International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development
Online ISSN: 2349-4182 Print ISSN: 2349-5979
www.allsubjectjournal.com
Volume 2; Issue 11; November 2015; Page No. 608-615

Shaw's portrayal of 'Cleopatra' (Source: 'Caesar and Cleopatra' By George Bernard Shaw)

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Caesar and Cleopatra, subtitled "A Historical Drama" is a play in the form of a series of episodes, ostensibly historical, linked chiefly by the presence of principal character, and by the relation of events during a comparatively short period of time. The narrative design is disarmingly simple. It depicts the arrival of Caesar in Egypt, in the year 48 B.C., some part of the details of his stay, and his departure at the end of winter. What dramatic force it has is derived from the tensions aroused by the intrusion of Caesar's powerful personality in to the complex situation posed by the rivalry of Cleopatra and her brother Ptolemy Dionysus for the throne of Egypt. At the beginning of the play, Caesar puts Cleopatra on the throne. At the end, he leaves her, under Roman tutelage, to await the coming of Antony. In the mean time, Cleopatra is transformed from terrified child into a rather terrifying young woman.

Caesar and Cleopatra is the second play in the triptych made up by T*he Three Plays for Puritans.* Like *The Devils Disciple* and *Captain Brassbound's Conversation*, it is a military melodrama that asks us to think more deeply than the usual about violence and justice. Where the unpleasant plays conjure up the glean of city slum, and pleasant plays, the sunshine of snow – capped peaks park lands, and the seashore, the Plays for Puritans all take place on remote imperial frontiers where what passes for civilization clashes with what is conventionally regarded as barbarism. In *Caesar and Cleopatra*, Egypt under the Roman occupation becomes, like Revolutionary America. Throughout these three plays Shaw attempts to define his idea of heroism. In the second play he puts on stage an actual historical figure, Julius Caesar.

Character Sketch of Julius Caesar

The historical Caesar, three time married, the man Suetonius contemptuously called *"every woman's husband and every man's wife"*, obviously has no place in Shaw's play. In Shaw's play Caesar stands for humanity in its highest development, Cleopatra for untamed natural passion. Shaw's Caesar is depicted as the deceptively simple man of whom Socrates is the classic prototype. He is kind to Romans and Egyptians alike; but as Cleopatra comes to realize, the kindness he bestows on others is not the result of sentimentality, as she first supposes but is the sort of kindness one might show to an arrival of another species, free alike from passionate attachment and moral indignation. Shaw's hero is properly presented in the first act as a man normally susceptible to the charms of woman, but his relation to Cleopatra from first to last is clinically pure. He is mainly her tutor. According to the best authorities, Cleopatra was twenty one years old when Caesar came to Alexandria. It is possible that Shaw was misled as to her age by Froude's account of Cleopatra, or perhaps Mommsen; but it is all together more likely that he wished to avoid the problem of managing his Caesar prudently in the neighborhood of a young woman whose amorous proclivities were legendary. In the prologue, the hawk – headed God Ra prepares us for the consequent situation in the biblical dialect presumably in use at Memphis in the time of the Ptolemis:

> *Are ye impatient with me? Do ye crave for a story of an unchaste woman? Hath the name of Cleopatra tempted you hither? Ye foolish ones; Cleopatra is yet but a child that is whipped by her nurse…..* (Prologue to *Ceasar and Cleopatra)*

Shaw therefore side – stepped the romantic issue in this manner thus preventing Caesar and Cleopatra from taking part in what might have been a dramatic masterpiece. Shaw's play is permeated with Mommen's pro-Caesar view, who far from considering Caesar as a tyrannical autocrat regarded his Caesar "so little at variance with democracy". In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, we find a picture of Caesar that reduces him to a mere petty self-glorifier. *Jilius Caesar* gives us Plutarch's Caesar diminished in stature so that he is nothing more than an Elizabethan stage – tyrant. Instead, Shakespeare exalts Brutus at Caesar's expense. Caesar's championing of the populace against the patricians in the Roman class war made him anathema to such writers as Suetonius, Lucan and Shakespeare. On the other hand, 19th Century historiography, reacting against aristocratic feudalism, hailed Caesar as the long overdue reformer of an outmoded constitution. Hence Caesar awakened administration in such men as Goelthe, Hegel, Mommsen, James Froude and Warde Fowler. Shaw's play is permeated with Mommsen's anti-aristocratic and anti-constitutional point of view. The soldiers' prologue ridicules the snobbish pretensions of the Royal Guard, whose class prejudices and chivalric code hopelessly limit their effectiveness as fighters. The Ra prologue, in its devastating judgment of Pompey, echoes the scorn Mommsen pours on the legalism and political myopia of Caesar's rival. Shaw further extends this anti-aristocratic criticism to Egypt's ruler, scourging the playboy extravagances most spectacularly evident in the reign of Cleopatra's father Ptolemy Auletes, *"The Flute – Blower"*. Shaw's Caesar is thus not reformer of codes but the man who has outgrown them. He stands for progress, not in the political and social, but in the evolutionary sense. He is a new breed of animal born with sounder instincts than the average man. Where the question uppermost in the mind of the man in the street will be whether or not Cleopatra has become Caesar's mistress, and where the sentimentalist will condone the sexual relation provided Caesar is in love with her, Shaw thinks that the lack of any such emotional bond is the important thing. Given this, it is to him a matter of indifference whether their

