. 359-367 (361). See also., Ellis, VII (1831), p. 614.

Gérôme and Cabanel, with the opening illustration clearly modelled after Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* (1888) (Fig. 3.5). However, the original illustrations for Haggard's *Cleopatra*, as it was serialised, were by Richard Caton Woodville, the most celebrated illustrator and war reporter for the *Illustrated London News*. In his lifetime, they published more than 1,800 of his works and sent him abroad to report on the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878) and the Anglo-Egyptian War (1882). Woodville was valued by the *Illustrated London News* because he could 'fashion pictures that expressed both his artistic ambitions and those of the magazine', and his realistic depictions of battle scenes won him commissions from prestigious clients, including Queen Victoria.⁹⁴ Woodville's illustration of Cleopatra entering Menkau-ra's tomb depicts her towering over one of her servants, unbothered by a shadow of a 'great bat' (Fig. 3.6). This scene in the novel is based on Haggard's own exploration of an Egyptian tomb, where he was startled by bats 'weaving endless figures in the torchlight' like 'dancers in a ghostly dance'.⁹⁵ There is a discrepancy between Cleopatra's stoic appearance and the snippet from Haggard's text quoted beneath the illustration, which suggests that she 'uttered a cry of terror'.⁹⁶ The fact that only the eunuch aligns with Haggard's description implies that Woodville independently chose to present Cleopatra as composed, making her more threatening than Haggard originally intended. As Haggard was personally frightened by the 'great bat', Woodville's Cleopatra appears even more fearless than the author. In contrast to Greiffenhagen's 'Grecian' queen, Woodville's Cleopatra has fuller lips, thicker eyebrows, a more defined jawline, long dark curly hair, a more athletic and fuller figure, and luminous brown skin that glows below the moonlight. Her body is draped in non-transparent white cloth that reveals her voluptuous shape without being overtly titillating. She wears understated gold bangles and hooped gold earrings that convey affluence without making her appear hedonistic. In contrast to Haggard and Greiffenhagen's 'Grecian' queen, Woodville's Cleopatra resembles a modern

⁹⁴ Tom Gretton, 'Richard Caton Woodville (1856-1927) at the *Illustrated London News*', *Victorian Periodicals Reviews*, 48.1 (2015), pp. 87-120 (p. 89).

⁹⁵ Haggard, *The Days of my Life*, I, p. 260.

⁹⁶ Haggard, *Cleopatra*, p. 178.

Egyptian woman. Even the servant lying at her feet wears a robe and prayer cap that resembles those worn by Middle Eastern Muslim men. Woodville's decision to illustrate Cleopatra as a modern Egyptian woman, rather than an ancient Grecian woman, makes her more threatening to Haggard's contemporary conservative readers. Instead of being a *femme fatale* who exists in the removed ancient world, she is a modern woman of contemporary British-occupied Egypt. In 'Sexuality, Gender, and Empire', Philippa Levine states that whilst 'the "Orient" [has] long been the site of European sexual fantasy', 'unrestrained sexuality was [perceived as] an unending threat to Empire' because it undermined notions of British moderation and rationality, 'produced interracial liaisons and sometimes offspring', while encouraging unauthorised sexual behaviours that could 'lead to effeminacy, enervation, and weakness' in men.⁹⁷ In this context, Haggard's Cleopatra is not only a threat to the novel's fictional men but also Haggard's modern male readers, who feared that their explorations in Islamic Egypt would expose them to foreign women whose sexualities could endanger their masculinity, pollute their bloodlines, and undermine their empire.

Haggard describes Cleopatra's servant as a eunuch, a man who has been physically castrated to lead a life of celibacy. In the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (1898), Edmund Andrews, a professor of clinical surgery in the medical department of Northwestern University, described 'oriental' 'eunuchs made such in childhood' as 'melancholy, not from ill treatment, but because they feel their isolation of manly enjoyments'.⁹⁸ He stated that although eunuchs may not have 'hair of the pubes', a 'scrotum, testes', or a 'penis', they 'retain a troublesome amount of sexual desire'.⁹⁹ Woodville emphasises Cleopatra's masculine nature while highlighting the eunuch's feminine weakness by presenting him cowering in a foetal position. Haggard's decision to surround Cleopatra with eunuchs, despite the lack of evidence that the Ptolemies castrated their servants, implies that she enjoyed the company of men who desired her sexually but could not

⁹⁷ Philippa Levine, 'Sexuality, Gender, and Empire', in *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 134-180 (pp. 136, 134, 137).

⁹⁸ Edmund Andrews, 'The Oriental Eunuchs', *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 30.4 (22 January 1898), pp. 173-177 (pp. 173, 177).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

physically act on their yearnings. The fact that Harmachis mirrors the eunuchs by becoming symbolically castrated suggests that men who are near sensual women risk losing their sexual autonomy. In 'About Fiction', Haggard lamented that authors were 'subject to proper reservations and restraints', as any deviation from the *status quo* would have their book 'denounced as immoral' and suppressed by the 'great power' which was the circulating library and 'vigilant' press.¹⁰⁰ In the widely circulated essay, Haggard stated that it was in 'human nature' to feel 'sexual passion' and that 'restraints' concerning sexual topics prevented authors from presenting 'men and women as they are'.¹⁰¹ Haggard held these views into the twentieth century, signing a manifesto issued by '70 leading playgoers', including Alma-Tadema, 'for the abolition of the present system of censorship of plays' in 1908.¹⁰² Haggard's acknowledgment of female sexuality as simple 'human nature' radically demystifies sexual women. Instead, his belief challenges the critics of female sexuality by suggesting that they reject human nature for the sake of propriety. This ultimately transforms the sternest critics of sexual liberationist feminists into symbolic eunuchs, incapable of accepting female sexuality. Like the eunuch who retains a 'troublesome amount of sexual desire', Harmachis – and, by extension, Haggard's conservative contemporary readers – emasculate themselves by denying their own sexual desires, while placing the blame for 'sexuality' on Cleopatra and her Victorian sisters: the sexual liberationist feminist and the sex worker.

The parallel positioning of the bat's shadow in Woodville's illustration emphasises the perceived dangers of women's sexuality by aligning Cleopatra with the vampire. At the *fin de siècle*, physicians encouraged middle-class women to drink the 'blood of strong animals' as a cure for anaemia, which they believed was caused by 'inevitable periodical blood loss'.¹⁰³ Dijkstra notes that the act of drinking blood for medical reasons made the 'existence of vampires, and especially

¹⁰⁰ Haggard, 'About Fiction', p. 178.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 176-7.

¹⁰² 'Dramatic Censorship: A Manifesto', *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 123.19111 (24 February 1908), p. 6.

¹⁰³ Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 337, 336.

vampire women', appear plausible.¹⁰⁴ As a result, the nineteenth century saw an emergence of voluptuary vampire women in popular culture, notably in popular novels like Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), Stoker's *Dracula* and Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897), as well as paintings including Albert Joseph Pénot's *The Bat Woman* (1890) and Philip Burne-Jones's *The Vampire* (1897) which was rumoured to depict Mrs. Patrick Campbell.¹⁰⁵ With the emergence of the hypersexual female vampire in art and literature, some physicians warned that sensual women would drain men of their vitality. William J. Robinson, a physician, sexologist, and editor of the *American Journal of Urology and Sexology*, taught that a 'hypersensual woman' 'is a great danger to the health and even the very life of her husband'.¹⁰⁶ In the popular guide, *Married Life and Happiness* (1922), he wrote: 'just as the vampire sucks the blood of its victims in their sleep [...] the woman vampire suck[s] the life and exhaust[s] the vitality of her male partner – or victim'.¹⁰⁷ New Woman activists attempted to fight back against the cultural reimagining of sexual liberationist feminists as 'vampires' by reclaiming the word. In her essay on 'Marriage', Caird asserted that even women who possess 'the fascination of Helen of Troy and Cleopatra rolled into one' were the 'victim of that vampire "Respectability" which [...] suck[s] the life-blood of all womanhood'.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, in the short story 'Miss Grief' (1880), the American New Woman novelist Constance Fenimore Woolson employs the vampire to describe men who 'take [women's] ideas and fatten on them, and leave her to starve'.¹⁰⁹ In *Victorian Women and Wayward Reading* (2020), Marisa Palacios Knox states that despite the anxiety that women could be corrupted by reading, 'both fictional and real Victorian women readers exercised identification as a flexible capacity instead of an emotional

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 338.

¹⁰⁵ Roxana Stuart, *Stage Blood: Vampires of the 19th-Century Stage* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1994), p. 165.

¹⁰⁶ William J. Robinson, *Married Life and Happiness, or, Love and Comfort in Marriage* (New York: Critic and Guide Company, 1922), p. 90.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Caird, p. 191.

¹⁰⁹ Constance Fenimore Woolson, 'Miss Grief', in *Scribbling Women: Short Stories by 19th-Century American Women*, ed. by Elaine Showalter and Christopher Bigsby (New Brunswick: Rutgers University press), pp. 271-291 (p. 288).

compulsion'.¹¹⁰ Knox also asserts that 'wayward reading in the Victorian period could and did unite women in imaginative affiliations that they translated into creative, political, and professional action'.¹¹¹ Caird and Woolson's use of the vampire to explore women being drained by patriarchal systems demonstrates that they employed vampire fiction to make feminist political statements. Furthermore, the popularity of vampire fiction in a medium consumed mainly by women indicates that female readers could, to some extent, identify with vampiric characters.

Whilst Cleopatra's connection with the vampire is most visually obvious in Woodville's illustration of her standing beside the shadow of a 'great bat', Haggard's contemporary readers would have recognised Cleopatra's vampiric qualities through her ability to transform 'her male partner', Harmachis, into her emasculated 'victim'. Even Greiffenhagen's illustrations of Cleopatra allude to her vampiric nature, as the way she leans over Harmachis in Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2 mirrors visual representations of vampire women, notably Burne-Jones's painting of a female vampire tilting her head back with a sombre look of arousal as she leans over the body of her male victim (Fig. 3.6). In 1917, Fox Film Corporations emphasised Haggard, Greiffenhagen, and Woodville's vampiric representation of Cleopatra in the silent film adaptation of the novel, which featured Theda Bara in the title role.¹¹² In the publicity blurb for the historical drama, Fox asked moviegoers: 'what will be your verdict when you see Theda Bara's portrayal of the passions and pageants of Egypt's vampire queen'.¹¹³ Despite presenting contrasting versions of Cleopatra, Haggard's text, Woodville's illustrations for the *Illustrated London News*, Greiffenhagen's illustrations for the first edition of the novel, and Fox's silent film all depict Cleopatra as a vampiric woman to emphasise the threat of her sexuality. Like a gothic monster or a 'wife with an excessive

¹¹⁰ Marisa Palacios Knox, *Victorian Women and Wayward Reading: Crisis of Identification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 3.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 4.

¹¹² Haggard sued Fox Films for adapting his novel into a film without authorisation and was awarded £5,000 in a lawsuit for what he believed was the 'shameless plagiarism' of his work. See., H. Rider Haggard, *The Private Diaries of Sir H. Rider Haggard, 1914-1925*, ed. by D. S. Higgins (New York: Stein and Day, 1980), p. 207.

¹¹³ Maria Wyke and Dominic Montserrat, 'Glamour Girls: Cleomania in Mass Culture', in *Cleopatra: A Sphinx Revisited* (California: California Press, 2011), pp. 172-194, (p. 178).

sexuality', her violation of men's bodies makes her a threat to the health and survival of the male sex. However, her ability to drain men, instead of being emotionally, physically, and spiritually drained herself, may have excited Haggard's contemporary female readers by offering them vicarious escape through fiction. As I interpret *Cleopatra* as a parody of the fears surrounding the New Woman, the novel's portrayal of Cleopatra as vampiric by an unreliable narrator satirises men's anxieties concerning female sexuality.

Cleopatra's emasculating sexual appeal is not her only danger, as her pursuit of knowledge also drains Harmachis of his vitality. Recognising Harmachis's intelligence, Cleopatra states: 'Give me of thy wisdom and open these wonders to me [...] for I have little knowledge [...] for I have the wit, could I but find the teacher'.¹¹⁴ The second sentence contradicts the first, as it reveals that Cleopatra has absorbed the knowledge of every 'teacher' she could 'but find'.¹¹⁵ Listening to Harmachis reveal 'many things', she speaks to him 'in the ancient tongue of Khem', declaring, 'if I be the fairest woman in Egypt', 'there is in Egypt no man more fair and strong than thou, [...] or more learned'.¹¹⁶ Haggard highlights the parallels between Cleopatra and Harmachis: both are born on the same day, possess competing claims to the throne, and are equal in intellect and beauty. The key difference between Cleopatra and Harmachis lies in their education: Cleopatra is instructed by the greatest minds in Alexandria, while Harmachis learns from the most distinguished priests of Isis. By seeking out Harmachis's ancient knowledge, Cleopatra aims to surpass him intellectually. She confesses to Antony, 'I loved [Harmachis's] wisdom, and to listen to his deep talk of all hidden things', 'now I have sucked his knowledge dry, and have no more cause to fear him'.¹¹⁷ Through acquiring Harmachis's wisdom, Cleopatra positions herself above her rival, demonstrating that knowledge is power. In the nineteenth century, some prominent men argued that educating women would divert their 'energy' from their 'trophic and reproductive centres',

¹¹⁴ Haggard, *Cleopatra*, p. 126.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 126.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 126, 127.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 230.

making them ‘stunted and deformed’.¹¹⁸ In a lectured delivered at the philosophical institution in Edinburgh in 1882, Clouston warned that girls should refrain from ‘the acquisition of knowledge’ to prevent ‘undue pressure’ from impeding their growth and reproductive organs.¹¹⁹ In *Women’s Suffrage* (1869) the American congregational minister, Horace Bushnell, cautioned that if women pursued formal education and suffrage, they would become ‘thinner, sharp-featured, lank’, ‘dry’ ‘taller and more brawny’, with ‘bigger hands and feet, and a heavier weight of brain’.¹²⁰ Bushnell’s theological teachings resurfaced in transnational periodicals after the posthumous publication of *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell* (1880). In 1887, the *Girls’ Own Paper* even published a letter from Bushnell to his daughter, expressing his hopes that she will grow into a woman embodying virtues of ‘modesty’, ‘patience, purity, and goodness’.¹²¹ Despite these medical warnings, Cleopatra acquires Harmachis’s knowledge whilst remaining beautiful and fertile as, echoing Enobarbus’s description of Cleopatra in Shakespeare’s play, ‘Time’ ‘could not change her charms’.¹²² By ‘suck[ing]’ the ‘knowledge’ out of Harmachis, Cleopatra performs the part of a vampire, enlightening herself without using her own reproductive energy. As a consequence of being ‘sucked [...] dry’, Harmachis loses his ‘strength and youthful beauty’, resulting in a ‘shrunk’, ‘pallid face’, ‘hollow eye-pits of a skull’, a long iron-grey beard, ‘thin blue-veined hands’, and a wizened halting form’ with ‘bowed shoulders and lessened limbs’.¹²³ Harmachis’s physical appearance matches Bushnell’s description of an over-educated woman, while his loss of strength mirrors Clouston’s warnings of what would befall over-educated women. The rapid degeneration of Harmachis’s body, contrasted with Cleopatra’s unchanging form, suggests that as a vampiric woman she has stolen his vitality by emasculating him and consuming his knowledge. As Harmachis performed the feminine role in his relationship with Cleopatra, it is only fitting that he

¹¹⁸ William Goodell, ‘The Dangers and the Duty of the Hour’, in *Transactions of the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of the State of Maryland* (Baltimore: J. W. Borst, 1881), pp. 71-87 (pp. 73, 77).

¹¹⁹ T. S. Clouston, *Female Education: From a Medical Point of View* (Edinburgh: MacNiven & Wallace, 1882), p. 8.

¹²⁰ Horace Bushnell, *Women’s Suffrage: The Reform Against Nature* (New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1869), p. 136.

¹²¹ Horace Bushnell, ‘A Father’s Letter to his Daughter’, *Girls’ Own Paper*, 8.384 (7 May 1887), pp.508-509, (p. 508).

¹²² Haggard, *Cleopatra*, pp. 275, 280.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

suffers from the theorised ‘deformities’ of over-educated women. By implying that Cleopatra appropriated his knowledge, Haggard’s unreliable narrator implies that Cleopatra enriched her body, mind, and empire at the expense of Egypt’s true royal bloodline.

The ending of *Cleopatra* suggests that Harmachis is responsible for Egypt’s downfall and that while death can subdue the threat of an emasculating woman, it cannot repair the damage she has inflicted. Haggard’s Cleopatra is driven to suicide by a disguised Harmachis, who convinces her to drink a draught which inflicts a slow and painful death with the aid of Isis. Watching her writhe in pain, Harmachis reveals that he is ‘the instrument of Vengeance’, come to ‘pay thee back for ruin, Treachery for treachery, Death for death’.¹²⁴ By poisoning her and then kissing her lifeless body, Harmachis re-enacts the moment she poisoned and symbolically sexually violated him in her bedroom. As Cleopatra did not consent to being kissed, the coercive sexual act allows Harmachis to regain his masculinity by robbing Cleopatra of bodily autonomy.¹²⁵ The illustration accompanying this scene displays the change in power dynamics (Fig. 3.8). Instead of cowering in terror, Harmachis holds the higher ground while Cleopatra trembles in fear and pain, confronted by the spectres of those she has wronged. The main difference in this parallel is that Harmachis *chose* to forfeit his power by kissing Cleopatra, whereas Cleopatra was compelled to relinquish her power by forces beyond her control. As Harmachis can only exert control over Cleopatra when she is dying, Haggard’s novel implies that weak men can only dominate sexually liberated women through force, aggression, and violence. Despite avenging himself by regaining power over the woman that emasculated him, Harmachis does not achieve catharsis. As punishment for failing to free Egypt, he is buried alive and condemned to an eternity in hell. His final words are ‘Cleopatra! Cleopatra, thou Destroyer! [...] Of all my griefs, this is the heaviest grief — still must I love thee!’.¹²⁶ Harmachis’s inability to liberate himself from the memory of Cleopatra demonstrates that she retains power over him even after death. The ending of Harmachis’s narration ultimately

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 321.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 328.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 335.

suggests that while sexually liberated women can be subdued through death, their threat can never be extinguished. Haggard reluctantly accepted that ‘society has made a rule’ that ‘the transgressor’, ‘especially [...] if she be a woman’, must keep her ‘passion within certain fixed limits’ or face punishment.¹²⁷ Considering his understanding of literary censorship, Haggard recognised that he had to respect ‘artificial bounds’ and punish Cleopatra with damnation. As men were not expected to resist sexual temptation, these same ‘artificial bounds’ did not need to be imposed on Harmachis. By punishing Harmachis to the same damnation as Cleopatra, Haggard highlights that despite Harmachis’s best efforts to blame Cleopatra’s sexuality for his loss of Egypt, he caused his own downfall. The ending suggests that weak men who fear sexually liberated women are the real threat to society.

By employing an unreliable narrator to warn of the dangers of women’s sexuality, Haggard transforms his Cleopatra into a parody of the New Woman, thereby exposing the hypocrisy of her critics. The novel ultimately insinuates that men cannot be emasculated by the culturally feared sexual liberationist feminist unless they deny human nature and allow themselves to be overpowered. While Haggard explores the potential of female sensuality and power, Ebers’s historical novel transforms Cleopatra into an educated, devoted mother, to explore women’s education, employment, and marriage in *fin-de-siècle* society.

Redefining Femininity: Family, Education, Leadership, and Power

Georg Ebers’s historical novel *Cleopatra* follows the lives of prominent Alexandrians in the final months of Ptolemaic rule – namely, the architect Gorgias, who is tasked with building Cleopatra’s tomb; the nobleman Dion, who competes for the love of the intellectual songstress Barine against Caesarion; and Cleopatra herself, who struggles to safeguard her children’s future following her

¹²⁷ Haggard, ‘About Fiction’, p. 176.

failure at the Battle of Actium. Ebers's contemporary reviewers have noted that he presents the 'famous Egyptian queen' as 'worthy of sympathy as well as admiration' by depicting her as a 'woman of rare depth of feeling, steadfastly loyal, sincere, and devoted to her children'.¹²⁸ These qualities make Ebers's Cleopatra more 'the affectionate mother than the Ptolemaic monarch plotting to save her dynasty'.¹²⁹ By transforming Cleopatra into an educated woman who is devoted to the care of her family and Alexandria into the academic centre of the ancient world, Ebers uses his historical novel to explore women's position in *fin-de-siècle* society. Ebers opens discussions regarding women's education, employment, and marriage through Cleopatra. By doing so, he proposes that women are capable of being highly educated while maintaining a family.

The Alexandrians in Ebers's novel describe Cleopatra as an exceptional and powerful woman, akin to the New Woman of the *fin de siècle*. When discussing the queen's relationship with Caesar, Archibius, a royal secretary with 'impressive dignity', states:

It was not only the eyes and senses which attracted a couple so widely separated by years, but far more the mental characteristics of both. Two winged intellects had met. The genius of one had recognized the other. The highest type of manhood had met perfect womanhood.¹³⁰

Ebers describes Archibius as a compassionate, stoic, intelligent, 'broad-shouldered man, with robust and well-developed limbs', who is completely devoted to Cleopatra to the extent that he has never married because she is the only woman he loves.¹³¹ While Archibius's devotion to Cleopatra suggests that he may be blind to her flaws, his description of her is not only endorsed

¹²⁸ Jeannette L. Gilder, 'His View is Kindly: George Ebers Writes of Cleopatra Without Prejudice', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 53.140 (20 May 1894), p. 25. See also, 'Cleopatra', *Literary World*, 25.14 (14 July 1894), p. 312. Jeannette L. Gilder was an American author, journalist, and critic who advocated for women's educational and employment rights, further demonstrating that Haggard's and Ebers's most celebratory critics were women.

¹²⁹ Danis, p. 122.

¹³⁰ Ebers, *Cleopatra*, I, pp. 18. 140.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

by the novel's prominent Alexandrians and Romans, but also by Plutarch. In *Life of Caesar*, Plutarch admits that Caesar began 'liking' Cleopatra because of her 'sweet conversation and pleasant entertainment'.¹³² In the preface to the novel, Ebers notes that although he primarily relies on Plutarch for his portrayal of Cleopatra because he 'is the most trustworthy', even his narrative 'must be used with caution' because 'it was hard to forgive this woman, born on the banks of the Nile, for having seen Julius Caesar at her feet and compelled Mark Antony to her bidding'.¹³³ As Ebers was aware of the prejudice facing Cleopatra, he viewed the comments made 'in her favour' as more reliable than those made at her expense.¹³⁴ By describing Cleopatra's intellect as her main attraction through Archibius, Ebers fights back against the popular belief that Cleopatra used her sexual allure to enchant Caesar. This narrative, which describes Caesar and Cleopatra as 'two winged intellects', raises the status of both, as Caesar is not 'at her feet' but by her side. While talking of Cleopatra's most prominent qualities, Archibius not only mentions her 'intellect', but her 'beauty' and ability to 'resist oppressors and foes as if she were a man'.¹³⁵ By describing her resilience as masculine before referring to her as 'perfect womanhood', Archibius implies that Cleopatra is more than a 'perfect' woman because she embodies desirable qualities coded as both feminine and masculine. The belief that mental resilience and intellect gained in the pursuit of knowledge made a woman like 'a man' was shared by the starkest critics of the New Woman who believed that she 'tresspass[ed] on traditionally masculine territory'.¹³⁶ Showalter notes that 'fantasies of being male [...] emerge[d] in women's literature in the 1880s, when feminist writers such as Olive Schreiner, Mary Coleridge, and Ethel Voynich were struggling with [...] conflicts between the professional and the traditional pressures of womanhood'.¹³⁷ However, while Ebers's

¹³² Plutarch, *North's Translation of Plutarch's Life of Julius Caesar* (London: George Gill & Sons, 1907), p. 51.

¹³³ Ebers, 'Preface', in *Cleopatra*, trans. by Mary J. Safford, 2 vols (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1894), pp. v-viii (pp. vii, vi).

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. vi.

¹³⁵ Ebers, *Cleopatra*, I, p. 132.

¹³⁶ Sarah Wintle, 'Horses, Bikes and Automobiles: New Woman on the Move', in *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, ed. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis (Chippenham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 66-79 (p. 66).

¹³⁷ Elaine Showalter, 'Victorian Women and Insanity', *Victorian Studies*, 23.2 (1980), pp. 157-181 (p. 175).

novel praises Cleopatra for possessing the resilience of ‘a man’, illustrations published in *Punch* satirised the New Woman’s desire to possess masculine freedom by presenting her as comically mannish. For example, an illustration by George du Maurier portrayed the ‘Passionate Female Literary Type’ of the ‘*NEW* School’ as traditionally unattractive, masculine, and intimidating (Fig. 3.9). Standing over a respectable young married woman, she states that she would not marry and become ‘A MAN’S PLAYTHING’. The irony of her statement is that no respectable Victorian man would marry her. Clouston’s conviction that female education would make the ‘degeneration of the race [...] inevitable’ was shared by other prominent psychiatrists, such as Henry Maudsley, who ‘cause[d] a stir’ in 1874 by publishing ‘Sex in Mind and in Education’ to warn that adolescent girls could produce permanent ‘injury to [their] health and strength’ and ‘morbid irritation to [their] reproductive organs’ by pursuing education.¹³⁸ Despite the medical claim that women’s mental health, ‘personal beauty’, and reproductivity would be impacted by education in adolescents, Ebers describes his Cleopatra as a ‘seventeen’ year-old ‘beautiful and lovable girl’ who not only attracted Caesar as his intellectual equal but went on to maintain her beauty and fertility as she became a mother.¹³⁹ Ebers’s Cleopatra takes on the qualities of the New Woman, such as her strive for education, her desire to be with a partner who is her intellectual equal, and her mental resilience, without falling victim to the many fallacies that men of science warned would befall educated women. By implying that a woman can simultaneously be educated, intelligent, beautiful, and maternal to his majority female readership, Ebers’s novel challenged the medical advice of doctors who functioned to enforce patriarchal systems by limiting women’s access to education.

While the men of Alexandria primarily think of Cleopatra as an intelligent ruler, Cleopatra views herself as simultaneously ‘woman’, ‘mother and Queen’.¹⁴⁰ Upon returning from the Battle of Actium, Cleopatra’s first wish is to see her children. Looking upon ‘Alexander, a lovely boy of

¹³⁸ Clouston, p. 19. See also., Katharina Rowold, *The Educated Woman: Minds, Bodies, and Women’s Higher Education in Britain, Germany, and Spain, 1865-1914* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 31. See also., Henry Maudsley, *Sex in Mind and in Education* (New York: C. W. Bardeen, 1884), pp. 5, 9.

¹³⁹ Clouston, p. 25. See also., Ebers, *Cleopatra*, II, p. 132.

¹⁴⁰ Ebers, *Cleopatra*, I, p. 234.

six', and the 'ten-year-old' twins 'Antonius Helios and Cleopatra Selene' sleeping, she is overcome with a 'flood of maternal love'.¹⁴¹ As some prominent psychiatrists believed that women only possessed enough mental energy to focus on their education and career, *or* reproduction and motherhood, Cleopatra's ability to focus on her empire and children directly challenges *fin-de-siècle* men of science. Cleopatra's greatest agitation following the loss at Actium is the uncertainty of her children's future. With 'tears glittering in [her] eyes', she states 'for each one of these children a great empire would not be too high a price', as she laments that she may not be able to bestow 'the lustre of the crown and the elation of power' upon her children.¹⁴² By being heartbroken at the thought of not being able to give her children 'a great empire', Cleopatra demonstrates that her intellect has not hindered her maternal instincts. In fact, the concepts of motherhood, education, and leadership co-exist within her, as she desires to use her intellect and power to elevate her children. Although Clouston doubted the existence of the 'highly-educated' mother, Cleopatra's maternity demonstrates that not only can educated women produce healthy children, but raise those children, regardless of their gender, to greatness.¹⁴³ Ebers's portrayal of Cleopatra's maternal instincts challenges patriarchal conventions by undermining *fin-de-siècle* psychiatrists, while promoting the belief held by New Women activists that education would make women better mothers. In *The Higher Education of Women*, Emily Davies, the founder of University of Cambridge's Girton College, wrote that 'the best possible education' produced 'the best wives and mothers'.¹⁴⁴ In this essay, Davies also mocked the belief held by psychiatrists that female weakness created by the pursuit of knowledge would pass 'from mother to son' until the 'human race' 'cease[d] to be human'.¹⁴⁵ By the *fin de siècle*, the 'Girton Girl' became associated with New Womanhood, as she symbolised female education and intelligence. Helena Taylor notes that 'Girton Girl' had a

¹⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 231, 233.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 233.

¹⁴³ Clouston, p. 20.

¹⁴⁴ Emily Davies, *The Higher Education of Women* (London: Alexander Strahan, 1866), p. 11.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 180.

‘charged meaning derived essentially from a distrust of learned women’.¹⁴⁶ As Clouston equated happiness with a healthy mind, the physical well-being and ‘peaceful, smiling face[s]’ of Cleopatra’s children reveal that having an educated mother has not negatively affected their mental or physical capabilities.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, Ebers not only presents Cleopatra as the biological mother of Caesarion, Antonius Helios, Cleopatra Selene, and Alexander, but also as the divine mother-goddess ‘Isis’ and the ‘royal mother’ of the children of Egypt.¹⁴⁸ Just as Davies asserted that the ‘best’ mother would also have the best education, Ebers presents the most educated woman of the ancient world as the embodiment of motherhood.

Cleopatra’s careful planning of her ‘self-destruction’ demonstrates her complete devotion to her children.¹⁴⁹ Following the Battle of Actium, Octavian gives Cleopatra an ultimatum: she must betray Antony or lose her empire. Considering whether she should ‘purchase a few more years of life by the murder or betrayal of her lover’, Cleopatra first thinks of her ‘children’ and how ‘it would have been delightful to see them grow up and occupy the throne’.¹⁵⁰ Although Cleopatra’s love for Antony and desire to be immortalised influence her decision to take her own life, the fact that she spends more time reflecting on the interests of her children demonstrates that they are her foremost priority. As it is in her ‘royal pride’ to rebel against the ‘atrocious deed’ of betraying Antony for ‘such a man’ as Octavian, the fact that she considers living a life indebted to him just to watch her children grow, demonstrates her love for them.¹⁵¹ Cleopatra’s greatest excuse for living and her foremost excuse for dying are both her children. Even following Antony’s death, Cleopatra endures the ‘unwelcome existence’ of living without her lover to ensure that her children will be protected in the event of her death.¹⁵² It is only when Octavian guarantees that he will allow

¹⁴⁶ Helena Taylor, *Women Writing Antiquity: Gender & Learning in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), p. 249.

¹⁴⁷ Ebers, *Cleopatra*, I, p. 233.

¹⁴⁸ Ebers, *Cleopatra*, II, pp. 76, 52.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 256.

her children with Antony to live that she takes her own life. In her final moments she declares that ‘men shall praise [her] memory’ because ‘ambition and love were the moving forces of [her] life’, yet her final words are ‘when they think of their mother and her end, will not the children –’.¹⁵³ Cleopatra’s final thoughts reflect her legacy, as she is remembered for her ‘ambition and love’ because of Shakespeare. Yet Ebers’s decision to make her final word ‘children’ suggests that, contrary to popular belief, Cleopatra was foremost a mother. Her significance as a maternal figure is immortalised after her death, as ‘the women of Alexandria’ go to her tomb ‘as if it were a pilgrimage’, and her grown children regularly visit it because Archibius taught them to hold her ‘memory dear’.¹⁵⁴ By trusting her children’s education to Archibius and having a temple built in her honour before her death, Cleopatra ensured that she would be remembered as a devoted mother. The fact that the women of Alexandria visit her tomb as if it were a holy site suggests her significance as a woman rather than just a ruler.

Despite not presenting education and motherhood as mutually exclusive, Ebers’s historical novel still makes a clear distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ female power. Fearing that Antony will no longer love her when the ‘cruel years’ show on her face, Cleopatra uses the ‘marvel of the temple treasures’, an enchanted ‘beaker of Nektanebus’, to cast a ‘mysterious spell’ on him.¹⁵⁵ The adjectives used to describe the power of the goblet – ‘coercive’, ‘demon’, ‘terrible’, ‘unnatural’ – demonstrate that it is a perverse object that forces men to act against their will.¹⁵⁶ The ‘coercive’ quality of the goblet robs Antony of his bodily autonomy, transforming him into Cleopatra’s obedient slave, or as Plutarch puts it, her ‘booty’.¹⁵⁷ As men were expected to remain in control, Cleopatra’s forced domination of Antony subverts traditional patriarchal gender roles by uplifting the wife at the expense of the husband. While contemplating the loss at Actium, Cleopatra states:

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 291.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 296.

¹⁵⁵ Ebers, *Cleopatra*, I, pp. 239, 248, 245.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 245, 247.

¹⁵⁷ Plutarch, *Plutarch’s Lives*, trans. by Bernadotte Perrin, 11 vols (London: William Heinemann, 1914-1926), IX (1920) p. 197.

Mark Antony, the hero who had braved a thousand dangers, had flung down his sword.

[...]

The goblet of Nektanebus is connected with it[.] [...] The magic spell exerted by the beaker has transformed the heroic son of Herakles, the more than mortal, into the whimpering coward, the crushed, broken nonentity I found upon the galley's deck.¹⁵⁸

According to Plutarch, the 'noble dignity' of Antony's 'broad' and 'virile' body made him resemble the 'portraits and statues of Hercules', who was a divine hero in Graeco-Roman mythology.¹⁵⁹ By admitting that she 'transformed the heroic son of Herakles' into a 'whimpering coward', Cleopatra emphasises the destructive power she wields. The combination of her natural charm and Egypt's magic gives her the power to bring down a 'more than mortal', demonstrating that, like Haggard's Cleopatra, she directly threatens men. Furthermore, the noun 'nonentity' demonstrates that by abandoning his sword, the man best known for his battle-skills has been reduced to nothingness. As swords are Freudian phallic objects, the loss of Antony's sword is symbolic of the loss of his phallus. Like Harmachis, Antony has been symbolically castrated by Cleopatra. As evident in Caird's *The Morality of Marriage* and *The Daughters of Danaus*, some New Women figures believed that marriage robbed women of their identity. In his 1898 article on 'Bachelor Women', published in *Contemporary Review*, Irish journalist and Protestant nationalist Stephan Gwynn claimed that 'nowadays there is an alternative to matrimony set before every ambitious woman: [...] her career'.¹⁶⁰ He cites 'Sygnor Ferrero', who argues that the 'pursuit' of 'knowledge exaggerates' women's 'egoism by strengthening her personality', leading her to avoid 'the vicissitudes of love and a family'.¹⁶¹ The nouns 'egoism' and 'vicissitudes' imply that women's abandonment of

¹⁵⁸ Ebers, *Cleopatra*, I, pp. 247-248.

¹⁵⁹ Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives*, p. 145.

¹⁶⁰ Stephen Lucius Gwynn, 'Bachelor Women', *Contemporary Review*, 73 (London: Isbister, 1898), pp. 867-875 (p. 868).

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

motherhood is selfish and destructive, as they deny themselves ‘love and a family’ in exchange for the selfish ‘strengthening’ of their ‘personality’. Ebers’s Cleopatra defies the belief that women would ‘risk’ their ‘personality’ by choosing ‘love and a family’. However, the individual who loses their personality is not the wife, but the husband. Antony, possessing the lower intellect, becomes a ‘nonentity’ because of his captivation. As a historical novel, Ebers’s narrative had to end with Antony and Cleopatra’s deaths. However, rather than attributing the couple’s downfall to Cleopatra’s feminine weakness during the Battle of Actium, as in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, Ebers implies that Cleopatra lost her empire, her husband, and the security of her children’s future due to her coercive control of Antony. Their fate suggests that it is dangerous for a woman to use her intellect and power to subvert patriarchal dynamics, as it jeopardises the survival of empires.

However, Ebers implies that although Cleopatra ruined Antony, his weakness as a man equally contributed to her downfall. Like Shaw, Ebers presents Caesar as ‘the highest type of manhood’.¹⁶² While Caesar takes ‘enjoyment’ in Cleopatra’s ‘intellect’, Antony prefers ‘filling [...] earthly existence with fleeting pleasures’.¹⁶³ To Antony, Cleopatra is ‘a delicious banquet given to celebrate a victory, at which the guests, crowned with garlands, revel *before* the battle’.¹⁶⁴ His excessive indulgence in carnal pleasures indicates a mental and spiritual weakness. While Cleopatra exerts a coercive hold on him, Antony’s tendency towards overindulgence suggests that she cannot be entirely blamed, as his nature inclines him to be captivated by an extraordinary woman. Reflecting on Antony’s impact on Cleopatra, Archibius states: ‘if life must have a goal, it should be only to live in accordance with the sensibly arranged course of the world, and in harmony with one’s own nature.’¹⁶⁵ Having watched Cleopatra grow, Archibius knows that she does not seek constant pleasure. By indulging in hedonistic pursuits to entertain Antony, Cleopatra betrays her

¹⁶² Ebers, *Cleopatra*, I, p. 140.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 144.

¹⁶⁴ Ebers, *Cleopatra*, II, p. 131.

¹⁶⁵ Ebers, *Cleopatra*, I, p. 145.

‘own nature’. Like Haggard, Ebers imitates Shakespeare by stating that ‘Time had not ventured to touch’ Cleopatra’s ‘feminine loveliness’.¹⁶⁶ Cleopatra’s timeless beauty reveals that her anxieties about fading looks were unfounded, as her insecurities stemmed from Antony’s attention to Barine, a younger version of herself. Moreover, Cleopatra’s use of the goblet, rooted in her fear of losing Antony, reflects how his pleasure-seeking and transient nature contributed to his downfall. An article published in *Literary World* in 1894 stated:

Dr. Ebers pictures the queen as a woman of rare depth of feeling, steadfastly loyal, sincere, and devoted to her children. Yet she could forget the prosperity of her country in the desire to impress her love with her magnificence[.]¹⁶⁷

Cleopatra’s innate qualities, such as her sincerity and maternal devotion, shape her into the ideal woman. As her only sin is her ‘desire’ to ‘impress her love’, her devotion to Antony becomes her ruin. This theory is reinforced by events following the loss at Actium. Cleopatra rebuilds the Egyptian army to thwart Octavian’s conquest, conceals Egypt’s treasures to protect them from Rome, and plans for her children’s future, ensuring they can grow into thoughtful, intelligent, and kind adults in her absence. In contrast, Antony seeks endless pleasure, giving no thought to his children or empire. Cleopatra’s attempts to secure her children’s future redeem her character, while Antony’s banquets condemn him. As Ebers implies that Cleopatra would not have forgotten the ‘prosperity of her country’ if she were not infatuated with Antony, the novel suggests that intellectual women can be great mothers and leaders if they have the support of equally intelligent men. The fact that the *Literary World* reported on Cleopatra’s moral downfall suggests that Ebers’s contemporaries read his novel as a didactic text. Since the novel indicates that women can pursue

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 235.

¹⁶⁷ ‘Cleopatra’, *Literary World*, 25.14 (14 July 1894), p. 312.

education and employment while being good mothers and wives, its moralising lesson aligns with the teaching of New Woman activists.

Ebers's *Cleopatra* explores the leading debates of the woman question by configuring Cleopatra as a modern woman, a portrayal that addresses contemporary issues surrounding women's roles in society. By depicting Cleopatra as both an intellectual and a mother, Ebers suggests that women can pursue higher education and greater socio-political rights while still fulfilling their domestic duties. This duality challenges the notion that intellectual pursuits and domestic responsibilities are mutually exclusive for women. Ebers's nuanced portrayal of Cleopatra not only aligns with the goals of the feminist movement but also offers a literary example of how women can balance multiple aspects of their identities to fulfil their maternal duties while simultaneously satisfying their aspirations. Ultimately, Ebers's *Cleopatra* acts as a guide for balancing traditional and modern concepts of womanhood, instructing women on how to lead fulfilling lives by cautioning them against men who are not their equals.

Conclusion

In *Cleopatra* (1889), Haggard reimagines the titular character as a New Woman to explore anxieties surrounding sexually liberated feminists who threaten male dominance. Through Harmachis's biased perspective, Haggard explores the era's cultural fears while critiquing the tendency to underestimate and vilify powerful women, illustrating how patriarchal insecurity distorts perceptions of female authority. By portraying Cleopatra as both a sexual threat and an intellectual rival, Haggard – alongside Greiffenhagen's and Woodville's illustrations – engages with contemporary debates on gender roles, revealing tensions between attraction to and fear of female autonomy. Ultimately, Haggard's use of an unreliable narrator exposes the instability of male authority, suggesting that the true societal threat lies not in female sexuality but in men's anxieties

over controlling it. Similarly, Ebers's *Cleopatra* (1894) intertwines the personal and political struggles of its protagonist with broader concerns about educated women at the *fin-de-siècle*. By portraying Cleopatra as a devoted mother and an intellectual equal to Caesar, Ebers counters the belief that women must choose between intellectual ambition and maternal responsibility. His portrayal of Cleopatra's ability to balance political strategy, cultural refinement, and familial care challenges contemporary medical and social narratives that framed female education as detrimental to reproductive and domestic roles. Ebers's characterisation of Barine further suggests that bourgeois women can also pursue education alongside familial duties, compellingly demonstrating that higher education and maternal dedication can be achieved by contemporary women, not just monarchs. However, while the novel acknowledges Cleopatra's and Barine's autonomy, it ultimately situates their power within the framework of maternal devotion, reinforcing a model of female influence that aligns with existing societal expectations rather than radically subverting them.

The popularity of these novels among female readers, shown by the Rider Haggard Archive at the Norfolk Record Office, highlights their relevance to contemporary gender debates. It reveals how western women, including feminist activists, engaged with Haggard's works, offering a valuable perspective on Cleopatra's representation. While Ebers's *Cleopatra* has been examined through a female lens, this is the first analysis of Haggard's novel as a female-oriented text, providing a new approach to his work. In the following chapter on short stories, the novel-reading woman transforms into the novel-writing woman, as short narratives authored by women transport Cleopatra from antiquity into modern *fin-de-siècle* society. Rather than simply reflecting anxieties about female power, these short stories actively reimagine Cleopatra's legacy in modern contexts, allowing their protagonists to navigate professional, social, and romantic ambitions in ways that reflect the specific struggles and aspirations of bourgeois *fin-de-siècle* women. Instead of viewing Cleopatra as an unreachable historical figure, these stories situate her within the lived

experiences of their female protagonists, demonstrating how Cleopatra's image could be reinterpreted to explore a range of contemporary feminist concerns.

Chapter Four

Reclaiming Cleopatra: Female Sovereignty in Short Fiction

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was a notable increase in short stories featuring contemporary women who drew inspiration from Cleopatra. M. K. D.'s 'Cleopatra' (1878), Mary Sheffey Peters's 'The Egyptian Amulet' (1881), George Egerton's 'A Cross Line' (1893), and Nelly T. Sawyer's *The Egyptian Ring* (1901) all portray contemporary women adopting Cleopatra's persona as a means of asserting their own power and independence. In these stories, contemporary women turn to Cleopatra's enduring image as a seductive, powerful, and autonomous queen to explore themes of self-determination, sexual liberation, and defiance against societal norms. In contrast to these modern tales, earlier short stories featuring Cleopatra, such as Théophile Gautier's 'One of Cleopatra's Nights' (1838) and Alexander Pushkin's 'Egyptian Nights' (1835) present the historic Cleopatra as a deadly, erotic figure who tempts men to pay for 'the price of her love' with their lives.¹⁶⁸ In both these narratives, Cleopatra embodies the oriental *femme fatale*. As Gautier's short story was translated into English from the original French in 1882, and Pushkin's was translated from Russian to English in 1916, both narratives experienced a second life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Apart from these translations, the only Anglophone short stories inspired by Egypt's final pharaoh ignore the historical Cleopatra and instead focus on modern women who imitate her to liberate themselves from patriarchal constraints. Instead of envisioning female autonomy in a distant time and place, these stories use Cleopatra's ambitious nature to illustrate how modern women might empower themselves within their own societies. As 'The Egyptian Amulet', 'A Cross Line', *The Egyptian Ring* and, presumably 'Cleopatra' are written by women, they symbolise the 'novel-reading' woman's power as both a reader and writer. In this chapter, I delve into the portrayal of modern women in late nineteenth-

¹⁶⁸ Alexander Pushkin, *The Prose Tales of Alexander Pushkin*, trans. by T. Keane (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1916), p. 418.

and early twentieth-century short stories, specifically focusing on those who feature modern women imitating Cleopatra as a figure of female power and autonomy. By analysing these narratives, I explore how contemporary women adopted Cleopatra as a model of female sovereignty without incurring social or cultural punishment. This examination includes a detailed investigation into the ways female writers attributed Cleopatra's qualities – such as her intelligence, charm, and sensuality – to modern women, thereby reimagining the possibilities of female identity. Furthermore, I examine how these writers navigated the complex relationship between maternity and sensuality, challenging and redefining traditional notions of femininity, motherhood, and sexual agency by drawing parallels between Cleopatra's legacy and the lives of contemporary women. Through this analysis, I uncover the broader implications of short narratives for understanding the evolving roles and perceptions of women during the *fin de siècle*.

Mary Chavelita Dunne Bright (1859-1945), writing as George Egerton, embodied her independent, sensual, cigarette-smoking heroines. Twice married with numerous 'love affairs', she had a child with uncertain parentage in her second marriage to Egerton Tertius Clairmonte.¹⁶⁹ Born in Australia to an Irish father and a Welsh mother, she lived in 'New Zealand, Chile, Wales, Dublin, Germany, New York, Norway,' 'County Cork', and London at various times.¹⁷⁰ Sally Ledger notes that this made her 'an interstitial cultural identity'.¹⁷¹ Egerton's sexuality, ethnicity, and ambiguous gender identity, stemming from her use of a male penname, meant that, like Sarah Bernhardt, she embodied the 'infinite variety' of Cleopatra.¹⁷² This made her the prototype of sexual liberationist feminists. Egerton's semi-autobiographical collection of short stories, *Keynotes* (1893), which includes the celebrated 'A Cross Line', was so successful that the Bodley Head printed 6,000 copies in 1893.¹⁷³ *Keynotes* was translated into 'seven languages' within two years and received critical praise

¹⁶⁹ Sally Ledger, 'Introduction', in *Keynotes and Discords* by George Egerton (New York: Continuum, 2006), pp. ix-xxvi (p. x).

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. xii.

for its depiction of womanhood, making Egerton an overnight celebrity who became associated with the Decadent and New Woman movements.¹⁷⁴ The Bodley Head, an independent publisher, was known for its avant-garde New Woman and Decadent fiction. Their minimal censorship explains why 'A Cross Line' is notably more radical than other short stories of the time.

Beyond Egerton, the authors of 'Cleopatra', 'The Egyptian Amulet', and *The Egyptian Ring* remain largely anonymous. Despite only using their initials, M. K. D. was a prolific short story writer, with works featured in the *London Reader*, *Bow Bells*, and *Ladies' Home Journal*. M. K. D.'s short stories often focus on young women navigating adolescence, education, employment, and marriage. These transatlantic narratives advocate for women's university education and employment, while challenging the hypocrisies of marriage. For instance, in 'Two Girls' Plans' (1892), Minnie leverages the privilege of a 'free education' to become a celebrated 'Artistic Dressmaker' before happily marrying a wealthy manufacturer in her thirties.¹⁷⁵ Conversely, her classmate Mattie spends her time 'reading all sorts of trash, and flirting with any young man who comes across her path'.¹⁷⁶ After her husband abandons her, she chooses to end her life with 'kerosene' rather than seek employment.¹⁷⁷ The short story celebrates the benefits of 'free education', while uplifting self-made women over those who rely on marriage and social class. In the absence of autobiographical information, M. K. D.'s stories suggest an alignment with New Woman opinions, indicating that the author might be a woman. Regardless of the author's gender, their narratives contribute to the understanding of nineteenth-century debates on women's education, employment, and sensuality.

Mary Sheffey Peters (1844-1906) was also a prolific writer. She published numerous short stories in *Peterson's Magazine*, a leading American women's periodical that promoted itself as a

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ M. K. D. 'Two Girls' Plans', *Bow Bells*, 18.230 (27 May 1892), pp. 511-512 (p. 511).

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 512.

‘magazine edited and written both by and for women’.¹⁷⁸ She was married to William Elisha Peters, a prominent professor of Latin at the University of Virginia, who shared her interests in antiquity. In her essay ‘The Heredity of Fiction’, she likened fiction writers to ‘human mothers’ who imbued their narratives with their spirit, energy, and identity, thus creating their own ‘immortality’ through their writing. In this essay, Peters cited novels by women like Charlotte Brontë as examples of immortal literature embodying their authors’ essence, demonstrating her admiration for literary women. Her story ‘The Egyptian Ring’, which first appeared in *Peterson’s Magazine* under her own name, was later republished anonymously in the *London Reader* with an illustration, demonstrating the transatlantic popularity of her work.¹⁷⁹ Both ‘Cleopatra’ and ‘The Egyptian Amulet’ were published in the *London Reader* during Britain’s peak fascination with ancient Egypt. Between 1860 and 1914, more than a hundred Egyptian themed narratives were published, including Marie Corelli’s *Ziska* (1897), H. D. Everett’s *Iras* (1896), and Haggard’s *Cleopatra*.¹⁸⁰ Lastly, although Nellie Tolman Sawyer (d. 1929) provided her full name on the cover of her novella and was occasionally advertised with the prefix ‘Mrs’, little biographical information is available concerning her. The most informative source on Sawyer’s personal life is the dedication of *The Egyptian Ring*, which reveals that she was the affectionate mother of Beatrice, an aspirational painter according to the Lexington Historical Society and the Art Institute of Chicago.¹⁸¹ Sawyer’s only publication, *The Egyptian Ring* explores the relationship between women’s ambitions and motherhood. ‘Cleopatra’,

¹⁷⁸ Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines*, 5 vols (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1930-1968), II (1938), p. 307.

¹⁷⁹ The *London Reader* also anonymously published Mary Sheffey Peters’s serialised novel, ‘The Maid of Mühlen’ (1880), which was first published in *Peterson’s Magazine* under the author’s name. See, Mary Sheffey Peters, *The Maid of Mühlen*, *Peterson’s Magazine*, 78.3 (September 1880), pp. 205-212. See also, ‘The Maid of Mühlen’, *London Reader*, 36. 918 (4 December 1880), pp. 125-128.

¹⁸⁰ Ailise Bulfin, ‘The Fiction of Gothic Egypt and British Imperial Paranoia: The Curse of the Suez Canal’, *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 54.4 (2011), pp. 411-443 (p. 418).

¹⁸¹ ‘Slavery Reinterpretation Exhibition’, [n.d.]. *Lexington Historical Society* <<https://www.lexingtonhistory.org/exhibitions/slavery-reinterpretation>> [accessed 19 August 2024]. See also, ‘Case 4: Signs of Use: Marks in Books’, [n.d.]. *Artic.edu* <<https://archive.artic.edu/ryerson-2015/books-for-working-artists/4>> [accessed 19 August 2024]. Sawyer’s obituary reveals that she also had a son, Carlton A. Sawyer. See, ‘Mrs Nellie T. Sawyer’, *Boston Globe*, 115.22 (22 January 1929), p. 14.

‘The Egyptian Amulet’, ‘A Cross Line’, and *The Egyptian Ring* collectively demonstrate that British and American women writers leveraged the popularity of Egyptian-inspired narratives to empower their heroines by emulating Cleopatra.

The format of the short story lent itself to discussions of female autonomy. A short story is a plot-based narrative with the same sensibilities and techniques as a novel, but its brevity means that each sentence is crucial to maintaining its ‘aesthetic wholeness’.¹⁸² Like the novel, the short story benefited from the development of the printing press and the growth of literacy rates. The rise of the middle class with more leisure time and the migration of newly literate working classes to cities after the industrial revolution led to a ‘growing demand’ for ‘cheap fiction and light journalism’.¹⁸³ Weekly periodicals, penny papers, journals, and magazines were cheaper, lighter, and more accessible than full-length novels. In *The Pen and the Book* (1899), the English novelist and historian Sir Walter Besant stated that reading has been transformed from ‘the amusement of the cultivated class’ to ‘the principal amusement of every class’.¹⁸⁴ While the Cleopatra of antiquity would have appealed to the educated upper class, the lower and newly emerging middle-classes may have found fewer opportunities to learn about the historical Cleopatra. Instead, their understanding of Egypt’s last pharaoh was shaped by illustrations of paintings, theatre reviews of adaptations of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, Sardou’s *Cléopâtre*, and Shaw’s *Caesar and Cleopatra*, as well as poems, opinion pieces, and even Haggard’s *Cleopatra* – all of which were widely published in popular periodicals.¹⁸⁵ The protagonist of M. K. D.’s ‘Cleopatra’ (1878) is testament to this, as she knows nothing about Cleopatra VII, yet views association with her as ‘dreadful’.¹⁸⁶ Instead of being present as a physical character, Cleopatra is an ideal that embodies female sexual

¹⁸² Ann-Marie Einhaus, *The English Short Story* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 1, 2. See also, Suzanne C. Ferguson, ‘Defining the Short Story: Impressionism and Form’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 28.1 (1982), pp. 13-24 (p. 14).

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Walter Besant, *The Pen and the Book* (London: Thomas Burleigh, 1899), p. 30.

¹⁸⁵ Andrew King establishes that although popular periodicals were aimed at middle-class readerships, their actual readers were ‘a socially diverse cultural formation of women and men, the youthful and the mature, the middle and the working classes’. See, Andrew King, *The London Journal, 1845-83: Periodicals, Production and Gender* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 6.

¹⁸⁶ M. K. D. ‘Cleopatra’, *London Reader*, 31.798 (17 August 1878), p. 337.

liberation and autonomy. For instance, in 1900 the *Girls Own Paper*, a leading weekly periodical for women and girls, stated that the popular English singer Clara Butt could have ‘stood for a portrait of Cleopatra’.¹⁸⁷ The anonymous author described Butt as a ‘beautiful’ woman with ‘dark hair’ and a ‘six-foot-two’ frame, possessing the ‘natural beauty’ and ‘light hearted’ nature of a ‘child’ or ‘tomboy’.¹⁸⁸ The term ‘tomboy’ asserts and undercuts femininity, while her profession as a contralto singer also makes her a morally questionable character. By comparing Butt to Cleopatra, the author discreetly suggests that she is a transgressive woman, as Cleopatra is culturally associated with sensuality, orientalism, and blurred gender boundaries. The popular *fin-de-siècle* beliefs surrounding Cleopatra enabled her to become a symbol in turn-of-the-century journalism and fictional narratives. Rather than explicitly labelling a young woman as a sexual deviant, authors could refer to her as Cleopatra. While directly accusing a modern woman of sexual deviancy could tarnish her reputation, implying that she is transgressive by comparing her to Cleopatra merely warns the reader of her character, thereby allowing her to be saved.

The short story also provided women the opportunity to consume and produce narratives featuring Cleopatra without facing social backlash. In *Daughters of Decadence* (1993), Elaine Showalter notes that ‘for late nineteenth-century women writers [...], the short story offered flexibility and freedom from the traditional plots of the three-decker Victorian novel, [...] which invariably ended in the heroine’s marriage or death’.¹⁸⁹ Similarly, in *British Women Short Story Writers* (2015), Emma Young and James Baily express that the short story offered New Women who desired ‘a fresh perspective on issues of gender, sexuality and women’s identity’ an opportunity to test ‘literal boundaries’ by intertwining fiction with ‘wider socio-cultural and political context[s]’.¹⁹⁰ Egerton’s ‘A Cross Line’ shows that New Women could openly address transgressive topics like

¹⁸⁷ ‘Some Singers I have Met: By a Professional Vocalist’, *Girl’s Own Paper*, 22.1086 (20 October 1900), pp. 40-43 (p. 42).

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Elaine Showalter, ‘Introduction’, in *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin-de-Siècle* (London: Virago Press, 1993), pp vii-xx, (pp. viii-ix).

¹⁹⁰ Emma Young and James Bailey, ‘Introduction’, in *British Women Short Story Writers: The New Woman to Now* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 1-14 (p. 7).

extramarital affairs and female sexual desire in short stories. Meanwhile, short narratives published in family papers, which were subject to censorship, show that women writers could still explore transgressive themes by alluding to Cleopatra. At the turn of the century, the rising demand for short stories created unparalleled economic opportunities for writers, making it a ‘powerful commercial vehicle’.¹⁹¹ The demand for short stories meant that women writers could financially support themselves, while allowing women readers to engage in discussions regarding the social, political, and economic status of women through consuming fiction.

Perhaps due to their authors’ relative anonymity, there are no scholarly works on ‘Cleopatra’ or *The Egyptian Ring*. ‘The Egyptian Amulet’ has only been lightly touched upon by Laura Eastlake in her consideration of Cleopatra’s implications for Victorian conceptions of masculinity and ancient Rome. Eastlake asserts that ‘The Egyptian Amulet’ responds to the ‘masculine anxiety about “feminine evil” [...] which haunts the imperial male psyche’.¹⁹² Instead of aiming to destroy these figures, Eastlake observes that ‘Haggardian’ texts focus on rehabilitating ‘their modern-day Cleopatras’ by pairing the unruly female with a Western husband, thus reintegrating her into ‘the conventional patriarchal structures of society’.¹⁹³ Expanding on Eastlake’s argument, I examine how ‘The Egyptian Amulet’ might be interpreted differently depending on whether it was read in the *London Reader*, which excluded the author’s name, or in *Peterson’s Magazine*, where it was attributed to Mary Sheffey Peters. This chapter also demonstrates that not all ‘modern-day Cleopatras’ were reintegrated into society. While the protagonists of ‘Cleopatra’ and *The Egyptian Ring* may have unsettled conservative readers, they ultimately evade punishment. Beyond Eastlake’s examination of ‘The Egyptian Amulet’, only Egerton’s short story has garnered critical attention.¹⁹⁴ In her study of Egerton’s *Keynotes*, Sally Ledger observes that

¹⁹¹ Minna Vuohelainen, “Contributing to Most Things”: Richard Marsh, Literary Production, and the Fin de Siècle Periodicals Market, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 46.3 (2013), pp. 401-422, (p. 416).

¹⁹² Laura Eastlake, *Ancient Rome and Victorian Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 153.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Maureen O’Connor, *The Female and the Species: The Animal in Irish Women’s Writing* (Manchester: University Press, 1997), p. 100. See also, Martha Vicinus, ‘Introduction’, in *Keynotes and Discords* (London: Virago, 1983), pp. ix-xix.

Egerton's 'A Cross Line' constructs 'the New Woman as a sensual, sexual being'.¹⁹⁵ Similarly, Christa Knellwold highlights that, using 'A Cross Line' as an example, British women's fiction sought to assert women's rights and promote more positive self-representation.¹⁹⁶ While 'A Cross Line' has been explored in depth in relation to women's rights, the allusion to Cleopatra has been largely overlooked. Focusing on the orientalist aspects of the narrative suggests that women engaged with fiction about Cleopatra to navigate their lives during a period when defining what it meant to be a woman was becoming increasingly complex.

An analysis of M. K. D.'s 'Cleopatra', Peters's 'The Egyptian Amulet,' Egerton's 'A Cross Line,' and Sawyer's *The Egyptian Ring* reveals that women writers utilised Cleopatra's association with female sovereignty, authority, and sensuality to reimagine her as a symbol of female power. This interpretation highlights that the myth of Cleopatra provided a framework for confronting and navigating the limitations placed on women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These largely forgotten narratives offer valuable insights into how Western women perceived and interpreted their roles in society.

Domestic Sovereignty: Female Authority in the Domestic Space

M. K. D.'s short story 'Cleopatra' revolves around the power women possess in the domestic space. Published in the *London Reader*, the narrative explores the relationship between a widowed squire and his young daughter, Cleopatra (Patra, for short). Viewing his daughter as a replacement for his wife, who died in childbirth, the squire fails to discipline her, allowing her to become uncontrollable and wild. In the absence of a maternal figure, Patra learns to assert power within the private sphere by imitating her namesake. Unlike traditional portrayals of Cleopatra, which

¹⁹⁵ Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester: University Press, 1997), p. 100.

¹⁹⁶ Christa Knellwold, 'Olive Schreiner's "Woman and Labour" and the Language of the Struggle for Women's Rights', in *Feminist, Aesthetics and Subjectivity: Essays on Women and Culture in Early Twentieth Century British Literature*, ed. Manuel Barbeito (California: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 2001), pp 155-178 (pp. 171-172).

emphasise her tragic demise, this story presents an alternative conclusion. Through her imitation of Cleopatra, the protagonist achieves personal fulfilment and a harmonious domestic life.

M. K. D.'s short story suggests that, in the absence of a mother, Patra will inevitably model her behaviour on her namesake. The narrative emphasises the significance of the mother by beginning with her words. The 'young Mrs. Alexander holding up her first baby for its father's inspection', says: 'I've been Mary Ann all my life, and I should like my little girl to have an elegant name'.¹⁹⁷ Although Mary Ann is culturally inferior to her husband in terms of gender and age, she holds the power in this scene because she has fulfilled her feminine duty by bearing a healthy child. As she dies shortly after childbirth, the only thing that can rouse Squire Alexander from mourning is fulfilling his wife's 'last' wish.¹⁹⁸ In honour of Mary Ann, he names the child 'Cleopatra', ensuring that the mother's character remains present throughout the narrative.¹⁹⁹ Patra's name inevitably links her to the last queen of Egypt, known to Victorian readers as a woman of 'infinite variety' – loving, sensual, cruel, jealous, and, above all, transgressive. As a young woman, Patra states: 'My dreadful name! [...] Oh! How could anyone have thought of such a name for me' when reminded of her 'namesake'.²⁰⁰ Patra's horror at her own name stems from Cleopatra's association with female power, transgression, and sexual impropriety. As the head of the Victorian household, the father was the protector of his family in both a literal and figurative sense. When his daughter is an infant, he protects her physically, and as she matures, he defends her virginity. A crucial factor of keeping a daughter pure is preventing her from acquiring sexual knowledge. John Tosh notes that 'comparatively few fathers were called upon to put this aspiration into practice, but they bore the ultimate responsibility for maintaining the conditions in which their wives could perform their moral mission within the home'.²⁰¹ In his attempt to honour the mother's dying wish, the father

¹⁹⁷ M. K. D. 'Cleopatra', p. 377.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 85.

fails as the figurative protector of his family by tainting his daughter with a sexually suggestive name that invokes notions of female power. As a young child, Patra is described as ‘the wildest, merriest, most uncontrollable of all children’.²⁰² Women’s etiquette handbooks stressed that it was the mother’s responsibility to ‘train’ her children to ‘practice common politeness’ to prevent them from becoming a disturbance to the peace of the domestic space.²⁰³ Patra’s uncontrollable nature hints at the absence of a mother figure and implies that, like her ‘namesake’, she cannot be easily controlled. By portraying a single father damaging his daughter’s reputation, M. K. D. highlights the importance of a maternal figure in preserving the sanctity of the home and the purity of its inhabitants, while drawing parallels between the child and Cleopatra.

M. K. D.’s short story uses the parallels between Patra and Cleopatra to explore the pseudo-incestuous relationship between the squire and his daughter. The only exception to Patra’s wild behaviour is the way she acts around her father:

But she would sit for hours together on her father’s knee. Petting him and being petted by him, looking so like her mother in miniature that the old squire could have fancied that his girl-wife had been changed into some beautiful little elf.²⁰⁴

In the Victorian era, the word ‘petting’ referred to affectionate caressing, as well as non-penetrative sexual ‘stimulation’ – an act which was common amongst un-married working-class youth.²⁰⁵ Alexander and Patra’s intimate relationship, which is sexualised through the word ‘petting’, calls to mind the Freudian Oedipus complex, which refers to the unconscious psychosexual desire that children exhibit for the parent of the opposite sex while wishing to exclude the parent of the same sex. Instead of seeing her as his daughter, the Squire views Patra as a ‘miniature’ of her mother,

²⁰² M. K. D., ‘Cleopatra’, p. 377.

²⁰³ Florence Hartley, *The Ladies’ Book of Etiquette, and Manual of Politeness: A Complete Hand Book for the Use of the Lady in Polite Society* (Boston: J. S. Locke, 1876), p. 148.

²⁰⁴ M. K. D., ‘Cleopatra’, p. 377.

²⁰⁵ Terry Trainor, *Victorian London Slums Seven Dials* (Morrisville: Lulu, 2012), p. 126.