relation is or is not a sexual one. To underline the difference between those Romans and Egyptians who share the stage with him Shaw uses an allegorical device unique in this play. He identifies the aggressive, greedy Romans with bull like and dog- like animals – a wolf- headed Roman war tuba opens the play with a "Minotaur bellow"; Rufio calls himself a dog at Caesar's heels; the Egyptianized general, Achillas, is described as looking like a curled poodle. In contrast, the feminine and treacherous Egyptians are given catlike and snakelike qualities– Cleopatra is compared to a kitten and a serpent, Theodotus to a viper, Ftatateeta to a tiger and a crocodile.

Shaw's Caesar and Shakespeare's are simply two different men. By contrast, their Cleopatra are recognizably the same woman. Shaw's girl- queen has the winsomeness, the grace, the impertinence, the caprice, the petulance, the cowardice, the treachery, the histrionic bent, and the cruel anger of Shakespeare's Cleopatra, together with her inability to conceive of any approach to men which is not mere imperiousness, babyish wheedling, or languorous seduction. That one is sixteen and the other forty, Shaw considers an irrelevance, his point being that the Cleopatra temperament is fully formed at the earlier age, since it is infect a kind of arrested development. Shaw admired Shakespeare's Cleopatra as an artistic achievement, where he thought the older playwright had "made a mess of Caesar under the influence of Plutarch".

Shaw's Representation of the 'Girl Queen' (Cleopatra)

Where Shaw does go beyond Shakespeare is in emphasizing Cleopatra's murderous and sadistic side. This is a result of Shaw's attempt to present what might be called the dynastic view of Cleopatra. Historically, the Ptolemaic Kings and queens of Egypt had shown a remarkable brutality in disposing close to the throne, evincing, in their willingness to connive a the murder of parents, children, brothers and sisters, a ruthlessness resembling that of the later Ottoman sultan. Shaw must have thought of Cleopatra as very much a typical Ptolemy in this sense. He replied to Gilbert Murray's charge that he had "overdone Cleopatra's ferocity", by declaring that "if she had been an educated lady of the time", he should have "made her quite respectable and civilized", but what he was "able to gather about her father, the convivial Flute Blower, and other members of the household, joined with consideration of the petulance of royalty" had led him to draw her as he did. Here Shaw seems to have been following the lead of the Irish historian John Pentland Mahaffy, whose book *The Empire of the Ptolemies (1895)* makes Cleopatra hereditarily fratricidal and recognizably akin in "beauty, talent, daring, and cruelty" to the six earlier Cleopatras who had preceded her on the throne of Egypt.

Half of the fascination of Shaw's play lies in the way in which we are invited to watch the Cleopatra of history and literature develop from the panic- striken hoyden of the Sphinx scene to a mature queen. At first she is childishly naïve on the subject of Kingship

> *"My father was King of Egypt; and he never worked"* (Act: II)

She tells Caesar, to which Caesar replies dryly that there may have been some connection between her father's negligence and his political and financial difficulties. Six months later she manages to sound more sophisticated. At this point Cleopatra can mouth Caesarisms in order to impress others with what she conceives to be her new maturity:

> *"Now that Caesar has made me wise, it is no use, my liking or disliking: I do what must be done, and have no time to attend myself. That is not happiness; but it is greatness".* (Act: IV)

But in realiy nothing but her external manner has changed. In a deeper sense Caesar's example has not influenced her at all, and she remains profoundly ambivalent in her feelings toward him. Part of her, the affectionate and sentimentally dependent child, wants his fatherly approval and is achingly jealous of any attention he pays to others, while the other part, the passionate woman, longs to be free of his paternal surveillance. When Ponthinus accuses her of secretly desiring Caesar's death, Cleopatra, who does not understand herself at all, is thrown into a murderous fit of rage, hatred and chagrin, all the more bitter because the eunuch has come so close to the truth. Caesar, who understands her perfectly, calls her behaviour natural and makes no attempt to alter her conduct beyond providing the lesson in deportment which are the most her nature can absorb. Shaw's Cleopatra is dwarfed by Caesar, but she develops and it is upon her development that the action centers.

Like Caesar, Cleopatra desires power. She desires, above all, the power to do as she pleases, to be herself, the more so as she has been under tutelage all her life. Her natural impulses, however, are not trustworthy. By nature she is cruel, willful, vengeful and vain, and it is only through fear that she is induced to behave properly. Shaw's Cleopatra is a child. Shakespeare's heroine, a character Shaw professed greatly to admire, is depicted as a mature and exquisitely voluptuous woman, ruined by passion she has no wish to restrain. She is an excellent example of the sort of woman the Renaissance associated with Eve, the temptress, and doubtless it was the magnificence with which she fulfilled her role as *femme fatale* that fascinated Shakespeare. In comparison, Shaw's Cleopatra is miniscule. She is poised between desire and passion, but neither has as yet any decisive claim upon her, and the contrast in scale between her petty concerns and Caesar's vast designs provide the comic background of action.

What kind of woman was Cleopatra? In having Enobarbus tell us that

> *"age can not wither her, nor custom stale*
> *Her infinite variety"*, (*Antony and Cleopatra*, Act: II Sc: II Lines: 225 – 227)

Shakespeare has, of course, fixed for all time an image of Cleopatra that has all but obliterated the historical one. It is Shakespeare's portrait, rather than whatever conjectures history had to offer. Shaw had in mind his own version of the Queen. Shakespeare's Cleopatra speaks of her "salad days" and Shaw goes back to these days in his own portrayal. As we have seen, he had ample justification for doing so in Plutarch, who informs as that Caesar had known her when she was "a girl, ignorant of the world", whereas when she met Antony she was "in the time of life when women's beauty is most splendid, and their intellects are in full maturity".

While analysing the character of Cleopatra, it is important to keep in mind that the sensual picture of this great queen is largely the result of the slander of Octavius and Catholic Rome.

Weigall in his biography categorically states that the generally accepted view of the queen stems from "those who sided against her in regard to the quarrel between Antony and Octavius" and is essentially "the simple abuse of her opponents" W.W. Tarn in the *Cambridge Ancient History* states that: *"the surviving accounts of her in our late sources largely represent the version.……"* Disputing the various attacks on the Queen as a slave to her lusts, Weigall asserts that "There is not a particle of trustworthy evidence to show that Cleopatra carried on a single love affair in her life other than the two recorded so dramatically by history, nor is there any evidence to show that in those two affairs she conducted herself in a licentious manner", and draws in his turn a somewhat sentimentalized picture of a kind of Alexandrian Queen Victoria. Not only was Cleopatra a mere girl when Caesar knew her; she was never the Oriental sensualist of Shakespeare's creation. Even more interesting to Shaw might have been Ferrero's insistence that Antony's marriage to Cleopatra in 36 B.C. was made for dynastic reasons, and the very flight from Actium was based on a prearranged plan whereby Octavius was to be thwarted and Rome brought under the domination of Cleopatra and Antony ruling jointly from Alexandria. Ferrero cites Pliny's account of Antony's fear that Cleopatra was trying to poison him at one time, a detail, which is in no sort of harmony with the love story imagined by ancient writers, but entirely consistant with the struggle of political interests. (*Characters and Events of Roman History by Ferrero pg*: 46, 53 – 54)

Shaw shows us a Cleopatra who grows somewhat in wisdom, insight and the capacity to rule, but only under Caesar's tutelage, and it is difficult to put down the suspicion that Shaw has shamelessly played down Cleopatra in order to pay up Caesar. The queen in Shaw's play may be viewed in two contrasting scenes which give us the essence of what Shaw was trying to do. The first episode is the extended passage climaxing Act I in which Caesar attempts to soothe the scared Cleopatra for the ordeal of meeting her Roman conqueror:

> *CAESAR: [admiring Cleopatra and placing the crown on her hand] is it sweet or bitter to be a Queen, Cleopatra?*
> *CLEOPATRA: Bitter*
> *CAESAR: Cast out your fear; and you will conquer Caesar…*(Act : I)

It is one of the great moments in Shaw, a scene at once indulgent and wise. Its counterpart is in Act IV when Pothinus engages in same verbal sparring with Cleopatra now, as he says, much changed.

> *"Do you speak with Caesar"*, retorts Cleopatra,
> *"Every day for six months: and you will be changed"*.
> (Act: IV)

> ***Cleopatra:*** *When I was foolish, I did what I liked, except when Ftatateeta beat me; and even then I cheated her and did it by stealth. Now that Caesar has made me wise, it is no use my liking and disliking: I do what must be done, and have no time to attend to myself. That is not happiness; but it is greatness.…*…
> (Act: IV).

Between this scene and the preceding, the "child whipped by her nurse" has grown up in a sense, though as a character she has not gained in depth to any appreciable degree. Before the end of the lay she takes upon herself he responsibility for the murder of Pothinus only o cringe when Caesar calls her to account; her vindictiveness is a living demonstration of the meanness of that spirit of vengence which Caesar has already repudiated once and now rejects with even greater intensity. At the opening of the play Cleopatra is afraid; at the end she has overcome fear sufficiently to talk up to Caesar. But all in all she is a poor second best to Caesar, who shows more interest in naming Rufio Governor of Egypt than in saying goodbye to the Queen, and infact, almost forgets to say goodbye at all.