Mary Ann, whom he nostalgically remembers as a 'girl-wife'.²⁰⁶ The implication of blurring the lines between 'wife' and 'mother' were that 'notions of motherhood were so deeply identified with purity that any identification of a wife with mother was likely to make her a highly equivocal object of desire'.²⁰⁷ By aligning his daughter with his wife, who was a mother, the squire transforms her into an 'object of desire'. Sharon Marcus notes that scholars have 'paid ample attention to the erotic dynamics of Victorian father-daughter relationships', whilst Peter Cominos argues that Victorian daughters suffered from 'Femina Sensualis', a 'false antithesis between sensuality and sublimation'.²⁰⁸ Cominos argued that 'Femina Sensualis' led to 'the young daughter' forming 'a neurotic attachment to her father' which was then 'transferred' to her 'husband'.²⁰⁹ 'Sublimation' is a term used in psychology to describe the transformation of socially unacceptable impulses into socially acceptable behaviour as a defence mechanism.²¹⁰ The squire's parentification of his daughter permanently skews her perspective on relationships. The expectation that she will transfer her 'neurotic attachment' from her father to her 'husband' suggests that she will lack the maturity necessary to become the moral guide of her future household. Without a mother-wife figure, the squire has failed to shield his household from impropriety, leaving his daughter unable to become the 'moral mother' of her future home. This perpetuates a cycle of domestic moral deficiency, causing children to grow up without the guidance needed to become respectable members of society. By viewing his daughter as a miniature of his 'girl-wife', the Squire acknowledges her as the legitimate matriarch, thus failing to provide a substitute mother-figure responsible for establishing moral boundaries. Alexander has failed to protect Patra from sexual knowledge and, through his emotional reliance, has burdened her with the roles of sensual mother,

²⁰⁶ M. K. D., 'Cleopatra', p. 377.

²⁰⁷ Tosh, p. 68.

²⁰⁸ Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 160. See also., Peter T. Cominos, 'Innocent Femina Sensualis in Unconscious Conflict', in *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, ed. by Martha Vicinus (London: Methuen, 1980), pp. 155-172 (p. 169).

²⁰⁹ Cominos, p. 169.

²¹⁰ Volney Gay, *Freud on Sublimation: Reconsiderations* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 142.

caring wife, and wild child, while neglecting to teach her how to be a good daughter, compassionate wife, and moral mother.

Patra's rejection of her father's authority at the end of the narrative suggests that women can challenge traditional gender roles and attain domestic bliss by emulating Cleopatra. When Patra becomes a 'young woman', Alexander is distraught when a man falls 'in love' with her, as he sees her as 'all his'.²¹¹ The narrator's rhetorical question, 'who can blame him?', indicates that the emotional attachment between fathers and daughters is understandable but does not justify preventing daughters from fulfilling their culturally prescribed roles through marriage.²¹² Rather than forbidding Patra from marrying Henry Bush due to his attachment, Alexander readily accepts the housekeeper Mrs. Prynne's 'evil tale 'that Bush is 'after [...] money'.²¹³ M. K. D. states that 'with a girl like Cleopatra this was enough. That night she eloped with 'her lover and married him', suggesting that Patra was naturally inclined to disobey her father.²¹⁴ As only working-class women and sex workers occupied the public sphere at night, Patra's elopement exemplifies her sexual deviance. Just as Cleopatra ended her marriage with her brothers through their deaths, Patra symbolically kills her father's paternal authority, ending their pseudo-incestuous relationship. As the squire viewed Cleopatra as his daughter-wife, her elopement also emasculates him by symbolically cuckolding him. Patra's rejection of her father's authority overturns the traditional doctrine of separate spheres, making Alexander a 'prisoner' of the domestic space as his disobedient daughter ventures outside.²¹⁵ By the 1890s 'Victorian fatherhood was on the defensive', as men feared that they would lose their masculinity if they failed to be the 'master' of their 'own house' by 'exercising authority over children as well as wife and servants'.²¹⁶ Traditional men feared that 'too much time spent in the company of women would encourage effeminacy'.²¹⁷

²¹¹ M. K. D., 'Cleopatra', p. 377.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Tosh, p. 89.

²¹⁷ Ibid, p. 181.

Despite angrily declaring that his daughter will never 'blacken' his house again, Alexander spends every moment hoping for her return. In Patra's absence, Alexander's home is dominated by his stern housekeeper, Mrs. Prynne, who wishes to marry him for his title. Alexander plays the helpless heroine, trapped by the villain (Prynne), waiting to be saved by the hero (Patra). This shift in the father-daughter dynamic emphasises Alexander's subordination, as he must depend on his daughter for protection from his female servant. Alexander's emasculation addresses the late nineteenth-century concern that the emancipation of women would result in the subjugation of men, while also illustrating how women could readily transgress societal norms within the home.

Although Patra internalises Cleopatra's autonomous nature by refusing to be constrained, she only consciously employs the influence of Egypt's last pharaoh after being educated about her. Following their elopement, Henry takes Cleopatra to 'see' a 'picture' of her 'namesake', which resembles Gérôme's *Cleopatra and Caesar*.²¹⁸

"I don't quite understand it," said Patra, at last. "That is Cleopatra, of course; but what is it all about?"

"Oh, you haven't read Roman history as thoroughly as I have, my dear, or you wouldn't ask," said the young husband. "That is Caesar, you know, and Cleopatra, who could not gain an audience otherwise, had herself wrapped up in a roll of splendid stuffs, which were sent to Caesar as a present. Of course, as soon as they were placed before him he had them unrolled, and, behold, Cleopatra!"

[...] "The beautiful, wicked creature. Henry it really seems as if Fate sent us here,"

[...] "Oh! How glad I am to have seen the picture! It has given me an idea."²¹⁹

²¹⁸ M. K. D., 'Cleopatra', p. 377.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

A key aspect of 'romantic love' was seen as attraction between opposites. While the wife provided 'emotional support', the husband became a 'window on the wider world which his education and experience made available to her'.²²⁰ This education on the 'wider world' was provided within the private sphere. By taking Patra to an academic space to view fine art, Bush becomes more than a 'window' for Patra; instead, he provides her with the opportunity to gain knowledge and experience. As this definition of 'romantic love' relies on the ignorance of the wife, Bush risks being emasculated by an educated Patra if she attempts to pursue knowledge like her namesake. Despite the squire's failures as a father, he succeeded in limiting Patra's knowledge of the 'wider world' for most of her life.²²¹ By eloping against his wishes, Patra enters a marriage that empowers her by promising to increase her knowledge. Just as Cleopatra's marriages to Caesar and Antony strengthened her hold of the Egyptian empire, Patra's marriage to Bush empowers her, while allowing her to finally embrace her namesake. She goes from viewing association with Cleopatra as 'dreadful' to calling her namesake a 'beautiful, wicked creature'.²²² The juxtaposition between 'wicked' and 'beautiful' illustrates Patra's acknowledgement of Cleopatra's impressive yet perilous qualities, while embracing them both. M. K. D.'s narrative suggests that modern women can fulfil their desires while still being wives and mothers. By exploring Cleopatra's story beyond its negative associations, Patra learns to view Cleopatra as a model of female sovereignty, guiding her toward achieving domestic happiness.

In a conscious performance of Cleopatra's first meeting with Caesar, Patra wraps herself in a 'Persian carpet' intended as a 'present' to her father.²²³ A group of 'young men' posing as servants of the 'Shah of Persia' trick Prynne into allowing them to carry the carpet into her father's bedroom.²²⁴

²²⁰ Tosh, p. 28.

²²¹ M. K. D., 'Cleopatra', p. 377.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

Mrs. Prynne flew out of the room, and, as she did so, the roll of carpet stirred, and out of it crept a little, slender figure, rumpled and dishevelled, and pink in the face, that flew to the door and locked it, and then came and flung itself on its knees before the squire.

‘Oh, papa, papa!’ it cried. ‘Old Prynne would not let me in, so I had myself wrapped up in the big Persian rug that was Grandma Bush’s wedding present, Like Cleopatra, in the Roman history, you, know, papa, and Henry’s cousins brought me in out of the carriage. Oh, papa, disinherit me! I’m your own little girl, and I love you better than anybody else in the world; but Henry next best, papa. Kiss me! O, papa, I was so wicked! But I love you! Kiss me!’²²⁵

Patra’s ‘pink’ face sexualises this scene, as women who possessed noticeably pink features – whether through over-exerting themselves, using rouge, or pinching their cheeks – were often viewed as ‘disreputable’.²²⁶ This is because rouge was used by sex workers and actresses, such as Bernhardt in her performance in *Cléopâtre*, to feign the appearance of sexual arousal. The description ‘rumpled and dishevelled’ also makes Patra appear undone, thus undermining her respectability and aligning her with transgressive women. By imitating the final pharaoh of Egypt to gain an audience with her father, Patra performs the part of Cleopatra while transforming her father into Caesar. In the beginning of the narrative, the pseudo-incestuous nature of their relationship primarily benefits the father, allowing him to overcome the grief of losing his wife by replacing her with his daughter. Now, the pseudo-incestuous relationship benefits Patra. Just as Cleopatra was believed to have used her sensuality to manipulate Caesar into giving her power over Egypt, Patra uses physical affection (‘I love you! Kiss me!’) to gain her father’s forgiveness despite emasculating and dishonouring him. As a result of Patra’s imitation of Cleopatra, ‘the squire and his daughter are reconciled’ and ‘her husband is forgiven’.²²⁷ By using Cleopatra as a

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ ‘Rouge and Pearl Powder’, *Spectator*, 37.1866 (2 April 1864), pp. 383-384 (p. 384).

²²⁷ M. K. D., ‘Cleopatra’, p. 377.

model of female sovereignty, the narrative concludes with Patra receiving everything she desired without punishment. Although the squire has accepted his emasculation by forgiving 'little Cleopatra', the narrative's resolution uplifts Patra and brings peace to the domestic space.²²⁸

M. K. D.'s short story reimagines Cleopatra as a symbol of domestic power, enabling the young protagonist to achieve domestic bliss without sacrificing her personal happiness. By assuming the role of the patriarch, she not only secures her own happy ending but also satisfies both her father and husband. While Patra uses the final pharaoh of Egypt as a model of female power to navigate the domestic space, the protagonist of Peters's 'The Egyptian Amulet' employs Cleopatra to completely undermine the patriarchy.

Cleopatra's Curse: Female Empowerment and Colonial Anxiety

In Peters's 'The Egyptian Ring', the 'darkly beautiful' Berenice Labordie uses her knowledge of Cleopatra to pursue autonomy and sexual liberation.²²⁹ She develops 'an irresistible fascination' with ancient Egypt and invests her time into reading 'every book [...] on the customs and antiquities [...] of the ancient Egyptians', until she is convinced that her soul 'is the soul of Cleopatra, or even one [of] her maidens, dwarfed and distorted by its passage of two thousand years through reptile, bird, and beast'.²³⁰ While traveling with her aunt Madame Dejarnette, Berenice flirts with multiple men while ignoring her cousin Allyn's numerous offers of marriage. In a performance of Cleopatra-esque sexuality, Berenice refuses to submit to the conquest of marriage until she is possessed by a vengeful Egyptian demon and needs to be saved by Allyn, who restores her 'into a lovely realisation' of Victorian womanhood.²³¹ 'The Egyptian Ring' allows the protagonist to relish in the pleasures of ancient Egypt, before being punished by a vengeful entity.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Mary Sheffey Peters, 'The Egyptian Amulet', *Peterson's Magazine*, 79.2 (February 1881), pp. 118 – 124 (p. 118).

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid., p. 124.

By making the protagonist an intelligent woman who seeks to reject male social hegemony through Cleopatra, this curse narrative works in demonstrating the prevailing anxiety regarding women's fight for autonomy.

By portraying Berenice as a racially ambiguous woman who seeks autonomy over men, Peters makes her embody various fears regarding imperial expansion and colonisation. As noted by Anne McClintock, 'controlling women's sexuality, exalting maternity and breeding a virile race of empire-builders were widely perceived as the paramount means for controlling the health and wealth of the male imperial body politic'.²³² As breeding racially pure offspring was crucial for British Imperial growth, 'unrestrained sexuality was an unending threat to Empire' with intermarriage becoming analogous to the downfall of the white race.²³³ According to Berenice's father, her great-grandmother was 'an Egyptian [...], who had been won from the banks of the Nile, by his grandfather, one of the French savants who accompanied Napoleon Bonaparte to Egypt'.²³⁴ Following Bonaparte's 1798 expedition into Egypt with an 'entourage of soldiers, scientific experts, and scholars [...] the Eyes of Europe turned toward the East and deeper into the past'.²³⁵ Europe's newfound Egyptomania meant that it was considered 'hardly respectable, on one's return from Egypt, to present oneself in Europe without a mummy in one hand and a crocodile in the other'.²³⁶ Like the coveted mummy, Berenice's Egyptian ancestress, 'won' from the banks of the Nile, serves as an object that symbolises her family's success in the East. Likewise, the beauty ascribed to Berenice's oriental features implies that the Labordie's are proud of their Egyptian ancestry. This makes Berenice a paradigm, as she symbolises her family's success in expanding Europe's grip on the East. However, Berenice's Egyptian lineage foreshadows her eventual possession. When she first discovers the amulet – a ring with a serpent adorned with

²³² Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 47.

²³³ Philippa Levine, 'Sexuality, Gender, and Empire', in *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 134-180 (p. 134).

²³⁴ Peters, 'The Egyptian Amulet', p. 118.

²³⁵ Tim Murray, *Milestones in Archaeology: A Chronological Encyclopaedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2007), p. 78.

²³⁶ Susan D. Cowie and Tom Johnson, *The Mummy in Fact, Fiction and Film* (London: McFarland, 2002), p. 49.

green enamel scales and emerald eyes – she muses, ‘what will you wager that it did not once grace the finger of my Egyptian grand-dame? Or who knows? [...] perhaps my grand-sire may have robbed some mummy of it, for his bridal offering’.²³⁷ The practice of mummy unwrapping, which was often conducted in theatrical spaces under the guise of science, was extremely popular from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The surgeon and antiquarian Dr. Thomas Pettigrew often gave parts of the mummy (including jewellery) that he found during his mummy unwrapping performances to enthusiastic female theatre-goers.²³⁸ Although unwrapping mummies for scientific and entertainment purposes was an acceptable pastime, in gothic narratives like Bram Stoker’s *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903), Guy Boothby’s *Pharos the Egyptian* (1899) and Haggard’s *Cleopatra*, the person who dared to disrespect the sleeping mummy was cursed and plagued. As Berenice follows in her great-grandfather’s footsteps by researching ancient Egypt, the conventional format of mummy narratives implies that she will be punished for her fascination. Berenice’s racial diversity makes her a symbol of western superiority and eastern contamination, as her European parentage represents the West’s victory over the Orient, while her Egyptian ancestry implies that she is a degenerate destined to become a vehicle for Eastern revenge.

In her pursuit of an education in ancient Egypt, Berenice mirrors Cleopatra, who was celebrated for her intelligence. To discover more about her Egyptian ancestress, Berenice ‘read every book to be found [...] on the customs and antiquities, the creeds and religious ceremonials, of the ancient Egyptians’.²³⁹ As Berenice’s great-grandfather was one of Bonaparte’s savants, it might be inferred that her family library contains some of the foundational Egyptological texts, perhaps even the multi-volume *Description de l’Égypte* (1809–1822). By using her family’s resources to gain a comprehensive education on ancient Egyptian customs, Berenice follows directly in Cleopatra’s footsteps. Berenice’s Cleopatra-esque education helps her recognise the amulet as

²³⁷ Peters, ‘The Egyptian Ring’, p. 118.

²³⁸ Warren R. Dawson, ‘Pettigrew’s Demonstrations upon Mummies: A Chapter in this History of Egyptology’, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 20.170 (November 1934), pp. 170-182 (p. 180).

²³⁹ Peters, ‘The Egyptian Ring’, p. 118.

bearing the symbol of ‘Cleopatra’s veritable asp’.²⁴⁰ While her aunt dismisses it as ‘common’, Berenice notices the ‘peculiar glitter’ of the enamel scales and the ‘strange glow in the emerald eyes’.²⁴¹ Her knowledge allows her to identify the amulet as a valuable Egyptian artifact from Cleopatra’s reign, sparking her interest and prompting her to visit the Museum of Antiquities. Gaining an education was the foremost priority of women activists like Josephine Butler, who succeeded in winning women the right to further education in 1868. By 1869, Cambridge opened Girton College, which allowed women to attend lectures and be examined in a variety of subjects including Science and Greek. The British Museum also permitted women to examine Egyptian archives, while prominent Egyptologists like Wallis Budge ‘admitted women’ into ‘Egyptology classes [...] but expected them to sew “tableaux” of Egyptian temples’.²⁴² Despite not earning the same qualifications as their male peers, educated women threatened to disrupt the conventional patriarchal structures of Victorian society by choosing employment over domesticity. Male critics referred to Girton College as ‘Infidel Place’ and Clouston argued that another ‘rape of the Sabines’ would occur if women continued using their ‘brain energy [...] cramming knowledge of sciences’.²⁴³ Berenice’s pursuit of knowledge, culminating in her discovery of the serpent amulet, is suggestive of the first sin committed by Eve. By mimicking Cleopatra (a pagan) and Eve (the first biblical sinner), Berenice embodies an infidel. As her discovery of the amulet would not have been possible without her knowledge of Egyptian artefacts, Berenice’s intelligence is directly responsible for her transgression. As her possession is diagnosed as ‘brain fever’, it can be assumed that by indulging in the pursuit of knowledge, Berenice has spent all her vital ‘brain energy’.²⁴⁴ The irony of Berenice’s fate is that Peters was an educated female writer with knowledge of antiquity.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² David Gange, *Dialogues with the Dead: Egyptology in British Culture and Religion, 1822-1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 213.

²⁴³ Paula Gould, ‘Models of Learning? The “Logical, Philosophical and Scientific Woman” in Late Nineteenth-Century Cambridge’, in *Teaching and Learning in Nineteenth-Century Cambridge*, ed. by Jonathan Smith and Christopher Stray (Cambridge: Boydell Press, 2001), pp. 150-64 (p. 155). See also; T. S. Clouston, *Clinical Lectures on Mental Diseases* (Philadelphia: Henry C. Lea’s Son, 1884), p. 371.

²⁴⁴ Peters, ‘The Egyptian Amulet’, p. 123.

In her essay 'The Heredity of Fiction', Peters imitated nineteenth-century physicians who warned of the dangers of women using up their 'brain energy' by referring to fictional narratives as 'the brain progeny of the novelist'.²⁴⁵ American readers of 'The Egyptian Amulet', who were aware of Peters's multiple contributions to *Peterson's Magazine* as well as her essays, may have interpreted the warning against pursuing knowledge as satire. However, since the narrative was published anonymously in the *London Reader*, British audiences may have taken its warnings seriously, believing that women could become godless and plagued if they pursued education.

In a deliberate performance of Cleopatra-esque sexuality, Berenice takes pleasure in teasing the story's primary masculine figure, Allyn. Madame Dejarnette states that she will 'give [the amulet] to Allyn, to present to his betrothed'.²⁴⁶ As a result, Berenice declares that 'the virtues of the amulet would be annulled' to her because of 'the conditions of the transfer'.²⁴⁷ Berenice is attracted to the amulet because its association with Cleopatra makes it a symbol of female autonomy, sexuality, and intelligence. As vocalised by Grant Allen's Cambridge-educated protagonist, Herminia Barton, in his New Woman novel *The Woman Who Did* (1895), marriage is an 'assertion of man's supremacy'.²⁴⁸ This makes marriage, with its associations of confinement, the antithesis of the amulet, which represents female liberation. By stating that the 'conditions' placed on the amulet would 'annul' its virtues, Berenice openly admits that, like Haggard's Cleopatra, she wants to be autonomous and free from patriarchal control. To reinforce her point, she tells Allyn: 'when you know that I am finally conquered, you can send it to me, à la Cleopatra, in a basket of figs'.²⁴⁹ According to Plutarch, instead of allowing Octavian to control her, Cleopatra chose to perform suicide by allowing an asp that climbed out of a basket of figs to bite her.²⁵⁰ Allyn, in this scenario, is likened to Octavian, who is known for causing Cleopatra's downfall. By

²⁴⁵ Mary Sheffey-Peters, 'The Heredity of Fiction', *Writer*, 7.10 (October 1894) pp. 147-148 (p. 148).

²⁴⁶ Peters, 'The Egyptian Amulet', p. 118.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

²⁴⁸ Grant Allen, *The Woman Who Did* (Boston: Roberts Bros, 1895), p. 43.

²⁴⁹ Peters, 'The Egyptian Amulet', p. 119.

²⁵⁰ Plutarch, *Plutarch's Lives*, trans. by Bernadotte Perrin, 11 vols (London: William Heinemann, 1914-1926), IX (1920), p. 329.

stating that she will only accept the amulet once she is ‘conquered’, Berenice likens marriage to defeat. By being able to accept the amulet only in a ‘basket of figs’, Berenice acknowledges that marriage will lead to the metaphorical death of her autonomy. Although Berenice flashes Allyn with ‘a laughing glance of defiance’, she is unable to ‘meet [his] eyes’.²⁵¹ By being unable to look at him during her performance of a defiant Cleopatra, Berenice demonstrates a knowledge of the impropriety of her statements. By employing Cleopatra’s downfall to express her contempt for marriage, Berenice proposes that women can utilise the idea of Cleopatra to empower themselves, while also acknowledging the dangers of imitating her. In the opinion of Victorian administrators and policymakers, ‘the bounds of empire could be secured and upheld only by the proper domestic discipline and decorum, sexual probity, and moral sanitation’ that would ensure the production of legitimate children for the expansion of the empire.²⁵² By using a Cleopatra-esque sexuality to reject marriage, Cleopatra becomes a ‘menacing presence in the text’, that encourages her female follower to undermine patriarchy.²⁵³ As marriage is required to produce human resources for the empire, Berenice’s refusal to act as a vessel for population growth undermines imperial expansion. Under the guidance of Cleopatra, Berenice empowers herself while undermining population growth, patriarchy, and the empire.

Although Berenice rejects the confines of marriage, she entertains her male admirers for her own amusement and relishes in being the ‘toast of the town’ in New Orleans, London, and Paris, with her ‘admirers [being] counted by the score’ in Dresden.²⁵⁴ In the nineteenth century, women of a marriageable age used formal dances as a reputable way of meeting potential husbands. As Berenice had no intention of marrying, she flirted with numerous men to feed her vanity and relieve her boredom. Entertaining men without the intention to wed was a common trope ascribed to gothic antiheroines. Corelli’s dangerously beautiful Ziska-Charmazel – who has skin as ‘fair as

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² McClintock, p. 47.

²⁵³ Eastlake, p. 153.

²⁵⁴ Peters, ‘The Egyptian Amulet’, pp. 118, 119.

a lily', 'black hair' and the dark 'eyes of a vampire-bat' like Berenice, – relishes in making men yearn for her at balls.²⁵⁵ The object of her devotion, who murdered her in a past life remarks: 'like a Cleopatra, or any other old-world enchantress [...] you have a singular freshness and wild attraction [...] which makes you unlike any other of your sex'.²⁵⁶ Ziska-Charmazel possesses the same beauty and powers as the Cleopatra of Haggard's novel, as well as oil paintings of Cleopatra by Alma-Tadema, Waterhouse, Collier, Cabanel, Gérôme, and Poynter. Beauty, desire, and male attention are evidently characteristics associated with 'Cleopatras'. Like Ziska, who entertained two men while being desired by many, Berenice 'monopolize[s]' her time between her two 'adorers', Alfried and De Selden in Dresden.²⁵⁷ When she grows tired of her admirers, she acts 'so uncompromisingly perverse' that they 'attach themselves to other ladies of the party' in 'self defense'.²⁵⁸ By choosing when to show kindness toward them, Berenice assumes a dominant role in her relationships with men. By seeking refuge with other women, her admirers' take on a role traditionally ascribed to women, which, in turn casts Berenice in a predatory light. Through acting 'perversely', Berenice denies her suitors the respect that their class, gender, and race dictated they deserved.

In the late nineteenth century, the cosmopolitan city of Dresden possessed a very small number of ethnic minorities, with the majority of the city's residents being white Germans.²⁵⁹ The same can be said regarding the other cities visited by Berenice during her family's tour of Europe. By winning the attention of men in every European city she visits, the ethnically ambiguous Berenice plays the role of a coloniser by threatening to racially contaminate her admirers. In this narrative of reverse colonisation, the educated woman who symbolises unruly Egypt seeks to seduce and abuse European men, thus making her a threat to the white male body and the

²⁵⁵ Marie Corelli, *Ziska: The Problem of a Wicked Soul* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1897), pp. 59, 85.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 305.

²⁵⁷ Peters, 'The Egyptian Amulet', p. 119.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 121.

²⁵⁹ Panikos Panayi, *Ethnic Minorities in 19th and 20th Century Germany: Jews, Gypsies, Poles, Turks and Others* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2014), p. 90.

expansion of the empire. Berenice's position as a dangerous woman can be further illustrated through her ability to control Allyn. Despite 'thrust[ing] him into the background' and 'snub[bing]' him in favour of Alfried and De Selden, she easily convinces him to escort her to the Museum of Antiquities with a 'smile'.²⁶⁰ As Berenice admits that she only wants Allyn's company because there is a mummy with a serpent ring 'exactly' like his, he is aware that he is being used.²⁶¹ Allyn's willingness to consent to her desires reveals his vulnerability to her charms. Like the Cleopatra of the *fin de siècle* imagination, Berenice holds the power in her relationships with men. By being in control of the male body and mind, Berenice completely undermines the conventional structures of patriarchal society. In Chapter Three, I proposed that educated female readers could admire Haggard's *Cleopatra* because historical novels provided a space for women to explore fantasies of female autocracy which challenged contemporary ideals of womanhood. 'The Egyptian Amulet' is authored by an educated woman who serves as both reader and writer. The portrayal of female emancipation and male subjugation in a short story initially published in a woman's magazine demonstrates that women were actively involved in creating and consuming narratives about the inversion of gender roles. Knowing that 'The Egyptian Amulet' is written by a female author adds a provocative dimension to the American edition, as it demonstrates that women readers could find narratives that directly explored women's experiences. This, in turn, allowed them to reflect on their own experiences, identities, sensuality, and perception of power through female-authored stories.

It is possession by a demon that transforms Berenice from a rebellious figure to a 'lovely' Victorian woman. Berenice's possession by her Egyptian ancestress weakens her:

²⁶⁰ Peters, 'The Egyptian Amulet', p. 119.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

‘I am thyself,’ said the phantom beauty, smiling. ‘Thy beloved didst release me from the bonds of Death in withdrawing the ring, and now shalt thou wear it and repose for more than two thousand years, while I shall stay my pilgrimage with whom thou hast loved.’²⁶²

Berenice Labordie assumes that the Ptolemaic Berenice was Cleopatra’s handmaiden. The name Berenice belonged to several Ptolemaic queens, notably Berenice III who ruled between 101 and 80 BCE and Cleopatra’s half-sister Berenice IV who ruled between 58 and 55 BCE. After usurping the throne from her father, Berenice IV momentarily placed Egypt under female control, before being pressured to marry. When her father regained control of Egypt with the help of Rome, he was ‘obliged to have [her] murdered’ because she had too much ‘power’.²⁶³ By telling Berenice Labordie that she is ‘thyself’, the ‘phantom beauty’ claims that she shares both a name and consciousness with the story’s protagonist. She uses this shared consciousness to state that Berenice loves Allyn. In doing so, she transforms Berenice into the story’s romantic heroine. While Berenice viewed Cleopatra and her maidens as powerful female forces who used their intelligence and sexuality to overpower men, the Berenice of Cleopatra’s court chooses to use her second chance at life to live with Allyn, ‘whom [Berenice Labordie] hast loved’. By choosing a life of domesticity, the Ptolemaic Berenice undermines the belief that oriental women were *femmes fatales* by submitting to patriarchal order. By desiring marriage, the Ptolemaic Berenice proves to be a lesser evil to male social hegemony than the nineteenth-century Berenice. In the period that Berenice is possessed by the Egyptian demon, she becomes subdued, is diagnosed with ‘brain fever’ and marries Allyn. A student of Clouston may have interpreted the new Berenice (a hybrid of the Ptolemaic Berenice and the nineteenth-century one) as both the over-worked woman who has run out of ‘brain energy’ and the ‘Sabine’ – with its connotations of the ancient female warrior – who will ensure the continuation of the European race. As Allyn marries Berenice while she

²⁶² Ibid., p. 122.

²⁶³ Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt: From Alexander to Cleopatra* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), p. 24.

‘hover[s] close upon the confines of insanity’, their marriage can be viewed as coerced, and their marital relations as rape.²⁶⁴ Instead of being empowered by Cleopatra’s maiden, Berenice is stripped of all autonomy and reduced to an object of masculine control.

The illustration accompanying the anonymous republication of ‘The Egyptian Amulet’ in the *London Reader* further undermines the narrative’s depiction of female empowerment (Fig. 4.1).²⁶⁵ In this illustration, Berenice Labordie and the demonic Ptolemaic Berenice are aligned through their costumes, which feature a zigzag pattern. Late-Victorians considered the ‘zigzag’ an ‘essential symbol of Egyptian designs’, alongside motifs like the ‘beetle’, ‘papyrus’, ‘asp’ and ‘sphinx’.²⁶⁶ Women’s fashion magazines, such as the *Ladies’ Book of Needle Work*, provided modern women with techniques to incorporate the ‘Egyptian’ ‘zigzag-pattern’ into their garments.²⁶⁷ By emulating an ancient Egyptian woman through the use of Egyptian motifs in her modern garments, Berenice embodies a departure from traditional Victorian womanhood. Despite sharing the same name and comparable garments to the Egyptian mummy, Berenice Labordie lacks confidence in this illustration. This makes her costume – which is meant to symbolise sexual liberation and autonomy – unsuccessful. In this illustration, Berenice’s face is plagued with worry as she leans into Allyn’s arms for protection. Instead of comforting her, the Ptolemaic Berenice looks directly at the reader with a menacing glare. Her angry expression can be interpreted as a warning against succumbing to the appeal of Cleopatra, especially to female readers. The only individuals who seem to care about the protagonist’s plight are the two men in the illustration. By positioning Allyn as the saviour of the story, the narrative restores his masculine status and implies that women require men for protection and guidance. This makes ‘The Egyptian Amulet’ a white man’s burden narrative, as the European Allyn is tasked with bringing Berenice, who symbolises unruly Egypt, under control. While American readers who accessed the narrative without the

²⁶⁴ Peters, ‘The Egyptian Amulet’, p. 123.

²⁶⁵ ‘The Egyptian Amulet’, *London Reader*, 37.946 (18 June 1881), pp. 164-167.

²⁶⁶ ‘Other Studies’, in *Annual Report of the Regents* (Albany: James B. Lyon, 1893), pp. 109-133 (p. 127).

²⁶⁷ *The Ladies’ Book of Needle Work*, ed. by Jay Daniel Georgens and Jeanne Marie von Gayette Georgens (London: L. Hachette, 1872), p. 52.

illustration may have initially believed in Berenice's empowerment, the *London Reader's* decision to place the illustration at the beginning of the narrative undermines Berenice's rejection of marriage and displays of autonomy. This placement prematurely makes the reader aware that Berenice will eventually succumb to male power, making the anonymous British publication appear more critical of female empowerment than the original version. Since the Egyptian demon is the reason Berenice married Allyn, both Peters's text and the *London Reader's* illustration undermine women who aspire to emulate Cleopatra by depicting the final pharaoh of Egypt as a symbol of male power.

Berenice's possession makes her turn against 'Egypt and Cleopatra and the ghosts of the dead past'.²⁶⁸ Before her possession, Berenice is figured as a woman obsessed with ancient Egypt. She educates herself on Egyptian customs, believes her soul to be the transmigrated soul of Cleopatra and seeks any opportunity to discuss Egyptian artefacts, to the point that her companions wonder 'when will [she] tire of [...] Egyptian nonsense'.²⁶⁹ Despite feeling a 'thrill [...] of horror' when she first enters the Museum of Antiquities, Berenice is drawn in by the mummies, hieroglyphs, and monuments of Osiris, Isis and Neptiti.²⁷⁰ While viewing a 'phonetic representation of a sacrificial offering' for the 'repose of the soul', Berenice declares that 'no one' must have 'offered a steer for the repose of [her] soul', thus maintaining her childhood belief that she possesses the soul of an ancient Egyptian.²⁷¹ After her possession, she responds to the 'blackened, swathed figure' of Ptolemaic Berenice's mummy with 'terror', clinging to Allyn as she 'shiver[s] and tremble[s]'.²⁷² She also loses all interest in ancient Egypt; 'not even the sight of the mummies by which they were passing' arouses 'any feeling in her', as she walks 'obediently' like a 'somnambulist'.²⁷³ As *all* Berenice did previously was research and talk about ancient Egypt, the

²⁶⁸ Peters, 'The Egyptian Amulet', p. 123.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 118.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 119.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid., p. 121.

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 123.

narrative strips her of her personality, autonomy, and individuality by taking away her love of Egypt and Cleopatra. She no longer has authority over her own being; she is a 'somnambulist' who blindly follows male order. Possession has also robbed Berenice of her voice, as there is no speech ascribed to her after she leaves the Museum of Antiquities. Through possession and marriage, Berenice Labordie loses herself and becomes nothing more than Berenice Dejarnette, Allyn's quiet and lovely wife. The new Berenice is no longer a threat to male social hegemony or the expansion of empire. As the Ptolemaic Berenice is responsible for the modern Berenice's somnambulist-like state, the real woman of Cleopatra's court becomes the saviour of patriarchal order. The Egyptian entity believed to empower women acts as a vessel of male dominance, transforming the rebellious woman into a dutiful wife.

'The Egyptian Amulet' ultimately demonstrates that imitating Cleopatra enables women to fulfil their aspirations and seek sexual autonomy while asserting that marriage metaphorically kills women's identities. Peters's short narrative tells the story of Cleopatra in reverse. While Cleopatra's power increases with each marriage, Berenice begins as an ambitious young woman but is ultimately subdued by the institution of marriage. Cleopatra's ability to remain a formidable force despite her marriages appealed to New Woman writers like Egerton. By inverting Cleopatra's narrative, Peters uses Cleopatra to demonstrate the potential of female sexuality, before suppressing it. *Peterson's Magazine* explored the marriage question by publishing numerous short stories and serialised novels by women writers that examined various outcomes of marriage. In the same year that *Peterson's Magazine* published 'The Egyptian Amulet', they also featured 'La Contessa' by Sidney Trevor, 'The Twelve Great Diamonds' by G. Austin, 'The Pearl Necklace' by Emma Garrison Jones, and 'The News from Yorktown' by Mary V. Spencer, all exploring marriage themes. In Spencer's popular serialised novella, the 'beautiful' nineteen-year-old heroine, Grace, battles her influential family to marry a man of 'liberal ideas', 'refinement, intelligence, and culture',

instead of her 'brutal' cousin who addresses her 'as a master'.²⁷⁴ Like Berenice, Grace views 'wedded life' with a man who does not share her interests as 'little better than a living grave'.²⁷⁵ As noted by Haggard in 'About Fiction', it was a societal rule that female transgressors must keep their 'passion within certain limits' or be punished.²⁷⁶ This rule meant that it was inevitable for Berenice to be punished by an ancient Egyptian entity. By making marriage the curse of the narrative, Peters implies that marriage can lead to the metaphorical death of ambitious women, thus confirming Berenice's fears. 'The Egyptian Amulet' highlights that marriage controls, regulates, and disempowers women, transforming them into respectable members of society who adhere by patriarchal rules, while supporting empire-building through population growth. In serving the patriarchy and the empire, they ultimately lose their sense of self.

'The Egyptian Amulet' uses Cleopatra to demonstrate the power, fulfilment, and autonomy women can achieve through education. By embodying Cleopatra, the protagonist gains the power to speak freely and reject the confines of marriage. However, her eventual possession subverts the notion that ancient Egyptian entities are a corrupting force by portraying the vengeful mummy as a vessel of patriarchal order. As the curse inflicted on Berenice induces her to marry, the narrative subtly implies that marriage is a disease that disempowers women. 'The Egyptian Amulet' ultimately demonstrates that women can look to Cleopatra as a model of female sovereignty, however it also warns that if they transgress too far, they will be punished for their political, educational, and sensual endeavors, as late nineteenth-century society is not ready to accept modern Cleopatras. As the narrative illustrates the complexities of female empowerment and the consequences of defying societal expectations, it sets the stage for Egerton's 'A Cross Line', which explores the intrinsic qualities of modern women that resonates with Cleopatra's untamed spirit.

²⁷⁴ Mary V. Spencer, 'The News from Yorktown', *Peterson's Magazine*, 80.1 (July 1881), pp. 39-44 (p. 41).

²⁷⁵ Mary V. Spencer, 'The News from Yorktown', *Peterson's Magazine*, 80.3 (September 1881), pp. 189-194 (p. 192).

²⁷⁶ Haggard, 'About Fiction', *Contemporary Review*, 51 (February 1887), pp. 172-180 (p. 176).

Untamed Desire: Celebrating Primitive Sensuality and Unhindered Femininity

Egerton's 'A Cross Line' suggests that modern women were not only inspired by Cleopatra, but innately like her. The short story follows an unnamed woman with a 'gypsy ease of attitude', as she engages in an extramarital love affair to escape from the monotony of domestic life.²⁷⁷ The beautiful, strange, sensual, novel-reading protagonist empowers her sex by proudly claiming that all women are born with a primitive wildness which makes them intellectually superior to men. In this narrative, Cleopatra does not serve as a model of female sovereignty, but rather as an exemplar of the raw, untamed nature women are often forced to suppress.

In 'A Cross Line', Egerton suggests that women can empower themselves through a performance of Cleopatra-esque sensuality. Egerton's heroine fantasises that she is 'Cleopatra sailing down to meet Antony' to escape the 'tame duties and virtuous monotony' of life'.²⁷⁸ Travelling to meet her lover, she 'fancies':

she is on the stage of an ancient theatre, out in the open air, with hundreds of faces upturned toward her. She is gauze-clad in a cobweb garment of wondrous tissue; her arms are clasped by jewelled snakes, and one of the quivering diamond fangs coil round her hips; her hair floats loosely, and her feet are sandal-clad, [...] She bounds forward and dances, bends her lissome waist, and curves her slender arms, and gives to the soul of each man what he craves, be it good or evil [...] she can see herself with parted lips and panting, rounded breasts, and dancing devil in each glowing eye, sway voluptuously to the wild music that rises, now slow, now fast, now deliriously wild, seductive, intoxicating, with a human note of passion in its strain.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ George Egerton, 'A Cross Line', *Keynotes* (London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1893), pp. 9-44 (pp. 12, 15).

²⁷⁸ Egerton, p. 11.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-28.

The narrator's sensual fantasies indicate her desire to embody an ancient *femme fatale* as a means of empowerment. Ledger and Showalter have observed that the heroine 'adulterously imagines herself as Salomé, erotically objectifying herself in the gaze of an admiring male audience'.²⁸⁰ Dancing to 'wild music' on 'the stage of an ancient theatre' conjures the exotic, oriental figure of Salomé, yet the 'jewelled snakes' 'clasped' around her arms and the 'quivering fangs [...] round her hips' also link her to Cleopatra, a figure culturally associated with serpents. Egerton's repeated description of the central figure's hands as 'brown' and skin as 'duskily foreign' implies that, even outside of her fantasies, she physically resembles oriental *femmes fatales*.²⁸¹ The adjectives used to describe her body – lissome, slender, rounded – suggest that she shares a sisterhood with the serpent through her physical appearance. As explored in earlier chapters, the slender curves of women's bodies transformed them into serpentine figures who tempted men to sin. Although travelling to meet her lover, the narrator imagines herself as the object of many men's desires. This imagery not only connects her with Cleopatra and Salomé but also modern actresses who played oriental *femmes fatales* on the *fin-de-siècle* stage. Bernhardt, for example, wore a gauze dress, sandals, and serpent jewellery in her performance of Cleopatra, and was similarly described as 'lithesome' (Fig. 1.3).²⁸² In *Sisters of Salome* (2002), Toni Bentley observes that actresses like Bernhardt 'could be heroines of mythical proportions without real-life consequences' as the stage allowed women to 'enact a paradoxical transition: she became the author of her own objectification, and the dark anonymous audience became *her* object'.²⁸³ Bentley's analysis can be applied to Egerton's narrator, who, seeing herself 'with parted lips and panting, rounded breasts', transforms into an object of sexual desire, captivating 'the soul of each man'. By enchanting her audience and fulfilling their desires, she exerts control. Like Berenice in 'The Egyptian Amulet' and Patra in 'Cleopatra', Egerton's protagonist fantasises that embodying Cleopatra's sexuality allows her to defy patriarchal

²⁸⁰ Ledger, p. 100.

²⁸¹ Egerton, pp. 12, 15.

²⁸² 'Sarah Bernhardt's Complexion: Paris is Wild About the African Hue of Cleopatra', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 51.17 (17 January 1891), p. 16.

²⁸³ Toni Bentley, *Sisters of Salome* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), p. 34.

control by using her sensuality to dominate men. Through her affair, she dominates both her husband and lover, momentarily rejecting the constraints of marriage. Like in 'The Egyptian Amulet', the protagonist's empowerment is only possible through the rejection of patriarchal conventions.

'A Cross Line' diverges from the other Cleopatra short stories by implying that all women, regardless of whether they consciously emulate Cleopatra as a symbol of female power, possess inherent sensuality and wildness. Reflecting deeply, the protagonist thinks:

And her thoughts go to other women she has known, [...] joyless machines for grinding daily corn, unwilling maids grown old in the endeavour to get settled, patient wives who bear little ones to indifferent husbands until they wear out, [...] have they, too, this thirst for excitement, for change, this restless craving for sun and love and motion? [...] the denseness of man, his chivalrous, conservative devotion to the female idea he has created, blinds him, perhaps happily to the problems of her complex nature [...] They have overlooked the eternal wildness, the untamed primitive savage temperament that lurks in the mildest, best woman. Deep in through ages of convention this primeval trait burns, - and untameable quantity that may be concealed but it is never eradicated by culture, the keynote of woman's witchcraft and woman's strength.²⁸⁴

The protagonist positions contemporary women, whether they are 'workers' or 'wives', as slaves to a system which objectifies and exploits them, using their bodies until they 'wear out'. In this framework, both modern women and the *femmes fatales* of antiquity are objectified by men. While the *femme fatale* leverages her objectification for empowerment, modern women are reduced to 'joyless machines' within a system that fails to understand them. The protagonist's belief that men

²⁸⁴ Egerton, pp. 29-30.

are blind to ‘the problem of [woman’s] complex nature’ because they are fixated on the romanticised ‘female idea’ they have constructed is reflected in her relationship with her husband. She tells him that she is a bad woman destined ‘to the devil’, and that if she ‘were a man, [she’d] be a disgrace to [her] family’, yet he always responds: ‘I wish I could understand you, dear!’.²⁸⁵ Despite her honesty about her wild impulses, her husband remains devoted to his image of her as a loving wife, wilfully oblivious to her true self. The protagonist’s desire to be understood is her lover’s key attraction, for while he does not understand her, he also does not ‘misunderstand’ her.²⁸⁶ By asserting that all women have an ‘untamed primitive savage temperament’ that cannot be ‘eradicated’ by time or culture, the narrator implies that all women possess the wildness of Cleopatra but are forced to conceal their true nature to navigate patriarchal systems. The protagonist is distinguished from her contemporaries by her refusal to hide her true nature. Embracing her unruliness, she is labelled ‘strange’, ‘sphinx’, and ‘gypsy’ by both her husband and lover.²⁸⁷ When her lover declares: ‘I never met any one like you; you are a strange woman!’, she responds: ‘No, I am merely a truthful one’.²⁸⁸ By asserting that all women are like her, the protagonist refuses to be othered. The narrative ultimately suggests that when women look to Cleopatra as an exemplar of female sovereignty, they are not merely absorbing lessons from women of antiquity, but are using Cleopatra to explore their true, unsuppressed nature.

The protagonist’s decision to end her romantic involvement with her lover upon discovering her pregnancy further aligns her with Cleopatra, who is associated with motherhood and the complexities of female power. After learning of her pregnancy and confiding in her maid, who herself experienced unwed motherhood, the protagonist places ‘something white on the lilac-bush near the gate’ to signify the conclusion of her affair.²⁸⁹ Ledger notes that ‘the highly sexualised central female character collapses gracefully into motherhood at the story’s close, surrendering the

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 24, 23.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 36, 33, 11.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 36.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 44.

dream of erotic power', while Brenda Ayres states that 'she affirms her identity in a community of women and mothers [...] and opts to accept motherhood over licentiousness, for she is pregnant and remains sexually faithful to her husband'.²⁹⁰ However, I contend that the protagonist's decision to embrace motherhood does not signify the abandonment of 'the dream of erotic power' or fidelity to her husband. As she believes that *all* women are inherently sensual, wild, and primitive, the protagonist does not view motherhood and carnal pleasure as mutually exclusive. Although Egerton was married to Clairmonte in 1893, she dedicated *Keynotes* to her affair partner, Knut Hamsun. The protagonist's lack of remorse regarding her affair indicates that, like Egerton and Cleopatra, she has the potential to engage in passionate love affairs despite being a wife and mother. Moreover, her interactions with her lover reveal that, while he has become attached to her 'restless spirit', she is prepared to 'send [him] away', as even before learning of her pregnancy, she understands that their 'moment [has] ended'.²⁹¹ Intimate scenes between the protagonist and her husband, where he massages her feet, kisses her, and 'crushes her soft little body to him and carries her off to her room' reveal that they have an active sex life.²⁹² Her extramarital affair is not the consequence of an unfulfilling sex life, but a way to escape the monotony of domesticity. In a contemporary review of *Keynotes*, the Decadent author and editor William Sharp asserted: 'the heroine of "A Cross Line" acts worthily and beautifully at the last, not so much out of womanly duty as from a sudden diversion of her mind from *ennui* to a new and engrossing interest', because if she left with her lover, 'two lives would have been ruined and one depraved'.²⁹³ The 'new and engrossing interest' is the 'mystery of maternity' which allows the protagonist to escape from the *ennui* of life. Sharp's reference to the narrator becoming 'ruined and [...] depraved' highlights that, while she can secretly have a sensual love affair, abandoning her husband would ostracise her from

²⁹⁰ Ledger, p. 191. See also., Brenda Ayres, 'Cross Line, A', in *The Facts on File Companion to the British Short Story*, ed. Andrew Maunder (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007), pp. 94-95 (p. 95).

²⁹¹ Egerton, p. 38.

²⁹² Ibid., p. 26.

²⁹³ William Sharp, 'Keynotes by George Egerton', *Academy*, 45.1137 (17 February 1894), p. 143-144 (p. 143).

society.²⁹⁴ This distinguishes the narrator from Cleopatra, who as a pharaoh, could openly have children outside of marriage. Nonetheless, the protagonist's lack of remorse regarding her affair and her excitement at escaping the mundanity of life through motherhood reveal that, like Ebers's and Sawyer's Cleopatras, she is innately maternal and sensual.

Egerton's 'A Cross Line' delves into the consciousness of her New Woman figure, illustrating that women possess innate sensuality, wildness, and intelligence. By paralleling the protagonist's fantasies with figures like Cleopatra and Salomé, Egerton suggests that contemporary women share the same emotions and desire for excitement as the women of antiquity. The narrative posits that embracing these primal traits, rather than suppressing them, allows women to reclaim their power and autonomy. When modern women fantasise about Cleopatra, they are simply uncovering aspects of their own complex nature that they have been compelled to repress. Meanwhile, in *The Egyptian Ring*, Sawyer manipulates Cleopatra's innate wildness to reconcile female liberation with societal values.

Cleopatra Reborn: Motherhood and Agency

Sawyer's *The Egyptian Ring* follows the courtship of Mark Anthony and Cleopatra Patrick, who possess the reincarnated souls of their namesakes. As the pair attend social events in the hopes of becoming acquainted, they come to realise that they may have loved one another in a past life. This theory is cemented by Cleo's Egyptian ring, which a theosophist priest confirms is connected to Cleopatra's soul to bring her 'love, wealth, [and] protection', and a painting at an art gallery of Antony and Cleopatra, which possesses an exact likeness to the modern couple.²⁹⁵ To unite their souls through marriage, the couple must overcome Vivian Sinclair who embodies Cleopatra's

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Nelly T. Sawyer, *The Egyptian Ring* (New York: The Abbey Press, 1901), p. 31.

transgressive qualities. Like 'The Egyptian Amulet', the narrative kills off the transgressive woman, making a domestic lifestyle the inevitable conclusion. As the pure reincarnation of Egypt's last pharaoh, Cleo is feminine, maternal, loving, beautiful, and intelligent, without being overtly sensual, hedonistic, or vain. Like Ebers's maternal Cleopatra, Sawyer's queen exemplifies that a modern woman can achieve a fulfilling, liberated life while still being a valued member of society.

In *The Egyptian Ring*, Sawyer portrays Cleo Patrick's appearance as the embodiment of maternity. When describing her face after a quick glance, Mark Anthony states:

she seemed neither young nor old, but a perfect specimen of mature womanhood, she was very beautiful, but entirely unlike the type of women affected by the morbid taste of the present day. She was not lank and bony and taller than the average man; not at all; she was the antithesis of all this; for she was little over five feet tall, plump and round as a cherub, with medium coloring, neither very dark nor fair, but glowing with health.²⁹⁶

The 'medium coloring' of Cleo's skin, as well as her Grecian-style dresses and Egyptian jewellery, align her with late nineteenth-century representations of Cleopatra in visual culture. By mirroring the Cleopatras of Alma-Tadema's *Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883) and Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* (1888), Sawyer presents her Cleo as racially ambiguous. The adjectives used to describe Cleo – 'neither young or old, but a perfect specimen of mature womanhood', 'plump and round', 'glowing with health' – are those conventionally used to describe pure, fertile women who conform to nineteenth-century western ideals of beauty. Cleo's appearance is contrasted with that of the tall, 'lank' and 'bony' modern woman, who Anthony looks down upon for ascribing to the 'modern taste of the present day'. Male physicians, authors and politicians often used these adjectives to

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

express fears that women's appearances would physically change if they sought masculine pastimes. As already explored in relation to Haggard's *Cleopatra*, Bushnell described the suffrage-seeking woman as a 'hungry-looking', 'cream-tartar' faced figure 'bearing a sharper look of talent, and yet somehow touched with blight and fallen out of lustre'.²⁹⁷ Cleo's appearance starkly contrasts with that of the modern educated woman, yet she is highly intelligent and well-educated. Anthony's focus on her physical beauty demonstrates that her symbolic connection to the women of antiquity, who embodied fertility and health is her greatest attraction. Like Ebers's historical novel, Sawyer's narrative challenges conservative theologians, academics, journalists, and physicians who argued that women would lose their fertility and beauty by venturing beyond traditional feminine roles.

Cleo's fertile appearance aligns her with two historically significant women: Cleopatra and Queen Victoria. The view of Cleopatra as a 'mother' began to gain popularity in academic circles towards the end of the nineteenth century. In his biography of Cleopatra, Weigall wrote:

We see [Cleopatra's] intense and lifelong devotion to her eldest son Cæsarion, we picture her busy nursery in the royal palace [...] and the vision of the Oriental voluptuary fades from our eyes. Can this dainty little woman, we ask, who soothes at her breast the cries of her fat baby, while three sturdy youngsters play around her, be the sensuous Queen of the East? Can this tender, ingenuous, smiling mother of Cæsar's beloved son be the Siren of Egypt?²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ Horace Bushnell, *Women's Suffrage: The Reform Against Nature* (New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1869), p. 136.

²⁹⁸ Arthur Brome Weigall, *The Life and Times of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt: A Study in the Origin of the Roman Empire* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1914), pp. 11-12.

Weigall acknowledges that Cleopatra is seen as a ‘sensuous’ ‘siren’ but insists that ‘there is not a particle of trustworthy evidence’ to support this narrative.²⁹⁹ Instead, Weigall imagines that Cleopatra was a devoted and loving mother who spent her time in the ‘nursery’ rearing the future of her empire. The ‘dainty little woman’ he describes can be mistaken for Cleo. Sawyer’s Cleopatra is not based on the ‘sensuous’ Cleopatra that was popular in *fin-de-siècle* culture, but on the motherly Cleopatra that Ebers and Weigall discussed. The image of Cleopatra as a woman devoted to her eldest son Caesarion, whose Egyptian and Roman parentage could have made him the greatest emperor, aligns the last pharaoh of Egypt with Queen Victoria. Not only was Victoria a ‘plump’ and ‘short’ woman like Sawyer’s Cleo and Weigall’s Cleopatra, but she was also perceived as the ‘mother of her people’.³⁰⁰ *The Egyptian Ring* was published in New York shortly after Queen Victoria’s death. Following the news of her passing, an American periodical in Boston titled ‘A Royal Woman: Victoria “Mother, Wife and Queen”’ reported that Americans were ‘deeply touched’ by the death of ‘an excellent woman’.³⁰¹ As John Plunkett observes, nineteenth-century periodicals depict Queen Victoria as ‘the bourgeois mother of the nation or as the Great White Empress’, roles in which she embodied and symbolised the nation.³⁰² By being perceived as ‘mothers’, both Queen Victoria and Cleopatra inspired devotion in their subjects. By exhibiting health and fertility, as well as being the mother of two vigorous children, Cleo embodies the role of mother. If she follows in Cleopatra’s footsteps, Cleo will also bear children for Mark Anthony after their marriage. In fiction, a woman’s motherhood often rendered her ineligible to play the role of the pure, naïve heroine. Sawyer’s narrative disregards the societal association between motherhood and sexuality. Not only is Cleo presented as a heroine, but when proposing, Anthony declares: ‘your beautiful motherhood is one of your greatest attractions’.³⁰³ Sawyer, a proud mother

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁰⁰ Archibald Primrose, ‘Victoria the Good’, *Manchester Guardian*, 19089 (14 October 1907), p. 12.

³⁰¹ Everett William, ‘A Royal Woman: Victoria “Mother, Wife and Queen”’, *Youth’s Companion*, 75.10, (7 March 1901), p. 112.

³⁰² John Plunkett, *Queen Victoria: First Media Monarch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 119.

³⁰³ Sawyer, p. 31.

herself, used Cleopatra to demonstrate that a woman could be both a mother and a lover. This allows her heroine to be an appealing love interest while undermining the contemporaneous fixation on female sexual purity.

Sawyer directly connects Cleo with Cleopatra through an Egyptian ring. Although Anthony recognises that Cleo looks exactly like Cleopatra after analysing a painting of her, it is the ‘peculiar ring’ – consisting of an ‘Egyptian scarabaeus, cut from a solid piece of turquoise’ set in ‘deep yellow gold’ with ‘lotus flower[s]’ carved on the ‘side’ – that encourages Anthony to believe that Cleo is the reincarnation of Cleopatra.³⁰⁴ Observing the painting, Cleo remarks: ‘It is true, then,’ [...] ‘This was Cleopatra’s ring. I always doubted the story told about it.’³⁰⁵ The tale recounts how her cousin Max was invited to a newly discovered tomb, where he witnessed the unwrapping of an embalmed woman later identified as Cleopatra. Despite her scepticism about Max’s narrative, Cleo wore the ring religiously from the moment she received it. Her attraction to the ring, along with its journey from Egypt to her, suggests a profound connection between the ring and Cleopatra’s soul. The fact that the model who posed as Cleopatra in the painting also wore the same ring implies that Cleopatra has been reborn before. This connection is confirmed by Mohundra, a ‘theosophist priest’.³⁰⁶ He tells Cleo, “This is the ring of Cleopatra. And you ... were, and are, Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, in other days”.³⁰⁷ He warns: ‘that ring was hers, your other self. Fate has once again thrown it into your hands. For you it bears a potent charm, but for none other. Treasure it, guard it, for it brings you happiness and love’.³⁰⁸ Like Patra, Cleo finds it ‘dreadful’ to be directly linked to Cleopatra because of her ‘naughtiness’.³⁰⁹ As predicted by Anthony and confirmed by Mohundra, Cleo possesses ‘a reincarnation of [Cleopatra’s] spirit, purified by suffering and death,

³⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 48.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 51.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 51.

³⁰⁹ M. K. D. ‘Cleopatra’, p. 377. See also., Sawyer, p. 22.

come back to earth to redeem her past'.³¹⁰ Purification alludes to the theosophical idea that the 'law of Karma is inextricably interwoven with that of Reincarnation', so that the soul becomes refined with each successive rebirth.³¹¹ Cleo embodies Cleopatra as a mother, wife, and intellectual, but lacks her transgressive qualities. By separating Cleopatra's undesirable qualities from her positive traits, Sawyer employs theosophical teachings to transform her modern Cleopatra into the ideal woman.

The enchanted ring, designed to bring Cleopatra's reborn soul 'love, wealth, and protection', suggests that the original Cleopatra valued these virtues. After a life of hedonistic excess, she ultimately came to cherish the fulfilment of domestic love and motherhood. When Cleo's ring is stolen by Franchette, a servant described as a 'slender serpent', she loses the charm it provided.³¹² She becomes 'gloomy and depressed', consumed by 'sorrow and despair', as the ring carried 'her fate within its golden circle'.³¹³ Just as a literal serpent was rumoured to have taken Cleopatra's life, a symbolic serpent robs Cleo of her happiness. This is an exact inversion of Berenice Labordie's fate. While 'The Egyptian Amulet' suggests that Cleopatra's influence could empower women to disrupt patriarchal conventions, Sawyer's narrative proposes that emulating Cleopatra's admirable qualities can enhance a woman's happiness, making her a more valuable member of society. When Anthony next sees Cleo, he remarks, 'are you ill? You look as though you encountered a ghost', indicating that her 'ill' appearance has caused her to lose the vibrant health that initially attracted him.³¹⁴ As Cleo's glow makes her the 'perfect specimen of mature womanhood', its loss implies that she is no longer a fertile heroine. The absence of the ring leaves her too ill to attend social events with Anthony or spend time with her children, directly impeding her responsibilities as a mother and her potential to become a wife. Since the ring belonged to the

³¹⁰ Sawyer, p. 22.

³¹¹ Helena Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, 2 vols (London: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1888-1893), II (1893), p. 317.

³¹² Sawyer, p. 65.

³¹³ Ibid. p. 65, 73.

³¹⁴ Ibid. p. 61.

original Cleopatra, the ‘happiness and love’ it brought to Cleo suggests that Egypt’s last pharaoh was determined to seek pure love in her subsequent reincarnations. In *The Egyptian Ring*, Cleopatra is not a menacing presence but a loving guardian who wants to help her reincarnation achieve a fulfilling life.

Although Cleo possesses a purified soul, she still engages in activities which some influential conservatives considered transgressive – namely, seeking knowledge. The Museum of Fine Arts, founded in 1870 in Boston, is repeatedly referred to throughout *The Egyptian Ring*. With over 450,000 works of art, including sculptures and paintings of Cleopatra, the institution provided an excellent environment to learn art history. By regularly attending the museum and taking her children, Cleo embodies a willingness to learn. As she met Anthony during one of her visits to the Museum, her pursuit of knowledge is linked to her potential to become an exceptional wife. Attending a private lecture by a theosophist priest with Anthony also attests to her desire to learn. Theosophy was a religion established in nineteenth-century America that taught that the purpose of human life is spiritual emancipation – that humans should strive to be reincarnated as ‘superior being[s] or developed human entity[s]’ by pursuing good karma.³¹⁵ As a theosophist priest reveals the truth behind Cleo’s soul, her desire to learn enables her to uncover the truth. Cleo’s acceptance of theosophy in a Christian society is transgressive, yet Sawyer portrays it in a positive light. Theosophy is the reason Cleo can be a good wife and mother, as her soul has become a ‘superior being’ through the good karma she accumulated in her multiple past lives. As Cleopatra was an intelligent woman educated in medicine, philosophy, pharmaceuticals, rhetoric, and oratory, Cleo’s desire to learn is a quality adopted from her past life. By portraying Cleo as an intelligent woman who can pursue education while still being the embodiment of motherhood, Sawyer presents female education in a positive light.

³¹⁵ Henry Steel Olcott, ‘A Chat on the Roof’, *Theosophist*, 11.121 (October 1889), pp. 3-8 (p. 6).

While Cleo has been purified of sin, Vivian Sinclair embodies Cleopatra's more transgressive qualities, reflecting the popular *fin-de-siècle* views surrounding her. Vivian is a 'beautiful', 'envied' affluent socialite who is 'unusually tall'.³¹⁶ Sawyer introduces her 'half reclining upon a divan, sipping tea' in her 'beautiful and luxurious [...] boudoir', surrounded by 'several society belles' and everything that 'money or influence could procure'.³¹⁷ The opulent setting and the description of Vivian reclining conjure images reminiscent of Cleopatra, notably in Gautier's short story *One of Cleopatra's Nights*, Cabanel's oil painting *Cleopatra Testing Poisons on Condemned Prisoners*, and promotional theatrical images of actresses like Bernhardt and Langtry dressed as Cleopatra. Like the 'naughty' Cleopatra with whom Cleo is afraid to be associated, Vivian takes pleasure in her wealth, surrounds herself with notions of love (statue of cupid, paintings of beautiful women), and has servants who will commit crimes for her. She is not only attracted to Anthony but will go to great lengths to possess him. Vivian's actions position her as a danger to all members of respectable society. She threatens to emasculate men by attempting to manipulate them into loving her, while also undermining female bonds of trust and friendship by betraying Cleo and taking pleasure in her suffering. Much like Cleopatra, who formed an intimate relationship with Antony despite his marriage to Fulvia, Vivian brazenly undermines other women to gain the affection of the man she desires. Vivian embodies all the qualities Cleo has been purged of. Her height, slender-frame and fashionable attire make her the type of woman Mark Anthony suggests Cleo is the antithesis of. The fact that Vivian shares traits with both Cleopatra VII and the 'Girl of the Period' implies that modern fashionable women reflect Cleopatra's most undesirable qualities.³¹⁸ Vivian's suicide at the end of the narrative further connects her to the historical Cleopatra, while suggesting that there is no place for transgressive Cleopatra figures in

³¹⁶ Sawyer, pp. 43, 40.

³¹⁷ Ibid., p. 34.

³¹⁸ In a controversial article published in the *Saturday Review* in 1868, the first female salaried journalist Eliza Linton wrote about the moral degeneration of the 'vulgar' 'Girl of the Period' to bring awareness to the increasing sexualisation of young girls towards the turn of the century. See, Eliza Lynn Linton, *The Girl of the Period and Other Social Essays* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1883), p. 16.

modern society. In *The Egyptian Ring*, the dangerous Cleopatra-esque character is eliminated, allowing the purified Cleopatra to live peacefully, devoted to her children and husband. This ending implies that modern women can find fulfilment by imitating Cleopatra's 'good' qualities, such as her devotion to her husband and her love for her children.

In contrast to the other short stories that present Cleopatra as a dangerous model of female sovereignty, inspiring modern women to empower themselves at the expense of men, Sawyer's Cleopatra embodies the ideal mother and wife. 'Purified by suffering and death', the protagonist devotes all her time to educating her children and pleasing her husband. She possesses all the good qualities associated with Cleopatra, without inheriting her more transgressive traits. Like Ebers, Sawyer does not view education and motherhood as mutually exclusive concepts for women. Her Cleopatra is as intelligent and educated as she is maternal. While this may have been a source of concern for conservative readers who viewed women's entrance into academic spaces as transgressive, it reaffirms the belief held by many early-feminist activists that women could be enfranchised, educated, and intelligent, while still being the moral centre of their family.

Conclusion

M. K. D.'s 'Cleopatra', Peters's 'The Egyptian Amulet', Egerton's 'A Cross Line', and Sawyer's *The Egyptian Ring* demonstrate that contemporary women could emulate Cleopatra as a model of female sovereignty, with differing consequences depending on how they navigated authority, sensuality, and domesticity. M. K. D.'s 'Cleopatra' demonstrates that bourgeois women can defy traditional gender roles and assert their autonomy in the domestic sphere by mirroring Cleopatra's manipulation of men. However, the protagonist ultimately seeks a conventional family structure, as evidenced by her desire to reunite with her father, highlighting the tension between defiance and social expectations. Similarly, Egerton's 'A Cross Line' suggests that contemporary women can embrace their primal desires for excitement and sexual fulfilment through embodying their

unrepressed wildness. In *The Egyptian Ring*, Sawyer contrasts Cleo's nurturing and intellectual qualities with the transgressive characteristics of Vivian Sinclair, implying that modern western women can achieve fulfilment if they adopt Cleopatra's intelligence, passion, and maternity, while rejecting the more dangerous aspects of her sensuality. The only heroine who is explicitly punished for imitating Cleopatra is Peters's Berenice, who is reprimanded for embracing Cleopatra's sexuality and political ambition. Although 'The Egyptian Amulet' ultimately reinforces a cautionary stance, it still illustrates that educated women could use Cleopatra's image to challenge societal institutions such as marriage. Across these narratives, modern Cleopatras attain varying degrees of sexual fulfilment, knowledge, and authority, with their success remaining contingent on negotiating existing gender norms, especially within the domestic sphere.