Arthur Nethercot quotes Ftatateeta's impatient remark to Cleopatra in the play: "You want to be what these Romans call a New Woman" – one of the numerous topical allusions in the play. Professor Nethercot comments: "However much Cleopatra may want to be a New Woman, she is incapable of being anything but a womanly woman". Cleopatra dreams not of Caesar's love but of the *"young man with strong round arms"*, Antony, whom Caesar wryly promise to sent to her from Rome, thereby prompting Rufio to exclaim scornfully:

> *"You are a bad hand at a bargain, mistress, if you will swap Caesar for Antony"* (Act: V).

It is perhaps too much to except of Shaw that he take into account Cleopatra's return visit to Rome and the supposition that her son Caesarion was Caesar's child. Arthur Nethercot reminds us that Shaw "artfully suppresses" the fact that Cleopatra paid a return visit to Caesar in Rome and there, according to same chroniclers, bore him a son, Caesarion. This cavalier treatment of history may easily be corrected; according to Carcopino, Caesar wanted Cleopatra in Rome as a matter of policy, but policy did not necessarily exclude armour. Whether Caesarion was Caesar's child is still a matter of controversy, although Octavian suspected enough truth in it to compel him to execute the boy.

Thorton Wilder, writing in a different medium and in a more subtle vein, recreates Cleopatra's visit to Rome, highlighting her motherhood:

> *A Queen, great Caesar, may be a mother. Her royal position renders her more, not less, subject to those loving anxieties which all mothers feel.…… Unfeelingly you have dealt with me and not only with me but with a child who is no ordinary child, being the son of the greatest man in the world. He has returned to Egypt.*

This is a very different Cleopatra from Shaw's, and one that throws into sharp relief Shaw's own conception. It is noteworthy also that in revealing to us a Cleopatra who, far from being a mere child, is part of the eternal mystery of motherhood. Wilder also gives the Queen credit for statesman like qualities even when Caesar knew her, for Caesar, in fact her fascination lay in the rare amalgam of gypsy allure and political astuteness. *Caesar and Cleopatra* is one of those plays where Shaw allots dominant role to the male, as opposed to the long procession of aggressive, masculine females in many of his plays, from Vivie Warren to Epifania in *The Millionaire.*

The purpose of the play *Caesar and Cleopatra* is to draw a great man in history. Shaw was highly dissatisfied with Shakespeare's sketch of Julius Caesar in the tragedy bearing his name Shakespeare's Caesar is a relatively minor character speaking no more than 120 lines, and he is dispatched by assassins soon after the play begins. It seems to have been Shakespeare's desire to portray Caesarism rather than Caesar. His presentation of Caesar as an irritable, pompous, deaf old man was a blasphemy in the opinion of Shaw, who had a great admiration for Caesar. In the preface he says, *'Shakespeare, who knew human weakness so well, never knew human strength of the Caesarian type. His Caesar is an admitted failure'*. Shaw thus offered his Caesar as an improvement on Shakespeare's.

Shaw has taken up Caesar's Egyptian war, the most difficult and dangerous war Caesar had ever undertaken, for the theme of his drama. As Roman consul Caesar arrives in Egypt to settle a dynastic dispute between young Ptlolemy and his sister- wife Cleopatra and to exact the tribute the father of the two rivals owed to Rome. Soon he finds himself entangled in a dangerous conflict with the Egyptian soldiers, the city mob and the Roman army of occupation under the leadership of Achillas. He is in foreign country vastly outnumbered by a well equipped and cunning enemy, the north west wind prevailing at this season of the year is unfavorable to him; all his communication by sea have been cut off and he has been deprived of all drinking water; in a short time he and his troops are faced with the danger of imminent destruction. But though caught off his guard and though without sufficient troops, Caesar by his customary resourcefulness, brilliant improvisation and personal bravery, makes head against a great city and powerful army, and wins victory. Ultimately he collects 16,000 talents, establishes Cleopatra queen to rule over Egypt under Roman supremacy, appoints Rufio as the Roman Governor and returns to Rome.

Caesar and Cleopatra has many commendable qualities, and is some respects it is one of the most remarkable modern historical plays. Though it flouts the conventional romantic history play by keeping love of the stage, it exploits elaborate spectacle and flamboyant histrionics of the nineteenth century history play.