The racialisation of these modern heroines parallels contemporary perceptions of Cleopatra's perceived ethnic hybridity. Egerton's unnamed protagonist, Peters's Berenice, and Sawyer's Cleo are all marked by an ethnically ambiguous appearance, particularly through their beauty and tanned skin. While this exoticism enhances their desirability and grants them power over men, it also marks them as 'other', reinforcing anxieties about degeneration and racial mixing. In 'The Egyptian Amulet' and 'A Cross Line', the heroines' racial ambiguity functions both as a source of allure and a symbol of their potential transgression. Like the heroine of 'A Cross Line', who contends that all women have an 'eternal wildness', the physical appearance of these heroines indicates that women inherently possess Cleopatra's power. By designing their protagonists to resemble oriental women, these female authors imply that modern women share Cleopatra's sensual and authoritative power, suggesting that feminine influence is both innate and performative. These stories suggest that women writers did not view the orient, as Said's *Orientalism* suggests, as a space of dangerous sensuality, fatalism, or exoticism. Instead, they used their understanding of the orient to empower their protagonists, imbuing them with strength and transformative potential through the emulation of Cleopatra, thereby reimagining possibilities for change. However, the publication history of these narratives means that, despite their imitation

of a women of colour, the empowerment afforded to these protagonists ultimately benefited white women, reinforcing their dominance and agency within the western literary tradition.

Furthermore, these narratives offer distinct perspectives on the relationship between autonomy, sensuality, and maternity. The theme of motherhood is central to 'Cleopatra', as the absence of a maternal figure enables Patra to seek empowerment through Cleopatra's example. In both 'Cleopatra' and 'The Egyptian Amulet', the heroines' marriages suggest their potential to become mothers. In 'Cleopatra,' this is viewed positively because she loves her husband, however, in 'The Egyptian Amulet,' it signifies her imposed disempowerment. Likewise, *The Egyptian Ring* and 'A Cross Line' depict women who pursue their desires while maintaining maternal identities, reinforcing the idea that motherhood, autonomy, and sexual agency can coexist. Unlike Peters' 'The Egyptian Amulet', these stories offer a more expansive view of women's power, suggesting that female desire and independence need not be at odds with maternity. As mothers themselves, Peters, Sawyer, and Egerton crafted narratives that provided contemporary women with a platform to reflect on their own experiences of maternity and sensuality. Beyond providing a space for exploring women's issues, the production of these short stories also enabled female authors to secure economic stability, allowing them to remain active in the public sphere while financially supporting themselves and their families. While these female-authored narratives reveal that contemporary women were turning to Cleopatra to explore the interplay between autonomy, sensuality, and maternity, the next chapter explores women and Decadent poets who used Cleopatra to examine female monarchical power, sensuality, passion, and lust.

Chapter Five

Transgressive Femininity: The Cleopatra of Antiquity in Poetry

The sheer volume of Cleopatra poems published at the *fin de siècle* suggests a mainstream acknowledgment of Cleopatra's transgressive nature. As discussed in the previous four chapters, Cleopatra was often perceived as a rebellious figure who challenged patriarchal values by embodying maternal, sensual, passionate, and powerful qualities that were otherwise considered mutually exclusive. This recognition made it permissible for poets and readers to explore the intricacies of female sensuality without being labelled as subversive themselves. David Perkins notes that *fin-de-siècle* poets were 'diverse in personality, in literary and cultural background, in opinions and beliefs'.¹ This variety is evident in the range of poets who explored Cleopatra, including Andrew Lang and Francis William Bourdillon, Decadents Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, and Michael Field, women poets such as Alice MacKay, Julia Clinton Jones, and Martha Dickinson Bianchi, and feminist activists like Mary Bayard Clarke. The re-publication of earlier controversial poems that depicted Cleopatra as a sexually transgressive *femme fatale*, including Charles Algernon Swinburne's 'Cleopatra' (1866; republished 1897), William Wetmore Story's 'Cleopatra' (1868; republished 1886), and the posthumous publication of William Herbert's 'Cleopatra' (1888), reveals that there was a renewed appetite for Cleopatra-themed poems at the *fin de siècle*.² An exploration of verse about Cleopatra reveals that a diverse range of poets could use her to explore the potential of female sexuality beyond the limits of conventional morality, without ostracising themselves from their respectable bourgeois communities.

¹ David Perkins, *A History of Modern Poetry: From the 1890s to the High Modernist Mode* (London: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 32.

² In 1897, Swinburne's 'Cleopatra' was republished in *Poems and Ballads* in America without authorisation by Thomas B. Mosher.

The 1880s saw the emergence of the Aesthete, who believed in ‘art for art’s sake’, an ideology centred around the ‘pursuit of beauty’ without a preoccupation with morality.³ Wilde, one of the most prominent poets and playwrights of the *fin de siècle*, was ‘looked upon as the High Priest of the Aesthetes’, because he made a ‘calculated point of ignoring philistine moralizing about art’.⁴ In 1893, Symons published ‘The Decadent Movement in Literature’ in the popular, widely-circulated transatlantic journal, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*. The prominent British poet and critic defined Decadence as ‘the latest movement in European literature’, characterised by ‘an intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, an over-subtilizing refinement upon refinement, [and] a spiritual and moral perversity’.⁵ While Aestheticism was an artistic movement that advocated for separating art, music, and literature from moral considerations, Decadence was a counter-cultural movement that encouraged pursuing beauty, pleasure, and art beyond the constraints of morality. Symons’s essay credits French writers such as Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé, as well the essayist Walter Pater (1839-1894) for allowing the Decadent movement to find ‘beauty in disease, truth in insanity, and pleasure in perversity’.⁶ Pater’s hugely influential essay *The Renaissance* (1873), which taught Symons that ‘life [...] could be itself a work of art’, urged artists to celebrate the ‘beautiful, active, or illuminating’ moments of life by preserving it through music, verse, prose, and painting.⁷ Decadent poets such as Symons recognised aesthetic traits in Shakespeare’s Cleopatra, who was beautiful, charming, sensual, and hedonistic, as much as she was powerful, authoritative, and demanding. In the first part of this chapter, I examine Cleopatra’s amorality in the Decadent works of Arthur Symons (1865-1945), Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), and the aunt and niece duo Katherine Bradley (1846-1914) and Edith Cooper (1862-1913), who wrote

³ Joseph Bristow, *The Fin-de-Siècle Poem: English Literary Culture and the 1890s* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), p. 112.

⁴ ‘By Scrutator’, *New Zealand Mail*, 1171 (10 August 1894), p. 23. See also Bristow, p. 13.

⁵ Arthur Symons, ‘The Decadent Movement in Literature’, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* (November 1893), pp. 858-867 (pp. 858-59).

⁶ Bristow, p. 11.

⁷ Arthur Symons, ‘Introduction’, in *The Renaissance* by Walter Pater (New York: The Modern Library, 1963), pp. xi-xxiv (p. xv).

under the pseudonym Michael Field, to explore the power of transgressive female sensuality beyond the confines of morality.

While the Cleopatra of *fin-de-siècle* theatre and oil paintings was almost entirely the product of the male imagination, the Cleopatra of *fin-de-siècle* poetry was also created by women. Marion Thain notes that owing to women's magazines and the 'dizzying array of poetic movements, genres, types and coteries' which made *fin-de-siècle* poetry welcoming to literary outsiders, women poets were publishing in 'such great numbers' that there was 'no longer a polarity between a "woman's tradition" and a mainstream' by the 1890s.⁸ Besides Michael Field, the American poets Mary Bayard Clarke (1827-1886), Julia Clinton Jones (c. 1863-1903), and Martha Gilbert Dickinson Bianchi (1866-1943), as well as the English poet Alice Dacre MacKay also produced verse regarding Egypt's final pharaoh. Although they have fallen into obscurity since the early twentieth century, Clarke, Jones, Bianchi, and MacKay experienced varying levels of literary success by having their poetry printed in popular periodicals, such as *Atlantic*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Pall Mall Magazine*. Clarke's 'Cleopatra's Soliloquy' (1877) was so popular that it was not only officially republished in 1881, 1888, 1889, 1896, and 1900, but also 'privately printed by a New York lady' who distributed it amongst her influential friends, which included the Jewish American author and actress Rose Eytinge, who performed the part of Shakespeare's Cleopatra in 1877.⁹ As in this thesis's chapter on short stories, the popularity of Cleopatra poems shows that women were engaged in both writing and reading verse regarding the final pharaoh of Egypt.

Joseph Bristow argues that while historians commonly associate the amoral nature of *fin-de-siècle* poetry with the Decadent movement, which was viewed as 'uniformly male', even poets who 'championed empire and nation' were not 'decidedly separate from the sexually subversive worlds that Symons characteristically inhabited'.¹⁰ He notes that mainstream poets, regardless of

⁸ Marion Thain, 'Poetry', in *The Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 223-240 (p. 224).

⁹ 'Questions and Answers', *Bizarre Notes and Queries*, 6.11 (November 1889), pp. 388-394 (p. 394).

¹⁰ Bristow, pp. 5, 6.

their affiliations, alluded to Decadent interests.¹¹ Although *fin-de-siècle* poetry began to explore previously taboo subjects, Cleopatra's sexually transgressive nature enabled poets outside the Decadent Movement to discuss female sensuality openly without appearing to endorse the indulgent and taboo sexual experiences celebrated by Decadent poets. Mainstream poets often mitigate their exploration of Cleopatra's character through a moralising lens by depicting her eventual punishment – her death, the loss of her lover, and the downfall of her nation. By framing Cleopatra's actions as ultimately immoral through her climatic death, these poets imply a critique of her transgressions rather than a celebration of them. This nuanced approach enables poets to explore female sexuality while maintaining a veneer of moral propriety. In 'Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra', for example, Jones's Cleopatra rejoices that 'steeped in pleasure' Antony 'who came to conquer, lay conquered by [her] side – / Gave up for Cleopatra, the world, his fame, his bride'.¹² Victorious and unashamed, this Cleopatra embodies Decadent ideals by relishing in the knowledge that her sexuality made a man choose physical pleasure over his honour, duty, and nation. Jones's 'Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra' was followed by 'Death of Cleopatra', where, having fallen deeply in love with Antony, she places the serpent at her breast so she can meet him again, thereby applying a moral judgement through her inevitable death and transforming her from a degenerate to a tragic heroine, thus suppressing her threat. Nonetheless, the overtly sexual content of 'Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra', especially when printed as a stand-alone piece in *Bizarre Notes and Queries*, reflects the growing acceptance of amoral themes in *fin-de-siècle* poetry.¹³ This is particularly notable because Jones, an educator from a prominent New York family, was entirely divorced from the Decadent movement. While Bristow notices that mainstream poets could slyly allude to perverse

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Julia Clinton Jones originally published her two Cleopatra poems, 'Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra' and 'Death of Cleopatra', in a single volume titled *Cleopatra* (1889). The volume, which has no page numbers, opens with a brief paragraph describing how the historical Antony and Cleopatra met, before transitioning into the two poems. See., Julia Clinton Jones, 'Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra', in *Cleopatra* (San Francisco: The Bancroft Company, 1889).

¹³ Julia Clinton Jones, 'Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra', *Bizarre Notes and Queries*, 14. 3 (March 1896), pp. 57-58.

topics, an exploration of poetry regarding Cleopatra reveals that there was an acceptability to discussing her in a Decadent manner, as she was already perceived as a transgressive woman.

In Cleopatra poems published by Decadent poets such as Wilde, Swinburne, Field, and Symons, as well as established artists including Story, Tennyson, and Lang, Cleopatra is a *fin-de-siècle femme fatale*. In contrast to Haggard's and Ebers's Cleopatra novels which present Cleopatra as a Macedonian Greek usurper, most nineteenth- and early twentieth-century poems present Cleopatra as ethnically Egyptian. For example, Herbert describes Cleopatra as the 'sister queen' of the 'Ancestral kings' of Egypt, including 'Rhamses', 'Amenophis', and 'Tathrak'.¹⁴ While the Cleopatras of *fin-de-siècle* theatrical productions, short stories, and oil paintings are racially ambiguous women who simultaneously embody the East and the West, the Cleopatra of verse is largely an unambiguously Egyptian woman. By portraying Cleopatra as an Egyptian woman who embodies 'transgressive sexuality and evil', poets could explore the potential of female sexuality through the far-removed other. In her investigation of mid nineteenth-century representations of *femmes fatales*, Jennifer Hedgecock states that 'Victorian writers [drew] from the power of Cleopatra's sexuality' to make 'it possible for the nineteenth-century femme fatale to murder her lover and run off with his wealth'.¹⁵ However, the Cleopatra of *fin-de-siècle* poetry did not need to use her sexuality to rob a man of his affluence because she possessed the wealth of Egypt. By indulging in love, sex, and murder without a mercenary need, the Cleopatra of *fin-de-siècle* poetry mirrored the Decadent artist by transgressing for the sake of beauty and pleasure alone. This makes her a transcendent *femme fatale* who has evolved from needing men, as she unintentionally ruins them for the sake of satisfying her sexual desires. By possessing a 'fascination [...] from which there is no escape', Cleopatra lent herself to discussions of female sexuality, thus becoming a retreat

¹⁴ Henry William Herbert, *Poems of Frank Forester*, ed. by Morgan Herbert (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1888), pp. 64-67 (p. 66).

¹⁵ Jennifer Hedgecock, *The Femme Fatale in Victorian Literature: The Danger and the Sexual Threat* (New York: Cambria Press, 2008), p. 6.

for poets outside of the Decadent movement to also engage in conversations regarding female desire.¹⁶

This chapter builds on Lucy Hughes-Hallett's *Cleopatra* (1990), Sarah Parker's *Form and Modernity in Women's Poetry* (2024) and Elissa Bizzotto's 'Strange Webs with Eastern Merchants' (2020).¹⁷ Hughes-Hallett argues that during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Cleopatra's story became 'suffused with an atmosphere of eroticised violence', as she was reimagined as an 'oriental monarch' with 'absolute power'.¹⁸ By referencing Symons's portrayal of Cleopatra as a 'necrotic' queen, Hughes-Hallett establishes that this 'killer-Cleopatra' allowed Europeans to experience death 'vicariously at the hands of a monster, a villain, and a *femme fatale*'.¹⁹ Similarly, in her exploration of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's influence on Decadent poetry, Bizzotto notes that *The Sphinx* embodies the 'aesthete's attraction for what is extraordinary in the Orient', while referring to Cleopatra as 'the archetypal Oriental femme fatale, with her concoction of transgressive sexuality and evil'.²⁰ This chapter builds on Hughes-Hallett's analysis of Cleopatra as a killer, and Bizzotto's reading of Cleopatra as an oriental *femme fatale*, by exploring how *fin-de-siècle* poets used Cleopatra to examine the potential of female power, delving into both her capacity for evil and, in the cases of Symons, Clarke, and Jones, her ability to harness that evil to expand her empire. Parker contends that Bradley and Cooper's 'commitment to blank verse is integral to the modernity of their plays', particularly their *Queen Mariamne*, which reflects Michael Field's 'favored subjects: desire, possession, and patriarchal control', while also exploring female power through Mariamne's strategic manipulation of Herod.²¹ I engage in dialogue with Parker by demonstrating that Bradley and Cooper crafted similarities between Cleopatra and Mariamne to

¹⁶ Anna Jameson, 'Shakespeare's Heroines', *Play Pictorial*, 9.54 (1 February 1907), pp. 225-252 (p. 250).

¹⁷ As Mary Bayard Clarke, Julia Clinton Jones, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, and Alice Dacre Mackay have fallen into obscurity since the early twentieth century, their poems have received little to no scholarly attention.

¹⁸ Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *Cleopatra: Histories, Dreams and Distortions* (London: Vintage, 1991), pp. 282, 288.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 310, 311.

²⁰ Elissa Bizzotto, "'Strange Webs with Eastern Merchants': The Orient of Aesthetic Poetry", in *Late Victorian Orientalism: Representation of the East in Nineteenth-Century Literature, Art and Culture from the Pre-Raphaelites to John La Farge*, ed. by Eleonora Sasso (London: Anthem Press, 2020), pp. 101-121 (pp. 107, 108).

²¹ Sarah Parker, *Form and Modernity in Women's Poetry, 1895-1922* (New York: Routledge, 2024), pp. 83, 98.

explore the multifaceted nature of female power. While Mariamne employs her charm, beauty, and kindness to manipulate men, Cleopatra wields her sensuality and pharaonic power to subjugate them. Building on existing scholarship that interprets Cleopatra in *fin-de-siècle* poetry as evil, this chapter demonstrates that feminine immorality is not inherently negative within Decadent verse by highlighting the complex interplay between sensuality, malevolence, and agency in the construction of female identity.

In this chapter, I argue that *fin-de-siècle* poets portrayed Cleopatra as an exalted *femme fatale* who lived for ‘the pursuit of beauty’, to explore the potential of female sexuality outside of the limits of morality. Given the vast number of Cleopatra poems published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I focus my analysis on works that best represent the *fin de siècle*; specifically Decadent verse by Wilde, Symons, and Field, as well as poems by bourgeoisie American women such as Clarke, Jones, and Bianchi. Although Symons’s and Field’s Cleopatra texts are dramatic verses, they were intended to be read rather than performed, hence their inclusion here rather than in the theatre chapter. This chapter demonstrates that women and Decadent poets utilised Cleopatra to explore the changing socio-political climate of the *fin de siècle*, leveraging her ‘infinite variety’ to challenge traditional gender roles and assert female agency in a rapidly modernising world. Through Cleopatra, these poets engaged with themes of sexuality, identity, and the complexities of femininity, showcasing her as a victim, villain, and figure of empowerment. As paintings, sculptures, and poems were considered ‘sister arts’, I examine Arthur H. Buckland’s (1870-1948) illustrations for MacKay’s ‘Antony to Cleopatra’ (1896) to demonstrate how visual interpretations added layers of meaning to poetic representations of Cleopatra, reinforcing her enigmatic nature while shaping the poet’s creative expressions.²² Ultimately, Cleopatra emerged as a powerful symbol, allowing poets to explore female sensuality beyond moral constraints, thereby redefining the landscape of feminine representation in poetry.

²² Michele Martinez, ‘Women Poets and the Sister Arts in Nineteenth-Century England’, *Victorian Poetry*, 41.4 (2003), pp. 621-628 (p. 621).

Decadent Cleopatras: Sensual Power and Cultural Degeneracy

In Oscar Wilde's *The Sphinx* (1894), Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper's *Queen Mariamne* (1908), and Arthur Symons's *Cleopatra in Judaea* (1916), Cleopatra is portrayed as a charming, sensual, amoral, diseased, and destructive 'Queen of Queens' who manipulates without guilt and murders without regret.²³ Bradley and Cooper were a prosperous university-educated niece and aunt who believed in a 'sensual, pagan, and erotic mode of being', as they were 'poets and lovers'.²⁴ Their artistic talents were acknowledged by both Wilde and Symons, who were significant members of the Decadent movement, with Symons stating that their poetry created 'something fierce, subtle, strange, [and] singular'.²⁵ In a letter written to Robert Browning in 1894, Bradley and Cooper expressed their desire to be known as Michael Field because they wanted to 'be free as dramatists to work out in the open air of nature – exposed to her vicissitudes, witnessing her terrors' instead of 'stifled in drawing-room conventionalities'.²⁶ By rejecting 'drawing-room conventionalities', they refused to be defined by their gender. Although their true identities were revealed in 1894 by Browning himself, Bradley and Cooper continued to write poetry exploring sensual, empowered pagan women under the pseudonym Michael Field until their deaths in 1913 and 1914. Their closet drama, *Queen Mariamne*, which was conceived in 1904 and published in 1908, was circulated under a new pseudonym 'The author of *Borgia*'. This, Parker posits, is because they wanted to be distanced from their transgressive, erotic, and pagan writing following their conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1907.²⁷ Although the women took measures to publicly distance themselves from

²³ Arthur Symons, 'Cleopatra in Judaea', in *Tragedies* (London: William Heinemann, 1916), pp. 123-151 (p. 131).

²⁴ Marion Thain and Ana Parejo Vadillo, *Michael Field, The Poet, Published and Manuscript Materials* (Claremont: Broadview editions, 2009), p. 27. See also, Emma Donoghue, *We Are Michael Field* (London: Absolute Press, 1998), p. 1.

²⁵ Marion Thain, *Michael Field: Poetry, Aestheticism and the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 8.

²⁶ Katherine Bradley to Robert Browning (23 November 1884), reproduced in Michael Field, *Works and Days: From the Journal of Michael Field*, ed. T. & D. C. Sturge Moore (London: John Murray, 1933), p. 6.

²⁷ Sarah Parker, p. 98.

Decadence in front of their new Catholic acquaintances by changing their pseudonym and cutting contact with their closest friends, such as the artist and author Charles Ricketts (1866-1931), their portrayal of corruption, eroticism, and sensual female power in *Queen Mariamne* demonstrates that their art remained Decadent.

Alongside Bradley and Cooper, Wilde and Symons were the most infamous members of the Decadent Movement who had risen to celebrity status because of their Decadent lifestyles and amoral publications. Russell Goldfarb asserts that Symons's poetry included 'every element of decadence': a fascination with 'the perverse and sordid', the presentation of art as 'more important than morality', the 'cleanliness in unclean things', 'the sweetness of unsavoury alliances', and the 'isolation of significant moments'.²⁸ Although *Cleopatra in Judæa* was completed as a manuscript in 1910, published in 1916, and performed at the Court Theatre in 1922, after the height of the Decadent Movement had passed, Symons's portrayal of Shakespeare's Cleopatra as an unclean 'Egyptian plague' who forms an 'unsavoury alliance' with King Herod encapsulates 'every element of decadence'.²⁹ As Decadence was an elite movement, Decadent poets 'issued their works in precious editions whose print runs rarely ran to more than five hundred copies'.³⁰ While Wilde's and Symons's contemporaries were aware of their numerous publications because of their celebrity status, the majority of their peers could not afford to read their poetry because it was published in expensive limited-edition volumes. Wilde's *The Sphinx* exists as an intersection between exclusivity and inclusivity, as extracts of the poem were published by reviewers in periodicals across Britain, Europe, North America, and New Zealand, although only two hundred copies were officially produced. *The Sphinx*, *Cleopatra in Judæa*, and *Queen Mariamne* all possess a sense of exclusivity and secrecy, as they were published for a restricted audience.

²⁸ Russell M. Goldfarb, "Arthur Symons' Decadent Poetry", *Victorian Poetry*, 1.3 (1963), pp. 231-234 (pp. 231, 232). See also Russell M. Goldfarb, 'Late Victorian Decadence', *The Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism*, 20.4 (1962), pp. 369-373 (pp. 370, 372). See also, Karl Beckson and John M. Munro, 'Symons, Browning, and the Development of the Modern Aesthetic', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 10.4 (1970), pp. 687-699 (p. 690).

²⁹ Symons, 'Cleopatra in Judæa', p. 131.

³⁰ Bristow, p. 2.

In their rejection of mainstream conservative bourgeois ideals, Decadent artists explored their fascination with the amoral through the production of orientalisng poetry. As imperialist stereotypes depicted the orient as a space filled with ‘tyranny, cruelty, laziness, lust, technical backwardness, languid fatalism and cultural decadence’, the orient became the perfect apparatus for discussing perversity without concern for the moral state of society.³¹ Both Field and Symons set their verse dramas in Judæa instead of Egypt. Their Cleopatras chiefly communicate with Herod the Great, the Jewish king of the Herodian Kingdom of Judæa, who is primarily remembered as a tyrannical ruler who ordered the ‘Massacre of the Innocents’ to kill the infant Jesus. By exploring the relationship between the pagan Cleopatra and the Jewish Herod, Symons and Field investigate Decadence and degeneration at the intersection of paganism and monotheism.

In 1895, Max Nordau’s *Degeneration* (1892), which claimed that immorality and sin in industrial cities would lead to the growth of ‘deranged minds’, became ‘widely reviewed and debated’ after being translated from the original German.³² Nordau argued that Decadents are ‘degenerates’ with ‘stunted development’ who are ‘enemies of all institutions’ because ‘they cannot adapt themselves’ to respectable society.³³ In response to Nordau’s argument that all ‘men of genius were mad’, Oscar Wilde stated: “I quite agree with Dr. Nordau’s assertion that all men of genius are insane [...] but Dr. Nordau forgets that all sane people are idiots’.³⁴ Wilde’s response parodies Nordau’s rigid views on creativity, suggesting that genius and madness are intertwined, while ‘sane’ mediocrity is to be pitied. Like Nordau’s description of the Decadent artist, the Cleopatra of Decadent verse is an ‘ego-maniac’ ‘degenerate’ whose moral ineptitude causes ‘anarchy and the ruin of the community’.³⁵ Yet despite fitting into Nordau’s definition of the Decadent by being an enemy ‘of all institutues’, Cleopatra’s degeneracy grants her the power to

³¹ John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 46.

³² John Lucas, ‘Voices of Authority, Voices of Subversion: Poetry in the Late Nineteenth Century’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 280-301 (p. 293).

³³ Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (London: William Heinemann, 1898), p. 302.

³⁴ Quoted in Chris Healy, *Confessions of a Journalist* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1904), pp. 133-134.

³⁵ Nordau, p. 302.

corrupt and manipulate all who surround her, thus allowing her to play the part of the ‘genius’ while her enemies are reduced to ‘idiots’. As the Cleopatra of Decadent poetry can satisfy herself and strengthen her nation through lying, seducing, and manipulating, her immorality provides her with the strength to empower herself.

The Sphinx

In his poem *The Sphinx*, which is narrated by a young student who has an erotic relationship with a carved statue that sits ‘in a dim corner of [his] room’, Wilde emphasises Cleopatra’s link to selfish Decadent sexuality.³⁶ While Wilde’s Sphinx is from Egypt, aligning it with the male Egyptian sphinx who symbolises the benevolence and strength of the pharaoh, its personality mirrors that of the female Greek sphinx, notorious for cruelly devouring those who fail to solve her riddles. Speaking to the ‘grotesque’, ‘lovely’, ‘half woman and half animal’ creature of the poem’s title, the narrator asks the Sphinx questions about her life and her past sexual experiences. While contemplating ‘who’ the Sphinx ‘lure[d] unto [her] bed’, the narrator acknowledges that she stimulates in him ‘foul dreams of sensual life’, before turning away from her to his ‘crucifix’.³⁷ The 1894 limited edition of *The Sphinx* was published by Elkin Mathews and John Lane, the founders of the avant-garde Bodley Head. The finely decorated book featured illustrations by Charles Ricketts. On the front cover of the volume, Ricketts depicts the sphinx as a nude hybrid of a woman, a marble statue, and a predatory feline animal, with a downward-looking glare that dares the viewer to challenge her (Fig. 5.1). This mischievous-looking creature sits on a circle which I interpret as the clitoris, as the oval lines that surround the circle mimic female genitalia. Ricketts’s illustration of Wilde’s Sphinx highlights her as a fierce oriental creature who symbolises the potential and danger of eroticised female sexuality. As Wilde’s Sphinx exists in the intersection

³⁶ Oscar Wilde, *The Sphinx* (London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1894).

³⁷ Ibid.

between Greek and Egyptian, animal and human, masculine and feminine, voluptuary and deity, she occupies the same ill-defined binaries as Cleopatra. The similarities between Cleopatra and the Sphinx were also recognised by Michael Field and Victor Hugo. In *Zim-Zizimi Soudan d’Egypte* (1859), which was translated from French to English in 1888, Hugo called Cleopatra ‘the ninth sphinx’ who could murder all ‘mankind’ with her ‘peerless smile’ and ‘sweet odors’.³⁸ As Cleopatra and the Sphinx possessed the same Decadent allure, Wilde’s poem ultimately explores the immortal power of oriental women.

Just as Wilde’s Sphinx is an oriental, intelligent, sexually alluring, and beautiful other who is a *fin-de-siècle femme fatale*, so is Wilde’s Cleopatra. Inquiring about the Sphinx’s experiences, the narrator states:

O tell me, were you standing by when Isis to Osiris knelt!

And did you watch the Egyptian melt her union for Antony

And drink the jewel-drunken wine and bend her head in mimic awe

To see the huge proconsul draw the salted tunny from the brine!³⁹

These couplets present Isis and Cleopatra as the *femme idéale* and the *femme fatale*. While Isis kneels for Osiris out of respect, Cleopatra does so to ‘mimic awe’, thus using the allusion of flattery to ensnare Antony into a ‘union’ born from her immense wealth and scientific knowledge. Deceived by her feigned ‘awe’, Antony transforms from a ‘huge proconsul’, the epitome of masculinity, to a man who is no better than a fish merchant. Wilde’s brief reference to Cleopatra aligns her with the Sphinx, as they both use their knowledge and sexual allure to captivate and destroy their admirers to fulfil their carnal desires. Although Wilde’s reference to Cleopatra is brief, it aligns her with

³⁸ Victor Hugo, ‘The Soudan, The Sphinxes, The Cup, The Lamp’, in *The Works of Victor Hugo: Ninety-Three Poems* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1888), pp. 245-253 (pp. 252, 253).

³⁹ Wilde.

Swinburne's, Field's, and Symons's respective Cleopatras who all feign admiration to manipulate men into becoming their willing servants. Even though only a select readership would have had access to the entire poem, most periodicals featuring extracts from *The Sphinx* contained the couplets concerning Cleopatra. Readers who accessed the poem in *New-York Tribune*, *New Zealand Mail*, *New Zealand Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, and *Evening Post*, would have been presented with verse about the Sphinx and Cleopatra.⁴⁰ Excerpts from *The Sphinx* that appeared in periodicals are consistent with Swinburne's 'Cleopatra' (1866), which was widely circulated in *Cornhill Magazine*. Swinburne's Cleopatra is a 'beauty' who 'stings' and 'hath the histories of all time'.⁴¹ By describing Cleopatra as both a 'serpent' who 'bite[s]' and an omniscient being who is akin to a 'Goddess', Swinburne aligns Cleopatra with the all-knowing sphinx and the first biblical sinner, Eve.⁴² The notion that women can empower themselves through abandoning moral conventions and embracing their sensual allure suggests that degeneration can cause anarchy by uplifting women above men.

Wilde positions Cleopatra as a parallel to the Sphinx, portraying her as an embodiment of Decadent femininity that wields both allure and danger. As women from antiquity disrupt patriarchal structures, they imply that contemporary women can pursue autonomy and assert their independence at the expense of morality. While this thesis's chapter on short stories demonstrates that modern women sought to embolden themselves by imitating Cleopatra, they generally functioned within the guidelines of morality, apart from Egerton, who was aligned with the Decadent movement. This ultimately makes the Decadent portrayal of Cleopatra the most dangerous. While Wilde presents Cleopatra as a mercenary, Field portrays her as the embodiment of female evil.

⁴⁰ 'Literary Notes', *New-York Tribune*, 54.17409 (15 July 1894), p. 14. See also., 'By Scrutator', *New Zealand Mail*, 1171 (10 August 1894), p. 23. See also., 'Echoes of the Week', *New Zealand Times*, 56.2282 (11 August 1894), p. 5. See also., 'Literature: Books up to Date', *Daily Telegraph*, 4907 (28 July 1894), p. 9. See also., 'Mr. Oscar Wilde's New Book', *Evening Post*, 4935 (11 June 1894), p. 2.

⁴¹ Algernon Charles Swinburne, 'Cleopatra', *Cornhill Magazine*, 14.81 (September 1866), pp. 330-333 (pp. 331, 332).

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 331, 333.

Queen Mariamne

Bradley and Cooper's *Queen Mariamne* explores the potential of female power by portraying women's ability to subvert patriarchal control through the manipulation of powerful men. *Queen Mariamne* is a five-act closet drama that follows the 'beautiful' princess Mariamne, who is trapped in an unhappy marriage to Herod the Great, who has ordered her execution in the event of his death.⁴³ Grieving the murder of her brother and grandfather at the hands of her husband, Mariamne treats Herod with 'insolence and harshness'.⁴⁴ Despite ignoring him and refusing to be sexually intimate, Mariamne manipulates Herod into sparing her life by showing small doses of affection to subdue his bloodlust. The drama ends with Mariamne's execution after she is framed for attempting to poison Herod by his mother and sister, Cypros and Salome. Refusing to plea her innocence, Mariamne is executed and embalmed in a crystal-lidded sarcophagus. Despite being a minor character in the play, Cleopatra is responsible for Mariamne's execution and Herod's descent into madness, as she manipulates Herod, Salome, and Mariamne's mother, Alexandra, into destroying one another. Possessing no clear motive for her hatred of Herod and Mariamne, Cleopatra '*watches like a stone sphinx*' as she causes havoc and ruination for her own amusement.⁴⁵

Though Mariamne is the *femme idéale* and Cleopatra the *femme fatale*, both women wield power through similar means, differing only in their intentions. Cleopatra and Mariamne both employ intentional silence to maintain control. In Act One, Mariamne remains silent despite hearing Herod repeatedly call her name. She asserts that she 'will not give him pleasure' and instead '*stares fixedly in a mirror*' as she waits for her mother to 'deck' her with 'long chains' of pearl and amethyst.⁴⁶ Calling her name, Herod declares:

⁴³ Michael Field, *Queen Mariamne* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1908), p. 92.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 131.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 64.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 6, 8, 9.

A moment's absence tightens all my breath!

Mariamne! Mariamne!

How often I evoke her to the echo!

Mariamne! Very oft[.]⁴⁷

Parker notes that 'Mariamne's silence represents her refusal to capitulate to the desires of others'.⁴⁸ Her silence can be interpreted as not only a refusal to submit, but also a weapon to harm. Herod's claim that Mariamne's silence 'tightens [his] breath' suggests that her intentional quiet induces breathlessness that can be compared to drowning. When Mariamne finally speaks after Herod refers to his own 'death', she states 'There / is drowning. ... No,.'. The line break, the period after 'drowning' and the ellipses are all moments of silence that allow Mariamne to ration her speech even when replying to Herod, while her immediate thoughts of drowning suggest that she wants Herod to suffer the same fate he inflicted on her brother. By ignoring his calls 'very oft', Mariamne forces Herod to repeatedly experience a hopeless sinking feeling that eventually drives him to madness when she becomes silent through death; leaving Herod shouting 'Mariamne!'.⁴⁹ While Parker acknowledges the power of Mariamne's silence, she does not comment on Cleopatra's silence. In Act Two, Cleopatra '*sits on her throne*' as she examines treasures, claiming: 'I am / Isis, / Soothing her jewels with my hands'.⁵⁰ When Herod enters to 'petition' for 'a ship', Cleopatra remains '*silent*'.⁵¹ When she does speak, her speech is riddled with pauses:

Come, closer. ... All your secrets

Are cherished in my bosom. Alexandra

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁸ Sarah Parker, p. 97.

⁴⁹ Field, *Queen Mariamne*, p. 142.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 15.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 19.

Has wept me all your wrongs. ... Herod,
there are
Soft deaths that buoy our rule – a priest's,
my brother's –
Scarcely fifteen. And on your side a
priest,
Almost a brother, in the dawn of youth,
They say, has died from you. ...

Are you so angry?

Do not be angry! Hush!
Out of the clay of Nile our lotus-flower
Lifts a perfumed and mitred face.
Fear me not – can cover many sins.⁵²

In this passage, Cleopatra attempts to manipulate Herod into confessing his ‘sins’ by suggesting that she is his equal when it comes to the murder of ‘priests’ and ‘brothers’. The phrase ‘soft deaths that buoy our rule’ makes murder appear gentle while suggesting that monarchs are obligated to commit murder to expand their power, as to ‘buoy’ means to uplift. The short sentences, brief single-word lines, and use of punctuation (em dash, comma, full stop, and ellipsis) can be interpreted as moments of silence. Like Mariamne, Cleopatra deliberately relays her message to Herod in a manner that suggests great thought while forcing Herod to linger on her words. By employing silence as a method of manipulation, Cleopatra induces Herod to reveal his true nature, as not only does he become ‘angry’, but he makes the mistake of undermining her, stating: ‘I have / naught to fear / From women’s machinations or their wiles’, a mistake that causes Mariamne’s

⁵² Ibid., p. 23.

death and the loss of his sanity at the end of the drama.⁵³ Despite the dramatic verse never being performed, the visual, grammatical, and lyrical similarities between Mariamne and Cleopatra in their opening scenes would have been undeniable on stage, as both women are queens who adorn themselves while ignoring a man who demands their attention. Their ability to maintain their power by employing silence, rather than relying on privileges exclusive to queens, suggests that modern women may likewise wield quietness as a means to manipulate, harm, and control men.

Mariamne and Cleopatra's similarities suggest that women do not need to be instinctively good or beautiful to wield power. Antony's desire to please both Mariamne and Cleopatra demonstrates the influence they both possess. Speaking to Herod and Octavian, Antony appoints Herod as King of Judæa because a woman who is 'royal' and 'fairer / Than any breathing' deserves to have her 'arms round sovereignty'.⁵⁴ He continues:

See,
I have given you a realm to gild the pleasure
Of Mariamne ... and have seen your eyes
Travel in royal progress far away.
I know ... but, man, I have displeased a
queen,
Defied her letter: I must give her sugars
And incense to appease. ... Necessity
Shears you of Jericho.
[...]
She shall have six cities,

⁵³ Ibid., p. 24.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

Six? – Seven; two pearls from Persia – and

a letter!⁵⁵

The statement ‘I have given you a realm to gild the plea- / sure / Of Mariamne’ reinforces that Herod only has a standing with the Triumvir because of his relationship with Mariamne. Bradley and Cooper’s decision to split the word ‘pleasure’ into separate lines can be viewed as a gesture of disrespect towards Herod, who has to ‘plea’ for certainty (‘sure’). Herod’s power hinges on Mariamne’s beauty, making him entirely dependent on her to maintain control. Assured by her mother that men ‘love but beauty’, Mariamne disrespects Herod through silence because her beauty is ‘eternal’.⁵⁶ Therefore, both Herod’s and Mariamne’s power stems from the latter’s beauty, which sets her above other women. The power of beauty in *Queen Mariamne* can be linked to the Decadent movement’s appreciation of art, beauty, and pleasure over morality. In contrast to Mariamne, Cleopatra is ‘not fair’. Instead, her association with Isis, her status as ‘queen’, and her ‘haughtiness’ empower her.⁵⁷ By stating ‘I have displeased a / queen’, Antony expresses his fear of Cleopatra’s anger. By stumbling over his words and questioning himself – ‘she shall have six cities, / Six? – Seven’ – when considering how to appease Cleopatra, Antony expresses his fear of her. Antony is equally driven to ‘appease’ Cleopatra, as he is to ‘plea- / sure’ Mariamne. By giving Cleopatra cities to expand her empire, ‘pearls from Persia’, and ‘a letter’ which is suggestive of affection, Antony demonstrates that Cleopatra’s ability to induce fear and lust empowers her, in the same way that Mariamne’s beauty uplifts her. Both Mariamne’s and Cleopatra’s characters are testament to Bradley and Cooper’s desire to portray powerful women. In her analysis of *Queen Mariamne*, Molly Youngkin argues that ‘the Graeco-Italian qualities of Mariamne are privileged over the Egyptian qualities of Cleopatra’, as Bradley and Cooper present Cleopatra as ‘negative’.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 9.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 59.

⁵⁸ Molly Youngkin, *British Women Writers and the Reception of Ancient Egypt, 1840-1910* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 129.

Although Cleopatra is a ‘negative’ force, Bradley and Cooper’s diary entries reveal their ambiguous feelings toward her.⁵⁹ In 1895, Bradley and Cooper push back against Maud Cruttwell’s harsh assessment of Shakespeare’s Cleopatra as ‘simply disgustingly sexual and nothing else – show me a simple trace of intellect in her’.⁶⁰ In 1899, they state that all women should ‘experience love’, as ‘the inheritance of Eve, Cleopatra, Queen Mary, [and] Juliet’, and in 1904, they refer to the Cleopatra of ‘reality’ as a ‘disastrous little wretch’.⁶¹ The fact that they acknowledge Cleopatra’s destructive nature, but still recognise that ‘love’ is the ‘substance’ of her life, implies that they saw her as a complex and sympathetic figure, one whose allure and tragedy could not be reduced to mere sexuality or villainy.⁶² Just as Bradley and Cooper challenged Cruttwell’s assertion that women cannot be simultaneously beautiful, intelligent, and sexual, Mariamne’s gravest mistake is her belief that Cleopatra cannot be powerful because she is ‘not fair’. Refusing to ‘fear Queen Cleopatra’, Mariamne is ultimately executed due to Cleopatra’s poison.⁶³ Cleopatra is a menacing presence in *Queen Mariamne*, but her ability to manipulate men through fear and lust illustrates how female power can operate outside of traditional ideals of beauty or morality.

Described as a ‘stone sphinx’, the Cleopatra of *Queen Mariamne* is a hybrid of the sphinx of Greek mythology, a merciless murderer who enjoys playing games with her victims, and the sphinx of Wilde’s poem, a voluptuary predator. Before leaving Judæa, Cleopatra makes mutually exclusive deals with Salome and Alexandra. Speaking to Salome, Cleopatra claims that she loves Herod and despises Mariamne for her coldness towards him. Understanding that Herod is ‘sick’ for

⁵⁹ Molly Youngkin uses Bradley and Cooper’s diary entries to support her argument that the poets did not like Cleopatra because she was ‘simply disgustingly sexual and nothing else’. However, this appears to be a misreading, as this sentence is placed in quotations to reflect Maud Cruttwell’s opinions, not Bradley and Cooper’s beliefs.

⁶⁰ Michael Field, *Work and Day*, 46783 (30 April 1895) <https://michaelfielddiary.dartmouth.edu/page-view/8/136> [accessed 11 September 2024].

⁶¹ Michael Field, *Work and Day*, 46788 (13 April 1895) <<https://michaelfielddiary.dartmouth.edu/page-view/13/115>> [accessed 11 September 2024]. See also., Michael Field, *Work and Day*, 46793 (8 January 1904) <<https://michaelfielddiary.dartmouth.edu/page-view/18/16>> [accessed 11 September 2024].

⁶² Michael Field, *Work and Day*, 46793 (24 February 1904) <<https://michaelfielddiary.dartmouth.edu/page-view/18/76>> [accessed 23 September 2024].

⁶³ Field, *Queen Mariamne*, p. 55.

Mariamne's 'love', Cleopatra teaches Salome that she must make Herod 'loath' Mariamne, so that he 'strike[s]' 'her dead'.⁶⁴ She tells Salome:

Leave me; I have a word for her [Alexandra]

And kiss me,

For I am bent on Mariamne's death.

*[They kiss].*⁶⁵

By teaching Salome that the only way to remove Mariamne is through Herod, Cleopatra demonstrates that a woman's strongest tool is her manipulation of man within patriarchal structures. Shortly after, Cleopatra assures Alexandra of her 'vast abhorrence' for Herod, promising to 'kill' him for murdering her 'child'.⁶⁶ She states:

My soul is fastened on this deed,

Now kiss me,

For I am bent upon King Herod's death.

*[ALEXANDRA receives her kiss coldly].*⁶⁷

Cleopatra's dealings with Salome and Alexandra reveal her sharp insights into her foes' weaknesses. She knows Mariamne's downfall lies in her coldness toward Herod, Herod's in his infatuation with Mariamne, Salome in her jealousy of Mariamne and longing for Herod's affection, and Alexandra in her need to avenge her son's murder. Cleopatra exploits her enemies' weaknesses and desires, manipulating the Judaeans into self-destruction. By supplying Salome with poison after her suicide,

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 65, 66.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 67.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 68.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 68.

Cleopatra triggers Mariamne's execution, Herod's madness, and Alexandra's isolation. The similarities between 'And kiss me, / For I am bent on Mariamne's death' and 'Now kiss me, / For I am bent upon King Herod's death', suggest that Cleopatra has rehearsed her manipulation of Salome and Alexandra, framing the exchange as a game. Like Wilde's Sphinx, Cleopatra relies on her sexuality to toy with her victims. By demanding a 'kiss' from both women, Cleopatra pressures them into a homoerotic sexual act, as kissing embodies both platonic affection and sexual desire. The homoerotic undertones of the kiss are heightened by Salome's later description of Cleopatra's 'lips' as 'wonderful and perfumed', which suggest that she found the 'kiss' pleasurable.⁶⁸ As Cleopatra carries out her promise to 'kill Mariamne', Salome's deal with Cleopatra fulfils both her sexual and murderous desires. Beyond their 'highly sexual' relationship with each other, Bradley and Cooper were primarily 'attracted to men'.⁶⁹ Cleopatra's bisexuality and incestuous relationships (alluded to when she mentions her brother) align her with Bradley and Cooper, who saw themselves as 'poets and lovers'.⁷⁰ Cleopatra's manipulation of both men and women through her sexuality establishes her as a powerful and menacing figure. The Decadent movement celebrated homosexuality, with Wilde asserting that 'heterosexual love was inferior' because 'the need to produce children deprived women of a more exalted, transcendent, and non-purposeful love'.⁷¹ Cleopatra's lesbian encounters illustrate her use of 'non-purposeful' love for empowerment, as she employs calculated seduction and deceit to manipulate Salome and Alexandra. While Cleopatra's malevolence demonstrates how not to behave, it also represents a form of female empowerment that is evil, corrupt, and degenerate.

By portraying the vindictive character of Cleopatra as just as powerful as the pure Mariamne, Bradley and Cooper demonstrate that women do not need to be beautiful or caring to uplift themselves from the subjugation of men. Regardless of whether they abide by conservative

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 84.

⁶⁹ Thain, *Michael Field*, p. 48. See also Donoghue, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Donoghue, p. 1.

⁷¹ Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*, (London: Virago Press, 1992), p. 174.

bourgeoise values of morality, the women of *Queen Mariamne* empower themselves through scheming and manipulating. Concepts of female empowerment through amorality continue in Symons's *Cleopatra in Judaea*, where Cleopatra embodies Decadent ideology, using manipulation to dominate those around her.

Cleopatra in Judaea

In *Cleopatra in Judaea*, Symons transforms Shakespeare's Cleopatra, who he believed was 'the real Cleopatra [...] on the romantic stage', into the embodiment of Decadent ideology.⁷² In a critical essay on Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, published in 1889, Symons asserted that 'Cleopatra is [not only] the most wonderful of Shakespeare's women', 'but perhaps the most wonderful of women'.⁷³ Believing Cleopatra to be a 'tiger', a perfect 'union [...] of cruelty with voluptuousness', Symons admired Shakespeare's Cleopatra's ability to 'love with a passion' and tame 'with an infliction' 'the man who has conquered kingdoms'.⁷⁴ He extends this 'power' to the Cleopatra of his own drama, who 'alone hold[s] the man who holds the world'.⁷⁵ While Symons acknowledged that Shakespeare's play had a 'moral message', warning of the 'absolute abandonment of everything to the claims of love', he was attracted to Cleopatra's 'intense, [...] exacting, [...] oppressive and overwhelming passion' that was 'wholly of the senses'.⁷⁶ By describing Shakespeare's Cleopatra as a cruel, voluptuous, selfish woman who lives for the 'senses', Symons interpreted her as the embodiment of Decadent ideology, as she lived for the pursuit of transgressive love, beauty, and pleasure.⁷⁷ Based on Act 3, Scene 3 of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and set in 'the Palace of

⁷² Arthur Symons, 'Critical Remarks', in *The Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. by Henry Irving and Frank A. Marshall, vol. 6 (London: Blackie & Sons, 1889), pp. 119-124 (p. 120).

⁷³ Ibid., p. 119.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 122, 121.

⁷⁵ Symons, 'Cleopatra in Judaea', p. 146.

⁷⁶ Symons, 'Critical Remarks', p. 121.

⁷⁷ In the title page of *Cleopatra in Judaea*, Symons quotes *Antony and Cleopatra*, where Cleopatra declares: 'That Herod's head / I'll have: but how, when Antony is gone / Through whom I might command it?', suggesting that *Cleopatra in Judaea* was intended as an additional scene to Shakespeare's play. See., William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Washington Square Press, 1999), III. 3. 7.

King Herod in Jerusalem, the verse drama begins with Herod planning to ‘smite’ Cleopatra because she is ‘poison in [Antony’s] bones’ and progresses to Herod promising Cleopatra his friendship and loyalty.⁷⁸ Symons’s Cleopatra manipulates Herod into devotion by convincing him that Mariamne is an adulteress. Believing that Antony’s infatuation with Cleopatra is the only obstacle preventing him from murdering Herod and taking Mariamne, Herod becomes obsessed with protecting Cleopatra. As in *Queen Mariamne*, Cleopatra’s manipulation of Herod demonstrates that women can use their speech, sexuality, and insight into their enemy’s weaknesses to wield power over them. Cleopatra’s corruption of Herod suggests that female power can be asserted through abandoning morality and becoming the embodiment of Decadence.

Symons’s Cleopatra is also the personification of Nordau’s degenerate. The first words spoken are by Phaniel, a priest, who urges Herod to murder Cleopatra because she is a sinful plague that threatens the male body:

This queen, this concubine, this idolatress,
 This white tenth plague of Egypt, brother’s wife
 And sister killer, this insatiate leech
 And whore of all the Cæsars, this outspewed
 Unswallowable and deadly weed of God –[.]⁷⁹

According to the Abrahamic faiths, God unleashed ten plagues, such as disease befalling livestock, water turning into blood, and the death of firstborns, onto Egypt to convince Pharaoh to emancipate the Israelites from slavery. By referring to Cleopatra as the ‘white tenth plague of Egypt’, which represents the death of the firstborns, Phaniel implies that Cleopatra is a Macedonian coloniser that will plunge Judæa into darkness, just as she corrupted Egypt. As Herod

⁷⁸ Symons, ‘Critical Remarks’, pp. 125, 128.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 125.

is biblically infamous for the ‘massacre of the innocents’, Symons’s decision to compare Cleopatra to the tenth plague is notable, as it subtly implies that Cleopatra’s corrupting influence will lead to Herod’s decree to kill all male infants in Bethlehem. Phanuel’s description of Cleopatra as a ‘concubine’, idolatress’, ‘whore’, and ‘sister killer’ makes her the embodiment of Nordau’s degenerate, who prioritises instinctual pleasure over morality. Just as Nordau suggested that degenerates would cause the downfall of humanity by producing mentally and physically deformed children, Phanuel believes that Cleopatra will deplete Judæa like an ‘insatiate leech’. As a priest of an Abrahamic faith, Phanuel is the antithesis of Cleopatra, who represents an ancient pagan religion. When Herod vows to ‘make an end’ of Cleopatra, Phanuel prays:

The fire of heaven lick up
The Nile and all its vermin; winds of drought
Suck dry the Egyptian cisterns; may the dust
Of all the desert be heaped over her,
Because of whom Israel shall surely sin[.]⁸⁰

Phanuel’s wishes for Cleopatra, from wanting the ‘fire of heaven’ to eradicate the ‘Nile’ to having the ‘dust / Of all the desert [...] heaped over’ Cleopatra, mimic plagues. Just as the Abrahamic God helped Moses against Pharaoh, Phanuel’s prayers suggest that he wants God to aid the Israelites against Egypt before Cleopatra can make them ‘sin’. Despite confidently praying for Cleopatra’s downfall, Phanuel transforms into a coward in her presence. Once Cleopatra enters, Phanuel *‘comes forward with a pointing finger, and cries out at her’*:

See,

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 129.

The leprosy of beauty, the white sin
 Her idols are upon her, Ashtaroth
 Points with the horns of the white poisonous moon
 Upon her forehead, Baal is in her eyes.
 Beware of the accursed beauty!⁸¹

Astaroth and Baal are examples of pagan female deities that were transformed into male demons by the Abrahamic faith. The goddess Astaroth was originally worshipped as a symbol of fertility in the Levant, Mesopotamia, and Greece. Similarly, Baal was the ‘principal deity in the fertility cult of the Canaanites’ and an honorary name given to ‘lesser local gods in Syria and Palestine’, before becoming a Hebrew term for false deities.⁸² By comparing Cleopatra to Astaroth and Baal, Phaulstic suggests that while her ‘accursed beauty’ may make her appear like an ‘idol’ of fertility, she is the epitome of evil. The line, ‘Points with the horns of the white poisonous moon’, highlights Cleopatra’s feminine evil. Cleopatra’s cow horn crown, as worn by Constance Collier in Tree’s adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra* (Fig. 1.8), was sometimes mistaken for a crescent moon by the Greeks and Romans.⁸³ Additionally, the moon symbolised fertility due to its association with the Graeco-Roman goddess Selene, the goddess Astaroth – whom Milton described as ‘queen of heaven, with crescent horns’ in *Paradise Lost* (1667) – and the belief that its cycles mirrored women’s menstrual cycles.⁸⁴ By calling Cleopatra’s ‘moon’ ‘poisonous’, Phaulstic suggests that Cleopatra’s beauty and fertility is false and damning. Alongside themes of sinful evil – ‘Ashtaroth’, ‘Baal’, ‘idols’, ‘sin’, ‘horns’ ‘accursed’ – are motifs of disease. By calling Cleopatra a ‘white’ ‘poisonous’ ‘leprosy of beauty’, Phaulstic warns that Cleopatra will not only spiritually corrupt Judaea

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 132.

⁸² Richard Cavendish, *The Powers of Evil in Western Religion, Magic and Folk Belief* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 236, 237.

⁸³ Joyce Tyldesley, *Cleopatra: Last Queen of Egypt* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), p. 125.

⁸⁴ Cavendish, p. 237. See also., John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Robert Vaughan (New York: Belford, Clarke, 1886), p. 14.

through 'sin' but through physical degeneration. Through Phanuel's character, Symons transforms Cleopatra into the embodiment of feminine evil, whose power comes from her degenerate charms and beauty.

Although *Cleopatra in Judæa* is set in a patriarchal society, Symons subverts gender binaries by portraying Cleopatra as completely in control of her emotions, while the men around her are erratic, compulsive, and self-destructive. Watching Phanuel overcome with passion, Cleopatra 'gazes at him with a tranquil and mocking smile' and states:

Sir,

Mardian my eunuch shall attend on you.

Go, Mardian, comfort him; speak to him kindly,

Mardian.

[PHANUEL *rushes out past her with uplifted arms.*

She turns to HEROD.]

Your counsellors are women, by these tears[.]⁸⁵

Phanuel and Cleopatra's interaction is a clear inversion of gender binaries, as well as an inversion of morality. A man who represents a monotheist patriarchal faith is weak and emotional in contrast to a woman who represents feminine pagan deities. By sarcastically urging a eunuch, a castrated man, to 'kindly' 'comfort' Phanuel, Cleopatra symbolically emasculates him. Phanuel's outburst overshadow his dramatic but true warning against Cleopatra, as Herod cannot take him seriously when he acts like a woman. Cleopatra's calmness when dealing with Phanuel suggests that she is familiar with playing the masculine role in her interactions with men. During her manipulation of Herod, Cleopatra convinces him that she has 'greater power than any man', stating:

⁸⁵ Symons, 'Cleopatra in Judæa', p. 132.

Kings have cast their crowns
Into the dust, and kings that are my foes
I can take up into my hand and cast
Into the dust, for love of me. I am a woman,
But I have power greater than any man's[.]⁸⁶

The plural forms of the words 'king' and 'crown' highlights that Cleopatra has emasculated multiple powerful men by inducing them to willingly give up their power for her. By stating that these 'kings' 'cast their crowns / into the dust' 'for love of [her]', Cleopatra subtly alludes to Phaulcon's original warning that her 'accursed beauty' shall make 'Israel [...] sin'. By asserting that she is more powerful than kings, Cleopatra induces Herod to form an alliance with her not as a seductress but as a pharaoh. In contrast to Field's Cleopatra, who uses her feminine charms to pacify Herod, Symonds's Cleopatra refuses to undermine her strength in the presence of her 'foes'. From the very moment she enters the stage and ridicules Phaulcon, to the moment she states that she is 'worth a Caesar' at the end of the dramatic verse, Cleopatra occupies a masculine position of power.⁸⁷ The implication of her 'power' is that it comes at the expense of domineering men who are reduced to eunuchs in her presence. Nordau referred to 'the inversion of the healthy and natural relation between the sexes' as the 'perversion' of 'masochism'.⁸⁸ As the inversion of gender norms is a crucial element of the Decadent movement, representations of castrating female power symbolise the degeneration of society.

Symonds portrays Cleopatra's power over all men through her corruption of Herod. Speaking to his advisors, Herod refuses to 'beware of [Cleopatra]' because he has no 'fear of any

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 144.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 149.

⁸⁸ Nordau, p. 414.

woman's spells', not even one who has 'cast a spell on Antony'.⁸⁹ Just before Cleopatra enters, Herod makes it clear that he intends to kill her:

Wisdom or folly. This Egyptian plague
Has cumbered the sound earth too long. She is
The idol of the world's idolatry;
No heathen can resist her, for she has
The witchcraft of their gods; but as for me,
My trust is in the Lord God, he is the God
Of my own people, he is the Lord of Hosts.
I will rise up in the young strength of God
And smite this ancient evil, that has wrought
So much of all the evil of the world.⁹⁰

Building on Phaulcon's warnings against Cleopatra, Herod describes her as an 'Egyptian plague' that embodies all which is grotesque, corrupt, and impure. However, while Phaulcon believes that Cleopatra can make 'Israel [...] sin', Herod believes that she has power only over 'heathen[s]', and that his faith in God will protect him from her. By pledging to 'smite' Cleopatra's 'ancient evil' from the 'world', Herod paints himself as God's servant on earth. Herod's self-identification contrasts with historical representations of him as a corrupt, murderous, and selfish king. By aligning himself with the 'Lord God' and Cleopatra with 'the idol of the world's idolatry', Herod asserts that it is his duty to 'smite' her to prevent her from creating more 'evil' and degeneration in the 'world'. Herod's final speech before meeting Cleopatra contrasts heavily with his final speech before leaving her. Kissing 'the queen's hand' to 'seal' their 'friend[ship]', Herod asserts:

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 132, 130.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 131.

May the Queen live for ever! As for me,
What I may do to honour you I will;
What honour I shall do you presently
You shall not wait to hear. May the Queen live
For ever; let there be between us two
Peace, and a long farewell.⁹¹

The contrast between Herod's promise to 'smite' Cleopatra and his prayers that she will 'live for ever' demonstrate that Cleopatra has shifted his loyalties in one encounter. Before meeting Cleopatra, Herod refers to her as 'queen', with a lower-case 'q', but by the end of their discussion he refers to her as 'Queen' with a capital 'Q'. The capitalisation of 'Queen' demonstrates that Herod has elevated Cleopatra in his mind – even above Mariamne who he refers to as a lower-case 'queen'. In contrast to his earlier passages which all refer to 'the Lord God', Herod's final passage does not refer to 'God'. The absence of 'God' in Herod's mind suggests that, by elevating Cleopatra, he has severed his connection with his religion. Instead of worshipping the 'Lord of hosts', Herod now worships Cleopatra, for whose preservation he prays. The differences between Herod's two speeches make his claim that Cleopatra's 'witchcraft' can only affect heathens humorous, as he has been transformed into a pagan worshipping at her altar simply by speaking to her. As Cleopatra gained Herod's 'honour' by defaming Mariamne, she used Herod's love for his wife to subjugate him. Goldfarb notes that Symons's poetry is preoccupied with the Decadent topic of finding 'cleanliness in unclean things' and the 'sweetness of unsavoury alliances'.⁹² By corrupting Herod, Cleopatra also corrupts Mariamne's image, transforming her into an 'unclean thing' in his mind. The consequence of the unsavoury alliance between Herod and Cleopatra is

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 147.

⁹² Russell M. Goldfarb, 'Arthur Symons' Decadent Poetry', p. 233. See also., Russell M. Goldfarb, 'Late Victorian Decadence', p. 372.

that while Herod falls into madness and executes his wife, Cleopatra empowers herself against a man she views as a 'swine and carrion of a Jew'.⁹³ Cleopatra's ability to transform Herod, who is historically remembered as a corrupt king who committed the 'massacre of the innocents', into an even more corrupt, murderous, and godless man shows the extent of her degenerative power. This Cleopatra not only corrupts virtuous men but also worsens the nature of evil men.

Symons's Cleopatra is the embodiment of Decadence and degeneration as she is a beautiful, charming, domineering, amoral, and powerful woman who permanently corrupts and destroys all who oppose her. Cleopatra's ability to corrupt Herod by destabilising his moral centre and transforming him into the murderous tyrannical monster that he is remembered as, and portrayed as in *Queen Mariamne*, suggests that even a man of 'God' is not safe from the degenerative effects of a powerful woman who seeks pleasure over morality.

Pharaoh of Desire: Reclaiming Female Sensuality

In Mary Bayard Clarke's 'Cleopatra's Soliloquy' (1877; republished 1881, 1888, 1889, 1896, 1900), Julia Clinton Jones' 'Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra' (1889; republished 1896, 1900), and Martha Gilbert Dickinson Bianchi's 'To Cleopatra's Mummy' (1898), Cleopatra oscillates between a sensual woman, a powerful pharaoh, and a tragic lover. Although numerous poems about Cleopatra were published and republished at the *fin de siècle*, these works are distinct because they were produced by respectable American women who were unlikely to have published poetry about female sensuality had Cleopatra not been a transgressive, ubiquitous icon. The subversive nature of these poems can be seen in their publication history, as Clarke's 'husband would not let her publish ['Cleopatra's Soliloquy'] till she was over fifty years of age' and Jones initially released *Cleopatra* under her initials 'J. C. C.', although her earlier verse was released under her full name.⁹⁴

⁹³ Symons, 'Cleopatra in Judæa', p. 148.

⁹⁴ 'Questions and Answers', p. 394.

Clarke's and Jones's hesitation to publish their Cleopatra verse suggests that women poets still broke conventions by openly discussing female desire. American scholars have explored Cleopatra's impact on nineteenth-century culture primarily through race. Although Jones, Bianchi, and Clarke are American women, with Clarke being an active reporter for the confederacy during the Civil War, they all use Cleopatra as a tool to discuss female empowerment instead of racial politics. This demonstrates that, regardless of her racial ambiguity, American women were attracted to Cleopatra because she was a tool to discuss women's issues.

Clarke, Jones, and Bianchi were all educated white women who came from influential American families. Clarke was the daughter of Thomas Pollock Devereux, 'one of the largest slaveholders in North Carolina', Jones's was the granddaughter of De Witt Clinton who served as both a United States senator and as the mayor and governor of New York City, and Bianchi was the niece of the poet Emily Dickinson.⁹⁵ Despite being born into bourgeois families, all three women sought employment. In addition to being poets, Clarke was a frontline war correspondent, journalist, editor, and political commentator on women's rights, Jones was a teacher, and Bianchi was a novelist, editor, and biographer. Their decision to seek employment was transgressive, particularly for Clarke, who was ostracised from her community, which believed that 'the goal for [...] southern ladies was matrimony, not employment'.⁹⁶ Although Clarke's career tarnished her reputation, Giselle Roberts notes that her writing allowed her to preserve 'her elite sense of self by developing an identity separate from her roles as wife, mother, and mistress'.⁹⁷ Through their published works, Clarke, Jones, and Bianchi achieved financial independence. Clarke became the primary breadwinner in her marriage, while Jones's poetry permitted her to minimise debt after illness forced her to give up teaching.⁹⁸ By becoming public figures, they contributed to the

⁹⁵ Giselle Roberts, 'Live Your Own Life: The Family Papers of Mary Bayard Clarke, 1854-1886', *Civil War Book Review*, 5.4 (2003), p. 1.

⁹⁶ Terrell Armistead Crow and Mary Moulton Barden, 'The Papers of Mary Bayard Clarke', in *Live Your Own Life: The Family Papers of Mary Bayard Clarke, 1854-1886*, ed. by Terrell Armistead Crow and Mary Moulton Barden (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), pp. xxiii-lxii (p. xxvi).

⁹⁷ Roberts, p. 2.

⁹⁸ Julia Clinton Jones, 'Letter to Edward Floyd-Jones', *Berkeley Library Digital Collections*, 25 July 1876 <<https://digicoll.lib.berkeley.edu/record/278162?v=pdf&ln=en>> [accessed 12 September 2023].

advancement of women's rights. Bianchi's publications of Dickinson's poems showcased the skill of female writers while ensuring her aunt's 'posthumous fame'.⁹⁹ Clarke advocated strongly for women's education and employment, believing it crucial for women to achieve financial independence. Jones's dedications in *Our Roll of Honour* (1894) praised women who took public roles in society.¹⁰⁰ Bianchi and Clarke also had a transatlantic reach, as Clarke's translations of Victor Hugo's poems were republished in Britain, while Bianchi's poems were published in transatlantic periodicals including *Harper's Bazaar* and *Atlantic*.¹⁰¹ By forming public careers as writers, Clarke, Jones, and Bianchi rebelled against gender norms. Through writing sensual poetry, they challenged conservative bourgeois values. Their Cleopatra poems reveal that women could explore Decadent themes such as female sensuality, gender inversion, and decay without being accused of endorsing Decadent immoralities.