Caesar is an exceptional human being in whom we find a harmonious blending of many contrary elements. He is a conqueror whose business it is to conquer countries by cruel bloodshed, but he is full of clemency and is averse to murder. He is passionate and is dazzled by the eyes of women but his passion is completely under his control and no woman has any control over him. He is a practical man of the world adroitly busy in conquering countries and setting disputes, but his deeper self finds real pleasure in dreaming and he *'will conquer ten continents to pay for dreaming it out to the end'*. (Act: I)

Cleopatra, the charming minx, who even at the age of sixteen 'troubles men's minds', and likes 'men, especially young men with round strong arms', who in the space of six month rapidly matures and plots to rule her conqueror and admits that she loves not a god like Caesar but a man like Antony – 'one who can love and hate- one whom I can hurt and who would hurt me', is a flesh and blood reality. In the first meeting before the sphinx, when Cleopatra does not know that she is talking with Caesar, Caesar tells her that he *'is easily deceived by women. Their eyes dazzle him; and he sees them not as they are, but as he wishes them to appear to him'*. (Act: I)

But Caesar, a man of passion, is not a slave of passion. The beautiful and clever minx, Cleopatra, spares no effort to captivate her judge, but Caesar only amuses himself by petting and fondling her. He is in a grave situation and he would not allow himself to be glamoured by a woman. He tells Cleopatra that her life matters little to him and that when the trumpet sounds, he will hold the hand of the meanest soldier more scared than her head. She tells Pothinus:

> *'…..Caesar loves no one. He has no hatred in him: he makes friends with everyone as he does with dogs and children. His kindness is a wonder'*. (Act : IV)

When Pothinus asks whether Cleopatra loves him, she replies,

> *'Can one love a God?'* (Act : IV)

Shaw has, thus, presented Caesar as a man with a tremendous control over his passion, allowing no women, not even Cleopatra, to exercise any influence over him when there was a grave task ahead of him. He has also shown that the love between Caesar and Cleopatra was a trifling affair. It may be pointed out here that Mommen makes Caesar's passion for Cleopatra a policy of expediency while Shaw represents this passion as a dream, not an infatuation, which has nothing to do with expediency.

Shaw has given a completely new picture of the love between Caesar and Cleopatra. He has made Cleopatra sixteen though, in fact, she was twenty-one at the time of Caesar's arrived in Egypt. According to Mommsen, whom Shaw has followed, she was nineteen when Caesar met her for the first time. She must have deliberately made Cleopatra younger by five years only to suggest that the existence of any serious love between a girl of sixteen and an old man of fifty is absurd. Following Mommsen faithfully, he says, through the mouth of Ra, that 'Caesar, seeking Pompey in Egypt, found Cleopatra'. This is far from the truth. From Rome Caesar has heard stories about the beauty and disdainful pride of Cleopatra. He had a great liking for exotic queens, and stories about the Egyptian queen must have aroused is him a strong temptation to seek her out and conquer her heart. Cleopatra, as Ludwig says, 'felt sure that it was she, and not the hunted Pompey, whom Caesar had came to seek on the shores of Egypt'. The tax he wanted to collect lay in the treasury in Alexandria where he was and not in Syria where Cleopatra was obliged to take her abode, and yet he sent for her, not once but twice! And from the day she was smuggled into the palace in a carpet by Apollodorus, her conquest of Caesar, as Plutarch says, advanced fast.

The old passionate conqueror had too inextricably entangled himself with the young and subtle queen. During his absence everything in Rome was in a state of dissolution. He was badly wanted there, and as soon as the Egyptian war was over, messenger after messenger was sent calling him back to Rome. But Caesar continued in Egypt for nine months fascinated by Cleopatra. At the end of Shaw's play Caesar promises to send her mark Antony saying,

> *'I will not forget. Farewell: I do not think we shall meet again. Farewell'*. (Act: V)

The fact is that Cleopatra followed Caesar to Rome, where she bore him a son. Caesar even allowed her to call the son Caesarion. He set up the statue of Cleopatra as Venus. He also issued coins on which Venus and Eros could be recognized as Cleopatra with Caesar in her arms. The scandal ran that Caesar meant to marry her, a foreigner and a queen and to rule as King

at Alexandria. But is Shaw's play the love between Caesar and Cleopatra is a trifling affair, so trifling indeed that in the rush of preparation on the eve of his departure for Rome, Caesar forgets her very existence. Shaw's reprensation of their love is an outrage on history. Shaw, it is evident, has taken sweeping liberties with history and has given a personal interpretation of Caesar and his relationship with Cleopatra.

The immediate source of Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* its Mommsen's *History of Rome*. Mommsen was a German liberal, disillusioned by the muddles and humiliations of the German revolution of 1848 – 1849. Writing shortly after the revolution he felt the need for a great man to bring order out of the chaos created by the failure of the German people to realize its political aspirations. He idealized Caesar to impress upon his countrymen that a strong man was needed to save German from ruin. Mommsen is a judicious historian but his account of Julius Caesar is rather a panegyric and many of his statements are in contradiction to the classical as well modern authorities. Shaw has taken some hints from Mommsen, but in his representation of Caesar as a man without worldly ambition and, especially, in his treatment of relationship between Caesar and Cleopatra, which is the main theme of the play, he has got from Mommsen only slight hints, if hints they might be called, and has idealized Caesar by exaggerating and, often, turning facts topsy –curvy. This idealization is the product of his professed purpose to draw the picture of a superman from history just as Mommsen's idealization is the product of his yearning for a strong man to solve the problems of Germany.