'Cleopatra's Soliloquy'

In Clarke's 'Cleopatra's Soliloquy', Cleopatra declares her absolute love for Antony, whom she would 'give all Egypt but once to feel [his] bliss', as she is overcome with 'jealous frenzy' at the thought of another woman experiencing the 'rapture' of 'his kiss'.¹⁰² The verse is riddled with repetition, as Cleopatra attempts to convince herself of Antony's devotion. Her concerns are put to rest when Antony returns to her during a 'tempest', choosing her over 'Caesar and his bride'.¹⁰³ The poem explores the relationship between love and power by presenting Cleopatra as a mighty queen whose only weakness is her longing for Antony, who is her equal. Clarke's letters reveal that

⁹⁹ Martha Dickinson Bianchi, *Emily Dickinson Face to Face: Unpublished Letters with Notes and Reminiscences* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1932), p. 49.

¹⁰⁰ Julia Clinton Jones, *Our Roll of Honour, or, Poems of the Revolution* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1894).

¹⁰¹ Mary Bayard Clarke published translations of Victor Hugo's poems under the pseudonym Tenella, which she was forced to use before her marriage due to her father's disapproval of her literary career. See, Tenella, 'Art and the People, from the French of Victor Hugo', *Southern Literary Messenger*, 32.5 (May 1861), pp. 329-334.

¹⁰² Mary Bayard Clarke, 'Cleopatra's Soliloquy', *Galaxy*, 25 vols (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1866-1878), XXIII (1877), pp. 506-507 (p. 506).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 506, 507.

she was a financially independent career woman who loved her husband despite his alcohol addiction, maintained scandalous friendships with intellectual men and exchanged ‘faintly flirtatious’ letters with publishers to have her poetry printed when she began writing under the pseudonym ‘Tenella’ as a young woman.¹⁰⁴ Elements of Clarke’s unconventional lifestyle can be seen in ‘Cleopatra’s Soliloquy’, as her Cleopatra desires love and companionship despite being powerful and independent.

In ‘Cleopatra’s Soliloquy’, Clarke presents sensual love as empowering by making ‘Eros’, the Greek god of erotic love, the only ‘god worshipped e’er by Egypt’s haughty queen’.¹⁰⁵ Speaking her thoughts aloud as if she is on the romantic stage, Cleopatra states:

O Antony! Antony! Antony! when in thy circling arms,
Shall I sacrifice to Eros my glorious woman’s charms,
And burn life’s sweetest incense before his sacred shrine
With the living fire that flashes from thine eyes into mine?
O when shall I feel thy kisses rain down upon my face,
As a queen of love and beauty, I lie in thine embrace
Melting-melting-melting, as a woman only can[.]¹⁰⁶

Cleopatra’s devotion to Eros suggests that she values sensual pleasure over feminine allure. In Antony’s absence, she misses his ‘circling arms’, his ‘embrace’, and his ‘kisses’ on her ‘face’ – all of which are physical sensations linked to lovemaking. The exclamation mark followed by the repetition of Antony’s name, ‘O Antony! Antony! Antony!’, highlights Cleopatra’s longing for him, whereas the repetition of ‘Melting-melting-melting’ suggests that she desires his body. ‘Melting’

¹⁰⁴ Terrel and Barden, p. xxxviii. See also., Mary Bayard Clarke, *Live Your Own Life: The Family Papers of Mary Bayard Clarke, 1854-1886*, ed. by Terrell Armistead Crow and Mary Moulton Barden (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), p. 56.

¹⁰⁵ Clarke, ‘Cleopatra’s Soliloquy’, p. 506.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

has two meanings: becoming liquefied by heat and experiencing strong tender emotions. The repetition of ‘melting’, alongside the hyphen merging the words, suggests that Cleopatra is recalling the orgasmic pleasure of her body merging with Antony’s in his embrace. Like Shakespeare and Jones, Clarke describes Cleopatra through imagery of ‘heat’ – such as ‘fire’, ‘brightens’, ‘warm’ – while defining Octavia as ‘cold’.¹⁰⁷ In her soliloquy, Cleopatra declares: ‘[Octavia’s] cold embrace but brightens the memory of mine’.¹⁰⁸ By stating that Antony is also filled with ‘fire’, Cleopatra frames their seduction as mutual, suggesting that she craves Antony’s body just as intensely as he craves hers. In the 1896 posthumous republication of ‘Cleopatra’s Soliloquy’ in *Bizarre Notes and Queries*, Cleopatra’s ‘O[s]’ have been changed to ‘Oh’, apart from the ‘O’ before ‘O Antony! Antony! Antony!’.¹⁰⁹ The distinction between a regretful ‘Oh’ filled with longing and an exclamative ‘O’ makes Cleopatra’s calling for Antony appear even more sexual, as it imitates an orgasmic ‘O’. As a worshipper of Eros, Clarke’s Cleopatra embodies female sensuality. As Antony fulfils her sexual desires, her relationship with him empowers her by satisfying her carnal needs.

Clarke emphasises the importance of women maintaining power by making Antony’s support of Cleopatra’s ‘queenly power’ nearly as important as his devotion to satisfying her carnal desires. Cleopatra continues:

When she’s a willing captive in the conquering arms of man,
 As he towers a god above her, and to yield is not defeat,
 For love can own no victor if love with love shall meet?
 I still have regal splendor, I still have queenly power,
 And-more than all-unfaded is woman’s glorious dower[.]¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 506, 507.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Mary Bayard Clarke, ‘Antony and Cleopatra’, *Bizarre Notes and Queries*, 14.4 (April 1896), pp. 81-82 (p. 81).

¹¹⁰ Clarke, ‘Cleopatra’s Soliloquy’, p. 506.

By calling herself ‘a willing captive in the conquering arms of man’ *because* ‘for love can own no victor if love with love shall meet’, Clarke’s Cleopatra uses the adjectives typically associated with Antony to suggest that passionate, violent, conquering love is empowering when ‘to yield is not defeat’. The verb ‘yield’ is a double entendre, as it can mean to willingly ‘provide’ and ‘produce’, as well as to give way to coercive arguments and demands. The gentle and aggressive definitions of ‘yield’ suggest that women do not have to degrade themselves by giving their love to a man. The theme of war – ‘captive’, ‘conquering’, ‘defeat’, ‘victor’ – contrasts heavily with Cleopatra’s assertion that ‘love’ does not need to subjugate women. In the 1877 publication of ‘Cleopatra’s Soliloquy’, the sentence ‘for love can own no victor if love with love shall meet’ ends with a question mark, whereas the 1896 republication ends with a full stop.¹¹¹ The full stop in the *fin-de-siècle* version conveys confidence, while the original suggests Cleopatra is seeking to reassure herself of the enduring nature of her love for Antony. The rhyming couplets that follow: ‘I still have regal splendor, I still have queenly power, / And-more than all un-faded is woman’s glorious dower’, are Cleopatra’s justification for viewing her sensual love as empowering, as despite being Antony’s ‘willing captive’, she maintains her wealth, authority, and ‘queenly power’. By rhyming the word ‘power’ with the noun ‘dower’ – an archaic term for dowry and a modern legal term referring to a widow’s ‘absolute right’ over a share of her husband’s property after his death – Cleopatra suggests that her relationship with Antony enriches her in both life and death.¹¹² Clark strongly believed that every woman who ‘works for payments’, should receive the same treatment in business ‘as if she were a man’.¹¹³ In ‘Woman North and South’ (1877), Clarke expressed hope that white southern women would adapt to the ‘social and domestic’ changes brought by the war, becoming more ‘self-supporting’.¹¹⁴ The article garnered attention across many states and was published in

¹¹¹ Ibid. See also, Clarke, ‘Antony and Cleopatra’, p. 81.

¹¹² David H. Bromfield, ‘Women and the Law of property in Early America’, *University of Michigan Law School*, 85.5 (1987), pp. 1109-1116 (p. 1114).

¹¹³ Mary Bayard Clarke, 25 December 1881, quoted in ‘The Papers of Mary Bayard Clarke’, in *Live Your Own Life: The Family Papers of Mary Bayard Clarke, 1854-1886*, ed. by Terrell Armistead Crow and Mary Moulton Barden (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), pp. xxiii-lxii (pp. l, li).

¹¹⁴ Mary Bayard Clarke, ‘Woman North and South’, *Current Thought*, 1.1 (October 1877), p. 1.

the same year as 'Cleopatra's Soliloquy', highlighting Clarke's advocacy for women's education and employment rights in both her political commentary and poetry. Just as Clarke urged southern women not to view literary, artistic, or social endeavours as a 'monstrosity' that would isolate them from marriage and motherhood, her Cleopatra demonstrates that women of status and intelligence can simultaneously navigate love, sensual pleasure, financial independence, and political influence.¹¹⁵

Although Clarke's Cleopatra insists that she would 'give all Egypt but to feel [Antony's] bliss', the poem's constant references to Rome suggest that her desire to possess Antony is partly driven by her ambition to expand her empire. Overcome with 'jealous frenzy', Cleopatra states:

'T was not for love he sought her, but for her princely dower;
She brought him Caesar's friendship, she brought him kingly power.
I should have bid him take her, had he my counsel sought.
I've but to smile upon him, and all her charms are naught;
For I would scorn to hold him by but a single hair,
Save his own longing for me when I'm no longer there;
And I will show you, Roman, that for one kiss from me
Wife-fame-and even honor, to him shall nothing be!¹¹⁶

As Cleopatra believes that 'Love's nectar' is 'sweeter when tasted on [her] lips', her insistence that she would have 'bid' Antony to marry Octavia for 'dower' and 'power' can be interpreted as a form of male prostitution.¹¹⁷ However, the phrase 'had he my counsel sought' sounds scathing, revealing Cleopatra's frustration that Antony married Octavia without her consent. Like Shakespeare's Cleopatra when she discovers Antony's betrayal, Clarke's Cleopatra is torn between grief, anger,

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Clarke, 'Cleopatra's Soliloquy', p. 507.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

and the comforting belief that she *will* win him back. Her direct address to Caesar, the ‘Roman’, can be viewed as a threat to possess Antony, along with his newfound ‘princely dower’ and ‘kingly power’. By asserting that she will make Antony abandon ‘wife’, ‘fame’, and ‘honor’, Cleopatra warns that her love can transform Antony into a Decadent man who lives for the pursuit of pleasure. When Antony finally arrives, Cleopatra exclaims:

He comes upon the tempest to calm my jealous fears;

He comes upon the tempest in answer to my call.

Wife-fame-and even honor – for me he leaves them all;

And royally I’ll welcome my lover to my side.

I have won him – I have won him from Caesar and his bride.¹¹⁸

The repeated phrases, ‘he comes upon the tempest to calm my jealous fears’ and ‘he comes upon the tempest in answer to my call’, link to Clarke’s use of the tempest as both a physical storm and a pathetic fallacy reflecting the turbulent ‘storm’ in Cleopatra’s mind. By arriving ‘upon the tempest’, Antony satisfies Cleopatra in two ways: he demonstrates his devotion by responding to her ‘call’ despite the perilous storm, and he alleviates her self-doubt and ‘jealous fears’. The repetition of the phrase, ‘wife-fame-and even honor’, shows that Cleopatra’s threat to Octavia has actualised. The final sentence of the poem – ‘I have won him – I have won him from Caesar and his bride’ – illustrates that Clarke’s theme of war throughout ‘Cleopatra’s Soliloquy’ refers to Cleopatra’s battle with Octavia and Octavian, with Antony as the prize. Cleopatra’s possession of Antony empowers her in multiple ways: it fulfils her sexual desires, allows her to maintain her power, and solidifies her empire. By winning Antony through her sensual charms, Cleopatra triumphs over Rome.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

‘Cleopatra’s Soliloquy’ portrays the internal conflict Cleopatra faces as she strives to retain her power as pharaoh while satisfying her emotional and physical desires. By winning Antony from Octavia, Cleopatra demonstrates how a woman born into power can use her charm to maintain control, defy societal norms, and assert dominance in both love and politics. Although Cleopatra’s position as queen is unique, her actions suggest that even women outside royalty can harness their beauty and charisma to achieve influence. Similarly, Jones’s *Cleopatra* illustrates that women are capable of surpassing men through their innate charm and beauty, suggesting that female empowerment extends beyond social status.

‘Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra’

Like Clarke and Symons, Jones builds on Shakespeare’s imaginings of Cleopatra as the ‘serpent of old Nile’ to explore the power, danger, and allure of female sensuality.¹¹⁹ In the preface of her brochure *Cleopatra*, Jones states that the ‘haughty Eastern syren’ used the ‘splendour of her beauty’ to captivate Antony, who, ‘fascinated by her charms, forgot his ambition and became her willing slave’.¹²⁰ In ‘Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra’, Cleopatra travels to Tarsus to meet the ‘proud’ and ‘victorious’ Antony to address the ‘conspiracy’ that she has committed ‘treason’ against Rome. Knowing that her opponent has ‘triumphed over all’, Cleopatra prays to ‘Isis and Osiris’, drapes herself with ‘gauze’ that reveals her ‘voluptuous’ ‘curves’, and surrounds herself with the ‘sweeping [...] sound of melody’ and ‘rare fragrance of burnt incense, to ‘measure with the Consul [her] smile against his sword’.¹²¹ The poem closely follows Shakespeare’s description of the couple’s meeting in Act 2, Scene 2, Alma-Tadema’s *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra*, and the opening of Sardou’s *Cléopâtre*. However, while Alma-Tadema’s account is purely visual and Shakespeare’s narrative is related by the Roman Enobarbus, Jones’s version provides insight into Cleopatra’s psyche as she

¹¹⁹ Shakespeare, I. 5. 22.

¹²⁰ Julia Clinton Jones, *Cleopatra* (San Francisco: The Bancroft Company, 1889).

¹²¹ Jones, ‘Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra’, in *Cleopatra*.

prepares to use her 'eyelids to subjugate the world'.¹²² In 'Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra', Jones's Cleopatra is compelled by beauty, pleasure, love, and power.

Jones uses the theme of battle to explore the power struggle between Antony and Cleopatra. While Cleopatra acknowledges that Antony 'glow[s]' 'with pride of conquest', she urges her enemies to remember that she has 'Ptolemy's great name' and 'proud blood'.

What wonder, them, forgetting that I, of Pharaoh's line,
Unconquered monarch, reigned by right yet more divine –
By right of woman's beauty, than crown far higher power!¹²³

By portraying Antony as the world's conqueror and Cleopatra as the 'unconquered', Jones depicts the meeting at Tarsus as a clash between two of the greatest powers of antiquity. While Antony represents the West as a 'proud Roman', Cleopatra embodies the East as a Ptolemy. As Jones's Cleopatra prays at the 'altars' of 'Apis', 'Nilus', 'Typhon', 'Isis', and 'Osiris' before travelling to Tarsus, she views her 'divine' blood as a source of empowerment. Like Shakespeare's, Sardou's, and Alma-Tadema's Cleopatras, who possess Greek and Egyptian ancestry, the Latinisation of the Egyptian names 'Nilus' and 'Typhon' complicate Jones's Cleopatra's racial identity. Despite her racial hybridity, Cleopatra emphasises her royal Egyptian lineage, divine connection, and beauty in her stream of consciousness. By highlighting these attributes, she asserts that her heritage, divine associations, and attractiveness grant her power, posing a significant threat to Antony's physical strength and armies. Cleopatra's 'beauty' and 'the radiance of her smile' prove to be superior, as Antony 'bow[s] [...] down to' to her.¹²⁴ When Cleopatra is certain of her victory, she aligns Antony with the West by calling him 'the head of the Triumvirs, he proudest of the three', and herself with the East by referring to herself as 'Enchantress of the Nile!'. By subjugating Antony, Cleopatra

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

subjugates Rome and proves that her Eastern sensuality is stronger than his Western pride. Just as Jones's poem begins with Cleopatra's acknowledgment that Antony has 'triumphed over all', it ends with her triumphing over him:

Till he, who came to conquer, lay conquered by my side –
Gave up for Cleopatra, the world, his fame, his bride,
Of all my glorious triumphs, this shall the lustre dim;
He, Latium's conquering Consul – *I*, conqueror of him!¹²⁵

Just as Symons's Cleopatra admits that she 'serve[s] [Antony] for his pleasure, not his good', and Clarke's Cleopatra rejoices that she has made Antony leave 'wife-fame-and even honor', Jones's Cleopatra celebrates that Antony has given up 'the world, his fame, his bride'.¹²⁶ In all these poems, Cleopatra's victory over Antony comes at the cost of his autonomy and pride, transforming him from an honourable man into a decadent degenerate who lives only for pleasure. The italicisation of the possessive '*I*' in the final line consolidates Cleopatra's power, showing that her beauty and sensuality have enabled her to conquer the world's conqueror, empowering herself through his defeat.

Like Clarke, Jones presents Cleopatra's sensuality as her greatest strength in her battle with Antony. Understanding that her 'kiss alone could tame' this 'impetuous soldier', Cleopatra drains his 'honor' with her 'love'.¹²⁷ Describing how they 'lay [...] steeped in pleasure', Cleopatra states:

Within his arms he held me, and feasted on my lip;
Draining Love's sweet elixir, I sank in his embrace;
Then with moist lips half-parted, I gazed upon his face!

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Symons, *Cleopatra in Judaea*, p. 136.

¹²⁷ Jones, 'Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra', in *Cleopatra*.

Lips breaking into laughter, blood-red with passion's fire,
Now, curved with scornful triumph – no, warm with strong desire;
Laughing that Roma's proudest lay captive in my arms,
Reveling in the lover won by a woman's charms[.]¹²⁸

Jones's repeated references to 'lips' illustrate the depth of Antony's subjugation. By indulging him with the 'sweet elixir' of her lips, Cleopatra encourages him to forsake his 'honor'. The phrase 'moist lips half parted' can be interpreted as a metaphor for her vulva, suggesting that she lures him into a life of decadence through sensual pleasure. Finally, the 'scornful triumph' of Cleopatra's lips demonstrates her conscious enjoyment in disempowering her enemy. This passage is both vindictive and indulgent, as Cleopatra revels in sensual pleasure and takes pride in capturing 'Roma's proudest'. There is a distinct difference between Clarke's use of 'captive' to describe Cleopatra, and Jones's use of the term for Antony. Clarke's Cleopatra maintains her autonomy as a 'willing captive', while Jones's Antony loses everything. By disempowering Antony through her sexuality, Jones's Cleopatra empowers herself by draining her lover, much like Haggard's vampiric queen.

Jones portrays Cleopatra as an oriental woman who maintains her authority while indulging in sensual pleasure. By emphasising Cleopatra's divine heritage and seductive power, Jones highlights her capacity to dominate both Antony and Rome, thus overturning traditional power structures. This representation demonstrates that Cleopatra's allure is a potent weapon in her political arsenal. Ultimately, Jones elevates Cleopatra from queen to a symbol of irresistible, transcendent power, celebrating eastern sensuality over western pride. In contrast, Bianchi's 'To Cleopatra's Mummy' examines the consequences of Cleopatra's pursuit of power and pleasure.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

'To Cleopatra's Mummy'

In Bianchi's 'To Cleopatra's Mummy', an omniscient narrator reflects on how the infamous queen, who crafted her 'legends of passion' in 'pain', has been reduced to a 'shrunk' object in the British Museum.¹²⁹ At the *fin de siècle*, short-form lyric poems gained popularity after they were popularised by French literature.¹³⁰ Thain notes that these compact poems were 'often humorous, debunking', and 'satiric'.¹³¹ Bianchi's depiction of Cleopatra's deformed corpse is satirical and debunks the myth that Cleopatra became empowered through death. Instead, 'To Cleopatra's Mummy' suggests that Cleopatra's life of pleasure and cruelty has turned her corpse into a symbol of sin and degeneracy.

In 'To Cleopatra's Mummy', Bianchi creates a disconnect between the power of Shakespeare's Cleopatra and the mummified remains of a woman called Cleopatra in the 'British Museum' (while the body is not that of Cleopatra VII, the poetic persona treats it as such).¹³² The first line of the poem, 'BEAUTY deceitful and favor vain', suggests that Cleopatra's power came from her physical appearance, which allowed her to manipulate her victims into believing that she admired them, much like Wilde's Cleopatra.¹³³ In contrast to Bianchi's description of Cleopatra's 'BEAUTY' is her account of Cleopatra's mummy as a 'twisted sack of bones'. The questions that run throughout the poem – 'Be these the mangled wages of sin?', 'Did the tiger crouch in this shrunk frame?', 'No haughtier fate for a storied name?', and 'From Antony's pillow to Death's grim arms?' – suggest that the narrator struggles to connect Cleopatra's mummy with the woman of 'Legends'.¹³⁴ As Cleopatra's power came from her beauty, the 'twisted' appearance of her mummy disempowers her, as she is no longer a 'sultry' seductress. The narrator's questions highlight Cleopatra's disempowerment, as she is subjected to scrutiny and observation without the

¹²⁹ Martha Gilbert Dickinson Bianchi, 'To Cleopatra's Mummy', *Atlantic*, 81.325 (March 1898), p. 365.

¹³⁰ Thain, 'Poetry', p. 223.

¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 223, 234, 235.

¹³² Bianchi, 'To Cleopatra's Mummy', p. 365.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

power to respond, leaving the narrator in full control. Instead of being a threat, Cleopatra's mummy is an object on display, meant to be possessed, viewed, and enjoyed. Just as the poem began with a reference to the power of Cleopatra's beauty, it ends with a reference to her disempowerment through the mention of the catalogue “‘number six thousand eight hundred and seven’!”. Number ‘6807’ resembles ‘6707’, the object number for the mummy of Cleopatra of Thebes, a seventeen-year-old girl who died over a century before Cleopatra VII's birth, a detail likely altered in the poem purely for the sake of maintaining a regular metre.¹³⁵ By naming the British Museum and providing a catalogue number similar to that of another Cleopatra, Bianchi gives legitimacy to her imaginings, transforming her poem from fiction to pseudo-history. By losing her beauty in death, Bianchi's Cleopatra is transformed from a powerful woman into an artefact owned and displayed by the British Museum. The satire of Cleopatra's objectification is that even one of the most powerful women in history has been transformed into a vulnerable entity owned by a western institution.

Bianchi's poetic persona further disempowers Cleopatra by transforming her from a ‘tigress’ into the embodiment of degeneration.¹³⁶ ‘To Cleopatra's Mummy’ oscillates between descriptions of Cleopatra's sinful life and degeneration in death. Bianchi writes:

Do dreams recall her those poisoned slaves,
Whose torment instructed her sultry charms
To walk seductive the way of graves
From Antony's pillow to Death's grim arms?

Stolid she turns but a crumbling ear;

She who was more than a Pagan's heaven!

¹³⁵ ‘Human Mummy’, *British Museum*, [n.d.], https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA6707 [accessed: 18 December 2023].

¹³⁶ Jones, *Cleopatra*.

The lines ‘to walk seductive the way of graves / From Antony’s pillow to Death’s grim arms’ highlight that Cleopatra lived a life of cruelty, violence, and sensual pleasure. However, by specifically asking if Cleopatra ‘recall[s]’ the ‘poisoned slaves’ instead of the pleasure of ‘Antony’s pillow’, the narrator suggests that Cleopatra’s cruelty has followed her into death. By portraying Cleopatra as entirely self-serving, Bianchi aligns her queen with Hugo’s and Gautier’s representations of Cleopatra as a sinful oriental woman, a portrayal that was popular among the Decadent movement. The references to destruction and decay – ‘crumbling’, ‘Ichabod’ ‘moulders’ – show the true extent of Cleopatra’s degeneration.¹³⁸ Nordau argued that ‘degeneracy’ ‘begets degenerate descendants who, if they remain exposed to the same influences, rapidly descend to the lowest degree of degeneracy’, as they mentally and physically become a ‘repulsive mixture of incompleteness and decay’.¹³⁹ While physical degeneration through death differs from Nordau’s concept of degeneration, which focuses on a hereditary and moral decline, Bianchi’s portrayal can still be linked to Nordau’s ideas in a metaphorical sense. The decay of Cleopatra’s beauty and power serves as a symbolic reflection of her moral corruption, illustrating how a life of excess and sin leads to inevitable downfall. By contrasting Cleopatra’s former grandeur with her final state of decay, Bianchi aligns her fate with the broader anxieties of degeneration, as death transforms Cleopatra from a powerful, dangerous seductress into an unthreatening, inanimate, distorted corpse who is left only with her sins. The narrator of ‘To Cleopatra’s Mummy’ ultimately warns of the consequences of a decadent lifestyle by making Cleopatra’s mummy a vessel of sin, suffering, and regret.

¹³⁷ Bianchi, ‘To Cleopatra’s Mummy’, p. 365.

¹³⁸ The word ‘Ichabod’ is associated with moral decline. In the Bible, the priest Phinehas’s wife gave birth prematurely after she learnt that the Philistines had won the Ark of the Covenant, the most sacred religious relic of the Israelites, in the battle of Eben-Ezer. Overcome with grief, she named her son ‘Ichabod’, which means without glory, to highlight that ‘glory has been exiled from Israel’. See, Timothy D. Finlay, *The Birth Report Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), p. 158.

¹³⁹ Nordau, pp. 34, 36.

Bianchi's 'To Cleopatra's Mummy' starkly contrasts the mythic allure of Cleopatra with the reality of her preserved remains, reflecting on her transformation into an object of fascination rather than reverence. The poem's satirical tone and its allusions to degeneracy expose the disconnect between Cleopatra's legendary seduction and her morphed, degraded state, underscoring the ephemeral nature of beauty and power. By evoking themes of sin and decay, Bianchi critiques not only Cleopatra's fall from grandeur but also academic institutions' tendency to objectify and trivialise history. The poem serves as a poignant commentary on how historical figures are reshaped by the narratives and institutions that claim to preserve them.

Between Love and Power: Cleopatra in Poetry and Art

Alice MacKay's 'Antony to Cleopatra' (1896) and Arthur Buckland's accompanying illustrations in *Pall Mall Magazine* present Cleopatra as a complex tragic heroine, blending sweetness, sensuality, and power.¹⁴⁰ MacKay's verse explores Antony's unwavering devotion as he dies beside her, while Buckland's archaeologically inspired setting – complete with animal skins and Egyptian costumes – highlights her pharaonic power (Fig. 5.2 and Fig. 5.3). Buckland's focus on Cleopatra's regal authority allows her to be seen as more than a grieving lover. MacKay even praises Buckland's artwork in her volume of collected poetry, *Song of the London Man* (1906), as 'beautiful and appropriate', affirming the portrayal of a powerful, hedonistic Cleopatra.¹⁴¹ While MacKay's verse alludes to Cleopatra's power by calling her a 'Queen divinely moulded', Buckland's illustrations amplify her authority, transcending Antony's romanticised lens.¹⁴² Together, their work challenges traditional notions of femininity, showing that influential women can embody sweetness, compassion, and love while also wielding masculine power.

¹⁴⁰ Alice Dacre Mackay, 'Antony to Cleopatra', *Pall Mall Magazine*, 9.37 (May 1896), pp. 76-79.

¹⁴¹ Alice Dacre Mackay, 'Antony to Cleopatra', in *Song of the London Man, Song of South Africa, and other Poems* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1906), pp. 17-19 (p.19).

¹⁴² MacKay, 'Antony to Cleopatra', *Pall Mall Magazine*, p. 77.

In *The Renaissance*, Pater states that the ‘constitute elements of the composition’ of ‘poetry and painting’ are ‘wielded together’, as both artforms are ‘a matter of pure perception’ as they strike ‘the eye or the ear only’.¹⁴³ Because of their appeal to the senses, poetry and art were perceived as interconnected, especially by members of the Decadent movement who respected Pater’s ideology that art forms should ‘become a matter of pure perception’ and ‘independent of [...] mere intelligence’.¹⁴⁴ Following Pater’s teachings, Field’s ekphrastic collection of poetry, *Sight and Song* (1892), was produced after the women visited art galleries across Europe. Similarly, Clarke is reported to have written ‘Cleopatra’s Soliloquy’ after she saw a painting of a ‘star-eyed Egyptian’ on exhibition in New Orleans, and MacKay was inspired by Henry Holiday’s oil painting *Dante and Beatrice* (1883) to write ‘On a Picture of Dante and Beatrice’ (1897).¹⁴⁵ Story not only produced a world-famous sculpture of *Cleopatra* (1858-1860), but three poems inspired by her: ‘The Confessional’ (1855), ‘Cleopatra’ (1865; republished 1886), and ‘Marcus Antonius’ (1868). Poems and visual culture complemented each other, offering nuanced interpretations of the same subject instead of exact reproductions. For example, George Layard noted that Swinburne’s ‘Cleopatra’ poem evoked ‘mystery’ because it was not an exact replica of Frederick Sandys’s wood engraving, ‘Cleopatra’ (1862-1866).¹⁴⁶ Just as Swinburne’s popular poem diverged from the engraving it was commissioned to emulate, there are significant differences between MacKay’s poem and Buckland’s illustrations, as Buckland builds on MacKay’s verse by presenting Cleopatra as a powerful and fearsome presence, even in her love for Antony.

MacKay’s semi-autobiographical poetry frequently delved into her personal desires and fantasies. For instance, in ‘Remembrance’ and ‘Sonnet to Life’, she expressed regret over her lack of formal education, as she ‘*craved to sit with knowledge*’.¹⁴⁷ Like Egerton, MacKay fantasised about

¹⁴³ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (New York: The Modern Library, 1873), p. 114.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ ‘Questions and Answers’, p. 394. See also, Alice Dacre MacKay, ‘On a Picture of Dante and Beatrice’, *Argosy*, 64 (October 1897), pp. 503-504.

¹⁴⁶ George Somes Layard, ‘Swinburne, Sandys, and Tennyson’, *Sphere*, 37.488 (29 May 1909), p. 182.

¹⁴⁷ Alice Dacre MacKay, ‘Sonnet to Life’, in *Song of the London Man, Song of South Africa, and other Poems* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1906), p. 212.

being an empowered woman in antiquity. In 'A Phantasy of Reincarnation', she imagines herself as an Egyptian princess in a past life, achieving her desires for 'pleasure' and 'knowledge' by finding a 'venerable' 'master' who was a 'pupil of great Zoroaster'.¹⁴⁸ MacKay married a 'brilliant intellect' who promised her 'every opportunity of devoting [herself] seriously to poetry and literature' after he sought her out because he was moved by the 'great pathos' of 'Antony and Cleopatra'.¹⁴⁹ Despite her husband falling ill shortly after their wedding, MacKay's poems reveal her deep love for him. In 'Remembrance', she recounts how her 'bridal days were fraught, / for death had marked the bridegroom', and she could 'not save' him as he entered '*Nothingness where matters nought!*'.¹⁵⁰ In 'To the Beloved Dead', she kisses her lover and wishes that he could remain alive despite his 'cursed' existence.¹⁵¹ The dedications in her poems to her husband resemble 'Antony to Cleopatra', where Antony prepares to enter the 'realms of Nothingness ere thy last kiss'.¹⁵² Evidently, MacKay viewed antiquity as a realm of knowledge and pleasure, which contributed to her favourable portrayal of Cleopatra. This contrasts with other poems from Antony's perspective, where his love clearly signifies his emasculation. MacKay's poem depicts a queen who is deeply devoted and faithful to her lover, while Buckland's illustrations introduce an additional layer of meaning by emphasising Cleopatra's sovereign authority. I contend that, rather than mimicking each other, the poem and illustration offer different interpretations of the same woman. When viewed together, they create a composite portrayal of Cleopatra that is distinct from either representation alone.

Buckland's illustration of Cleopatra with her handmaidens, a scene absent in the poem, emphasises Cleopatra's seductive influence even amid mourning (Fig. 5.2). This artwork introduces the poem by presenting Cleopatra reclining as two attendants fan her with ostrich feathers while a

¹⁴⁸ Alice Dacre MacKay, 'A Phantasy of Reincarnation', in *Song of the London Man, Song of South Africa, and other Poems* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1906), pp. 89-107 (p. 95).

¹⁴⁹ Alice Dacre MacKay, 'Preface', in *Song of the London Man, Song of South Africa, and other Poems* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1906), pp. vii-xvii (p. xii). See also, MacKay 'Antony to Cleopatra', in *Song of the London Man*, p. 18.

¹⁵⁰ Alice Dacre MacKay, 'Remembrance', in *Song of the London Man, Song of South Africa, and other Poems* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1906), pp. 204-205 (p. 205).

¹⁵¹ Alice Dacre MacKay, 'To the Beloved Dead', in *Song of the London Man, Song of South Africa, and other Poems* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1906), pp. 206-211 (p. 208).

¹⁵² MacKay, 'Antony to Cleopatra', *Pall Mall Magazine*, p. 79.

third plays the harp. Cleopatra's downcast eyes and the dark shadows beneath them, as well as on the tip of her nose and cheeks suggest that she has been crying. Her attendants, with downturned eyes, solemn expressions, and arched backs, convey a shared sense of grief. As explored in this thesis's chapters on theatre and oil paintings, race was predominantly understood as visual in the nineteenth century. Therefore, Buckland's illustration inevitably racializes MacKay's Cleopatra through her association with brown-skinned attendants. The body language and facial expressions of Cleopatra and her attendants imply they are engulfed in sorrow, yet the tiger skin alludes to Cleopatra's dangerous sensuality. As surveyed in the chapters on theatre, novels, and oil paintings, oriental feline skins in nineteenth-century art symbolise women's primal 'aggressive sexuality' and 'bestial needs', a notion reflected in John Collier's depiction of Cleopatra's corpse on a tiger-skin rug (Fig. 0.4).¹⁵³ In Buckland's illustration, light illuminates both Cleopatra and the tiger skin, with the two figures centred and aligned. Cleopatra appears solemn, but the tiger's fierce glare, downturned lips, and sharp white teeth emphasise its potential to bite, reminiscent of Shakespeare's Cleopatra. The presence of the tiger skin suggests that, despite her sadness, Buckland's Cleopatra remains a dangerously voluptuous and pleasure-seeking woman. Poetic references to Cleopatra also link her to tigers. Jones describes Cleopatra as a 'fettered tigress', while Story's eponymous 'Cleopatra' wishes that, instead of living a 'weak human life', she was a ferocious animal, making love with her mate and tearing her victims 'limb from limb' to drink 'their blood'.¹⁵⁴ Buckland's drawing could easily be used to illustrate Jones's 'Death of Cleopatra', where Cleopatra's intoxicating 'Love' for Antony is described alongside her hatred of Rome and refusal to be 'a queen undone, discrowned'.¹⁵⁵ While 'Antony to Cleopatra' presents a romanticised version of Cleopatra, the illustrations remind the reader that, beyond Antony's idealised view of her, she is a powerful empress. The fact that MacKay approved of Buckland's illustrations, and

¹⁵³ Ann C. Colley, *Wild Animal Skins in Victorian Britain: Zoos, Collections, Portraits, and Maps* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), p. 139.

¹⁵⁴ Jones, *Cleopatra*. See also., William Wetmore Story, 'Cleopatra', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 98.698 (August 1865) pp. 254-256, p. 256, 255.

¹⁵⁵ Julia Clinton Jones, 'Death of Cleopatra', in *Cleopatra* (San Francisco: The Bancroft Company, 1889).

subtly alluded to Cleopatra's regal power within the verse, suggests that she intended for her Cleopatra to be perceived as a formidable force. By emphasising Cleopatra's fierce nature, the illustrations demonstrate that while MacKay's Cleopatra is a tragic heroine, she is also a powerful woman.

MacKay's poem and Buckland's illustrations intersect in their portrayal of Antony's devotion to Cleopatra. Laying in Cleopatra's arms as he slowly dies, Antony declares that his 'dying heart' belongs to Cleopatra 'only'.¹⁵⁶ Embracing her 'witching [...] warm caresses', he states:

Light me but to Oblivion, eyes most tender!

For since the Gods do will that I must lose

Thy starry golden glow and dusky splendour,

I ask but to forget my loss; I choose

Oblivion's wave before Elysian dews.¹⁵⁷

By choosing 'Oblivion' over the eternal bliss of 'Elysian', Antony reveals the depth of his devotion to Cleopatra. Antony's repeated references to Cleopatra's beauty – 'golden glow and dusky splendour', 'loosen'd dusky tresses', 'flow'r-soft crimson lips', 'sweet voice, most dulcet' – highlight that her appearance enhances her allure, as he envisions her 'golden glow and dusky splendour' when he pleads for 'Oblivion's wave'.¹⁵⁸ Buckland's engravings reflect MacKay's poem by illustrating Cleopatra with fair 'glow[y]' skin, delicate 'crimson lips', voluptuous breasts and dark 'tresses', thereby showcasing her beauty and charm. In both MacKay's poem and Buckland's illustrations, Cleopatra's beauty symbolises her power. Antony's use of the possessive verb 'choose' underscores his acceptance of his own suffering, as he embraces his role as her 'captive'. In the final stanza, Antony declares:

¹⁵⁶ MacKay, 'Antony to Cleopatra', *Pall Mall Magazine*, p. 77.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 77, 79.

Love! I complain not, tho' Death come to take me
 To realms of Nothingness ere thy last kiss
 Hath tired upon my lips, for thou dost make me
 To fade so happily, dissolved in bliss,
 That sweet it seems to die, if death be this!¹⁵⁹

By embracing 'Death' to enter the 'realms of Nothingness' with Cleopatra's 'last kiss', Antony reveals that his fear is not oblivion, but parting from Cleopatra. The juxtaposition between the theme of 'Oblivion' – 'Nothingness', 'fade', 'dissolved', 'die', 'death' – against Antony's contentment in being 'dissolved in bliss' illustrates that Cleopatra's love is his greatest treasure. Though Antony's death carries a poignant sweetness, his devotion underscores Cleopatra's dominance over him and the depth of his self-admitted captivation. His belief that her 'sweet voice' 'lures back [his] fading soul' 'from the grey shades of death' demonstrates how deeply he internalises her power, perceiving her will as stronger than 'Death' itself.¹⁶⁰ Tennyson's 'Antony to Cleopatra' (1827; republished 1893), which may have inspired MacKay – who credited Tennyson with encouraging her to submit her poems to 'the Editors of the first-class magazines' – is also narrated from Antony's perspective.¹⁶¹ In Tennyson's poem, Antony laments that he has '*lost a throne / To wear the crown of love alone*'.¹⁶² Both MacKay's and Tennyson's works reveal the depth of Antony's devotion to Cleopatra. However, MacKay focuses solely on their shared love, whereas Tennyson's references to Antony's lost power imply that he has emasculated himself by prioritising love over authority. The portrayal of Antony as love-sick by nineteenth-century poets suggests a perception of him as weak. By not addressing Cleopatra's influence in Antony's downfall, MacKay

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁶¹ MacKay, 'Preface', pp. xiii, xiv.

¹⁶² Alfred Tennyson, 'Antony to Cleopatra', in *Poems by Two Brothers* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co Publishers, 1893), pp. 31-32, p. 32.

avoids presenting his love as degrading. Likewise, Buckland's illustration of Antony's death only subtly alludes to Cleopatra's involvement, as the archaeological setting of her palace suggests he died fighting for Egypt. By depicting Cleopatra through the eyes of her devoted lover, MacKay and Buckland emphasise her beauty, sensuality, and power while omitting explicit references to her role in Antony's downfall. This approach allows them to celebrate Cleopatra's decadent allure without imposing moral judgement. MacKay's verse stands apart from that of American women poets, who, while exploring sensuality more openly, focus on Cleopatra's suffering by depicting Antony's betrayal or her impending death. In contrast, MacKay's poem is more empowering, as Antony's love absolves her from blame. As Buckland's illustrations predominantly highlight MacKay's Cleopatra's sensuality and imperial power, the interplay between visual culture and verse explores transgressive female sensuality while transcending moral boundaries.

Buckland's illustration of Antony's death highlights that, despite MacKay's description of Cleopatra as the epitome of 'sweetness', she is foremost a powerful monarch (Fig. 5.3). The sketch depicts Antony on Cleopatra's lap, gazing into her eyes in a grand Egyptian hall, 'dissolved in bliss' as he enjoys her undivided attention. While his final thoughts are centred on Cleopatra's 'Sweet' 'Love', the illustration reveals that both Antony and Cleopatra are regal figures. Antony is adorned with a golden crown and Cleopatra wears an uraeus, signifying her status as pharaoh. The opulent Egyptian hall further emphasises Cleopatra's power. The interplay of light and shadow enhance Antony's description of Cleopatra's 'glow'. Besides the light framing the doorway, which highlights two enigmatic cloaked figures, Cleopatra is bathed in light, making her appear iridescent. Antony's face, torso, and arms, which are close to Cleopatra, are illuminated, while the parts of his body farther from her are shrouded in darkness. His cloak, spreading out on the floor like spilled blood, is also shadowed. The contrast between the light surrounding Cleopatra and the darkness enveloping Antony symbolises his descent into 'Oblivion' as he moves away from her 'golden glow'. Not only is Antony falling into 'Nothingness', but so are the hieroglyphs and statues in the background. By depicting darkness consuming ancient Egyptian symbols, Buckland foreshadows

that Cleopatra's imminent death will plunge Egypt into 'Oblivion', much like Collier's *The Death of Cleopatra*. This darkness warns that both Egypt and Antony depend on Cleopatra, as neither can survive without her. While MacKay's poem highlights Antony's devotion, Buckland's illustrations emphasise Cleopatra's power as pharaoh. Together, they intertwine themes of female allure, beauty, and love with concepts of power, wealth, and empire, enabling both artists to subtly explore the decadent sentiments associated with Cleopatra without aligning with the Decadent movement.

MacKay's 'Antony to Cleopatra' and Buckland's illustrations portray Cleopatra as both a tragic heroine and a powerful monarch. MacKay's poem emphasises Antony's deep love, depicting her as the embodiment of sweetness, while Buckland's illustrations add a regal yet sorrowful dimension, highlighting her imperial strength, sensuality, and decadence. Together, they explore Cleopatra's identity as heartbroken lover and empowered sovereign. This synergy of poetry and visual art reflects Pater's focus on sensory experience, enabling the artists to delve into themes of power, desire, and mortality. Ultimately, their portrayal reveals that Cleopatra, despite her tenderness, wields authority that shapes the destinies of those around her.

Conclusion

Despite the abundance of poems about Cleopatra, this chapter explores relatively uncharted territory by examining poems and dramatic verse that scholars have yet to investigate thoroughly. Field's and Symons's lesser-known closet dramas reveal that Decadent artists exploited the already malign perception of the Orient to present Cleopatra as the embodiment of evil and degeneration, demonstrating how monarchical and sexual power could be asserted through moral transgression. By unearthing these overlooked works, we gain insight into how Decadent poets engaged with shifting moral and cultural boundaries at the *fin de siècle*, using Cleopatra as a figure through whom anxieties about Decadence, empire, and gender could be explored.

This chapter also highlights how women poets utilised Cleopatra's image to assert their own identities and desires, particularly in relation to sexual and literary autonomy. For professional women writers, poetry provided both a creative and economic means of self-expression, not only granting them financial independence but also enabling them to shape public discourse on female agency and desire. Through poetry, these women explored the complex relationship between power and sensuality while securing financial independence and maintaining a presence in the literary sphere. While Cleopatra is racialised differently across genres, this chapter demonstrates that *fin-de-siècle* poetry consistently depicts her as an Egyptian woman from antiquity. The geographical and temporal distance afforded by this depiction, alongside Cleopatra's cultural construction as a *femme fatale*, allowed women poets to navigate restrictive Victorian moral codes while addressing female sensuality with relative freedom. This discussion builds upon the previous chapter on short stories, demonstrating how literary women reinterpreted Cleopatra's image to assert their identities and explore alternative models of female agency, thereby enriching our understanding of women's evolving roles in society, culture, and the arts.

Decadent poets portray Cleopatra in a far more dangerous, degenerate, and malevolent light, while paradoxically being less critical of her. These narratives often omit or downplay Cleopatra's death, shifting focus away from the consequences of her actions. For instance, Wilde's *The Sphinx* and Symonds's *Cleopatra in Judaea* avoid it entirely, while *Queen Mariamne* conveniently has Cleopatra die offstage halfway through the drama. By concentrating on Cleopatra's malevolence at the height of her monarchical power rather than her downfall, these works highlight her potential for evil without imposing moral consequences. This approach aligns with Decadent preoccupations with transgressive pleasure and excess but also reflects deeper anxieties about moral decay, imperial decline, and the destabilisation of traditional gender roles. In Decadent poetry, Cleopatra embodies uninhibited sensuality and rebellion, illustrating the allure of rejecting conventional morality. Unlike moralistic portrayals that depict her as a cautionary figure, these

poets celebrate Cleopatra as a lasting emblem of defiance, reinforcing Decadent preoccupations with pleasure, excess, and the transgressive allure of unrestrained desire.

By examining the interplay between Decadent and women's poetry, this chapter demonstrates how Cleopatra was reimagined to navigate and critique contemporary cultural boundaries. Decadent poets used Cleopatra to embody fantasies of destructive sensuality, while women poets engaged with her image to explore questions of selfhood, monarchical rule, and female pleasure. For women poets, Cleopatra became a means to negotiate their own artistic and economic agency. This nuanced analysis reveals how artists and poets reinterpreted Cleopatra not as a singular symbol but as a contested figure through whom female monarchical, sensual, and economic power were explored and redefined in a time of cultural transformation.

Conclusion

Weaving Cleopatra Narratives Together

Examining these mediums both separately and in dialogue with one another reveals their interconnectedness, as each iteration of Cleopatra draws inspiration from its predecessors. For example, Haggard's novel influenced Sardou's script, while Alma-Tadema's *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* and Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* inspired Sarah Bernhardt's and Constance Collier's costumes. When analysed together, Haggard's narrative can be viewed as presenting Cleopatra's story through the lens of a prejudiced male perspective, while Sardou's narrative provides a more nuanced portrayal of the same woman. By focusing solely on Cleopatra, without the bias introduced by Harmachis, it becomes evident that Cleopatra is a cunning imperial leader striving to empower herself and her nation through various means, including violence, manipulation, and seduction. Visual comparisons further illustrate this continuity. Woodville's illustrations for Haggard's *Cleopatra* (1889), Bernhardt's portrayal in Sardou's *Cléopâtre* (1890), Alma-Tadema's *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* (1883), and Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* (1888) all depict a consistent image of the queen. She is presented in loose, semi-translucent Grecian-inspired robes, with slightly tanned skin and dark, voluminous hair. I demonstrate that these representations uniformly emphasise Cleopatra's power before delving into the complexities of gender, sexuality, and ethnic hybridity.

The artists and writers discussed in this thesis were actively engaged in dynamic dialogue with each other. The Decadents – Wilde, Symons, Field, Tree, and Egerton – were interconnected and continuously conversed within their circle. Alma-Tadema and Ebers also maintained a close friendship throughout their lives. In 1888, the prominent art critic Marion Spielmann remarked that 'if Alma-Tadema may be called the Ebers of the brush, Herr Ebers may as appropriately be

termed the Alma-Tadema of the pen'.¹ Their friendship was not only personal but also professional, as they frequently collaborated to create literary and artistic interpretations of similar scenes. For instance, Ebers's novella *A Question* (1881) was inspired by Alma-Tadema's painting *The Question* (1877), and Ebers even wrote Alma-Tadema's biography *Lorenz Alma Tadema* (1886) which was translated into English by Safford before being published in London and New York.² Both Ebers's *Cleopatra* and Alma-Tadema's *The Meeting of Antony and Cleopatra* delve into the interplay between conventional femininity and masculine power. Ebers's portrayal of Cleopatra emphasises her role as a devoted mother, yet also highlights her authority in political matters, such as her involvement in the Battle of Actium and her decisive action against a traitor. In contrast, Alma-Tadema's depiction of Cleopatra focuses on her as a powerful pharaoh representing the grandeur of Egypt, though it subtly incorporates allusions to her maternal role through references to Isis. Both Ebers and Alma-Tadema approach Cleopatra's ethnic hybridity with nuance, avoiding orientalist stereotypes. When considered together, their portrayals reveal a complex Cleopatra who balances her roles as a mother in Alexandria with her responsibilities as a pharaoh in battle. Through their use of archaeology, Alma-Tadema and Ebers provide a multifaceted depiction of Cleopatra, illustrating the depth and complexity of the same woman from different perspectives.

This thesis also highlights the role of the periodical press in transforming elitist mediums – originally designed for bourgeois audiences – into elements of mass culture. Initially, Decadent verse was published in costly limited editions, oil paintings were showcased in esteemed venues like The Royal Academy, and theatres such as the Royal Opera House, the Savoy, and His Majesty's Theatre, which staged Cleopatra plays, were reserved for the burgeoning middle- and upper-classes. However, the growing popularity of these forms led to their dissemination through the periodical press. For instance, extracts from Wilde's *The Sphinx* were published internationally,

¹ Marion Harry Spielmann, 'Painters in their Studios -VIII: Laurence Alma-Tadema, R. A', *Graphic*, 38.977 (18 August 1888), pp. 201-202, (p. 201).

² Georg Ebers, *Lorenz Alma Tadema: His Life and Works*, trans. by Mary J. Safford (New York: William S. Gottsberger, 1886), pp. 86-88.

while reviews, photographs, and illustrations of theatrical productions appeared in periodicals throughout Britain, Europe, America, and the colonies. Full-page illustrations of oil paintings were also mass produced in periodicals. Wyke and Montserrat note that depictions of Cleopatra became widely accessible commodities, allowing people to incorporate her image into their homes through items like framed lithographs of Alma-Tadema's painting, cigarette paper featuring Cleopatra's likeness based on ancient reliefs, or postcards of actress Lillie Langtry in pseudo-Egyptian costume.³ Cleopatra's prominence in *fin-de-siècle* culture effectively bridges the gap between exclusivity and mass appeal, as even the most elite representations of her were republished for a broader audience.

The pervasive presence of Shakespeare's Cleopatra across various media underscores the playwright's significant role in establishing her as a ubiquitous figure. Shakespeare's influence pervades every chapter of this analysis. Chapter One not only highlights Tree's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* but also notes that Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* was deliberately crafted as a counterpoint to Shakespeare's portrayal. Despite being inspired by Plutarch's biography and Haggard's novel, Sardou's *Cléopâtre* faced accusations of plagiarising Shakespeare. Sardou, Ebers, Shaw, and Haggard drew from Graeco-Roman sources to create their versions of Cleopatra, yet their works were frequently juxtaposed with Shakespeare's in contemporary reviews. As noted by Shaw, Shakespeare's Cleopatra had become so deeply ingrained in Western culture that new portrayals of the Egyptian queen were often unfavourably compared to his depiction.⁴ The chapter on short stories illustrates how modern women used Cleopatra as a symbol of female sovereignty, with Sawyer referencing Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* at the beginning of two chapters. This demonstrates that Shakespeare's Cleopatra remains influential, even when the historical Cleopatra is not the primary focus. While the chapters on theatre and novels examine

³ Maria Wyke and Dominic Montserrat, 'Glamour Girls: Cleomania in Mass Culture' in *Cleopatra: A Sphinx Revisited*, ed. Margaret Miles (California: University of California, 2011), pp. 172-194 (p. 174).

⁴ Gale K. Larson "'Caesar and Cleopatra': The Making of a History Play, *Shaw Review*, 14.2 (1971), pp. 73-89 (p. 73).

attempts to diverge from Shakespeare's influence, the poetry and art chapters focus on materials that are more explicit in their celebration of the playwright's legacy. Symons's *Cleopatra in Judaea* was produced as a missing scene from Shakespeare's play, and poems by Clarke, Jones, and MacKay can be seen as reflections of Shakespeare's queen. Similarly, the paintings discussed in Chapter Two are inspired by scenes from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Through an in-depth analysis of Cleopatra narratives across different mediums, this thesis reveals that Shakespeare's enduring legacy was pivotal in shaping *fin-de-siècle* perceptions of Cleopatra within culture, literature, and art. While contemporary critics have emphasised Shakespeare's pervasive influence on the 'intellectual' and 'social life' of the Victorians, this thesis builds on existing scholarship by demonstrating that Shakespeare's portrayal of Cleopatra allowed *fin de siècle* society to explore race and empire, while providing a crucial framework for discussions of gender and sexuality.⁵

The intricate relationship between literary and artistic depictions of Cleopatra, evolving through nuanced interpretations of power, femininity, sexuality and imperial grandeur, transformed Cleopatra into an icon of *fin-de-siècle* culture. Shakespeare's portrayal significantly influenced late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century representations, while the periodical press democratised these images, making them accessible to broader audiences. By exploring Cleopatra through various mediums, we uncover a rich tapestry of artistic and literary dialogues that redefine her myth, to reflect and engage with contemporaneous culture.

Cleopatra through the Female Lens

⁵ Stuart Sillars, *Shakespeare and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 16. See also., Adrian Poole, *Shakespeare and the Victorians* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004). See also., Adrian Pool, 'Introduction', in *Victorian Shakespeare: Literature and Culture*, ed. by Gail Marshall and Adrian Poole (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

This thesis demonstrates that women were integral to both the popularity and production of Cleopatra narratives. In *Women's Theatre Writing in Victorian Britain* (2005), Katherine Newey reports that 'the growth of female audiences in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, in line with the emergence of the female consumer, had a significant impact on both the commercial and the avant-garde theatre'.⁶ Sardou's *Cléopâtre* is evidence of the impact women had in shaping the theatre. Due to Bernhardt's star status, contemporary theatre reviews of Sardou's play reveal that most of the audience were women. As Sardou had a long working relationship with Bernhardt and wrote *Cléopâtre* specifically for her, he tailored the play to the female gaze. *Cléopâtre* captivates the female audience with its opulent eastern fabrics and exquisite jewellery, elements that resonated with the tastes of fashionable aristocratic women. Sardou's play is a testament to female empowerment, portraying Cleopatra as a loving, sensual and cunning woman who primarily asserts her identity as an imperial ruler. Davenport's public discussions of Sardou's *Cléopâtre* highlight that contemporary women were drawn to theatrical depictions of female strength and authority.

Through an exploration of archival material, letters, and biographies, this thesis has also revealed that Haggard was attentive to his female readership. Haggard's and Ebers's Cleopatra novels were read and enjoyed by American, British, and European women, who praised their depiction in letters to the authors. While Cleopatra novels were written with female readers in mind, short stories and poems by women writers were both produced and consumed by women. Peters's 'The Egyptian Amulet', for example, was written specifically for an American women's magazine before being republished in the *London Reader*. Clarke's 'Cleopatra's Soliloquy' also had a widespread female fanbase, as one New York woman even privately printed it to share amongst her influential friends.⁷ While novels written for female audiences attempted to explore women's place in society through depictions of antiquity, short stories and poems written by contemporary

⁶ Katherine Newey, *Women's Theatre Writing in Victorian Britain* (Eastbourne: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 69.

⁷ 'Questions and Answers', *Bizarre Notes and Queries*, 6.11 (November 1889), pp. 388-394 (p. 394).

women used Cleopatra as a model of sovereignty to explore concepts of female liberation, power, maternity, and sensuality. The only medium lacking a distinctly female presence are oil paintings. While it falls outside the scope of this project, further exploration of Cleopatra's representations by female artists could include Margaret Murray Cookesley's *Cleopatra* (c. 1885-1920, Fig. 6.1). Cookesley, an English painter who exhibited at the Royal Academy, travelled to the Middle East for inspiration in creating oil paintings of oriental women, including Circe and Cleopatra. Examining Cookesley's *Cleopatra* could offer valuable insights into how emergent women artists were exploring the relationship between female power and sensuality in art.

The ability of Cleopatra narratives to appeal to women readers and writers made them the perfect vehicle to discuss the woman question. All these narratives, whether positively or negatively, explore women's changing status in society. Tree's adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra* and Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* examine the perils of women in positions of power, depicting Cleopatra as a symbol of imperial decline and racial degeneration. Ebers's *Cleopatra*, Egerton's 'A Cross Line', Sawyer's *The Egyptian Ring* and the costumes worn by Constance Collier in Tree's production of *Antony and Cleopatra* explore the relationship between autonomy, maternity, sensuality, and intelligence. This allows them to explore the possibility of women expressing their sensuality, gaining an education, and occupying leadership roles, while being mothers. Similarly, Alma-Tadema's, John Collier's, and Waterhouse's oil paintings explore the nature of female governance by using archaeologically inspired settings to demonstrate the potential of female imperial rule. Poems by Clarke, Jones, and MacKay, along with Symons's dramatic verse, Haggard's novel, and Sardou's play, all highlight Cleopatra's power as a pharaoh while portraying her as a sensual, alluring, and intelligent woman. Collectively, these narratives explore fantasies of female liberation through Cleopatra. Short stories by M. K. D., Sawyer, and Egerton further illustrate that modern women can achieve liberation, contentment, and sexual fulfilment by emulating Cleopatra as a model of female autonomy. While these short stories allowed women to

envision the disruption of gender boundaries, the commercial demand for plays, short stories, and poems also created opportunities for financial independence. As a proponent of women's employment, Clarke exemplifies how the literary market enabled women to achieve financial independence and personal satisfaction. Ultimately, Cleopatra's enduring allure has not only inspired creative works that showcase women's potential as active members of society, but also paved the way for women to redefine their roles and assert their autonomy in both literature and life.

Cleopatra's Legacy in Film

Although film emerged as a representational technology in the late nineteenth century, it has not been the focus of this thesis's main chapters. This is because *fin-de-siècle* short films featuring Cleopatra, such as *Cléopâtre* (1899) starring Jeanne d'Alcy, *Antony and Cleopatra* (1908) starring Florence Lawrence, and *Cléopâtre* (1910) starring Madeleine Roch, have been lost, making it difficult to provide an in-depth exploration of them. Nevertheless, early twentieth-century feature films, such as *Cleopatra* (1912) starring Helen Gardner, *Cleopatra* (1917) starring Theda Bara, and *Cleopatra* (1934) starring Claudette Colbert, were heavily inspired by *fin-de-siècle* literary and visual culture. An exploration of these films reveals that the 'infinite variety' of the *fin-de-siècle* queen survived beyond the early twentieth century.

The 1912 feature film, for instance, was not only based on Sardou's play but also directly mirrored Sarah Bernhardt's performance of Cleopatra. Promotional photographs of Gardner's 'tigerish' queen portray her draped in translucent fabric, adorned with pearls and jewels, and

wearing sandals on her feet.⁸ Gardner almost appears as if she has stepped out of Clairin's painting of Bernhardt as Cleopatra (Fig. 6.2). Just as Bernhardt was integral to the creation of Sardou's play, Gardner was the star actress, producer, costume designer, and editor of her film. Like Bernhardt, Gardner crafted her version of Cleopatra. Gardner's multifaceted involvement in the film industry mirrors the efforts of women poets and writers who produced Cleopatra narratives to gain financial independence while exploring themes of female autonomy. Through their creative endeavours, these women were able to assert their artistic vision and achieve a measure of personal and professional independence.

Fox Film's immensely popular 1917 production, which grossed over a million dollars, was plagiarised from Haggard's *Cleopatra*. Theda Bara, an anagram for 'Arab Death', even presented herself as Cleopatra reincarnate. She embraced rumours that her mother was an Arabian Princess, furnished her home in an oriental fashion, stroked a snake in the presence of the press, and was rarely seen outdoors in daylight.⁹ In preparation for her role as Cleopatra, Bara posed in a museum gazing at mummified remains, claiming, 'I live Cleopatra, I breathe Cleopatra, I am Cleopatra'.¹⁰ While the majority of the film has been lost, publicity images of Bara draw heavily from various *fin-de-siècle* artistic influences. In one photograph (Fig. 6.3) of Bara reclining on a divan, her figure-hugging, translucent shift dress echoes the famous silver gown worn by Constance Collier in Tree's adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra*, as well as the costume depicted in John Collier's *The Death of Cleopatra*. Bara's uraeus and stern expression closely resemble the regal gaze of Waterhouse's queen, while her body positioning mirrors the poses of *fin-de-siècle* actresses such as Lillie Langtry, Sarah Bernhardt and Cora Brown-Potter. Overall, the composition of the room in the photograph strikingly resembles Greiffenhagen's illustration for Haggard's novel, which features Cleopatra in bed with a leopard-skin rug spread across a cluttered room (Fig. 3.1). Drawing on *fin-de-siècle*

⁸ 'Helen Gardner in Cleopatra', *Bioscope*, 18.334 (6 March 1913), pp. 718-719 (p. 718).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Quoted in Wyke and Montserrat, p. 178.

depictions of Cleopatra, Bara's portrayal presents her as a powerful queen who commands the Egyptian empire, while also embodying a seductive allure capable of causing destruction, much like the Cleopatra seen in late nineteenth-century British oil paintings.

Finally, Cecil B. DeMille's *Cleopatra* (1934), which won the Academy Award for Best Cinematography, draws inspiration from Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Haggard's *Cleopatra*, and Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*. Mirroring Shaw, the film initially presents Cleopatra as a 'kittenish girl' learning to rule from Caesar, before transforming her into an 'avatar' of Haggard's Cleopatra, who uses her intelligence to conquer Antony.¹¹ In the movie's final scene, Cleopatra is seated on her throne, with Iras and Charmian at her feet. She retrieves a serpent from a basket of figs, declaring it to symbolise 'victory', and places it on her chest, gradually succumbing to death.¹² As the screen fades to black, Cleopatra's lifeless body remains upright on her throne, adorned with an uraeus on her head and the winged sun god depicted on the wall behind her. Aside from Colbert's fitted black costume, this scene closely parallels Waterhouse's painting, as it powerfully illustrates the supremacy of Cleopatra's suicide (Fig. 6.4). DeMille's production demonstrates that *fin-de-siècle* depictions of Cleopatra continued to inspire how the final pharaoh of Egypt was perceived well into the twentieth century.

Cleopatra films achieved immense popularity, captivating audiences across the globe. The 1917 version, in particular, was showcased in numerous prestigious venues, including the Lyric Theatre in New York and the New Gallery Kinema in London, reaching theatres and opera houses throughout America, Britain, and Europe. Despite the high production costs of the film – over \$500,000, which covered elaborate scenes, props such as a full-size sphinx, the employment of 30,000 extras for battle sequences, and 50 distinct costumes for Bara – the ticket prices remained

¹¹ Gary Allen Smith, *Epic Films: Casts, Credits and Commentary on More Than 350 Historical Spectacle Movies* (London: McFarland & Company, 2015), p. 50. See also., Giuseppe Pucci, 'Every Man's Cleopatra', *Cleopatra: A Sphinx Revisited*, ed. Margaret Miles (California: University of California, 2011), pp. 195-207 (p. 205).

¹² *Cleopatra*, dir. by Cecil B. DeMille (Paramount Pictures, 1934).

surprisingly affordable.¹³ An advertisement from Fox highlighted this contrast, noting that while setting eyes upon Cleopatra cost Caesar an empire, audiences could enjoy the film for just 25 cents.¹⁴ This combination of affordable ticket prices and extravagant production values made the glamour of cinema accessible to a wide audience. As women became the 'core audience' for cinema by the 1930s, Cleopatra films continued to portray female power for its predominantly female audience in the twentieth century.¹⁵

The portrayal of Cleopatra in early cinema reflected a deep engagement with *fin-de-siècle* aesthetics and narratives, from the silent films of the late 1890s to the grand productions of the 1930s. Despite the loss of early films, their influence persisted in the lavish representations seen in later adaptations, such as those starring Bara and Colbert. These films not only drew from earlier artistic interpretations but also shaped the public's enduring fascination with Cleopatra as both a regal figure and a symbol of seductive power. The evolution of Cleopatra's depiction underscores how cinematic representations can both mirror and perpetuate cultural myths and artistic traditions. Ultimately, this thesis illustrates that Cleopatra's enduring influence across literature, art, and performance reflects her evolution into a multifaceted symbol of female power, maternity, imperial grandeur, and sensuality. By examining her portrayals in dialogue with one another, this thesis uncovers how Cleopatra's representations across various mediums navigated the complexities of gender, sexuality, race, and empire at the *fin de siècle*. This interplay not only redefined her myth but also engaged with and contributed to contemporary cultural debates, solidifying Cleopatra as a timeless figure in both elite and popular culture.

¹³ Philip Leibfried, *Rudyard Kipling and Sir Henry Rider Haggard: On Screen, Stage, Radio, and Television* (London: McFarland, 2015), pp. 107-109.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

¹⁵ Wyke and Montserrat, p. 183.

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