Shaw's Caesar is not a faithful portrait of a historical character, but it does not matter. Compounded of an indomitable will, an ability to influence other people and a capacity to accomplish his purpose, Caesar is an extraordinary man; and he occupies a very prominent place in the portrait- gallery of Shaw. Shaw, in this play has given a portrait of a great man of his conception, a portrait which is convincing and it is immaterial that he his not an exact replica of the Caesar of history.

Shaw's Cleopatra is a pursuing woman, though she would prefer to be called a new woman. Shaw does not spare an elaborate description for her. No doubt, Cleopatra shed much of her childishness, after her studentship under Caesar, but her growth is from kitten to a cat. However, she assumes much airs as a disciple of Caesar*:*

> *"Now that Caesar has made me wise, it is no use my liking or disliking: I do what must be done and have no time to attend to myself. That is not happiness; but it is greatness".* (Act : IV)

It can be seen that even Cleopatra's claim for studentship under Caesar is part of her scheme to win Caesar. Shakespeare's Cleopatra knows how to ensnare Antony:

> *"See where he is, who's with him, what he does;*
> *I did not send you: if you find him sad,*
> *Say I am dancing: if in mirth, report*
> *That I am sudden sick; quick and return".*
> (*Antony and Cleopatra*, Act: I Sc: III Lines: 03 – 07)

Such techniques will not work with the cool- headed Caesar. Hence, Shaw's Cleopatra tries to impress Caesar with her new grandeur got under the influence of Caesar. Her meeting Caesar through the carpets, her grand dinners thrown in his honour, and her appearance in black when Caesar is about to leave, would have ensnared any ordinary hero. But Caesar is a Life Force Genius who can not be trapped. And the fact is that Cleopatra has not basically changed which is revealed by her sense of revenge in murdering Pothinus. Louis Crompton rightly compares Shaw's Cleopatra with Shakespeare's Cleopatra in their roles as pursers:

> *"Shaw's girl - queen has the winsomeness, the grace, the impertinence, the caprice, the petulance, the cowardice, the treachery, the histrionic bent and the cruel anger of Shakespeare's Cleopatra, together with her ability to conceive of any approach to men which is not mere imperiousness, babyish wheedling or languorous seduction".*

Caesar is unquestionably a Shaw- hero and essentially a teacher. Cleopatra, however, fails to learn the much praised clemency from Caesar. Her bidding farewell to Caesar with the hope that Antony will be a good replacement for Caesar again confirms the fact that Cleopatra is still immature and is yet to learn.

In the preface to *Three Plays for Puritans* Shaw says that *Caesar and Cleopatra* is to be taken as 'a counter blast to the sexual romanticism of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra'*. A.C Ward compares the two historical plays of the two dramatists and remarks, 'That Shakespeare should make tragedy out of the debauchery of Antony and wantonness of Cleopatra by turning his huge command of rhetoric and stage pathos to give a theatrical sublimity to the wretched end of the business, and show Antony running away from the battle of Actium for the love of Cleopatra was unbearable to him. He therefore chose Caesar, a man with prodigious capacity for work, as a more admirable figure than Antony with his sexual infatuation; more admirable also as a leader who could manage men, in contrast to the man who allowed himself to be mismanaged by a woman. By declaring that sexual infatuation is not a tragic theme, including in sexual infatuation a great deal of what most people call love- Shaw also declared by implication his temperamental incapacity to enter into a wide range of emotional experience.

The Caesar of Shaw is compounded of numerous elements. He contains a good measure of the Platonic philosopher king; he is a civilizer. He is the first projection of Shaw's growing concept of the statesman. This Caesar finds a Cleopatra who is a somewhat vicious, unrestrained little hoyden, not without feline charm, but enshrouded in a hopelessly self indulgent egotism, superstition, and ignorant of the world. Taking her in hand, as a matter of dispassionate expediency, he moulds her into same semblance of a ruler whose authority, once established, as he well perceives, will always be coupled with cruelty and self-will. At least he has made a Queen where a Queen was required. He leaves her, the awe and dread he has inspired already diminished by the very schooling he has given her, promising to send her

> *"a beautiful present from Rome".* (Act: V)

But, as the faithful Rufio observes,

> *"You are a bad hand at a bargain, mistress, if you will swap Caesar for Antony".* (Act: V)

This Cleopatra is an indignant repudiation of the glorified pair of sensualists exalted by Shakespeare's *Antony And Cleopatra* the crime of which play, charges Shaw, was to portray faithfully the grossness, folly and treachery of their natures, then to use a high powered spell of poetry and sentimentality to exalt them to a high tragic stature unrelated to the facts.

Shaw makes Cleopatra a much more human character than Caesar. She is fiery, lustful and murderous; a veritable she-devil; and all the while an impressionable, superstitious, shadow- fearing child. The period of the play is 48 B.C, when Cleopatra was a girl of sixteen and Caesar an oldster of fifty-two, with a widening bald spot beneath his laurel and gradually lessening interest in the romantic side of life. Shaw depicts the young queen as an adolescent savage: ignorant, cruel, passionate, impulsive, selfish and blood- thirsty. She is monarch in name only and spends her time as any child might. Egypt is torn by the feud that finally leads to the Alexandrine war, and, Cleopatra, perforce, is the nominal head of one of the two parties. But she knows little of the wire- pulling and intriguing, and the death of her brother and rival, Ptolemy Dionysius, interests her merely as an artistic example of murder. The health of a sacred cat seems of far more consequence to her than the welfare of Asia Minor.

Caesar comes to Alexandria to take a hand in the affairs of Egypt and, incidentally, to collect certain money due to him for past services as a professional conqueror. Cleopatra fears him at first, and is vastly surprised when she finds him quite human, and even commonplace, that she straightway falls in love with him. Caesar, in return, regards her with mild and cynical interest. He needs 1600 talents in cash and tries to collect the money. In truth, he has little time to waste in listening to her sighs. There comes fighting and the burning of the Alexandrine library and the historic heaving of Cleopatra into the sea and other such incidents. Through it all, the figure of Caesar looms calm and unromantic. To him this business of war has become a pretty dull trade: he longs for the time when he may retire and nurse his weary bones. He fishes Cleopatra out of the water and complains of a touch of rheumatism. He sits down to a gorgeous banquet of peacock's brains and nightingale's tongues- and asks for oysters and barley water. Now and then Cleopatra's blandishments tire him. Again, her frank savagery startles and enrages him. In that end, when his work is done and his fee is pocketed, when Cleopatra's throne is safe, with Roman soldiers on guard about it, he goes home.

> *"I will send you a beautiful present from Rome",* (Act: V)
> he tells the volcanic girl- queen.
> She demands to know what Rome can offer Egypt.
> *"I will send you a man",* says Caesar,
>
> *"Roman from head to heel and Roman of the noblest; not old and ripe for knife; not lean in the arms and cold in the heart; not hiding a bald head under the conqueror's laurels; not stooped with the weight of the world on his shoulders; but brisk and fresh, strong and young, hoping is the morning, fighting in the day and revelling in the evening. Will you take such an one in exchange for Caesar?"*
>
> *"His name? His name?"* breathes the palpitating Cleopatra.
>
> *"Shall it be Mark Anthony?"* says Caesar. (Act: V)

And the erotic little Cleopatra, who has vivid remembrance of Anthony's manly charms, born of a fleeting glimpse of him, falls into her elderly friend's arms, speechless with gratitude.

2.2. The Gradual Transformation of Cleopatra

Cleopatra contrasts vividly with Caesar. She is immature; unlike Caesar, she changes during the course of the play. At first she is a superstitious girl of sixteen, afraid of her nurse, afraid of the Romans and afraid of Caesar. In Act I she heeds Caesar's first lesson: do not show fear. Her impulsive, childish behavior towards her servants shows that she has much to learn yet before she can become a queen. She has to learn not only courage, but pride and majesty to defying her beauty. By the end of Act I, Shaw has given Cleopatra, who is girlish, warm hearted, cruel superstitious, eager to learn, weak frightened, gaily impulsive, honest, foolish: in short a volatile adolescent who Caesar hopes to turn into a queen. Caesar's humbling of Ftatateeta demonstrates for Cleopatra how a ruler's force of personal authority and power to give orders can be used to control others. At this stage, Cleopatra sees only how quickly she can throw off her nurse's old rule over her. She does not yet know how to behave like a queen nor how to use her power.

In Act II Ftatateeta enters as if she were a queen. Cleopatra is still the girl hiding behind her nurse. But she questions Caesar about his conversation with the mutinous Achillas and Pothinus, puzzled that Caesar listens calmly. He explains that they are speaking the truth. Cleopatra watches Caesar's behavior and then threatens to throw Ftatateeta to the crocodiles. Her youthful arrogance is at its worst when she tells Caesar,

> *'If, you do as I tell you, you will soon learn to govern.'* (Act: II)

She shows, too, that she does not yet know that Caesar must work: power has its duties. At a time of battle, Cleopatra merely teases Caesar about his baldness.

Act III shows Cleopatra's new command over Ftatateeta firmly established: she even orders the nurse to strangle the sentinel, an order which points to the murder of Pothinus in Act V. Though her power and courage are growing, she is still silly and thoughtless, as the carpet trick reveals. Caesar shows her that one soldier's hand is worth more in battle than her head. She learns that Caesar will not play with her, or be a lover. He will not show her illusions. To stay near Caesar, she must become more realistic. When she is thrown into the sea, fun turns into a struggle to survive. During the six months which pass between Act III and Act IV, Cleopatra has learned a good deal. In her dealings with the musician, she shows that she can judge for herself: she knows a fraud when she sees one. Her scene with the court ladies shows that she has learned from Caesar how to listen to people in order to know them. She is now totally in command of Ftatateeta. Her talk with Pothnus shows her to be the Queen: she is dignified, intelligent and tries to follow Caesar's example. She tells Pothinus

> *"Now that Caesar has made me wise, it is no use my liking or disliking: I do what must be done… If Caesar were gone, I think I can govern the Egyptians; for*

Caesar is to me, I am to the fools around me." (Act: IV)

Now she has confidence. Now she is talking like a ruler. She has become a woman. Yet she has more to learn from Caesar. She is so angry when Pothinus says that she is a traitor to Caesar that she orders Pothinus's death. This shows that she has not yet learnt how to be merciful. Caesar knows how to use merely for his own good. She does not. Her hasty action almost brings about Caesar's defeat. She still needs his cleverness and foresight.

In Act V Cleopatra appears in mourning for Ftatateeta. She is angered greatly by her death at Rufio's hands. Caesar's final lesson is that sometimes in order to govern one has to kill. But it must be done only out of necessity, not malice. If Cleopatra has not yet learned how to govern, at least she is made to realize the force of Caesar's rules of government,

"without punishment. Without revenge. Without judgment." (Act: V)

She is now ready to learn how to love a man. Caesar leaves, promising to send her Mark Antony.

3. Conclusion

Far from using the sexual dimension of the relationship between Caesar and Cleopatra to capture our attention, Shaw takes great pains to establish that Caesar lacks any sexual appeal but his energy, and that Cleopatra's imagination is preoccupied by the romantic image of Antony. Nor are we asked to take an interest in Caesar's personal development or growth. He simply does not change. And yet he is not static. Shaw's interest lies not with Caesar as an individual, but with the theoretical and dramatic relationship between a 'force', represented in the play by Caesar, and human affairs, with its impact, not on any specific historical moment, but on History.

At the very beginning Cleopatra herself is little more than an abstraction, simply the role or "idea" of queenhood, an empty mask whose utterances, as Belzanor wryly observes in the Prologue, reflect the will of her advisors and, notably, Ftatateeta. Though Caesar may not change, Cleopatra does, and her evolution from an almost fatuous caricature of royalty to the reality of ruler of Egypt, under the constant abrasion and hammering of Caesar's realism, provides a major structural element of the play.

The Cleopatra that Caesar finds asleep in the arms of the Sphinx lives in a simple world of priests and nurses, whom it is her duty to obey, of the Romans, who are "bad" and "barbarian", and of the easy evasions of magic. Even the elemental reality of power is absent; and when Caesar first endows her with a sense of her own power, she uses it as do all those who lack any sense of purpose; sadistically, to prove to herself her power over others. Her first exercise of new found authority is to beat Ftatateeta, and she indulges in fantasies of the slaves she will torture, or the*"many young kings, with round, strong arms"* (Act: I)

Whom she will whip to death when they have satisfied her needs. Being a queen, she says, means doing just what she likes; she is intoxicated with a freedom that has no object but self-indulgence. She loses her fear of Caesar as an idealized deity, and before she has recognized his stature as a human, she assumes an impertinent arrogance towards him:

"If you do as I tell you, you will soon learn to govern". (Act: II)

But as her experience grows, and as her understanding of what Caesar is deepens, she becomes increasingly aware of the suprapersonal dimensions of responsibility implicit in freedom and power if they are to be anything other than destructive.

Early in Act IV it is evident that Charmian's sheering comment is true:

"Cleopatra is no longer a child". (Act: IV)

Although accused of imitating Caesar, she acknowledges that it is not her nature to be like him, only to learn from him; and when Pothinus is startled by her grasp of the lealities of political life, she points out:

"Do you speak with Caesar every day for six months: and you will be changed". (Act: IV)

But it had been easier and pleasanter before*:*

"I did what liked…. Now that Caesar has made me wise, it is no use my liking or disliking: I do what must be done, and have no time to attend myself. This is not happiness; but it is greatness". (Act: IV)

Although Cleopatra rises above the simple equation of power with doing what she wants – or more accurately, what she wants is no longer happiness or pleasure, but *"doing what has to be done"* – the queen of Egypt is not of the same order of being as the emperor of the world, no matter how much she may aspire to his approval. Infact, it is wholly farfetched to consider Cleopatra representing a whole constellation of idealizations and abstractions – the concepts of rights and duties, of law and social hierarchy, of "established system" – that are in various ways obstacles to Caesar, and that like Cleopatra are not so much overcome as in some way reshaped through the force of his personality and his realism.

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